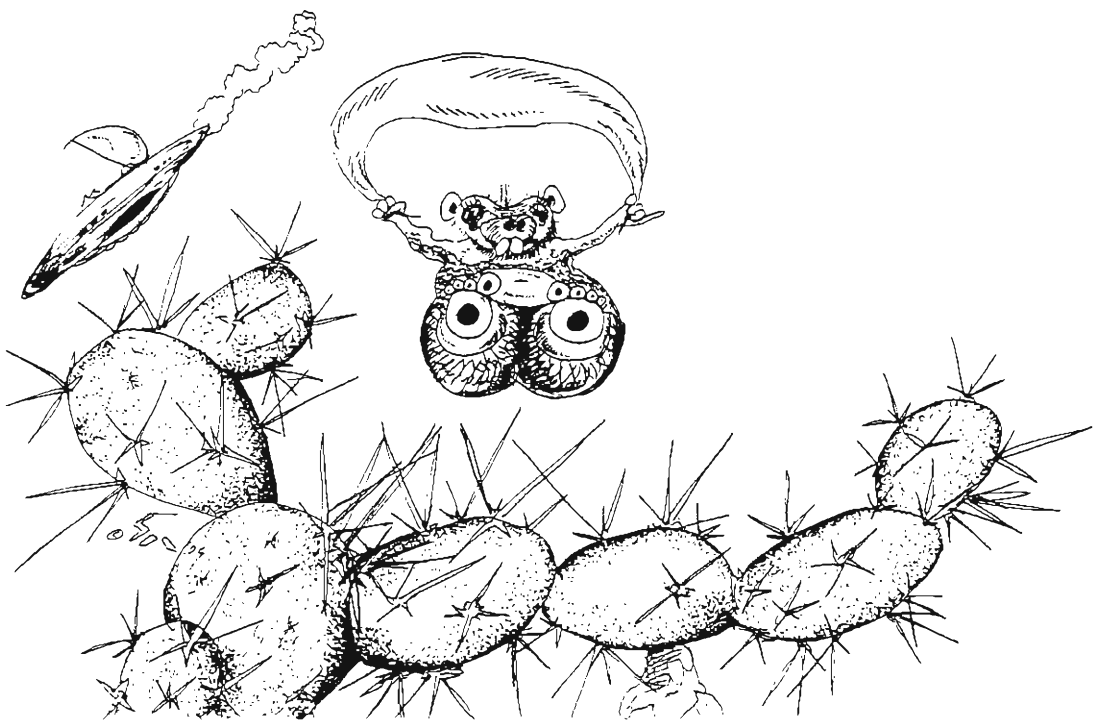


# OPUNTIA

19.5



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OPUNTIA #19.5

July 1994

BUT CONSTABLE, 'T WAS ALL IN FUN!

1994-3-11

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## WORD GAMES

For no reason at all, I was suddenly thinking about word games we used to have fun with back in university student quarters. Sitting around the beer keg, trying to think of new oxymorons, that sort of thing. There was the game of terrifying names for military units. Not bland groups like the Gurkhas or the Green Berets. I mean the ones that destroy enemy morale with just the name of the unit alone, like the Ulster Kneecappers, or that dreaded American regiment, the 7th Disgruntled Postal Workers.

AS REPORTED IN THE CALGARY HERALD

1994-5-4

City council will debate the new billing system, proposed to take affect this fall, May 16.

Thank God it's Friday. Up at the provincial legislature in Edmonton, Opposition Leader Laurence Decore (Liberal) was riding with his staff worker Margie McCaffery in her new four-wheel-drive. She decided to see what it would do, so she drove it over the curb onto the legislative lawn and tried to climb the steep slope up to the building. She spun out in the snow and slid back down to the parking lot, hitting a vehicle owned by Nick Taylor. He used to be the provincial Liberal party leader before he was overthrown by Decore. This happened at 17h30 on a Friday afternoon; both Decore and McCaffery claimed to have had no more than two glasses of wine that afternoon. The security chief at the Legislature, whose name is Wally Bland, said McCaffery would be expected to pay for the cost of repairing the ruts in the turf. Taylor wasn't too upset, saying "As long as Margie was paying for damage I wasn't particularly worried about how it all occurred.". But Decore's reputation has suffered. Why was he yeehawing in a 4WD on public property and why didn't he just say no? It took about sixty seconds for people to come up with a name for this scandal: Tailgate.

WARHOON 28

1994-3-28

This epic arrived in today's mail, via Chris Drumm Books. I had seen it in his latest catalogue and my order went out in the next post. US\$32 ppd. or about C\$43 depending on the exchange rate by the time Mastercard clears the credit slip. Read up to page 24 tonight but since I work an early shift I won't have time to read the other 590 pages tonight.

Every so often I take on such a major reading project. The last one was a fifteen-year run of BEDSIDE GUARDIAN. Before that, a 50 cm high stack of 1970s PUNCH, and before that, the all-time record breaker, a 5 m stack of STAMP COLLECTING FORTNIGHTLY, from 1947 to 1978. I don't have a television set, I might add.

Our maintenance depot being located at the junction of two freeways and half-a-block from a third, we are used to people wandering in to ask the way or to use the telephone because their car broke down. Today a dog walker came in. There are several regular dog walkers who go by every day. They live in homes on the other side of the depot and walk their dogs along the freeway ditches so they don't have to clean up after their dog as would be required in a park. This particular dog walker advised me that while walking along Deerfoot Trail below the golf course he had spotted a dead coyote in a hole by the golf course fence, just below the gravel spillway. Our depot and the golf course sit on the edge of the Bow River valley escarpment. Deerfoot Trail runs along the bottom of the escarpment on the valley floor. The slope below the golf course started sliding a couple of years ago from excess moisture, so they dug a trench straight down the slope and backfilled it with boulder gravel to channel the water. The depot slope is dry and undisturbed, so it isn't sliding, but the golf course expanded a few years ago along the top of the escarpment. Blackfoot Trail used to run through there but now stops in front of the depot. In fact, my office sits directly where the freeway had been. An unusual case, a freeway being converted into a park, instead of the other way around. But the slope below the golf course began a very slow motion slide, the layer of turf gradually becoming wrinkled across the slope. And at the bottom, a dead coyote.

I don't know why the dog walker expected us to do something, but we are always polite to the taxpayer, so I told him that I would phone over to the golf course and advise them. They sent a man out to have a look. He found the dead coyote was frozen in a thick layer of ice at the bottom of the hole, the water having come down the gravel spillway. Who knows why or how the coyote had died. It may have been old age or disease, or perhaps it tried to den for the night in the hole and drowned or

froze. Was it hit by a truck on Deerfoot Trail and made it to the hole to hide in its misery and die from internal injuries? Its final hours would have been spent in the hunt for food before its mortal fate arrived. Canis latrans, which translates as 'barking dog'.

But life goes on in the midst of death. About an hour later I drove by on Deerfoot Trail and saw a live coyote trotting along the slope. Its ears were pricked up and head down, obviously hunting for food. What surprised me was that it was hunting by day. Normally one seldom sees coyotes in daylight, usually just a quick glimpse of them in the headlights at night. I rather like coyotes in the city as they keep the ground squirrels under control but any evidence that they are here is usually indirect. The chap from the golf course later told me that they had spotted two coyotes, one a female with enlarged teats. They figured she was denning below my depot, so we will have to keep an eye out for pups stumbling around.

The dead coyote will have to stay there for a while until the ice melts in April. Maybe longer, because the frost isn't completely out of the ground until May, and it is a deep hole. The freeway margins are de facto wildlife sanctuaries, and probably the unfrozen bits of the coyote sticking up out of the ice will be nibbled on by denizens of the ditches.

#### CURB SWEEPING

1994-3-30

We began the annual spring rite of curb sweeping, using mowers fitted with power brooms. First a water tanker goes ahead and wets the curb and boulevard to eliminate the dust. The power broom comes along and sweeps off the winter accumulation of road salt and gravel from the grass, spraying it out onto the gutter. An arrowboard truck follows to warn away motorists from getting their cars sprayed with gravel. Later a road sweeper will pick up the gravel.

YES, VIRGINIA, THERE REALLY IS AN EASTER BUNNY 1994-43

Drove up to Red Deer today for Easter Sunday dinner at my parent's house. Sunny and warm yesterday, so I washed the car, bought a new pair of sunglasses, and took the storm windows off and replaced them with the screen windows. I really should know better than to tempt fate, of course, as this morning Calgary was afflicted by wet snow with low visibility. However about 30 km out of town the snow abruptly stopped and the road was clear and dry thence.

A crowded and noisy house with numerous relatives. As the next generation spawns and produces high-spirited progeny, family reunions are livelier than they used to be. There was an awkward decade from about 1975 to 1985 where no small children were in evidence. Everyone was either in their fifties or just out of university. Get-togethers were quiet and dignified, as if we were having coffee and pastries after the funeral service. Now we have to be careful where we put our foot, zigzagging between the Lego blocks and the Hot Wheels cars as we make our way to the livingroom couch. Toddlers squeal as they run about looking for hidden Easter eggs, babies are bounced on the knees of indulgent uncles, and young moms compare notes on bringing up baby.

My mother told an anecdote at the dinner table which my brother and I don't remember even though we were the centre of it. As wee lads back in Eckville, we arose one Easter Sunday to discover a basket of eggs on the coffee table. Leading up to it were some pawprints, which led us to believe there really was an Easter bunny. Mom didn't tell us the truth; she had set the basket out last night before going to bed, and sometime during the night our cat Stuff jumped up to investigate and have a good sniff around. Not being an egg-eater, he carried on elsewhere, leaving behind his pawprints in the dust. Mom says she doesn't know if it is wise to tell this story as it might reflect on her housekeeping that the table was so dusty.

MEANWHILE, BACK AT THE WARHOON ...

... there was a mention of an article on SFDom published in LIFE magazine. This sounded interesting, so I went to the University of Calgary Library to see if I could find it. One basic law of library research is that they will have a run of the periodical you are looking for, missing only the issue you need. As the importance of the information increases, the odds that it will be missing also increase. As an example, I have been researching the life and times of John Reginald Hooper, the founder of what is now the Royal Philatelic Society of Canada. After his falfiation from stamp collecting (he got sent up for murdering his second wife, but that is a long story I don't want to write about now), Hooper reappeared in Winnipeg before WW1. Sometime during the war he vanished and was not heard of again until 1936, when he reappeared in Los Angeles a wealthy man. He died May 30, 1944, but most of his life was a blank to us. I thought that I might check his obituary in the Los Angeles paper to glean a few more facts. The U of C has an extensive run of microfilmed papers, including the L.A. TIMES. Of course they are missing one part of the run. Naturally it had to be 1944; if anyone has access to L.A. newspaper files for May 30 to the first couple of weeks in June of 1944, could you look up Hooper's obit for me?

However, luck was with me, and while the files of LIFE are incomplete in the U of C Library, they did have the May 21, 1951, issue. It was a bound volume that took both hands to lift; apparently the Library wanted to do as little binding as possible so the volumes are 15 cm thick and probably as many kilos in weight. It took me a while to find the article I wanted, as I kept being diverted off course by other interesting stories, such as the theft of the Stone of Scone, which had Scotland Yard in a lather at the time. A search then began for a photocopier, the one on that floor of the library being out of paper. Down one flight, lugging my briefcase and

[continued next page]

a tremendous volume of LIFE that had me leaning to port like a ship broadsided in galeforce winds. Next floor had a working photocopier. Unfortunately the smart card gadget wasn't; I couldn't make any copies because the '9' key on the keyboard wasn't working. The PIN of my smart card has a 9 in it, of course. So down another flight of stairs, and finally success. I slipped in my smart card, punched in the PIN, and the photocopier blinked happily that there was enough money stored in the card to pay the cost of copies.

I suppose I should mention the article, "Through The Interstellar Looking Glass" by Winthrop Sargeant. It wasn't bad actually. A few questionable points, but better than the usual garbage about SF reported in mass media. I was amused to see an ad for Greyhound buses next to the paragraph on SF cons. A goodly portion of WARHOON 28 is taken up by diatribes against that company, Walt Willis having many stories about lost luggage, bad food, and other not so enjoyable adventures on the bus.

UNACUSTOMED AS I AM TO PUBLIC SPEAKING ... 1994-4-13

The Bank of Montreal opened a new branch on the Siksika Reserve east of Calgary, about an hour's drive on the Trans-Canada Highway. There were the usual ceremonies and speechmaking for the ribboncutting. One tribal elder will go far with his public speaking abilities. His entire speech was: "We all know that money doesn't grow on trees, but a bank has branches.". Then he sat down to well-earned applause.

A WALK IN THE WOODS 1994-4-13

It was a bright cold day in April, and the clocks were striking thirteen as I walked along the Bow River path. But out here along the riverbank the Orwellian clocks were too far away to be heard. Too early for spring flowers

yet, as I walked through one of our natural parks along the Bow River, checking for vandallism or hazards. The cottonwood poplars won't bud out for a couple of weeks, so the forest canopy is wide open. Off in the distance over the southeastern horizon rises a huge wide pillar of white smoke, squatting as if it were contemplating the city and deciding whether to move in or not. Yet another grass fire, the traditional harbinger of spring in Calgary. The snow is gone from the ground (although we will still get flurries until May) and the annual rains do not start until late May. The grasslands are dry. Dead grass from last year has not yet been suppressed by new green growth. Everything is a light tan colour, except the huge black patches on freeway slopes or open parks. There are three or four fires a day, March and April being the busiest time of year for the Fire Dept.. The top of Nose Hill Park, a natural grassland preserve, burned two days ago, a 40 hectare blaze. Grass burns with a dense, creamy-white smoke that makes such fires instantly identifiable from great distances away. Building and vehicle fires burn with black smoke in a narrow point-source column, not the wide squat white smoke of grass.

Brilliantly-coloured clumps of moss were scattered on the open forest floor. The dark green masses have bright green capsules sticking up out of the mat on thin delicate red stalks. Yellow lichen covers the trunks of the poplars. Anyone relying on the myth about moss or lichen growing on the north side of the trees would be lost in this bush; the trees are wrapped in yellow all around. Nearby, the sound of Canada geese honking as they cruise along the river at wavetop height.

The open stand of trees, instead of the summer verdant gloom, means the magpie nests are very conspicuous, not hidden by leaves. Magpies build messy globular masses of twigs, inside which the next generation is raised. One can see their nests long distances away, as they usually build in the terminal crotch of a tree or on top a tall jagged stump. But I never see obviously juvenile magpies.

Flying about in parks they are always fully mature size and colour. One sees goslings and ducklings on the river, yellow-brown bundles of fluff bobbing along with the current as they float with mother, but no family gatherings of magpies hop about the ground scavenging.

I am walking along a footpath through the poplars. A robin scurries along the path in front of me, hesitating every few metres to see if I have given up the chase and turned aside. But I happen to be going the same direction too, so bird and human travel like this for some time. Scurry, stop, scurry, stop, but eventually the robin gives up and flies over to a log and lets me pass. The robin sits on one of the many poplars toppled by beavers. Beavers may be busy but they are certainly not very efficient. Many of the trees are toppled in the wrong direction or hung up on other trees.

#### PEACEMAKING AND BOOKBUYING

1994-4-16

I don't drink alcohol or smoke anything, but I am a hopeless book addict. Today was a beautiful sunny afternoon so I went downtown to stroll about and visit the bookshops. I don't normally go downtown very often because of the parking problem, but there is free parking in the East Village, at the extreme east end of downtown. It means a bit of a walk, which is why I wait for sunny days like today. Parked the car, strolled past the St. Louis tavern, where Ralph Klein spent much of his time during his nine years as Mayor of Calgary. Now a tourist attraction, where Klein's favourite booth is pointed out, but since he is now Premier of Alberta he seldom comes by any more. This would be a scandal anywhere else, but Klein entered the Mayor's Office while finishing off an impaired driving suspension, and campaigned for party leader on a platform of cheap booze and the right to smoke in public places. Past the St. Louis is City Hall, then Olympic Plaza, then the Stephen Avenue Mall. Today there was a

display of United Nations armoured vehicles from a local regiment. Rather incongruously, a Trinidadian steel band was in the midst of them, playing away next to the APCs and command vehicles. The soldiers were explaining the displays to sweet young things in hot pants as the band thumped through a Marley song. The headlines in today's newspapers are about the sixteen Canadian peacekeepers being held hostage by Serbs in Bosnia. The subject is not academic to many Calgary families, whose loved ones are over there.

The white U.N. vehicles are sitting on the pedestrian mall in a rather appropriate location. This portion of the mall is the oldest collection of buildings in this city, dating back to the late 1800s. One building burnt out in a fire some time ago, and two of its neighbours are being renovated and have their facades stripped down to the bare girders. The block looks like it took a few artillery rounds, and the armoured vehicles are right at home in that setting.

I continue westward down the mall to a superbookstore at the western end of downtown, where I bought an expensive hardcover about Dr. Johnson and Richard Savage. I have been on a bookbuying spree this weekend, the \$35 hardcovers that I can't afford but must have anyway. The one I bought yesterday was I. ASIMOV, the third volume of his autobiography and quite readable, although it has a few duplications from the previous volumes. I'm about three-quarters through WARHOON 28; the end is nigh.

Heading back east to my car the way I came, the peacekeepers are moving out in convoy. The armoured vehicles grind their way through the downtown streets, protected front and rear by police vehicles. Calgary drivers yield to no one, not even heavy armour on treads, so police are needed to escort them back to barracks. The steel band is still there however, now playing a Barry Manilow song with vocals by a pretty woman badly off key and tempo.

When my father made farm calls to treat sick animals, his car was an object of fascination to every dog and cat on the place. Dogs in particular, who would sniff the wheels and mark the tires and hubcap with their urine in the ancient manner of setting territorial boundaries. As Dad usually visited half a dozen farms a day, and only washed the car once or twice a year, the tires soon were a mélange of dog scents. Not detectable to humans but a cacophony of urine to the four-footed set.

After riding along with Dad on numerous farm calls, I began to develop an hypothesis that one could tell the type of farmer by the behaviour of the farm dog. Friendly dogs that slobbered all over us instantly we got out of the car belonged to kind-hearted farmers who ran a neat, tidy operation. Vicious mutts that had to be called off by their masters before we could get out seemed to go with a tumbledown farm, weedy fields, and livestock that were poorly. I remember keeshond dogs that leaped high in the air and were impossible to pet because they never stood still long enough to touch them. In later years, I used to hunt fossils along the Red Deer River badlands south of Drumheller. A prime site for Cretaceous dinosaur bone was on the land of Senator Bud Olsen. I would stop at his house to ask permission to cross his land, and have to work my way through a mob of excited dogs determined to get a pat on the head from me. One such encounter left me covered in pawprints, it having rained recently and the friendly critters just in from a neighbouring grain field. (That was also the trip where, jumping across a gully in the badlands, my foot slipped as I lifted off. I fell headfirst onto the other side, and naturally put my hand out to break the fall. The ungloved hand went straight into a pricklypear (*Opuntia polyacantha*) palm—first with the weight of my body driving the spines into my hand.)

Dad had a variety of dogs and cats around his veterinary clinic, which was located on his farm. Some were discards

from people who had wanted them put down, but Dad didn't have the heart to do it, and instead kept them as pets. Others were leftovers from momentary enthusiasms, such as Boston terriers (he bred them in the early 1960s), poodles (late 1960s), and German shepherds. In the early 1970s he was into exotic breeds of cattle, although the main herd was Charolais and Hereford. He attended an auction of exotic animals once. Fortunately he was dissuaded from buying the llama, but he did return home with two bison heifers. At that time, beefalos were a big fad with farmers, a fad which quickly died when the problems of handling bison were discovered. Our corral fences had to be increased to a height of 4 m because the bison are tremendous jumpers, then reinforced since a bison will try to go through any fence it can't jump. Beefalo are crosses between ordinary cattle and bison. Today there are a few specialists left handling them, but beefalo and bison are not for the average farmer.

Dad put the bison heifers in a barn with a Charolais bull. The bull was willing to do his duty, but the two bison would have none of him. The bison were small and skinny, the bull huge as they come. But the bison spent every moment chasing the bull back and forth, spelling each other and not giving the poor thing a moment's rest in the barn. It broke my heart to watch him; he had to be removed for his own safety even though he weighed more than the two heifers combined.

The cattle would occasionally get through a fence, especially one Charolais bull whose official name I have forgotten but who was known as Jumper for good and sufficient reason. Dad eventually sent Jumper to the packing plant after seeing him go over yet another fence. "I'm sick and tired of being sick and tired", was what he said. Jumper couldn't be used for breeding because his progeny would also jump fences. The local Mountie once warned Dad about possible charges if the cattle got loose again on the highway. I don't recall that it ever happened again, but that was about the time I and

my brother went off to university and thence to our chosen careers. Dad had a hired hand for a while, but the farm had relied on our free labour, so he reduced the herd and eventually got out of the business.

A policeman's lot is not a happy one, they say, but the local Mountie wasn't too troubled. Loose cattle, grain rustlers, cattle rustlers, but mostly speeding tickets and purple gas citations kept the constable busy.

Purple gas (and diesel) was ordinary fuel tinted with a colouring dye. It was sold at a reduced tax rate, to be used only in farm vehicles with a special licence plate. Naturally abuse of the system was rampant, and farmers were the worst. Why keep two fuel tanks on the farm when you can run the car on purple gas as well, not just the truck or tractor? The favourite tactic of the Mounties was to block off all exits of a rural senior high school when classes let out. Each gas tank was siphoned, and any student found driving the car or non-farm truck on purple fuel got a ticket to take home. Back when Dad still had his practice in Eckville (we didn't move to Red Deer until I was eight), he had an assistant to help in the clinic. Vince borrowed the Volkswagen Beetle that Dad normally used; that was the day he got caught in an RCMP roadblock checking for purple fuel. Of course Dad ran it on purple, but he paid Vince's fine for him.

Next to the barn at the clinic and farm in Red Deer, we had three large fuel tanks: purple diesel, purple gas, and clear gas. Sometime while I was away at university, Dad switched the order of the tanks. I came home for Christmas unaware of what had happened. We were driving down to Calgary that day for a family reunion, and Dad asked me to top up the fuel tank on the family car. The tank was still half-full; I filled it up the rest of the way with what I thought was clear gas. Only after putting the nozzle back did I discover that the end tank was now purple diesel. But the Datsun ran reasonably well on the trip south, although it coughed and sputtered at

random. By incredible coincidence, one of Dad's brothers at Calgary happened to ask him what the car ran on. "Half and half", he was told.

The clinic at the Red Deer farm was actually the second one built. The first proved too small and was converted into a storage building. They were built some distance apart, but both were used as an edge of a corral or pasture instead of building a fence, in the same way that many farmers use their barns as one side of a cattle pen. Cattle can be as curious as humans, so it was entirely possible to look out a window of the clinic to see a cow peering back at you with great interest.

When Dad bought the farm, there was a tumbledown cattle shed in one of the corrals. It was easier to burn it down than to try and dismantle it, so the shed was doused with gas (probably purple) and set ablaze. It was a thoroughly spectacular blaze, one that brought in passing vehicles from the highway, including a Mountie. In the ashes of the shed we found an artillery shell left behind by the previous owner of the farm, a WW2 veteran. (The shell was empty of course; had it still had powder and fuze, my biography would have abruptly ended in 1963.) The shell was a heavy one, and for the next two decades was used as a doorstop or bookend around the house. After I moved to Calgary in 1978, I took it to the Glenbow Museum to see if they had any use for it in their military collection. The serial number on the shell, still clearly readable despite being buried in manure for twenty years and then burnt, indicated that it was a rare type not in the Museum collection. So it was deposited therein.

We didn't actually live on the farm but on an acreage about 3 km away, a short commute. The acreage was bush, a great place for kids to explore and build forts. Now it is suburbs; not even the land contours or original country roads retained but all bulldozed flat and a new maze of streets built, lined with bungalows.



Two stamp events on this weekend in Calgary, sponsored by different groups back-to-back. Philatelic groups here co-operate in staging events. The procedure is not to run a single event sponsored by several groups, but rather a series of events that allow each group to hand off to the next. Everyone in a group works madly one day, then takes it easy the rest of the time. Vancouver SF fans are trying this technique in a different sort of manner, with the events spread over a year rather than a weekend. It does work in Calgary with stamp collectors, and I trust it can work out there. Friday and Saturday (today) was the Spring Meeting of the Calgary Regional Group of the British North America Philatelic Society. Tomorrow is the spring minishow of the Calgary Philatelic Society. The BNAPSers specialize in the stamps of Canada and the various Dominions and colonies that made up British North America prior to the final Confederation. The CPS is a general society, whose members collectively collect the world, not just BNA. The BNAPS event concentrates on seminars and banquets; the Stamp Day minishow is a dealer course and competitive exhibition. BNAPS collectors come to Calgary from all over western Canada and adjacent USA, and stay over for the Stamp Day on Sunday. They wouldn't come just for the seminars, or just for the show, but the two events back-to-back make it sensible to book a hotel room for the weekend. Stamp dealers will not travel long distances for a one-day show, but will for a weekend. The Calgary BNAPSers work hard Saturday and relax Sunday, and the CPSers show up and sit back at the Saturday seminars, then hustle on Sunday.

I am a member of both groups, but did my part only for BNAPS, giving a seminar on stamp design errors. Tomorrow I have an exhibit in Stamp Day, but other than dropping off my entry will do nothing but browse through the dealer bourse. The best talk in today's seminars was by John of Vancouver, who entitled his slide show "A Victorian

Romance", the story of how he developed his collection of Victorian-era covers (envelopes with postal markings) that took him from Nova Scotia to his own house. John picked out a type of stamp known as Small Queens, and set about buying covers with the stamp used on them. After a while he noticed that he had several covers addressed to Amelia Pickard, dated through the 1870s and sent to her in Nova Scotia and New Brunswick. The covers were all in the same hand, and John determined that they were from a lawyer in Halifax, name of Stockton who was courting her. John became so fascinated by the correspondence of these two lovers that he made a special trip out east to track down descendants and find out how the story ended.

He was successful, photographing gravestones, buildings, and finding descendants. Amelia had children, and her great-grandchildren were still thick on the ground. One of her sons was named Ronald, and John was told that he had moved out to Vancouver to practice law. John therefore decided to concentrate on researching Ronald's descendants for reasons of convenience. He was astounded to discover that Ronald's law office had been in the same building as John's current office. Not only that, it had been on the same floor, just down the hallway. But wait! Ronald Stockton later took a partner, name of Baird. So John did a quick check on Baird and was further astounded to discover that John's first offices (before he moved into the same building as Stockton) were the exact same offices used by Baird when he was freelancing. But wait! There's more! John happened to mention this to his wife one day, and discovered that Baird was her grandfather.

All this from a more-or-less random choice to collect a particular type of stamp on cover.

ENTER THE EGO

1994-4-25

Justice Mr. Hugh Landerkin returned from vacation today

to discover that during his absence his salary had been reduced by 5%, all judges taking the reduction due to the provincial budget cuts. He was not a happy judge. There had been fair warning from the Tories, who are cutting by 20% government spending, so as to eliminate the deficit in three years. Provincial and municipal unions are one by one agreeing to wage rollbacks as their contracts expire, usually 5% cut the first year, followed by a two year freeze. Landerkin has responded by refusing to sit in court.

#### IN WHICH GASOLINE IS POURED ON THE FIRE

1994-5-1

Landerkin has been off work for a week now, claiming to be studying the issue of the pay cut. It reminds one of the union tactic of calling one-day 'study sessions' back in the days of industrial disease. Meanwhile, Premier Ralph Klein cannot resist walking past a sleeping dog without giving it a good kick in the genitals. Landerkin's one-man strike got remarks of sympathy from other judges, but no one else followed his example. The opposition Liberal party made a fuss in Question Period, but the issue was dying the usual death of three-day wonders.

Klein, with all the tact, charm, and diplomacy of Harlan Ellison at a bad SF con panel, has stirred up what was a dying issue by declaring that Landerkin should be fired. Klein said he had the right to fire judges at will, which is news to the Judicial Council. The Council is an independent committee of judges and lawyers who supervise the day-to-day operations of courts, and keep them free from political interference. Judges are in an uproar over the remarks by Klein, saying the pay cut and his comments are interference that undermines the impartiality of courts. Of course, in the past when the judges got regular pay rises, this was not considered interference, but that was then and this is now. Klein has a bad habit of thinking out loud and talking before his research assistant has a chance to look up the facts. Good for news reporters but

tends to stir up trouble where a quieter person might have calmed the waters.

YOUR HONOUR, I'D LIKE TO MAKE A MOTION ...

1994-5-2

Liberal backbencher Percy Wickman was up before a judge today on a count of impaired driving. Known as Percy the Giant Killer, because he defeated former Tory Premier Don Getty in his own riding the election before last. An embarrassed Getty had to get a rural backbencher to resign and create a by-election in a safe Tory seat in order to get a seat in the Legislative Assembly. This ultimately finished Getty's political career, as although he got back in, he was forced a year or two later to resign as party leader. Ralph Klein took over, having run a successful campaign for party leader on a platform of cheap booze and the right to smoke in public places. But I digress.

Wickman got his case adjourned on the grounds that the remarks by Klein indicated that judges were not independent of the government and he therefore would not get a fair trial.

MORE VERBAL DIARRHOEA

1994-5-4

Defence barristers know a good thing when they see it. All over the province they are getting cases adjourned on the grounds that judges are not independent. But even the Tories' worst enemies would admit that was carrying things too far. The flood of adjourned cases made Klein realize that he mis-spoke himself. He has started to backpedal, trying to save face by saying his comments only relate to "labour", not control of the judges.

TRUCE

1994-5-6

Klein sent a letter to Chief Judge Edward Wachowich and

[continued next page]

did some verbal tapdancing and grovelling. His apology to the judges has been accepted. Wachowich says he now considers himself impartial and unbiased. Bad news for Wickman though, who must now face the music on his impairment charge.

IF YOU DON'T STOP IT, YOU'LL GO BLIND

1994-5-10

The newspapers yesterday were full of the story of this morning's partial solar eclipse, telling us you'll go blind if you look at the sun and how to make a pinhole viewer. I've never been able to get the latter to work, and as for the former, one or two seconds quick glimpse through squinted eyes and polarized sunglasses won't hurt. (Yes, I know some people are blinded at eclipses, but they stared directly at the sun for many seconds.) The eclipse was 10h30 Calgary time, while I was at work. The moon passed across the lower part of the sun's disk from left to right and covered only about 40%. I squinted at the sun through the corner of one eye and caught a quick glimpse. One of my crews was in the yards shovelling wood chips on to their truck (for mulching). They were all wearing polarized sunglasses, so we combined two or three at crossed angles and got better views of the eclipse. By the time the last man looked, the moon was just about off the sun's disk. Prior to the start of the eclipse there was cloud cover but it moved off in time. Actually a thin cloud would have been nice to improve viewing by screening off some of the light.

And so back to work. We started up the small mowing machines yesterday. There is little work yet for the big mowers (triple decks) as the centres of parks are still brown. But along the curbs the grass is green and the roadway medians are already lush. It has been a dry spring with little rain. Leafcutter bees and bumblebees are everywhere in the green grass.

## DEALING WITH BUREAUCRATS

1) Don't yell and scream at the front-desk staff. They didn't write the rules. Getting them antagonized by being aggressive will only hinder your cause. As the saying goes, "You catch more flies with honey than vinegar". Politeness is not a guarantee of success but it certainly won't hurt.

2) Know the regulations better than they do. If you want an application approved and the clerk gives you trouble, quote a few regulations. If you don't know the rules, then ask. Then listen attentively; nothing makes paper-pushers feel more flattered than an interested audience.

3) Save face. Embarrassing someone and catching them out is great fun for you but may give you cause to regret it later.

4) Poor planning on your part does not constitute an emergency on their part. It never ceases to amaze me how many phone calls I get Thursday afternoon asking for a soccer playfield to be mowed and groomed for Friday, as there will be a provincial tournament that weekend. The tournament was awarded a year ago and now they just remembered the field has to be mowed?

5) Always get names and telephone numbers of those you talked to, so that you can trace back any failure in the lines of communication. I get calls from people wanting something done in a park but never heard back. "Who did you talk to last?", I ask. They didn't get a name and forgot the number they called. There are 2000 employees in the Parks Dept., of whom I know about 75. If they don't know, how am I supposed to?

6) It is easier for bureaucrats to say no and then say yes, than it is to approve something and be forced later to rescind it.

## DIRT IS WHAT YOU GET ON YOUR CLOTHES

After I graduated from the University of Alberta, located in Edmonton, in June 1978 with my B.Sc. in horticulture, I got a summer job at the U of A Soil Science Experimental Farm. It was located south of Edmonton near the place-name of Ellerslie, and is part of a complex of research labs. We shared a common boundary line with the Animal Science Experimental Farm. Although I majored in horticulture, I ended up taking a lot of soils courses because the professors in that department were so good. They had a genuine interest in their students, and, like most of the students, came from agricultural backgrounds. They could relate to them, having baled hay and mucked out the corrals as well. When I was there in the early 1970s, the Faculty of Agriculture was just starting to undergo a change in the student body. More and more of the students were city-raised, without the background of experience a farm kid might have. The professors had to get used to explaining things that passed without mention in talking to rural students. Horticulture in particular is now very popular with urban students who may never have been in a greenhouse or nursery.

The manager of the Soil Science Farm was newly appointed, a graduate student fresh off the boat from Ontario. Craig was a city slicker, and while a promising learner, didn't have the entire confidence of the professors as far as his farming ability was concerned. I got my job partially to teach him the tricks of farming. Craig was doing a M.Sc. thesis on symbiote strains used by legumes for nitrogen fixing, which involved a lot of handweeding of his research plots. Herbicides would have thrown off the data. I missed most of that grunt labour, running the tractor instead. The tractor, like all the farm machinery, was diesel. There was a radio telescope in the middle of the farmstead; if you drove a gasoline vehicle too close, the sparkplugs would cause electrical interference. Moments later, a nasty phone call would come in from the physics

lab at the Edmonton campus.

The research plots were small and intensively maintained so most tractor work was plowing, rather than with the normal duckfoot cultivators used on western Canadian farms. The plow we used was a boustrophedon plow, which consisted of two plows, one a mirror-image of the other, welded upside-down on top of the other. The small size of the research plots meant they couldn't be plowed in the usual round-and-round-the-field manner. We plowed across the plot, then turned around and came straight back, flipping the boustrophedon over so as to keep the furrow all going to the same side. Using an ordinary plow would dump soil the wrong way on the return trip, producing double-height ridges and double-depth furrows. I always plowed as deep as possible since the plots were generally on mild slopes. This produced some deep furrows. One professor grumbled that he was never so exhausted as when he crossed my fields, what with goose-stepping over knee-high ridges. But I was vindicated when the farm was hit by a tremendous cloudburst in July; the furrows across the slope held the soil and there was little washout.

There was a barn used for storage of seed and fertilizer, heavily infested by mice. One rainy day I restacked the bags of seed, accompanied by the farm cat. After making sure we were each in position, I shifted a bag, which sent a mouse or two scampering out from under, towards the cat. She would crunch it down, then await the next bag. The record was four mice at once, three under each paw and one in her mouth. To this day, when I eat crunchy food, it reminds me of the sound of breaking mouse bones in her mouth. Her name was Cat (the professors were very logical about naming things) and she produced regular batches of kittens, thanks to the tomcat over at Animal Science Farm. Craig muttered once that he spent more time trying to give away kittens than he did running the farm. The university accountants refused to pay for her food bills and other expenses, so the professors charged her to the pest control account as operating expenses for rodent control. The accountants never noticed.

To the monthly meeting tonight of the Calgary BNPASers, one of the small specialized stamp clubs in this city. We each take turns being Program Chairman, and tonight I was in charge. D-Day's fiftieth anniversary had been two days ago, so the obvious choice of topic was WW2. I rounded up some war veterans in the club and we listened to their war stories. A fascinating evening, as grandfatherly gents who had trouble getting up a flight of stairs these days went back in time to when they had a full head of hair and took the stairs two or three at a time. Ostensibly each was to show a cover (envelope) or stamp with WW2-related postmarks, but most only quickly showed one item and then spent the rest of the time on stories about the war that had no connection to philately. None of us minded, for this was a last chance to hear stories that in a few years will be taken to the grave when the veterans die. I have tried to record as many as possible, and herewith is the account of that evening.

Bob was first, a retired police constable, plump and jolly. He started with the infantry in 1941, and ended the war as a sapper in an engineering regiment. His wife was an English war bride. Bob made a show of looking over his shoulder to see if his wife was listening (she was in the coffee room with other wives, all of whom had heard the stories often enough and preferred to chat by themselves). He told the following jest: "My brother was wounded overseas and invalided home. He later got a disability pension. My best friend was wounded overseas and brought home; he got a pension. I was married overseas but I didn't get a pension!". Sappers are the ones who clear minefields, but Bob also did a lot of work with Bailey bridges, about which he was very enthusiastic. A Bailey bridge is a steel latticework bridge that can be quickly put across a river and is strong enough to take the weight of army vehicles. (As an aside, the rural area where I grew up had numerous war-surplus Bailey

bridges over creeks and rivers, and which are still in excellent condition fifty years later.)

Next up was Perry, a Navy man who served in the north Atlantic on a variety of ships. He said he couldn't remember where he was on D-Day other than he was somewhere on the Great Lakes aboard a newly-commissioned shipbound for Québec City. The ship was so new that no one had been briefed on how to work the radio, so they never heard the news about D-Day until they arrived in port. Perry showed a photo of another ship, taken by a reconnaissance aircraft while the ship was pitching about in the Atlantic. As it happened, Perry saw the plane and later got a photo. He had just come off wireless watch. His relief told him that the mess deck was in fact a mess and not to go down there. When the ship had left St. John's harbour a few hours ago, someone had carelessly left a huge vat of bean soup sitting on a table. In the harbour the water was calm, but as soon as the ship cleared the breakwater, it began tossing about. The mess was awash with bean soup over every surface, and they were still trying to get it cleaned up. So Perry went for a walk on an upper deck. As he started to climb the ladder, the ship heeled over and Perry had to sprint up the ladder with water lapping at his feet. Just then he saw the recon plane. Alas, the photo doesn't show him; he was obscured by a stack.

Perry was in Halifax harbour during the V-E Day riots. Halifax is the major naval port for Canada, but was hated by military personnel because of its bluenose laws. On the Day, sailors and soldiers decided to get even and rampaged through the city, looting liquor stores. Perry had been across the harbour in Dartmouth and had bummed a ride back to Halifax on a naval launch. He was standing on the street waiting for a streetcar, but none came. A citizen told him that public transit was shut down; the streetcars were overturned and fired by drunken sailors. Perry had to walk across the city to get back to his ship. The next day, the Navy ordered all ships out

[continued next page]

to sea. On Perry's ship, a detail had to clean out all the empty liquor bottles tossed into the ventilator shafts.

Jim was a bomber pilot, flying loads against V-1 launch sites and participating in the big raids on Mannheim. He flew half daylight raids and half night raids, and definitely preferred the latter. The advantage of a night raid was that they couldn't see the anti-aircraft flak, which made it easier on the nerves. Jim still had his pilot's log book, which he passed around for us to look at.

The longest part of the evening was given by Gordon, who was a Spitfire pilot, and also one of the first to enter a concentration camp when it was liberated. Gordon showed two photo albums at the meeting. I was leafing through it after the program and am sorry I did. Most of the photos were airbases, airplanes, and war buddies, but when I flipped a page to the concentration camp (I didn't note the name, something like Breslin?) I was horrified by the photos. The ground covered by nude corpses, the ovens only just recently shut down. One image sticks in my mind; the body of a beautiful young woman in her twenties. Her corpse was nude; from the breasts up she was spectacular; but below her breasts she was a stick figure. On her hips were tooth marks of a frontend loader tractor, which had shovelled bodies like a load of gravel. Many of the bodies showed no recognizable features, just skin tightly stretched over bone, absolutely no flesh at all. What got me thinking was that Holocaust deniers will be able to spout off a decade or two from now when those who saw the truth, like Gordon, are dead and can no longer stand up and say "I was there, I saw it, it really happened".

Gordon, like Jim, got his initial training on the Harvard trainer aircraft. The first time he got into a high-speed fighter, his instructor told him that when he was taking off on a runway, about one-third of the way down the runway he would be travelling at the takeoff speed of the Harvard. At that point he would be asked to put in full

throttle. Gordon did so, and discovered what speed in a plane really was. The airstrips in southern England he flew from, and Europe as well, were simply a long strip of metal mesh laid on turf. There was only one runway, aligned with the prevailing winds. If there was a crosswind at right angles to the plane, tough luck, they had to land anyway. Gordon flew a variety of planes. In the haste of war, training was sometimes minimal. He was once checked out on a plane that he had never seen before. He let the instructor enter the plane and sort of hung back a bit to see which seat he should take. Once settled into the cockpit, he looked at the other chap expectantly. The other fellow looked back at him and told Gordon to start the plane. "Where's the starter?", asked Gordon. Somehow they got into the air and after an hour or so Gordon had figured out most of the controls. As they were landing, Gordon suddenly realized he didn't know how to put down the landing gear ...

But he survived that and went on to spend most of the war flying Spitfires. The original airwar over Europe was fought at high altitude, then gradually moved down as German defences crumbled. Early model Spitfires had rounded wingtips; Gordon's last Spitfire had square-tip wings and was used mostly for strafing. Gordon remarked that the Spitfires were a typical product of England; no heating in the cockpit. The high-altitude flights meant that he had to wear three pairs of gloves and as many socks, but still had no feeling in his hands and feet on return. This despite staying up only an hour due to fuel limitations. There was an experimental set of electric socks that he tried. He put them on; a cord dangling was plugged into an electrical outlet in the cockpit. What happened was that after a short time the heated socks made the feet perspire, short-circuited the wires, and started a prickly feeling, so it had to be unplugged.

An auxiliary fuel tank could be clipped onto the Spitfire to extend the range. It was made of wood, and the problem was that Gordon couldn't fly the plane very fast or

the tank would blow apart. When he did bomber escort duty the planes flew slow not only to match the speed of the bombers but to keep themselves from losing their extra tanks. Originally gunsights were quite primitive, and deflection shooting was the standard. Deflection shooting is where you aim ahead of the moving target, as with duck hunting or skeet-shooting. Spitfire gunsights had a calibration ring; the usual procedure was to estimate the enemy plane's speed and shoot four rings ahead. Gordon used five rings himself; he said that both sides were terrible shooters and more planes were brought down by accidentally flying into bullets than by good aiming. In the later stages of the war a new electronic gunsight was introduced where the pilot only had to line up the enemy in two beams of light. The worst problem that Gordon remembered was constant sore necks, because the pilots were always looking every which way above and behind them for enemy planes.

Gordon also flew against Messerschmitt 262s, the first jet fighters. They were so fast they were impossible to hit. Gordon said he would see a blur go by, then hear a whooshing noise. However he soon learned that they were not a major problem. 262s had a serious fuel difficulty and burned it so fast that they normally only made one pass through a Spitfire group, then had to run home. When Gordon was based in France the 262s could stay longer as they were near their bases, but even then could not last more than ten minutes.

The final speaker of the evening was Ed, who was also the youngest veteran and never went overseas. He was still a teenager when Canada entered the war in September 1939. On the day that war was declared, he was walking to school when he noticed the Mounties had raided a neighbour's house. The doors and windows were wide open, so Ed went to get a closer look. Peeking through a window, he saw a swastika flag hanging on the living room wall, and a portrait of Hitler over the mantelpiece. Constables tramped about gathering evidence; the neighbour was interned for

the duration. In the final stage of the war, Ed ended up serving as a prison camp guard at a variety of camps across the prairies, mostly POW camps but also an internment camp. Years later he was at a stamp show going through dealer's stock in the bourse and discovered a cover mailed by his interned neighbour. Ed is also collecting postmarks of each camp he was at.

At war's end, troops were mustered out according to how many points they had accumulated, two points for each month overseas, one point for each month in uniform in Canada. Long-servers like Bob (the sapper) went home immediately; Ed had a long wait. He used to check his name on the posted list and watch as he got closer and closer to the top. Then just as he was about to qualify a troop of overseas men would arrive back at regimental H.Q. and knock him back down to the bottom of the list. His final posting was Seebe POW camp, just west of Calgary in the Rocky Mountains. He recalled making rounds of the perimeter fence, shivering in the cold despite a greatcoat and extra underwear. Then out of the barracks would come these German supermen dressed only in jockey shorts and shoes; they would then do exercises for the next hour in the biting cold. When the war ended, Ed and his comrades were lined up and told to count off as 1 and 2. Those who were 1s were detailed to guard the Germans on the train that took them across Canada to Halifax, where the POWs were turned over to the British. Ed and the other 2s were detailed to clean up the camp and demolish it. The commanding officer ordered that all German possessions left behind would be collected, to be auctioned off for the benefit of H.M. The King In Right Of The Dominion of Canada. One German general had left behind a beautiful footlocker, made of the finest wood, sponge interior to protect the contents from rough handling, and silk lining with Iron Crosses marked on it. Ed had his heart set on buying that footlocker, and scraped up all the money he could find, borrowing from friends, hocking items in a pawnshop, etc., finally accumulating \$45. Ed still hasn't forgiven the C.O., who bid \$46.

[Editor's remarks in square brackets]

FROM: Chester Cuthbert  
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1994-4-17

You mention having forgotten words to a childhood song. I thought this was merely a jingle: "All the King's horses and all the King's men, they marched down the street, and they marched back again, all the King's horses, AND the King's men." There was always tremendous emphasis on the underlined word, with upward inflection. I know nothing of music notation, so cannot provide you with the tune, still vivid in my mind.

FROM: Joseph Major  
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1994-4-15

It was the Duke of York. "The Grand Old Duke of York, he had ten thousand men, he marched them all up the hill and he marched them down again". This is a pro-French, or at least anti-government, satire. In 1794, Prince Frederick Augustus, Duke of York, second son of George III, commanded the British contingent of the army sent to Flanders to chastise and suppress that rowdy rebel rabble. The campaign was particularly futile, thus the jingle. When the army returned, York at least had learned something,

as he was kicked upstairs to the position of Commander-in-Chief at the Horse Guards, where he could do something worthwhile. He trained and organized the army, mostly abolished the purchase of commissions (it came back) and laid the foundations for the victories in the Peninsular Campaign, the War of 1812, and at Waterloo. Now the Duke of Cumberland, his great-uncle, well ... I would not advise mentioning him at all favourably north of the Border, or in the presence of any of the many expatriate Scots. (Well, there is one.)

Interesting comment about Premier Klein and his unwillingness to take things lying down. One of the things about the West that so astounded Mikhail Voslensky was that high-ranking political officials in the West would have listed telephone numbers, answer their own telephones, and deal with constituents' problems (see NOMENKLATURA). Teddy Kollek, the famous mayor of Jerusalem, also was listed.

FROM: Harry Warner Jr.  
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1994-4-26

If you didn't touch up the prose, the letter from Holger Eliasson is uncanny for his command of English, including idiomatic expressions. Why do European fans succeed in foreign languages so well and North Americans poorly? I know their schools stress foreign languages more than ours do, but it's hard to believe that students are diligent enough to accomplish such marvels of reading and writing just as a result of several years' classes.

I ALSO HEARD FROM: Chuck Connor, Lloyd Penney, Harry Andruschak, John Thiel, Henry Welch, Buck Coulson, Michael McKenny, Brant Kresovich, Frank Denton

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