

# OPUNTIA

## 70.5A

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

Whole-numbered OPUNTIAs are sercon, x.1 issues are reviewzines, x.2 issues are indexes, x.3 issues are apazines, and x.5 issues are perzines. A cumulative subject index for all issues is available on request.

## HELL'S BELLS NO MORE

by Dale Speirs

For the last time, an alarm clock jarred me out of my sleep at 05h45. It was Sunday, August 8, 2010, my final day of work and then I was retired from the Parks Dept. All my life alarm clock bells have been controlling me. When I was a boy, they got me out of bed to go to school and do farm chores. Then for four years of university they reminded me it was time for classes. For the last 31 years, they sent me to work. Now no more.

Years ago, in the early 1970s, I read a newspaper article which I have always regretted never having kept a copy. It was about a German factory worker who operated a 10-ton stamping press in a factory for forty years. On his final day of work, he brought in his alarm clock, and with great satisfaction stamped it into a paper-thin sheet. He'd be dead by now, but I've often thought of him over the years as I got out of bed on a pitch-black winter's morning to go to work in a blizzard.

It's not that I had a bad career. There were some dull times and occasionally a rough patch with a boss from Hell, but overall I enjoyed the outdoor life in Parks Dept. Maintenance. I was fortunate to be on the Weekend Trouble Calls shift for the last decade, working 12-hours Friday to Sunday, although I got re-organized a couple of months ago into the downtown district

Thursday to Sunday 10 hours. Unlike many people I've never defined myself by my job. I will have plenty to do in retirement but at my pace, not the alarm clock's schedule.

In my final month, time slowed to a crawl. Each work day seemed to last an eternity now that the end was in sight. Dealing with the staff became more and more tedious. Once-important problems dwindled into trivia.

**Mo Shuile Togam Suas.**

2010-08-08

A quiet day, exactly what I wanted for my final hours of work. I did one tree branch problem on a downtown sidewalk. Not a trouble call, but rather a broken branch near the post office where I have my box number. I noticed it several days ago while picking up my mail on my day off, and kept it aside as the last pruning job I'll ever do for the City.

Walking through Prince's Island Park, I was intercepted by a young couple. They were on a scavenger hunt and needed to get a photo of someone in a cowboy hat. Outside of the Calgary Stampede, which concluded several weeks ago, cowboy hats are seldom seen. I was a bit surprised that a scavenger hunt would specify such a thing but she showed me the brochure listing the items for the hunt. I posed with her for a photo, and we went our separate ways. Perhaps my image will be posted on the Internet.

The rest of the day was mostly sorting things out at the depot and taking care of a hundred little details in order to leave a clean slate for Gary, my replacement. Throughout the day I had a steady stream of congratulatory phone calls from co-workers on or off duty, and one park attendant stopped by to deliver a card signed by the rest of the weekend shift..

Although I was in charge of the downtown parks, I worked out of a suburban depot due to lack of space downtown for my truck and equipment. I headed back to the depot at 16h00 to put away the truck and do one final check of my e-mail and approve the timesheets on the computer for the weekend crews. At 16h30, Wayne, the evening shift foreman, met me to get my keys to pass on to Gary when he comes on duty next weekend. I walked to my car, said goodbye to another weekend worker who drove in just then, and then pulled out of the depot and into a new life. For the final time, I drove up the street in the out-of-the-way neighbourhood I will never have reason to be in again.

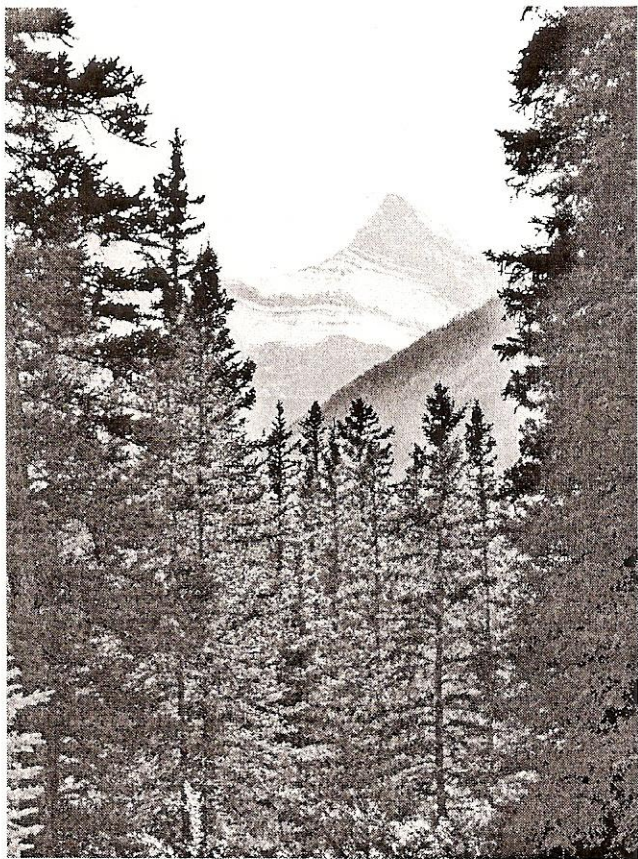
It felt so strange. I have a good pension coming, plus my investments, my house was paid for in 1997, and I have no debts or spending problems. Yet it feels that I have been cut adrift, that I must be doing something wrong even though I've been planning for this day for years. I keep thinking I've forgotten something, or that someone will call me and say there's been a mistake and I have to keep working, but intellectually I know I am finally free.

Although I've now been retired one month, the bureaucracy moves slow. Today I went down to City Hall to sign various papers. The pension clerk said that 2010 was definitely busier than 2009, but based on computer projections, they were bracing themselves for a tsunami of applicants in 2011 when the bulk of Boomers start leaving. Apparently the big predictor is not the age of the retiree but how many kids they have in the late teens or early 20s. This is the age of university or trade school, when Mom and Dad have to keep working to fund the kids. Most of those kids are now graduating, which means that their parents don't need as much money and can now downsize.


### The Rocky Mountain Way.

On the next few pages are some photos taken on my hikes in the Rocky Mountains adjacent to Calgary. We had a wet summer in 2010 so I didn't get out that often. On my days off, it was either raining or if it was sunny then I was tied down by business in the city. But I did manage to get a few trips in and depressurize myself.

*At right is Big Sister peak, on the south side of the Bow River, seen in the distance through the trees from Canmore.*





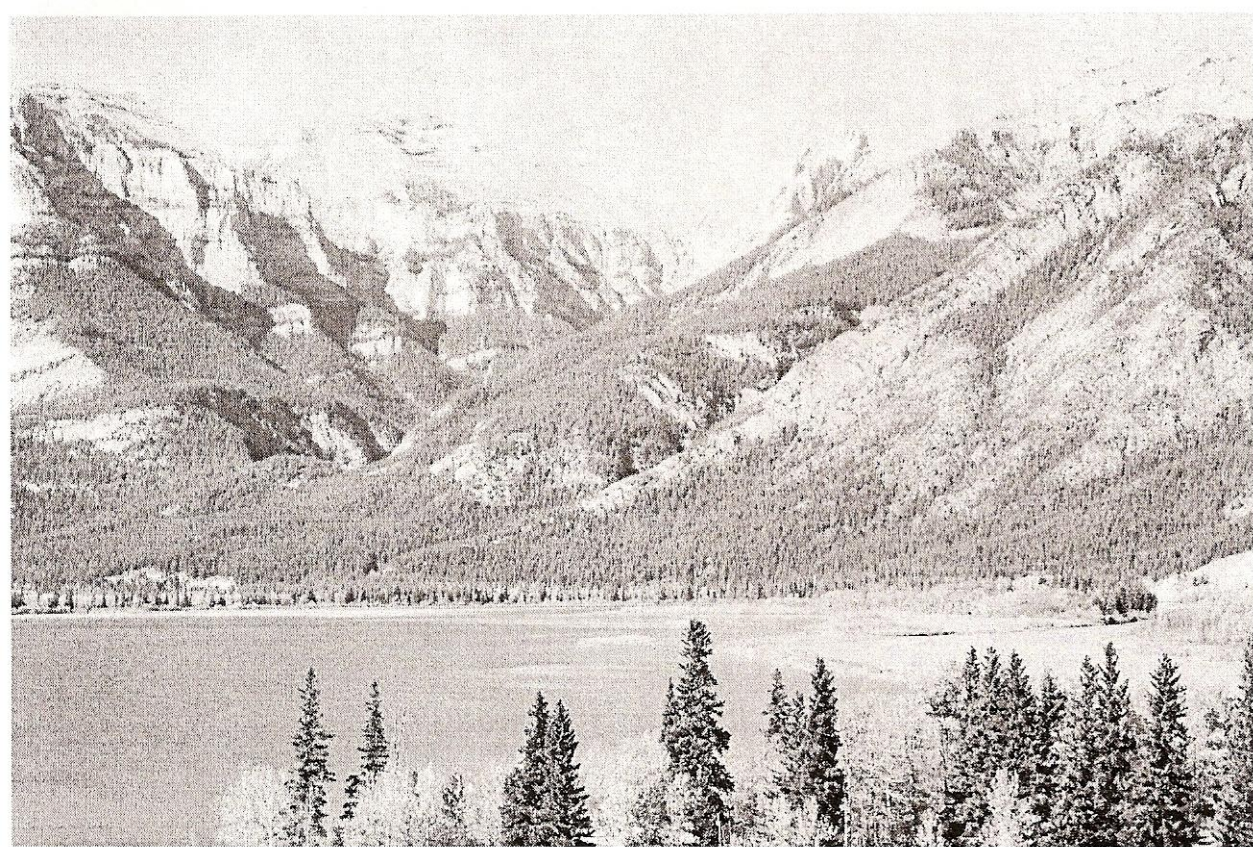


*Goat Pond, in the Spray River valley. The Kananaskis mountain range is in the background, one of the front ranges of the Rockies.*

*The Spray River eventually empties into the Bow River just downstream of Banff, in the national park, but this area is in a provincial park adjacent.*

*Goat Pond is named after the mountain goats that live in the area. I didn't see any though.*





*Lac des Arcs, at the entrance to the main ranges of the Rockies. The lake is essentially just a wide backwater of the Bow River, hence its name.*

*The English name equivalent, Bow Lake, is used further upstream for a lake at the source of the Bow River at Bow Glacier. The name comes from the Nakoda tribe, who found the woods along the river a good source for making bows and arrows.*



*Downstream of Lac des Arcs is the Bow Mag dolomite quarry. (Dolomite is magnesium carbonate.) It has been in operation for about a century but has barely managed to do more than nibble at the mountain's foot despite shipping millions of tons.*

*Behind the quarry is the company town (a hamlet actually) of Exshaw.*

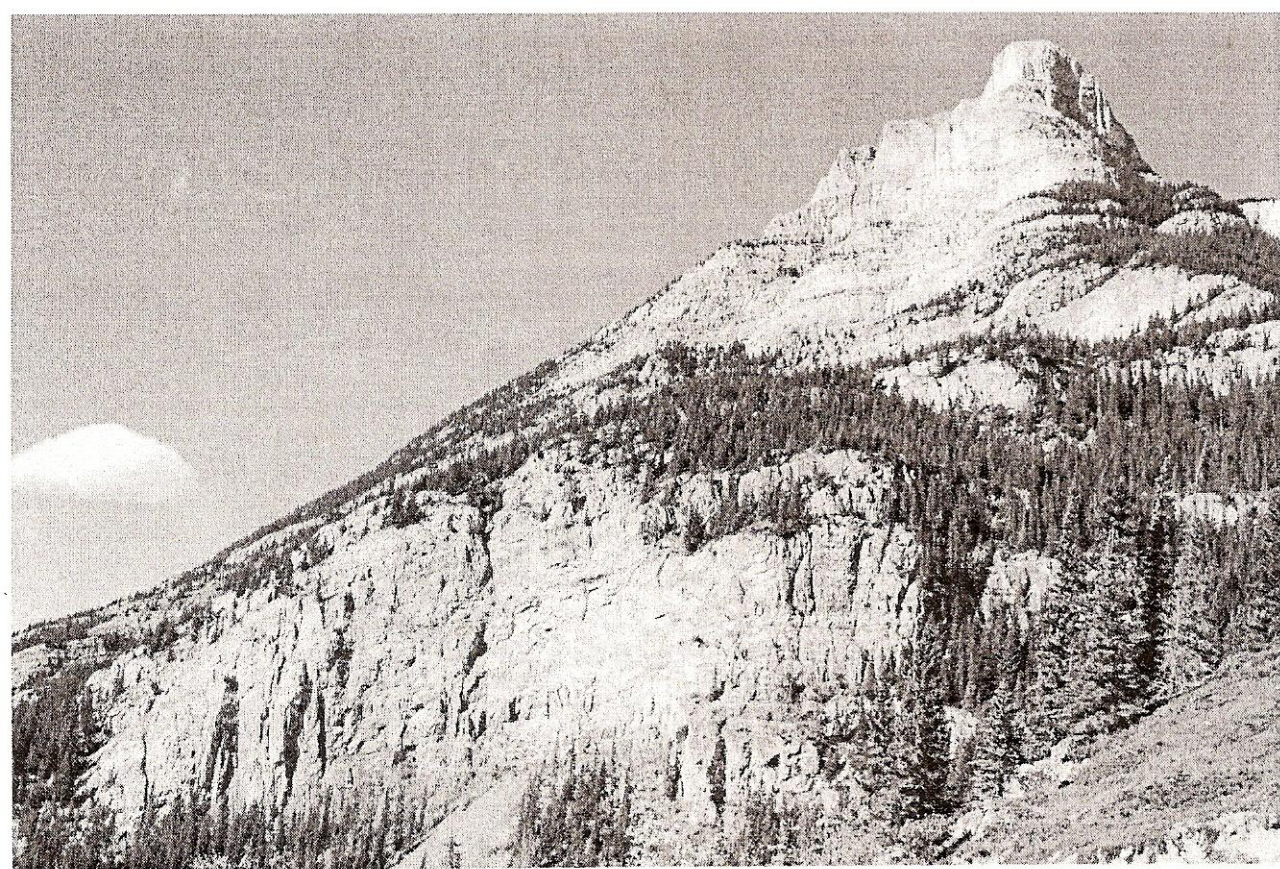






*Looking south, with the Exshaw post office in the foreground. On the far side of the valley is Heart Mountain, so named because the strata on the top sank down into a valentine shape. It looks more like a horse collar to me.*



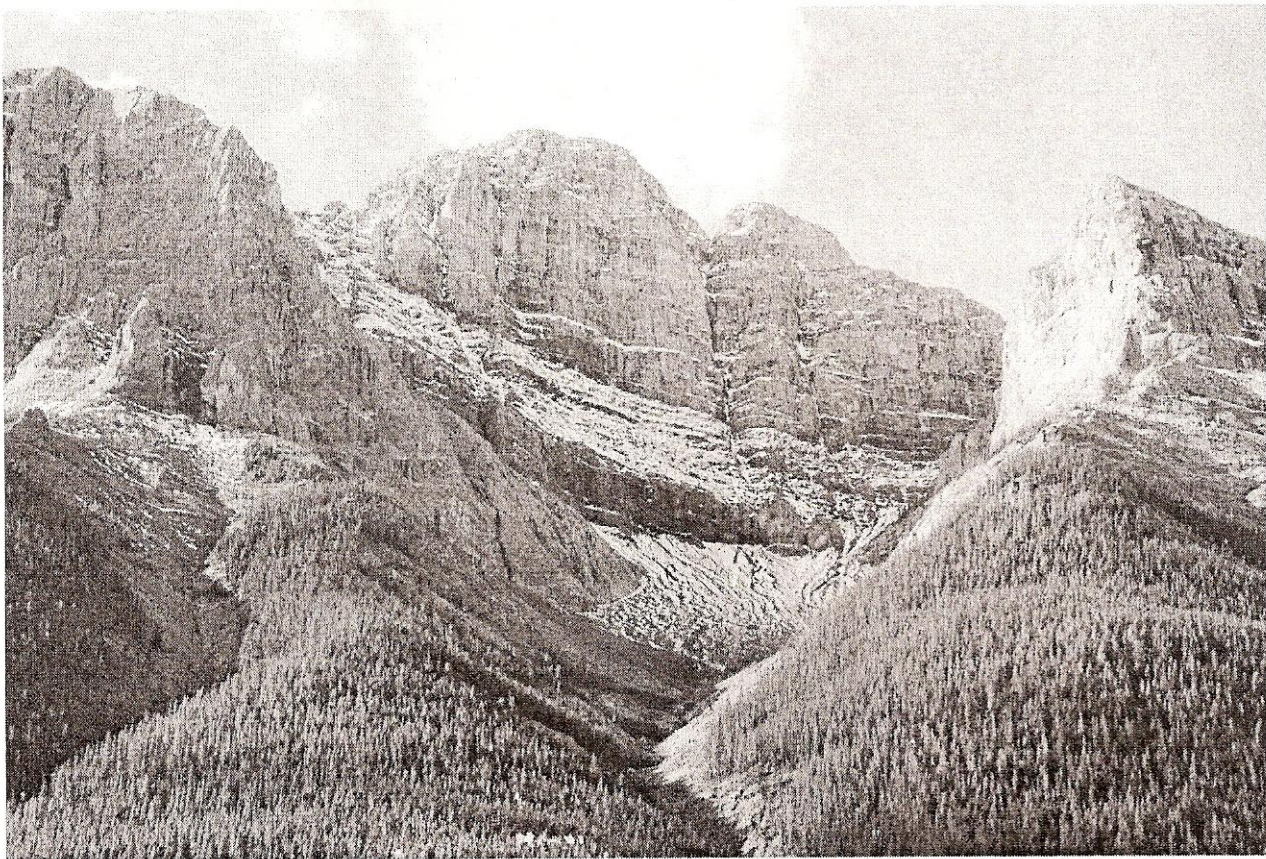


*The southeastern peak of Grotto Mountain. There is a narrow canyon (not visible in photo) that starts in the lower right below the rockwall and marks the eastern edge of the mountain.*

*This is one of the windiest places in the Rockies. I had to lean against a tree to brace myself to take this photo due to being buffeted about.*



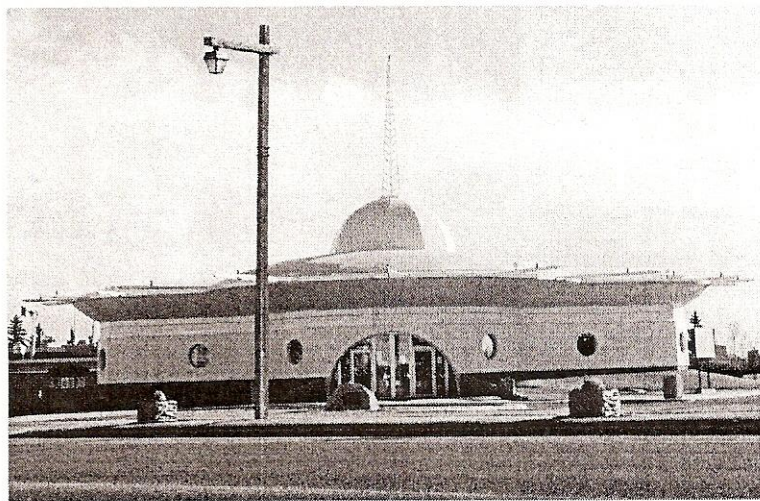
*Further upstream  
from Lac des Arcs  
on the south bank  
of the Bow River is  
Mount Ehagay  
Nakoda, which  
overlooks the town  
of Canmore.*





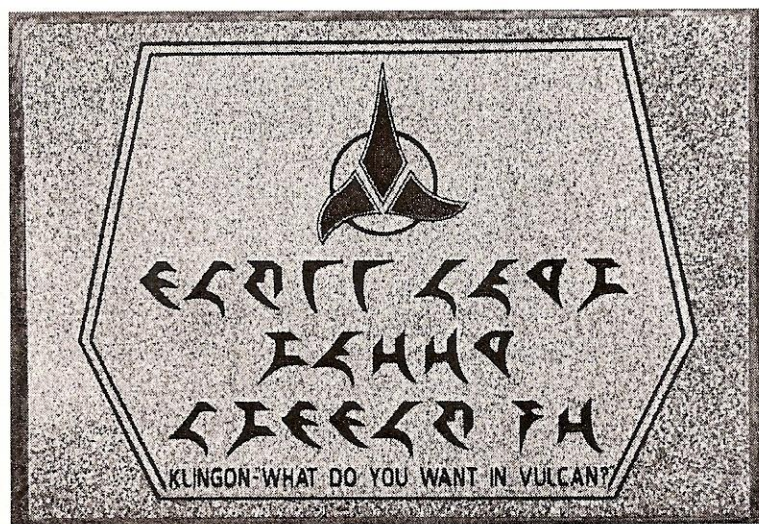
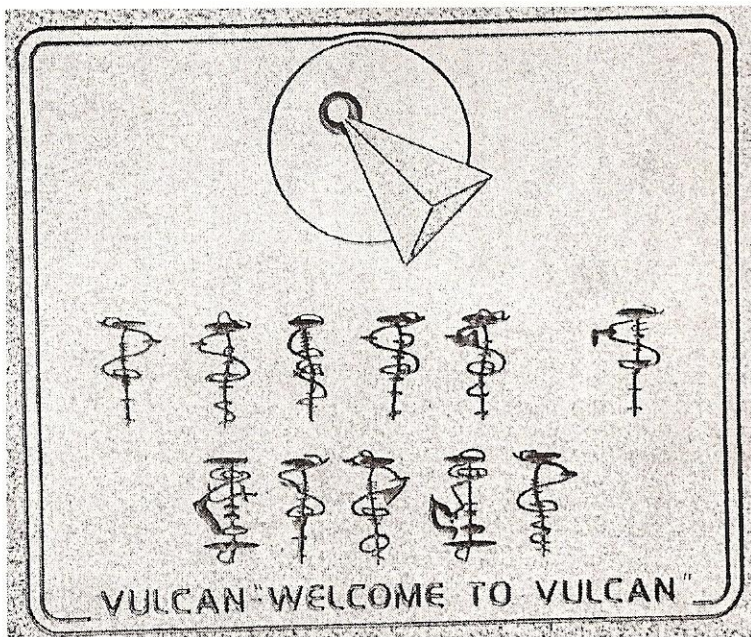
I am the bulletin editor of the bimonthly CALGARY PHILATELIST and when I mail each issue out, I have it hand-cancelled with the postmark at one of the local postal outlets in Calgary. There are about 80 postal outlets here, so it will be a while before I have to worry about duplication. I learned by accident that the Vulcan, Alberta, post office had a temporary pictorial postmark to celebrate their centennial, so I made the trip today to provide club members with something out of the ordinary.

Vulcan is out on the flatlands about 1.5 hours drive southeast of Calgary. It was named after the Roman god of fire and patron of blacksmiths. The area is strictly grain and irrigation. There are no ranches and the fields are unfenced. Like most small towns on the prairie, Vulcan was losing population. No natural features exist to attract tourists. In the early 1990s, the town council decided to wish upon a star, more specifically, upon Star Trek. A large model of a Federation starship was fabricated in 1995 and placed at the east entrance to the town, and a small museum built nearby. Calgary Trekkies got into the spirit and hold an annual gathering in Vulcan.





The plinth of the starship has several plaques affixed. One is the usual "On this date ..." plaque announcing the sculpture. The others are more interesting, as follow.



Across the street from the starship was the Enterprise Family Restaurant. It was vacant, with a prominent For Sale sign in the window. Directional signs in the town are superimposed on a Star Trek uniform badge, but other than that, Vulcan looks much like any rural town you have seen. I had a sandwich at a Subway outlet like the one in your local malls, run by an Arabic family. It made me wonder how they had come to be in such a remote place.



An imaginatively named locum in Cowtown is the Bow Tower in the downtown core, which will be 59 stories when completed, the tallest skyscraper in Canada outside Toronto. The photo at left is looking down the steep Centre Street hill southwards to the tower. Centre Street terminates at the base of the Calgary Tower, the torch-like building seen in the distance. You can't see the Bow River from this location but the cars coming up the hill have just crossed the bridge over the river.

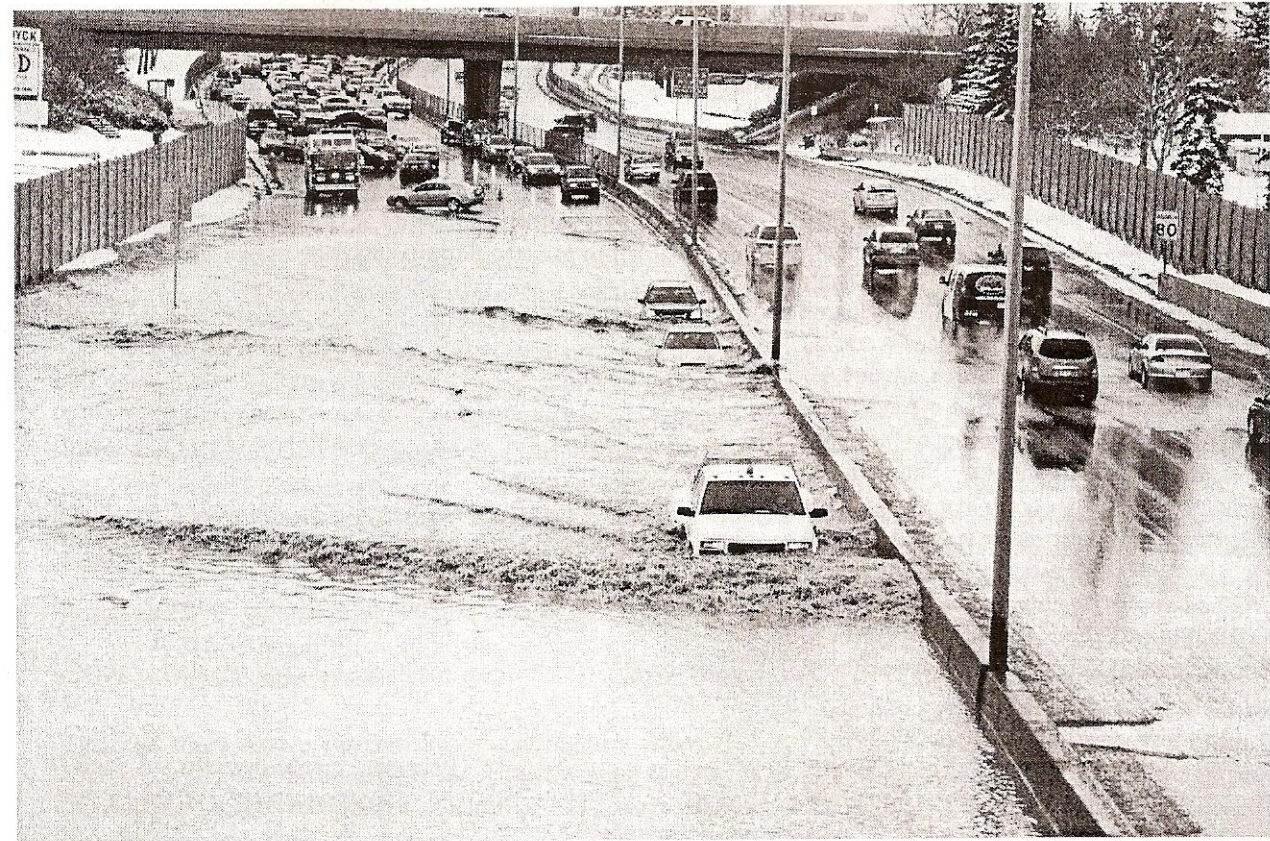
On the left side of the street is Rotary Park. Back in the middle 1980s when I was the Parks District Foreman in charge of it, I replanted the slope along the sidewalk. It is nice to see some of my work remains. I am probably the last person alive who worked on the project, save perhaps a few who may still be in nursing homes. Like those who are building the Bow Tower, I can say "I was part of that". Most of my career was on the maintenance side, and I didn't have much to do with construction of parks.





2011-04-17

For once, I was in the right place at the right time with my camera. This is a 40-cm water main break on northbound Crowchild Trail SW near my house. The water filled up the road between the concrete barriers with only a few gaps for drainage into the southbound lanes. The first-responders turned traffic around but some drivers tried to get through. They were allowed because in Canada stupidity is not yet a criminal offense.





## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

[Editor's remarks in square brackets.]

FROM: Franz Zrilich  
4004 Granger Road  
Medina, Ohio 44256-8602

2010-10-07

Now that you are retired, you might want to consider writing books.

[I have been compiling groups of articles into book form as one of my many retirement activities. I hope my book on mail bombs will be followed by others such as the history of the Papernet. The main problem is finding legitimate publishers rather than vanity presses.]

I strongly urge you to keep on working because of the troubled times we live in. Several U.S. cities and counties are now a half-trillion dollars in the hole, which is felt to be a grave understatement of fact, for their retirement plans. The normal reaction to politicians in Washington, D.C., when they finish hearings will most likely be to consolidate all public employee retirement systems in each state. This will feed back to Canada where I understand your politicians are rumoured to read our version of English. If Alberta consolidates its retirement plans

internally, or finds its plans consolidated with other provinces by Ottawa, you will find yourself all living on very inadequate retirement plans.

-14-

[Canada has a very different financial system than the USA, part of which is that the Canada Pension Plan is a self-funding Crown corporation, not a looted, pay-as-you-go plan like American Social Security. Ottawa has no authority over provincial pension plans (Canada is a confederation of equal provinces, not a unitary federal state like the USA), and the plans such as I belong to are self-funding. Having said that, they are not fully indexed to inflation, so those who didn't save will be in trouble over time. I will be eligible for the Canada Pension Plan (federal) when I am 63 and probably won't be getting the Old Age Supplement (federal) at 65 because my income will be too high. The CPP is solvent but it was never intended to maintain a middle-class lifestyle, only to help keep the wolf from the door. It pays barely enough to keep a single person in a cheap rooming house, or a couple in a one-bedroom apartment. I spent the past decade or so building up my investments as a backup for my pension. If I had to, I could live solely off my capital for about twenty years, which is about my projected lifespan given that the men in my family die in their late 60s or 70s.]



FROM: Ken Bausert 2010-11-02  
2140 Erma Drive  
East Meadow, New York 11554-1120

Congratulations on your retirement. You mentioned your letter of intent going in for a retirement date of December 18th but say your last day of work should be August 8th.

[My official retirement date was December 18, 2010, when my pension began. However, over the years I had banked quite a lot of vacation and overtime, originally because I was a caregiver to elderly relatives and wanted to have time available off work if I needed it. They have since died but I held on to the banked time so I could use it as time taken and thus speed up my retirement. Hence, August 8th was my last day of actual work and I was on vacation until December 17 when I officially retired and my pension began the following day.]

FROM: Sheryl Birkhead 2010-11-12  
25509 Jonnie Court  
Gaithersburg, Maryland 20882

[Re: the Hugo Award for Best Fanzine going to a podcast] I watched a rerun of the podcast of the winner waiting to hear the results. He was just nattering on, but said he had no idea who the

others were. When Best Fan Artist was announced he said he really had no idea who any of them were or what their work was. But he had no problem just telling his listeners to nominate and vote.

[Unfortunately it has been many a long year since fanzine publishers were the core of SF fandom.]

FROM: Ned Brooks 2010-10-12  
4817 Dean Lane  
Lilburn, Georgia 30047

[Re: my having to wait out a vicious dog before pruning a tree] I'm surprised you would put up with a loose vicious dog. Couldn't you call an animal control officer? If it was frightening you, what would it be to a child on a bike? Loose dogs are illegal here but still quite common, but it's been a long time since I saw one that wasn't well socialized and wanted nothing more than to sniff me.

[Had I called Animal Control, I probably would have spent the rest of the day waiting out there in the country for him to show. I wasn't frightened of the dog, just smart enough not to pick a fight with an animal about my weight and with better teeth. In any event,



I'm quite well versed in animal psychology, being the son of a livestock veterinarian and having grown up on a farm. Dogs have the attention span of a fungus gnat, so if one remains quiet and out of reach, they'll get bored and wander off.]

**I Also Heard From:** John Held Jr, Mike Dickau, John Hertz

## **WORLD WIDE PARTY #18**

2011 was the 18th annual World Wide Party on June 21st at 21h00 local time. Invented by Benoit Girard (Québec) and Franz Miklis (Austria), the idea is to get a wave circulating the world of zinesters, mail artists, and SF fans toasting the Papernet.

At 21h00 Mountain Daylight Time, I faced to the east and with a can of pop (I am a teetotaler) I toasted those who had already celebrated the WWP. Then I faced south and north in quick succession to toast those who were in my time zone. Finally I faced to the west and toasted those who had yet to celebrate.

If you celebrated the WWP, I hope you had a good time. If you didn't, please mark your calendars for next year on June 21st. You are not a solitary zinester, mail artist, or letter writer; you are part of something bigger, and the WWP reminds of that fact.

## **GLITCHES IN THE PAPERNET**

**-16-**

If you sent me a letter or zine in June and had it returned due to the Canadian postal strike, it is now safe to re-send. The posties were upset that they were only making \$23 an hour, plus benefits plus a gold-plated defined-benefits pension, and wanted more when the contract came up for renewal. Like General Motors assembly-line workers who got \$35 plus benefits, they refused to understand they were in a dying business. The posties first staged rotating strikes, and then got locked out by Canada Post. The federal government brought in back-to-work legislation, but the system was shut down for a couple of weeks.

It cost me a fortune in private courier expenses. You can't e-mail everything. My investment company had its taxes due at the end of June and our accountant is in Lacombe, about 170 km north of Calgary, so that was \$28 a pop for legal document packages via UPS. The accountant e-filed the tax return, but you still have to have hardcopy royalty reports, expenses receipts, and so forth.

I missed the paper zines. Yes, the Internet will ultimately win, but blogs with three-sentence natters are not substantial like a properly done zine with solid content. Trying to read pdf zines on efanazines.com is a pain; most zinesters still don't get the idea that they should use horizontal format, not 8.5 x 11 vertical format. But that is another rant for another day.