

OPUNTIA

51.5B

In Memoriam: Anna Elizabeth (Betty) Speirs
1931-09-01 to 2002-08-14

ISSN 1183-2703

OPUNTIA is published by Dale Speirs, Box 6830, Calgary, Alberta, Canada, T2P 2E7. It is available for \$3 cash for a one-time sample copy, trade for your zine, or letter of comment. Americans: please don't send cheques for small amounts to Canada as the bank fee to cash them is usually more than the amount. US\$ banknotes are acceptable in Canada at par value; what we gain on the exchange rate we lose on the higher postage rate to USA. Do not send mint USA stamps as they are not valid for postage outside USA and I don't collect them.

Whole-numbered OPUNTIA's are sercon, x.1 issues are reviewzines, x.2 issues are indexes, and x.5 issues are perzines.

WHY THE NEXT ISSUE WILL BE LATE

by Dale Speirs

My mother had not been well for several years, suffering from inoperable congestive heart disease (leaky heart valves), then in recent years diabetes and blood pressure problems. Her weight

had dropped until she was skeletal, and without the help of her younger sister driving out from Eckville every week, the housekeeping would not have been done.

The weekend of August 9 to 11, while I was attending Conversion in Calgary, my brother Neil took the grandchildren up to Red Deer to see her. She was so weak that instead going out with the kids as she so greatly enjoyed, she stayed home and slept most of the time. Neil was alarmed, and when he got back to Calgary, he phoned me Tuesday morning and left a message. I was out hiking in the Kananaskis mountains that day but got back in the afternoon and returned his call. I then phoned Mom and on the second try she finally answered the telephone. Her voice was slurred and a strange tone, so I told her I was coming up the next morning. My thought was that if she was as weak as I thought, then I would get her admitted into hospital.

Wednesday morning I arrived, and had to use the key to get into the house. I found her in the living room, slumped sideways on the sofa. Her body was cool but not cold, and rigor mortis was only just setting in, so she must have died a few hours before. Because of her insomnia she often stayed up late and watched late-night television or favourite videotapes. Her eyes were open and she had a peaceful but slightly startled look on her face. My belief is that as she got up from the sofa her heart gave out finally, and she toppled over sideways as she blacked out and died.

What Happens Next.

I dialed 9-1-1, and the paramedics were soon there. Because she died unattended by a physician, a constable was called as a matter of routine. The Mountie took a statement from me, and collected her eleven prescription bottles from the kitchen counter. As I later realized, he deliberately kept me busy answering questions in the kitchen until the Medical Examiner's crew had removed her body from the living room, so as not to distress me with the sight.

From then, the day was busy. I called my brother, Mom's sister, and various names and phone numbers in her directory. She had named me executor in her will, which will mean endless meetings with solicitors and accountants, since she had a complicated estate (her grandparents owned the petroleum rights on their homestead, and a century later, the oil is still pumping, plus my father speculated in real estate, so his property is still in the family). I phoned my office and booked off a fortnight.

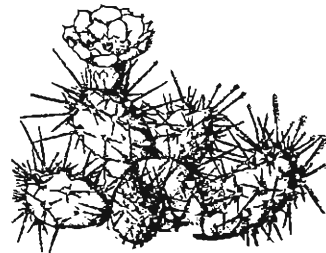
A Note To All Readers.

Always keep an updated list of who to contact in the event of your death, where your bank accounts are, and who your lawyer is. Don't put it off another second. I'm not saying that rhetorically. Put this zine down right now (you can finish it later) and get a sheet of paper. List all the practical details your family will need

to know. What bank do you use? Names and phone numbers of those who need to know about your death. Do you have a prepaid funeral plan, and if so, where? Don't hide the will; give immediate family members a copy so they know what to expect. If you have a safe-deposit box, where do you keep the key? (It cost me \$100 to have my mother's safe-deposit box drilled out because I couldn't find the key.) Don't assume everybody knows all the details or remembers your actual intentions; put it in writing where they can easily find it.

Please do it now. If you already have such a list, get it out and check it over for obsolete names and phone numbers. Spread copies around to several people, so back-ups are available. It is always better to have too much information than not enough.

Done? Thanks. Somebody will be glad you did.



Why The Next Issue Will Be Late.

Endless phone calls, endless details. A funeral is only the beginning. Countless round trips between Calgary and Red Deer, a 280-km round trip (city centre to city centre) over a boring divided highway through equally boring prairie.

The G-8 piece that starts on this page was set up and ready to go just before my mother's death. The space I used to tell you about her would have been letters of comment, but they will be held over for a future x.5 issue. Expect delays and lack of timely response. Thanks.

THE G-8 SUMMIT COMES TO COWTOWN

Dumb Crooks Of The Year.

2002-01-13

The Calgary Chamber of Commerce is always fussing about Cowtown being a world-class city. The Tourist and Convention Bureau is always trying to snag world-class events for our fair city. Apparently world-class is good. The new year has only just begun but already Cowtown had its first nominees for Dumb

Crooks. And they were world-class.

But before that, this. The Prime Minister announced last year that Kananaskis Provincial Park would be the site of the G-8 Summit on June 26 and 27, 2002. This mountain area is about an hour's drive west of Calgary on the Trans-Canada Highway. The park is bisected into two halves by a solid wall of mountains; there is no mountain pass between the two sides of the park. To get from one side to the other, one must drive to the north end of the park and loop around via the Trans-Canada Highway.

The Summit will be on the western side. It is easy to see why the P.M. chose the site. Firstly, there are no Liberals sitting in southern Alberta ridings, so if protestors trash the place then he is no worse off for votes than before. Secondly, the only access into western Kananaskis is via a single two-lane highway. Thirdly, if protestors try to go into the valley overland via the mountains from the eastern side, they will not only anger the environmentalists, they will run the risk of tangling with bears, cougars, and elk, none of which are particularly well tempered animals at the best of times.

The obvious conclusion by all concerned is that since the G-8 delegates must come through Calgary International Airport, the demonstrations will probably be in the city or out on the Trans-Canada Highway. This went over like a lead balloon with the

Calgary Police Service and the RCMP highway patrol. You know things are strange when the loudest voices against the G-8 are the police and city council, not the protestors.

The federal government managed to mute most of the grumbling by shoveling about \$40 million onto Calgary police to cover security expenses. The total invoice, once the RCMP and Canadian Armed Forces are added in, is about \$300 million. That may seem high, but the police have to guard a mountain wilderness about 50 km by 100 km, keep the Trans-Canada Highway open, protect Calgary International Airport, and patrol the downtown cores of Calgary and the adjacent towns en route of Cochrane and Canmore. Quite a job. The security people took over an abandoned building along the highway, west of Calgary, for their headquarters.

Which finally brings us to the story of the dumb crooks. Yesterday two men decided to videotape the security building, thinking to sell the tapes to protest groups and earn a few dollars. After doing so, they got nervous when they saw the commissionaires guarding the building watching them. They pulled off the licence plate of their car and roared away, squealing the tires. This drew the attention of the security people, who called the RCMP, who in turn started a high-speed chase and pulled the suspects over on the Trans-Canada Highway.

As a Mountie got out of his cruiser and approached the suspect car, a baggie of marijuana went sailing out the window into the ditch. The man who tossed it immediately changed his mind, got out of the car, and the two raced each other to the baggie. They both arrived at the same time, and in the ensuing struggle the baggie was torn open and the marijuana scattered to the winds.

Meanwhile, the other man tried to obstruct another Mountie from the suspicious car. The first man, having failed to reclaim his baggie, ran off on foot but was quickly tackled by his Mountie. Police said later that the men were not associated with any protest or terrorist groups and were just a couple of local characters.

The suspects were charged with dangerous driving, obstruction of a peace officer, assault of a peace officer, assault with intent to escape arrest, escape from lawful custody, and operating a motor vehicle without a licence plate. Other charges were pending. No charges were laid in connection to the actual videotaping, since it was not illegal to film the building. The building was a public place and the men were on a public highway. In other words, had the men stayed calm, nothing would have happened to them. RCMP Corporal Patrick Webb added insult to injury when he remarked that: "*We saw the video and it's really poor quality. It's not salable as far as we can see.*". He rubbed additional salt into the wound by mentioning that the public is free to visit the facility; group tours by appointment.

Meanwhile, Back At The G-8.

2000-04-10

One thing I've learned over the years is that people are usually their own worst enemies, especially in politics. Planning continues apace for the Kananaskis summit, and the mandarins in Ottawa are busily tendering contracts for supply and services. One such bureaucrat posted an invitation to tender on the Government of Canada Website, and helpfully included all the details necessary to post a bid. Presumably he thought only contractors would view the site.

The helpful details included maps of the conference rooms where the world leaders would be sitting and the exact spots where their chairs would be. Locations for surveillance cameras were mapped as well. Everything a commando team needs to build a mock-up for practicing a raid. The site was quickly taken down, but not before enough people copied it. It goes to prove the adage that you should never worry about what your enemies are up to; it's what your supporters are doing that will keep you awake at night.

G-8 Meets The Parks Department.

2002-05-29

It's nice to know that it isn't just science fiction fans who can't organize conventions. Protest organizers have only just now started to plan their demonstrations. With less than a month to go,

they are indignant at the City Parks staff

-6-

for not letting them book a park at the last minute.

The popular spots are long since booked by sports leagues, wedding parties, and social clubs. The protestors are expecting first choice on parks that are inappropriate for marches or speech-making, and throwing temper tantrums when they don't get them. Mayor Bronconnier pointed out to them that it is not the City's obligation to do their planning for them.

One organizer from the Canadian Labour Congress threatened rioting would be the result if the 10,000 expected protestors didn't get their way. Of course, during the World Petroleum Congress held in Calgary in 2000, those same protestors had difficulty scraping up 2,000 people for their marches, and most of the time they only had 200 or 1,000. The WPC was concentrated downtown, but the G-8 is scattered over hundreds of kilometres, so the protestors will have an even more difficult time co-ordinating events.

What has always annoyed me about these protestors is how they piddle away opportunities by being so diffuse. During the WPC, the few protestors that did show up represented a dog's breakfast of causes, everything from anti-globalism to environmental protection to poverty groups to a baker's dozen of anti-war ethnics. Instead of a single co-ordinated protest, every parade had dozens of different signs for different causes. If someone had

hoisted a sign "Gay Vegetarian Marxists For Jesus" it would not have been a surprise.

When I was a university student, instead of having a parade of everybody and their third cousin, we would have a series of protests over time, each on a different subject. Everyone would support everyone else's protest march on the principle of "You march in mine and I'll be in yours". One week the environmentalists would protest pesticides, and the Marxists, the anti-Vietnam War group, the women's liberation group, and the separatists would all come out with signs like "Gay Vegetarian Marxists Against Pesticides". The next week the women's group would have their march and the environmentalists would carry picket signs for them, and so forth through the social calendar. This had the additional advantage in that news media coverage was more focused on the topic, instead of "Look at all the weirdos! Film at 11."

Convention Planning, A La G-8.

2002-06-11

With only a fortnight to the G-8 summit, the organizers for the protestors are still hunting around for places to put up out-of-town people. A major group of American protestors today announced that they are moving their protest to Ottawa, seeing as how the Calgary group couldn't organize an orgy in a whorehouse. Not their exact words, of course, but pretty much their feelings.

River Deep, Mountain High.

Sunny weather predicted for today, so I decided to make a try at the Elbow River side, the eastern side, of the Kananaskis range. (The Summit is being held on the Kananaskis River side of the range over the mountains.) Before I left Calgary I stopped at a supermarket and bought some food. Driving into eastern Kananaskis, I passed a group of people standing in the ditch at the base of a cliff, busily inspecting the strata. Obviously a geology class outing from the University of Calgary. Just past them was a picnic ground on the Elbow River between the Elbow Falls and Canyon Creek. I stopped for a meal of ciabatta bread and smoked cheddar, washed down with Coca-Cola, to the sound of rapids roaring with flood waters.

Onwards to the trailhead at Loop E. Under sunny skies I walked upstream on the left bank of the river. On the far western horizon, the snow-mantled mountains were blinding in the morning sun. A turn to go up the Nihahi Creek Ridge trail, which climbs through spruce forest. I lost the trail a few times because of the snow still on the ground but usually picked it up again in a dozen metres or so. I wasn't worried about getting lost, since in a worst case all I had to do was turn downhill until I struck the river and then follow it downstream. And so back down below the snowline and to my car.

Driving out of Loop E, I saw a forestry road going north. The signs warned it might not be passable, but I figured the worst that could happen would be that I had to turn around. I drove a few kilometres in but soon realized I had put myself in a difficult position. The road was one lane and sometimes down to a 3/4 lane. There was no place to turn around. It was gravel and clay, but the clay always seem to predominate on the tight curves with a 100-metre drop into the valley on one side and a deep drainage ditch on the cliff side. There were no shoulders to the road. At the entrance to the road there had been a speed limit sign of 35 km/hr, but I was averaging about 25 klicks. My heart started to pound when I realized I was past the point of no return. Backing a front-wheel-drive Honda Civic in reverse gear 20 km over a mountain pass on slippery clay would be a nightmare if I had to do it.

The road turned surprisingly dry as I drove up over the Mount Powderface pass. The snow had recently been ploughed off the road, and was a metre high on the shoulders. I knew I was over the pass when the roadside creek suddenly began flowing in the opposite direction. The mountains were spectacular, but I didn't dare take my eyes off the road even for a second.

Another mountain pass followed, with the creeks switching back and forth between north flowing and south flowing. Sometimes the creek was 100 metres below me. Other times the road dipped onto the valley floor and a creek lapped across it, which was very

frightening. But the Honda splashed through, although I never took the wet clay sections on the curves at anything more than 5 klicks. Occasionally the car was moving so slowly that the speedometer needle didn't even move off the peg.

The road widened a few times to about 1 and 3/4 lanes wide, where I stopped to admire the view and let my heartbeat rate slow down. As I looked up at the Kananaskis mountains, it became obvious that the most fanatical G-8 protestor couldn't possibly hike over them to the Summit on the far side of the range. The late spring left deep snow still on the crests of the mountain passes, and below the snowline everything was hip-deep mud and muskeg. The creeks and rivers could not be forded in full spate.

The forestry road was starting to get better and wider. I was encouraged when a forest ranger drove past me in the opposite direction. He was driving a white truck that was spotless, so there couldn't be anymore mudholes ahead of me. The road was about 1.8 lanes wide, so we both slowed to a crawl and got past each other without scraping anybody's side mirror off.

Finally out onto the Jumping Pound River valley floor and Highway 68, which took me out to the Trans-Canada Highway and civilization. I drove the Powderface Trail once, and that'll be enough for my lifetime.

Waiting For Them.

2002-06-21

On my way home from work tonight, I stopped off at the downtown post office to collect my mail. Almost exactly two years prior, from June 11 to 15, 2000, Calgary hosted the World Petroleum Congress. The dire predictions of riots and mobs looting the downtown core failed to materialize. Canada Post issued a warning notice to boxholders at the post office downtown about possible disruptions to service. I wasn't surprised when I found a similar notice in my box number tonight for the G-8 Summit. When I compared it to the WPC notice, it was obvious that the latter was used as a template. The notice read as follows:

“IMPORTANT NOTICE TO POSTAL CUSTOMERS. The 2002 G8 Summit is meeting in Kananaskis from June 26 to June 28. This important event will bring world leaders, international media and protestors to Calgary.”

“While we are hopeful that postal services will proceed as usual, we are aware that, for the days preceding the Summit and during the Summit itself, protest activities are being planned.”

“The Calgary Central postal installation, which houses our employees and contractors who sort and deliver mail for customers in the T2C, T2G, T2P, T2R, T2S, T2T, T3C and T3Z postal code areas, is located in an area where protest activity is

most likely to occur. If obstructive or non-peaceful protest activity does occur, we may be unable to provide “Business as usual” mail delivery and pick-up service to your area.”

“We expect that normal delivery and pick-up service will resume on June 28.”

“If you are unable to access to our Calgary Central Post Office at 207 9 Avenue S.W. as a consequence of protest activity, retail service is also available through our franchise network. Locations are listed in the white pages of your telephone book under “CANADA POST”, or visit our website at www.canadapost.ca.”

“Large volume mailers who normally deposit mail at the Calgary Central Post Office can use either of the following corporate facilities during this period:

- * Calgary Mail Processing Plant,
1100 49 Avenue NE*
- * Calgary South Post Office,
6100 Macleod Trail SW “*

“Additionally, street letterboxes will be temporarily removed from parts of the downtown and University areas. Customers who

normally use this equipment can deposit mail at any postal location in our franchise network, or at one of the two corporate facilities listed above.”

“Canada Post apologizes for any inconvenience this may cause. Your co-operation and understanding is appreciated. If you have any questions please call our Customer Service Line at 1-800-267-1177.”

And So It Begins.

2002-06-23

The Sunday of the G-8 week. As I drove around at work on my weekend shift, I saw gunships thundering through the skies continuously, usually in groups of four. The Canadian Armed Forces have taken over an entire airport in the countryside west of Calgary at Springbank, and are using it as a staging post. Heavy transports and fighters constantly come and go from Calgary International Airport. This airport is in my work area, and as I drive by it several times a day, I see the parking lot at the end of the runway is packed with cars. Airplane spotters are coming from all over western Canada to photograph aircraft of G-8 countries seldom seen here. The military transports of Canada and USA are visible looming above the terminals. They are biiiiig. As of this Tuesday, a 150-km no-fly zone will be activated around Kananaskis, and any aircraft straying into the park will be shot down by NORAD fighters on 24-hour patrol.

Fortunately I had no protests going on in -10-
my work area; the downtown core is where all the excitement is. Today the protestors got about 2,500 people for a march around the core. This was billed as the Community Solidarity March, but the communities were the usual suspects, such as labour unions, special-interest groups, university students, and semi-professional protestors who don't seem to have a day job but can always afford to show up at these events no matter where they are held. The real communities, like the working-class poor of east Calgary or Chinatown, were not there.

The railway police arrested two American protestors spraying graffiti on freight cars. In Canada, the Canadian National and the Canadian Pacific railways have their own police forces, with the same authority as any municipal police force. There were casualties out at Kananaskis, where 30 Mounties on point duty in the bush came down with food poisoning. Never mind the protestors, it's your friends in the catering corps you have to watch out for.

A City of Calgary bureaucrat issued a public warning advising all people to stay out of the downtown core. This defeatist attitude concedes everything to the protestors. I intend to go downtown to pick up my mail each day. As with the World Petroleum Congress two years ago, I expect that any inconvenience I will suffer will be from officious security guards, not the protestors.

The Monday of the G-8 week, which is actually the start of my weekend, since I work Friday to Sunday. First to the University of Calgary Library to check my e-mail and do a bit of research. Then I walked downtown. Once downtown, there was no point in taking the Plus-15 system (pedestrian walkways at the second floor level, which connect most of the downtown buildings), as security guards were carding everyone wherever the pedestrian ways passed through a skyscraper. Hastily-photocopied "Private Property" signs were ubiquitous. In Canadian law, you can't be charged with trespassing unless you have been formally warned by a sign or in a previous encounter with building security. Many skyscrapers had locked all their doors opening on the sidewalks except for one main entrance. I stopped in at the downtown post office. The street letter box that normally stands outside the post office door for after-hours mailing had been brought inside, and was now in the lobby of the retail counter section.

No sign of protestors anywhere on the Stephen Avenue Mall, nor at the Olympic Plaza directly across from City Hall. Undercover police were in evidence though. They were easy to spot. 30-year-old skateboarders are not very convincing in the first instance, and less so when they have earplugs but no Walkman. Casually-dressed mountain bikers who kept talking into their left wrists stuck out a block away.

The Tuesday of the G-8 week. The leaders have started arriving, but they immediately changed from their planes to helicopters and flew out to Kananaskis without even visiting the airport terminal. Traffic was at a standstill on the roads around the airport as thousands of plane spotters watched Air Force One arrive. It is the first time a sitting American President has visited Calgary.

This morning as I walked to the bus stop to take me to the University, I was startled to see a Canadian Armed Forces tank retriever come rumbling down the street past my house. I thought to myself they were lost, which was confirmed a few minutes later when they came back again in the opposite direction. They stopped by a pedestrian further ahead of me, and a soldier leaned out the window and said something. The pedestrian then pointed in the direction of Crowchild Trail, the soldier gave him a friendly hand wave, and in a moment they were out on the freeway.

Later that morning I walked downtown from the university to get my mail. It was a hot morning, with temperatures soaring to 26°C, and I was dehydrated just walking. Coming out of the post office, I saw my first protestors. The lead marchers were wearing giant paper-mache heads of the G-8 leaders, followed by about ten

supporters waving picket signs. None of the pedestrians paid the slightest attention. The protestors marched into a parking lot and then pulled off their masks to chug-a-lug bottles of Perrier water. An inferno inside those masks.

The barricades were up but not by the protestors. The police barricades were not as extensive as they were for the World Petroleum Congress two years ago. Not much in the way of official business was happening here; all the action is at Kananaskis. The convention centre was partly fenced off but little else. I only saw only one storefront boarded up with plywood.

Each street corner had seven (exactly) police constables lounging about. About half the constables were Ontario Provincial Police, with a small sprinkling of RCMP (who are seldom seen inside Calgary limits), Waterloo Regional Police, and the rest were Calgary police. With no protests to worry them, there was nothing for them to do but stand around gossip with each other. I noticed there were no jaywalkers whatsoever. Usually Calgary pedestrians consider traffic lights as leftover Christmas decorations and pay no mind to them. Today everyone was law-abiding. I strolled down the pedestrian mall to the Olympic Plaza, but nothing was happening there either.

The buskers and hawkers were out in full force. I saw one hawker doing good business selling ice-cold cans of soda pop to the

constables and building security guards sweltering in the heat. I immediately thought of Terry Pratchett's Discworld fantasy novels, in which one of the recurring characters is C.M.O.T. Dibbler, a pedlar who can always be found at any public gathering or riot selling smokies of questionable origin.

Snaking Through The Core.

2002-06-26

The first day of the actual G-8 Summit was today. The leaders were all out at Kananaskis, but that didn't deter the protestors from marching all day around the downtown core. Their avowed purpose was to cause traffic jams. While there were a few backups here and there, it was difficult to see much difference between the protestors' effect and the Roads Dept., which, with impeccable timing as always, was repaving a main drag. This surprised me because usually Roads waits until Stampede rodeo week to annoy people with lane closures.

I followed my usual routine for the day except that instead of walking downtown from the University, I took the LRT. By 11h00 it was 29°C, and although the 8-km walk is downhill, I wasn't going to kill myself with heat prostration.

I caught up with the marchers as I left the post office, and stood in the shade of an office building as they shuffled by on the

Stephen Avenue Mall. I was disappointed at the quality of the banners and picket signs compared to how it was at the University of Alberta when we marched in the early 1970s. Kids these days.

The NDP led the way with a banner "Participation of women". Bilingual, of course, since they are a national party. Possibly the blandest picket sign ever carried in Canadian history was by the earnest young man declaring "Let's redefine wellness!". The banner "Against the State / Against capitalism" was fair enough but its credibility was undermined by one of its bearers wearing Nike shoes. Some of the signs were in small letters about 2 cm high that no bystander could read from the crowd, with enough text to fill a chapbook. Picket signs should be big, loud, and proud, not an essay with references cited. I was thrilled to see one man carrying a large poster of Che Guevara. I didn't think the younger generation knew who he was. I haven't seen that poster in twenty-five years since I left my university dormitory.

As the marchers crossed 2nd Street SW, there was a bit of a mix-up. The NDP forged straight ahead down the mall, while another bunch turned right in confusion, up the street. Out-of-towners, I suppose, as that direction would have led them from the core into the warehouse district. The group leader had to chase after them, and there was a bit of milling around before everyone was rounded up and pointed in the correct direction. It reminded me of our cattle drives back on the farm when I was a boy. There was

a busker on the sidewalk next to me. As the front of the march went past him, he started playing "One Tin Soldier" for the NDP, then switched to "Music Box Dancer" as the Marxist-Leninists came by.

A tiny woman used a bullhorn to harangue the office workers enjoying the show on their lunch break, but her words were unintelligible due to echos from the adjacent skyscrapers. I wasn't five metres from her and I couldn't make out a word she said. Back at the U of A, it was our practice to select a few big guys from the inter-varsity hockey team to bellow out slogans, since baritone voices carry better over traffic noise.

I told you all that so I could tell you this story. As the Che poster man went by me, I saw C.M.O.T. Dibbler marching in step with him. Nothing to do with solidarity. Mr. Dibbler was trying to sell him a can of cold pop. They were having trouble closing the sale since both had their hands full, one with a banner and the other with a ice cooler. They also had to keep moving or get run over from behind by other protestors. Che managed to fish a loonie out of his pocket and the deal was done as they crossed 2nd Street. Che bought a can of Coca-Cola.

A motorcycle cop blocking vehicular traffic for the marchers watched Dibbler with undisguised envy.

The constable was in full

leather gear and helmet, in direct sunshine, and getting the additional heat reflected off the skyscrapers. His face was beet red from the temperature. Dibbler then criss-crossed the marchers behind Che. He didn't succeed with them, but did manage to sell to a few office workers. As I left the scene, I saw him walking hopefully towards a batch of OPP constables.

The End Is Nigh. 2002-06-27

The final day of the G-8 Summit. 32°C today, and the Waterworks Dept. has announced rationing; no garden or lawn watering. Not only is water demand soaring, but the Glenmore reservoir water treatment plant had a breakdown and lost 40% of its capacity at the worst possible time.

Again I made my usual rounds to the University library and then downtown by train to pick up my mail. The Stephen Avenue Mall was quiet, so in hopes of a good riot I wandered eastward to the Olympic Plaza. A sweet young thing tried to sell me a special G-8 edition of the CALGARY DAILY WORKER (Marxist-Leninist). I declined.

The Plaza had a bit of activity. The television networks had given up on getting good footage of riot police battling protestors or black-flag anarchists setting fire to garbage bins, so they were doing man-on-the-street interviews. As every science fiction fan

knows, no matter how serious a science fiction convention is, or how high the quality of the programming, all the news reports will show an overweight teenager dressed up as a Klingon and make him representative of the convention.

The G-8 protestors were having the same problem today. A woman off in the corner of the park was orating to a small group about globalization. The cameras, however, were on the other side of the Plaza, focused on a scrawny man wearing a metallic purple monk's hood and cloak, and on what appeared to be some neo-pagans nearby attempting a Druidic ceremony.

The man in the purple cloak was a tall beanpole with a straggly goatee, and wearing a tee-shirt under his cloak that had originally been white but was now mostly yellow. He looked like the kind of geek seen at science fiction conventions, probably a gamer. Behind the cameras, the inevitable Dibbler was there, busy selling cold pop to the television technicians. As Beanpole spoke with his interviewer, I saw his eyes shifting constantly to Dibbler. A deep purple hood and cloak are not wise dress on a 32°C day. The interviewer was wearing a suit jacket with Bermuda shorts, an appalling combination to passersby but eminently practical in the heat since she would only be shown from the waist up. Immediately the interview was finished, they both quick-stepped over to Dibbler.

Nearby was a group of half-naked neo-pagans doing a circle dance. The dancers had blue body paint but in the heat and sweat it was running like bad mascara. They looked like blue zebras. Worse yet, the dancers were either grossly overweight or skeletal. Call me old-fashioned but I don't think either gender should show themselves like that. There are some things too disgusting for public viewing, like dog droppings, nude science fiction fans, and university students trying to be Druids. A few businessmen on their lunch hour were craning to see the dancers, in the hope that perhaps the women might strip off. No such luck. I was getting a sore neck craning, plus the heat was getting to me, so I moved off to catch my bus home.

Walking back down the Mall, I noticed that maintenance workers had carefully chained shut the cast iron grates that protect boulevard tree roots from compaction by pedestrians. These grates normally hinge open in halves so that gardeners can weed the tree wells, but for G-8 were chained shut in fear of rioters using them as projectiles. Never mind that it takes two strong men to lift one. I crossed the street and then saw that the tree grates on that side were still loose. Going down the street it became obvious that only one side of the Mall had been secured. I know exactly what happened. The workers did one side of the street, went for a coffee break, forgot to finish the job, and then left for some other task.

At the west end of the Mall, a petroleum skyscraper was being renovated. All the tree grates in the vicinity were chained shut but the stacks of lumber, cinder blocks, and pipes were behind a shaky, loosely-tied portable rental fence that wouldn't slow a 10-year-old, much less an adrenaline-pumped black flagger. Don't worry about your enemies; it's your own side you've got to watch.

After The Flood.

2002-07-03

The G-8 Summit is rapidly fading into history, having accomplished nothing of value at a cost of \$300 million. Now that the western valleys are open again, I took the opportunity of a nice day to drive out there. I proceeded up the valley and stopped in at the village post office to mail a couple of postcards.

One could immediately see where some of that \$300 million had been spent. The parking lots were full of contractors disassembling kilometres of 4-metre high chainlink fence that had been used to encircle the entire village. This is the type of fence used for baseball backstops and golf course driving ranges. It is not easy to install because of its height and wind susceptibility, and must be cemented deep and braced with crosswires. The fencing had been everywhere, in parking lots, highway roadsides, and as checkpoint gates. All that work for a two-day photo opportunity.

Leaving the village and heading deeper into the valley, I saw guard towers being dismantled along the roadside. These were four stories tall and constructed from ordinary industrial scaffolding. They were quadruple-width; the ones you see used by painters or brick masons are single-width. Kananaskis had to have had the entire surplus supply of scaffolding in western Canada to build those guard towers.

Both the protestors and the security forces claimed victory at the end of the G-8 Summit. The former because they frightened the Establishment into spending \$300 million on them, and the latter because the black flaggers were unable to start any riots. My belief is that the only two winners were Dibbler and the fencing and scaffold rental companies.

Epilogue.

2002-07-05

This morning, a week after the G-8 was over, there was a massive march through the downtown core of Calgary, watched by 250,000 people. Dozens of different special-interest groups carried banners as they were shepherded by police. Normal traffic came to a standstill and the barricades were up again.

It was, of course, the opening parade of the Calgary Stampede, the world's largest rodeo (more than a million paid attendances). Instead of chanting "Redefine wellness! Redefine wellness!" they

chanted "Yeehaw!". Instead of strangely dressed goths and anarchists, there were strangely dressed cowboys and cowgirls, most of whom were petroleum executives or secretaries in their day job. The security guards at the skyscrapers were there not to prevent protestors from handing out free meals for the homeless, but to keep the sidewalk lineup orderly at the free flapjack breakfasts for office workers.

As pipe bands and horse riders from around the world marched past the spectators in the parade, a man could be seen trolling the crowd along the curb. Dibbler was selling ice-cold pop.

