

MOSS ON THE NORTH SIDE

MOSS ON THE NORTH SIDE #2 is intended for the second CRAPA mailing; produced by Eli Cohen, at 2236 Allison Rd., Vancouver, B.C. V6T 1T6, with some slight negative assistance by two pussycats named Harlequin and Samantha. To the tune of Susan Wood groaning over illegible term papers. Begun on March 1, 1978.

Since there are some people on the roster I don't know, as well as some I don't know very well, let me begin with some biography.

I am two months short of thirty (my how time flies when you're having fun); I have been reading SF since, oh, THE SPACESHIP UNDER THE APPLE TREE, but I didn't discover fandom until the Worldcon came to New York (1967). I was promptly signed up by the N3F, and it's been downhill ever since.

Among my contemporaries in that venerable organization were Richard Labonté (a mild-mannered reporter for a great metropolitan newspaper; well, *The Ottawa Citizen*, actually) and Linda Eyster, who has since become Linda Bushyager. Through Linda I got involved with WPSFA (the Western Pennsylvania Science Fiction Association, which has since colonized most of the Western Hemisphere).

Meanwhile, I, er, was associated with the Fantasy and Science Fiction Society of Columbia University (FSFSCU), and co-edited a fanzine called AKOS which lasted all of three issues.

While pursuing my graduate studies in Columbia's Mathematical Statistics Dept. (but never quite catching them), I lived in a fabulous fannish slanshack known as The Avocado Pit, which I shared with various subsets (proper and improper) of: (cast in order of appearance) David Emerson, Jerry Kaufman, Suzle Tompkins, and Asenath Hammond. I was surrounded by fannishness, and reached a peak of frenzied fanac I have never since equaled: I regularly published an issue of KRATOPHANY every nine months. Clearly, this pace could not last, and in 1974 I moved to Regina, Saskatchewan to cool off, having completed all requirements (not to mention requirements) towards a doctorate in statistics except for the trivial matter of a thesis.

As you can well imagine, there was no question of a fannish hotbed in a town where the temperature dropped to 40 below: the best the local fen could do was huddle together for warmth (said fen consisting of myself and Susan Wood; the closest other fan was in the Prince Albert Penitentiary doing 3 years for possession of a truly staggering quantity of hash). I spent the next 2½ years working as a Research Officer for the Saskatchewan Dept. of Social Services, mostly involved with the Corrections Branch (yes, I was in and out of jail constantly). Oh yeah, there was a little problem with Canadian Immigration; nothing serious, and it only took them two years to concede that I could be a productive member of Canadian society and make me a Landed Immigrant.

Whereupon I promptly moved to Vancouver and spent a highly traumatic six months on unemployment.

I am currently working as a computer programmer for Vancouver General Hospital, at the moment trying to design an inpatient information system. I share a house with Susan Wood, two cats, and assorted plants; my room has a beautiful view of the mountains, except when Lynne Dollis is here; and I have access to a mimeo and a *Selectric*. All I need to achieve Nirvana is a home computer system, but that's another story.

My how time flies. It is now March 15, and I got back two days ago from a trip to New York (to visit my parents and those few people who haven't moved to Seattle). It was covered in mountains of snow (they got six more inches while I was there), and people said rude things to me whenever I mentioned the crocuses and daffodils that are out already in Vancouver. My feelings about New York are complex, as is the city; there are usually two contrasting images I come back with, and this time ~~xx~~ they are Zabar's on a Sunday afternoon (Zabar's is a gourmet delicatessen type food store, with every conceivable, and some inconceivable, type of cheese, meat, and smoked fish), and the garbage-filled gutter of 167th street near the Grand Concourse in the Bronx (the deteriorating neighborhood where my grandmother's nursing home is located).

One of the more eventful things I did on the trip, actually, was read Marge Piercy's *SMALL CHANGES* (finished it on the plane home). She is an incredibly powerful writer -- the vividness of her characters ("vivid" -- from the Latin *vividus*, living, animated, lively) leaves me gasping with outrage when they get fucked over, whether by other characters or the faceless state bureaucracy. She's got a talent for describing people ground up helplessly by institutions (mental hospitals in *WOMAN ON THE EDGE OF TIME*, the courts in *SMALL CHANGES*), enough so you know it wouldn't be any different for you, should you get caught on the wrong side of the machinery (the worst I've ever had to deal with, fortunately, was Canadian Immigration forbidding me to live where I wanted to with whom I wanted to).

All of the men in *SMALL CHANGES* are pigs, which bothers me a bit (though some have redeeming virtues), but they're very real pigs -- I continually felt like reaching into the book and strangling them for being such bastards. (Besides, I've read lots of books where all the women were villains or idiots.) And I don't mean that the men are stereotypes; they are all quite distinct, with different hangups and ways of interacting. Piercy has a sure feel for people, and though a ~~1~~ good deal of the story is specifically about the kinds of oppression women suffer, much of it is universal -- everyone should feel flashes of recognition in the relationships with parents, friends, and lovers. Sometimes lightning bolts of recognition. There are some extra insights due to her switches between the two principle viewpoint characters, Miriam and Beth, so you see other characters from both points of view, and you see them from outside as well as inside.

Wonderful book. Depressing as hell.

SEND IN THE CLONES (Rick): Speaking of clones, the clone story broke at about the time I arrived in New York. Anybody wanna take bets on whether it's real? Stu Shiffman has it all figured out, though -- I mean, who the clone is. See, so far they've only been able to clone frogs. So what they needed was a millionaire frog who wanted to be cloned. Ergo, it is obviously a clone of Kermit the Frog.

SPECIOUS (Loren): Re Politics and Art. Some wag once said that artists shouldn't sell their birthright for a pot of message. Say for arguments sake that one of the elements of Art is universality, and we put this on a sliding scale (wheee!) so that better art communicates to a wider range of people. To the extent that the politics is petty day to day stuff, the work loses its audience fairly quickly, and becomes only of historical interest (face it -- the wittiest satire on the Teapot Dome scandal just doesn't make it). To the extent that the politics is part of human experience at all times and in all cultures, it can transcend the specific incidents it refers to ("Guernica", say). Thus, Art. Harry we can deal with next time. (I'd go on, but I've gotta write a book review for PNRB.)

PHENGOPHOBIA (Robert): Ran into Roger Braintree at the F&P, and he sends his regards. (Said to tell you he's got a phone.)