

WEBER WOMAN'S WREVENGE

Oh No!
It's the Big Five-0

Come help Jean Weber
celebrate her 50th birthday

When: Saturday, 27 February 1993
Where: 7 Nicoll Avenue, Ryde
5 pm until ???
BYO drinks and chairs; everything*
else provided. A contribution of \$15
each towards expenses is requested.

Gifts not expected, but if you must,
a live Australian native plant,
suitable for a suburban garden,
would be appropriate.

RSVP (02) 809-4610

* barbecue meat, salads, dessert, plates, utensils, cups, etc

Special
photographic
exposé issue

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I prefer some sort of
personal response.

The Rubbish Bin

I've been very busy since I published the last issue of *Wrevenge*. I made a quick trip in November 1992 to visit my parents in Lacey, Washington, with a two-day stop in Seattle that included a meal with lots of fans, organised by Janice Murray. I also stopped in the San Francisco Bay area to see my sister, her husband, and their new house, and managed to catch up with Alyson Abramowitz, but only briefly.

Just before that trip, IBM called again with a small editing job that turned into a major editing/rewriting job – this kept me busy until the first week in January. Then Kinhill Engineering called, wanting an experienced scientific editor to be part of a team working on a major submission to a government inquiry. Five weeks of long hours and gruelling work, but very interesting – both the subject matter and the editorial team.

As soon as that ended, I was back at IBM for a few weeks, during which time one of last year's clients rang wanting a revision to a book, on two weeks' notice. I charged them extra, but got it done. Eric and I then went to Perth for a week at Easter, attending SwanCon 18 and doing miscellaneous sightseeing.

Exciting news from SwanCon was the announcement of a serious bidding committee for Australia in 1999. Eric and I were favourably impressed with the group's convenor, Donna Heenan, who lives in Melbourne. Look for flyers and representatives at ConFrancisco and other cons near you!

Now I'm at another computing house for about 4 months, as Team Leader for the technical writing group on a project, and doing the editing for that project. This will become a part-time job in June, and I'm expecting to get involved in something else part-time (although I don't know what yet).

Eric and I are soon heading off for a week in New Zealand, visiting various people (including Lyn McConchie) and attending DefCon in Wellington.

– Jean

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Photos from 1992-93

Photos and comments by Jean Weber, except for photos on pages 10 & 11, which were taken by Jim Nomarhas.

Joe and Gay Haldeman

As I mentioned last issue, in June 1992, Joe and Gay Haldeman stayed at my house while visiting Sydney. Here are a few photos from their visit.

You've probably read elsewhere that Joe enjoys cooking, and is well-known for preparing delicious meals. This was fortunate, because I was feeling too ill to cook – and I don't enjoy cooking at the best of times. One photo shows Joe starting preparations for one of the dinners – even with semi-destroyed taste buds, I could tell the result was excellent.



Above: Joe Haldeman preparing dinner



Above: Gay Haldeman

My house

A kitchen photo (with Joe in it) naturally leads to some other photos of the house (p.4), including the hot tub room (p.5) I've been raving about for some time.

Collatio

The next collection shows me (p.6), Eric and Minou (p.8) collating the November 1992 issues of *Wrevenge* and *Gegenschein*.

Below: Terry Dowling, me, Gay, Joe





Above: Front of Jean's house

Below: Back of Jean's house



Coping with kipple

by Sue Peukert

Last year I shifted house six times. I won't go into the traumatic circumstances that caused my nomadic wanderings, but, during that time, I became very efficient at moving. One of the reasons that I became such a capable mover was that I jettisoned many of my possessions with the aim of travelling light.

About six months ago I moved into a tiny townhouse in Marden. I was sharing it with a guy my age who turned out to be a strange, religious type. The constant shifting, and various other events of that year, had left me emotionally and physically exhausted. I therefore decided that, although the place and my flatmate were less than ideal, I would stay there for at least a year to allow me to develop a settled and sane life again.

I renewed my acquaintance with Roman just prior to moving into the place in Marden.(1) For those of you who don't know him, Roman Orszanski is a bearded, bicycling, rabidly green Adelaide fan. After a few dates, Roman asked me back to his place. He warned me it was messy. It was. At that stage I found the mess amusing, I considered it a charming quirk of Roman's. I also assumed that the mess was of a temporary nature. I was wrong!!!

The mess didn't worry me overly much while I was still residing at Marden. The only time it raised my temper was when I tripped down the hall in the middle of the night, fumbling through the dark, trying to avoid the strategically placed piles! I would work out a safe route, but the next time I would try it, a new obstacle would be in the way. I would yell abuse at Roman when I tripped over something, but still found the mess endearing.

Well, things have changed since then. I no longer live at Marden, and I no longer find Roman's messiness charming.

Why the move from Marden, when I was determined to have a longish-term stay there? Well, that is my former flatmate's fault. I got home from work one night and Barry informed me of two things. The first was that he was moving to Queensland in ten days time. The second thing was that I had to leave the townhouse the following weekend, six days hence.

I had several options. Moving back in with my parents was one of them. I was not keen on this option as I had lived with them for four months in 1992, and though I love my parents dearly, I find it difficult to live with them. Although it was kinda sweet, I

didn't really appreciate my father waiting up until I got home from a night on the town, et cetera. Another option was to try and find another place to rent. Given the short notice, this would have proved practically impossible, but I was willing to give it a go. The final, and I thought most sensible, option was to move in with Roman.

Later that night I explained my predicament to Roman. I resisted the temptation to ask him outright could I move in with him. After my explanation of the situation, we sat in silence for about an hour, staring at one another. Roman broke the silence by asking me to move in with him. I accepted. We had been discussing the issue of us living together, but my predicament proved to be the catalyst for it actually happening! I didn't sleep at Marden again from that night, by that stage I didn't very often anyway...

To my surprise, I discovered that I found living with Roman's mess a source of great irritation. There seems to be a significant difference between casually observing such a mess and actually living amongst it. To my amusement I witnessed a radical change in my short-term goals. My short term aims in life had been things such as write chapter *n* of my

Hot tub room at
Jean's house



thesis on genetic algorithms, prepare next week's lecture, et cetera. This has changed to the notably more mundane: Tidy house!

I've been discussing the mess in very abstract terms; let me describe it. It was the type of mess that our respective parents would stare at and shake their heads. It was the type of mess that would prevent me from asking friends over until the place was made more respectable. It was the type of mess that meant you had to tiptoe gingerly, weaving your way around the piles, to move through the place...

So, what did the mess consist of? When I first started dating Roman, the only clear floor space in his house was in three rooms: the kitchen, bathroom and toilet. Every other room of the house had a (protective?) covering of varying depths. This covering contained clothes, journals, books, 'zines, old newspapers, inches of dust and the like.

To give a more precise account of the nature of the mess, I went on an archaeological dig. Results from a small core sample of a randomly selected, representative sample of mess revealed the following items:

- A copy of *The News*, dated December 13, 1990. *The News* was a poor quality tabloid, that ceased to exist in 1992. While it was not the oldest newspaper discovered in the dig, it gets mentioned for historical interest.
- Many discarded condom wrappers, but luckily no used condoms!

- A gross of used, dried tissues. I took to wearing gloves after their discovery.
- Old bills, some dating back to 1985. I found this interesting seeing Roman only moved into Vale Park in 1989.
- A number of old zines, including *Gegenschein*, December 1991 and *Fuck The Tories*, December 1985.
- Many old telephone messages and letters.
- Assorted books and comics.
- Old bus tickets.
- A cache of coins, I made a tidy profit out of the dig!
- Dust, pubic hairs, dead bugs and various other bits of assorted crud.
- A photo of some blue wire chairs inscribed with the following sweet message:

*Tues 9th Oct
Dear Roman,
Life has been blue & square
without you
Look forward to NOW!
XO J....(illegiblecrawl)*

It's extremely difficult to tidy such a mess, especially when it was created by someone else. My pleas to Roman to clean the place have had two types of results. I occasionally extract a pledge from him to clean up, with no follow up action on his behalf. I then make yet another attempt to do it myself. The second type of result is that he moves **everything** in one of the offending areas of mess to his study. I don't care if his study is messy – it's his private environment. I am, how-

ever, rather concerned as his study keeps absorbing the miscellaneous items. I fear that eventually it will be so full that when we open the door we will be engulfed by an avalanche of junk, oops, I mean valuable items!

I won't go into the details of how I've been dealing with the mess, the reason being that I would like to live a little longer and Roman would probably kill me if he finds out what I have been doing. The house is now relatively tidy and may be navigated without risk to life and limb. A reassuring, to Roman, ring of mess is left on the perimeter of most rooms, but these are also being worked upon!

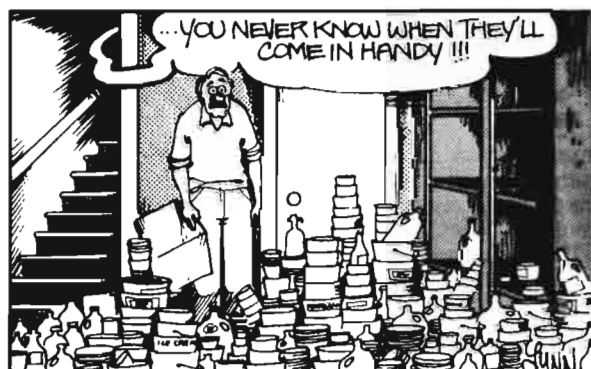
Roman's messiness is probably our major source of potential conflict. Roman finds me compulsively neat(2), while I find him extremely messy. Luckily we both have good senses of humour and the ability to negotiate, so I'm sure we'll survive....

Notes: (1) See *OAFF* No. 4 for details. Write to the author of this article for a copy.

(2) I'm not. When I'm in the midst of studying, marking and preparation, my study is a disaster area. And I'm perfectly capable of building a mountain of dirty clothes, et cetera. I received further reassurance on this point from arecent house guest of ours, Judith Hanna. Judith states that I definitely fail to make the grade as a compulsive tidier. She should know since her partner of many years (Joseph Nicholas) is nicknamed Attila the Tidy!

I'm tempted to tell Sue many stories gleaned from ten years of living with Eric, whose habits sound very similar to Roman's. But I won't – I'll just say that somewhere along the line I decided that if I had to choose between a tidy life without Eric, and a messy life with him, it was no contest. Besides, I had decided long before I even met Eric that I didn't care what other people thought of the way I live or the people I live with. To paraphrase a book title from Richard Feynmann, why should you care what other people think? – JHW

FOR BUILT-UP OR WORSE



Notes from rural New Zealand

Lyn McConchie

(Editor's note: the big news from Farside Farm is that Lyn's first book of short stories is out! It's called Farming Daze by Elizabeth Underwood. Wrevenge readers will recognize some of Lyn's anecdotes from these pages, but they've all been reworked for professional publication, and new tales have been added. Send NZ\$21 to Lyn for your very own, autographed, copy; Australian readers can send A\$16 to me, Jean Weber. See addresses on p. 2)

A new cat in the house

I now share the house with a feline friend. My house is again a home.

I found Tai Shan at the SPCA in Palmerston North. For the first two days I had a cat apparently determined to live permanently under an armchair. Any attempt to persuade him out produced wild panic. I was wondering what had been done to him to cause this fear.

He was supposed to be around 10 months old. He was in very good condition, but the SPCA had only had him there a couple of days. Someone had cared for him. But if he'd lived with a human who cared enough to feed him well, why was he so afraid of me?

I've never been judged a threat by a cat before. Even the wild female who lives nearby and visits isn't exactly scared of me. She just doesn't want to be handled. Tai was acting as if he'd been born feral – either that or he'd been very badly ill-treated recently. I decided to try to find out.

In the meantime I would leave him alone. A quiet word when I saw him, food and drink, but no attempt to approach or to handle him – that might soothe his fears.

On the Wednesday night I deciphered the name and address on his vet card. Tai was occasionally out from under the chair and had been trotting about investigating the house. I could hear his collar bell tinkling as he moved. However, any appearance by me and he was back under the chair.

I rang the name on the card. The mystery was to some extent solved. Tai had been bred, probably by a breeder of Siamese, and both he and

his sister had been promised to someone who never came in to collect them. At eight months the breeder had tired of waiting and taken them to the SPCA. The lady on the vet card had found him there. For two months Tai had lived with her; but owing to her much-loved dog, he had never quite settled.

It sounded from what she had heard as if Tai's life with the breeder had been one of loneliness. Kept in a cage, fed, watered, cleaned out and not ill-treated, but never let out, handled or provided with any attention or affection. A human in such a position would be left as inadequately socialised.

Poor Tai was rather like a deprived child. After my talk with his human (who had been heart-broken to give him back to the SPCA but felt it would be better for him to have an exclusive home) I could hear him bouncing about the library. It sounded as if my small lonely cat was playing.

The thing that infuriated me in all this was the SPCA's attitude. When I had asked, they had claimed to know nothing of his background, although he had been through their hands twice. In addition, his second owner had taken in his adored red rat toy and asked them to keep it with him. Not only had they not bothered, it hadn't even been given to me when it would have helped him settle in far better.

His second owner had gone down and retrieved it, posting it on to me. By now Tai had been with me some 10 days. He was still under the chair and only came out when I was outside or in bed. I'd given him an old woolly chair rug and he slept cuddled up in that. Now that he had his rat back, he was feeling more secure.

Gradually I persuaded him that if I lay across the sofa arm and halfway around his chair, he was in no danger. With his rat for comfort and his chair as a barricade, he was prepared to permit me to touch him gently. A few more days and he was moving a few inches forward to meet a coaxing hand. Then – a small breakthrough. I was hanging as usual over the sofa arm. Tai crept forward and, as my fingers worked around his jaw, he purred.



After that he purred each time he was petted. Not that he was coming out from his chair, mind you. I was still contorting myself if I wanted to scratch him, but he was slowly thinking it over. I became aware as I read in bed that I was seeing a small grey, white and fawn cat peering around the door at me. Then around my side of the bed.

Finally late one evening he sidled out from behind his chair and paced along behind the sofa and his chair, around behind the enclosed fire, across the front of the lounge and back around behind the sofa and chair. It was a start. He had voluntarily emerged when I was present and sitting there in front of him.

He was fascinated whenever I had a bath. I left the door open and sooner or later I would be aware of a small face peering at me in amazement. The expression either read "Dear Goddess, what kind of an idiot lies down in water on purpose" or (if his previous human had done so) "Good grief, here's another one of them that does that!"

Four weeks after he arrived, he floated up onto the bed. There he curled up by my feet, gradually inching higher until he was tucked in at knee level. I made him welcome. The next night he was back. This time he began at knee level and inched higher. Finally he was where I could rub his jaw and stroke him. He considered, then with a worried squeak he hurled himself bodily into my arms, looking up and saying he hoped I could be trusted and would I love him forever now? I assured him I could, and I would. And that was it. Except that we have to have a snogging session every morning when I wake, to reassure him all over again in

case I changed my mind during the night. Poor little soul.

Now that Tai's settled in, my bank balance is rapidly diminishing. That cat doesn't so much eat as inhale his dinner in passing. Healthy young appetite, says my friend next door. If it was any healthier, I'd be killing whole sheep for him.

He has also managed to wreck my house water pump to the tune of \$250 for a replacement. He got into the pump cupboard when the phone rang and I left it open. Then he flailed around the plastic pipes, chewed the power cord and howled for me. I extricated him and shut the door, without realizing any of the above. The bumped pipe subsequently leaked and filled the lower concreted part of the cupboard full of water. (It's slightly below ground level.) I then needed to fill the stock tank down in the yards, plugged the pump in, switched it on... and BANG!!! Clouds of smoke, burning smell, and PANIC! As a result I had to empty the bank to get a new pump installed. It's only because I only plug it in when I actually need the pump that he survived. If the power was permanently on, chewing the cord could have electrocuted Tai. Neither of us would have been happy about that.

Then too there was my tea the other night. I came in late and pooped, grilled a few sausages and buttered a few slices of bread to take to bed and eat there. (Most meals are

taken that comfortable way. One of the joys of living alone.) The phone rang. I answered, chatted a couple of minutes and looked up just in time to see a large slice of buttered bread leaving on long Siamese legs. I let him have it; somehow I'd gone off that piece.

But when I finally sat down to eat the rest, I was slightly puzzled. I could have sworn that I'd done three sausages, but all I could see were two. Oh, well, must be wrong. Tai couldn't have taken that - there hadn't been time. Yes, well. Next morning I rose and went to dig out my sneakers. Pushed my foot into one and dropped it with a yelp. Good grief, what the heck was *that* in the toe, a mouse? Humm, shake out sneaker. No, not a mouse but 3/4 of a sausage that Tai had filed for future reference, after eating as much as he could manage after the bread.

On the 20th of December, I had my neighbor's birthday cake at my place so he wouldn't know about it. We were also having a mini-Christmas that day as we had decided "no Xmas presents for adults this year". Things are getting a bit expensive. Of course Ginger, Tony and I had all bought presents for each other prior to this arrangement made by the rest of their family without due notification. So we picked Tony's birthday to swap them instead. So...

Ginger comes over to milk and let me know things are ready and I can

bring my boxfull plus cake over any time. I get the cake out and put it in a carton. I then have a phone call. (I swear the sound of that thing is a signal to Tai.) I return, open the box to add the last couple of small items, and discover that the cake now has a section of icing missing from the edge. All too clearly something has clawed around a square inch off the edge - right by a gap in the side of the carton I hadn't realised was there. A paw-sized gap. And on the armchair someone is sitting, looking horrendously innocent but licking a front paw with a very smug look.

No time to fiddle with things, so I grab a sharp knife, clice off a couple of corners unobtrusively and use them to fill in the gap. No one notices, luckily for my slick-pawed friend. He uses his paws like real fingers at times and I am amazed at just how clever he can be using them. Mind you, I'd be happier if he used them in ways that cause fewer problems for me at the last minute.

The joys of parenthood

The geese are starting to nest for the season. I passed my original trio on to friends who wanted experienced watchgeese. They're on the main road and they're quite sick of losing property to midnight fence climbers. Since Ghandi and the girls arrived, they haven't lost a thing.

I was left with Curly and two new geese from last year's goslings. This

Jean collating Wrevenge



is the first time any of them have had eggs. The girls began to lay and Curly was fascinated. The geese had to speak brusquely about him minding his beak and keeping it out of their future offspring. To compensate for this, he went off and laid an ambush. The next three visitors were bitten. I rocketed out after the third to speak quite brusquely myself.

Curly retired wounded. For a day or two he sulked; then, having considered the whole thing, he apparently came to the conclusion my speech had been a dastardly coverup. In reality we were up to something! After that, it's been murder.

Anyone entering the yard has a large white gander slinking suspiciously in their wake. About three paces behind, with his beak stretched out parallel to the ground and about two inches up. He seems to be combining the suspicions of Hercule Poirot with those of an over-fervent customs officer of surly nature.

It isn't that he lies at you; he doesn't. It's the perpetual slinking. It's that everywhere you go in the yard and whatever you are doing – there's this large straggle-feathered shape lurking at the periphery of your vision. After awhile you become quite un-nerved by him even though he does nothing to harm you.

He hasn't had it all his own way, of course. Not considering my other animals. Bet found him lurking at her

heels last night. With the grass so short and the spring growth not in yet, she's been munching her way down an electric-fenced grass verge for a couple of weeks. She goes out after milking, then comes back for her afternoon hay.

Last night she ambled across the lawn, heading for her paddock and molasses hay. From the corner of an eye she observed Curly slinking in her wake. She turned, stared, and blinked thoughtfully. She began to stroll for the gate again and discovered once more that she was being followed. She spun on small neat Jersey hooves and jumped for the would-be detective. With a honk of horror, Curly abruptly gave up being a P.I. and vanished into the hedge.

He's still following me, but tonight he's decided to absolve Bet of evil intent toward the eggs. This is just as well for him. Not that he's really learned his lesson. Tonight the pony is on the lawn for a day or two. Guess who the great Hercule Poirot Gander is following now?

Curly had better watch out. The first eggs the geese laid turned out to be duds. We tried them with a few spare duck eggs. Those didn't hatch either, although that may not have been the geese's fault.

But, usually if the first batch of egg-laying is unsuccessful, the geese lay again 2-3 months later. This time they haven't. It's true I keep them

primarily as watchgeese, but goslings sell to a small circle of locals who either like roast goose, or their own set of guards.

I don't know if the problem lies with the gander or not. It probably does as the girls were very keen and sat faithfully. I'll be giving Curly another season. No goslings this coming spring, and he may be roast goose himself. It isn't healthy to be infertile on a farm. Thanks be that this only applies to the stock, and not this farmer...

And the cow's in calf

For months Ginger next door has been eyeing her favourite black and white cow doubtfully. Lotto had a calf last year, weaned it, and then apparently went on strike. To our puzzlement, she never seemed to come into season again, and finally Ginger had had enough.

Lotto is the only daughter we ever had from the original milk cow. Mama was a vast and docile Friesian, the first cow they learned to milk on and the leader of their small herd. Almost all of her calves were bulls, so Lotto is precious. But you can't keep a cow that doesn't produce, not on a combined farm the size of ours.

So we called the vet in. If something had gone wrong with Lotto's inner workings, we needed to know about it. The vet came, checked, and developed a wide grin.

Minou helping Eric collate Gegenschlein



"She's already in calf."

We all stood around looking at each other – stunned. It was impossible. We hadn't had the bull we borrow on the place for a good eight months. According to the vet, Lotto was five months in calf. We certainly hadn't had her AI'd. We'd planned to, but she never seemed to come into season. If she'd escaped from her paddock, we'd also have known.

But, I remembered, we *had* had a couple of young bull calves. At the time Lotto was hunting a boyfriend, they'd have only been six months old. Was that even possible? Ah, well, yes, it was, we were informed. Once in a while you got a very precocious calf. We'd had two running together. They could have been egging each other on. If so, they'd certainly succeeded.

So Lotto was going to have a calf in May. Just when we didn't want it, but we were too pleased to care. Lotto is out in the paddock looking extremely smug. We are back in the house trying to decide how to ensure enough grass to keep her in calf milk – at a time when the grass doesn't grow and we're feeding the whole lot hay. Still, what the heck. Lotto's

retrieved and we're going to get a bonus we weren't expecting. Farming is full of surprises.

Research

Having an enquiring mind can get you looked at very strangely at times. The other day I was happily re-reading the *Cat Who* books. In *The Cat Who Played Post Office*, there is a bit where the two Siamese are being conveyed by car. They were said to be protesting this "at the rate of 40 howls per minute".

My mind for some reason latched onto this. Both cats are howling. At 20 howls per minute per cat, that's 3 seconds per howl. I wondered it that was possible. Were Siamese likely to howl that rapidly?

I was fascinated by the possibilities of this. I repaired to the kitchen where I write. Tai, asleep in the armchair in the adjacent open-plan lounge, sat up. I settled, waited until my second hand hit the 12 and commenced to howl. (I do a very good imitation of a Siamese.) Tai certainly thought so. Several howls into my experiment and he was echoing me with enthusiasm.

This was useful. It made the test more valid, as I could use his cries to keep my own to a reasonable length as per a "real" test subject. I howled – Tai howled – I howled – Tai howled – I howled – Tai howled ... and I suddenly had an odd feeling at the back of my neck. Still with an eye to my watch, I glanced sideways.

Standing open-mouthed in the doorway was my stunned neighbour from next door. As she says, it's a good thing she's known me since we were kids. (Otherwise, I gather she'd have fled in search of a strait-jacket.) Explaining that I was timing how many times to the minute a Siamese can howl didn't seem to help matters. She departed, still looking as if she wondered what I turned into at midnight.

I pointed out later that I was a writer, after all. We liked to know things. I don't think I convinced her.

But I did find that the book was correct. Two Siamese could manage 20 howls per minute each, a total of forty a minute. However, if men in white coats appear to take me away, I intend to blame it all of the book's author.

Jean's 50th birthday party

Moving right along, we have a few shots from my 50th birthday party.

Right: Gordon Lingard and friend Cathy

Left: Me





Above left: Terry Dowling's back, Sarah Murray-White, Nick Stathopoulos, me



Above right: Margaret and Warren Nicholls, Sandra Charker, me

Below left: Gary Luckman, Warren Nicholls, Eric, me, Nick Stathopoulos

Below right: Cathy, Womble (Karen Warnock), Warren Nicholls





SwanCon 18 Photos

And last but not least, a few fans at SwanCon 18, Perth, Easter 1993. I ran out of film, so the pictures of Dick and Leah Smith are on the next roll, which at the time of writing is still in the camera.

Above: Clive Newell, Rod Kearins, LynC

Right: Craig Hilton

Below left: Susan Margaret, Susan's daughter Sarah, Sally Beasley

Below right: Donna Heenan, Con-
venor of Australia in 1999 (Aussiecon
III) bid committee



Letters

Dave Dismore
516 S. Alexandria
Los Angeles, CA 90020
USA

approx. Christmas 1992

Well, I'm still here, and so is *most* of the city. It got pretty interesting there for awhile during the "unpleasantness" last spring [1992], but since the town only goes nuts once every 27 years or so, that's not so bad.

I was at the office when the verdict [in the original Rodney King police trial] came down at 3 pm. By 5, all the convenience stores had long lines of people, buying as much food as they could before the hoarders and/or looters got there. By 6, the lines were gone – as were most store windows, and looters were happily carrying away whatever was left.

Pedaling home down Wilshire, I noticed that any business that sold electronic equipment or food was fully looted, and by the time I got to Western Avenue, I knew I was out of the frying pan & into the fire (literally!). The smoke was incredibly thick in my neighborhood because the rioters had made a kind of "tic-tac-toe" pattern as they moved through Koreatown. One group went north, up Vermont, another chose Western. Two other groups went west: one down 3rd Street, & the other down Wilshire, so I was in the "center box" of the pattern.

Actually, the closest buildings that burned were 1/2 block south & 2-1/2 blocks north, so it wasn't all that bad here. The electricity never went off, so I could follow all the action on TV, and whenever there was a convergence of helicopters overhead, I knew it was time to go outside for a look (and a few pictures, at a discrete distance, with a telephoto lens!).

I had a dental appointment on Day Two (as if things weren't bad enough!) and though I normally bike to Orange County, so many streets were either blocked off or full of broken glass that I just biked downtown to Union Station and took the train. I do like trains, and it was relaxing to be out of the riot for a couple of hours, though once I began to get into Los Angeles again I could see *lots* of new smoke plumes, so I knew it wasn't over yet.

On Day Three, things got better. The army finally arrived, and set up a staging area in front of Ralph's Grocery, which, to everyone's relief, re-stocked and opened up again. (I was down to tuna fish & popcorn, so it was none too soon.)

So, it was definitely an exciting year. I'm in the process of editing all the riot coverage on TV into a video, showing what happened, and some of the events leading up to it.

Bernadette Bosky
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USA

(This comment appeared in *Company of Women* #2, in *A Women's Apa* #95, February 1993)

I enjoyed all the material by Lyn McConchie... The writing reminded me a bit of Rebecca Ore's LoCs and conversations about her life & animals – not so much in the style as in the attention to detail and interesting view of non-human life-forms.

I like your reply to Joseph Nicholas's letter. I made a speech many Corflus ago (at the "living Outworlds" near Cincinnati) that pointed out the ironic contrast of academe's growing acceptance of multiple, subjective standards of value – breaking open the canon of works to teach, multicultural and interdisciplinary curricula, post-structuralist challenges to traditional standards and the idea of objectivity in general – and many of the premiere critics in sf fandom, who remain absolutely certain of what constitutes "quality" in zines and are never shy to enforce the idea with whatever power they have. Which is far less than even that of academe! One would – or at least I would – think that fandom would be even more apt to embrace multiple standards & judge a work on its own terms, since fanac has no value – perhaps no point – apart from enjoyment.

Beyond that, I'm general suspicious of the idea "that it's pointless to do less than your best, less than you know you're capable of," as Joseph says. On the one hand, I am sympathetic to the general quest for excellence, and I think people with those aspirations (including him &

me) deserve credit. On the other hand, putting it in absolute terms is, in my experience, as likely to produce nothing as it is to produce continued quality. If I'm always doing rushed, mediocre work, then I need to look at my time-use and priorities and do something. But if, because of circumstances or energy or whatever, I have the choice between mediocre work and nothing, I fervently believe that the former is always better. As a friend of mine in bodywork points out, if you run a machine at peak load all of the time, it will break. Most people I know need (self-given) permission to produce flawed work, more than they need to be chided into quality.

(I often don't write something because I don't have time to do it properly – when it's something I consider important enough to deserve my "best". For example, I never wrote up my trip to Australia's Northern Territory several years ago. The country and my experiences affected me so much that I felt they deserved special treatment (I had, after all, gone there for the experience), but it never got written. –JHW)

D Gary Grady
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(This comment appeared in *No Theory! Facts!!* #29, in *FLAP* #80, February 1993)

I hope you will pass on to Lyn McConchie my tremendous delight in reading her stuff. She's easily one of the best and most consistently enjoyable writers in fandom.

The Nation, a U.S. leftist weekly, recently ran an article on so-called "difference feminism," an increasingly dominant strain of American feminism that holds that there are important biologically-determined mental differences between men and women, and that the good and noble traits are, coincidentally, all on the female side. The author of this article holds an opinion closer to yours, that differences (except for the obvious physical ones) are cultural. For the most part I tend to agree with you, but there is a respectable body of evidence that points to a link between aggressiveness and tes-

tosterone. It may well be that, independently of socialization, men have a greater tendency to be aggressive (under which rubric I subsume both "assertive" and "aggressive" in the popular psychology sense of the words). Whether this is "good" or "bad" depends on a great many things. Also, I don't mean to say that this is anything more than a tendency. Individual men and women cover a wide range of aggressiveness, and the two distributions largely overlap, if my experience is any guide.

I strongly disagree with Teddy Harvia's claim that racial prejudice in the U.S. "still exists today as ingrained as ever." I don't deny there's a long way to go, but I do deny that there has been no progress at all.

(I differentiate between what people think and feel, and what they do. Many people have modified their behaviour, but the prejudice may still be there, waiting to break out in times of stress or even when circumstances seem to condone it. So I'd agree with Teddy, not just in speaking of the U.S., but of many (most?) parts of the world. - JHW)

Roger Sims
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(This comment appeared in *Bheer is Best* #5, in *FLAP* #80, February 1993)

Lyn's stuff about the farm are always wondrous to read, but since I know nothing of it no comment comes out of my head. However I do have two questions: What is, "brought her up on a bucket?" and "no trouble to bail break..." Please explain someday.

"Brought her up on a bucket" means to have fed the calf milk from a bucket, instead of having the calf feed directly from the cow's teats. This usually occurs when the calf's mother is missing from the scene, either because the calf was taken away before it was old enough to be weaned, or because the cow is ill or dead. "Bail break" refers to convincing the cow to stand quietly in a narrow pen while you milk her. I think the "bail" is the pen, but I'm not sure. "Break" is of course used in the same sense that you "break" a horse when you convince it to allow a human to ride on its back. - JHW)

Sheryl Birkhead
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10 March 1993

Lyn's continuing farm saga is great. For her information, I am licensed (veterinary) in 3 states. Each has its own manner of listing. West Virginia has both an oral and a written exam. One of the first of my oral questions was "How do you de-bleat a sheep?" Consider the situation - nervous, keyed up ... and drawing a total blank (meaning I mentally jumped to the conclusion that this meant I would fail miserably) - I ummed, errred...and finally admitted I had no idea, other than to cut the vocal chords. To compete the tale, when I was finished with my questioning, I had a chance to ask questions of the panel. I finally asked, "...Uh, how do you de-bleat a sheep?" The pertinent questioner looked straight at me and replied, "You don't... it was a trick question." I passed the exam.

Dale Speirs
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15 March 1993

McConchie's account of sheep farming in New Zealand bears remarkable similarity to cattle ranching in Alberta, with only a change in species. I decided that I preferred city life rather than chasing after a herd of Charolais cattle. Whenever I hear people talking about how they would like to give up the urban rat race and retire to the country to enjoy the simple life, I chuckle into my beard. I shall show them Lyn's article to sober them up. One difference though; instead of hens in the hayloft, the hazard of taking out bales to feed the cattle was wasps.

Buck Coulson
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20 February 1993

Lyn McConchie's column reinforced my belief that I was wise to avoid the entire idea of farming. I must say I'd never heard of feminist cows before; the revolution is spreading. The sheep stories were funny, but then most sheep stories

are funny.

Your review of the Cummings book reminded me that one person Juanita and I see at cons has baffled us as to sex. Baffling Juanita is somewhat harder than baffling me, of course; she notices more details. We've never really "met" the person, and never conversed, but see him/her at several conventions each year. One of those things that, logically, doesn't matter; we're not involved and so it should make no difference to us. But it has the pull of mystery; one wants to *know*, even when knowing would make no difference whatever. (And, of course, it's unlikely we ever will know; we obviously have little in common with this person, or we'd have become acquainted by now.)

Diane Fox
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Australia

7 December 1992

Lyn McConchie's story of the little lamb who produced hideous noises in the night reminds me of a joke John heard:

"The New Zealanders are bringing out a sequel to 'Silence of the Lambs'. It's called 'Shut up, Youse'."

Mike Gunderloy's comments about garbage and recycling were interesting, and the picture he paints a depressing one. Re your own remarks about people scavenging what other people discard, I think it may have a lot to do with the impulse to get something free, rather than actual poverty. Probably people who grow up in environments where there aren't many shops or means of getting needed items easily, tend to hoard or scavenge in the hope that, if something is needed, they will have it on hand. Book buffs like me will not go past a pile of cheap books without poking through them, and electronics buffs like John are even worse - one time he rescued an old discarded TV from a ditch in the hope that its components might still be useful.

(Well, I enjoy scavenging and I'm certainly not poor! I attribute it to a desire not to be something go to waste (and a basic stinginess with my money). I think this goes back to my growing up in a family with that attitude (and not poor, either), because my parents lived through considerably

shortages during WWII and earlier, when things simply weren't available and you re-used everything you could. Pity our "affluent" society lost a lot of those habits – consumption might be good for the economy, but it sure isn't good for the environment! Note that I said "might" – that's a very debatable point, as I'm sure Roman Orszanski, amongst others, can tell us. – JHW)

There's also the reverse aspect – people who discard or destroy things they no longer need, seemingly offended by the possibility that others might use them. For instance, a business ordered too many shirts for its staff, so discarded the spares at the local tip, slashing the backs first to make them unwearable. Or the rich lout who felt he would not get enough back by selling his car, so drove it to the top and set it alight. (Needless to say, it was one of the expensive brands of car in superb condition and reasonably new. This sort of thing does not seem to be done by owners of old scruffy cars.)

Steve George
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21 January 1993

Your exchange [with Joseph Nicholas] was about the most entertaining bit of the issue. I think he makes some valid points, but so do you. Writing, as you put it, "exactly the sort of report I wanted to write" doesn't mean much, especially if nobody else wants to read it. And if you're not writing what you think other people might want to read, then why are you publishing at all? Then again, you're right too. It's very difficult to write well, never mind entertainingly, about things that don't interest you.

(Well, enough people write to say they like my trip reports, that I think I do have an audience who want to read what I write – although I suspect more of them want to read Lyn McConchie's writing! – JHW)

Lyn McConchie's column was cool. I've thought long and hard about giving up urban life for the country, but can't convince my wife it's a good idea. The problems Lyn faces sound, from a distance, amusing and rather mild. Give me a cow with mastitis or a scouring bull-calf any day to traffic jams, consumer debt, faceless 9 to 5 work in money-

grabbing corporations, and fucking American cars that won't start when it's 40 below zero (F or C it don't matter). Then again, the grass/shit/problems are always greener on the other side of the fence/high-way/world.

Joseph Nicholas
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15 January 1993

Your response to my letter in *WeberWoman's Wrevenge* 43 reveals, I'm sorry to say, the typical fan's inability to distinguish between the argument and the person making it. It is not a question of you writing what I personally would have preferred to read, but of satisfying the generally accepted "rules" for an interesting and involving piece of writing. (Particularly travel writing. I can only assume that you've never read any.) I cannot understand why so many fans have so much trouble grasping this elementary distinction between person and argument, but perhaps you might care to be the first to explain to me why they persist in confusing the two.

(First, I do distinguish quite clearly between the two; I just like to stir you along, Joseph. Second, I am well aware of the "rules" of good writing, and especially of travel writing. If I were writing in hopes or intention of publication by someone else, I would follow their rules. I also know that what one person finds "interesting and involving" bores another person shitless, so I have a strong scepticism about those rules. – JHW)

Gerald Smith
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early 1993

Your review of *Katherine's Diary* I basically agree with. I was engrossed with the book from start to finish but did find that it missed that ultimate explanation of what it is that defines a transsexual. Of course the book really only purports to be a narrative description of what happened, not why it happened. But it does give tantalising glimpses of the answer. Maybe the reason we don't see any more of the answer is that Katherine really can't describe that answer herself – any more than we can ade-

quately explain colour to a blind man.

I see Joseph continues with his tireless one-man crusade to mould every faned into his own image. I'm afraid that Joseph is just incapable of understanding that anyone should want to do something differently to the way he does it. One can only feel a little pity for the continual sense of disappointment such an attitude must engender.

Harry Andruschak
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14 January 1993

What follows is *my opinion* only.

Ah yes, that book by Stanton Peele about the diseasing of America. I thought Peele had a good concept but went off the track in overstating his case. And much of that comes from the fact that he does not understand just what the AA program is about, and neither do you from your comment on it. But in a way, you are correct that many people buy into addiction concepts, compulsive-obsessive personalities, and the other jargon of recovery. And right there is the key problem: "recovering" vs. "recovered".

It still seems to astonish many [people] that the old AA term was "recovered". Not recovering. And it goes to the heart of the AA recovery program. The best wording on this that I can find in AA General Conference Approved Literature is from the pamphlet "A Member's Eye View". It has this...

"Sooner or later, the recovered alcoholic in AA is literally forced to think for himself... The formless flexibility of AA principles as interpreted by their different adherents finally pushes our alcoholic into a stance where he must use only himself as a frame of reference for his actions, and this in turn means he must be willing to accept the consequences of those actions. In my book, that is the definition of emotional maturity."

Now do you understand why so many take-offs from AA have dropped the word "recovered" and gone over to "recovering"? If you are always recovering, see, you are always sick and not fully responsible for your actions. It is not your fault.

So many of the 12-step oriented groups just become meetings for wallowing in self-pity... "I have a disease and it is not my fault if I cannot function properly!"... that I can understand why Stanton Peale is tired of it all. I am tired of it all, and especially the drug addicts at AA meetings who spout that "recovering, not recovered" line.

(That was pretty much my view even before you explained it, Harry, and I'm glad you confirmed it. I probably didn't explain myself sufficiently or very well in my mini-book report. - JHW)

Two transsexuals have impacted on my life, although at a superficial

level. One is science fiction fan Joanne Dow, LASFS member and Amiga fanatic. The other was Cynthia Robbins, an electronics technician at the Post Office who had his/her operation while working at the Post Office and generated a huge amount of controversy on how to handle it all. Quite simply, most of the male-dominated technicians and supervisors handled it very badly. A sad story, but one of which I cannot fill out all the details since I do not know them. But even though she left the Post Office a couple of years ago, the after effects are still around. Including the odd fact that I am not allowed to wear the kilt at work. The

rule is now on the books that no MPE Mechanic or Electronics Technician can wear dresses and skirts at work. And it is referred to as the "Cynthia Robbins Rule".

I sure can sympathize with Lyn McConchie's water problems. Southern California has gone through 6 years of drought. It rains like hell every winter, and people think the drought is over. Not so, since all that rain just washes out to the ocean. Where we need lots of rain is in the mountains, for snowpack and reservoirs and ground water.

And yup, the last two years severe water conservation measures were

Transsexuals – some historical notes

Lucy Sussex

I tend to agree with your review of Katherine Cummings's autobiography, as I also think gender is societal rather than biological. The roles assigned to the different sexes in different societies are far from identical. Just to take the interest in dress that KC finds so much a female characteristic – it is not necessary to do more than open a *National Geographic* to find photoessays on the Wodaabe, an African tribe where *male* beauty contests are a regular feature. Or, to stay within western culture, but some hundreds of years in the past, try Samuel Pepys's diary to find a man positively drooling over his new beaver hat with ostrich feathers, or full-skirted brocade coat with pink silk lining.

Perhaps KC's interest in female clothes which constrict is an extension of the sense of being wrong-bodied felt by the transsexual. But quite apart from the health problems caused by such garments – high heels cause knee and feet problems, corsetry was a major cause of the fainting fits experienced by C19th women – they inhibit female movement, and thus are as patriarchal, if not as extreme, as the chador or the custom of footbinding.

I note that the desire for men to live as women, as opposed to dressing as them on a temporary basis, is a comparatively recent development in western society. The Apache had the institution of the berdache, the Omani the xanith (who sound like an exotic Vance-style alien). Historian Thomas Lacquer argues that for

most of western history, it was believed that the two sexes were indeed one, with the woman the interior version of the male, e.g. Adam's rib, the biblical version of cloning. Physiologists argued away the physical differences between the sexes by claiming the vagina was the penis, inside-out, the labia the testes, etc. Fitting the clitoris into this radical revision of anatomy was problematic, and thus is got disappeared in a lot of early anatomies. But I digress. If the prevailing world-view is that there is only one sex, then there can be no such thing as a transsexual. Sure, men dressed as women in the Feast of Fools or the Morris Dance, and women fought in battle etc wearing armour, like Joan of Arc, but these moves were largely temporary.

It could be argued that the desire for men to live as women is a function of the growing empowerment of women, their increase in status. Historians date this change in western society to the eighteenth century. A pivotal figure here is the Chevalier d'Eon, a French aristocrat, author, diplomat and spy, probably the first western man to change sex, not anatomically, but by an emotional and intellectual process which still remains mysterious. He was 49 when he decided that he was a woman, and not only convinced his royal master, Louis XV, but also his *mother* and the whole of Europe. Bets were placed on d'Eon's gender, with in 1777 a British court declaring him to be female.

Although on his death it was discovered that d'Eon had male geni-

tals, he seems to have been generally asexual, with no known lovers. And, cross-dressing had little to do with his changeover. D'Eon in fact wanted to keep dressing as a Dragoon officer, in memory of his distinguished military career. However, given the obvious impossibility of a uniformed Dragoon staying at convents, the King of France ordered d'Eon to don petticoats. D'Eon did, but wept bitterly, claiming, "My heart is broken. My body is like my spirit. It does not like to be tied up in lace." On female dress generally he opined that it was "too complicated for quickly dressing and undressing, full of inconveniences [...] uniquely made only for vanity, luxury, other vices, and the ruin of husbands." True – aristocratic female dress in the 18th century was constricting enough to please the unutterably vile John Norman.

Gary Kates discusses d'Eon in *Bodyguards* (Routledge 1991) from which most of the above is taken, but cautions against shoehorning the Chevalier into the categories of modern sexual thought. Claiming d'Eon as an androgyne or transsexual is wrong, he feels, for we can as little comprehend the workings of C18th gender relations as we can the decision of an individual to live like a modern Tiresias. Gender is not fixed, but differs widely from person to person. Bodily we may be classed as men or women, but our perception of that state is a highly individual matter. To me, that is the most interesting thing about it all.

Books

Kate Elliott, Jaran, 1992; An Earthly Crown (Book 1 of The Sword of Heaven), 1993, both Daw

The covers and titles of this series could mislead potential readers into thinking they are fantasy, when in fact they are science fiction. Humans and the alien Chapalii are vying for economic power. The main character in *Jaran*, Tess, who has studied the Chapalii language and culture at university, finds herself stranded on a planet populated by humans who have no idea of their earthly origins. The planet is supposed to be under interdiction so the locals' culture won't be "contaminated" before it's been thoroughly studied, but Tess discovers that the Chapalii are breaching the interdiction. She needs to get her information back to the proper authorities, but to do so she first has to survive and to cross

Continued from page 16

asked of Southern Californians. Indeed, last year a special effort was made to conserve water. I am proud to say that, believe it or not, southern Californians responded. Boy did they respond. So well did they respond that water consumption dropped to such low levels that water rates were hiked to cover the loss in revenues to the water companies.

So now, in 1993, the people are angry, we have rain outside my window that sends most of the water down the storm drain to the ocean, we may be going into a 7th year of drought, and nobody takes water conservation seriously after being hoodwinked last year.

I also heard from: James Allen, Pamela Boal, Tom J. Fullopp, Kathleen Gallagher, Ian Gunn & Karen Pender-Gunn, Teddy Harvia, Joy Hibbert, Craig Hilton, Debbie Hodgson, Chuck Jones, Craig Macbride, Rachel McGrath-Kerr, Shayne Morrissey, Janice Murray, John Newman, Bruno Ogolorec, Lloyd Penney, Berni Phillips, Pete Presford, Ben Schilling, Sue Thomason, Laurraine Tutihasi

several thousand miles of unknown territory on a planet where transport is strictly on foot, horseback, or boat.

A nomadic tribe (the Jaran) takes Tess in, and she travels with them towards her destination. Along the way she learns a lot about their culture. As with many such tribal groups, there is a considerable distinction between what's "women's business" and what's "men's business", in both personal and economic relationships. The Jaran's world view is, however, somewhat different from the ones we're used to, particularly in the realm of male-female relationships. The author avoids the usual traps of complete role-reversal, or excessively rigid role definition, yet still presents an extremely convincing culture in which societal pressure ensures that women are not abused, raped, or otherwise exploited – nor are men. Nor is everybody completely happy – this is not an utopia, but an alternative society.

In the meantime, Tess is spying on the Chapalii and learning some extremely interesting things about the origins of the humans on the planet; not all of the tribes of Jaran agree with the views of Ilya, the leader of the group she's joined (who is trying to unite them against the incursions of the settled peoples) and so a bit of war occurs; and Tess's brother Charles is trying to find her.

The story continues in *An Earthly Crown*, when Ilya's war against the settled lands is going ahead successfully. Tess's brother Charles Soerensen shows up, along with other people from offplanet, and a complicated series of battles of will ensue between Tess and the various men in her life.

John Barnes, Orbital Resonance Tor, 1991

Nominated for several awards, this is another excellent book about human relationships. It reminds me of Heinlein and Panshin. The book is written as a school exercise by Melpomene Murray, who lives in an asteroid colony. We follow her daily life at school and with family and friends. It takes awhile to realise that what's she's learning in school is just

a bit (a very important bit) different from what students typically learn on earth. When Melpomene learns the truth about her upbringing, and the reasons behind it, readers are suddenly presented with a lot to think about regarding our assumptions about human interactions and individual freedom. A very readable, yet extremely thought-provoking book.

C.J. Cherryh, Rusalka, 1989; Chervog, 1990; Yvgenie, 1991; all Del Rey

I definitely don't like Cherryh's fantasy anywhere near as much as I like her science fiction, although I don't quite know why. These volumes have all sorts of interesting creatures, ideas and events in them, yet the overall effect on me was one of tediousness.

The story is taken from an old Russian folk tale concerning a ghost (rusalka) who clings to "life" by drawing the life energy from all nearby living things. In *Rusalka*, Pyetr and Sasha have fled from a city and taken refuge with an old wizard. Sasha learns to develop his wizardly powers, Pyetr falls in love with Eveshka, the rusalka (the old wizard's daughter), she comes back to life, and various magical critters interfere on the sides of both good and evil.

In *Chervog*, a very powerful wizard, who had been placed in suspended animation some years before (to keep him from doing more harm) is revived and contends with Pyetr for Eveshka's love; Eveshka's mother turns up; and dark magic is once again loose in the world. Pyetr and Sasha, with some help, finally kill Chervog. In *Yvgenie*, Pyetr and Eveshka have a daughter, Ilyana, who gets involved with a ghostly friend, who turns out to be Chervog; and they all have to confront the problem yet again.

Norman Spinrad, Russian Spring, Bantam, 1991

A very impressive book. More about this next time.

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