

Why you got this zine

- ___ You asked
- ___ We said things about you
- ___ You said things about us
- ___ We've heard things about you (and we'd like to hear more)
- ___ We met you at ConFrancisco
- ___ It will contribute to world peace, reduce unsightly blemishes and maybe make you laugh
- ___ We thought you'd be particularly interested in one of the articles

Bento #5 is a Bento Press production from

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Art Credits

All art this issue is by us; the cover is based on a Breton design. Submissions of art for future issues would be really keen.

Bento #5



A zine by Kate Yule and David Levine
For ConFrancisco — September 1993

1

*She stood upon the balcony, inexplicably mimicking
his hiccuping while amicably welcoming him home.*

Warning, Will Robinson!

Last year we spent the Fourth of July weekend with Portland fans Eric Simonson, Jim Fiscus, and B. C. Shelby at Eric's parents' beach house on the Long Beach Peninsula in Washington state. We spent the holiday in the typical American fashion, with barbecue, corn on the cob, flying kites, watching a parade, and Blowing Things Up.

Now, as you might already realize, doing *anything* in the typical American fashion is something Kate and I rarely do, and I am usually content to let others handle the pyrotechnic chores. But here on the beach, with nothing flammable in the immediate vicinity and no big civic fireworks display nearby, it seemed the thing to do to buy a bunch of colorful, cheaply-packaged explosives from a transient street vendor and risk life and limb for the sake of a few fleeting thrills.

The actual pyrotechnic experience was the typical combination of frustration (won't the damn thing *ever* light?), disappointment (looks like it's a dud...), panic (shit, it's heading right for us!), and exhilaration (ooh! aah!), but what I really remember are

2

the warning labels. Each garish, out-of-register label had the following warning, or something like it:

CAUTION

EMITS FLAMING BALLS AND REPORTS
USE ONLY UNDER CLOSE ADULT SUPERVISION
FOR OUTDOOR USE ONLY
PLACE ON HARD FLAT SURFACE
DO NOT HOLD IN HAND
LIGHT FUSE AND GET AWAY

We had fun reading each warning out loud before blowing it up. The one warning that was strikingly different was on the snakes, which said:

DO NOT PLACE IN MOUTH
LAY ON GROUND
LIGHT PELLET

DOES NOT CONTAIN POISONOUS MERCURY

Jim demonstrated the proper procedure by laying on the ground to light the pellet, but not placing it in his mouth. I really wonder about that mercury comment, though. This was the only warning we saw that something was *not* dangerous....

All of which made for a suitably warped context for the following warning, which appeared on a bottle of Schweppes Club Soda that we got on the way back home:

CAUTION: CONTENTS UNDER PRESSURE.
IMPROPER HANDLING MAY CAUSE BOTTLE TO
BREAK WITH FORCE. CAP MAY FORCEFULLY
EJECT. POINT AWAY FROM FACE AND PEOPLE
WHEN OPENING.

And I always thought club soda was fairly harmless... — DDL

Half-Sashayed and Loving It

Faithful readers may remember from issue #4 that I've been dancing in a gay square dance club for some time. I mused then about the universality of "fandoms", and that if the fun of this one ever palled for me, there would always be some other activity to catch my interest. Well, the chewing gum has not lost its flavor; I am more enthusiastic about square dancing than ever.

If anyone familiar with the genteel, gingham-bedecked shuffle that constitutes square dancing in Granges and Legion Halls across this fair land is surprised at my fervor, I don't blame you. And of course I am used to a certain degree of crogglement that gay square dancing even exists, much less that a straight person would

could it be, when the statement "You should all be in normal couples now" is greeted with hoots of laughter?

I didn't know any of this, that fall day when I saw the notice that the Ramblers were holding lessons around the corner from our apartment. All I dreamed was that my partners would be under fifty, and we wouldn't have to wear those damn crinolines. And maybe, just maybe, the sexism which pervades standard square dance patter would be less galling in the context of a gay square.

If I could get up the nerve to go.

Butterflies? Yeah, encased in a cold quivering lump of lime jello and trying to get out.... It took every bit of blind determination I could muster, to walk in that door that first Wednesday night. The first dozen nights. Mind you, I would worry that I was "out of place" anywhere short of a convention of multilingual red-heads named Kate. (Hey, even there: what if I didn't measure up?!) This time, I really DID know that I was different from everybody else. And it was their party, on their terms. Maybe they got enough of heterosexuals the rest of the time. I felt like an infiltrator, there under false pretenses. At the same time, surely it must be blazoned in neon on my forehead: "Breeder. Does Not Belong." Contradictory? Of course.

It was rough, for a while. The dynamics that year were right out of junior high: boys on this side of the room, girls clumped in impervious cliques on the other. Eventually things got easier. It

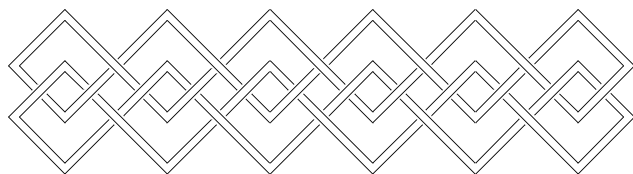
be found among them. Believe me, you'll never keep me down on the farm now that I've seen Gay Paree! (Paree, Texas, that is.)

Gay square dancing uses the same standard list of calls used by callers everywhere. But if square dance is a foreign language (see Bento #2), then gay clubs have a dialect of their own. We talk louder, faster, and full of slang and idiom. Dreamy "Weave the Ring" becomes a high-kicking, boot-stomping, floor-shaker of a call. The energy level is incredible. Can you say endorphin rush? I knew you could!

Square dancing is also mental exercise, for those of us with a bent for pattern analysis. I love the special challenge of dancing in a square where dance position and physical gender have no correlation whatsoever. I've developed a little routine of noting, each time, who the "boys" are, who the "girls" are...which one I am... "I'm dancing boy, you're my corner, Star Through with the right hand..." (Not unlike the mantra we used behind the wheel in Britain this spring.) Learning to dance both parts is very common, which makes for stronger dancers. (Sometimes a shaky square will go through more gender reversals than *Victor, Victoria*, but it's all in fun!) Callers who can cope with squares that aren't neatly half pants/half petticoats love the way we'll take whatever they throw at us. Only the newest of dancers are fazed by a call that puts them on the "wrong" side of their partner ("half-sashayed"). How else

was always fine as long as we were dancing. I loved the dancing. But I was afraid of rejection if they knew the truth. Sure, I thought of asking someone "Hey, I'm straight, do you mind?" It always sounded dangerously close to "Please don't think I'm one of you." Besides: Don't ask questions you don't want to know the answer to.

So I kept quiet, and I avoided words like "David" and "boy-friend" and "he", and I learned something of what the inside of a closet looks like.



All of that was four years ago. It's been tricky to write this piece, because things have changed so much even in the last months. Slowly, fear gave way to friendships. I "came out," gradually, over the past two years. (Interestingly enough it became much easier to talk about David as soon as the word "husband" applied, instead of scrabbling among lover/ boyfriend/ roommate/ partner etc.) Just in these last few months I have finally asked some of my friends in the club what they thought of me being straight and dancing there. Turns out that it is so utterly a non-issue that

conversations on the topic wither and die for lack of content. Beyond mild curiosity as to what led me to the group, they truly Do Not Give a Damn.

Do I feel stupid, or what?!

Answer: Yes. And no. Nothing but experiencing it could have shown me what it is like to be closeted: shy about displays of affection if David dropped me off for a dance, silent about how I spent my weekends, afraid for something I held dear if the truth were known about *who* I held dear. I *can't* regret the depth of that insight. I have learned so much in these years of dancing. I'm more comfortable with strangers. I notice the gays around me as I go about my everyday life, and my view of the world is richer for it. At this year's annual Convention, 1150 strong for a long holiday weekend, I was privileged to share what happens when being gay is so pervasive that it isn't an issue any more: when they are free to just be people, like everybody else. It was a glorious weekend.

Still and all, I didn't join the Ramblers out of sociological experimentation. It all comes back to the dancing. And the people. Is it Wednesday yet? — KY

[David here. After four years of watching Kate go off to dance with the Ramblers every week, I'm taking the plunge and joining in myself. I've taken one lesson so far. Wish me luck!]

nothing on it but souvenir shops, hotels, and the abbey. They have been selling tacky souvenirs to pilgrims on the Mont for over 2000 years. They are very good at it.] These are incredibly *expensive* souvenir shops: lace, glass, leather. But go so much as *one alley over* and you are on the quiet back streets that Mont St. Michel does not have. I wonder how many people never do that?

We're seated on the edge of the Pescheria loggia, the fish market, watching the milkman (in something like a canal narrowboat, red & green & yellow, with a big white cooler chest); bus-boats full of somberly dressed, bored commuters; gondoliers heading for their posts by inboard motor; a crane lifting dumpsters onto a garbage barge—Garbage barge! Hey, this is where Michael Palin was in *Around the World in 80 Days!*

I have to get over the feeling that asking for "aqua del rubinetto" instead of mineral water is like requesting a nice carafe of bathwater.

4 May

Much less water in Venice than expected. Every picture you've ever seen in your life includes a canal, but you can walk for half an hour and see only streets. Well, not streets—that implies vehicles to me, and also width. We're talking about paved *passageways*, typically 4-9 feet wide. Yes, I'm serious. They will often open out into "campos", Venetian piazzas, but except for St. Mark's, which is large enough for three dance orchestras to play at

Enchanted May

This spring, David received eight weeks paid sabbatical for having worked at Intel for seven years. We fled the country: spent two weeks in Italy, four in France, then my sister joined us for Scotland and England. We were excited at the prospect of having so much source material for this issue.

Then we tried to fit a two-month trip report into Bento, the Big Little Fanzine. Yeah, right! Kind of like trying to cram all the books we acquired in England into our backpacks (we wound up mailing home six boxes). Maybe the trip report will become a separate Bento Press Publication — no promises. For now, here are some excerpts from my journal.

3 May

If Milan was New York City, Venice is DisneyWorld. It's a lot more colorful than I expected—all I knew was the blue & gold haze of Canaletto, the sepia monochrome of CJ Cherryh's Merovingen. We have got sunlight (finally! Hallelujah!) and the buildings are pink, peach, green, rust—muted all, but varied. If you follow the signs to thread the maze "Per San Marco" or "Per Rialto" or to another noted tourist destination, you go along streets that are like the Grande Rue in Mont St. Michel, if less tacky. [The Grande Rue is so narrow that the municipal garbage truck, a Cushman, backs down it for lack of somewhere to turn around. There is

three separate outdoor cafes without clashing, the largest of those is a fraction of an open city block. When we reached the north bank this evening, Fondamento Nuovo, I was surprised how *relieved* I felt to see some open space: miles of water, out across the lagoon. And wide even walkways on the FN itself, wider than any other non-campo we'd seen.

Here at the hotel (albergo, pensione, whatever) is a bulldog. He is massive, solid, completely improbable. Every time I see him, unless he is actively clicking across the floor, I think he is a statue. His name is "Lord", with a definitive Italian R. When first we met I sat down at the other end of the sofa from him and he slowly (minutes later—we are talking deliberate action to the point of glacialness here, when you see him in any pose it seems impossible he could ever be any other way) got down, went round to my bag, sniffed at it, and then started butting at it like an angered moose. A *slow* angered moose. The next time, I put my hand out and he licked it. Would clearly have settled in to lick all day if allowed to. I took my hand away, stood up, and he licked my shin—then clambered in under my skirt and proceeded to start in on my knee. He got very much underfoot every time I saw him yesterday. Apparently likes me.

5 May

Wrapped up loose ends in Venice yesterday. I very much wanted to see the Ghetto—the original of that name, so called for

the foundry that was there at one time. It was at once less dramatic and more moving that I expected. You come over one of three bridges (formerly 2, with gates) and emerge into a decent-sized campo, with scattered benches and a few rare trees. A pleasant square. Easy to imagine the children playing there, parents (and the community in general) watching from the windows above. A few buildings had bits of Hebrew carved on them. One wall had some bronze artwork: a Holocaust memorial, erected by the French. A notice on the synagogue door asked that the bell not be used on Saturdays or holidays: please knock. A corner storefront with an indefinable quality reminiscent of Vietnamese grocery stores or Filipino video places in the states—from the handwritten notices? the sun-faded blue-pink displays? I dunno—was the Chabad Lubovitcher headquarters. In case of emergency, kosher food could be obtained after hours by ringing at the community center “across the ghetto”. I considered buying a pair of milchik and fleischik potholders.

The guidebook had mentioned that they built up on the buildings as needed: Jews were restricted to this section of town, which was closed off each night. And we noticed that they did seem taller than many other campos had, with shorter individual stories. But what really struck me was when we left the island, and I realized that the structures around that pleasant, open campo were *one building deep*. That’s all there was. I wonder what the population

correct spell carefully and sign your True Name. If you do everything right, the Oil Fairies will come and warm your house for many months. But if you don't do everything exactly right, the Oil Fairies won't come, or — even worse — they will come, but they will bring with them a curse that will make your life miserable. Collection Agencies.

Social Moths

That’s us. Social butterflies flit gaily and cheerfully from event to event. Social moths are drawn, irresistibly, compulsively, towards the bright lights — a party, a dance, a movie, a street fair, let’s go! — only to burn out in the flame (sizz!) or beat against the unyielding glass of conflicting commitments (fwap!) until we fall, exhausted. But still we persist. We are often seen staring at next month's social calendar — full already — and muttering “flutter, flutter, fwap.”

Bug Pressure

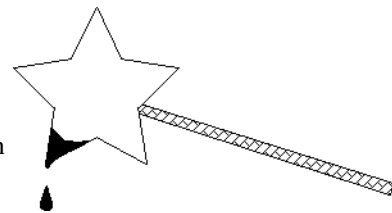
Why is it that, when you open the door or window, bugs come in but rarely go out? The answer lies in “that pesky physics thing” (as one of Kate's dancing partners put it in explaining what happened to her car). All you have to do is treat bugs as a gas, with very large and slow-moving particles and a very low density. Then you can use the Ideal Gas Laws to predict their behavior (on a statistical basis).

density of that area was, and how it compares to today or to other neighborhoods then. Venice’s Jews—who came here from all over Europe when other countries got unpleasant, such as Spain in 1492—seem to have been fairly safe until the 1940’s, but only in a very small space. Was the foundry still operating when all this started? Did it make the area somewhere Christians didn’t want anyway? — KY

Unnatural History Corner

Oil Fairies

Our rental apartment’s heat was provided by dwarves. They toiled away in the basement with their little hammers — we would hear them banging and clanging on the pipes. Now we are homeowners, and there is a different system.



Deep in the winter, when the house is cold, you must write your name on a piece of green paper and leave it outside, at night, under a special rock in the garden. Not just any green paper will do; it must be properly prepared by the shamans, with the correct cabalistic symbols imprinted upon it, and you must write the

For example, any given space has a certain “bug pressure,” which is determined by both the number of bugs per unit volume (density) and their average velocity (temperature). On a typical summer day, there might be 10 or 20 bugs per 100 cubic meters outdoors, flying around at a good clip. This represents a high bug pressure. But indoors, you might have only 1 or 2 bugs per 100 cubic meters, so the bug pressure is much lower. When you open the door, bugs will tend to come in until the bug pressure on both sides of the door is equalized. If you keep the door open after that point, the number of bugs coming in will roughly equal the number going out.

So far we haven't come up with any practical uses for this idea. However, since the bug pressure is determined by both density and temperature, perhaps we could increase the indoor bug pressure without increasing the number of bugs by somehow accelerating the bugs we already have. I calculate that one fly zipping around at 1500 m/sec would be sufficient to keep the entire house bug-free no matter how many doors we open... — DDL

$$E = (bem)c^2$$

$$pV = nr'$$

How is a Millipicture Like an English Poet?

Answer: It's one word's worth! Here are some more metric to english conversions:

1 millihelen = the amount of beauty required to launch 1 ship.

1 microsmile = that for which Al Jolson would walk one mile.

1 boost = 10^{-18} boy (1 attoboy).

1 vanilli = 2000 guys who can't sing.

1 picobu = 1 I.C.U.

1 arnaz = 10 Cuban bandleaders.

1 mockingbird = 0.0005 novel, where 1 novel =
2 kilomockingbird.

And of course you remember Milli, Micro, Femto, and Atto,
the Marx Sisters... — DDL

How We Met Trabi

It had been a long day. We had started in a small Italian fishing village, eight hours and four trains away from Nice. It was apparently impossible for information about railway schedules to traverse the French-Italian border, at least as far as the Italian railroad staff was concerned, so we had been unable to give any definite arrival time to the people at the Peugeot office in Nice, where we were picking up a car for the next phase of our trip. We were to telephone from the train station, and someone would come to meet us.

the Nice airport. Monsieur, memorable for the slim brown cigar that somehow never left his mouth, handed our bags up to his young overalled assistant, who put them in the trunk of the car. This was oddly disconcerting, as it was still on the back of the truck. We climbed into the two-person passenger seat in the cab. Jeune* joined us, and engaged in a spirited conversation with Monsieur Cigar through the car window, with much handwaving and pointing at maps. One of them knew the way to the airport, and disputed the other's grasp of this information. The other pooh-poohed all such concerns. We weren't certain which was which. *All* of this, of course, was taking place in rapid-fire Provençal dialect.

Soon Monsieur walked away. Jeune mumbled incomprehensible but friendly Provençal at us. "Smile and nod," that's our watchword, "smile and nod".... The truck pulled out, without waiting for Monsieur. Why wasn't he leading us? — as it became rapidly clear that Jeune was *not* the one who knew the way to the airport. At each decision point he would look into his rear-view mirror and gesture expansively, waving hands and shrugging shoulders until some consensus was reached. Finally the light

* We dubbed him this after the otherwise-nameless and overworked assistant to Monsieur Menicucci in Peter Mayle's *A Year in Provence*, which we'd both read just before the trip. Great book, godawful TV show.

Instead we were greeted by the thoroughly unexpected sight of two men with a tatty cardboard sign reading "M. Levine." We staggered up, introductions were made (our brains grinding audibly as we attempted to switch over from Italian), and we found ourselves hustled out of the station before we knew we were in it.

There, six feet from the door, in the passenger-loading-and-unloading-area-only-driver-must-remain-at-wheel, was a brand-new shiny green Peugeot, staring back at us at eye level from the back of a small flatbed truck. *Our* brand-new shiny green Peugeot. For one stunned moment we thought they were going to roll it off the truck and hand it over to us right then and there.

It was *our* car in that we had agreed, by means of a multi-page contract and a \$12,000 (gulp) promissory note, to buy the car from Peugeot — and to give it back on a specified date. The cost to us was significantly less than renting, *and* free of the exorbitant French taxes and added insurance fees which more than double the nominal rental price. Peugeot in turn had agreed to sell it to us, *unless* (this was in the fine print) French tax law should change such that the deal was no longer in Peugeot's best interest. It was a relief to spot that clause: at last we knew what was in it for them! We got cheap use of a factory-new car; they got a tax dodge by letting foreigners convert it into a used car.

It had to be foreigners — European residents need not apply. So there was some paperwork to complete at the customs office at

dawned: Monsieur was behind us — on the truckbed — in our factory-new Peugeot! Please, let the cigar be unlit. We kept a sharp eye out for any road signs that would imply the existence of an airport.

Many mumbles, smiles, nods, and expressive rearview shrugs later, we pulled into the passenger-loading-and-unloading-area-parking-strictly-prohibited at the airport arrivals terminal. Monsieur ran inside with David's passport — "No, no, you wait here." Jeune engaged in an elaborate game of three-card monte with the truck, our car, and another Peugeot which he had obtained from elsewhere in the parking lot while objuring us to "wait here." Oh, no problem, we'll just be here on the sidewalk smiling at the parking police — who were, so far, keeping a wary eye on our little entourage from a distance.

Monsieur returned shortly with a sheaf of papers. Sign here, here, here and here, initial *here*. This is the *Carte Grise*, or Gray Card: it proves you own the car. This is the *Carte Verte*, or Green Card: it proves the car is insured. And this is my receipt for your receipt. You must have the car serviced after 1500 kilometers as specified in the owner's manual; the person performing the service must stamp here and here, sign here, and return this postcard to Peugeot. Here's the gas pedal, brake, clutch; here's the windshield wipers, radio, and cloud lights (cloud lights??). You've got five liters of gas. Here's the key. Adieu, bon voyage. This last was said

with one leg already inside the passenger compartment of the truck.

We delayed his departure just long enough to establish that we had misunderstood as “cloud light” was the *fog* light, not low yellow headlights but a single bright red light for the benefit of drivers behind you. Try communicating that with a 2000-word mutual vocabulary and a cigar in your mouth.

So there we were in the passenger-loading-and-unloading-area-parking-strictly-prohibited at the Nice airport, after eight hours on a train, with a car we’d never driven before, in a country we’d been in for only two hours and whose language was battling half-successfully with Italian for dominance of our brains. It was just beginning to sink in that we had just *purchased a brand-new automobile* in the space of five minutes in an airport loading zone. But the local gendarmes were beginning to tap their toes, so we had no time to stop and think. Trying to ignore the fact that we hadn’t driven a car in three weeks, and hadn’t driven in France in three years, we jumped in, started the car, and drove off.

None of our further adventures with Trabi quite matched that first day. (We’ll spare you the details of how we got to our hotel, barely avoiding both downtown Nice and the toll expressway to Cannes only because of our earlier attention to detail with Jeune, and ending an *hour later* in a room overlooking our friend the airport loading zone.) Trabi—we nicknamed it after an indefatigable

Bid Stickers and Gizmos: More! Yes yes yes on new fandoms to catch our interest. There’s a wonderful consistency in the human tendency to clump and get weird.

To Stop the Train: Well, I learned the hand gestures you quote from Singer, but knew the round from a buncha folkies. We did the round at BirthdayCon (my 30th B-day, in 1990; the con from which Jane ~~stole~~ got the idea. I got engaged to Juan at mine; Jane & Luke got married. Speculation exists that the next birthdaycon ought to feature a birth, though I insist that a consummation—symbolic, with flocks of white doves rising from drawn bed-curtains—is the real next step. Ahem. Where was I? Oh, yes.) We sang “To Stop the Train” en masse aboard the big roller coaster at the local amusement park. It pulled out, we began to sing, the attendants looked at us astonished. We did the round the whole way, round curves, down precipitous drops, gesturing wildly and adding the occasional shriek, pulling at last into the station, still singing. On key. Everyone was completely croggled. Ask Tom Whitmore—he was there, on the lam from “Nafsic”.

[Tom corroborated this in an independently-received postcard, in which he also commended to our attention the dobemushi, or pine mushroom soup, at Nikko in Seattle. “Single best flavor I’ve ever tasted”, says Tom.]

Rotating Sushi: We have a sushi boat parade that does the same thing. A little moat around the prep area and a parade of

Trabant which was the title character in the East German comedy movie *Go, Trabi, Go!*—was a loyal car and true. When we said adieu, four weeks and 3600 kilometers later at the ferry terminal in Calais, it was a sad moment. Somewhere out there, someone is renting our little green friend. — *KY/DDDL*

On LoCation

Lots of response this ish. We got LoC’s, we got PoC’s (post-cards of comment, and one Photo of Cat), we got EoA’s (email of acknowledgment). Bribery seems to work! As you’ll see, the soda machine article struck a near-universal chord.

Elise Matheson

St. Paul, Minnesota

8-12-92

Hey hey hey— Thanks for the Bento! Was most pleased to receive, yes! Comments and word associations on various articles:

Liked the Good and Bad Advice. Have you ever done readings from the labels on Dr. Bronner’s Soap? We have a marvelous old cover for StippleApa done by Tom Grewe that features “the label for Dr. Stipple’s Magic Apa”, featuring such gems as “massage vigorously towards collation. Do not put apa in eye! Dilute! Dilute! Okay!!” (Has anyone ever mailed away for the Essene Scrolls offered on the label? I’m curious.)

boats with little dishes. Pay by the dish. We used to come in when it was almost deserted, until one day, when we were acting out an (impromptu) Japanese historical epic, involving agents of the Emperor pursuing some ronin, acted out by three hamachi and an ebi (as the ronin), there was a tragic accident. The ronin fell in the moat and perished. We paid quickly and left before our grief—and giggles—overcame us. I suppose I could go back, it’s been three years. What’s the statute of limitations on ebicide?

Yes! on “gone to milk mastodon. Also gather eggs. Wonderfully versatile creature”. We have those here, too! Only they’re mammoths. “Have slain mammoth. Is wanting supper, yes? Dead mammoth on noodle entanglement.”—sample conversation. There’s also the use of the word “mammal” as a term of endearment, but that’s another story.

Alan Stewart

Melbourne, Australia

4 September 1992

The 24-Hour Coin-Operated Church of Elvis sounds like something straight out of *Weekly World News*, but probably more true. There’s a rumour that some writing in *WWN* would be eligible for a Hugo nomination under Fiction: short story.

Your “To Stop the Train” article reminded me of an effort by local fan and artist Ian Gunn. Called the “Tegan” (after the “Australian” air line hostess companion of the fifth Doctor Who)

it begins with “This air craft has six exits...” and continues through the life jacket and oxygen mask drill... it has been danced at numerous cons.

[*At the Mpls suite in Orlando we met a fellow from the Columbus, Ohio Gay Men’s Chorus, who told of his trip to Denver for the national gay/lesbian choir festival. From Chicago on, the plane was full of choristers, who did something like the Tegan from their seats and had the attendants in hysterics: “All we did was pass the safety demonstration on to the rows behind us....”*]

You can’t make a hamlet without fertilizing eggs.

Andi Shechter

Seattle, WA

August 12, 1992

To expand on Amy’s “To Stop the Train” round, and further confirming the Prairie Home Companion definition of a folksong, we have the “anti-nuke trouble maker’s” version, which we hope will prove, if nothing else, that some of us political activists *do* have a sense of humor. (You should hear the various versions of “We are a Gentle, Angry People” and a parody of “When I’m 64” — the chorus of which is “Will you stand up to Officer Johnson, though he’s six foot four?”) This too comes with appropriate gestures:

To stop (*same as original*)
 the nukes (*hands over head forming a missile*)
 In cases of emergency (*look frantic, tear your hair out*)
 We’ll walk down the road (*mime walking*)
 Sit at the gate (*mime sitting*)
 The penalty for trespassing (*pretend you are a cop, wag your finger at the naughty trespassers*)
 will be real small (*show “real small” with two fingers*)

This was used repeatedly during demonstrations I attended at Lawrence Livermore Laboratory and at at least one demonstration at Diablo Canyon Nuclear Power Plant (our motto: “Faultline, shmaultline. There aren’t any earthquakes in California!”)

[*Re: “going off in a snit”*] You go off in a snit because you got a beautiful deal on a great used 1986 blue four-door snit last year! It’s the same reason you go off in a huff! [*Or in a minute and a huff.*] Have you seen the new huff minivans?

Finally, I’m on a small but determined crusade to get people to get the spelling of my last name right. This Means You! Please — it’s important to me and I’m *real* tired of feeling like no one pays any attention. It’s (all together now) **SHecHter** (2 h’s, 1 c).

I am not the drawer of the rats, I am the maker of the whimsical stamp art.

Cathy Doyle

Newport News, VA

August 12, 1992

Well, here’s a prompt reply, send the gory details about the wedding promptly. Our wedding was only a five minute ceremony in front of the judge after traffic court — good thing too, I thought I was going to pass out!

Enjoyed reading David’s pieces on vending machines. The head of the Art Department at Georgia Southern U. had gotten his hands on a used Coke machine and filled it with 10 oz. bottles which you could purchase for a mere quarter. Each bottle was properly capped and had an interesting picture inside.

Allen Baum

Cambridge, England

21 Aug 92

Great vending machines we have known: You are showing your (young, tender) age. Old-fashioned vending machines that dispense by the cup, indeed. Old fashioned vending machines dispensed in a bottle — a 7 oz. glass bottle, at that (try finding that size anywhere now — I actually know someone with a collection of 7 oz. Coke bottles, one from every bottling plant).

Really old fashioned ones didn’t exactly dispense them — they looked like chest freezers, and you reached down into them to pull the bottles out (that’s even before my time).

Rumor and hearsay was that when NASA was contemplating the Phoenix project (rocket powered by little A-bombs), they contracted with Coke to design the bomb dispensing mechanism, as it resembled the vending machines a bit.

I’ve seen a fair number of Japanese vending machines — if you’ve been to Japan it’s unavoidable since they are absolutely everywhere, even places you would swear that the only reason there is electricity is to power said vending machines.

The most ubiquitous is the drink machine, which dispenses slim cans (slimmer than the standard 12oz. can in the US) for about 80 cents. Pepsi is readily available, as are the interestingly named, though innocuous “Calpis” and “Pocari Sweat” (I don’t know what a Pocari is, and Calpis is really slightly yellowish). Coffee (heavy on the cream and sugar) and tea are available as well, either hot or cold, from the same machine, in the same size cans.

Some of the machines go a little bit farther than merely vending. They have little colored lights in the shape of horses, and when you select your beverage of choice, they start blinking, and music (I *think* it was “Camptown Races”) starts playing. If your lucky light is on when the can is delivered, your money is returned! Las Vegas, watch out.

We saw an umbrella vending machine on the streets of Kyoto. Everyone is told how honest the Japanese are, but this allegedly

does not extend to umbrellas; hence the machine. The (very cheap plastic) umbrellas were about \$4 — not bad.

One of the oddest machines I saw, just down the street from one of the royal palaces, was vending porn. We didn't actually buy any (truly), but we found the title rather amusing: “Outdoor Sex”.

Re Donald Wileman's LoC on Scrabble dictionaries: We've introduced Boggle to a bunch of people here in Cambridge who go to a pub once a week to play bridge/Scrabble/etc. It's tough being an American playing with a bunch of Brits who know obscure Welsh and Scottish words about sheep anatomy and the textile industry. All those obscure words are in the dictionary they use (Chambers), which we've been impressed enough to buy. Now all I have to do is find “Big Boggle”, which I understand is out of print, to really amaze them. They're also rather amused by the concept of Monopoly with street names from somewhere other than London — and really amused at the thought of them being — Atlantic City?

*Can you imagine if movie snack bars sold sushi?
There'd be this salmon-sized slab of fish for \$23.95,
and the clerk asking you if you want wasabi flavoring
on that.*

Luke Mc Guff

Seattle, WA

8-18-92

Sheesh! I'll never live down that “Luke talks just like he writes.” A few years ago, I had another computer, and a rumor briefly started that I had all the expressions like “hah” and “yeah” and “sheesh” and so on set up as memory keys. Sheesh! No, this is typing, not macros, actual physical typing. Sheesh! I sure can type “Sheesh!” fast though, and really crack down on the “!”. Sheesh!

Have you ever seen a talking soda machine? There was an arcade in the Minneapolis skyway system that had a talking soda machine, full of enthusiasm. “Refreshment, and change back from your dollar!” “Change returned for purchase only!” It made me feel like Marvin the robot, “look at me, a brain the size of a planet.”

[Luke also sent the “special ‘close your eyes and click the spell checker’ version” of his LoC, which featured “corrections” like “Sheet!”, “Margin the Robot”, and “Gear Sultan” for a reference to Geri Sullivan.]

Roger Waddington

Norton, Malton, North Yorkshire, England

18th August, 1992

I suppose that my greatest regret is that I could never have been a happy, blissfully ignorant mundane. I observe them almost

Pascal J. Thomas

Toulouse, France

August 24, 1992

I'd like to correct Donald G. Wileman on a small point: the French circumflex never was abolished! In fact, the government proposed a limited, very timid spelling reform which would have simplified some of the rules governing compound words and done away with the blasted circumflex in a few words where it was not justifiable (and that was even less than what the ad hoc committee of linguists had proposed). Thereupon a great hue and cry was raised, leading intellectuals* proclaimed that this would spell the end of literacy and French culture (conveniently overlooking the fact that French spelling had been reformed a number of times already, and that something like a third of the French words got new spellings over the course of the 19th century...), the government got cold feet, and finally decided that the spelling reform would be optional — old and new spellings would both now be considered acceptable. So that what started out as an attempt to make things simpler will in fact complicate them a little, and the reform will probably be forgotten as the spelling fundamentalists will always be more vocal about their pet peeve.

* And very few Giscardian youths, as far as I can remember. Hey, I used to be one of them! Of course, they're more or less extinct, but not completely.

as another species, listening from my office desk... they talk about what they'll do when they get home: go out to a restaurant, see a show, maybe spend the evening putting the garden to rights. And when it comes to the weekend, having the day out or the whole weekend away, maybe going for a drive in the car, without a care in the world; and here I am trying to keep my fanac straight, chained to a hot typewriter every night. Well, I could maybe have let my SF reading go no further than the latest John Wyndham, like most of Britain (he was the one SF author that everyone read), but I had to discover all these magazines filled with nothing else but SF, didn't I? And with such enthusiasm, my fate was sealed.

On great vending machines.... I've read (but have yet to see in this neck of the woods) about the machine that actually cooks and dispenses a portion of chips (French fries in your parlance), piping hot. But for the ultimate, what about a vending machine for maggots? I kid you not, and I should have kept the cutting, but it's designed for anglers who are up and about before the bait shops open. Apparently they're (hopefully) kept cold and quiescent in their little containers until you put your money in, whereupon they're gently warmed through, letting you take the lid off a tub of gently wriggling maggots all ready for the line...

As far as public transport goes, “To Stop the Train” seems very close to the Elton John song, “Passengers”; remember it? Well, if you do, you might be able to help me; the only words I

could ever make out after much listening were “Deny the passengers who want to get on”, which doesn’t seem quite the right way of running a railroad; so what was it all about?

[Got me, but you heard him right. We have that CD now, I’ll send you the full lyrics.]

For good advice, we’ve got a similar form of wording over here, where anyone being given children’s cough medicine is advised not to drive or operate heavy machinery after taking the dose; which makes me wonder about this race of superchildren; not quite the Midwich Cuckoos, but... My personal favourites are the boxes which urge you to “Tear Along the Dotted Line”; though I always end up falling off the packet. Did you ever hear the hopefully apocryphal story about the postal packet that was labelled PHOTOGRAPHS DO NOT BEND; where the postman had written “Oh yes they do!” and had proceeded to prove it?

Mark Manning

Seattle, WA

August 20, 1992

“Bid Stickers & Gizmos” was superb, though I thought your teaser at the end was a wimp-out. *[I’d announced the next installment as “What’s a Straight Girl Like You Doing in a Club Like This”—though that title later changed.]* Like, who in fandom would care one way or the other whether or not you were gay? On the other hand, maybe you send *Bento* to non-fans, who’d be

shocked at your breach of traditional family values (which seems to be the buzzword of the day). So you did the correct thing, I guess. It’s just that I feel that, what with gays being harassed so much, it’s kind of like capitulating to unfairness to always feel we have to prove that hanging out with or befriending Them doesn’t make us one of Them. Straight folks in this country seem so hung up on any form of variant sexuality, that I actively resist the urge to declare my “normality” whenever non-straight are under discussion.

[Boy, there are a zillion sides to this one. I did say that deliberately, though not because it offends or threatens me if someone takes me for gay. Main reason: If I leave readers of Bento with the impression that I am gay, none of what David and I write about our life together (i.e. most of the zine) will convey what we intend it to. I also thought it important to acknowledge that whatever I write about gay culture, I write from an outsider’s perspective. (See innumerable recent panels about co-opting indigenous cultures in fiction.) I agree completely that insisting “I’m not one of Them” denies them of useful support. On the other hand, I believe it can also be useful when I am out there as a straight person saying “I hang out with gays all the time—what’s the problem?”]

Marine Polis Rotating Sushi Land sounds like a cool place to experience. And, speaking of Asian cuisine, we’ve become very fond of a Vietnamese restaurant chain, Pho Hoa. Pho is a kind of

beef noodle soup that I’d prefer to show you than to describe to you. There are plenty of good reasons for that, not least the way in which bible tripe tastes at least a thousand times better than its name sounds.

[We’ve independently discovered pho—the joys of eating it that is. It’s a great cheap lunch, although neither of us has actually worked up the gumption to order bible tripe...]

Donald G. Wileman

Lindsay, Ontario, Canada

“Discovery Day (Yukon Terr. only), 1992”

Many thanks for *Bento* #4. It was fun, through and through. If —perhaps— it did not quite come up to the sublime heights of “Daydream with Volkswagens”, well ... When we got to the Church of Elvis & Rotating Sushi-Land, I started to wonder about the reality of Portland-as-described, but here’s Mr. Larsen to remind me about “weirdness magnets”. I was one from about Grade Six until... —hmmm, can no longer recall just when the effect faded out. It stretched my sense of the possible all out of shape, but I miss it now it’s gone.

The section on badge adornments called to mind the colour-bars on the jackets of high-ranking military officers —which in turn have always reminded me of the routing codes on boxcars.

I’m getting into sound manipulation on the Mac now but when I pulled this Classic II out of its box and found that it came

with a microphone, I could hardly have been more surprised —until I found that the System software would only Record for fifteen seconds at a time. It sort-of figures —the Mac being such an Eighties computer— that it would come equipped only for Sound Bites.

My condolences to Shattan. I made the same mistake of excessive diligence and probity. I even ended up unemployed after all that. Annoying the extent to which I seem to have *believed* fifties propaganda long after thinking I had matured out if it.

Lovely imagery & word usage throughout. Mighty few places I run across vocabulary like “concatenated”, and in most of the few places I *do* run across it, little else makes sense (some of the more intellectually luxuriant journals near my field come readily to mind...). *Nowhere* else would I find it with “...the sort of voice a blender would have the morning after making too many margaritas”.

So, mail me *Stuff and Nonsense* —not that you haven’t often done so before! *Still* giggling occasionally about “*Ceci n’est pas une thingie*”, I remain, yours sincerely, Donald G.

WAHF: Donna McMahan, Teddy Harvia, Kate Schaefer, Pam Wells, Dwight R. Decker., Tom Whitmore, Vicki Rosenzweig, and no doubt others.