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The Rubbish Bin

The building work at my house is done and the hot tub is functional. It's wonderful! While the builders were here, I had them put a skylight in the third bedroom, which we call "Eric's room" but which has functioned mostly as the overflow junk room for the two years we've been here. That room needs more work than I like to think about, but I've recently started work on it, because I finished tiling the floor in the kitchen, laundry, and hot-tub room. Unfortunately, the building completion means I now have no excuses (except lack of time) to avoid making some semblance of order out of the back yard, so I'm doing bits of that now and then too.

In May IBM gave a month's notice to four writing contractors, including me. My last day was just before Joe and Gay Haldeman arrived for a visit, and two days after I came down with a bad case of some virus, loosely termed "flu". So I enjoyed their visit, but not as much as I might have, and I did not go travelling to Canberra with them and Eric as I had planned, nor did I even go to the mini-con Eric had organised at the Powerhouse Museum (which paid Joe for presenting a day's "seminar" titled "A Day in the Life of a Science Fiction Writer". Terry Dowling and Lewis Morley and Marilyn Pride were also involved. By all accounts, it was quite successful, despite just about all the attendees having the "flu" that was going around.

The week before the Haldemans' visit, Lyn McConchie popped over from New Zealand for a few days, bringing the manuscript of the third book in her fantasy trilogy for me to read avidly. Sure hope it sells soon, so the rest of you can enjoy it too! I held a small party at my house in honor of Lyn, and we raided a few bookstores, but she declined to try out the hot tub.

I did get several odd jobs between July and November, mostly writing but also teaching a one-day scientific writing course to research scientists and a 3-day technical editing course to writers of computer documentation. If I had the time and ambition, I could regale you with tales of the people I have been working for, on contract. On the positive side, the variety has been interesting!

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Notes from rural New Zealand

by Lyn McConchie

The iceman cometh

In spades as it happens. In May I wandered off to Australia to stay a few days with Jean Weber. There I collected my medallion and \$200 for the short story contest that I'd won at Syncon at Easter (in absentia). I had a great time and returned home several days later wearing a broad grin and clutching piles of books purchased with my winnings.

However, winter was now landing on us with all its strength and my grin got wiped off rather rapidly. I arrived back late on the Monday, fielded several phone calls, checked that all had been fine in my absence and staggered off to bed. On the Tuesday afternoon I had C.W.I. (Country Women's Institute) and on my return from that I noticed that I was unusually tired. Wednesday was busy! It was coming up to lambing and we had to inject all the ewes (for pulpy kidney) and sort them into the best paddocks. We also were due to drench the calves and weigh them. All that took up an entire day and I was bushed at the end of it.

I woke on Thursday to discover that my nose was blocked, my head felt as if it was falling off, and I had all the energy of a dead rabbit. I retired to bed again, then realised I had the wood to bring in, the cow to milk, and the hens to feed. I staggered out, did the chores and retired to bed again. A week later I was slightly worse. Another week and I was worse yet. My friend next door was quite annoyed with me. I should see the doctor! Propelled by her I did so, to be informed that I had added complications to the flu. I was given antibiotics, four other kinds of medicine and strict instructions to stay in bed for at least 4 or 5 days. Ginger said she'd do the chores if I'd promise to keep warm inside. I promised.

For nearly a week I listened to the problems she was having with my idiosyncratic stock. The hens started it. They are used to being fed at certain times. They are also used to checking up on me by standing on the pump-housing and peering through the kitchen window to see where I am. If I'm at the typewriter and the

meal is late, they hammer on the window to remind me.

Ginger came over to feed them after she'd done her own work. The hens spent a lot of time busily reminding me and furious when I didn't come out. Eventually they became so confused that even when Ginger had fed them, they would reappear on the windowsill, hammering for a meal and squawking bitterly at me. As feeding them in winter means having to stand over them while they eat so 4967 small birds don't get most of it, I was unable to come out and feed them. Ten minutes in the cold would have put me right back to where I'd been before the antibiotics.

The cow too was indignant. I purchased Bette Davis as a 6-day-old baby, all eyes and legs. I brought her up on a bucket and made a pet of her since I intended her to be my house cow. It was no trouble to bail break her as a result. She'd been petted, loved and cared for as long as she could remember, so the bail was nothing to scare her.

Unfortunately what I hadn't thought of was sex. Mine! Bet is used to a woman doing the milking. That was okay so long as Ginger did the milking. But when Tony came over, all hell broke loose. Bet kicked over the bucket, wedged her head under the hay manger, and squirmed all over the bails. Tony got half the usual milk and surrendered. For the next few days Ginger did the milking, but Bet was becoming more and more unhappy about it, and the milk level dropped in consequence.

Finally after six days, the antibiotics won. I still wasn't up to par, but I was well enough to come outside and do hens, cow and wood. By this time lambing had started and the field next door to the house was filling with small bleating forms. My sheep are run with the ram a cycle later than Ginger's (3 weeks) so that we can



deal with both lots of sheep more easily. Ginger and Tony's ewes, like mine, are semi-tame. However something must have gone a bit wrong at some stage. We'd sorted the ewes into early and late. Now we had some of the "late" ewes lambing – in the wrong paddock at that. In between gathering up heaps of wood and transporting it inside, milking the cow twice a day and feeding the hens, I now had to run in irritable sheep. The ewes that had lambed didn't want to shift. The ones that hadn't were very happy to.

This meant walking around the paddock and catching small lambs who promptly had heart failure, screaming in terror as they were seized. (Mum, the bogey man's got me – MUM!) Carrying them gently through the gate, you also had to beware of being butted in the pants by furious ewes as you struggled to restrain hysterical lambs. Finally everyone was sorted out and in the right places.

I would have rested then and got fanac done but for the geese. They had begun at 7 am the next morning. The honking was reminiscent of a bicycle convention and I shot outside to see what was wrong. The gaggle scrambled to the fence as I appeared and honked louder. I searched, peered and found nothing.

It wasn't until I finished the milking and went into their paddock to clean their paddling pool that I found the cause of the excitement. Last winter had been shorter and warmer. With the earlier and deeper cold, the paddling pool was frozen solid. I now have to add refilling that every morning to my chores. And the geese blame me for it – I should have done something!

Winter is not a great time on the farm...

Lambing time

Lambing time is with me once more. Since my ewes were all late this season, I've managed to hit the bad weather as well. I lost my favourite ewe the other week because of circumstances I won't describe. Why harrow those who don't have to be present.

Poor Martha was eight. It isn't a bad age for a sheep, although Teardrops is now 16 and had twins this year. One of them is a royal pain in the neck. At a week old she discovered something interesting.

Her lungs inflate and deflate. Holding things a certain way when they deflate produces a long wailing cry. This has little noticeable effect in the daytime, but night is another matter altogether. At night deflating her lungs has a human erupting out of the house waving a torch. Her mother, rudely awoken from a light doze, rises with an irritable barrrrr! Her twin yells in fright. All the other ewes in the paddock leap to attention. Something awful must be about to occur. They call their lambs, the lambs call back. Panic!

Sheep rush across the field, discover their offspring are misplaced in the dark and scream for them. Panic-stricken lost lambs scream back, rushing to the nearest ewe. The ewe starts to relax – that which was lost if found. Then her nose comes in contact with a fat woolly body. Wrong lamb. Furiously the lamb is butted away. Deeply wounded in its feelings, it sets up a cry that would cut glass. Its mother bawls back, thinking her child is being murdered. The lamb answers, assuring her it is! Pandemonium ensues again. Eventually everyone finds their own families and peace reigns – but not for long.

In an hour or so the operatic one will be practicing the scales again while I wear out boots and batteries to make sure no one is in trouble. After several nights I removed them to my front lawn. There, if midnight cries rend the welkin, I can lean out of the window with the damn torch.

The twins have been named Topknot and Bella. I'll leave readers to guess who is the latter. It's been my experience that character traits run in sheep families, just the same as in human ones. Since both twins are

ewes, I may end up adding them to the permanent coloured flock. However, I shudder to think of an entire line of sheep that all shriek in the middle of the night. Bella may have to prove they don't. One lamb and if it does, I'll sell them both to someone who sleeps more heavily than I do. Either that or lay in a twenty-year stock of ear plugs. It all depends on how good her wool turns out to be. Very good and it's the ear plugs.

I wonder if the vet would consider de-baaing a sheep?



Power dressing - and woolies

All over the country this winter it's going to be interesting for those whose houses are on electric power only. That's because our government and Electricorp between them have totally stuffed the system – and us! Somewhere around the end of summer it became clear to the power barons that we could run short of water for the hydro power stations. Had they at that time alerted us all, we could have cut back slightly, enough to have carried us through the winter on voluntary savings alone.

However they thought, considered, and continued to urge us to use power. (If we didn't buy, the profits would be down and that would be terrible!) Apparently they gam-

bled on strong winds from the right direction bringing lots of nice rain to fill the hydro lakes. (Apparently no one in Electricorp has ever heard of Murphy's Law.)

So, of course, the rains never came and finally they confessed to the government that, um, they might be just a trifle short of power this winter. By then it was February (the middle of summer). The government, presumably shocked speechless at this revelation, said nothing for three more months. After that it was talk – too many locals had already commented on how low the lakes were this year. So in a pre-emptive strike, the media were saturated for days on the possibility of water heating cuts. Once we'd all had nearly a week to take that in, they cut the water heating. They are now assuring us that we may move on to rolling blackouts soon. This probably means next week if the last lot is anything to go by.

I'm one of the fortunate ones. I live alone, so I don't have to try to bathe three children and wash clothes, dishes and everything else on one tank of hot water per 24 hours. One tank at 35 gallons is ample for me. I don't have to fear heating cuts either, as I never use electric heaters. My enclosed fire (the Kent), fed some 12 large chunks of firewood over 24 hours and with the dampers almost closed, can keep the entire house around 18-20 C (66-68 F). I can heat hot water and cook stews or soups on the top of it, and dry clothes on strings around it.

In fact, when I consider it, it would only be if they cut the power completely that I'd be seriously inconvenienced. I would then be unable to use the electric blanket for my leg just before I climb into bed in the evening. I would not be able to use my nice electric typewriter either. I would hate to have to go back to using the manual one, although I still have both of the ones I once used. Still – perhaps I should buy some more firewood – and lay in woolies to wear. Just in case.

Noises in the night

A friend to whom I write often, says that as far as she can tell, 80% of my farm news is based on sex. Looking back I'd have to agree. If I'm not waiting to breed something, I've al-

ready done so and am awaiting the offspring, or I'm welcoming them now they have arrived.

Not that it's all sex. After all, my geese didn't exactly try to breed with the two intruders who tried to steal my farm bike very late one night. Nor was it what I had in mind recently when strange sounds rent the welkin.

It was around midnight. It isn't unusual for me to be up that late. After all, while I write and farm a good part of the day, most of it can be done at any hour. Therefore being something of a night owl, I often sleep in late and write far into the night. I'd done so that day, being afflicted with a short story that refused to go away or wait patiently. Around half past eleven I finished, stretched, and ambled off to bed. For once we were getting a couple of chilly evenings in the middle of summer. Sitting at the typewriter for five hours had left me stiff, tired, and rather cold. So I donned a comfortable and voluminous caftan before going to bed.

After twenty minutes or so I turned out the light. Around fifteen minutes later, just as I was slipping into sleep, the geese started up. Then my friend's german shepherd next door. Jill is about as dangerous as a rabbit, but she does have a good loud bark. I drifted silently through the dark house and, picking up a weapon, made for the back door. I opened it quietly and peered into the moonlight. From the barns just across the yard came slight scufflings. Hummm!

I hoped they wouldn't see me coming. My caftan is a sort of pale iridescent pink. I scurried across the back yard. The geese didn't honk about that. I'm not news, but they were still all lined up staring at the main barn. Deciding to take whoever it was by surprise, I slunk around the building in a circle. Ahead of me was a smallish dark figure also slinking along. I howled a challenge, raised my cavalry sabre and prepared to attack. Tony, my unfortunate next-door neighbour, just about passed out on the spot. He'd also heard noises and decided to investigate.

We never did find out what made the sounds. But Tony assures me that if he'd been a burglar, he'd have had a heart attack. The sight of me bearing down, dressed in loose and billowing material with a huge sword swinging was sufficient to have scared Ghengis Khan – or so he says. Well, it's a nice idea but somehow I don't

think the Khan was that nervous.

I say we never did find out what made the noises, but I have my suspicions.

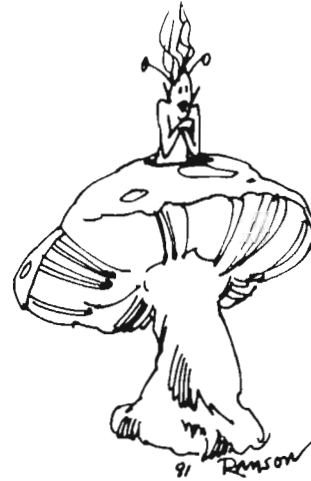
Over Christmas we'd managed to bring in my hay crop. 440 bales off a mere 3 acres isn't bad at all. We'd roped in half our friends plus my next-door neighbour's daughter and son-in-law. Wayne is an experienced farmer. And when I protested I didn't think we'd get the 300 bales I wanted to keep in the old hay barn, he scoffed. By dint of a lot of juggling and jigsawing, he and his cohorts managed to get every last one of 300 bales inside the barn and under cover. (We sold the rest for enough to pay for having the hay done.) Then I sat back happily.

Unfortunately my hens weren't quite so pleased about it. They're free range and they like the barn. They lay in there, snooze in there, and take dust baths in the doorway in summer. I watched one try to get up the face of the hay two days later. So well packed and stacked were the bales, they defied her attempts to get a clawhold. She gave up in disgust after an energetic hour. I assumed she'd find another spot and forget the barn. I should have known better. My hens are known all over Norsewood as brighter than most poultry.

A week after that I realised that my egg count was dropping. Irritated, I went hunting for new nests. Nothing! Now I was getting two eggs a day from hens who should have been giving me three times that. I kept hunting and finding nothing. The hens kept laying – somewhere. Then my next-door neighbour was left alone early one morning. Deciding to wander over in the dawn for a chat, she took the usual shortcut through the barns and covered sheep yards.

She was right in the dark barn when something hurtled past her head. She screamed and another something hurtled past. This time it cackled hysterically as it flew. Her sounds were pretty similar by now and I came out with a whoosh. Just as I came through the door with a large torch, a third thing flew through the air right past my face and landed. A hen. We stared at each other in wild surmise. Later that day we boosted her 8-year-old into the hay. Somehow my feathered friends had worked out that if they came in from the inside of the sheep yards, scaled the gear hanging up the wall, jumped a two-foot gap

and climbed one last bale, they were on top of the hay. They then had a fifteen inch gap between all the bales and the roof. Steve found nearly thirty eggs in 4 different nests. Mystery solved?



Interesting times

A good old-fashioned Chinese curse someone must have hurled at me prior to the last 24 hours. Morning arrived along with a wood shortage and the fire almost out. I wandered forth to secure a supply from the woodshed at once. My gander must have been feeling irritable around then. I headed back with wood stacked in my arms, and he came flying after – unbeknown to me, unluckily for him. I came through the kitchen door and with my hands full, hooking the door shut hard behind me with one foot.

Unhappily for Curly, he'd just reached it as I did so. I caught sight of him from the corner of my eye, but too late to halt foot or door. Smitten hard on the end of his beak, one gander developed an acrobatic ability to somersault backwards.

Four hours later I set off to the shop half a kilometer away on my four-wheeled farm bike. Curly hates the bike shifted and while trying to persuade it to return he got too close. His foot wasn't damaged, just flatter than usual and a bit bruised – so was his temper.

Muttering grimly about dim-witted ganders, I retired to spend an evening reading. Just after dark I decided to trot out to the sheep shed to check on a lambing ewe. One of the last to go. I came around the corner from one direction, my mate came around a corner in the other.

We both saw a dark figure a few feet away and let out shrill squawks of horror. So did the ewe who'd been asleep until we started scaring her in stereo. It took us several minutes to get heart beats back to normal and the same time again to reassure the sheep. (She had triplets in the early hours, but I don't think it was anything to do with us.)

Then at ten I vanished to have a lovely hot bath. While sitting down,

my dud leg gave way, a hand on the bath edge slipped, and I sat down hard and fast in a lot of water. Proving simultaneously the tsunami principle of water action in shallow bays and Archimedes' "Eureka" theory. The entire bathroom now resembled one of the wetter Louisiana swamps, while my temper demonstrated the ability of a human not to reach spontaneous combustion as easily as has always been believed.

Eventually I got everything including me dried off and wandered to bed. I'd have spent the night worrying about what would happen next if it hadn't been for some nice man who range me four times between then and 2am. He wanted "Bob". I wanted to lay my hands on whoever had been responsible for that curse!



Books

Katherine Cummings, Katherine's Diary: The Story of a Transsexual, William Heinemann Australia, 1992

This review is going to say more about me than about the book; consider yourself warned.

This book isn't science fiction or fantasy, but it was written by a fan. Katherine became known to many fans as the prize-winning green alien at the Aussiecon I masquerade, and later as the Golden Android (at Aussiecon II, I think), a person about whom the most common comment was, "Is that a man or a woman?" It was, in fact, a man in the process of becoming a woman.

I've never been able to understand what causes a person to feel he or she (usually he) is the "wrong" sex, although I'm willing to accept that is the case. I've tended to feel that the distinctions between men and women in our society are cultural constructs, rather than anything biological, and so the whole issue is an indictment of our society's gender roles. The one major real biological difference (ability to bear children) can't be changed by today's sex change operations, so what's the point? A vagina and breasts? I do not understand. So I turned to this book, written by someone I have met and talked with, to perhaps shed some light on this question. Unfortunately, it didn't.

A lot of the events described in Katherine's Diary revolved around the wearing of women's clothing (cross-dressing or transvestism), so one could be forgiven for getting the idea that clothing is of great impor-

tance in transsexualism. (Although Katherine does point out that most transvestites are not transsexuals and have no interest in changing their sex; they just like dressing up.) Obviously clothing has symbolic meaning, but isn't the main point, which is (I gather) feeling trapped in a body of the wrong sex. The book gave me no insight into that (or at least I was unable to derive any insight on that subject from the book).

I realise that I have strong views on women's clothing that makes me unable to comprehend why any sane, rational person (who didn't feel she had to) would want to wear some of the garments which I think are at best uncomfortable and inconvenient and at worse instruments of torture and/or oppression (for example, high heels and corsets). For the occasional dress-up or costume party, sure, but for "real"? If it's the costuming that's the fun part, and play-acting another sex (even if stereotyped), and if that's what transvestites do for fun, I can understand that and even relate to it. No big deal. But what, I wonder, does that have to do with being a real female person? It's all superficialities, isn't it? There must be something significant that I'm missing, that's additional to the cross-dressing, and that presumably defines the transsexual from the transvestite. And that's what I couldn't find any clue to in this book.

I can think of a lot of good reasons (that is, ones I would understand and thoroughly approve of) for not telling some of the other things. Perhaps Katherine was protecting the Cum-

mings family, or being wary of potential lawsuits, or doesn't want to offer personal reasons that would inevitably be read by some as typical or representative of transsexuals in general. (Several passages in the book say that the reasons are different for each individual.) So I can understand why the answers I want might not be in here, but I was still disappointed not to find them.

On the positive side, the book is a fascinating glimpse into the life of one person and the international world of transvestites. John/Katherine was/is a librarian, an occupation that is stereotyped as peopled by meticulous, boring people. Obviously some of them at least are anything but boring, although they may hide their other interests very well. There are also references to a few well-known Australian fans, including Nick Stathopoulos, Terry Dowling and Kerrie Hanlon.



The next collection of books were read in a bunch soon after I attended the 20th anniversary conference of the Women's Electoral Lobby (titled "Looking Backwards, Moving Forwards") in January 1992. I picked up many of them on sale at the conference, and others showed up by coincidence (?) about the same time. None of them are fantasy or science fiction, so you are welcome to skip them if you're not interested.

**Marcia Cohen,
The Sisterhood: The True
Story of the Women Who
Changed the World,
Simon and Schuster, 1988**

This book focuses on Betty Friedan, Gloria Steinem, Germaine Greer and Kate Millett. Although I certainly don't believe all the author's interpretations of events (they may be correct, or they may not; I have no way of knowing), I found this book very interesting as an insight into the complexities of the lives of some well-known feminist figureheads. Despite the inclusion of Germaine Greer, this book focuses almost exclusively on happenings in the USA.

**Angela Neustatter, Hyenas in
Petticoats: A Look at Twenty
Years of Feminism,
Harrap (London), 1989**

This book focuses on events in Britain during roughly the same time frame as *The Sisterhood*. Whatever differences there might have been in what was happening in the two nations is lost a bit in the completely different writing/reporting style of the two books. This one relies more heavily on quotes and interviews with a range of women, and tends to emphasise the negative (ain't it awful, how women are treated) rather than the positive (here's what some of them are doing about it). If I spent more time analysing the contents, I might well find there's not all that much difference in negative and positive things actually happening, but the presentation leaves certain impressions. Reading the two books in sequence was quite interesting.

**Gloria Steinem,
Revolution From
Within: A Book of
Self-Esteem, Little,
Brown and Com-
pany, 1992.**

This book does an excellent job of mixing autobiographical revelations with a wide range of other material to show the wider implications of the points the author is making. I was very impressed, but then I'm already a devotee of many of the ideas included, such as self-esteem, taking responsibility for one's own life, and the importance of internal changes before one can take full advantage of external societal changes. Others have criticised the book for what they perceive as a "blame-the-victim" approach (a charge often made to me when I express many of the same opinions as Gloria does) and/or a "trendy, new-age" view of life. Such critics are unable, or unwilling, to see the point; they probably suffer from low self-esteem but are too threatened by the idea to examine it.

**Pat Richardson, Belle the
Bushie, Gumleaf Press
(Sydney), 1990**

This collection of essays (most of which were presented on the radio over the course of a year) are slightly fictionalised accounts of events in the author's life. I've known Pat Richardson slightly for years through our mutual association with the Women's Electoral Lobby, but had not known much about her private life. It's probably typical of the lives of many women who must cope with problems of husband, children and often parents, as well as their own problems. These stories of trial, tribulation and triumph are told with wit and humour (and many asides to the effect of "why do women put up with this?"), but the tragedy is there too. There is now a second volume, which I haven't read yet, titled *Belle on a Broomstick*.



**Tricia Szirom, Striking
Success: Australian Women
Talk about Success, Allen &
Unwin, 1991**

This book provides a unique view of the way in which Australian women define and live with success. The book is based on interviews with 44 very different women, all considered by others to have achieved success in their field. Some are household names (in Australia) while others are quiet achievers within their own communities.

A common feature is their strong sense of integrity, credibility, purpose and a willingness to take risks to achieve their goals – and the fact that they all define "success" very differently from the traditional male definition. This is similar to the results of similar studies in, for example, the USA.

Each chapter in the book looks at different aspects of these women's lives, such as influences, purposes and goals, priorities, costs, care and support, presentation and skills. After presenting and analysing the interviewees' comments, the author provides a series of exercises so the reader can, if she wishes, examine her own reactions to these issues and perhaps begin to develop some strategies for making positive changes in her own life.

**Hester Eisenstein, Gender
Shock: Practising Feminism
on Two Continents, Allen &
Unwin, 1991**

The author, an academic from the USA, spent several years in the 1980s in Australia in government and academic positions. In this book she compares her experiences in the two countries, and discusses wider issues of the family, the power of Australian



feminists in government, the necessity for optimism among feminist activists, and gender as a category of analysis and the politics of its use within academia.

I found it quite fascinating, not least because there's been quite a spate of articles this year comparing the position of Australian women very favorably with the position of women in the USA. Many of these articles have come from Anne Summers, a former women's adviser to a former Prime Minister, who subsequently spent several years in the USA as editor of Ms Magazine, and who is now back in Australia. The sorts of cultural and bureaucratic problems encountered in the two countries are quite different, so the solutions – or tactics used to find solutions – are also different. This book, and the other articles, confirmed what I'd been feeling for some time but did not have the data to make a real comparison.

Philida Bunkle, Second Opinion: The Politics of Women's Health in New Zealand, Oxford University Press (Auckland), 1988

Several years ago I published Lyn McConchie's summary of the "cervical cancer scandal" in New Zealand. Philida Bunkle was one of the two women who searched out the information and first published reports on it. This book includes material on that issue, and on several others, including the author's own experiences with a lump in her breast. If you think I published medical horror stories, some of the information in this book should really curl your hair. Any woman who can read this book without at least gnashing her teeth in outrage and anger has probably been so familiar with these problems that she has no energy left for such a response. Many of the problems are similar in other countries, but there are some unique aspects to the New Zealand health system that readers in other countries might not know the details of.

Stanton Peele, Diseasing of America: Addiction Treatment Out of Control, Houghton Mifflin, 1989

Here's a book that's almost guaranteed to start arguments. I'm not going to try to sum it up here. I agree with many of his controversial arguments, although I can't evaluate the data upon which he bases those arguments because I haven't read his source material. Peele's central thesis is that by (mis)labeling so many of today's problems as "addictions", society essentially tells people that they are victims of circumstances they cannot control, and that they are effectively not responsible for their own behavior. One consequence is that many people don't accept responsibility for their behavior when they should, and others (who could solve their problems or might simply outgrow them) are forced into "treatment" and labeled "addicts", all of which causes more harm than good.

I felt Peele rather overstates his case (a standard debating or journalistic tactic) at times, even though I agreed with his conclusions. By not allowing that some percentage of people might fit the addiction mold, and that AA-style treatment might be very valuable to some people, he is as guilty of mislabeling as those who insist that everybody who exhibits certain symptoms is an addict who needs treatment. I think this overstatement is a bit unfortunate because it's easy for someone to reject his entire argument because they feel they personally (or someone they know) do fit the labels he rejects.

What really struck me about the book was the way government authorities can control a person's life in the (often quite well-intentioned) guise of "helping" that person. What Peele depicts isn't all that different from locking people up in mental institutions because they have politically incorrect views. And I can personally recall only a few decades ago

when women who didn't want to marry, have children and keep house were charitably described as "sick" or "disturbed" and given drugs to "cure" their mental aberrations (and I'm sure this goes on in many places even today). What's the essential difference between that and some other rebellions against "normal" life today?

Okay, you can start reading again here, if you wanted to skip the "real world" reviews.

Marge Piercy, Body of Glass, Penguin, 1991

This isn't marketed as sf (science fiction, science fantasy, speculative fiction), but it is – as much as her novel *Woman on the Edge of Time*.

Two stories are interwoven. The following quotes are from the jacket blurb, but they sum the book up quite well. One story is set in 1600 "in a Jewish ghetto in Prague, where a 'golem' is brought to life to protect the inhabitants from attack by mobs that rise periodically to ravage and murder". The second is "in the 21st century... in North America, [where] scientist Shira Shipman joins forces with Yod, the world's most sophisticated cyborg, to guard her freetown, Tikva – a fragile modern ghetto in a land of rigidly controlled environmental corporate domes – from a gang of deadly intruders... interweaving cyberpunk and ecology, Jewish history and mythology".

Piercy has taken the "conform and be employed, don't conform and be unemployed" theme and given it a chilling future similar to the future seen in numerous novels I've read lately. (What is going on in the USA these days?) Like many women writers I've read, she also postulates an alternative society, where people follow non-hierarchical lifestyles and attempt to treat the environment well, while still using the tools of modern society (such as computers); this alternative is threatened by the big corporations and government controls. Piercy is good at showing the personal side of these conflicts.



Mary Gentle, *Grunts!*, Bantam, 1992

I never thought I'd thoroughly enjoy a book that included so much mindless violence, and so many scenes in very bad taste (not to mention the puns!), but I did. This book violates almost every standard I have for a good book, but it does it with such wit and style that I didn't simply overlook the stuff I normally don't like, I actually enjoyed it. The main reason I liked this book is that the author has managed to parody dozens of the things I dislike most about the military, religious and bureaucratic mind, especially those interested in controlling others. It's hilarious, it's cutting, but it's also disgusting. Read and enjoy at your own risk.

Mary Gentle, *The Architecture of Desire*, Corgi, 1991

Mary Gentle writes superb stories in a variety of styles, about a variety of topics (thus displaying a strong talent for writing). The contrast between this book and *Grunts!* is dramatic, although they have certain features in common, such as some disgustingly realistic scenes of death and sickness, and a really cutting sense of humor. This book is not so conspicuously funny as *Grunts!*, but the occasional wry aside is definitely there.

In this book we meet again Valentine White Crow and Lord-Architect Casaubon, familiar from Gentle's books *Scholars and Soldiers* and *Rats and Gargoyles*. I won't try to describe what goes on, but it's complicated and intricately described. I had to pay more attention to the story than I usually do, just to try to keep track of what was actually happening, but the effort was worth it.

Carol Severance, *Demon Drums*, Del Rey, 1992

I praised the author's first novel (*Reefsong*) but I think this one has surpassed the other for sheer drama and elegant storytelling. *Reefsong* was science fiction; *Demon Drums* is fantasy, set in a land of islands. The first chapters were published previously as "Shark-Killer" in *The Women Who Walk Through Fire*, edited by Susanna J. Sturgis, which I mentioned in WWW41.

I particularly appreciated this book because it is different from most genre fantasy in that it's set in a world modelled on the South Pacific islands, rather than on Celtic or other European mythology. Iuto Mano has retired from a war (between good and evil, although she doesn't quite understand this yet) and is living on an island where she dare not use her magic lest she attract unwanted attention. But the war comes to her anyway, and she knows she must fight with all her powers, or she will be taken to make a Mother Drum for the Demon Drummers, whose magical drums beat the blood music of their enemies. There is also the island girl Tarawe, whose magical powers are just awakening and are hard to control – what is her importance in the cosmic scheme of things?

Eleanor Arnason, *A Woman of the Iron People*, Avonova, 1991

(Published in paperback in two parts, *In the Light of Sigma Draconis* and *Changing Woman*.)

I was impressed with these books, in which a human woman and an alien woman learn about each other and get new insight into some of the assumptions of their individual cultures. Put like that, the story sounds awfully dry and academic, but it's definitely not! The author did a fine job in depicting the difficulty of any being when her or his basic assumptions about life, the universe and everything are challenged by someone who sees things quite differently. In this case, one of the major assumptions challenged is that of the roles of males and females (and their relationships); another has to do with who makes decisions, and the use of force to carry out decisions.

Emma Bull, *Bone Dance*, Ace, 1991

A bizarre and chilling tale of mind-control and survival in a nasty world that exists after a nuclear war, told from the point of view of a few people who are too far down the pecking order to know what's going on, other than that someone else has entirely too much power over their lives. Impressive and original.

William Gibson and Bruce Sterling, *The Difference Engine*, Bantam, 1991

What if steam engines had come to England years before they did? Would Charles Babbage have been able to build a steam-driven "difference engine" (computer)? In this book, these things happened, and the world of 1855 is very different than it was in our timeline. This book is "part detective story and part historical thriller" and was quite interesting and enjoyable to read. I was a bit disappointed in it, for reasons I have trouble identifying: I probably wanted more glimpses of the alternative past, and less of the "plot", which shows what my reading priorities are!

Anne McCaffrey and Margaret Ball, *PartnerShip*, Baen, 1992

An enjoyable book about Nancia, a young "brain ship" similar to the famous Helva, the ship who sang.

Michael Flynn, *The Nanotech Chronicles*, Baen, 1991

A collection of 6 stories, 5 previously published in *Analog* and 1 from *New Destinies*. All good science fiction "if this goes on" extrapolations of the good and bad sides of nanotechnology and the people who might use it for their own purposes.

Orson Scott Card, *Xenocide*, Tor, 1991

The third book in the series started with *Ender's Game* and *Speaker for the Dead*, although you don't have to have read the first two to appreciate this one. I am continually impressed with Card's examination of important moral issues, in the context of a story that's interesting in itself for the politics and personal relationships involved.

This book follows several groups of people, whose actions are separate but all of whom have bearing on certain core problems in the book. Card also takes into account the time dilation effect of near-light-speed travel. Since his universe also includes the ansible, which allows instantaneous communication across any distance, the political consequences are complicated.

Stephen R Donaldson, *The Gap into Conflict: The Real Story and The Gap into Vision: Forbidden Knowledge*, Bantam, 1991

As usual, Donaldson uses far too many words to tell a story, and his characters wrestle with some fascinating mental demons (this reader always wants to thump his characters up alongside the head and say "shape up, you twit!"), but there's something fascinating to me in his stories, and they carry me along through the wordy bits. I must confess, though, to skipping ahead to find out what happens. But (unlike with some other writers' works), I go back and read the bits I've skipped, because the details are fascinating even when tedious. Kinda like life, I suppose.

These books are science fiction, not fantasy, but mostly they're examinations of what goes on in the characters' minds, and Donaldson creates some *very* sick characters

Van Ikin, editor, *Glass Reptile Breakout*, University of Western Australia, 1990

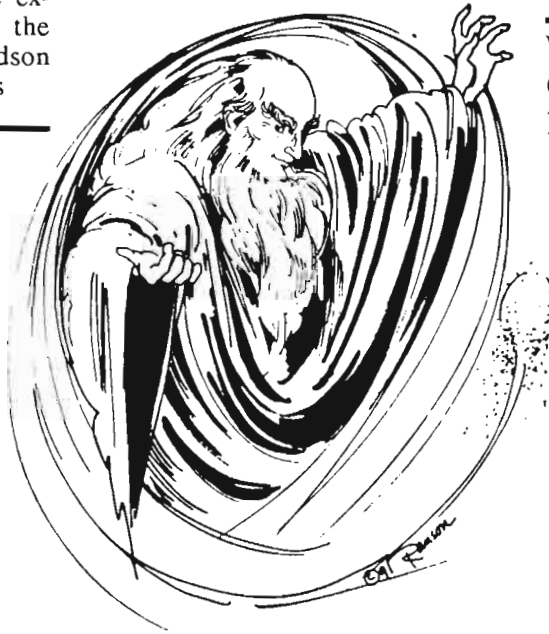
A collection of Australian speculative fiction, by a lot of familiar names, mostly first published in the 1980's. If you're interested in a sampler of recent Australian sf, this is a good book to start with.

Lewis Shiner, *Slam*, Bantam, 1990

A really wacky book, not really sf. Dave gets out of prison because a lawyer friend sets him up with a job minding a houseful of cats. Dave meets some oddball people, mostly dropouts from society, most of whom sound like a lot of fun and remind me of people I know. Unfortunately his association with them, though unsought-for, could land him back in jail again for breaking the conditions of his parole. You'll like the prissy parole officer and the lawyer who tells endless tacky lawyer jokes, as well as many of the other characters (in both senses of the word) that inhabit this universe. I especially enjoyed the ending, and won't give it away!

Lewis Shiner, *Deserted Cities of the Heart*, Bantam, 1988

"Amid the Mayan ruins of Na Chan, in the heart of the Mexican jungle, the destinies of three young Americans converge. Thomas, an idealist, is an ecologist whose research facility has just been seized by the Mexican government. His brother Eddie, once a rock star, now a psychiatric hospital patient, has just signed himself out of the hospital and has disappeared among a tribe of Mayan Indians. Thomas has always lusted after Eddie's wife, Lindsey, and when she appears on his doorstep begging for help in the search for Eddie, he can't refuse her. Earthquakes and revolutionaries are ripping Mexico apart, and they are thrust into the center of the turmoil." Not sf, exactly, but great stuff.



Barbara Hambly, *The Rainbow Abyss and The Magicians of Night*, Del Rey, 1991

Fantasy. The Master Wizard Jaldis opens a dark well to the Abyss between universes, and receives a cry for help from a world that has lost all magic. Although the problems of his own world need addressing, Jaldis turns his concerns towards these others, and his assistant Rhion helps him. When they finally cross the Abyss, Rhion finds himself in Europe during the reign of the Nazis. His magic is sought by both sides of the struggle, and he does not know

enough about our world to determine who's lying to him. An unusual theme, and I suspect a third book in the series, when Rhion goes home again.

Frederik Pohl and Jack Williamson, *The Singers of Time*, Bantam, 1991

"The humans called them 'Turtles', members of a superior alien race that arrived to conquer Earth. But the conquest was through commerce and trade, the rule benevolent, and the result a time of plenty and tranquility... as long as humans stayed in their place. Then... the Mother ...of all living Turtles vanishes (and) the Turtles turn to humans for help... (The) quest will unlock the secrets of the universe and beyond in an incredible journey through dimensions of time and space..."

William Barton and Michael Capobianco, *Fellow Traveler*, Bantam, 1991

"As the new century dawns, the Soviets are reclaiming the high frontier. After a decade of social upheaval, they have embarked on a bold gamble to regain leadership in space exploration - moving a massive asteroid into Earth's orbit to harvest its precious metals. But the reactionary leadership of the United States sees the project as a potential weapon. They are willing to risk everything to stop it... A vividly realistic thriller... a powerful and prophetic tale of heroism and hope." I really liked this one, and I don't usually like "thrillers".

Deborah Grabien, *Plainsong*, Pan, 1990

Subtitled "A fable for the Millennium", this is a delightfully oddball fantasy about the second coming.

Maya Kaathryn Bohnhoff, *The Meri*, Baen, 1992

Fantasy. "She saw her parents murdered when she was but a child. Rescued from the rubble of her village by a teacher of the Divine Art, Meredydd-a-Lagan swore to learn the powerful secrets necessary to track down the marauders and

achieve vengeance. But first she would have to overcome centuries of prejudice against female mages, and become the first ever female apprentice to the Meri, the otherworldly being who stands as the Bridge between humanity and the Spirit of the Universe..." And what happens when she finally meets the Meri isn't at all what she expected.

Spider and Jeanne Robinson, Starseed, Ace, 1991

A sequel to *Stardance*. An Earth-born dancer, Rain McLeod, can no longer dance in gravity, so she volunteers for the Starseed Foundation, to train for joining with a symbiotic lifeform that allows humans to live in space. But someone is trying to sabotage the Foundation.

Judith Moffett, The Ragged World, Del Rey, 1991

A collection of stories about the alien Hefn that appeared in *LASFM* and *F&SF*. Particularly interesting to me because of Moffett's Quaker background, which usually is carried through to at least some of her human characters.

Vonda N McIntyre, Metaphase, Bantam, 1992

Sequel to *Starfarers* and *Transition*. I really enjoy the idea of a university campus on a starship, the staff of which rebelled against higher authorities when ordered to abandon its mission; they went on the trip anyway. In this book they meet their first true alien being, a so-called squidmoth. J.D., the alien contact specialist, must deal with both her relationship with the alien and her relationships with her fellow humans, and the other humans are having to deal with each other in rather unusual circumstances. They must also make some very heavy decisions that could affect their chances of ever getting back to Earth again.



Kate Wilhelm, Death Qualified, Fawcett Crest, 1991

Wilhelm is well-known to sf readers but she also writes mysteries, a few of which I've read (I don't normally enjoy mysteries, but hers have sf-nal elements that I like). This one begins with a nude body in a river, then a murdered man. Then Barbara Holloway gets involved in defending the woman accused of murdering her estranged husband, Lucas. As she tries to unravel what really happened, she finds it's a case even more complicated and bizarre than any she's dealt with before. What sort of mind control has been used on Lucas? What else is going on here?

Alexis Gilliland, Lord of the Troll-Bats, Del Rey, 1992

Another amusing tale of W-Izenbeak, wizard and King-Patriarch, as he deals with an invading army of dragons and the intrigues in his own court. Sequel to *Wizenbeak* and *The Shadow Shaia*.

Charles De Lint, The Dreaming Place, Questar, 1990

Fantasy in which an angry young woman, Ash, seeking magic "is drawn into a wondrous Otherworld of totems and dryads, living tarots and mystic charms. At the same time, her cousin Nina is stalked by an Otherworld nightmare... somehow Ash must find the strength to overcome her own anger, learn the full power of magic, and save her cousin". I enjoyed and was impressed by this book, my reactions to all the De Lint fantasies I've read.

Sharyn McCrumb, Bimbos of the Death Sun, TSR, 1988

Marketed as a mystery, this hilarious tale is set at a fantasy convention. You will recognise many of the fans depicted, or at least their types. Definitely light reading.

Terry Bisson, Voyage to the Red Planet, Avon, 1990

"The Grand Depression has finally ended. NASA, Yellowstone Park, even the U.S. Navy have been sold off to private corporations in order to finance the government's deficit.

And space travel is a forgotten dream... until a renegade independent movie produced gets an abandoned spaceship out of mothballs, recruits an out-of-work astronaut and his beautiful Russian counterpart, contracts a brilliant midget cinematographer, hires a pair of certified superstars, and sends them all off to make Hollywood history on Mars." Hilarious.

C.J. Cherryh, Heavy Time, Questar, 1991

Another fast-paced action adventure set in the universe of *Rimrunners* and *Downbelow Station*.

Anne Gay, Mindsail, Orbit, 1990

I've got a bit bored over the years by tales of isolated groups of people descended from the crews of crashed spaceships, who in surviving on an alien planet have lost most of their human knowledge and turned the rest into mindless rituals. This might well be a realistic scenario, but it's usually a device for setting up some stereotyped ideas and playing them off against each other.

To a certain extent, that's what this book does, too, but there are some nice twists and touches that raise it a bit above the boring herd. There is hope for growth in the end, as some of the people begin to reclaim some of their past.

Review book received but not read

Martin Middleton, Sphere of Influence (Book 3 of the Chronicles of the Custodians), Pan, 1992

The first two books are *Circle of Light* and *Triad of Darkness*. The cover blurb makes it sound like fairly standard fantasy to me:

"Teal the Death Lord... has banished the Dark Gods from his world and secured an uneasy peace in the lands under his dominion. But the cost has been great -- the Gods of Light have been forced to follow the Gods of Darkness into oblivion. If Teal is to return the Light to his lands, he must also unleash the forces of Darkness and once again do battle with evil..."

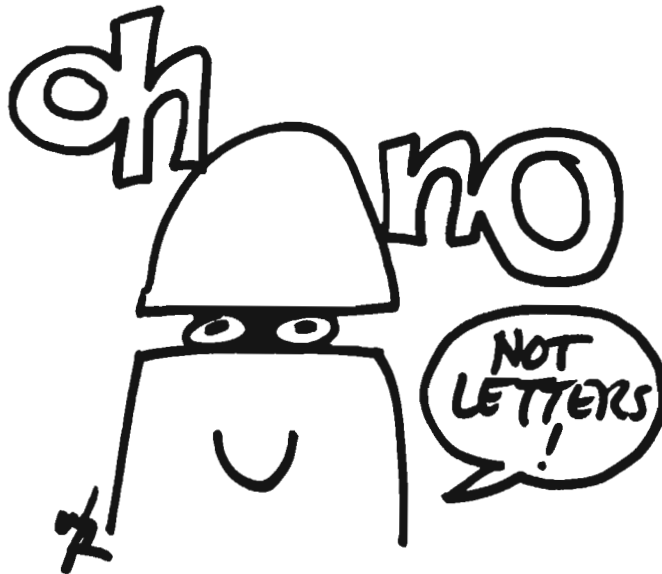
Letters

Joseph Nicholas
5A Frinton Road
Stamford Hill
London N15 6NH, U.K.
13 March 1992

...the account of your visit to the USA in *WWW*41... seems to consist almost entirely of the "then I did this - then I did that - then I met X for lunch" sort of journalism characteristic of the trip reports produced by the winners of fan funds. (When they bother to write anything at all, that is - gosh, it's almost ten years since my GUFF trip! My, how time flies...) What this means is that your readers never gain any clear idea of where you went (place names are not a substitute - we can look those up in an atlas), what you saw, or what you thought or felt. In short, there is no description - not even something as simple as the difference in the colour of the sky in Seattle from that in San Francisco, or comparisons between the landscapes of Vancouver and the Blue Mountains. An opportunity to write something more than a trip report has thereby been missed, and it's a great pity.

Well, I can guess your response: you do what you can in the time available, you don't want to make any more effort than you are already, and so on. But I remain convinced that it's pointless to do less than your best, less than you know you're actually capable of; if not just for your readers, then for your own satisfaction. In addition, writers who cease to push themselves to their limits, and settle instead for the easy options, eventually fall into bad habits that block further development - bad habits, for example, like trip reports of the "then I did this - then I did that" variety instead of genuine travelogues.

[The flaw in that argument, Joseph, is your implicit assumptions that I should want to write what you want to read, or that what I wrote wasn't my best. In fact, I wrote exactly the sort of report I wanted to write. The fact that it isn't the report you think I should have written is quite beside the point. I took that trip for the purpose of meeting people and not for travelling as such, or for seeing or learning about new things



and places. For one thing, I'd been to most of those places before and wasn't all that interested. You may think that's a failing, or simply a "great pity", but I don't.

Because I was visiting people, I made a lot of observations which I wrote up in my private diary but which I considered would be an invasion of privacy if I published them, so I didn't. Perhaps unfortunately for your reading pleasure, and my development as a writer, I didn't publish reports of my trips to, say, Uluru or Kakadu, where I did notice the landscapes and the people and was affected by the experience, but didn't feel I could do it justice in the time I had available, so I didn't write about it at all (except in my unpublished diary). Perhaps your GUFF trip falls into the same category? - JHW]

Judith, who opened *WWW* (and the accompanying issue of *Gegen-schein*) tells me that it was in fact addressed only to her, and not to both of us. Does this mean that we should consider you for inclusion in *FTT* 13's Hall of Shame?

[The omission of your name from the mailing label was quite deliberate. At one time you said you did not read or respond to zines that were not addressed to you, and we had got tired of your repetitious letters decrying our publishing efforts, so we removed your name from the label. Now that it's clear that didn't work, and you are reading our zines anyway, we have restored your name to the list. We've had our little joke. Besides, we do like *FTT*. - JHW]

Lucy Sussex
430 Dryburgh
North Melbourne, Vic 3051
Australia

The story I mentioned in my letter on *WWW*#39 [on surrogacy] appeared in *Angels of Power* (Spinifex Press, Melbourne 1992), an independent press collection of stories/plays etc relating to reproductive technology. Ros Love is there too.

Patricia McKinley
15 Barker Street
Ipswich, Qld 4305
Australia

In #41 you mentioned *Folk of the Fringe* in your book bits. I read it last year and spent the next few months angsty over how on earth the man who wrote *Ender's Game* and *Seventh Son* could possibly be a devout Mormon (or devout anything - organised religions are so unreligious, sort of). I'm a fairly lapsed Catholic myself and most lapsed Catholics I know are into religious discussion and reminiscences in a big way - maybe it hit a nerve. Last week I read *Maps in a Mirror* and thanks to copious author's notes I've stopped being bothered by it. I still don't understand it.

[I'm not sure I understand what you mean. Card is obviously very concerned about some major issues that deeply religious people are concerned about (morality, I guess I'd call it, though in the much wider sense the word should be used, not the narrow sex-related sense it seems to be used by many people these days). Do you mean that close followers of organised

religions seem to you to not be interested in moral issues? I've certainly observed a lot of what I'd consider gross hypocrisy amongst a lot of people who claim to be religious, while people who display what I'd consider true "Christian" values often don't have much to do with organised Christianity. Is that what you meant, or something else? I must read Maps in a Mirror myself one of these days. - JHW]

**Roelof Goudriaan
Caan van Necklaan 63
2281 BB Jijswijk
The Netherlands
April 1992**

I feel sorry about not making time to loc WWW – life is still so ghastly busy I am just coping. But at least now, unlike 2-3 years ago, it's not 75% despair but 75% creativity/ craft building instead.

[Good to hear it! – JHW]

**John Newman
PO Box 1135
Ballarat Mail Centre, Vic 3354
14 June 1992**

Your comment about losing NZ views in the mist reminded me of our place. The mist sweeps in and out so suddenly that at one moment you can see Ballarat, and in the next you can't see the nearest fence.

It's a funny life for a city boy. Chopping wood because we decided that using the open fire is a good way to limit our heating bills, digging drains to stop the back door being hidden behind a muddy brown moat, trudging about in the rainy dark trying to find out why the water pump has stopped. It's quite amazing, really.

In addition there is the delightful climate. Last week we had our coldest maximum (4C), our coldest minimum (1C) and a brief sprinkling of snow during breakfast. It wouldn't be so bad if it was supposed to be Alpine around here. But there are compensations. The snow was beautiful.

A week ago my brother Lindsay and his wife Lynne were staying for the night. At first the weird grunts and squeals coming out of the night alarmed them, until Jan pointed out that it's just the koalas over by Blackberry Lane. A couple of days later, coming home from a long day in Melbourne at 12:15 am, I surprised three grey wallabies grazing by the side of

the road near the top of our driveway.

It had never occurred to me before, but in damp, cold weather the outside of a mud brick house gets rather soft! You have to be careful not to bump into it, lest you make a dent, or knock out pieces of rubble. A month ago we finally were able to move into the new shed, so much of the junk lying around the lounge and hallway could move out. This would be the smallest house we have ever lived in.

Of course that's just the inside. Outside (where one hardly goes at the moment) is nearly ten acres of basically bare and neglected mountain-side. From the size of the thistles (and the large gum trees around the perimeter) the soil is as rich as it looks, and we have started plans and planting for gardens.

Naturally, Jan wants a basically European/UK/international type of garden, while I'm keen on restoring some of the bush that was cleared out 150 years ago. So she has her son Ben digging flower beds around the house, and I'm planning on a stand of Mountain Ash (*Eucalyptus regens*, the tallest Australian native tree)! At the moment the wind howls across the property, and some windbreak trees will be a priority next spring.

On the business side I'm picking up various small application programming and computer communication jobs in Melbourne and Ballarat, as well as having a venture going in partnership with a bloke I met up here. My preferred interests in system software, languages and industrial computing are taking a back seat while I try and make a living.

The "venture" I speak of is a Point of Sale system, which I am writing and my partner is marketing. I've always needed a partner like that. We have three beta test sites organised in Ballarat, one of which has been running quite successfully for over a month. If this business does well it will be a big relief, but this calendar year won't see much in the way of income from it.

In addition, and meanwhile, Jan's antique business is doing OK. Not booming, but summer was good, and she's surviving in an industry where many aren't. I help out, mainly carrying and fixing plus a bit of shop minding. Today she's up the country looking for bargains.

The life we are living is a surprising distance from where we were a couple of years ago. It's interesting,

but you know what they say about interesting times. It had better stop being so hard soon, I think, but as long as the cars last out another year we'll probably be OK!

I miss a lot of the things which used to be in my life, including St Kilda, our big house, and the friends I see less of than ever. Still, I feel a definite urge to settle on this mountain, and sink roots into the deep red soil.

**Rachel McGrath-Kerr
2 High Street
Evandale, Tas 7212
Australia**

I smiled at Lyn's observation on her Seattle flight that she was "supposed to be embarrassed and apologise for (her) intemperate demands". I've been having fun with the National Westminster Bank at their Maida Vale branch (*in the UK, where she's been living – JHW*). Apparently I should've been ashamed of myself having the nerve to ask for a card so I could use their automatic teller machines. Perhaps I really do have a penetrating voice. My public discussion with the assistant at peak time (with a number of interested on-lookers) resulted in a cashcard in record time.

**Harry Andruschak
PO Box 5309
Torrance, CA 90510-5309
USA
14 April 1992**

I am in a cash crisis. I have been in an auto accident, my car is totalled, the insurance company will pay me off at Blue Book value (which is nowhere near what I still owe the finance company), I need to buy a replacement, and my insurance rates will climb, even tho it is not my fault.

[Things like that remind me of why I do not want to buy a replacement car until I can pay cash for it, or at least pay such a large percentage that I won't owe much. But I want to get rid of the old car before it develops too many more expensive problems. A dilemma! Eric and I were remarking lately that it's a real nuisance that noone will steal or destroy my car when I want them to, because in my case the book value is quite a lot more than I can get if I sell it at street value or use it as a trade in. Another example of the basic unfairness of the universe. - JHW]

16 July 1992

Re your trip report, and the comments on airline announcements... the real reason United wanted everyone sitting down is lawsuits. And the announcement had to be such that you would notice it, or at least United could claim that you should have noticed it. Otherwise, passengers could sue for millions of dollars. Hence, rude but noticed announcements, with government regulations getting the blame, not the courts.

[How could I possibly forget the American national pastime - suing anyone or anything for any reason, or threatening to! - JHW]

Last Memorial Day my mother came down from Seattle for a 1 week visit. Among other things, my brother and I took her out to a fancy restaurant. Brother was in traditional suit-and-tie, but I was in full Highland Dress. Mother claims it was my stunning outfit that got us a table in less than 5 minutes, and one of the best views in the house.

Mike Gunderloy
111 Washington St #1
Troy, NY 12180
USA

12 September 1992

The last year or so has been extremely taxing for me, a full-blown mid-life crisis involving separating from my wife, stopping publishing (hell, even stopping writing anything at all for six months), switching jobs, starting drinking, lapsing out of vegetarianism, moving, and probably several other major changes which I'm blocking on at the moment.

Anyhow, I did want to say a word or two about Bernie's garbage article... I'm now living in a working class neighborhood, and the environmental consciousness here is just

about zero. I can walk down the alley behind my apartment building and see three mattresses (there were four, but one vanished, presumably scavenged), two chairs, the shattered remains of an entire toilet, and numerous sacks of garbage broken open by roving cats and dogs which the garbage people can't be bothered to collect. Cardboard and bottles in profusion appear too. New York State now has mandatory recycling, but the compliance on my block is precisely zero - in part because the trash company hasn't yet bothered to distribute the containers that are supposed to hold the separated wastes for curbsid pickup. Not that it will matter - you can't put a trashcan in the alley without it being stolen (we all use large bags), so I'm sure the containers won't last long, if they ever do show up in the first place.

[The last 2 or 3 times the Ryde council has held a "big item" pickup, where people can put out furniture, car bodies, and other stuff that won't fit in the garbage bins, I have been amazed at the small amount that survives the scavengers. Even broken stuff is taken away. Trucks cruise the streets, their drivers and passengers leaping out to pick up stuff. Maybe it's all the recent migrants (from cultures of poverty and scarcity)? Whatever, I'm all for it! - JHW]

Teddy Harvia
PO Box 905
Euless, TX 76039
USA
24 July 1992

I grew up with racial prejudice in the USA. Despite all the legislation against it, it still exists today as ingrained as ever. A recent poll among whites revealed their greatest fear is

young black males. Scary for me were mannerisms and speech patterns my own teenage son (he's white) picked up from watching too many rap videos on TV.

I remember separate public water fountains in Texas in the 50's, one clearly marked "Coloured". My parents, both raised outside the South, gave me a clear message that they thought segregation wrong.

In the early 60's we moved to Ohio. Swimming pools, which in Texas were public, were private in the North. A membership fee kept the blacks out. Unfortunately, it kept the children of poor whites out too, me included.

During the height of racial tension in the 60's, we lived in Tulsa. Memory of race riots in the 20's inspired church leaders to try a program which had whites visit the homes of blacks. I remember sitting with adults in the living room of one black family while their kids played outside. Very uncomfortable.

My freshman years of college I attended an all-white, all-male junior college in Alabama. The cafeteria help was all black. To eliminate the chance of racial slurs, the only accepted term of address for all was "sirree".

The first real test of my upbringing came in the Army. I ended up an enlisted man in the infantry in which whites were a minority. I learned to respect black sergeants who had authority over me. Harder to accept were the poor blacks and whites who'd joined to avoid going to jail.

I also heard from:

Sheryl Birkhead, Buck Coulson, John & Diane Fox, Kathleen Gallagher, Judith Hanna, Eric Meyer, Chris Nelson, Peggy Ranson, Carol Severance, Sue Thomason, Julie Vaux and probably lots of others.

Dick Smith and Leah Zeldes for DUFF!