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COLLINGWOOD CAPERS

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For the members of ANZAPA and a few others.

Some members of ANZAPA (and others) will notice that this is the first stencil I have typed and run off since - when? - October 1979? (That's not quite true. I typed a stencil of the first page of my most recent ANZAPA fanzine. I put it on the Roneo 865 duplicator which I bought from John Bangsund late in 1979 - the duplicator which I've used once since then. I twirled the little handle. Pages flew everywhere. I don't know what went wrong; I'm just not acquainted with that duplicator, I suppose. Perhaps everything had seized up since the previous time I had used it. No matter. I typed everything out on layout sheets and my friendly instant offset place relieved me of my printing difficulties. If the same thing happens again, what will I do? Curse at the duplicator, throw things at it, the usual little actions which help fanzine production immensely. Maybe not. Maybe I will get out the Gestetner, which is still here. I know just how that works.)

It's very difficult to explain to somebody like John Foyster why I have nearly abandoned the use of the duplicator to produce fanzines. (Perhaps it's difficult because he's not really interested in that point of view, let alone the explanation.) One reason is that the trusty Adler Gabriele got beyond typing stencils. The Adler Gabriele has many advantages over an IBM Selectric (which is not mine anyway, and some day will need to return to its rightful owner). One is that the typer-of-stencils-on-the-Gabriele does not need to muck around with backing plates and surface plastic sheets over the top of the stencil. Nothing ever slowed down my fanzine production quite so much as changing to the tiny-type Olivetti in 1975. If you don't use plastic sheets on stencils when typing with the Olivetti, it punches out all the Os and rips drill holes through to the platen. And one needs plastic sheets with the IBM to stop the wax gumming up the golf balls. So there I was with a pile of stencils in front of me. Type page 1. Rip out the stencil. Bung in the next stencil. Oh no! no plastic sheet or backing plate! Rip out the stencil and spend ten minutes affixing the needed appurtenances. Concentration destroyed. Contrast all that with my mode of operation for SFC 35/36/37, the last large issue typed on the Adler Gabriele. I knew it would be 150 pages, since I had already typed layout sheets. So I piled up the contents of three boxes of stencils, and kept typing for five days. Result: a 150-page fanzine. (Even that was too slow; really I had allowed myself only three days for typing stencils.) Each stencil took ten minutes. Compare that with typing

stencils on the Olivetti: half an hour a stencil, if I was lucky.

Anyway - and take a deep breath - after about five years of putting it off, finally I took the Adler Gabriele into Elite Typewriters, Carlton, about two months ago, and had it completely done over. The results? I don't know. Wait till I start playing with duplicators again when these stencils are typed.

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The Curse of the Gillespies:

AN ANTI-RESTAURANT GUIDE

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If you ever become the proprietor or owner of a restaurant in Melbourne, and you serve the greatest food in the city, and you want your enterprise to succeed - don't tell Elaine and me about it. We might get to love the place, and turn up every Tuesday night. You might as well file the bankruptcy papers now.

Let me show you what I mean. When Elaine and I got together, we decided that gobbling down a plate of chops and veg was not the most romantic way to spend a relaxed evening. Then, as now, we had little enough money, but we were willing to try a few promising restaurants. It annoyed us that there seemed to be no good restaurants in the Collingwood area, so we put off restauranting for a while. Meanwhile I had quite often walked past a little place on Johnston Street when walking from our place down to Hoddle Street. The sign outside said 'Two Up'. Curtains and a fish tank in the window hid the interior. No menu outside. It was impossible to tell what kind of a place it was. To judge from its surroundings, it could not possibly be more than a primitive chop house.

But Elaine and I were still looking for The Place to Eat. Our favourite Chinese restaurant, King Wah in Lonsdale Street, Melbourne, had already closed down. (The sign said that the place would be closed for two months for renovations; the renovations eventually took two years.) One night, when swallowing the inevitable chop and veg at Johnston Street, Elaine and I said to each other, more or less at the same time, 'Let's try that place down the road. It might be good.'

Some nights in one's life are merely memorable: others are all-important. We walked into Two Up very tentatively on that first night. We had made no booking. We did not know even whether it was the sort of place where one made a booking. We were met by a genial, slight, young chap in a cook's apron. He showed us to our seats. The place proved to be a genuine candlelit restaurant. Even in mid-1978, candlelit restaurants were strictly passé. We loved it. The small space, with low lights and candles and air-conditioning, made us forget that Johnston Street, one of the busiest thoroughfares in Melbourne, was burbling away outside. There was a lit fish tank in the window, so we watched the peregrinations of the various creatures in it.

The food? Ah yes. Some items on the menu in French (not very well spelled). At least the place had pretensions to quality. (But why was it located here, in a particularly seedy-looking part of Collingwood?) We played safe. We both had onion soup and carpetbag steak. When the food arrived, we became addicts of Two Up restaurant. The soup had a creamy yet complex flavour. (Even now, we've found nothing like the soups at that place.) When the carpetbag steak arrived, I realised that I had not known exactly what kind of steak that was. Very rare eye fillet steak stuffed full of oysters - mmmm? For me? A few mouthful. Yes, for me. Yes, for Elaine. The red wine we had taken was great as well. The strawberry pancakes afterwards were remarkable. I've never tasted better than them, either.

Two Up was a one-restaurant food education centre for us during the next year and a half. Before we started going there, I was sure that I did not like seafood. Even now I like garlic prawns, and all other varieties of prawns, better than I like a whole fish. But it was the quality of the cooking at Two Up which made me a lifelong addict of prawns and whole fish. Two Up set a standard for quality of meat and fineness of cooking of eye fillet which I've never seen equalled. Before we began visiting Two Up, I did not realise how good a pâté or garlic bread could be. New addictions, all.

We remember that first night at Two Up as one of the perfect nights of our lives. But it wasn't quite. Even then, odd aspects of the restaurant showed up. The music was dreadful. Soon after we arrived (and we were the only people there, as on many other nights at Two Up), the chef/waiter switched on some particularly loud and obnoxious music through the restaurant's PA system. A few months later we would have recognised the music as disco. After only a few minutes, I begged him to turn it down, which he did. But for some time after, the loudness and bumptiousness of the music made us think twice about going to the place. This seemed strange because, if any decor was designed to accompany soft Mantovani-type restaurant music, that was it.

Oddnesses kept bringing themselves to our attention. When we started going to Two Up, the place had a thriving luncheon trade. That disappeared and the place soon closed at lunch time. The quality of the service was variable. The chef/waiter was our favourite. When he was there, he not only provided prompt meals, but had a good yarn to tell as well. Then came a splendid-looking lady, also with a slight accent, who proved to be Rob's sister. But Rob wasn't Rob at all. The little card for the restaurant said he was 'Alex Doubov'. Towards the end of 1978, Rob's sister, who was a very capable waitress, disappeared. Rob was again both chef and waiter. We could not help noticing that the restaurant was not doing great business. If we went on Tuesday night, we were usually the only people there. Talks with Rob brought out great accounts of the decline in restaurant trade in general, and how too many places were opening all over Melbourne. (Which was true enough. That was the height of the Melbourne restaurant boom, about the time when The Age was going well with its Epicure restaurant crits.) We almost parted company with

Two Up when another waitress began work on busy nights. She wasn't very good. Once she even offered to place a bottle of fine claret in the refrigerator until we needed it! But on those nights when nobody else was around, and the long conversations went on, we found out that this was Galinda, Rob's girlfriend. Now there was no sign of any members of Rob's own family. Galinda was good at one thing, though - telling us in graphic detail about how badly the restaurant was doing. It became a matter of guessing which week would see a closure date.

To cut this story a bit short - those two formed the centre of a disaster area. Even all the fish in their fish tank kept dying! At first we thought Galinda must be one of those girlfriends who hang like a millstone around the neck of the beloved. But it turned out that Rob had a violent aversion to Greeks - but was trying to run a restaurant in Collingwood. (He was Latvian.) I don't think he had ever asked himself why the mediocre Chinese restaurant two doors down always did a roaring trade, while his was disappearing. I suspect that, at some time before we found the place, he had found various ways of alienating all the local people who could have kept his place going. He retained a dream of attracting flocks of people from Kew and Doncaster - and, for a while, people did come long distances to enjoy the food. We were hit by one example of their ability to bugger things up. It was approaching the time of our wedding (beginning of March 1979), and we would have loved to have had it at Two Up. Elaine's parents were doubtful about the whole idea, but we knew that anybody who attended would be won over by the quality of the food. But late in January, we walked into the place and found Rob and Galinda looking more than usually distraught. 'We'll have to close,' they said, and did - at least, for long enough for us to be forced to find another place for the wedding reception. They gained a loan to keep them going for another year.

No matter what they did, things went downhill for them during 1979. We kept telling people about the wondrous food of the place (and the quality never declined in that department). They would go along, and get annoyed by something or other, and never go again. Rob had one weird period when he was trying to train a helper - with the result that the main meal would arrive about 11 p.m. and dessert at 1 a.m.! It actually happened on two occasions I can remember. Some friends of ours were not amused by the experience.

The inevitable came in January 1980. Two Up did not re-open after the Christmas break. We tried to find out where Rob and Galinda were moving to, but nothing came of that. Despite the fact that we became part of their distraught lives for a time, we miss that restaurant still. We have never found a place that matches it for quality of food. We have never found another place where the decor and atmosphere so suits our hide-away-from-it-all temperaments. (There were some nights when Elaine and I were left to stare at each other or at the fish in the tank - quite enjoyable, provided the wine was good, as we could forget everything that was difficult in our lives and concentrate just on each other and the sips and munches.) There is no cook like Rob (or Alec, or whatever his name really was). Where is he when we need him?

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Why the title, 'Anti-Restaurant Guide' for this article? Because Elaine and I have proved deadly ammunition against some of the best restaurants in Melbourne. We just keep knocking them down. The more we like a restaurant, the less chance it has of withstanding the onslaught of our admiration.

I've mentioned King Wah already. Perhaps it is not in the top rank of Melbourne's restaurants, but quite a few people might remember enjoying its 'Chinese breakfasts' during the Easter Convention 1978. It was the restaurant where Elaine and I went when we first started living together in March 1978. As I've said already, it closed down for nearly two years. The renovations have not improved it. Now it no longer has any windows to give some airiness to the interior. Also, the willowy Chinese lady waiters have now been replaced by frightfully well dressed Chinese lads. (Quite good waiters, but we did become more friendly with the former crew.) MUSFA End-of-Year Bistro Nights were once always at King Wah - very wild occasions they were, too, especially as the staff never worried about the goings-on. We returned to King Wah for 1980's End-of-Year, and even that did not quite have the same atmosphere. (This might have something to do with the fact that most members of MUSFA no longer drink alcohol; it was quite different in 1975.) So far, I have not mentioned the food at the 'new' King Wah. Not bad - certainly better than at the Chinese restaurant we frequented while King Wah was in mothballs. Very enjoyable food at King Wah: but it's not really the restaurant we knew and loved so well.

Mermaid, in Smith Street, Collingwood, fared much worse for our frequenting. It was a very good fish restaurant (although most of the fish dishes were not as well done as the same things cooked by Rob at Two Up). Its specialty was a sweet called hot cheese cake - a sort of ice-cream-cheese-cake taken out of the refrigerator and put in the oven for only a few minutes. One could skimp on the rest of the meal in order to get to dessert. The atmosphere was fine. Somehow the effect of a large open area had been alleviated by the skilful use of carpets and drapes so that it was nearly as quiet to be in as Two Up. (Mermaid's musak was better than Two Up's disco, though.) The only waiter at Mermaid was an affable Greek. We were most puzzled one night when two characters stalked into the restaurant and thudded out to the kitchen. They did not look as if they were there for a nice night's feed. Finally they stalked out again. (There had been much rapid talking and gesticulation from the back, and no food had arrived at all.) When the waiter finally arrived with the next course, he did not look too happy. We did not say anything at the time, but Elaine and I both had the same idea - how long before Mermaid would be burned down? Fires happen regularly in Collingwood, you see. Big furniture stores, owned by Greek people who have just made it big in the new country. Small stores in blocks which somebody wants to turn into a supermarket. They don't seem to be 'insurance fires' of the usual sort (at least, insurance companies have not contested any Smith Street payouts, that we know of). One can only conclude that there is some sort of protection racket, or gambling

debts recovery scheme, going on in Smith Street. And that waiter looked as if he had just been leant on.

Mermaid did burn down eventually. Not for some time after, and not before a temporary change of name. One morning Elaine went past in the tram and there was the blackened wreck. And the news of the fire was not even on the radio news or in the paper.

Who is the latest victim of our little vendetta? El Cid, in Johnston Street (Fitzroy end) appears to be. This is a surprise. We discovered that its chef/waiter (whose name we never did find out) can cook steaks nearly as well as Rob could. The fish dishes are nearly as good as Two Up's, and Spanish cuisine has lots of extras, like zarzuela and paella. El Cid has been written up in The Age and The Melbourne Times, and it has often been crowded when we have been there. It has not been swept away; it has simply not re-opened since the end of 1980. However, the innards of the next-door barber shop are being torn out, so we hope that El Cid is merely undergoing expansion and renovation. If this is so, we'll find out if the food is still marvellous, and then recommend that you go there often. I suppose we should do the place a favour, and stay away.

The Cochrane/Gillespie Curse works in all sorts of annoying little ways. Want to buy a pizza in Collingwood? You can't. We discovered what was the only place where you could buy pizza in Collingwood. The little Italian place in Smith Street just near Johnston Street, called Brussio's, had just about the best pizzas I've tasted. But the proprietor's brother went back to Italy, and the proprietor (as he explained to us in voluminous detail) could not afford to hire someone just to make pizzas, which do not pay their way. At the same time, Brussio's was praised in The Age Weekender's 'Guide to Twenty Places Where You Can Eat For Less Than \$5'. Brussio's, after two years of struggling for survival, became booked out every night. Now the pizza oven has been removed, and I bet you can't eat there for less than \$5 any more. We wouldn't know. We did not like the non-pizza food when we tried it last.

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Perhaps you'd like a guide to restaurants that will live forever, ie, ones we would never revisit. There are not many which are definitely bad. The competition for customers around Melbourne has meant that not many rip-off joints are left. Some places are too inconvenient to visit. Perhaps the best restaurant in Melbourne is Enri's in Richmond - but it's now hard to book a place since it's become so popular, and the style of the restaurant is such that you need to go with a pleasantly drunken group. Enri himself is crazy, and you need people around you for protection.

Perhaps the most uncomfortable we have been made to feel in a restaurant was in Two Faces, South Yarra. The Age restaurant writers keep picking Two Faces as one of the three best restaurants in Melbourne. Maybe the same writers are given better tables than we received the one time we went there. It seemed that every customer had to pass by the table we were given, and every waiter had to buzz around it for something or

other. Not a place for quiet atmosphere. The food was very expensive, not remarkably good, and served in small quantities. Since Elaine and I both like competing in the Carey Handfield Prize for Conspicuous Consumption, we particularly resented the frugality of the portions. The night was not without its compensations. (It was during the last time we had large bank accounts, and we were determined to enjoy ourselves.) A loathsome supercilious wine waiter had to pay attention when we started raiding the cellar, so to speak. A 1966 Wynn's Coonawarra! At only \$11 a bottle! That's what really made the night. We managed to find a very good white and a fine 1972 as well. (There were four of us at table, I should mention.) It seems likely that the only reason for going to a licensed restaurant in Melbourne is in the hope that the place has been going long enough to have some great wines in the cellar at an affordable price.

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Already we feel on the brink of discovering more restaurants. Already we have been warned to stay away from the Danube in St Kilda - our St Kilda friends like it too much. One night there recently convinces us it is a place to try again. St Kilda people are fairly safe, though. Yes, it is still easy to get there by the Punt Road bus, but no, we don't often climb on the bus and roll down to Sin City. Silly of us, I know. We've already tried Fairy Stork in Acland Street, and it seems a very good Chinese restaurant. Quite a few other places have good reputations. And then there is Fitzroy Street, its restaurants still unfamiliar to us. Some time in the future, when we are quite sure that El Cid is closed forever.

Meanwhile, research for this article has had the expected result: when I weighed myself over Christmas on the scales at my parents' place, I found that I was 10 kg heavier than I thought I was. (Our scales still lie unblushingly and tell me I am 80 kg.) Elaine instituted a Diet in January. It worked for a while, but my weight has begun to creep up again. Could be that we enjoy this research for articles about restaurants. But going to a restaurant is essential to our mental well-being, if not so good for the physical well-being. It's the one chance we have to sit back, quite unworried about anything (except paying for the meal). Elaine is a marvellous cook, but meals at home are obviously less relaxing for us than going out. We keep searching for the Perfect Restaurant - which would be a less hazardous task if only we had not found it once, only to have it close down.