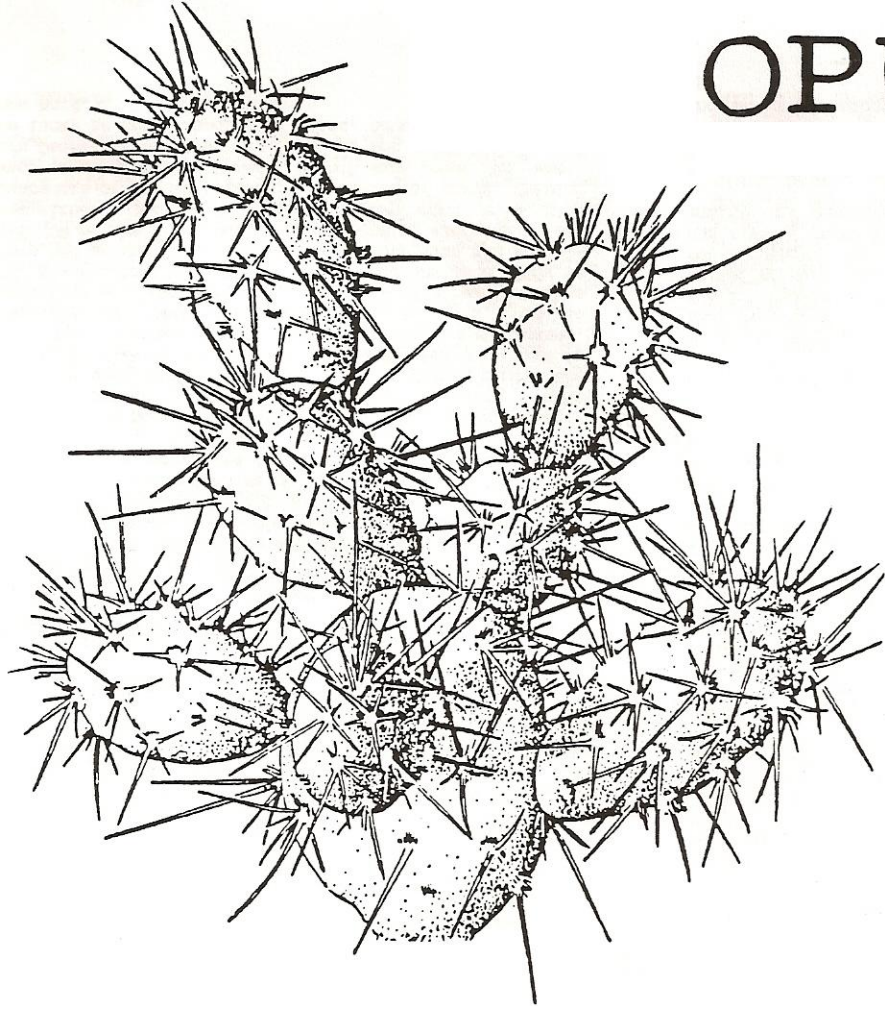


OPUNTIA

16.5



OPUNTIA #16.5

December 1993

ISSN 1183-2703

OPUNTIA is published irregularly by Dale Speirs, Box 6830, Calgary, Alberta, Canada T2P 2E7. It is available for \$2 cash, letter of comment, or trade for your zine. Just so you don't blame the post office, there was no #15.1, 15.5, or 16.1. Whole-numbered issues are sercon, .1 issues are reviewzines, and .5 issues are perzines.

ELECTION CAMPAIGN

1993-9-18

The federal election is October 25, and we must spend a depressing month listening to the candidates proclaiming how they would destroy the economy better than others. Deficit reduction is the big issue; the accountants have already won before a ballot has been cast. The economy continues to decline as we go into the next Kondratieff nadir, the bottom of the fifty to sixty year long wave.

There is the possibility of a minority government, a disaster to some but a good thing to historians, who note that the most useful governments in Canadian history were the minorities of the Diefenbaker versus Pearson years in the 1960s. Without the ability to just do as they pleased, the Tory and Liberal governments of those years had to negotiate and take others into account. The result was the Old Age Pension, medicare, etc.. Since the late 1960s we have had strong Tory or Grit governments with the socialist NDP as the third party. This upcoming election may see either a Tory or Grit minority government, with Bloc Québécois or Reform holding the balance of power. The Bloc want separation from Canada, Reform want power for western Canada, and the NDP is fighting for survival and will be lucky to get a handful of seats, nevermind the 43 they now hold.

The Reform party has been hampered because they were infiltrated by the neo-Nazi Western Guard in Ontario, and party leader Preston Manning has had to divert time and energy into winking them out, some of whom managed to be named candidates. The Liberals have had similar trouble to a lesser degree, but the national news media has concentrated on Reform. But Manning clears out the nutcases as he finds them, remarking once that "Every bright light attracts a few insects".

The NDP is in freefall, not because of its federal party officials, but because of its provincial troubles. The main culprit is the NDP government in Ontario, led by Bob Rae, who couldn't have antagonized his labour union supporters more than if he had deliberately set out to do so. The Ontario NDP announced a social contract that would gut union benefits worse than the Tory party would ever dare. The punchup between unions and a labour-socialist party is one of those things that wasn't funny at the time but ...

Jean Chrétien, leader of the Liberal party, was first elected as a backbencher in 1963 and later was cabinet minister in the Trudeau government. He has been called 'Yesterday's Man' by his enemies, having been in politics for thirty years. A nice chap but incoherent in both official languages.

Prime Minister Kim Campbell is hampered by the fact she took over Tory leadership at the wrong time. The Tories are in trouble because of Mulroney's goofups and by the belief of many voters that after nine years it's time for a change. She has a difficult time of it since she had several portfolios in the Mulroney cabinet and can't shuffle off complete responsibility for Tory disasters.

A mess no matter who wins. The greatest difficulty in Canadian federal politics is that the centre (Ontario and Québec) controls the balance of power; the western and eastern provinces are always on the fringe.

Over to my brother Neil (and Pam) this afternoon; Mom and Dad are there stopping over on their return from a vacation trip to British Columbia. Neil and Pam have two small children, Ross aged seven months, and Calandra, who is three years old. Ross is sitting up on his own, although he can't yet crawl. He rolls around the floor to move about. While we were all in the living room watching his imitation of a sidewinder snake, several telephone calls happened to come through in the space of a few minutes. Calandra burred: "Just like Red Deer!". A reference to her paternal grandparents' house in Red Deer (100 km north of Calgary) where she has stayed many times, and many times has heard Dad answering the phone every few minutes to talk to farmers about sick animals (Dad is a veterinarian) or prospective tenants for one of his rental units.

Neil and I grew up listening to phone calls like this at the supper table:

"Hello" [brief pause] "Speaking"
 [longer pause while farmer explained about sick cow]
 "Is she sitting up or flat out?"
 [then a series of questions. I list only a few.]
 "What colour was her urine?"
 "Any bloody discharge?"
 "When did she calve?"

As soon as we heard Dad ask this question, we knew it was a milk fever case. Milk fever is brought on by calving and is a blood-calcium deficiency.

Our family can eat anywhere without being disturbed by disgusting scenes or conversations, the result of forty years of listening to Dad ask about bloody discharges as we were drinking our milk or eating a slice of cherry pie.

Neil and I quite often went out with Dad on his evening

farm calls. We explored barns and farmyards while he was treating the animal. We watched with great interest as he pulled a stuck calf out a birthing cow, or cut open an animal for surgery. Milk fevers were fun since we got to help. It is treated by administering calcium solution intravenously. Dad would puncture the neck artery on the cow, let the blood spurt a few seconds to remove air bubbles from the needle, then attach the tubing and bottle of calcium supplement. Cows with milk fever are always on the ground (sitting up or flat out) so even as a little boy I had no trouble holding the bottle up high enough for it to siphon the calcium into the bloodstream. Usually two bottles were given, each about one-litre if memory serves. When the first bottle was drained, the needle was left sticking and Dad quickly switched to the tubing of the second bottle. Milk fever patients usually made fast recoveries and half an hour later the cow was up and about.

Another memory was castration of stallions. The soon-to-be-soprano was haltered and walked over to a clean piece of turf, on what he thought was routine exercise. Dad then injected a sedative into the horse, and it was walked around and around in circles until the anaesthetic took hold. The horse staggered, then sank down and went to sleep, to awaken somewhat lighter at the rear.

During the 1960s, Dad drove a Volkswagen Beetle to farm calls, an excellent car for wintry roads or pastures. His trademark was a black Beetle with a red hood or vice versa. Farmers could see him coming miles away. I got my learner's permit and learned to drive a car by going with him on calls. The first few times he would drive to the calls, then afterwards find an isolated road where I could practice with the clutch and gears. As my driving skill improved, I did all the driving. The early trips he sat alert and gave a constant stream of advice. Once he was confident of my abilities, he would sleep the trip coming and going.

ELECTION CAMPAIGN CONTINUED (UNFORTUNATELY)

Alberta has been afflicted with too many elections in the last year. Starting in October 1992 we had province-wide municipal elections, the constitutional referendum, the provincial Tory leadership race, and a provincial election. Now the federal election.

I'll vote Reform as a protest, and partly because their leader Preston Manning seems to be the only one who has a real sense of humour. His best quip is a reply to Liberal leader Jean Chrétien, who had proposed spending an inadequate amount on road-building etc. to restart the economy. Manning said that was like trying to start a Boeing 747 with a flashlight battery. Manning has a quavery voice that has made him immensely popular with comedians, who can mimic him with little difficulty. He also has a sense of proportion about how the public feel, and gets a big laugh at speeches with: "Q. How many politicians does it take to grease a combine? A. Fourteen, but you have to feed them through slowly."

In my riding, the race is between the Tory incumbent and Reform, with the Liberal hoping to sneak by them due to splitting of the vote. The haven't-got-a-hopers include Green Party, Natural Law (known as the flying yogis), NDP, Christian Heritage, the National Party (leftwing, led by a bankrupt publisher Mel Hurtig who produced the CANADIAN ENCYCLOPAEDIA).

I'LL BE BACK

1993-10-13

Over at the Calgary ENAPSers tonight for our monthly meeting. While a bunch of us were waiting for it to start, a phone call came in from a member sending apologies for absence. He had started a night course and would not be at the meetings this forthcoming year.

Ed, one of our senior members, was reminded of a story

related to this. Several decades ago, Joe, another member, announced that he was being transferred to the evening shift at work. Therefore, this was the last meeting he would attend until he got off the shift. Joe was not at the next meeting. Months went by. Years went by. Entire generations of club members came and went. Ten years later, Joe walked into a meeting as if he had only stepped out to the washroom for a moment and said "Well, I'm off the evening shift now."

SPEAKING OF PEOPLE OFF THEIR SHIFT ...

The Natural Law party has begun publishing advertisements explaining its policies. Until now, most people would have classified them in with the Greens or other well-meaning groups with a plan but no hope of being elected. The Natural Law ads will effectively kill any hope of them being taken seriously.

Dr. Neil Paterson has his picture in the ad. "Party Leader/Natural Law Party" reads the first caption. So far so good. "Custodian of the Constitution of the Universe", reads the next line. Now if there is one thing that Canadians like, it is a good squabble about distinct societies, double majorities, notwithstanding clauses, and other matters of constitutional reform. Our three most popular sports are curling, hockey, and arguing about the constitution. But even the most rabid separatist will nervously edge away from a Natural Law supporter who insists on talking about the Constitution of the Universe. Violent antibilingualists will demand the flying yogis speak English, dammit. A final line beneath Paterson's portrait identifies him as "Ambassador of the Government of Nature", which sounds like they stole it from the Greens.

Parts of the ads are sober enough, but about every other paragraph one runs into high weirdness as quoted below.

[continued next page]

I am not making any of this up. These are actual quotes.

"Health - Reduce disease by 50% in three years through Maharishi Ayur-Ved prevention-oriented natural health care saving Canada \$35 billion yearly."

"Education - Unfold the full creative genius of every student through Maharishi's Transcendental Meditation and TM-Sidhi program, while developing the skills necessary for professional success: study and research in consciousness to develop higher consciousness so that everyone lives in harmony with Natural Law - life free from mistakes and suffering."

[What Natural Law does not seem to realize is that under law, education is the prerogative of provincial governments and the feds cannot interfere with curriculums.]

"Defence - Create invincible defence by establishing a group of 7000 Yogic Flyers to generate coherence and harmony in collective consciousness, thereby preventing the birth of an enemy ..."

Dr. Paterson advises us: "I will establish a group of 7000 experts who will practice Transcendental Meditation and Yogic Flying. This group will radiate positivity and harmony throughout the nation and create a unified national consciousness."

If I were a reporter at his press conference, I would ask him why he can't just go ahead and do it now, without the bother of running a government.

SPEAKING OF FLYING ...

1993-10-15

A few moments before I sat down at the typewriter and did the above story, I was sitting in my livingroom when I heard a lowflying airplane go overhead. I live in the SW quadrant of Calgary adjacent to Canadian Forces Base Cal-

gary, and the International Airport is on the opposite side of the city in the NE. Occasionally I hear a distant noise of a highflying passenger jet, but normally the only air traffic here is an infrequent helicopter clattering into CFB Calgary. The plane I heard tonight sounded like a single-engine plane and was definitely travelling low. But no sound of a crash, so I'm sure there was a reason.

It did, however, remind me of a story told to me a few years ago by a neighbour down the street. Across the street from our houses is a large open field, remnant prairie that has never been developed. On the far side of the field is CFB Calgary. During WW2, the CFB was immense, comprising the whole neighbourhood, where now stand our houses, a college, and an industrial park. The industrial park is in fact a collection of aircraft hangers converted into warehouses. Today, the CFB handles only helicopters, but at one time was a full-sized airport. The open field across from our houses was the approach to one of the runways.

My neighbour, an elderly gent, told me of the time not long after the war ended. A civilian plane was coming in for a landing at Calgary International, and the pilot was talking to the air-traffic controller. The plane was in final approach, low and below radar. (Modern radars now track planes down to treetop level) The pilot had never been to Calgary before. He told the controller that he was lined up for final approach on the runway. But the controller couldn't see him, either on radar or visually with binoculars, and was becoming frantic. "Where are you?" "I'm right on course" "No, you're not, I can't see you." "Yes I am; I can see the runway."

The pilot landed. You may have guessed that he landed at the wrong airport. Once he and the military got over their mutual surprise, they discovered that the plane was too big for the runway, and could not take

off again until the cargo was unloaded and the interior gutted as much as possible.

CFB was reduced in size a few years later, and the airport converted to industrial use. The control tower was left where it was on the base, and was not removed until the late 1980s. Today, CFB Calgary is strictly infantry and armoured regiments. They still land helicopters, but military fixed-wing aircraft use the International. During the unpleasantness with Iraq, an American plane came by to pick up some Canadian troops. It was the big transport (Galaxy Starlifter?); I'm not sure what the name of it is, but it is the largest transport plane in the forces. I happened to be on a hill overlooking the airport when it was there and watched it take off. The 747s were dwarfed by this monster, and it moved so slowly down the runway that I wondered how it would ever take off. But it did, and lumbered off into the air. The CAF uses the International for some of its fighter planes, and it is impressive to watch them whip up off the runway and climb near vertically.

ETHEL THE AARDVARK GOES QUANTITY SURVEYING 1993-10-20

I was out inventorying a newly-accepted park along the escarpment between the Bow River and houses on Mt. Cascade Place (still under construction). Some of the park was B-class, irrigated and visited by the maintenance crew and mower every second week or so. The rest of it was E-class, natural area with minimal maintenance. One area is tall grass, past my knees. The grass reached right up to the fences of houses still under construction. I was measuring the length of the property line there, pushing my measuring wheel along. It took effort to push the wheel through the tall grass. Only the long handle was visible in the dense vegetation. I walked past a house still being roofed. Two carpenters stopped work to watch me go by. One of them shouted to the other: "Hey, look at the guy walking his stick!".

FOUR LITRES OF JUJUBES

1993-10-21

The annual United Way charity campaign is on. Office staff had a contest going on behalf of the campaign; guess the number of jujubes in a 4-L pickle jar and win jar and contents. Entry fee was \$1 per guess; all proceeds to the charity. The jar full of jujubes sat for two weeks on the receptionist's table, but not till an hour before the deadline did I accept her blandishments to enter, mainly because I wanted to use her telephone instead of walking all the way back down the corridor to my boss's office. I gave her a loonie and looked at the jar scientifically, using the formula of a cylinder's volume ($V = \pi r^2 h$). The jar was approximately 10 jujubes high, with a diameter of about 8 jujubes. Not having a calculator handy, I set pi to the value of 3 rather than 3.14, did the multiplying in my head, and got an estimate of 480 jujubes in the jar. The actual count was 465 and my estimate was closest. Next closest was 449, by a technical foreman who had looked at the bottom of the jar, counted the number of jujubes on the bottom layer, then estimated the number of layers. The office staff are mostly secretaries and Recreation Co-ordinators with 'soft' educations, that is, little or no science/math courses like us field staff. Their estimates of jujubes ran in the 200s, and thought Tom and I were excessively high. So a technical education in university does pay off in the long run. But if I'd had a calculator, I would have lost to Tom, because using the correct value of pi would have given an answer of 502.

THE MORNING AFTER THE NIGHT BEFORE

1993-10-26

And so we voted, producing the wildest election result in Canadian history. In the final week of the campaign the Liberals were tipped to form a majority government. The Tories would be Official Opposition, and Reform and Bloc Québécois would be close behind. NDP would be

[continued next page]

down from 43 seats to about a dozen or so. The fringe of Natural Law, Green, Christian Heritage, Communist, and others would be nowhere.

Most of those predictions were reasonably accurate, but a shocker was the extirpation of the Tories. Having had 154 seats in the previous House of Commons, they plunged down to 2. Prime Minister Campbell lost her own riding. In the new House, Bloc has 54 seats and Reform has 52. Some results were close and recounts may change the totals but for now it looks as if the separatists will form Official Opposition. The NDP and Tories both had fewer than twelve seats, so they will lose official party status in the House. Quite a blow for the Tories to go from a majority government to two seats.

Not having a television set, I listened to the results on radio, in between bouts of scraping and retiling the kitchen floor. (People who put battleship-grey tiles on a hardwood floor are a good reason for bringing back the death penalty; they were probably the same ones who had painted the cedar shingles of this house.) The polls in each time zone close at 20h00, at which time the media start their election reports. It is illegal in Canada for election results to be reported until the polls close, so not until 20h00 did we learn that the Grits were already a majority government in eastern Canada. The only suspense was who would be the Opposition party, Reform or Bloc. In Calgary and most of Alberta, Reform swept the board, and likewise British Columbia.

Reform stole most of the Tory vote; the protest element was the main reason, as it probably was in Québec for the Bloc. The NDP knew they were going to be wiped out so no one was surprised. A few Liberals were elected in Edmonton due to splitting of the vote between Tories and Reform, but elsewhere Reform piled up margins of 20,000 votes per riding.

May you live in interesting times.

SOLIDARITY FOREVER

1993-10-27

There may yet be hope for the next generation. Many of my seasonal workers over the last few years are late teens or twenties in age, and I've noticed they tend to be both apathetic and ignorant of local affairs. But the younger teenagers have finally mobilized.

It was about 10h45 and I was on my way to pick up a mowing machine that had been in the shop for repairs. I was driving my pickup truck and towing a tilt trailer to haul the machine with. A tilt trailer is a low-slung flatdeck trailer, hinged over the wheels like a teeter-totter. The trailer tilts back to allow a machine to drive up on it, then flops level from the weight. As I drove north on Macleod Trail, an eight-lane artery into the city core, traffic was brought to a halt by thousands of high school students protesting education budget cuts. They were on their way downtown to McDougall House, the offices of the provincial government. Arms linked and walking abreast, they spanned the entire roadway, stopping traffic. Then a brief sitdown began, a line of students across the roadway eye-to-grille with vehicles. Police were trying to direct everybody as well as they could under the circumstances. Television crews were dashing madly about trying to get good shots for the evening news.

While we waited for the sit-downers to stand up, I heard a rapping on the passenger window of my truck. It was a senior citizen from one of the cars beside or behind me. Visibly angry, he wanted me to call the police on my two-way radio (neither of us knew at the time that they were already here because the crowd and traffic blocked our view). I stalled him a bit and as it turned out, a moment later the protesters got up and started to stream past us, weaving inbetween the cars.

"These young punks should be thrown in jail!", he hollered at me. His tone of voice and the way he looked at me was as if I was personally responsible for the whole thing. Maybe it was my beard and long hair. "Oh now", I said to him, "you were young once and the same way.". "We were well brought up kids", he snapped indignantly. "In a pig's eye", I thought, but I kept that to myself since I was driving a pickup clearly marked in large, loud, red letters with a City of Calgary Parks logo and a vehicle unit number.

He disappeared back to his car, and the students streamed past. Some couldn't resist the opportunity to jump up on my trailer and kangaroo-hop down its length. Tilt trailers are constructed out of angle iron and heavy sheet metal, so they made a deafening noise as they shook it. But no harm done; the trailer is designed to take impacts from machines, so a few hominids certainly won't matter.

Slowly the traffic inched along and soon we were on our way. But not for long. I was about ten kilometres from downtown, where Macleod Trail terminates. Traffic was slow or stopped completely. Finally getting on a side street, I sped on my way while listening to radio reports about the protest.

It seems the protest was city-wide and traffic throughout the main drags was snarled. Students were heading downtown from junior high and senior high schools everywhere. The Sixties were back again! Reporters interviewed parents who denounced the 'radicals'. The Minister of Education pontificated about how they should follow proper channels and work within the system. Someone denounced the CALGARY HERALD for running a story about a march from Lord Beaverbrook Senior High. Contrary to popular belief, kids still do read newspapers, for it appears that students from other schools decided spontaneously to join the Beaverbrookians after reading the HERALD article.

This caught everyone else by surprise. Police were bogged down unsnarling traffic everywhere in the city. Educators were suddenly harassed by news reporters. Couriers and deliverymen could only pound the dashboard in frustration at the tieups.

This replay of the Sixties reminded me of the only protest march I was ever on, back in the early 1970s on the University of Alberta campus. Same issue: budget cuts to education. No results from the march then and probably no results from the march today. To be truthful, I thought it was a waste of time back then and only went because my girlfriend went. But although protest marches by students may not accomplish anything, I would rather see them placarding on the street instead of hanging out in a shopping mall.

LATE THAT AFTERNOON

About 5000 students arrived at McDougall House during the noon hour, forcing closure of downtown streets in the area. After five hours of demonstrating, the protest was finally broken by the arrival of a cold-front storm which sent everyone running for cover. But the point had been made, and the students certainly put Premier Ralph Klein on the defensive. Up in Edmonton (200 km north of Calgary) what would have been a routine session of the legislature that afternoon turned into a shouting match as Klein replied to Opposition members about the protest. There was a demand from the Minister of Education that the students be suspended and their parents fined, but school principals were more phlegmatic. It would be over-reaction, they said, and soothingly said that teachers would discuss with students other methods of politicking.

One of my workers had been listening to radio talkshows as he worked that afternoon. Normally one would expect to hear an election post-mortem but all the calls were

about the protest. The funniest part was the number of callers who said the kids were hooligans and the older generation wasn't like that at all. "We were well-behaved kids, respected our elders, etc.". Makes one wonder when juvenile delinquency first started, say about five years after the caller graduated. How soon we forget what we were like at that age.

During the demonstration at McDougall House, the police noticed the speakers were getting hoarse shouting to be heard by the crowd. A kindly Inspector loaned a bullhorn to the speakers so everyone could hear them. At the end of the festivities, a hundred or so teenagers stayed and helped pick up all the litter. Buses were brought in to take the protestors back to their schools, perhaps not so much out of kindheartedness but rather in horror of the thought of them plugging up homeward-bound peak-hour traffic. No doubt there were some interesting conversations that night at supper tables all over Calgary, as parents asked their kids "What did you do in school today?".

THE GREAT GOLD-PLATED TONG SHORTAGE

1993-11-3

To the monthly meeting of the Calgary Philatelic Society tonight. Reading of the minutes of the last meeting, committee reports, any new business?, for our program tonight we have ... etc. You know what it was like; from Ukraine to Australia, from philately to SF, all club meetings are the same.

Some awards were announced. Ed, the Program Chairman, made presentation of gifts to speakers for the previous year, a token of appreciation for their trouble in preparing and giving a talk to the club. This year he gave them books. Traditionally though, the gift was gold-plated stamp tongs with suitable engraving. I have several tongs from programs I've given over the years, most recently about "Design Errors on Stamps" (such as the stamp showing a four-

engine jet leaving six contrails behind it, or the one showing Newfoundland as three distinct islands).

Alas, Ed informed us, he was unable to get gold-plated stamp tongs this year. There is only one supplier of them in Canada, who orders them but occasionally from the world's sole manufacturer in Germany. It was simply too long a wait for the next batch of gold-plated tongs. Most stamp collectors use ordinary stainless-steel tongs which are readily available.

One of the most famous awards in philately is the fur-lined, gold-plated stamp tongs (I am not making this up) and, in recent years, the gold-plated flyswatter (don't ask). The coveted fur-lined, gold-plated tongs, given out by an American philatelic editor, should not be confused with the regular gold-plated tongs given out by the CPS.

But as Ed was saying, in view of how hard it is to obtain gold-plated tongs, one might be better off investing in them rather than stamps, and get a better rate of return.

WHAT THE WORLD REALLY NEEDS ...

1993-11-10

... is a computer program that will predict what day the garbage will be picked up. Everytime there is a public holiday, the schedule changes. Normally the day of collection is set back one day. But I can never remember how the system works when we have a double holiday such as Good Friday/Easter Monday or Christmas/Boxing Day. Then the sanitation crews only takes one day off. However, if that one day is the day my neighbourhood was scheduled for pickup, then we wait until next week plus a day later. If, on the other hand, the crew is working that day and taking the other day of the double holiday off, then all is normal. Trouble is, no one knows if they work the holiday or not.

I WONDER WHAT THE THIRD THING WILL BE?

Traditionally the chartered banks in Canada were prevented from dealing in other financial areas such as stocks or insurance. But the outgoing Tories changed the rules much against protests from insurance companies, and the banks are about to begin offering policies or buying insurance companies as subsidiaries. The Canadian Imperial Bank of Commerce was quick off the mark, and last week held a press conference to announce its plans. The head of CIBC General Insurance, Dwight Lacey, could not attend the conference unfortunately, having broken his leg playing hockey and still in hospital. Kevin McNeil, next in the chain of command, substituted but on his way to the conference had gashed his finger on a sharp edge getting off the elevator. The reporters were kept waiting while the CIBC officials went looking for a first-aid kit. Bloody but unbowed, Mr. McNeil was bandaged and went on to tell the assembled scribes about ... the CIBC's new accident insurance plan.

SPEAKING OF ACCIDENT INSURANCE ...

1993-11-18

I never go directly home from work but rather go first to the downtown post office to pick up my mail. Having done so, I was westbound on 11 Avenue when an Oldsmobile in the adjacent lane suddenly made a lane change as we entered the intersection at 4 Street SW. The driver of that car had decided to go south on 4 Street. Trouble was, I carried on westward, and the twain shall meet. Right front corner of my Nissan Micra against left front corner of his Olds Cutlass. The seatbelt certainly proved its worth, locking up instantly and preventing me from exiting via the front windshield.

When all the bits and pieces had stopped rolling along the ground, we got out and inspected the damage. The right front fender of my car was gone and the wheel was bent backward, rubbing against the wheelwell. His car had some body damage and the wheel wobbled alarmingly. My

car is a front-wheel-drive, so I'm worried that hidden internal damage may have been done.

We pulled our cars into an adjacent parking lot so as not to block traffic. (The accident happened at 17h15 during peak hour.) Two witnesses gave me their cards, and the driver and I exchanged information. We phoned for tow trucks, and he also called his wife to come down and pick us up. She took us over to the police station where we filed a report. Calgary police don't come out to traffic accidents unless serious, such as cars immobile and blocking traffic, injury, or fatality. Our cars could be driven just enough to clear the road, albeit mine made horrible scraping noises and the other sounded like a wobbleboard in a skiffle band. A lengthy process at the police station, not because of the reporting but because of constant interruptions. The constable at the front desk was the only one on duty, and had also to deal with people picking up subpoenas or asking the way to Inspector So-and-so's office. From there, the wife drove me home. A rather awkward parting: "Sorry to have met under these circumstances" "Yes, well, these things happen."

Fortunately tomorrow (Friday) is my day off, so I won't lose pay running about dealing with insurance agents.

THE MORNING AFTER THE ACCIDENT BEFORE

1993-11-19

A busy morning, phoning agents for both sides, contacting the autobody shop, and rescheduling my appointments. Got a loaner car from the autobody shop, a great relief since Calgary is not designed for pedestrians. The bus system is geared to serving downtown commuters and a few major crosstown routes. What irritates me most about this accident is that I spent \$2100 in February for new brakes and a transmission, and a week before the accident put new winter tires on the car for another \$300. Funnily enough, the other driver told me he had just got his car from the garage five minutes before the accident.

The Grey Cup game will be played in Calgary on November 28, next Sunday. This is the championship game of the Canadian Football League, now 80 years old. Today is the semifinal for the Western Division of the CFL, with the Calgary Stampeders hosting the Edmonton Eskimos in a -20°C blizzard. One reason why football is dying in Canada is the insane playing season of the CFL, which goes to the end of November. That might be alright for the American South but ignores climatic reality up here. Calgary finished first place in the regular season, thanks to star quarterback Doug Flutie, but today the team lost to Edmonton. Flutie specializes in the aerial game but the blizzard forced more ground running. Edmonton will be here again in a week to face the Winnipeg Blue Bombers, who won the Eastern Division. But despite Calgary being knocked out at the last moment, Cowtowners are still prepared to party hearty during Grey Cup week. Thousands of volunteers have been lined up for countless events in the Grey Cup Festival, the biggest thing since we had the 1988 Winter Olympics.

The Calgary Stampeders won the Grey Cup in Toronto last year, and brought the trophy back with them. Since then the Grey Cup was taken all over town. People had their pictures taken next to it, or with their baby sitting in the cup. CFL rules strictly state that the Cup is to be kept in secure storage at all times, but Stampeders players were taking it home overnight or for the weekend to show off to the family and neighbours. It travelled to just about every sports bar in town.

One event for the Grey Cup Festival didn't come to pass. It had been hoped to have a steam train excursion for Edmonton fans to ride down to Calgary. Modern train tracks are equipped with infrared sensors along the line to detect overheated wheel bearings (hot boxes), the most common cause of train derailments. The firebox of the steam engine would have set off every sensor along the way.

We vary our pruning with the weather. Up until now it has been relatively warm, no lower than -10°C, so we were doing corrective pruning on small trees. This is the shaping of them so they will grow up in a proper shape. Much of it involves standing for a few moments and contemplating which branch to remove next. But a polar front moved in and we are in -25°C weather. We switched over to legging up big poplars, which doesn't involve any judgemental calls. Legging up is the removal of all branches up to about 2 m height on the trunk, so as to clear branches away from traffic, pedestrians, and mowing machines. No standing about in deep thought. Just saw off a branch, stack it, saw off a branch, stack it, ad nauseum. Since these are bigger trees, branches are larger and require more physical work to saw off. This keeps us warmer. Productivity increases as temperatures decrease, since idlers will soon freeze while constant sawing keeps one warm. Even smokers, who are less productive because of time wasted lighting up, are going along quickly without stopping for a puff.

We moved over onto one block with medium green ash on the boulevard. One tree I legged up was on the T of an intersection. Leading up to it was a beautiful set of skidmarks, about 30 m on the road, then 2 m where the car bumped up over the curb onto the boulevard. It stopped just millimetres from the tree. Hopefully the driver is now aware one can't roar down an icy road as if it were a hot August afternoon.

Leslie, one of my coworkers, was working along the road in the opposite direction I was. She waved at me, then pointed at a tree I had just pruned. I was puzzled at first, thinking I'd done something wrong. But then I saw a woodpecker systematically flying from one pruned tree to another, climbing it in a helix and rapping at what one hopes was insect food. It reached the end of the line of pruned trees where I was, then flew off.

AND THE WINNER IS ...

1993-11-28

... the Edmonton Eskimos, who defeated Winnipeg to win the 81st Grey Cup. Fortunately a chinook wind had blown into town and brought temperatures above freezing. All week long, parades blocked main drags, businesses put on free pancake breakfasts as if it were the Stampede rodeo, and convenience stores did well selling snack foods for private parties. 50,000 people filled the stadium at game time. Not I though, not being particularly interested in sports.

BENEATH THE SILVERY MOON

1993-11-28-23h05

I had forgotten there was a lunar eclipse tonight, and was preparing for bed while listening to the 23h00 news. After the Grey Cup report, the newscaster mentioned as an afterthought that the moon was currently in eclipse even as he spoke. I quickly put on a bathrobe and slippers and dashed outside into the cold night to see it. The moon was almost vertically above in the sky. On my way into the house earlier that night it had been brightly shining in the eastern sky. Now it stood above in muted grey and just a bare hint of reddish brown along one edge, with a sliver of brightness on one side. It looked rather three dimensional; it seemed to bulge out instead of being a flat disk. What impressed me most though was the clear dark sky, with stars visible that I normally don't see because they are usually washed out by the glow from city lights. Faint stars were visible that I haven't seen in years. As a young lad in a small town I used to have a refracting telescope and did quite a bit of skywatching. Now only the brightest few stars are visible in the big cities. I can still see Venus regularly, which came in handy when one of my neighbours was convinced it was a UFO because he hadn't noticed it before. I had some explaining to do to convince him it had always been there.

One problem I've had since I moved to Calgary is that it

always clouds over whenever some interesting astronomical event occurs. Meteor showers, conjunctions, whenever such an event is announced one knows what will be the problem at the appointed time. This did, however, work to advantage several years ago when we had a partial solar eclipse around the middle part of the day. It was winter, if memory serves, when sunrise was 08h30 and sunset 16h00. The day was cloudy and dull to begin with, so when the sun began to fade, few people seemed to notice. I was downtown at the time and stood looking at the disk of the sun through the clouds as the moon crawled partially over it. Pedestrians bumped me as I stood looking up but no one else was curious enough to look. It was the end of the lunch hour and everyone was hustling back to the office.

AND ANOTHER WINNER IS ...

1993-11-29

... myself, as I learned at the office today when I was in to pick up the mail. (The head office is several km from my depot and I only go in once a day.) I had entered the office Grey Cup pool for \$2 and won \$15 for having the second quarter score. First a jar of jujubes and now this. But I still can't win the Lotto.

A different start to the workday today. Repairs were in progress on the pathway running along the south bank of the Glenmore Reservoir, but the tandem trucks dared not drive in on the icy pathway with no way of turning around. So an area of shrubs was cut down to ground level; we started at 07h30 when we could hardly see the shrubs in the dark. A large area was cleared by combined efforts of two pruning crews. What to do with the branches was a problem. A house-sized pile of branches was too much to be dragged up a steep slope. There was a bulldozer working on the pathway repairs. First we tried to rope the branches together and pull the pile out with the bulldozer but they kept slipping. The successful method was for the bulldozer to shove them

[continued next page]

with its bucket along the pathway and up into the park, a distance of 500 m. Since the ground is frozen the shrubs that were cut down won't be damaged, and next spring they will come back up from the roots.

ON THE ROAD AGAIN

1993-12-2

Picked up my car from the repair shop after work, two weeks to the day since the accident. A nice shiny paint job, new suspension and axle joint, and they even cleaned the interior of the car, which I haven't done since I bought it six years ago. The insurance company settled up a week ago, and I was pleased at how swiftly and well everything was done. It helped that the other driver was undoubtedly at fault by physical evidence, his own admission, and testimony of two witnesses. No horror stories about this one.

CHOCOHOLIC VIGNETTE

1993-12-3

Stopped off at a shopping mall this afternoon to grab a quick bite to eat after spending the morning on various errands such as taking OPUNTIA 16 to the printer. I like to have dessert with my meals, so before going to the fast-food court in the mall, I swung by the Purdy's Chocolate kiosk. The staff know me because I always order exactly the same thing, \$2 worth of pineapple creams. As I dealt with the shopgirl, I noticed a sign announcing that President and Mrs. Flavelle would be present at that time to greet customers of their company. Only then did I see the distinguished elderly couple standing next to me. The gentleman introduced himself as Mr. Flavelle and we had a pleasant chat while my order was done up. What struck me about him was that he could be L. Sprague De Camp's twin brother. Imagine DeCamp just slightly taller and slightly heavier, and that is what Flavelle looks like. There is a saying that everyone has a doppelganger somewhere in the world, so if De Camp wants to know where his is, Flavelle

lives in Vancouver and is the president of a nationwide chain of candy stores. (And good chocolate too, fresh and creamy).

A BIRD IN THE BUSH

1993-12-6

This morning at work I went to start the truck and discovered a male ringed-neck pheasant idling about the building. He veered off into a mulched shrub bed when he saw me; once satisfied that I wasn't going to jump a 2 m chainlink fence to get at him, he nested down into the wood chips. Even in the dark his colours stood out.

Pheasants are not native to Alberta. They are bred in a hatchery by the Ministry of Fish and Wildlife and released for hunters. In the past few years the overwintering success of pheasants has declined due to loss of habitat and predation from coyotes. Paradoxically a lot of wildlife is moving into Calgary as their native habitat is disrupted by rural humans. They enter the city via the river valleys, then fan out into parks, freeway margins, and undeveloped land. My depot is on the edge of the Bow River valley. Below us are a slope overgrown by bush, then the eight-lane Deerfoot Trail, then the river. Animals cross the freeway at night, browse, then retreat for the day into the bush. There is no pedestrian access to the bush, which makes the freeway margin a de facto wildlife sanctuary.

Because the price of coyote pelts is too low, hunters have left them alone. Other wildlife has suffered. The population boom in coyotes is reducing the population of pheasants, Hungarian quail (also introduced), mule deer, white-tailed deer, house cats, and pet dogs. The coyotes come right into home yards.

Pheasants are not really adapted to Alberta. In cold weather they nest down with their backs to the wind to scent enemies from the rear while watching in front.

This also freezes the birds since the wind ruffles their feathers and gets underneath. Worse yet, it doesn't stop the coyotes, who hunt in packs and use one member to scare the birds into the waiting fangs of the rest. But the best of luck to our bird, and we hope it survives.

SOLDIERS OF THE QUEEN

1993-12-7

Quite a few Calgary soldiers from CFB Calgary have been pulling duty in Bosnia with the United Nations peacekeepers. The local base here is used as a training and assembly point before the troops move out. Reservists are also being called up from militias such as the Calgary Highlanders, in addition to the regulars of the Princess Patricia Infantry or the Lord Strathcona Armoured. Near my house is an open field, undeveloped land of the military married quarters. I drive by it on the way home from work and yesterday saw it covered with tents, trucks, a field hospital, and a mess, as the personnel practiced deploying out in the field. But this practice was considered too tame, so CFB Calgary hit on a different method.

But before that, this. The U.N. has run into trouble with recent peacekeeping operations such as Bosnia because they are not maintaining an established truce; they are trying to restore peace itself in the midst of active combat. The troops can fight a full-scale war or they can patrol a ceasefire line, but they have little or no experience in the grey area between. There is the added complication of dealing with civilian populations who may not be particularly grateful to see U.N. troops. The Canadian Armed Forces has decades of experience in normal peacekeeping such as Cyprus, but has had trouble dealing with Bosnia and Somalia, where no truce exists and supposed noncombatants are merely waiting for a chance to re-arm.

To try and simulate a mixture of military operations and civilian onlookers, CFB Calgary has begun training soldiers by deploying them into local schoolyards. Each night

they redeploy to a different high school, camping in the playfields and learning how to deal with inquisitive students and teachers the day. Each morning, students of a different school arrive to find soldiers swarming about, a tent city set up, patrolling a perimeter with rifles just as they would in Bosnia. During the day, groups of students are taken on a tour of the encampment; it is a learning experience for both sides. The soldiers get a bit of practice in talking with noncombatants and jollying them along without starting a confrontation. Coming home tonight, I passed a long convoy of military trucks en route to the next school.

DISGUSTING THINGS TO KNOW ABOUT PRUNING

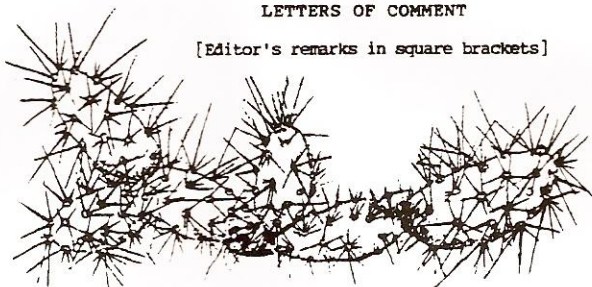
1993-12-8

First of all, never walk up to a tree in a boulevard or park without first checking to see if there are dog droppings around it. If you step in the older stuff, it is usually dry and hard, but fresh dogs turds are very difficult to clean out of workboot treads, and no one may want to ride in the crewcab with you.

Fruit trees are a menace in winter (dog droppings all the year round). Using a 4 m long pruning pole, shake the tree hard so that all the fruit drops off. If not done, then the vibrations of the saw will cause fruit to patter down on oneself, with at least one finding a way down the back of the shirt. Small fruits such as hawthorns, chokecherries, Maydays, mountain ash, and Amur cherries are not so bad since they are mostly dry. Crabapples, however, are absolutely the worst, since the cold turns them into a thin-skinned bag of slush. When they land, they always splash out exactly like a rotten tomato, leaving a circular patch of red goo. One of our pruners forgot himself and ended up looking as if he had been in a food fight. It wasn't so much him neglecting to shake the tree, rather it was another pruner shaking the tree while he was standing under it looking in the opposite direction. It was an accident.

LETTERS OF COMMENT

[Editor's remarks in square brackets]



FROM: Walter Willis
32 Warren Road
Donaghadee, Northern Ireland BT21 OPD

It startles me to learn that there are 87 ridings in Alberta. The origin of 'riding' is a third part of a piece of land. This originates in my knowledge that Winifred Holtby's novel SOUTH RIDING was named after a region that did not exist, there being no South Riding. It was a bit like Hardy's 'Wessex'. There were only three ridings in Yorkshire.

[Quite right. Yorkshire was divided into 'trithings'. In time the word was corrupted into 'ridings' and applied to political boundaries for the House of Commons instead of just the three parts of Yorkshire. Canada inherited the term from England. There are, however, any number of people who insist that the word is derived from the area of land a horseman can ride the circumference of in one day. An excellent example of folk etymology, where a plausible but incorrect origin is derived from what seems a logical source.]

FROM: Harry Andruschak
Box 5309
Torrance, California 90510-5309

1993-10-7

Of course, the first thing in OPUNTIA 14.5 that captured my notice was your description of the Calgary Mail Processing Plant. It sounds like a smaller version of the General Mail Center here in Los Angeles, where I work, including the poor air conditioning. In theory we have a dress code about no shorts or skirts higher than four inches above the knee, but in practice that and T-shirts are quite common. Another rule is that Electronics Technicians and Mechanics must not wear dresses and skirts, due to the alleged dangers around the machinery. Which is why I am not permitted to wear the kilt, even on those days when the wearing of ethnic attire is encouraged.

[You could wear trews. Just kidding.]

FROM: Buck Coulson
2677W-500N
Hartford City, Indiana 47348

1993-10-9

Archaeology can be hard on the fingers and nose, too. A friend of a friend has been on several digs and reports that the job everyone hates and so is handed to the new recruits is washing potsherds. Whether the original population washed their pots or not, they didn't bother to wash the broken ones that were being thrown out, so each potsherd has a heavy accumulation of grime, grit, and dessicated garbage which must be removed carefully so as to preserve the piece of pot and decorative work, if any. Hard physical labour plus an indescribable smell from the wet, dessicated crap.

Some wheat is grown in Indiana but the main crops are soybeans and corn. Indiana has seven or eight licence

plates; there are special ones for hunters, nature enthusiasts, and so on, but one has to pay extra for those, so we get the standard one.

Some years back I read an article about the reintroduction of Longhorn cattle, since they produce lean meat and can look after themselves on the range better than other breeds, thus requiring less work. Haven't heard anything since, though. On tours through the west, we've seen pairs of Longhorns for sale, but I'm told these mostly come from Nigeria.

[A few years ago there was a brief fad in Alberta using Brahmas and Texas Longhorns to crossbreed with cows to get a calf sooner and to help if the cow had a history of calving problems. The first reason was discovered to cause permanent difficulties for the cow if she was bred too young, and farmers decided that for the second reason one might as well ship the cow to the packing plant instead of letting her propagate bad genes. Brahmas still are popular as rodeo stock, but Longhorns are rarely seen anymore.]

FROM: Harry Warner Jr.
423 Summit Avenue
Hagerstown, Maryland 21740

Most radio stations in this area have the same custom of getting their local news from newspapers as those in Calgary. It's mainly a matter of economics. There are too many radio stations around here to thrive because advertising is split up so many ways. They function with skeleton staffs and usually can't spare anyone to do news gathering. Years ago, one station arranged for reporters from a newspaper to give several newscasts daily from the newsroom. In return, the newspaper got radio publicity. I became the 630 pm newscaster for several years. This arrangement was eventually discontinued because it meant too much extra work writing short radio versions of stor-

ies in addition to regular newspaper copy. My biggest moment came one night when I got hold of the official, final tabulation of a local election just minutes before 630. There wasn't time to write a script so I devoted the whole five minutes to an improvised summary of who had won and by how much. I somehow managed to do it without blunders or hesitations. The Associated Press supplies its radio station customers with different versions of news stories than those that go to newspapers, because some phraseology that seems natural when read is awkward when heard.

FROM: Alan Stewart
Box 222, World Trade Centre
Melbourne, Victoria 3005, Australia

1993-11-11

There's a used Australian phonecard enclosed with this letter. I don't personally collect them, but they seem to be quite the rage in stamp dealers. Currently I'm carrying a \$2 generic one which they apparently aren't making anymore. I never used to have one, until I had to make a call from a public phone box and the only one working in a bank of three was the 'card only' one. My 30¢ cash was useless.

[Thanks anyway but I don't collect them. Phonecards do not exist here yet, although they may come. Interestingly enough, the FIP (the world governing body for stamp collectors) declared phonecards cannot be displayed in stamp shows. No hostility to them being collected, just a belief that phonecard collectors should get their own organization.]

I ALSO HEARD FROM: Chester Cuthbert, Joseph Major, Mark Harris.

CHANGE OF ADDRESS: Ben Schilling, 2615 Madrid, Apt. 1, Madison, Wisconsin 53713