

Diazepam hath charms to soothe the savage stomach department: I was not myself around the Xmas/New Year period, and I don't know whether anyone else was (though goodness knows it's someone else's turn, really: I mean, nearly a third of a century without a break is pretty rough), but I seem to have done some odd things. I remember smiling at Paul Anderson in Adelaide, for example, and taking part in a panel discussion on horror films. This sort of thing seems to happen to me about once a month. I don't mean smiling at Paul, I mean not being myself. Bela, Carolyn and others who have survived this - this thing - will know that all it means is I've run out of Valium and decided to kick the habit.

The first few days are pretty easy. No withdrawal symptoms, just a slightly increased intake of alcohol. Then I deteriorate, rapidly. At the end of a week I am unfit for human society. (I can hear someone - Robin, I think it's you! - saying a rude thing.) If I still haven't got a fix half-way through the second week, I become so lethargic and irritated, simultaneously, that I can't bring myself to seeing a doctor, and anyone who suggests I should is answered in a rather surly manner.

Last Sunday I ran out of the evil stuff again, and again vowed not to renew the habit. The changed circumstances - living in the peaceful atmosphere of Canberra, unharried by fans &c - I thought might be conducive to finally ditching the accursed tranks. And I survived very well indeed for the first couple of days. Alison busted the turn-indicator lever in the car, and I was so gentlemanly about it I think even she was surprised; the boss provoked me way past the stage where I would normally tell a boss to shove the job where his brains are, and I didn't say a word in retaliation; I received a Summons from the Sales Tax People to appear in court in Melbourne on 15th May for failure to lodge a return during January (penalty \$200), and I laughed at it; a new lady at the hostel talked to me about science fiction for about two hours, and I didn't say more than maybe four or ten derogatory things about sf in all that time. By Friday...

Well, even before Friday I knew I was on the downhill slide. Bruce Gillespie wrote during the week, and from his letter I learnt that Ted Camell had died. That ~~gaww~~ gnawed at me for days. I still can't get used to the idea. (In the same letter Bruce reported that Fredric Brown had died, too. It points up the essential nature of science fiction fandom, in a way. I knew Brown only as an excellent, most entertaining writer. My response to this news was, more or less: So it goes. But Ted I had written to, sent fanzines to, even sent stories to - and he had written to me, and he supported "Australia in '75". He was part of my life, if nowhere near as big a part as he was of a lot of other people's lives - Lee Harding's, for example.)

By Friday I was impossible. Everything irritated me; I had peculiar spasms in the chest, tingling in the fingers, close to zero concentration - all the symptoms I know so well. I needed a fix: a little yellow pill containing 5mg of diazepam. I knew that, but it didn't help. As usual I felt bad about needing pills to keep me going. But, also, I knew that I had misplaced the prescription; and, after a number of phone calls, I realized that Things Are Different in Canberra - you don't just roll up to any doctor you find and get on his books. The first half dozen I called are not taking any more patients; the seventh would see me next Friday.

Last night and this morning I have been combing my mountains of paper - and there's a lot of fascinating stuff there, too (I must publish another fanzine one day). At 11.30am I found the prescription, and fifteen minutes later rejoined the human race. Safe for another month.

Meantime I've written some odd letters to some of you, in this cold-turkey week, and if I have offended in any way, been obtuse, unhelpful, curt, you-name-it, I apologize.

What I did for Easter department: I didn't do anything for Easter. What has Easter ever done for me? But I did drive up to Sydney and spent two days or so driving Bob Smith nuts with my incessant talk about a magazine called "Kangaroo Feathers" and Lyn Smith nuts with my incessant smoking. And Ron Clarke came over and showed us the Genuine Australian Fannish Sydney-Melbourne-Adelaide Running Jumping & Standing Still Film. It rained all the time, I didn't venture out at all except to visit the local bottle shop, I had a marvellous, relaxing time, and I think Lyn is wonderful. (Come to think of it, Bob can't be all that bad, either, if Lyn likes him.) It was rather sad missing out on the convention in Melbourne, but Lyn and Bob, with their unstrained hospitality and lashings of baroque music and fannish talk, more than compensated for missing the whizzbang shindig at the Savoy Plaza. As a result of our talk, if I may say so, SynCon '72 might just possibly be a little more exciting even than it already was.

Last weekend, feeling the need for a break, I drove to Sydney and saw Lyn and Bob (and Ron and Shayne). No, it wasn't quite like that at all. After the deadly boring drive the previous weekend I had decided I wouldn't make that trip more than once a month if I could help it. But Alison had some things to pick up and people to see in Sydney, so there I was again. That sounds far too noble, an impression I must correct. Alison is excellent company and I am very fond of her; easily the nicest, most interesting person I have met at the hostel so far. Her wish is not quite my command, but the prospect of spending the weekend with her and her friends was irresistible? - I'd make a lousy sub-editor or proofreader). It was a great weekend. We left about 9 on Saturday morning, reached Mittagong about 11.30, and, taking Alison's short-cut, proceeded to get thoroughly lost. (I won't say whose fault that was. I was navigating at the time, but, in all fairness, I had no idea where we were going.) Around 12.30 we found Rosalie's place, about a mile out of The Oaks - a pleasant little fibro house up a rutted, anonymous lane. (I pause to remark - having accidentally hit the ; instead of the ' - that, in case you hadn't noticed, this is being typed without benefit of correcting-fluid.) I like Rosalie and her little house out back of nowhere and her cat. Again I had a most relaxing weekend. We seemed to be on the move all the time, and yet it was relaxing. We visited a winery at Cobbity, where I bought two flagons of burgundy for \$3.20. We saw Lyn & Bob & Ron & Shayne, briefly. We called in at the University of NSW to collect Alison's books. We visited the University farm, where Rosalie works, several times. (I walked into the lab, and despite knowing that Rosalie's work is to do with chooks and eggs and suchlike, immediately felt: cor! - it's like something out of science fiction!) We finished up at a barbecue in a backyard at Kingsford. It was timed for about 3, but actually got under way about 7. The first hour or so I talked to a couple of Uruguayans and a bloke who had hitchhiked around South America. Fascinating, and sort of sad. I was beginning to enjoy the barbecue - instead of grace, most of the company had sung the Internationale, and there were planes close overhead most of the night, and I had discovered a couple of keen sf fans - when, early in the evening, about 10, Alison insisted that we drive back to Canberra. Ah well.

I had an advertisement in The Review last weekend. The response has been limited, shall we say: until this morning nothing at all, except Robin's letter addressed to "The Advertiser", which, since I had given my name in the ad, did not surprise me. The standard of poor-reading at The Review has fallen off since I left, and the phone number they printed was not the one I gave them in my copy. Still and all. There was a letter this morning from Hugh Capstan, 10 Tennyson Crescent, Forrest 2603, suggesting we start a science fiction club. I will write to him tomorrow. I have, of course, found an sf club here, and have no desire to start another. (If you would like to know what the Canberra SF Society does, write to Leigh Hyde, 34 Trumble Street, Pearce 2607: but don't tell him I sent you.) In today's Review there is an ad from Dennis Stocks about the Brisbane convention at the New Year. I wonder whether we should try to have something in every issue?

This seems a pretty scrappy letter. I wonder what else I can say. Do you want to know that I have written to Professor A. D. Hope? No? Thought you wouldn't. Do you know that Mungo MacCallum and Race Mathews live in Canberra? Do you care? How about Bert Castellari? Oh well.

I am working myself up to publishing another Scythrop, mainly because I know that the moment I get started I will receive instructions from Bob Smith on Kangaroo Feathers and will have to switch over to that. The Campbell book is proceeding, slowly. The Hermes has packed up - carriage return lever is out of action, and now the line-spacing has gone - so most of my letters are hand-written, since I tend to write letters early in the morning and late at night at the hostel. ANZAPA this time was most entertaining: small, and obviously not what Dennis would like, but indicating again that we must surely have more humorous writers in Australian fandom than there are anywhere else, proportionately. Bill Wright is developing into a really brilliant humourist, in particular. I nearly got myself sacked on the spot, laughing at his stuff during office hours.

In conclusion: This letterzine is in part-response to your letter or publication: OR I feel duty-bound &c to let you know how things are going: OR I would appreciate something from you, some time. I have no permanent mailing-list for this outpouring. If you want to see more, you must do something, such as writing to me, for example.

Peace.

JB