

STUNNING 10c STORIES



DON-O-SAUR

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DON-o-SAUR 56

(November 1989)

DON-o-SAUR is a personal fanzine written, edited, printed, collated, stapled, stamped and mailed by Don C. Thompson of 3735 W. 81st Place, Westminster, CO 80030-3919. The phone number (in case you want to call and complain) is (303) 429-3750.

DON-o-SAUR seems to have become a quarterly publication, and I hope to keep it that way. Look for the next issue in February 1990.

Many of the financial and business aspects of the publication are covered in the discourse beginning on the very next page, but I'm going to summarize them here in case you want to skip my portion of the zine and get immediately to the LoCs.

DON-o-SAUR is available to those who insist on money for \$2 per issue or \$8 per year. (I don't want to encourage subscriptions by giving any kind of discount.)

D-o-S is also available in exchange for fanzines of comparable worth; for artwork; for letters of consent; for stamps; and in response to polite requests.

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Neoteric Biblioplist (supplement)

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DECISIONS, DECISIONS

I have made a decision. I have severe misgivings about it and great trepidation, and it follows in the wake of careful consideration and reconsideration. I may regret it. May, hell; I regret it already, and I haven't even done anything, but the decision is (at least temporarily) irrevocable.

With this issue, DON-o-SAUR becomes a sort of semi-prozine. Well, no, not really. More accurately, it becomes part of my "business."

I didn't realize it until a couple of weeks ago, but for the past five years, I have been somewhat self-employed. (If I seem to be using a lot of qualifiers here, it's because the situation is highly qualified. It may unqualify itself later.)

By the time this issue of DoS is published, I will have attained my 62nd birthday, which means that I can start collecting my Social Security benefits. But it doesn't kick in automatically; anyone who wants to collect Social Security has to apply for it.

So I finally applied, two whole months before my birthday. Social Security wanted a lot of information from me--date of birth, military service, marital status, etc; they want documentation. I can't imagine why they asked for such information; they obviously already know more about me than I know about myself.

They knew I'd been self-employed, and I didn't. I'd been reporting my annual \$1,500 or so from the *Denver Post* as "other" income for the five years that I've been writing the SF review column; and last year, for some reason, I just lumped it in with wages and salaries. Social Security, and presumably the IRS, considers it self-employment income. The Social Security people strongly suggested that I file amended tax returns for the past three years. "Otherwise, if you're audited, you may have to pay a penalty in addition to whatever back taxes might be due." The

implication was clear that an audit was highly probable if I didn't refile. It was also strongly advised that I get the forms prepared by a CPA. I might have done better to have shopped around or taken bids or something, but I was in kind of a hurry to get it taken care of, and I suspect that CPAs constitute a club and all charge about the same rates for tax preparation. The last time I had anyone else prepare my income tax returns, he had just raised his rates to \$65, and that was seven or eight years ago, so I wasn't surprised to learn that the going rate is now \$75. That's for ONE year. For three years, it's three times that.

Ouch! Shit!

And then it turned out that for two of those years I did owe back taxes. The first time he figured it, M.J. Winkler, CPA, had me owing something like \$150 for each of the three years,

but I lost my temper and furiously demanded to know if he'd taken into account my expenses for those years.

"What expenses?"

"Well, some of the items under miscellaneous deductions--can't those count as business expenses? Books and magazines and travel to SF conventions, that sort of thing?"

Well, sure they could, but I had to spend more time sorting through my checks and receipts and other records for the various years and deciding which were (or could be) related to my *Post* column as distinguished from those related to my teaching.

On the second and final calculation, I still owed nearly \$200, but that seemed so much better than the original \$450 estimate that I just grinned weakly as I wrote the checks. But here's the point:

If I had realized that I was self-employed, I could have kept better records of my expenses related to self-employment and could probably have shown an actual loss for each of the three years and might have even ended up getting a refund.

Surely, if I had been able to deduct my expenses for publishing DON-o-SAUR last year, it could have reduced my taxes some, even though I did only one issue in 1988. It still cost a lot, in terms of paper, wear on the copier and especially postage.

Well, it's too late to do anything about last year.

Ah, but THIS year...!

This is the fourth issue of DoS this year. I have established a quarterly publication schedule, have I not? And a few people have been offering money in exchange for copies. I'd previously thought about (and dismissed) the idea of setting a subscription rate and a per-copy price. Seemed like too much trouble.

Well, situations do change. I've reconsidered, and, most reluctantly, with trepidation and severe misgivings, I have reached a decision.

With this issue DON-o-SAUR becomes part of my "business."

Henceforth, I will accept money for it; I'm setting an official subscription rate of \$8 per year, and I'll have a cover price of \$2.50. I might even accept advertising, if approached persuasively enough.

Now, all this requires some explanation and elaboration, along with some exploration of its ramifications. There's nothing simple or straightforward about any of this. I'm being sneaky. Devious. I'm employing an elaborate subterfuge. I'm sure you'll understand, and I'm pretty sure it'll satisfy the IRS, especially if I can bring myself to keep more meticulous records than I'm accustomed to.

There's much more to the "business," of course, than just DON-o-SAUR. It's a relatively small part. I am primarily a free-lance writer, right? The bulk of my self-employment income comes from writing book reviews. Hey, just the other day I sold a 1,000-word review of Clive Barker's new novel, "The Great and Secret Show" to *Flood Review* for the princely sum of \$10!) I occasionally do write fiction and try to sell it. I'm also a book dealer, again. Many years ago, in the very early years of the first incarnation of DON-o-SAUR, I established a tax-writeoff book business called SCORPION Books and actually sold some books and magazines. I'm not going to call it SCORPION this time, but I'm back in the book business, specializing in advance-proof copies of recent SF and fantasy. (There will be a catalog supplement in this issue of DoS.) What else? Well, I can charge for the use of my copier so that all expenses with it can be deductible. (That's almost enough right there to guarantee an annual loss on the business, though I understand I can't take a loss every year.)

Am I making my main point perfectly clear? I'm not in business to make a million dollars; great wealth was never and is not now one of my life goals. But if the government is going to insist that I am self-employed, I intend to get full bene-

fit of the condition. According to my preliminary calculations (and bear in mind that I am not exactly a world-famous mathematician), it should be possible for me to actually increase my self-employment income significantly while at the same time reducing my taxes by claiming ALL permissible business expenses.

Now, what does all this mean for DON-o-SAUR readers? Are you going to be summarily dropped from the mailing list if you don't cough up some money real quick?

Nah! You know better than that. DON-o-SAUR's distribution terms remain essentially the same ever--"the usual." If you locate occasionally, or trade, or send artwork, or are in any of the apas that I'm in, you're safe. (I've got to keep the mailing list above the magic 200 figure anyway, you know.) Names will be (and are now) dropped if I get no response after a reasonable time, but that won't be because you haven't sent money. The only real difference is that I will now accept money from people who want to buy individual issues or to subscribe. (And I hereby promise to try to keep track of who pays, and how much.) The worst that can happen in this scenario (and the source of my trepidation and misgivings) is that either DON-o-SAUR or the book business (or both) should become a huge success. If two or three hundred people suddenly decide to send me \$8 each for DoS subscriptions, I'm gonna be in real trouble. (Maybe I should set the subscription rate at \$50 a year?) If I get so many book orders that I have to spend eight (or even six or even four) hours a day filling them, I'll be in even worse trouble.

So I'd like to ask your cooperation:

Don't tell too many people about me. Don't urge them to send me money. If it's someone you really trust and think might enjoy reading (and loccking) DON-o-SAUR, well, okay; you're doing that anyway, some of you. That's fine. But please, don't go out of your way to spread the word. I don't WANT a circulation of much

more than 200. Counting FAPA, it's closer to 300 now, and that's big enough, thanks.

Also, please, don't order a book from me unless you really WANT it and can't get the same book at a comparable price from someone else, okay? Don't think you're automatically doing me a favor by buying books from me. Since I'll be dealing primarily in advance-proof copies with outrageous prices, that should effectively limit my clientele, but we'll see...

...

I'm sure I have other things to talk about in this issue of DoS, but I wanted to get this matter clarified first. Any questions?

And meanwhile, does anyone have any good suggestions for the name of my new book business? Obviously it should be something prehistoric, something related to dinosaurs... Diplodocus? Triceratops? Bronto Books?

Never mind; I'll think of something. (See the supplement included in this issue to learn what I decided.)

Roads Not taken

Might it give more legitimacy to my claim that *Don-o-Saur* is part of my business if I run occasional book reviews? Never mind; it's a moot question. I'm going to include book reviews no matter what; they're part of my nature, but I'm not going to review a book right now, anyway. I didn't read all of "One" by Richard Bach (of "Jonathan Livingston Seagull" fame) or even very much.

The book had been loaned to me by an AA friend and I felt I should read enough of it to get an idea of its content. I gave up not long after I got to the last line of the Preface (or Foreword or whatever).

The line is "What if science proves to be true?" (referring

to that aspect of quantum theory hinting at a multiplicity of universes). The idea is at least as old in SF as Murray Leinster's 1934 novel in *Astounding*, "Sidewise in Time," and probably even older; it has provided inspiration for some of the most entertaining and ingenious SF ever written. Where would Simon Hawke and Harry Turtledove be without the concept that endless alternate universes come into existence every time any kind of choice is made? But the idea is apparently brand new to Richard Bach, who probably got it from "The Dancing Wu Li Masters" or "The Tao of Physics."

Bach's story, as nearly as I can tell from reading the jacket blurbs and the first 35 pages, is an introspective rendition of the old question: "What would have happened if I hadn't married the woman I did, and what if we could go back and talk to ourselves in the various alternate timelines?" The answer seems to be that we could write a whole book by transcribing the ensuing conversations.

Maybe I should try again to read the book, but any author who asks "what if science turns out to be true?" has a such a radically different view of reality from mine that I have difficulty comprehending it.

Hey, fella, don't be so damn judgmental! Bach has gotten rich with his fuzzy view of reality; and anyway, it is kind of fun to play the "what if?" game, if you don't take it too seriously.

I don't pretend to begin to understand quantum theory, except that in general it applies on the subatomic level and doesn't necessarily have any relevance to the level of existence on which our daily lives function. I doubt that there are really a multitude of Don C. Thompsons pursuing a multitude of different lifelines in endless alternate universes. And even if there are, it doesn't matter, because there's no way I can find out what those others are doing or communicate with them in any way. All I can do is speculate, which is all that the best and the

worst science fiction writers are doing--and all that Richard Bach does.

And anyway speculation is the very essence of science fiction.

And another anyway is that I once spent a year (when I was 32) writing a book based on an idea very similar to Bach's. Actually my idea was the one that was later the basis of two highly successful movies--"Back to the Future" and "Peggy Sue Got Married." No, I'm not alleging plagiarism. The idea wasn't all that new when I tried to use it. My novel was never published--never even finished. I got bogged down in detail, and too immersed in memories when I should have been worrying about reader interest, suspense, plot twists, atmosphere, etc. "Innocence Revisited" was my first attempt at writing my autobiography, and I was 20 or 30 years too early with it.

Not that I'll ever try a full autobiography again. Mine appears in bits and pieces throughout some 56 issues of DON-o-SAUR and in scattered other apazines, and that will have to suffice. I think it's more than enough. The very best use of the "past revisited" idea that I've seen is in Ken Grimwood's novel, "Replay," where the protagonist has not just one but many opportunities to improve on his first lifetime, and the hero is able to make significant changes in the course of events--not just in his own life but in national and world affairs--and a more or less rational explanation is offered for the experiences.

By comparison, my story was terribly unimaginative. Not only was I unable to think of any reason for my 32-year-old self waking up in my 16-year-old body, I found myself unable, while writing the thing, to make any improvements, or any changes of any kind, in the course of my life as it had actually been

lived. That was something of a personal disappointment. After all, the conscious motivation for writing the book--it was subtitled "A Wish Fulfillment"--was to go back and in imagination at least undo the damage that I had done to myself and others when I was 16. I was trying to find the point at which I could have decided not to embark on a burglary career. I couldn't find it. Even dramatizing and fictionalizing the episode, equipping the adolescent version of myself with an adult point of view and the judgment of maturity, I found myself helplessly watching as I said and did all the same dumb things again.

I'm sure I considered making that the whole point of my novel, but I was simply too discouraged to finish it. The manuscript is buried in a box somewhere deep in my closet of anxieties, and I have no intention of closely examining it again. But when I start playing the "what if" game--what would my life be like if I had made one choice instead of another at some crucial point in my life?--that's a natural point to start with. For one thing, that was the age at which I first started making my own choices. Until then, they'd all been made for me. I didn't choose to grow up in Laramie, Wyo. (If I'd had a choice, I'd have remained in Denver when we moved there for my health in 1940; many years later I realized that I could have attended DENVENTION I in 1941 if I'd been here then and known about it.) I had no choice about attending Baptist church and Sunday School and pretending to take seriously the nonsense being purveyed there, pretending to be a good Baptist youth--pretending to be *good*. On a deep level I resented the necessity for pretense, and my conclusion in the process of writing my book was that I had very little conscious choice about the form that my inevitable rebellion took.

Anyway, I'm convinced now, 30 years after my first serious attempt at literary self-examination, that my life would have

turned out pretty much as it did, with or without the burglary escapade. If it hadn't been that, it undoubtedly would have been something else equally disgraceful, and I would still have found it expedient to enter the Army right out of high school (though the GI Bill benefits would have been a compelling enough reason to join the Army, even without that.) I would still have come back home to attend the University of Wyoming and would still have majored in journalism, to which I had pretty definitely committed myself even while in high school, and I would still have met and married Carolyn...

You know, when I try to imagine alternate universes, infinitely forking timelines, I have no trouble visualizing any number of them which contain no Don C. Thompson (no me, I mean; any and all branches of reality contain an abundance of Don Thompsons). I had ample opportunity in infancy and childhood to be phased out of existence; at times it was a matter of mere minutes, when it was virtually a toss-up as to whether I would keep on breathing or not.

The one that I remember most vividly was when I had the ear infection (at age 16) in the wake of scarlet fever. The pressure was building up steadily and excruciatingly; the doctor had to come all the way from Cheyenne late at night; it was at least an hour's dangerous drive in those days. I knew that if he didn't get there in time, my whole head was going to explode like a pumpkin with a bomb inside it (many years before "Scanners"). As it happened, the doctor arrived about two minutes after I thought the blast was due. When he stuck the needle into my ear, puncturing the eardrum and allowing the poison to gush out (and I mean it *gushed*!) I decided to try breathing again and maybe even keep on living. It wasn't just my imagination; it was a close call. There had been others earlier that I don't remember so well. That was merely the latest one--and the last of my severe illnesses.

So I can easily imagine any number of timelines branching off from before my 16th year in which I and my progeny have no role. But when I (or someone else) asks me, "What would have happened if you'd decided to take a different course of action instead of the one actually taken at a certain time?" I have trouble even identifying those certain times when the crucial decisions had to be made.

What would my life have been like if I'd decided to be a railroader like my father instead of a journalist?

It's a meaningless question. In this universe, there's simply no way I could have ever considered becoming a railroader. The occupation never had the slightest appeal for me. I wanted to be a chemist or an astronomer until I learned that those occupations involved math. After that I wanted to be a writer. Hell, I still want to be a writer. Newspapering and college professoring were mere compromises.

All right, back to the theme of Bach's book, what would have happened if I'd decided to marry someone other than Carolyn?

Another meaningless question. I've never been certain that marrying Carolyn was my idea anyway; Carolyn has always claimed it was her decision and I can't prove otherwise. I felt that I married the first girl who would have me. No one else was ever in the running.

Most of the crucial decision points of my life, as I try to examine them in retrospect, are like that: the decision was never entirely in my hands. There might have been a fork in the road, but there was seldom any real question as to which fork I would take. I took the one that was possible, in most cases. In most of the others, I took the obvious one--the easiest, if you want to put it that way. Isn't that what we all do?

But let me see if I can't come up with at least a few examples of decisions that I might have made that could have resulted in my life being different from what it is now....

Long pause here; this is tough! But okay, I think I have a starting point, working backward.

The most recent crucial decision I had to make was whether to take early retirement or not; and even though there was never a question as to what I wanted to do, it wasn't clear at first that my choice was genuinely possible or economically feasible. I felt sure that we had the economic reserves, or at least the potential of future earnings, but Carolyn insisted on being convinced. We had several sessions with a financial adviser provided by PERA, and he used elaborate mathematical projections of the data we provided, establishing to Carolyn's satisfaction that we should be able to survive to about age 95, if we pace it carefully.

But it was a near thing. The decisive factor was the tax-sheltered annuity program that I'd gotten into almost casually way back in the first or second year of my teaching career. I wasn't sure then that I hadn't fallen for some supremely clever scam. This smooth-talking representative from VALIC (Variable Annuity Life Insurance Co.) came around talking to the English faculty, and I listened to his pitch and finally signed up, even without consulting Carolyn (or maybe I did; it was so long ago...) I had severe misgivings for a time. The deal looked too good to be true. I'd never been much of an investor, other than putting a little money into savings accounts when possible. I recalled that when I was working in Dubuque, some of the people my age were investing what money they could in Mutual Funds, which I regarded as playing the stock market. My parents' memories of the '29 crash was still too fresh in my mind for me to even consider such a thing, even if we'd had the extra money, which we didn't.

So what was different about VALIC?

It was explained that these accounts were offered under terms of a special law that took into consideration the fact that college professors didn't make as much money or have as many fringe benefits as individuals of comparable experience, education and ability in the private sector.

Yes, the money I put into it would indeed be invested in stocks and bonds and such, and I could take advantage of the variable aspect of the plan and let the interest rate on my money rise and fall with the market (never, never! abhorrent thought!) or I could use the "fixed" account, which would yield a certain guaranteed percentage, to be adjusted each quarter.

Well, I still didn't much like the idea, just on principle, but I signed nevertheless. For one thing, the interest rate was significantly higher than for most savings accounts. More important, the interest income wasn't taxable. Still more important, the money that I put into the fund each month wasn't counted as income (and was therefore not taxable) until I chose to withdraw it.

I noticed that most of my colleagues in the English Department were NOT taking advantage of the offer, but I went ahead anyway, having, by the age of 42 or whatever, developed a certain uneasy independence of spirit.

Anyway, I could afford it (and I didn't quite realize that most of the other faculty members couldn't) because what with working part time year round on the newspapers, I had a double income. I didn't really miss the \$200 or so a month that was deducted from my Metro check. That was more than made up for by my weekly checks from the *Rocky Mountain News*. As time went on and I received raises in pay from both the paper and the college, I increased the amount being withheld from my Metro check and put into VALIC. At its peak, for a period of several years, I was putting \$500 a month into the tax shelter, and at the same time, as I took a certain greedy capitalistic delight in noting,

the account was growing by at least another \$1,000 per quarter in accumulated interest.

(And yes, yes, certainly, it occurred to me often that this was an almost classic example of how American legislation aimed at the relief of economic inequities usually managed to benefit those who were least desperate for the breaks. It was OK; I'd long since learned to live with a guilty conscience.)

By the time the early retirement opportunity arose at Metro, the VALIC account totaled well over \$100,000, and that was the margin by which, after adding up all our other current and potential assets (\$120,000 house, PERA pension, Social Security, RMN pension, cars, furniture, books, etc.) our financial adviser figured we could survive to age 95. (I don't know what we're supposed to do after that; worry about it when the time comes, I suppose...)

But what if I hadn't had that cushion? If I'd had to continue teaching for another six or seven years? Well, but I did. Yeah, but if I hadn't?

Hell, I don't know. I can't imagine that things would be much different from what they are now. I would still be sitting here at my word processor, working on the next issue of DON-o-SAUR, having perhaps first graded a batch of papers instead of having read a manuscript for the writers workshop I'm in, but...

It occurs to me that the VALIC account played a major role in another crucial life decision, nearly 12 years ago.

Carolyn and I separated in the spring of 1978; you know about that, and it seemed like one of those inevitable and irrevocable courses of action. I haven't been able to think of anything I would have or could have done to head it off. It looked like we were heading straight for a divorce; both of us had accepted that as the only possible or plausible conclusion of our relationship. Only a few details remained to be worked

out, but one of those details was the VALIC account. I was willing to turn the whole thing over to Carolyn (it contained about \$30,000 at the time) and start a new one for myself. But when I went to the VALIC office to start the paperwork, I discovered it wasn't that easy. My account was a one-time-only deal. I could indeed turn the \$30,000 over to Carolyn--but only by withdrawing the cash and allowing it to be taxed, thus reducing it to about \$25,500; and if Carolyn invested that in any standard savings plan, the interest would also be taxed.

The alternative was to leave the \$30,000 alone and keep adding to it, but to write an iron-clad provision into the divorce agreement that would assure Carolyn a certain percentage of the total at a certain age. The VALIC agent shuddered to think of how much we'd have to pay an attorney to tailor such an agreement. So did I. The agent pointed out that if I just left the account alone and didn't even add to it, it should total more than \$100,000 by the time we were 65. I went back home to explain the situation to Carolyn. What she understood was that I could be left with nothing in savings if I turned the money over to her at this point. She didn't dislike me, didn't want to wreck me; she just didn't want to live with me.

"Let's just let things coast for a while," I suggested. "Maybe one of the lawyers will have an idea."

They shuddered to think of the VALIC complexities but were willing enough to tackle them--for a shuddersome price.

So things drifted, and eventually Carolyn and I drifted back together, and I'm not sure we would have or could have if the divorce had gone through.

And I shudder to think of what my life would have become if I had remained permanently separated from Carolyn. I'm almost certain that I wouldn't have been able to quit drinking without her help; and that would have resulted promptly in another timeline marked by my non-existence. There's no point speculating

on whether I might never have resumed drinking if Carolyn and I hadn't separated in the first place. As I've noted, there was never a point at which we could have decided NOT to separate.

This is interesting (to me, anyway), because what I seem to be saying so far is that the life decision with the most far-reaching consequences for me was one that I made most reluctantly, almost in violation of my own principles.

Is it necessary to point out that deciding to do a thing is not the same thing as doing it? It seems fairly obvious, but I have a tendency to forget it. I've decided to do many noble things in my lifetime, and done relatively few of them. I have DECIDED hundreds of times to quit drinking, but the only times I've done it for any extended length of time have not been the result of conscious decisions but of simple exhaustion, as nearly as I can figure it out.

I've decided many times to write a best selling novel. I decided in my youth that I would make my living eventually by writing fiction, including best-selling novels. I don't recall ever deciding to be a copy editor instead of a reporter, though I did make the conscious decision to go into newspaper work as a stepping stone toward my career as a writer. I guess I did decide to become a college teacher, but I sure as hell never decided to stay one for 20 years. I'm quite certain that I never decided to be a fanzine editor or to produce 56 issues (and counting) of anything as ridiculously titled as "DON-o-SAUR." Going back much further, Carolyn and I absolutely did not decide to have three children (or even one, for that matter). Some of the most pleasant things in life just seem to happen, quite independent of personal choice or decision. I'm not denying that they often follow in the wake of

some deliberate decision and action, but sometimes the real cause-and-effect link seems tenuous at best.

I can think of a few important exceptions. When Carolyn and I seemed stuck in Mauston, Wis., where I had my first real newspaper job, we decided after only a few months that we'd get out of there as soon as possible after sticking it out for at least one full year. We were there for a total of 13 months, the move made possible by the sale of a novelette to *Galaxy* magazine in the spring of 1953. We could have moved right then, but the year wasn't up, so we stayed until July. (I have often wondered if I might have become a better or at least more successful fiction writer if I'd stayed on that job for several years instead of a mere matter of months, since in retrospect I can see that that's where I did my best writing; but I truly believe such a decision was beyond the realm of possibility--certainly for Carolyn, if not for me. And I've never regretted that particular move.)

I did not yet have another job when we left Mauston. I felt recklessly rich, having sold one story for a princely sum, and with no doubt in my mind that it would be followed by a rapid succession of steadily more lucrative sales. I sent letters of application to newspapers advertising for reporters and we then moved in with Carolyn's parents in the apartment house they owned in Laramie. I took over the attic as my "office" and concentrated on writing. It didn't go smoothly, but I was psychologically prepared to do nothing but try to write fiction for as long as six months. That was the time limit for success that I set for myself.

Still, I was as relieved as Carolyn and her parents were when I got the job offer from Dubuque, especially since I wasn't being offered a job as a reporter, but as *Night Editor*! (I had no idea then--or for a couple of weeks after I was actually

doing the job--as to what a Night Editor did, but it certainly sounded important, and it paid more than reporting did. It was the only concrete offer I'd had. So of course I took it.

But you know, it occurs to me just now that it was a series of decisions by Oliver Witte, editor of the Mauston papers, that really set the course of my whole newspaper career. To begin with, he decided to hire me right out of college, with no experience to speak of. He decided to let me write a column in which I could, to a certain extent, express my own ideas and opinions (and thereby confirm how much fun that kind of writing can be). After I wrote a controversial Christmas card column, Oliver decided not to fire me, but he did take the column away from me, thereby giving me the time and incentive to vent my anger and frustration in that novelette which, on one level, can be read as a protest against thought-control. When I sold that story, I was suddenly famous in Mauston, and Oliver (feeling guilty?) decided to give me the exalted title of News Editor of the *Mauston Star and Juneau County Chronicle*. That was the crucial decision. You understand that my job didn't change--just the title. I was still doing a bit of everything involved in the production of a bi-weekly newspaper: reporting, taking pictures, writing the headlines, helping in the backshop and with the mailing, cleaning up the mess afterward... At least I didn't have to help with the advertising. Whew!

It's clear to me now that if my title in Mauston had remained "reporter," I would have been hired as a reporter on some daily newspaper somewhere, some time. But because my resume showed "editor" as my most frequent former jobs (I'd been Editor of the college newspaper in Wyoming, Assistant Editor of the *Newcastle Newsletter-Journal* for one summer, and News Editor in Mauston), I was obviously over-qualified to start on a daily newspaper as a mere reporter. Employers ARE impressed

by important-sounding titles. I thought for a while after I started in Dubuque as Night Editor that the joke was on me; the job wasn't nearly as dignified or important as it sounded, and it was far more fast-paced and hectic than anything I'd ever done before, more intense and nerve fraying.

But I mastered it, and someone decided eventually to promote me to the position of copy desk chief on day-side.

The point is that by then my fate was sealed; I was a committed copy editor. I had no more chance from then on of ever becoming a reporter than I had of becoming president of the United States. I might have been a better and more successful writer if I'd been a reporter, with the daily discipline of writing and meeting writing deadlines; I've often felt that way, but there's no way to tell. And it was never really my choice anyway. Oliver Witte done it to me.

It was not a result of blind, random chance that we ended up in Denver. That was very much a conscious decision, carefully planned and executed. Carolyn and I both loved Dubuque, and I loved my job on the Telegraph-Herald, but...

I don't recall exactly when Denver became my ultimate newspaper goal; I think it was while I was still in college, but maybe it wasn't until Mauston. After we left Mauston, I would probably taken any halfway attractive job anywhere in the country (except possibly the Deep South).

By the time I'd put in a couple of years in Dubuque and began to realize that there was a definite limit to the advancement possible there, Denver had become a very clear target.

One of the main motivating factors was Carolyn's desire to be closer to her parents, and our mutual desire to have the kids closer to all their grandparents. We always spent our vacations in Denver and Wyoming, and Carolyn would sometimes bundle the kids up and take them to visit the grandparents even before or after my vacations.

The thing that made Denver seem a realistic goal was the fact that many of the recent "graduates" of the *Telegraph-Herald* had gone to Denver. Monk Tyson, a former T-H sports editor, had gone to the *Denver Post* a couple of years before I started in Dubuque; he had become a local legend. Did I know Gene (Moon) Mullins before he went to the *Rocky Mountain News*? I think so, but not for long--a matter of weeks. A couple of years later, Hal Heffron, T-H City Editor, accepted a job on the *News* copy desk in Denver, working with Moon.

So I knew that someone on the Denver newspapers was impressed by the quality of copy editors produced in Dubuque. I worked hard to become a good enough copy editor to apply for a job in Denver, and by the end of my third year, I felt confident enough to do it. I'd sent letters in advance to both papers, telling them I'd be in Denver on vacation in August, and asking for a personal interview. The "interview" on both papers consisted of working one full shift (and getting paid for it). I worked at the *News* from 3 p.m. to midnight, got up early (about 5 a.m.) and worked a day shift (6 to 3 p.m.) at the *Post*. I saw no reason to tell the people at the *Post* that I'd been offered, and had accepted, the job at the *News* the night before. Anyway, the only clear offer I got from the *Post* at the end of the shift was to work another shift if I wanted to. I declined, and spent the next 12 years very happily on the *News* copy desk.

I said earlier that I had decided to become a teacher, but even that isn't quite true. I could have remained placidly at the *News* forever (or until retirement) if Bob Chase, the Assistant Editor, hadn't decided to take me off the book reviewing job that I loved and put me back full time on the copy desk, a move that I considered somehow degrading at the time. It made me so angry that I started looking around for something else to do.

Metro State College just happened to have an opening in the English Department, with the Journalism program in its infancy, just at the time I applied. After that, things just took their natural course.

I was about to say that I'd never even considered living anywhere but Denver, once we'd gotten settled here, but that isn't quite true. I had one offer, once, back in 1979, for a position as Managing Editor of a magazine in Chicago--one which I came dangerously close to accepting.

This takes a little explaining, and I think it's interesting enough to take the extra time and space to do so.

Remember Oliver Witte? The Nauston editor who changed the course of my life by giving me an editorial title? Oliver had a son--Oliver Jr.--a 16-year-old high schooler when I knew him. I taught him the rudiments of chess. Well, by 1979, Oliver Jr. was a journalist in his own right, editing a chain of technical magazines in Chicago. The managing editor of one of the magazines (a building design and construction publication) had resigned. They needed someone with maturity, experience and competence, and they needed him quickly.

Oliver Sr. recommended me, as I learned from Oliver Jr. in the surprise phone call I received at the RMN one evening. I was genuinely surprised. I would have thought that Oliver Sr. had long since forgotten about me, or would have still been trying hard to forget me. I had caused him considerable unpleasantness, but apparently time had fogged his memory.

Oliver Jr. sounded sincere and just a bit desperate. I told him at once that I didn't think I was really suitable for the job, having had no magazine experience and no knowledge of the building and construction design field (or whatever it was). He said that didn't matter: general competence and intelligence was more important. I didn't tell him that I didn't even consider myself very competent at anything any more. It was that very

feeling of general worthlessness, in fact, that caused me to hesitate. Things were not going splendidly for me just then. Carolyn and I were separated, and I was still thinking it was permanent; I was drinking, off and on; I'd taken a year off from teaching but school would be starting again soon and I wasn't sure I could handle those duties, plus the job at the News, plus continue as co-chair of the Denvention II committee, AND continue drinking at my current rate. I was sure that drinking would be harder to give up than anything else.

During the lull when all that was going through my mind, Oliver Jr. said the starting salary of the magazine job was \$30,000 a year and that the publisher would pay my round trip airfare to Chicago for a personal interview, and would pay all moving expenses if the publisher and I got along all right.

So I flew to Chicago, and I spent a day in the office, talking to the boss and being shown around and introduced to the staff, and I got along with the publisher just great; he really liked me, I could tell, and I came back home leaving the impression that I was eager to start my new duties and that I would probably call in a few days saying I'd given notice at the News and at Metro and would be ready to make the big move whenever the publisher said.

I'd lied.

I knew in my gut from the first look around the decrepit downtown Chicago building and the antiquated offices that I couldn't survive on that job for six months, even if I had been able to quit drinking and concentrate on the job. I was totally out of my element. (And anyway, \$30,000 a year, while it sounded impressive, was considerably less than I made from my combined teaching and newspaper jobs, and I wouldn't have the tax shelter in Chicago.) But it was three or four days after I got back home that I could call Oliver Jr. and say, "Sorry, I can't take that job after all."

It was not my finest moment. I have often shuddered to think how things would have gone if I'd been drunk enough to have given a definite "yes" to the job offer and if I'd been trapped into actually making the move to Chicago and if I'd had to try to figure out what a magazine Managing Editor does.

As I'd fantasized the situation (patterning my fantasy on the job performance some of the managing editors at the RMN that I'd known) this would be sort of a semi-retirement for me. I would come into the office about four days a week, wander around a while, meet with the staff, let them explain to me what they were doing, offer a few harmless suggestions, report occasionally to the publisher, spend a lot of time at the Press Club, and take long weekends to attend the plenitude of SF cons in the Midwest.

The reality of the job as actually described was different. I would have to come up with cover ideas; I would have to be able to convert feet and inches into metric; I would have to read all the material that went into the magazine and be responsible for its accuracy; I would be responsible for the overall appearance

of the publication and would help with the layout and graphics. I would work as long each week as it took to get the work done.

I couldn't have survived six weeks.

The time has come for me to throw this whole question (or tangle of questions) back to you. (I always get more satisfactory and comprehensive answers from you guys when I tackle one of these philosophic questions than I get from myself.)

What have been the key turning points in your life? What would your life have been like if you'd taken some path other than the one you did? How important were your own personal decisions in such matters, as compared to the casual decisions of other people?

What are we talking about here? Free will? Determinism? The Wheels of If? Alternate timelines? God's plan? All of the above? None? Be as far ranging and discursive as you feel like, of course, but do please let me you know what you think.

An actual book review

My review of the new Clive Barker book did appear in *Blood Review*, but there were a few unfortunate typos and one paragraph got a bit garbled. So I'm reprinting the whole thing here. The Great and Secret Show, by Clive Barker (Wm. Collins Sons, 698pp, \$12.95)

The first volume of Clive Barker's latest epic is, among other things, a pretty good ghost story. Genuine ghosts, I mean, the kind that rise from graveyards: savage, angry, ravaging ghosts, not the kind that just

say boo and try to scare you to death. These do you to death.

The book is also a good love story, and a story of transformations.

The only problem with the ghosts is that they seem a bit out of place, anachronistic, old fashioned, overly traditional amid the host of more original, more horrifying horrors crammed into this book.

Although, on reconsideration, perhaps the horrors aren't all that original after all. Maybe it's just

the names, the words--different names and words for the same old fears and nightmares that have haunted us forever.

Consider the Ferata, the indescribable transient evil creatures literally sweated out of people by Randolph Jaffe after he becomes the Jaff:

Ferato:- "a wonder, monster..."

But Ferata sounds more evil, more monstrous, more wondrous, more unknown than just "monster," doesn't it?

Same with the Lix, the ugly guardian snakes created by Kissooon, last of the Shoal, in his time-loop prison.

What a marvelous irony of name-choice, what a masterpiece of under-description are the Lix!

There's no such word as "lix" in my dictionary, but there's *lixivate*, meaning "to form into lye, to impregnate with salts from wood ashes..."

"...to impregnate..."

Clive Barker has a reputation for gory, graphic, total gross-out descriptions; but throughout "The Great and Secret Show" he exercises the utmost restraint. When the concept is revolting enough, there's no need for detailed descriptions.

Once we've been told that the Lix are created by Kissooon's semen being ejaculated into a pile of shit, and that Kissooon can achieve an erection only by allowing insects to swarm over his groin area ... do you really want the process spelled out? Don't you know enough about how the Lix look and smell? We're told enough about what they do, and that isn't pleasant either.

Precise word-choice, giving the right name to things, is a major key to Barker's writing power.

In the Sea of Quiddity, visited three times by every human individual during a lifetime (once at birth, once

during the first night of love, and once at death), there's the island of Ephemeris, on which takes place the Great and Secret Show.

Quiddity must be preserved; but the secret guardians, the Shoal, have all been murdered, except for Kissooon and Mary Muralles, trapped in a time loop, a stasis.

Look up some of those words: quiddity, ephemeris, shoal...

Look up Iad Uroboros while you're about it. You won't find it, but you've heard of the Worm Ouroboros, from E.R. Eddison or from Norse mythology, and that should be enough to suggest the menace from beyond Quiddity that threatens all of reality.

Throughout human history, the Shoal have established religions and cults, sects and secret societies as smoke screens to divert attention away from themselves, the select few, practitioners of the Art, so that only the most skilled, the purest, the most persevering and deserving may join their ranks.

But sometimes corruption creeps in. The unworthy find the way.

In the Dead Letter Office in Omaha, Randolph Jaffe, a misfit postal employee, comes across clues to the Art in scores of lost letters, and embarks on a quest for power. For the Art.

Eventually Jaffe and Richard Wesley Fletcher, an outcast scientist and drug addict, drink of the Nuncio (there's another word you'll want to look up) after first trying the elixer on an ape, which is transformed into Raul, Fletcher's devoted servant and companion, who becomes an important actor in this drama.

Jaffe and Fletcher are transformed into ... something

else--Jaffe into the Jaff, lover of darkness, thing of evil; Fletcher (who desires nothing more than to become the sky) into his implacable foe.

Locked in mortal and intimate combat, the two exhausted entities settle into a newborn lake near Palomo Grove, California. Four young women, ranging in age from 17 to 19, go swimming there in 1971 and emerge--transformed: into sluts, whose only aspiration for a time is to become pregnant, by any means possible, by any available male.

Families are disgraced, the town is scandalized. The League of Virgins becomes a community legend, a shared secret.

Children are born. The two beautiful twins, Jo-Beth and Tommy-Ray McGuire, are offspring of the Jaff.

Howard Ralph Katz is the son of Fletcher.

When Howie and Jo-Beth meet at the age of 18--and fall in love--the two fathers writhe in torment and renew their bloody feud. The Jaff breaks free and raises an army of Terata, ready, at last, to use the Art.

Tommy-Ray is a true son; he's the one who raises the ghosts from the graveyards, while transforming himself into the Death Boy.

Jo-Beth sides with Howie, who is reluctant to side with his own desperate father (transformed finally into light).

The other major characters in the story are Grillo, the scandal sheet reporter; his sort-of girlfriend Tesla, a screenwriter who also undergoes a major transformation; and the dead comedian Buddy Vance--and his pop art mansion.

The love between Jo-Beth and Howie is handled with tenderness and delicacy. Barker's treatment of the more

nature and complex relationship between Grillo and Tesla is even more impressive.

A ghost story, a love story, a story of transformations and unspeakable horrors, 'The Great and Secret Show' is, above all, a Clive Barker epic; and it's Barker at the height of his magical powers.



(Art by Rod Ford)

FANZINES RECEIVED IN EXCHANGE FOR DON-O-SAUR

This is still not a review column. It is just a list of zines I've received since the previous issue of DON-o-SAUR, with occasional comments and observations. What's happening? I thought fanzines were supposedly dying out. The evidence seems to indicate otherwise:

A&A #122 & 123 (June and July 1989 and I misnumbered 'em last issue as 17 and 18), Frederique and Francis Valery, French Space Academy, c/o Frederique Pinsard, 11 rue des Vignerons, 33800 Bordeaux, France. Attractive looking 6X8 1/2 fanzine French language fanzine.

A CASUAL CARTOON REIVEN #1 (\$1), Steven Ahlquist, 511 Warwick Ave., Warwick, RI 0288-8. Casually reviews a few animated cartoons, plus "The Whole Toon Catalog."

ALIENS ATE MY TOYOTA, Christopher Mills, P.O. Box 1245, Reseda, CA 91337. Four-page letter substitute from Chris. He's moving again.

BCSFazine #195, 196, 197. Monthly publication (5 1/2 X 8 1/2) of the British Columbia SF Association, P.O. Box 35577 Stn. E, Vancouver, B.C. V6M 4G9, Canada. Available for "the usual."

BRUZZFUZZEL NEWS #59 & 60. Baton Rouge SF League newsletter, Clay Fourrier, Editor, P.O. Box 14238, Baton Rouge, LA 70898-4238, 8 1/2 X 11. Published 6 times a year. The Usual.

CONVENTION LOG #55, R. Laurraine Tutihasi, 5876 Bowcroft Street, #4, Los Angeles, LA 90016-4910. Eight-page letter substitute, touching on cons, movies, universal laws, etc.

BARYON 43, Barry R. Hunter, P.O. Box 3314, Rome, GA 30164-3314. Ten pages of reviews (mostly books) from a personal perspective.

ERG 107, 108 (July & October '89); B.T. (Terry) Jeeves, 56 Red Scar Drive, Scarborough YO12 5RQ, England. 24-page 6X8 perzine with a fascinating variety of material, including provocative editorials, articles on weird but real aircraft, SF art, letters, reviews, etc. Terry is interested in trading ERG, but preferably not for other fanzines. Inquire.

FACTSHEET FIVE 31 & 32; Mike Gunderloy, 6 Arizona Ave., Rensselaer, NY 12144-4502. THE catalogue (well over 100 pages) of fanzines and small press publications--of all kinds. \$2 per copy or trade.

FILE 77 #81 & 82; Mike Glycer, 5828 Woodman Ave. #2, Van Nuys, CA 91401. Best fanzine of 1988 (1989 Hugo winner), edited by world's best fanwriter (Hugo winner in several years). This is the only real fan-oriented newszine there is, so you need it. 5 issues for \$5, or by arrangement.

FOSFAX #141, 141, 143, 144 (July-Oct '89); clubzine of the Falls of the Ohio SF Association (FOSFA); edited by Timothy Lane and Janice Moore, P.O. Box 37281, Louisville, KY 40233-7281; \$2 per issue, \$15 a year. How do these guys do it? 40 to 48 pages of club news, reviews and voluminous LoCs ~~ev-~~ ^{ery} month! How do they manage to NOT win a Hugo?

GENTLE WILLOW, Norma Lee Edwards, 220 Locust St., Reading, PA 19604; poetry and assorted prose pieces. She's not a bad "poetess" (her term, her spelling), but her abuse of commas is alarming.

GRAND CANYON MEMORIES (and additional pages from the diary of Harry Andrushak from May to September), P.O. Box 5309, Torrance, CA 90510-5309. Andy keeps us up to date in his purple prose (the last of the ditto masters) about his job, his vacations, his reading and his thinking.

THE INCOMPLETE GEOMETER (Winter 1989), Bill Bridget, 1022 N. Runyon Drive, Chattanooga, TN 37405. 8-page perzine featuring a sarcastic essay on sarcasm.

JOURNAL OF MIND POLLUTION, #28 & 29 (August and October 1989); Richard A. Dengrove, 2651 Arlington Drive #302, Alexandria, VA 22306, produces this very readable perzine in which he discusses such topics as flying saucers, Robert Anton Wilson and Petronius.

LAMARTIAN CHRONICLER, Susan Crites, 6109 Road HH .7, Lamar, CO 81052. Susan is one of the funniest writers fandom has ever had, but she publishes so seldom and distributes to such a limited readership that too few know her talents. Well, she IS a bit isolated. (Lamar Where??)

LAN'S LANTERN 30 and 31, George Laskowski, 55 Valley Way, Bloomfield Hills, MI 48013. Since it is obviously impossible for any one individual to produce a high-quality

146-page genzine in June and follow it in August by a 118-pager of equal worth, and still attend every con within a 1,500-mile radius of home and participate in a dozen or so apas, I don't know how to account for these.

OASFIS EVENT HORIZON #28 & 29; monthly publication of the Orlando (FL) Area SF Association, edited by Ray Herz, 905 W. Espanola Way, Melbourne, FL 32901. Club news, plus a generous serving of book, movie and fanzine reviews.

PIECES #25, Bruce Schneider, 1300 Army Navy Drive #807, Arlington, VA 22202. Normally when I see something that looks like a trip report or a travelogue, I manage to ignore it, and I tried to do the same with this but ended up reading the whole 20 pages and then forcing it on Carolyn so she could enjoy it too--which she did. It's about Bruce's sojourn in Japan, and it is very entertaining!

THE RELUCTANT FAMULUS #5 and 6, Thomas Sadler, 422 W. Maple Ave., Adrian, MI 49221. Tom seems to get just a little more ambitious and a little more knowledgeable about pubbing each issue--and it shows. Now, if he can improve the print quality just a bit, he'll have a truly attractive zine.

RENAISSANCE FAN #7 (August 1989), Rosalind Malin & Dick Pilz Jr., 2214 SE 53rd, Portland OR, 97215. This is an "amateur fanzine" with a professionally typeset look, gorgeous cover (by Roz) and hand-colored interior artwork. The theme this issue is carousels, carnivals, circuses and fairs.

SCAVENGER'S NEWSLETTER #67, Janet Fox, 519 Ellinwood, Osage City, KS 66523-1329. THE magazine for small press editors, writers and artists. Sample copy \$1.50. Subscription rates are \$10 a year bulk, \$14 first class.

SCIENCE FICTION RANDOMLY Vol. 2 No. 3, edited by "Hawk" and Steve Antczak, P.O. Box 12705, Gainesville, FL 32604-0705. 12-page parody issue includes "Those Who Walk Away From Omelets" by Liam Miller and "Star Trek: The Lost Season" by Steve Antczak, and other humor.

SHARK TACTICS #6, Mike Copley, 18 Athole Gardens, Hillhead, Glasgow G12 9BA, Scotland. Single sheet (8 1/2 x 11 1/2), printed on both sides) of satire on the state of British SF, featuring "The Jingopunk Manifesto" and "Clandestine Mutations."

SHIPYARD BLUES #1 and 2, John D. Owen, 4 Highfield Close, Newport Pagnell, Bucks, MK16 9AZ, England. Digest-size successor to Crystal Ship is John's attempt to "stir up a moribund British fanzine scene with a frequent zine which isn't wholly fannish..." Good writing and artwork.

THE SHUTTLE #53, 54 and 55 (Aug-Oct. 1989).

Official newzine of the South Florida SF Society, P.O. Box 70143, Fort Lauderdale, FL 33307-0143. Pretty much a typical clubzine, with occasional reviews and con reports.

WEBERWOMAN'S WREVENGE #34 & 34 (April, June 1989), Jean Weber, P.O. Box 244, Potts Point NSW 2011, Australia. Both of these 16-page issues are devoted largely to Jean's recent trip to the U.S. Lively and literate.

WARPI #68 (May-June '89). Official newsletter of New Zealand's National Association for Science Fiction, Carol Brandenburg, Editor, 119 Garlands Road, Christchurch 2, NZ. 28 pages of well written news, views and reviews, attractively printed.

THE WHOLE FANZINE CATALOG #29 (June '89), Brian Earl Brown, 11675 Beaconsfield, Detroit, MI 48224. Available for trade or \$2. First issue in two years is hand pocket size (4" X 6") and lists fanzines published in 1987 and '88).



(Art by Christian Holl)

Dono-locs

D. Claudia Thompson
708 S. Seventh
Laramie, WY 82070

What an interesting juxtaposition: Pavel's story of his grandfather, a founder of the Yugoslavian Communist Party, and your story of Johnny Koshak who fled from that regime; yet each man believed passionately only in what he thought was right and best for everyone.

I want to talk to Pavel and Berislav for a moment: don't judge Americans too harshly. No doubt we are arrogant and ignorant. We are human beings, no better and no worse than the common type of the animal. The cumulative accidents of history put America into a position of world leadership, and in time accidents of history will choose a new leader; but Americans are not wiser and better than other people and should not be judged by a tougher standard. Are there no arrogant or ignorant people in Yugoslavia?

Education. There are so many things I could say about education. My education, like everyone else's, was so deeply colored by outside events. I entered the first grade in 1960; I graduated from high school in 1972. During that time the country fought the Vietnam War. It was a time when authority was being increasingly challenged; and school administrators were preoccupied with their authority over their students. In grade school we had to say the pledge of allegiance with our hands over our hearts. In high school we attended mandatory pep rallies and screamed support for our football team as if it were our army going into battle. My older brother graduated in 1970 and had to face his chances with the draft.

Now let's get right down to it: patriotism and the free

world be damned! There was nothing on the line in Vietnam that was worth my brother's life to me. Anyone who thought that war was worth fighting was welcome to go, but they had no right to tell me what to do; and for all the rhetoric that was thrown away on it, national security was never at stake.

So I came out of high school rebellious, anti-authoritarian and generally mad. I didn't go to the prom, I didn't go to the graduation exercises, I have never been to a reunion. Also, I hate football, and I have no fond feelings for the flag. These two things are symbols of oppression to me. Sorry. That's just the way it is.

I seem to have gone off on a tangent here, talking about the social situation rather than about education; but all the turmoil taught me something. It taught me to think and reason and question and read. That's good. It also taught me some knee-jerk reactions to things (like flags and football) that are not good; but it was all part of my education.

Douglas Thompson
1233 Yucca St.
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I feel obligated to point out that I work at the Palo Verde nuclear project, not Palo Alto which is a city in northern California. Palo Alto is Spanish for "tall tree" which is inappropriate for the Arizona desert. Palo Verde means "green tree" which may seem inappropriate but the project is named after the Palo Verde tree which is a leafless shrublike tree which carries on photosynthesis in its green bark.

It occurs to me while typing this (I thought I should get some use out of my typewriter) that the most useful subjects I took in high school were typing and Spanish. I don't think the problem with the education system is so much with the sc-

them. In my years of attending school I'm not sure I met anyone who really cared about the material they were there to learn. Some (like me) just wanted to get the best grade possible. Others just wanted to pass so they could get their degree or diploma. Of course, anyone who can read doesn't need school to learn; there is all the information one could possibly want available at the public library. One could even learn a lot by watching TV. The best thing a school can do is instill the desire to learn more, but it seems this seldom happens. We need more teachers like Bruce who are really excited about the subjects they teach. I'm sure this must rub off on some of his students.

{I think my record is perfect: I made at least one mistake for each of the three kids. Doug works at Palo Verde, Bruce teaches at Mercyhurst (not Maryhurst), and Claudia is in the American Heritage Center at UW, which is not quite the same thing as the Library. At least I don't have to worry about my offspring becoming disillusioned about me. They know what to expect.}

Dr. Bruce E.R. Thompson
Mercyhurst College
Erie, PA 16546

I think I have an answer to the question: "What is an education for?" It is an answer I hit upon when I was teaching at the University of Denver, roughly five years ago. At that time the University of Denver was in the midst of a shakeup. The faculty saw it as part of their job to answer that question, so we could give a coherent response to students who were asking, "Why should I come here?" My answer wasn't very popular. It wasn't the kind that inspired students--and their parents--to gleefully reach for their checkbooks. But I have yet to be convinced that my answer is wrong, and I think mine makes better sense of the relevant facts than the usual answers.

One of the relevant facts is this: people don't really learn very much in school. This is not to say that school isn't important to education. It is, in the same way that having a litter box is important to owning a cat. But I think most people would admit that most of what they know wasn't learned in school. Schooling doesn't eliminate the need for on-the-job training. It isn't intended to.

I figured out how to use this fact to become a rather good student, in spite of hopelessly bad study skills and a mediocre intelligence. The principle was simply this: learn a subject first, then take a class in it.

I first discovered this principle in fifth grade when I developed an interest in Greek and Roman myths. I read every book I could find on the subject. I even went so far as to hunt up books outside my parents' collection. (I was convinced that my parents owned at least three books on any subject you care to name. On interesting subjects they could be counted on to own at least five.) Later, almost as an afterthought, I gave a class presentation on the subject. Naturally, the presentation was a success.

In college I took literature classes only when I had already read at least some of the books to be covered. The most memorable was the World Literature course in which we read Dante's *Inferno*. The other students hated it. I, on the other hand, had read the entire *Divine Comedy* the year before and was disappointed that we didn't have time for the *Paradisio*.

The point is that I didn't go to school to get an education. I went to school to cash in on the education which I already had (and had been acquiring along the way) for a degree. Of course there were exceptions. I was occasionally forced to take classes for which I was not prepared--Economics was one. And I always learned more from classes than I had known before. I don't wish to claim that people don't learn anything in school. But I do think that the things we most value knowing are precisely the things we learn on our own, outside of, and sometimes in spite of, school.

I used to think that learning a subject before taking a course was a subtle form of cheating. I don't think so any more. But my previous attitude was symptomatic of the generally accepted notion that an education is supposed to be for the benefit of students. How can a student benefit from a course if he already knows most of the material? But I no longer think that the generally accepted view is correct. The reason we have so much difficulty answering the question, "What is an education for?" is that we assume the answer must tell us how students benefit from an education. But this doesn't really matter, since education is not primarily for the benefit of students in case. Nor is it primarily for the benefit of teachers (as some of my colleagues think). Teachers are, after all, merely advanced students.

The college course that changed my view was, believe it or not, a required course in English grammar [at Metro State College in Denver], taught by Lonnie Williams. She taught (with the zeal of a convert) the new theory of grammar developed by Noam Chomsky. Chomsky's grammar was so different from classical grade-school grammar that there was virtually no comparison. Chomsky's grammar does not even recognize the existence of adjectives! It was clear to me that this new approach to grammar was correct so far as it went; but it was incomplete. People simply hadn't had time to work out all the details. There was work here to keep an army of scholars busy for a hundred years. There was so much to do that even a relatively young and inexperienced scholar could hope to make important contributions.

It was then that I realized--really realized--that human knowledge isn't finished up. And grammar was only one comparatively humble example. Thereafter, in every course I took, I found that there were exciting new breakthroughs to be made, if only scholars could find the time to work on them. I ceased to be interested in what was known. I only cared about what still remained to be discovered, and what I could do to assist in the discovery. The enormity of it boggled my imagination. I still feel lightheaded when I think about it. The fact is, I had

fallen in love with a goddess.

Students don't usually realize how much they contribute to the growth of human knowledge. As a scholar, all of my best ideas have come, in one way or another from my students. A student at Arapahoe Community College showed me that William Paley's proof for the existence of God is not invalid in the way most scholars think it is. (It is invalid, however.) Some day I shall write a paper on the subject. My course was probably the only philosophy course that student ever took. Students bring me ideas, in exchange for which I give them a grade. I sort through the ideas and share them with other students, who criticize them and offer further ideas. Eventually I publish the results. That, as I understand it, is how scholarship works, and how human knowledge grows.

So what is an education for? Education advances the growth of human knowledge. What do students get out of it? Not much. Mostly they get the opportunity to serve a goddess.

But, if my analysis is correct, why should we complain about the current state of American education? The answer is obvious: students today have less to contribute. They don't come to class prepared to offer ideas. They think it is my job to educate them.

P.S. I do know what I.N.R.I. stands for. I found out just the other day, by asking one of my students.

Mike Glicksohn
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As always, a fascinating issue. I'm not sure what the girl on the cover represents unless it's your way of telling us that punks are the dinosaurs of modern pop culture but it was quite striking nevertheless.

As a teacher I naturally found your essay on education of particular interest. As a fan with a notoriously bad memory I also found your early educational history both amazing (how

did you turn out so well?) and frustrating, since I literally have no recollections of my own formative years. I can remember the name of one teacher and the names of two students from my first six years of education in England. Beyond that I can recall being a good student (although I also remember walking to the front of the class to bend over a desk and receive a few swipes from the one teacher whose name I do remember) although I have no specific memories of actually learning to read, write or do arithmetic. I can recall one specific incident having to do with my upcoming departure for Canada and that is it. I have the very vaguest of ideas as to what the school buildings looked like but the actual process of being educated is almost a total blank for me. I don't even know where my early interest in maths and science was born although I know it was firmly in place by the time I was 11 and the family headed west. So your reminiscences were of great interest to me. Were I to attempt a similar essay I'd have trouble writing as many paragraphs as you wrote pages!

While I'd be the last to try to defend the American (or the Canadian) educational system against the systems of most other industrialized nations I also think it's easy to make things seem much worse than they really are by picking outrageous examples. About three years ago one of my senior home form students astounded me by reacting to a morning announcement with, "What's this 'apartheid' they keep going on about?" Now, this was a bright guy whose university engineering career has been quite successful but he really didn't know anything about that particular topic. The point is, before I could react, a dozen of his fellow math students took him to task for not following current events and started to complete his education. On average our students may not be as well-educated as, say, the Japanese but let's not take our worst cases and present them as average, eh? (And in partial reply to Pavel's anecdote about the young girl from Texas may I describe a painting that sits on display in one of the cases in my home room: it shows a figure (obviously me) reading a book underneath a tree from which a

very large ripe fruit is about to fall and in nice calligraphy the message reads IGNORANCE IS CURABLE. STUPID IS FOREVER. Admittedly anyone who doesn't know Freud, Hawkins, DaVinci or Pink Floyd is pretty damned ignorant but maybe that's just Texas for you?)

I applaud your desire to prove to yourself that you can master a foreign language (even though Canada is theoretically a bilingual country and I took five years of French I'd have trouble carrying on even the most haltingly rudimentary conversation in that language so I'm always a bit embarrassed by the English fluency of so many foreign fans) but it seems to me you could have made a better choice than Serbo-Croatian. (No offense, Pavel.) Why not learn a language that might actually be of some use to you, so the exercise has practical as well as intellectual significance? It'll be nice to one day loc one of Pavel's fanzines in his own language but surely mastering Spanish or even Russian would have made more sense?

{Or even Dutch, since I WILL be going to Holland for the WorldCon next year. Well, I'll get a Dutch phrase book before then.}

I'd say your son Doug summed up the purpose of education pretty well: education shows that you have the ability to understand and apply new ideas and concepts, to analyse and solve problems, and hence that you can be trained to do what you need to do. In theory, of course, education should prepare you to participate in a creative, useful and enjoyable way in the society you belong to while providing you with a framework from which to develop a way of both coping with the world and expanding your own capabilities and potential.

But if my students can at least learn how to learn I won't care whether they remember any of the derivative formulas or not.

Simon Hawke to the contrary, I frequently hear stories of intruders stopped in their tracks by armed householders.

Unfortunately it's usually the householders who get arrested. And while it's undoubtedly true that the whole problem of crime is a very complex one with no "simple" solutions, to argue against gun control on that basis strikes me as asinine. You might as well argue that since there's no cure for the common cold you shouldn't take any of the medicines that can at least alleviate some of the suffering until the cold runs its course. Gun control may be only a small step towards solving the problems of American society but it sure as hell is a reasonable step to take. (Good comments on the NRA. People who seriously believe any citizen has the right to own any kind of weapon seem to have absolutely no understanding of human nature.)

I fully agree with Roy Lavender that gun control by itself is likely to be ineffective. It must, of course, be coupled with proper treatment for those who use guns illegally. But this is an argument for reform of the current judicial system, not against gun control.

I too am surprised that governments haven't decriminalized certain drugs just for the profits to be gained by taxing them once they become legal (not to mention the enormous savings once money need not be spent combatting suppliers of illegal drugs.) I'd be damned surprised if there weren't detailed government plans for such contingencies already drawn up, just waiting for a sufficient change in popular opinion so they can be implemented.

The simplest solution to prison overcrowding, of course, is to bring back the death penalty. While I'd draw the line at going as far as Larry Niven did in one of his organlegger tales where the death penalty was applied to minor traffic offenses, I'd have no problem with putting murderers, rapists, drug dealers, child abusers and others of that ilk to death, but I know I'm in the minority on this one.

{Depends on where you live, I guess. Death penalty advocates constitute a huge majority in Florida, at least, which state implements its death

penalty more vigorously than anywhere else in the U.S.--and still has a high crime rate and overcrowded prisons.}

In a way, I suppose, the steady increase in crime can be looked on as being good for the economy: just imagine all the people who'll be employed building and staffing all those new prisons we're going to need.

Avedon is absolutely correct in her comments about the rights of women, of course, but let us not lose sight of the fact that there are a fairly large percentage of women out there who do make exceptions if you happen to be or look like Tom Selleck or Robert Redford. Or Rob Lowe. (I have no practical experience in this, you understand. But I read the papers, and not just the ones with the funny headlines and the pictures of Cher and Dolly Parton on the front.)

In his comments about crime, punishment et al Skel writes about "cerebral salvation." Now this is probably a typo by Don, which is a shame because it conjures up delightful images of widespread intellectual epiphanies resulting from perusal of DoS and its intriguing essays. On the other hand, perhaps Paul was scared of sounding too egotistical and decided to cut back on his use of "i"?

{Nope; 'twas indeed a fortuitous typo.}

Curt Phillips
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Your article on education is fascinating and is making me think a lot about the nature and quality of the schooling that I and my parents received. As you know I was born and raised in the same region that your parents were, Southwest Virginia. Your early schooling sounds a lot like what my parents went through in these parts in the '30s and '40s (except that their education was a lot more consistent since they stayed at the

same schools throughout) and quite a bit like the primary education that I received in this same area in the '60s. Cleveland Elementary School in Abingdon wasn't a one-room schoolhouse but was very much a backwoods school. Although at the time I was unaware of any shortcomings in what I was being taught it became apparent when I entered high school that I had not only missed out on a lot, but that I had actually been misdirected in some particulars. Believe it or not, I was 10 years old before I learned that the South did not, in fact, win the Civil War. Oh we certainly studied the Civil War before then, but somehow the surrender at Appomattox was glossed over. Even today I have trouble reconciling my mental images of those glorious heroes like Lee, Jackson and Moseby, and the great Southern victories at Bull Run, Fort Sumter and Chancellorsville, with the realities of Gettysburg and the scars of Reconstruction, which have never completely faded. On a much more practical level, just as you were shortchanged in mathematics in school, I somehow failed to learn all that I should have about spelling, as this letter will no doubt show. (The truth is, I'm quite sure that almost all of what I've learned about punctuation and grammar has come to me as a result of my being an insatiable ((I had to look up that word in the dictionary)) reader.)

Also, I have a vivid memory of being ridiculed by some of my teachers for my accent. I was often admonished that people out in the world would laugh at me for sounding like a hick unless I managed to improve. Actually, I think they used to tell me that I sounded stupid. Anyway, I applied myself and today I have an accent that sounds like I'm not from anywhere on this planet. My grandparents think I sound like I'm putting on airs, and my friends from other parts of the country think I was raised abroad. Whenever I chance to see one of my old teachers on the street or in the supermarket, I always make it a point to greet them with the thickest and most drawling Southern accent I can manage.

Still, high school managed to knock off the rough edges and taught me a few things, and two years of junior college gave me

the Associates Degree that I needed to land a minor engineering job. My real education in terms of what I use to perform my job has been learned mostly on the job. Somehow it never seemed to me that things should have been different. If I could have changed one thing about my years at that little country primary school, I think it would be that I should at least be made aware that the world was huge and that there was a limitless array of choices before me. Most of those choices were simply ignored as I grew up, damn it.

Nice illo on page 19. So that's where fanartists come from; Don C. Thompson raises them on his Colorado fan ranch!

The lettercol in 55 is... no, I already used "fascinating;" make it "engrossing." I particularly enjoyed Harry Bond's, Simon Hawke's, Harry Warner Jr.'s and Roy Lavender's letters. Best of the lettercol was Pavel Gregoric Jr.'s. I'm glad he wrote about his grandfather, who seems to have been a tremendous statesman. I've only lately begun to realize that because American education largely ignores the history and culture of Communist nations (at least from the early 20th century onwards) we've effectively lost out on what those countries have to contribute to the cumulative world knowledge. Pavel's letter is particularly valuable to me in that it helps to fill that gap.

Alexis A. Gilliland
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Begin with Pavel and his 16-year-old girl visitor. He has already demonstrated that he is a lot better educated than she is, and he then says "You've read the Bible, you're a Christian, you certainly know what INRI means, do you not?"

Well, of course she didn't, and her reply is: "No I don't. I'm stupid, you know. We are all stupid." Pondering the literal text and wondering whether Texans ever admit their own stupidity misses the point. She took the question as a put-

down, and her response is telling Pavel to get lost. He, enmeshed in textual analysis, wonders who "we" refers to. In context it means everybody but him.

So the theme of the issue is education? Almost as good a topic as anger, although anger is one of the Seven Deadly Sins, while education falls more under the Corrupt Practices Act. Anyway, education in the U.S. has several problems, some of them being related to the sclerosis of the institution itself (administrative bloat, teachers' unions) while some of them reflect the loss of values (lack of discipline, lack of manners, loss of the work ethic) in the society which education is supposed to serve.

Might there be other problems? Absolutely. Busing students around to achieve racial balance, for example. Here in Arlington it has stopped, because there are over 50 ethnic groups in the school system, and somebody asked why we were going to all this trouble to balance Blacks and not Thais, Vietnamese, Hmong, Cambodian, Chinese and Pakistanis as well. The local NAACP wasn't happy about losing busing, but they couldn't answer the question either.

So you have the country, which is rich, and the people who are encouraged by TV advertising to be self-indulgent. How can the schools counter the indoctrination children get from TV? They can't. How can working parents instill their children with their own sense of values? With great difficulty. You can't even stop the school boards from dubbing down the texts by the elimination of controversial material. Why? The basic reason is that the U.S. holds book learning in minimum high esteem. Fat, dumb and happy is the way we want to be.

You want to change the educational system, change society first; the schools will follow.

Which brings us to your question: What's an education for? It depends on who you ask, of course. For the Yugoslavs it is a matter of survival. For the British, it defines (or helps define) your class. The philistine Americans say "better jobs," or "more money," neither of which is as true as it used to be.

Naturally the Yugoslavs and British are doing better than the Americans. In this country you can find just about anything, but no consensus exists about sex education (partly because eating from the tree of knowledge empowers the eater) or anything else important. Probably the best answer is that an education is what the student makes of it.

A pity that so many people are incapable of learning from anything except direct experience.

The letter column is very interesting. Pavel's grandfather, dying in an auto accident at 95, was an extraordinary man, and perhaps a lucky one as well.

Cathy Howard,
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You hit one of my buttons with your discussion of education. It is a lot on my mind currently because I am going to school during the evenings and work my regular jobs days.

Yes, I am going to school so I can get a better job. Why is this type of education considered bad or not being done for the "right" reasons? Would poetry be "bad" if a person could get \$100 a word for it?

I have never heard a good explanation as to why the more abstract subjects should be more valued than the ones which can be used in everyday life.

English tends to sway back and forth between over the borderline of practical and abstract. (Lest this be thought sour apples, I received a B in both Eng. 101 and 102.) Several rules of grammar had changed since I graduated from high school. This was fine; I relearned them with a minimum of bitching. What bothered me was my 101 teacher's almost hysterical insistence that the current rules be looked upon and obeyed strictly as the ultimate pinnacle. I thought she was going to have a nervous breakdown when I suggested the rules would be changed again in another 20 years.

Literary criticism as taught by both my 101 and 102 teachers is the weirdest pile of garbage I've ever been exposed to. These two intelligent people subscribed wholeheartedly to the idea that the way to enjoy a story is to build long rambling conclusions out of one or two sentences. If a story has allusions (preferably classical ones) then it will be hailed as a masterpiece and it will never be noticed that the supposed story is lacking even a poor excuse for a plot.

It also bothers me that only certain classes count toward my degree. Why couldn't I take 'how to read and write music' and elementary piano, which I would like to learn, instead of music appreciation and so on?

I don't like having my ignorance of a subject automatically assumed. Education strikes me as being in the Big Business category. Things are not always done for the public's benefit but for profit.

Then we come to the people who think it's horrifying that students don't know one thing or another. The people who are doing the yelling have picked a question which relates to subjects they are personally interested in. It is doubtful these people could answer a question about subjects I've gone into out of personal curiosity. And why should everyone have tons of facts memorized when it is simpler and less time-consuming to look something up when the information is needed?

{I think most educators agree that the mere accumulation of facts is relatively unimportant; but tests seem necessary, and the easiest tests (to give) are those that measure information absorbed. I never grasped the principles of lit crit myself.}

Richard Freeman
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Having been given several degrees in education (with the proviso that I never actually teach), I think I can say that there is no way of discussing education even between consenting adults

(kids, on the other hand, often can & do talk about it--but that's because among educators, kids do not count).

So, instead, let's talk about food.

When I was young, I could go to a Hot Shoppe & have a real double cheesburger. People today have to eat Big Macs.

Some people do not believe in fast food and go to expensive restaurants. They serve awful food at awful high prices.

I'm told there are excellent places to eat--in Europe.

If one really wants to eat well, the only way to do it is--find someone who can cook & marry them.

Or learn how to cook yourself.

I hope this helps answer some of your questions. I don't know what education is for... but I do know who it is against.

Simon Nicholas Hawke
Denver recluse &
relentless writer

I swore I wasn't going to do this. I was going to gafiate completely, give up going to cons, refrain from reading fanzines, stay away from fannish activity and just concentrate on my writing, but nooo...I'm toastmastering MileHiCon again this year (and looking forward to it) and I've become addicted to your bloody zine. Here I am, running late on the last Time Wars book (I swear, this will be the last one!) and desperately trying to find the time to work on other projects and once again I'm dropping everything because the new Don-o-Saur has arrived. And as usual it's full of wonderful, thought-provoking stuff.

I don't want to turn this into a debate on gun control, but your reply to my support of the NRA (among other organizations whose causes I support) deserves a response. And it does tie in to some of the other issues that you've raised. Namely, freedom, education, crime, anger, etc. You said your main point of contention with the NRA is that it will not 'concede that hunters don't need or have any right to use AK-47s or

other kinds of assault weaponry." And then, in your response to Buck Coulson's loc, you mention that if drugs were decriminalized, the profit motive for gangs would disappear and crime would decline. You said that seemed so obvious, you were amazed that other people didn't see it. As it happens, I agree with you on that point, but I have also found that what seems "obvious" (from a practical, logical standpoint) largely depends on one's personal beliefs.

It seems obvious to me, for example, that gun control of any form simply will not solve the crime problem, succeeding only in taking the option of personal defense away from the law-abiding citizen. It also seems obvious to me that the founding fathers were not thinking of the right to bear arms applying only to a militia or to hunting. That guns should have a "sporting use" is something never referred to in the Constitution. And there were numerous court cases testing the right to bear arms from the early 1800s to the Civil War. In every one of those, the citizen's right to carry weapons on his person were upheld. Our first gun control law came about only after the Civil War, aimed at disarming former Confederates. Political agendas tend to influence interpretation.

While I have no interest in assault rifles whatsoever (I only like revolvers and the prize of my collection is a Colt single action Army, which appreciates in value faster than blue chip stock), I do recognize that they have a legitimate use, even from your point of view. Ranchers and farmers, for example, often use them as varmint rifles, for which purpose they are admirably suited, being small and portable, highly accurate, easy to pack and bring into action. There is no better weapon for defending stock against predators. And while most hunters do not use them, they can certainly be used for hunting. (George Will's comment in his column about slaughtering a deer with 50 rounds only shows his ignorance, typical of people with no experience in the outdoors. In most forms of hunting, it is only the first shot that counts, which is why many hunters use only a single shot rifle. I'll give you an AK-47 and watch you

try to hit a deer if you miss with the first shot and it runs. Good luck.) It is also an excellent weapon for personal defense for people who live in remote areas. My parents, for example, live in the Adirondacks and one day a gang of bikers decided to visit them. They saw the house from the road and thought it could be used for a party. My old man's a pretty nervy bastard and he discouraged them with a shotgun, but if shots had been traded he would have been empty after two shells. An assault weapon would have served him admirably. Yet all that is truly beside the point.

The point is one of freedom and of simple economics. I do not tell you what you can or cannot own, what you do or do not need or have a right to. In return, I expect the same courtesy. And the NRA's point is that if the state is allowed to rule on what a person has a right to own, then once they ban assault rifles, hunting rifles will be next, and then handguns. And there are many well-intentioned people, such as Handgun Control Inc., whose goal is to ban all firearms. The NRA will not "concede" on principle and I agree with their logic. Wherever there is a demand, there must arise an outlet of supply. That's an irrefutable law of economics and a simple fact of life. And it's significant that since importation of assault rifles was banned, the DEA has been seizing large shipments of assault weapons brought in by drug dealers, who have now been given a profitable new commodity to market illegally.

Assume, for a moment, that all firearms were banned. Would this reduce crime? Well, it might keep a kid from shooting his sister accidentally while playing with his father's gun, but so would responsible gun ownership. It wouldn't take guns out of the hands of criminals. I can show you how to make a .22 out of a block of wood, a car antenna, a rubber band, a small piece of metal and some electricians tape. It's called a "zip gun" and we made them to shoot cans and bottles with when we were kids. Making a gun is relatively easy. Anyone with a reasonably well set up machine shop could manufacture

firearms out of his garage or basement. And we'd have a brand new market for organized crime, exactly like drugs. With firearms, just as with drugs, we seem not to have learned the lesson taught by Prohibition.

Which leads into the question of building new prisons, which also ties in with education and the violence of our times. The overcrowding which has resulted in a need for new prisons is largely a function of two things--increased population density, especially in urban areas, and laws that lack popular support. Let's take the latter first. How much room would we have in our prisons if we decriminalized things like drugs, gambling and prostitution? I'm not saying that any of these things are "good," per se, merely that if there were no demand there would be no market. You really cannot legislate social change. Take smoking, for example. There are now laws banning smoking in certain public places, but the most effective means of reducing cigarette consumption in the public have been education and social pressure. Ditto, drugs. I grew up in an era when drugs were fashionable. That's changed to a large extent, but not as a result of legislation. We still had the same laws then, but our attitudes are different now. I, for one, would be happy to have some of my tax dollars go toward clinics where addicts could register to come in and receive their doses for free, rather than go out and rip somebody off to support their habit. It would be expensive, yes, but nowhere near as expensive as enforcing our current drug laws. (Or supporting the Contras, for that matter.)

The other factor is population density. The vast majority of our population now lives in cities. Increased population density has certain inevitable consequences, some motivated biologically. There was a recent experiment in which a colony of rats was provided with a closed environment in which they had plenty of food and water and no limit to their reproduction. But the environment and its resources were limited. As their population density grew and started to strain the limits of their environment, certain social changes were observed. The sexual

behavior of the males began to change. There was an increase in homosexuality. Among others, sexual behavior started to fall off entirely. They were very fit and healthy, but they spent most of their time grooming themselves. Females began to avoid the males and vice versa. Then violence increased exponentially, until it reached truly savage proportions and the rats were killing each other off. Nature, it seems, has built in certain genetic "triggers" in an effort to maintain a balance. As with lemmings, who, when their population density reaches a certain point, head out to sea and drown themselves. How does this apply to us?

Well, let's take a look. We've had a dramatic increase in homosexuality in recent years. Especially in dense, stress-filled, urban areas. (I am not homophobic, by the way, and make no judgments beyond purely observing the phenomenon.) We also seem to have had an increase in communication problems between men and women. Over and over, one reads in books and hears on TV about how an increasing number of men are showing a lack of sexual and emotional interest and consideration in their wives or partners. (And we certainly are spending a lot of time these days concerning ourselves with things like fitness and grooming, aren't we?) We (meaning males) seem to be growing increasingly insensitive to the rights and needs of women, both personally and politically. And we (as a society) are becoming increasingly concerned with violence, especially in our entertainment. Novels and films more and more deal with excessively graphic violence, frequently against women. And most of the violence in our society occurs in densely populated urban areas.

We're not recognizing the signs. What we need, from a purely Draconian perspective, is an epidemic or a war. Yet we are an enlightened species, or at least we like to think of ourselves that way, and we should be able to find more sensible solutions. Such as zero population growth and resource management. Your young Yugoslavian friend was right. We Americans, in particular, are an incredibly arrogant people.

We are woefully underecuated. The average European school-child knows more about our own history than we do, knows more about science and geography, math and philosophy and literature than the average American adult. Why is Fundamentalism so much more prevalent here than in Europe? Because we are so much more ignorant here. And ignorance breeds superstition and complacency. (Imagine a Christian being unaware that I.N.R.I. stands for Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews, in Latin! That says it all.) We're for-ever seeking simple solutions to complex questions. I'd make philosophy, world literature, science and sociology required subjects from grammar school on. Especially philosophy and literature, which teach children to think instead of be passively entertained by television. I'd teach creative writing from the moment they learn penmanship, to get their young imaginations working, because we desperately need imagination. The real sin is that dialogues such as are conducted in *Don-o-Saur* are not conducted in the schools. I, for one, would love to teach, but my 38 published novels do not impress the academe. I lack a graduate degree. And there lies the rub, as Shakespeare would say. What seems to matter in our culture are material symbols, not substance. And that's why the new generation is more concerned with making money than with making a difference. We only reap what we sow.

{Resisting the temptation to point out what I see as some gross over-generalizations in Simon's arguments (particularly the leap from rat experiments to anti-gun control), I'll have to agree with his assertion that "what seems 'obvious' (from a practical, logical standpoint) largely depends on one's personal beliefs." And I can't help adding that while he and I do not directly tell each other what we can or cannot possess, we are both forbidden, by the constraints of the society we both live in, to own live hand-grenades and many other forms of military ordnance, as well as a wide range of poisons and pollutants. Maybe we just disagree on the cutoff point?}

Tom Feller
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I must admit that I had to look up "I.N.R.I." in the dictionary even though I was confirmed in the United Church of Christ. It is a "liberal" Protestant sect and did not require the learning of Latin phrases.

Speaking of sects, Jerry Pournelle must have forgotten that Jimmy Swaggart was affiliated with the Assembly of God. There are probably some Baptists laughing as hard over his predicament as we secular humanists.

Your remarks on graduation requirements were very interesting. When I attended Ripon College, a small private liberal arts college in Wisconsin, from 1972 to 1976, the administration had already succeeded in reducing the foreign language and natural science requirements for graduation.

The official justification was that this allowed students more freedom to concentrate in areas of their choice. The real reason was that it allowed the administration to market the school more effectively.

They felt that students were more interested in a degree than in an education and that by adhering to rigorous graduation requirements they risked declining attendance.

This belief seems to be in agreement with your observations. They also were trying to phase out the more traditional liberal arts courses, e.g., Latin and Greek, in favor of more "relevant" subjects such as anthropology, sociology and political science. After I graduated, business administration was added as a major. It is now the most popular major.

It is my experience that businesses do not expect schools to train their employees. In my company, a hotel management company, we hire graduates in that field, but place them in a job called "management trainee." Only after they have gone through our own training program are they promoted to a management position.

I know of at least one internal audit department of a company in the restaurant business that will hire new CPAs and still put them through a six-month training course. I think it more likely that your later comment was true, i.e., that businesses find they have to teach fundamental verbal and analytic skills.

Clifton Ansbury
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Well, I didn't take Latin either and I've forgotten most of the German, French and Chinese I did take in school and the Castillian I learned in Spain, but I did know that there's no "J" in Latin and hence that Jesus of Nazareth was (in derision) King of the Jews. And I didn't know of Pink Floyd, but when I asked my grandson if it was a rock group he said yes. So if you don't know something, maybe you can know where to find out.

As to education:

"Cowing of Age in Samoa" was published 61 years ago. In the first sentence, Margaret Mead wrote: "During the last hundred years parents and teachers have ceased to take childhood and adolescence for granted. They have attempted to fit education to the needs of the child, rather than to press the child into an inflexible educational mould." I recommend the rest of that introductory passage, which suggests that she was living in a normal Western society of the last 2500 years. Plus new-fangled scientific pretensions.

Languages and arithmetic are rote-learning. So are date-based history and strict obedience. People can be trained to do them. In our schools it was seen that there was something there that didn't fit right, so the universities (Schools of Education) which replaced our normal schools concentrated not on content but on "theory of Education," which they called "method."

Ever since then there's been a constant demand for "reform of teaching" and of the educational system. But no three people

can agree on from what or to what. So it remains a mess because some want all students to be rote trained and some want a total self-demand system and most are somewhere between or 'way off track.

About the remarks about Claudia's "overqualifications:" Back in the '50s or early '60s, the Warehouseman's union here in the Eastbay was having trouble with a company named PABCO. The union sent out men from the hiring hall in strict rotation. But all the blacks sent to PABCO were sent back as unqualified. A most usual rejection was "no high school diploma." So finally they referred one who was a college graduate and with impressive recommendations from former employers.

Naturally he was returned as overqualified.

How does this fit Claudia? About 1933 or '34 I enrolled in Library School. The head of it (a man himself) called me in and pointed out that with my qualifications they couldn't keep me out, but that there were more applicants than places and that they'd have to turn down another girl. And there really weren't many jobs for men, after all, were there? Very soon after that and especially from 1945 to 1975 I noticed men coming into libraries and zooming right up to the top of the good-paying jobs with titles. Only in the last five years have I seen any real marked reversal. Maybe Claudia and I just suffer from poor timing.

As to what education is for, I do have ideas. Basic education should supply people with two capabilities: either to function as the kind of beginning employee which employers, or someone able to go on to a higher education.

At one time employers demanded a high school diploma. That's what the schools furnished and soon were wringing their hands that most of their dropouts were from among the best students. Meanwhile employers and testing services were wringing their hands for other reasons.

But if employers just demand degrees, that's what they'll get. Presumably Bechtel also asked for Douglas's transcript.

Higher education is 1) to supply such transcripts or deg-

rees as required, and also 2) to enhance one's understanding, appreciation and hence enjoyment of the universe and of the life which is one's own particular share of that universe. This does not work for everyone, but it did for me.

Buck Coulson
2677W 500N
Hartford City IN 47318

I think the difference in language study between U.S. and European students has more to do with geography than anything else.

What percentage of Americans ever need to know a foreign language? The sheer size of this country--and Canada to the north--means that most people will never spend a day in a country where English isn't the major language. And if they do tour Europe, it's quite possible to do that without learning any new languages. English is currently the international language. It may well be useful to learn other languages, but it's not necessary. People in Yugoslavia need different languages just to converse with people in another part of the same country. I wanted to learn Spanish when I was in school, but it wasn't taught until after I graduated. Of course, I could learn it now, but I don't see a practical purpose for it and I'll never get around to doing it. (If I'd learned it in school, I planned to go down to South America and make my fortune. Somehow, I never got around to it.)

I don't doubt that the Yugoslavs are better at other studies as well; the U.S. fell apart when a) a strenuous effort was made to get every child in school instead of letting slum kids go to hell in their own way, and b) the concept of "teaching the whole child" hit grade schools. After my time, thank God. Schools weren't able to cope with the influx of students without middle-class attitudes, and the emphasis on not hurting anyone's feelings took care of attempts to pound knowledge into reluctant little heads. So anyone whose parents could afford it could get a college degree, whether they learned to read and write along the way or not.

I had a school that was in between yours. Small community,

with teachers who had mostly gone to the school themselves, got their teaching degrees, and come home to teach. Most of them were mediocre-to-good teachers, though in my case it didn't matter much; I had my parents on my back. From first grade on, I was expected to get straight A's. A "B" caused comment; anything lower meant a long discussion and my father telling me to get to work. I was also "sickly," largely due to allergies; one year I missed 41½ days out of a 160-day school year. But I damnwell got mostly "A" grades and a few B's; I might be unable to breathe well enough to go to school, but I could lie there and study. (Not that I had to, most of the time; I was usually well ahead of the class anyway and could miss a week or so without any problems.) To make education work, you have to convince the parents to back it, instead of demanding exceptions.

At that, I have to admit that I learned nearly all my history and geography outside of school, because (the third problem with American schools) the school texts in those subjects have been incredibly dull ever since the 1930s and probably long before then. I learned geography from my stamp collecting and history because I discovered that historical novels (initially those by Kenneth Roberts) were more fun than any other reading at somewhere around age 8, and later transferred my affections to straight non-textbook history books. I developed the ability to remember exactly what the schoolbooks said until examinations and then forget it--anyway, my outside reading had shown that the approved school histories weren't always correct.

I did take a lot of science in high school because the best teacher in the school was the science teacher; I liked him and took as many of his classes as I could. (One of the results of this was to be reduced to smothered laughter by the end of the first SF movie, when I recognized the depiction of the "cloud" as a textbook illustration of a vagina. I puzzled a lot of fans by commenting on what a dirty movie SF was...)

I never went to college, but I did keep on reading. Which

is, of course, additional education; it's not absolutely necessary to go to school in order to be educated.

What's school for? Well, on one level, it is useful for getting a job, and the TV is full of people saying that future jobs will require more education than present ones do. This may well be its major utility, now and in the future. (Some years ago, I was promoted from draftsman and did five years of technical writing and illustrating; I was the entire technical writing department for one Honeywell factory. When that factory closed and I was offered a transfer to Chicago with no extra pay, I looked around for another job. Not without a college degree in English; five years experience didn't mean shit. So I went back to drafting at Overhead Door and got promoted to door design, which isn't a transferrable skill, and now most places do their drafting on computers and my skills are outdated.) Initially, when most jobs were learned from one's father or through the apprentice system, education was for obtaining a clearer outlook on state, national and world affairs, knowing how to participate in a rational discussion, and so on. I'm not sure present-day schooling is worth much for that; outside reading does just as well. But it may well accustom the mind to rational thinking, at least in some cases. And then, a university degree looks so well on one's printed stationery...

I'm with Hawke on firearms, except he should have put quotes around "assault rifles" as well. A true assault rifle has full automatic capability, and such guns have been essentially banned in this country since 1935. The so-called "assault rifles" being written about now are strictly semi-automatic guns that merely look like the real thing. (The difference, for those uneducated readers, is that a fully automatic weapon will keep shooting as long as one holds the trigger back, until it's empty. A semi-automatic fires only when the trigger is pulled, one shot per pull. It neither "sprays" bullets nor fires them in a "stream," as some newspaper writers have said.)

Sure, Howard, hanging was the usual method in those days. But my grandfather was always very progressive.

Note to D'Annassa: cynicism and toleration are two different things. I don't think all that many fans would call me tolerant--I know you wouldn't, Don. I've done my part for the National Rifle Association (anyone who doesn't think gun owners are oppressed, think again), NAACP, Sharecropper's Fund, National Poverty Law Center, National Wildlife Association, various Indian charities, the local Humane Society, written letters to newspapers, etc. Only difference is that I'm not surprised and therefore don't drop out when nothing gets done.

P.S. Education test. Identify the people on the postage stamps on this letter, and explain what they did that was important enough to get them on a stamp.

(The letter was sent with two 7-cent stamps bearing the name and picture of Abraham Baldwin Baldwin; and an 11-cent stamp with the name and picture of Alden Partridge. I had to look 'em up-- but I knew where to look.)

Roy Lavender
2707 E. 17th St.
Long Beach, CA 90804

Some time back we took the flash pan off of our rifles. A little later, we put caps on the back end of the cartridge and our rifles no longer singed our eyebrows. However, until recently, we stuck to having that foot of wood between our eyebrows and the fire.

However, if you look closely, you will note that all popular hunting rifles are really military actions dressed up.

The media made "assault weapon" a dirty word, with complete disregard to little details like the difference between auto-loading and full automatic.

I agree it would be nice if our weapons were only for sport, but don't ever forget the sight of the students in China, standing with sticks in hand against tanks. That is

what the anti-gun crowd are heading for, whether that is their intention or not. There is always a would-be dictator waiting in the wings. Or do you have complete trust in your politicians?

Why would legalizing drugs be any different than legalizing alcohol? You notice how repealing Prohibition solved that one.

What I've been pushing in letters to editors, senators, representatives, etc., is, instead of building more prisons, go the cheap way and fence in a few thousand acres of not otherwise useful government land with at least three rows of concertina wire or razor ribbon.

Install the same facilities that are available to basic trainees on maneuvers. That way no one can claim "cruel and inhumane treatment." Heh, heh. After all, we don't mistreat our draftees, do we?

Install the drug users, street peddlers, distributors and importers. Reserve the prisons with air conditioned cells and TV for the murderers, rapists and child molesters too stupid to plea bargain their way back onto the streets.

Perhaps we should put a line of fence between the users and the sellers. A thin one.

{I find myself in disagreement with Roy on almost every point in his letter this time. I don't even agree that hunting is a 'sport.' Give the deer a means to shoot back; then I might. No, I don't trust politicians, but I don't think armed citizens can stop any would-be dictator who has the support of the military; and I suspect the Chinese students would have fared even worse if some of them had been armed. The illegal status of drugs accomplishes exactly the same thing that Prohibition did with liquor in the '20s--makes the traffic profitable for gangsters and leaves ordinary citizens caught in the crossfire between cops and crooks. There are no quick fixes, and concentration camps won't provide one.}

Howard DeVore
4705 Weddel St.
Dearborn, MI 48125

I noted the letter from Buck Coulson regarding his trip to the 1953 Midwestcon and their being turned away from the hotel because they had a black woman in the group. Presumably this would have been Beatly's on the Bayou as we called it then. I recall the incident and there was some talk about it at the time. It has occurred to me that Mrs. Beatly (to use the proper name) may have thought that Buck and the lady were a "mixed couple." Certainly she would have refused entrance to anyone she found objectionable. Certainly she refused to rent a room to Riva Smiley (white) of Detroit for no specific reason. Riva had a few nervous habits and was refused so she stayed down the road and walked up to Beatly's.

Each time she saw her, Mrs. Beatly threw her out and she would sneak back an hour later.

However I'm not sure the lady [with Buck] was refused simply because she was black. I'm almost certain that was the year that Randall Garrett persuaded a male black fan to attend and he spent the weekend there, because he rode back to Detroit with Martin Alger and myself. We invited him to attend local club meetings but he never showed up.

The Misfits had meetings from 1947 till the early '70s, but I can't recall that we ever had a black fan present; certainly there was no policy about it. The Cincinnati Fantasy Group acquired a black fan, Frank Johnson, about 25 years ago when he was perhaps 15 and I can't recall that they ever had another one. No one has told Frank that he's different and I guess he still doesn't know.

Interesting comments on prisons, etc. Tonight's newspaper mentions someone in prison for attempted rape who has won a lottery prize of a quarter million or so...and the victim is suing him for the entire amount. She says she will use it to educate people on the subject of rape etc., whereas he says he wants to spend the money on psychological training so he won't be tempted again.

It does seem a shame to spend millions building new prisons for dope dealers when a good rope can be bought for \$20 and used over and over.

Actually my feelings on prisons are sorta mixed. In general I feel they got themselves in there and now it's their problem. Judy Lynn Del Rey put me in touch with a prisoner some 20 years ago and then I got him a sub to Buck's Yandro. Because of this he met a woman involved in prison reform and they got married. He got weekend passes, and I suppose Buck and I could claim to be Godfather to their son.

She pointed out once that the public hates weekend passes, early parole, etc., because some prisoners have committed more crimes while on parole, but that prison has no effect on their character and they would be released eventually anyway. It is her theory that a prisoner does not mature after he enters prison, that her husband was 18 when he went in and 20 years later he still thought as one who was 18. The last I heard she had given up hope that he would be released or change and she was divorcing him. I know only that it was a major crime, with much publicity and I suspect he is still in prison and must be almost 45 by this time.

John Thiel
30 N. 19th St.
Lafayette, IN 47904

I can't tell you how commendatory the print job on *Don-o-Saur* 55 was. It made reading pleasurable; and moreover, as you seem to be finishing much of your personal recounting, I see fannish elements creeping back that looked sort of subdued for awhile. Not that I'm not reading along with your writing, and if the question you ended with is the focus of your invitation to comment, you really came up with a poser.

I consider education an intermediary in the course of progress toward a proper consideration of the past. Of course there are laggards and speeders in this--it isn't kept as uniform as its machinery of function.

So you see I'd consider talk about whether an education was

successful as limited in its applicability.

I see in Roy Lavender's letter that Martin Fleishman is a top rated scientist. It looked like Lavender had seen him at LASFS. SF fan of the '50s Marty Fleishman happened to be an expert at experiment duplication and I wonder if it is the same one? You see, I am always looking around for old-time fans, and that's why I like it when you talk about fans in your writing or letter column. Thanks for sustaining my interest for another issue.

Sheryl Birkhead
23629 Woodfield Road
Gaithersburg, MD 20882

The local news yesterday said that six out of ten 17-year-olds can't figure change due after buying a sandwich and Coke. The county I live in has functional reading and math exams which must be passed at various levels to be promoted. I actually saw parts of some of them and thought the level of expectation was more than a trifle high. I mean those questions were NOT easy. One part of the math exam involved map reading and, to my mind, the map was not all that clear to start with.

I do not know I.N.R.I. and so far no one else I've asked knows. I was "directed" to ask a Catholic or an Episcopalian. So far none found.

(Later): Found I.N.R.I. in the back of an OLD dictionary--still didn't give an explanation, just a translation which wasn't at all satisfactory, but I FOUND it.

I also had a strep infection that went bad, but instead of rheumatic fever (which they kept checking for) I developed chorea ("St. Vitus Dance") and for several years after that had frequent checks on heart function. I was kept out of phys. ed. that year (seventh grade), which didn't upset me in the least.

(As an aside - did you realize that the second dino [of

Sheryl's artwork that appeared in the letter column of issue 55] was upside down?)

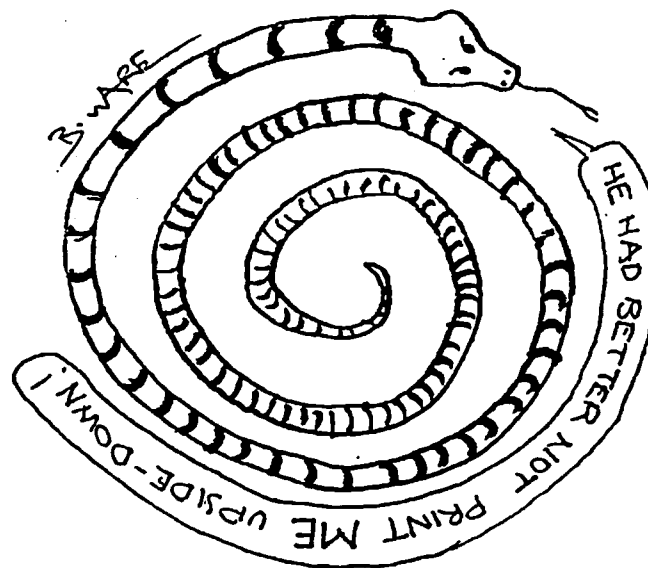
{Sure I did--after a large number of people pointed it out. Just confirms what Carolyn has said about me so many times: that my sense of direction is so bad I can't tell up from down.}

B. Ware
1233 Surry Place
Cleburne, TX 76031

Thanks for DoS 55. You have an impressive readership. I'm especially intrigued by your foreign contacts/alien encounters.

Your comments about the educational/intellectual level of foreign youth is right on.

I thought you could use & need more art, even though Sheryl's was inverted. Here's some stuff I hope you can use.



Garth Spencer
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It's one thing to hear one of the perennial shibboleths, like American-pupils-are-too-ignorant-to-pound-sand. We've all been ignoring stuff like that most of our lives. (Well, I have.) It's quite another thing to hear you confirm it, on the basis of first-hand experience.

If in fact Americans, specifically are more ignorant on average than other people, what brought it on? I've been thinking on it and come up with the same factors that must apply everywhere. When it comes to knowledge of anything outside of the continental United States, I imagine the sheer size of the country and the population has some consequences. Perceptually, Americans live in their own world of experience; how many see any world outside, let alone any need to experience anything more or anything else?

Many of my correspondents live in the United States, and regularly step outside (perceptually or literally). I get the distinct impression that the students you describe were never exposed to anything outside this perceptual America--or, perhaps more crucially, to any reason why it should be important to them.

One of the consequences of this perceptual America is the implication that nothing outside it is important, or indeed that there is nothing outside. The suggestion is chronic and tire-sore on this side of the border...but that is a whole 'nother subject.

In any time or place, in the kind of educational system we're used to, primary and secondary students resist education, resist passively any message that there is something they have to learn. I suspect the great mass of adults reinforce this, with a subliminal I-don't-need-to-know-any-more message. But in a country that can afford enough self-absorp-

tion, which is almost a world in itself, doesn't ignorance get a lot more reinforcement?

The weakness of the argument I'm making is that previous generations, with less general high school education, have had more general knowledge--and respect for it. So maybe the matter at hand isn't geographical, but generational.

What do you think?

{Me? Damn if I know. Could be a combination of size and increased complacency and national arrogance stemming from the U.S.'s increased role as a world power following World War II. I don't have the necessary statistics to make adequate impressions, but I get the impression that students in other big countries, such as China and the Soviet Union, have become increasingly knowledgeable about the rest of the world as their own countries have gained in world stature. So where does that leave us?}

Harry Andruschak
P.O. Box 5309
Torrance, CA 90510-5309

I am attending a two-week school at the Technical Training Center of the U.S. Postal Service in Norman, Oklahoma. Want to know how bad it is here? This is the hometown of the University of Oklahoma. A lot of students were unhappy when the local movie theaters refused to screen THE LAST TEMPTATION OF CHRIST last year. Bible Belt, remember? So they decided to use the funds and facilities of the University Student Union to show the film for three days next month. The University Board of Regents stepped in and banned the screening. Period. To hell with academic freedom, First Amendment and so on. The students are upset. Some of the faculty are upset. However, many alumni have stated that they will withdraw financial support if the film is shown. So there.

I do not currently speak a foreign language. This has not been from lack of effort or opportunity. My earliest memories of school are from age 12, when I was at Slade Green County Secondary School in England. I remember that I was supposed to try and learn French. I was more interested in reading SF and playing chess. On 4 October, 1957, I had my 13th birthday. Yes, that was the day the Russians launched Sputnik I.

I remember nothing about French today. Nothing. But after I left England in 1958, I didn't study French in U.S. schools. Use it or lose it. OK, so I arrived in Detroit in August 1958 and after a couple of interviews I was considered by the Detroit teachers to be one or two years ahead of the average U.S. school kid of my age. So I was assigned to Cass Technical High School, which is where all the above average students were assigned. Nowadays, I believe Cass Technical would be called a "magnet school."

Now this was just after Sputnik, remember. Lots and lots of money was flowing into the Detroit school system for science education. I rode the wave of money. Biology, chemistry, physics, mathematics and a wide variety of humanities. And this included two years of German. But I was never really any good at the German language, and once I left high school I never had an opportunity to use it. I lost it.

Lack of money prevented me from going to college. It did not prevent me from joining the U.S. Navy. I took the usual battery of tests, and was rated as genius. I was assigned as an Electronics Technician. Shortly after that the best and brightest of the Electronics Technicians were given a new rating--Data Systems Technicians, assigned to maintain digital computers on board ships. And Data Systems Technicians got \$150 extra pay a month.

Single, with money in my pocket, and assigned to places like San Francisco and London, I took no further educational courses. The name of the game was alcohol and sex. Especially alcohol. And more alcohol. And...

When I sobered up at age 39, in the year 1984, I was ob-

begin four years of study at a theatre conservatory.

What is an education for? I grappled with this question myself as I went about selecting my college and beginning my career there. The work I do here will be rewarded with a Bachelor of Fine Arts degree from the university with which the school is affiliated. In order to be eligible for the degree, the university almost apologetically requires me to take a few "real" academic courses.

The truth is that the ideal of the well-rounded, intellectually versatile individual seems to have been reduced to a viewbook cliché--a turn of events that discourages this admirer of the Renaissance man.

There is a twisted attitude about the benefits of an education that has become very common, and it may be sired in the college applications process. One of the chief reasons I loathed prep school was my observation that, through a combination of parental and scholastic pressures, the children tend to focus on their transcripts, and worry only about getting into a college that will please their families and future employers. The dominant procedures of study are memorization and plagiarism: tactics my private school denounced, but never effectively counselled against.

An eminently educated man of my acquaintance whose opinion I greatly respect used to advise his students, "Take care of the learning, and the grades will take care of themselves." (He has, by the way, retired from teaching since.) The age when that axiom was self-evident has recently been eclipsed by one in which standardized tests, not to mention the curricula of many private schools, are focused almost exclusively on the individual's ability to take tests. Intellectual development is an option which one may pursue if time permits. More often than not, students don't.

The twist is a subtle one: young people are focusing on what an education can get them, rather than what it can do for them.

After some debate, I have decided not to scream into the holes in Mr. Hawke's offhand arguments against gun control.

Suffice it to say, this is one gun-owner who does not have a high opinion of that insensitive empire known as the NRA. Don-o-Saur is not looking for that debate right now.

Terry Jeeves
56 Red Scar Drive
Scarborough YO12 5RQ
England

Your accounts of varying types of education brought me up against one snag in equating it with our system over here. Americans have grades, and one travels up them. What I don't understand is what age they correspond to, and how many are there? Does grade 1 start at age 5 (as education generally does in the UK) or at a higher or lower age? Here the range is 5 to 16 years at State School ... but pupils can stay on for further qualifications or going to college.

[Communication is a problem at best, isn't it? The simplest concepts can be the source of dark mystery and confusion because of differences in background of the communicators. OK. In some places in the U.S., kids start pre-school or kindergarten at age 5 or earlier. First grade is for those aged 6 or 7 (depending on when the birthday falls). Grades 1-6 are primary school. Grades 7-9 are middle school or junior high (it was grades 7 and 8 when I was a kid, but that was a while ago). High school is grades 10-12. The term "secondary school" is also used to refer to grades 7-12 in some places. Most students graduate from high school at age 17 or 18. Bachelor's degrees result from four years of college. Master's require at least one more year, plus Thesis. Doctor's degrees can take forever.]

Your most vital question (which I have never seen answered by educationists or anyone in authority, is "What IS an educa-

solete. I had hung onto my job at JPL by the skin of my teeth. But Challenger killed seven astronauts and the NASA Planetary Exploration Program at JPL. Massive layoffs included me. I was unemployed for one whole year. My lack of any significant education in the previous 20 years was a handicap. So was being over the age of 40. I wound up at the Post Office simply because nobody else wanted me.

The future is not rosy. Maybe if I could find the money and time, I might go back to college. But could I find the motivation? Would time and money spent going to college and getting a degree translate into a better paying job when over age 50?

You already know the answer. Last April I spent \$2,000 for a wonderful three-week vacation at the Grand Canyon. Next year, if possible, I would like to spend five weeks in Africa, at a cost of \$3,500. In between times I spend a lot of time in the wilderness, hiking on my own or with the Sierra Club. I have learned a lot about the history of the California wilderness areas that I hike in. I have learned a lot about the local ecology. I am learning a lot of new skills. But this was all for pleasure.

Going on to another topic, you state on page 23 that if drugs were decriminalized, the crime rate might decline. I think that depends on what you mean by "decriminalized." Should that mean that "crack," heroin, cocaine and all the rest be as available as alcohol? That is about the only situation that might work. On the other hand, how many more burnt-out addicts will you have that will wander the streets? Should we feed and house them, and if so, at what cost?

I think about this a lot lately, since the subject of the Los Angeles winos has been in the papers lately. After all, a few small changes in circumstances and I could have been one of those LA Skid Row winos. Anyhow, Gallo, after being subjected to a lot of pressure, is going along with the concept of banning fortified wines like Thunderbird from skid row stores.

(And this should make you laugh if nothing else I have ever written has: The newspapers reported that a lot of money was

spent on a study as to why the beverage of choice of the skid-row alcoholic was fortified wines. After spending thousands and thousands of dollars on this study, they concluded that these wines gave more alcohol for the money than anything else on the market. Jesus, I could have told them that. So could most of Alcoholics Anonymous. I am sure lots of those skid row winos told them that early on. Where is Senator Proxmire and his Golden Fleece Award when we need him?

Given our track record on the way we treat, or do not treat, terminal alcoholics, what would you suggest we do with the large increase of terminal addicts that will result if all drugs are legalized? Where will the money come from? Right now, most of the addicts who want treatment cannot get it. No facilities, no money. And let us be honest, Alcoholics Anonymous, Narcotics Anonymous and all the other 12-step groups have a poor record for long term recovery anyway...

{The money should be the easy part: it would come from the licensing fee for manufacturers and dealers and the 90 percent tax on the product. No matter how you look at it, legalization and treatment can scarcely cost more than is being spent now on futile attempts to wipe out the drug scourge. Some alcoholic beverages, such as absinthe, are effectively outlawed now. The deadliest of the drugs, such as crack, could be similarly restricted (and would be less in demand if safer drugs were available. Simple quality control should cut down on the number of deaths. The poor record of recovery programs is indisputable, but at least we alcoholics have freedom of choice.)}

Algernon S. Stewart
910 W. Belden #216
Chicago, IL 60614

I suppose the person whose name appears at the top of this page must seem a complete stranger. But no, such is not quite the case; this is, or was, Dave D'Annassa. I have had my name changed for reasons I won't bore you with, and moved to Chicagoland to

tion for?" Suggest it is to fit people to do a job and earn their living, and howls of protest arise. All you ever get are generalities: "To lead a fuller life," "ready to take one's place in society," "to help one develop their potential"... but NEVER what the aim really is, or what should be taught as basic in getting there. I taught Secondary School (12-16) for 32 years and never found a satisfying answer.

Query: Anyone out there interested in trading paperbacks and hardcovers published over here for those published in the States?

{Yeah, I am, even if no one else is.}

Pavel Gregorić Jr.
Tuskanac 22
41000 Zagreb, Yugoslavia

I feel I owe a growling excuse to the readers for certain parts of my letter in DoS 55. I said the USA was the best war-equipped country in the world. After consulting numerous books and brooding over the question "is the United States militarily superior to the USSR," I faced another question: "Has it ever been?"

The Russians have a proved edge over Americans in the quantity of weapons, that's for sure. Americans like to claim they're qualitatively ahead, but unfortunately the statement about quantity can be and is proved, whereas that about quality is much less provable. I found some data on the Soviet superiority in multiple-warhead missiles, submarines, ships and fighters. To tell you the truth, I've seen MiG-29 fighters in the air and can assure you its performance equals or exceeds McDonnell Douglas F-15 Eagles or F/A-18 Hornets.

However, it is well known that the best of the Russian scientists are deeply involved in their military effort, unlike the American scientific elite. Furthermore, Russian military expenditures are far greater than American, and what's the most terrifying - the Soviets do not talk about everything they are

doing. There is an area in which the U.S. has a military advantage - electronics, particularly computers. American military devices of all kinds are generally much more sophisticated.

But what good of it? The Russians can over-kill Americans 17 times, while Americans can do it "only" 12 times... This is nonsense! Children do not talk like that any more.

We must be pacifists and optimists. I wish nobody had any military advantage... Wouldn't it be better to use that money instead of for military purposes, in feeding the hungry children of Africa and Asia, or in peaceful space researches and general development of science. It's an anguishing burden to know that 40,000 kids below the age of 6 throughout the world, die of hunger or preventable deaths - DAILY. And only one "Pershing" or SS-21 could save their life...

This is one of the most disputable subjects than can be incited. Since you are the citizens of one of the parties I have been mentioning, I'd like to hear your opinions.

{It's hard to be optimistic in the face of governmental and bureaucratic stupidity and intransigence; of course it makes more sense to spend money saving lives than in preparing to destroy them; but military leaders have their own priorities, and they're in charge.}

Ann Greenberg
1602 E. 18th St.
Brooklyn NY 11230

I never enjoyed school although I was a National Merit Scholar and was in honor classes in high school and frequently on the Dean's List in college. I hated college so much that it took me 12 years to meander through, via four schools & a lot of time off doing other things. I occasionally encounter prejudice because of this. A recent example came when my boss, a Princeton grad, found me reading *The Wall Street Journal*. "Why are you reading that?!" he said. This from someone who when he was sick for 10 days read *Newsweek* and one book!

I dislike school, not learning or research & subscribe to approximately 50 publications. I go to two different libraries each week, reading about five books a week (I read very fast). Because I had a rough time enduring school, however, he has no respect whatsoever for my brain. It doesn't matter that I solve all the computer problems in the office. If I couldn't get thorough college in four years, I'm a loser.

I've known other people over the years who took their time through school. They haven't been the most successful at moving through the corporate ranks, but they were usually more intense in their interests than others. These are people who allowed & even welcomed the outside world impinging on "study time" & other such nonsense.

Remember the "grinds" of your high school, the ones that did nothing but study? These are the people who grow up to hate books, not people like me who had to learn everything useful at the library. I guess what I'm saying is that this aspect of

education is even more alarming than the system's lack of ability to teach the slower children or raise the general level of mediocrity. One of the best examples I saw of this was during a recent trip to Europe. The newsstands were huge & packed with special interest magazines. In the U.S., few people develop an interest in anything beyond TV. Who needs 15 magazines for amateur pilots and flight buffs? Just turn on the remote! Who needs real news analysis? Read *USA Today* & *Time*!

Also Heard From:

Ruth Berman, Bill Bridget, Ferry Broome, Scott Gray, Berislav Pinjuh, Brad Sinor, Alan J. Sullivan, David Thayer, Charles Thompson Jr. R. Laurraine Tutihasi, Michael W. Waite, Jean Weber.



(Art by Brian Cooper)

The
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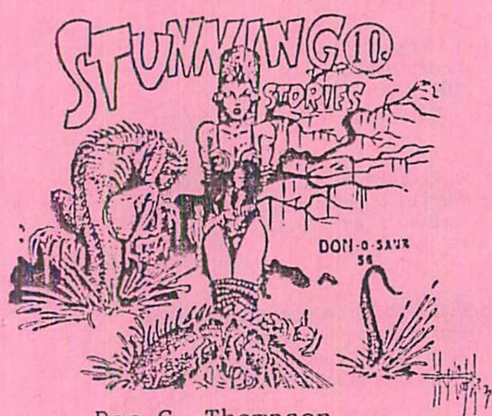
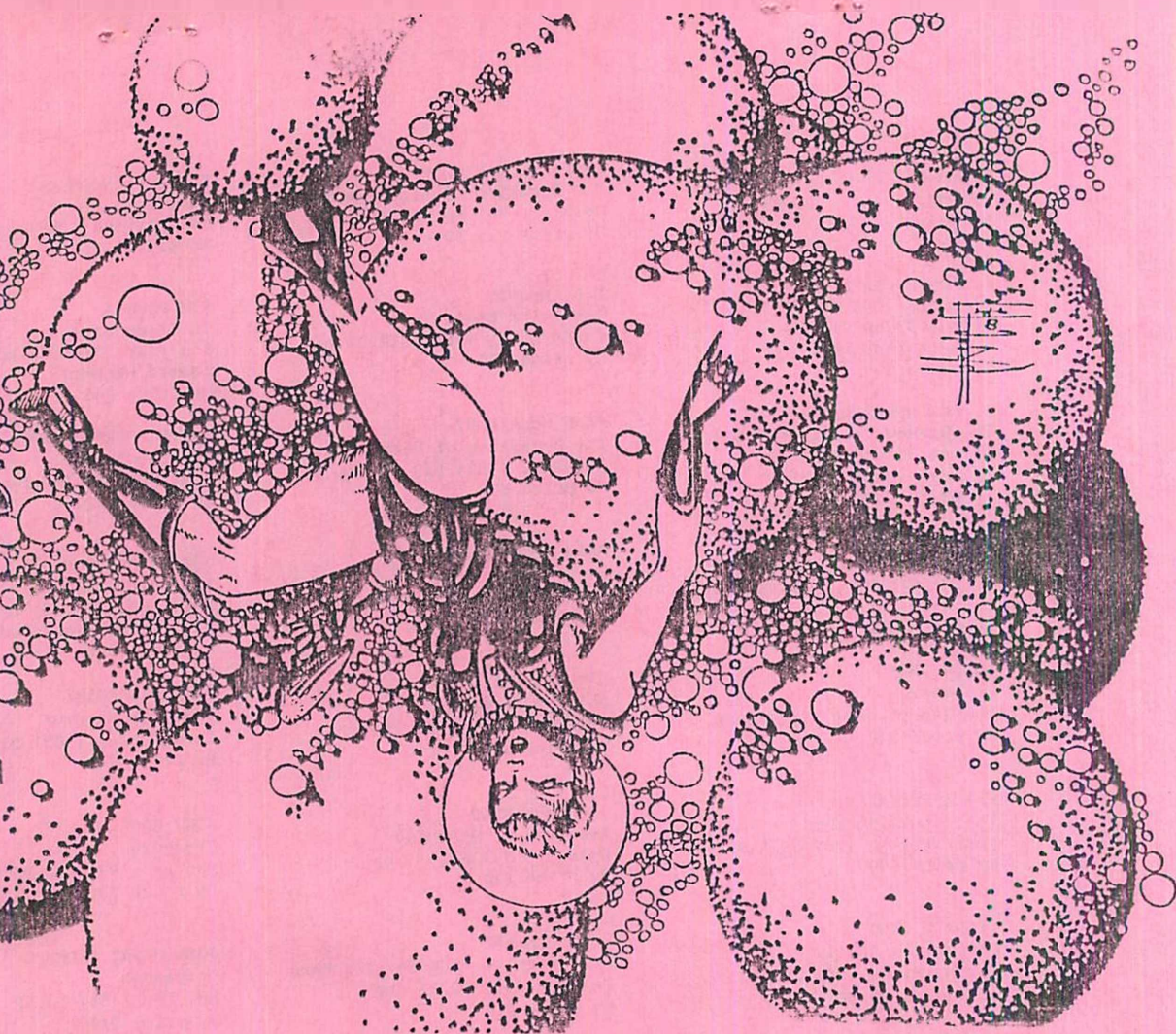
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