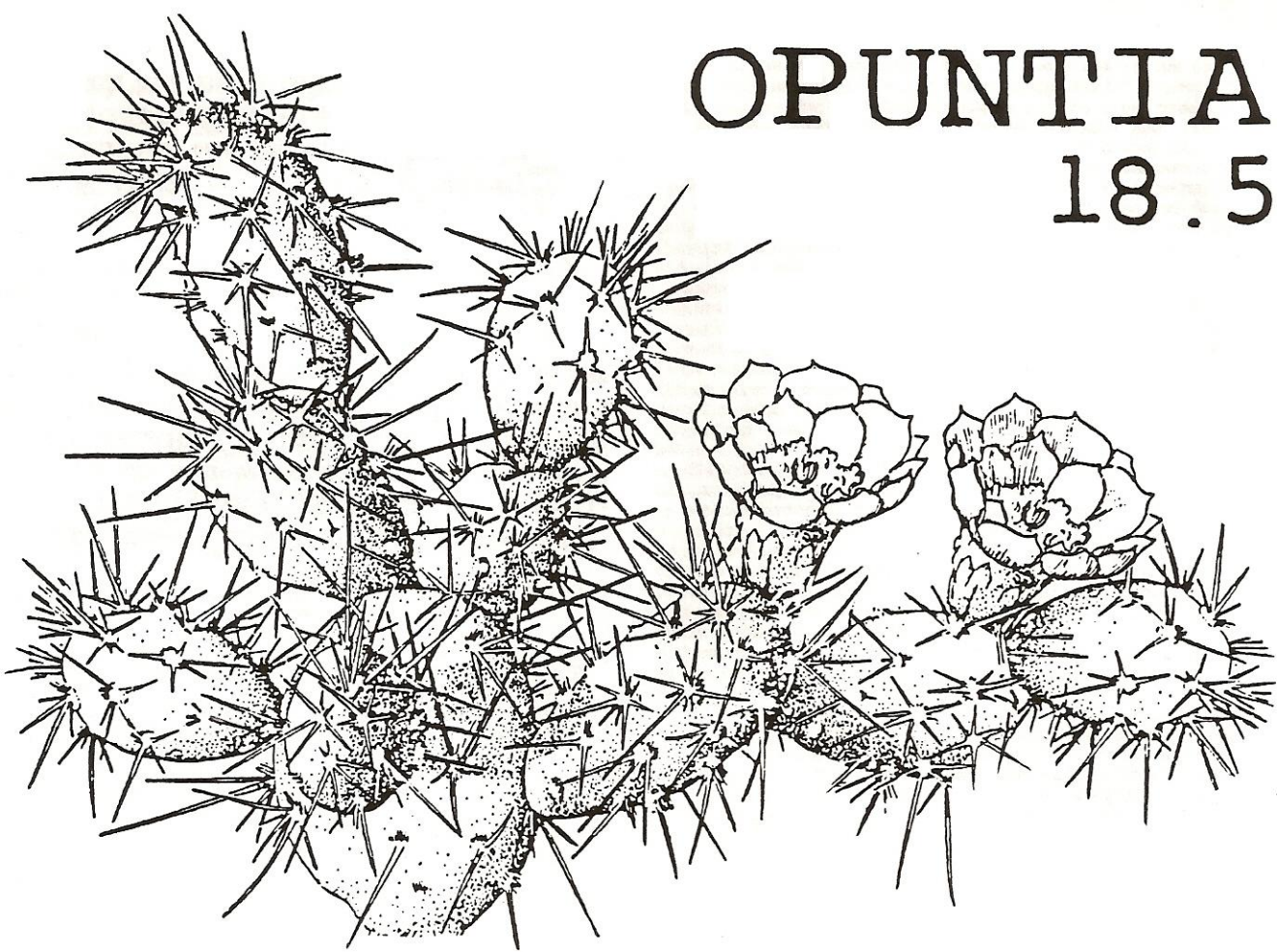


OPUNTIA

18.5



OPUNTIA #18.5

April 1994

LIFE IN THE TREETOPS

1993-12-14

ISSN 1183-2703

OPUNTIA is published irregularly by Dale Speirs, Box 6830, Calgary, Alberta, Canada, T2P 2E7. Available in trade for your zine, for letter of comment, or \$2 cash. Whole-numbered issues are sercon, .1 issues are reviews, and .5 issues are perzines. There was no #17.5 or #18.1.

AS REPORTED IN THE CALGARY HERALD ...

1993-6-30

Federal officials are conducting audits of individual government departments to see why delays exist, with the intention of finding ways to speed up the system. Initial findings won't be available to Canadians for at least a year.

... AND FROM THE IMPENDING APOLOGY DEPT. ... 1993-7-21

4 p.m. — Oprah Winfrey examines the potential harm to children who are allowed to watch too much television on Ch.

5

One finds things in trees while pruning them. Usually plastic shopping bags blown into the top of the tree by the wind, or errant kites, but sometimes oddball stuff. Today it was a dart embedded in a twig. Had it been in a large branch or stuck into the trunk, I would have thought nothing of it, but it had penetrated a small twig about 5 m above the ground. The twig was about 7 mm in diameter at the time of impact, and in the intervening years had grown 3 or 4 mm of callus tissue around the point of the dart, which had penetrated to the other side. The dart was now firmly fixed into the twig and over the decades would have been absorbed into the branch. I snipped the twig off for my collection of oddities. The fletches of the dart are green plastic, with "Made In England" stamped on a fletch. On one of them, insects had laid eggs. Considerable odds against a dart thrown and hitting a twig waving about in the wind high up in a tree.

Not too many problems with kids building treehouses in parks, but they build some rather complex structures in the natural areas. We recently had to remove a three-deck treehouse that with a little more work could have been sold as a condo. Treehouses are generally a problem only in suburbs still under construction, as this gives kids access to all sorts of lumber lying loose about a construction site.

Nails in trees are found only in the trunks, where people nailed up signs over the years. If the tree dies and is to be removed, chainsawing the trunk can be dangerous sometimes. Years ago, one boulevard tree was being sawn down. When it had been planted, the homeowner put a metal edging around the tree well to hold the water. The edging wasn't removed when the tree well was later filled in. The tree grew over the iron band and died because it was girdled. The inner bark layer (cambium) and the leaves are the living part of the tree; if the cam-

[continued next page]

bium is cut, the flow of water and nutrients up and down the tree is interrupted. Here, the iron band cut through the cambium and the tree died. But we didn't know that until after the fact because the iron band was covered by the bark. The chainsaw hit the band and the chain came off the saw, whipping fully half a block down the street in a few seconds. No one's ankles were in the way fortunately.

Pruning boulevard trees is often slowed down by extension cords dangling from the trees. It is illegal to lay an electrical cord across a sidewalk, for fear of someone tripping. On cold winter nights, cars have to be plugged in to a cord, so the engine block heater can keep the car from freezing up. An engine block heater is basically a hot plate that fits on the oil sump or radiator hose and heats the engine enough to keep it from being frozen. If a car is parked on the street, homeowners will run electrical cords from the house to the car. The cord is thrown up into the trees and crosses the sidewalk above head height, then down the boulevard tree to the car. If it is wrapped around a branch we wish to remove, it must be taken off and placed over some other branch. Most of the time this is fairly simple as the homeowner simply dangled the cord over the branch. Some homeowners are worried about theft of the cord, so they tie it in knots to several branches, which slows us down trying to get it off.

THE DUKE OF YORK, HE MARCHED HIS MEN ... 1993-12-21

... up the hill and then, he marched them down again. Or perhaps it was the Duke of Cumberland; I've forgotten the verses to that childhood song. I was reminded of the song today when we were pruning trees on an ice-covered hill. The brush, or cut branches, could not be left scattered in piles throughout the park as we normally do when it is too far to drag them to the curb. Brush is picked up by a hired contractor, who runs it through a chipper. If

human pruners had difficulty marching up a hill, then in no way could a 4-ton box truck towing a chipping trailer make it. So we dragged the brush down to the roadside where the chipper could reach it. Marching down the hill while dragging a load of branches was easy because the weight of the branches stabilized us bipeds. The weight pulling us from behind kept us from slipping or going down the hill out of control. Marching back up the hill was harder, as we had to walk with our feet sideways to get a grip on the slope.

The chipper is a noisy grinding device on a trailer that converts branches and logs into wood chips and spews them into the back of the truck towing it. The truck has about a 60 m³ capacity. When full, the truck dumps the chips at one of our compounds. Next summer we will use the chips for mulch. The chipper has contrarotating corrugated drums which grab the branch and squeeze it between themselves, crushing the wood and pushing the mangled remains forward into the spinning knives of the next stage. The knives chop the wood and spit the chips up a chute into the back of the truck box. The best chips are from winter pruning, when the wood is brown, dry, and dormant. Summer wood produces green chips that compost, giving off steam and carbon dioxide, and attracting huge clouds of mosquitoes. Mosquitoes locate their prey by body heat and exhaled carbon dioxide, so the steaming pile of green chips confuses them. We want mulch, not compost, besides which it is difficult to shovel chips into a shrub bed while half-blinded by mosquitoes swarming about.

The brush is not piled hodge-podge any old way, as this makes it difficult for the chipper operator to pull branches out from the pile. The branches are stacked one on top of the other with all the cut ends bunched together. This allows the chipper operator to pick them up, step backwards, and shove the branch into the machine's jaws cut end first. Any other method of piling

[continued next page]

branches means the operator has to swing the branch about to feed it in. A few seconds extra perhaps, but it soon adds up into a lot of wasted time.

The easiest branches to stack are elms, because they grow in a relatively flat fan shape. Poplar are intermediate, and the worst is green ash, which branches at right angles. Green ash branches in a pile stick to each other like velcro. Crabapples are almost as bad as green ash for similar reasons. Poplar is easy to cut with soft wood but green ash has hard wood that wears out saw blades. Elm has slippery wood; it is often difficult to cut off branches without peeling some bark from the next branch or trunk. Elms and green ash have narrow-angled branching, making it difficult to fit a saw in the crotch of the branch. All told, the worst type of tree to prune is green ash, and the easiest is cottonwood poplar.

SNOW ROLLERS

1993-12-22

This morning we had snow flurries, which only lasted an hour. Immediately following was a strong gale-force wind. The net result was that snow rollers began to appear everywhere, which I haven't seen in twenty years. The snow has to have just the right moisture content to produce rollers. Too wet and it is simply slush melting into the ground. Too dry and it is hard crystalline powder that drifts. But inbetween there is a magic zone where snow is just moist enough to cohere into a flaky crust. The wind gets under a bit of crust and flips it over, then again and again. The snow rolls along the ground as a cylindrical shape pushed by the wind, leaving a trail behind it and getting bigger as it rolls. On a slope, they have the additional assistance of gravity, so they can travel further and reach a good size. On level ground they can puzzle people who have never seen them; up to several dozen cylindrical barrels of snow, trails behind them, but no footprints to show who made them, no kids rolling up snow to make a snowman.

Snow rollers are rare in Calgary, where snow cover is soon melted away or converted into ice by chinooks, the hot winds that come out of the adjacent Rocky Mountains. Calgary gets a fair amount of snow but the snow doesn't stay long. Where I grew up in Red Deer, 100 km north of Calgary, the chinooks did not reach. Red Deer gets more snow cover which accumulates and is thus a better candidate for snow rollers. As a young lad I used to see them quite often, but until now not since I moved to Calgary, where winters are usually brown.

WORLDCONS TOO BIG, EH?

1994-1-14

Just reading the latest issue of AMERICAN PHILATELIST, about an international stamp show called Bangkok 93. It was held last October and had a paid attendance of over 450,000 people in ten days. This is a record for a FIP show. (Each country can hold an international show once every ten years, sanctioned by the Federation Internationale de Philatelie.) Canada's last international in 1987 had 20,000. The last American international had 200,000 paid visitors.

HAUNTING WORDS

The provincial Tory government has been hacking away at everything in sight to keep its election promise of eliminating the budget deficit in three years. Screaming people everywhere, not helped by the Tories rewarding rural areas that supported them with patronage at the same time they claim to be cutting according to a 'firm but fair' plan. (As any government worker anywhere in the world can tell you, there is no plan.) The opposition Liberal party is helpless to criticize since their leader Laurence Decore blundered during the election and said he would make 'brutal cuts' if elected. If any Liberal dares complain, the Tory ministers push and shove for the privilege of throwing his words back in their faces.

For the last week and another to come, the sound of helicopters has been continuous day and night over the south end of Calgary. Normally noise is not a problem from CFB Calgary, but now they are shifting into the most intense training the soldiers have ever had, in preparation for rotation to Bosnia and Croatia. The infantry were camping out in high school yards to get the feel of dealing with citizens. Now the 1 Field Ambulance is practising medevac procedures with the choppers of 408 Tactical from Edmonton. Paramedics rehearse loading casualties into choppers and doing emergency medical aid while the helicopter is in flight. Living one block away from the CFB, I have been used to the occasional overflight, but the constant thump-thump-thump of helicopters for hours at a time is a new experience. At first I thought the forced-air fan in my furnace was running off its bearings. The noise of the choppers is difficult to localize, and the low-frequency vibration makes it sound like house noise. But when the furnace shut off, the noise continued, and was louder still when I stepped out onto the front steps.

AND NOW, A RAY OF SUNSHINE

I have a new gardener working for me who is attending night school to get a diploma in Business Administration. Dave is just starting the program, and his first course is in macroeconomics. Naturally I've been propagandizing him about the Kondratieff long wave, the fifty to sixty year economic cycle which is currently taking us to the bottom. Not all economists agree that such a thing is real, so out of curiosity I asked Dave to query his lecturer on the subject to see what kind of response he'd get. Dave reports that a look of gloom passed across the lecturer's face when the question was put, and the fellow sighed heavily and said "God, I hope not. The thought of it being real is too depressing."

Alberta Premier Ralph Klein has been taking a lot of heat in the past few months over the 20% budget cuts to the provincial government. He has a hair-trigger temper and is easily provoked. News reporters looking for a good quote on a slow news day know they can go to him with a provocative question and get something for the headline story. Klein was a television reporter before going into politics, so it is a bit surprising to see him feuding with the news media; he should know better.

Klein lives about ten blocks south of me in an ordinary middle-class bungalow. He is listed in the telephone directory and thus gets a lot of calls from irate citizens. What many callers don't know, and soon find out, is that his answering machine has a call tracer on it, identifying the number the incoming call was made from, the time of day, and date. Klein makes it a point to phone back everyone who called, even if they didn't leave a name and number. He gives as good as he gets, so more than one surprised citizen has been chagrined to get a return call from the angry Premier.

THE MORNING COMMUTE

1994-1-24

And so to work at 06h00 on a gloomy Monday morning. Ice fog blankets the city. I live two blocks off Crowchild Trail; as I pull up to the traffic light there, a redcap (military police, so-called because they wear red berets) is standing on the median looking down the road to CFB Calgary. His jeep is parked on the corner, its red flashing beacon lighting up the ice fog like a strobe. Just as my traffic light turns green, the redcap briskly walks to the centre of the intersection and halts us. A fragment of a military convoy rumbles through the intersection, mixed in with civilian vehicles driven by commuters who yield to no one. My traffic light turns

red again, and we wait. Green again, and convoy or not I have to go to work, so I beep my horn at the redcap and edge out into the intersection. But it was the tailend of the convoy anyway, and as the last tandem-axle trooper goes through, the redcap walks away and I swing in behind the truck. I take the ramp to eastbound Glenmore Trail (many Calgary freeways were originally cattle trails) and so does the convoy ahead of me. I become one of the commuters intermixed with the convoy. There are only two traffic intersections on Glenmore Trail, both of which are controlled by redcaps, so we all whip through at a steady pace. We go our separate ways when I turn south on Blackfoot Trail towards work and the soldiers keep going east, ultimately to Bosnia.

My house was built in the middle 1950s. Last summer, I was at home when a redcap knocked on the door and introduced himself. Chris had grown up in my house in the 1960s. He had recently been posted back to Calgary and thought he'd take a chance and see if anyone was home. We had a pleasant chat; he said the house hadn't changed much in thirty years. As it happened, when I bought the house in 1982 I went to the public library and researched who had owned/lived/rented it over the years, going through old Henderson Directories. Chris' father was on my list, which I showed Chris. We wandered through the backyard; saplings of thirty years ago are now mature spreading trees.

THE ICE WORMS NEST AGAIN

1994-3-1

Pruning today on the west bank of the Bow River, where a pathway runs along the riverbank through a natural area. We were clearing back branches 1 m from the path, tossing the cut branches back into the wild area for the benefit of local wildlife. The past week was steady at -20°C but a chinook wind blew into Calgary today, raising temperatures to the +15°C mark. When we started the job, the temperature was slightly above zero and we were walking on ice. Coming back to the truck an hour later it was +17°C

and we slogged through slush. The record for a chinook in Calgary is -40°C to +10°C in one hour.

We cut along the riverbank, watching the hundreds of ducks and geese. A steady procession of ice floes went by in the river. The sound of ice moving was noticeable and came in two types. There was a continual hollow knocking sound as ice collided with ice or with quartzite boulders on the riverbed. Another sound was water slapping against the underside of ice shelves projecting from the riverbank. Occasionally an ice floe would get too close to the banks, and go scraping and grinding under the ice shelf before spinning free back out into the open-water channel in the middle of the river. The constant sound of moving ice in the quiet of the park was reminiscent of the distant rumble of artillery from CFB Calgary.

A BIRD ON THE SAW IS WORTH TWO IN THE BUSH

1994-3-3

Pruning today on a residential boulevard, legging up the big poplars with branches hanging low over the road. As I sawed through a large branch with a 4 m polesaw, a chickadee came and sat on the cut, looking to see if the spray of wood chips could be edible. It hopped back and forth around the saw blade, jumping over the cut, quite fearless of the fact that I was still sawing away. But it concluded there was no food and began working its way up the tree before finally flying away.

Chickadees are quite unafraid compared with other songbirds, and come close to humans. This has to do with the very high metabolism of these little birds combined with the effect of cold; they need lots of food and have to take more chances when looking for it. The winter mortality rate is about 50%. In Calgary, as in most urban areas, bird survival is improving because of people setting out bird feeders. This in turn increases the survival rate of our falcons, bald eagles, and owls.

The 1994 Olympic Winter Games in Norway gave me reason to go through all my memorabilia from the 1988 Calgary Winter Games. I was a volunteer then, collected lots of loot and memories, and otherwise enjoyed a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. Fragments of memory remain. Riding on the LRT train when a group of DDR female athletes got on and started talking in German; I wish I knew what they were saying. Or having tourists ask me where the LERT was; I had to think a moment before realizing they were talking about the LRT (Light Rapid Transit). And the evening at the Olympic Plaza downtown, where the medals were presented each evening. My mother had come down from Red Deer and was staying with me. We went to see the medals given out on the night that the Finnish skiers had won gold and Mom was delighted; her family originates from Finland. With 20,000 people jammed into the Plaza, we had taken the bus downtown. On the trip home, a couple sitting next to us turned out to be Finns, so Mom had a pleasant chat with them.

Until a fortnight before the Games, Calgarians did not really realize what was about to happen. The preceding seven years had been filled with scandalmongering, political infighting, and lofty apathy. What changed it was the day the Aeroflot planes began landing at the Calgary International Airport. The sight of strangely-marked aircraft instead of the usual Air Canada jets made citizens suddenly realize that they were the centre of the world for a few days. The turnaround in mood was instantaneous. Those who sneered at the volunteers were now envious as we walked about in our uniforms. For the month of February 1988, anyone in official Olympic uniform had status and prestige. Volunteer ID cards were issued on a long necklace that made them dangle at about waist level; most of us immediately shortened the chain so the card was at the neck and far more conspicuous. The accreditation card had a photo and a barcode. The photo made me look like a biker. Security guards would run a light pen over the bar-

code to determine your up-to-the-minute status. I had a wild thought about pasting a supermarket barcode over mine to see what would happen but decided not to risk a possible detention.

I was on the OLYMPLEX 88 subcommittee of the Olympic Arts Festival, what was basically the sideshow of a sideshow. OLYMPLEX was a stamp exhibition. Any place awarded the Olympics is required to put on cultural events as well, and a subparagraph in the contract makes it obligatory to have a stamp show. This is because many of the big names in the Olympics have stamp collections and want a chance to show them off. OCO, the Calgary Olympic committee, knew nothing about running a stamp show, so they came to us at the Calgary Philatelic Society. We had the display frames needed, knew the people, and knew how to put on a PEX from years of running CALTAPEX. All we needed was the money.

It costs about \$150,000 to stage a proper international stamp show, sanctioned by the FIP, and for which then-Communist governments would allow its citizens to display their collections outside the Warsaw Pact. We set a budget which included a \$100,000 grant from OCO and \$50,000 revenue to balance the expenses. OCO was run by accountants. They decreed that any revenue from any Olympic event, sports or arts, was to go into general revenue of OCO, never to be seen again. All very well, but they then announced the maximum grant of \$100,000 would not be exceeded, which thus left OLYMPLEX \$50,000 short. Out went the FIP sanction, and in came a non-competitive non-international event. Few philatelists overseas would bother entering such an event, and those in Communist countries were outright forbidden from any non-FIP event.

The Calgary Philatelic Society soon found out the truth of the saying "Who pays the piper, calls the tune". OCO bureaucrats did not understand the subculture of stamp collecting nor did they want to learn. We were grunts.

Mercifully I missed most of the committee meetings. All but myself on the committee were downtown workers. They could easily assemble in the OCO offices two blocks away from the Olympic Plaza, and all worked normal business hours, so they could convene during the lunch hour. I was out in the suburbs on non-standard shift. My particular task was editing the OLYMPLEX show catalogue, which contained articles on winter sports and Olympic philately. I assembled the material from writers across North America and handed them over to an OCO bureaucrat who assembled them into the actual paste-up. OCO had a deal with the printers to print all the various Arts Festival books at once on the same printing press in the same format at the same time. Just to add to the fun, everything was bilingual, since the Canadian federal government required it. A translator who knew something about philately was found, but to this day I have no idea if the French part of the catalogue is readable. I know our first publicity poster wasn't, and had to be replaced with a revised version. (The original translator spoke France French, not Québec French.)

I had one of the best jobs of all the Olympic volunteers. The catalogue was printed and released the day before the Games began. My job was therefore done, and during the Games I could stroll around at leisure in my uniform and barcode. I spent most of my time on the 8th Avenue pedestrian mall downtown, where all the action was among the pin traders and hucksters. Not having an unlimited budget I restricted myself only to books, magazines, and a few miscellaneous items about the Calgary Games. Even so, I managed to spend \$2000 in two weeks. I now have 2½ m of books and magazines about the Calgary Games, plus rare posters, a few pins, and oddments.

The hassle of dealing with OCO bureaucrats was soon forgotten and I concentrated on having fun. I know some of my readers live in cities that will host Olympics, and my advice is to volunteer; you won't regret it.

Pin-trading was the big deal during the Games. The spot for this was a huge tent erected by Coca-Cola on the 8th Avenue mall, but the crowds of pin traders spilled out onto the mall. February weather was good, about 0° C and little snow in the city, so the pin traders spent their time clustered about sidewalk benches, bargaining like stock-market traders, only slower. ABC Television pins were the hot items, selling for hundreds of dollars. Today pawn shops sell them for a couple of bucks. There is no established secondary market in lapel pins, unlike postage stamps or coins. In the last few days of the Calgary Games, prices went into freefall and have never recovered.

The medal ceremonies were spectacular, held each night at the Olympic Plaza across from City Hall. Instead of awarding medals out at the venues in the mountains, the athletes were brought back into town. The Plaza is a half-city-block in size. Adjacent streets were blocked off to handle the crowds, ranging from 20,000 people on most nights to 50,000 people on the rare occasions when a Canadian won a medal. We always took the bus to the ceremonies; traffic was horrendous and parking spaces non-existent. The crowd started to form at 18h00 which is when we arrived. During the hours to the ceremony's start, we were entertained by singers and dancers, ate from the pushcarts, and made conversation with each other. There were giant TV screens scattered about the place. Since the television camera crews blocked the view for many of the crowd, this was the only way to watch the ceremony. If you were a block away, then quite often you got a better view on the screens than someone nearer who had the misfortune of standing behind flagwaving patriots from Switzerland or Germany.

Nearby skyscrapers had screens attached to their sides, upon which laser beams etched out designs of athletes in motion. The rooftop lasers were also used for cross-ed beam effects, forming grids and radiating patterns high up in the skies of downtown Cowtown. The fireworks

were low-tech by comparison, but had the advantage of making tremendous concussive booms you could feel in the guts. Technology ran amuck in the Plaza; I've never seen a light show before or since that could match the nightly medal ceremonies.

The Olympic Plaza was paved with bricks. For \$19.88, you could have a brick engraved with your name on it. I bought one (part of that \$2000); it is on the east side of the Plaza and is still like new six years later. When the bricks were first laid down, a common sight was any number of people head-down, staring intently at the ground for their brick, and apologizing when they bumped into someone else while doing a sideways shuffle. One or two fell into the reflecting pond. Today the Plaza is used for numerous public ceremonies, such as the hockey team winning the Stanley Cup. The area immediately in front of the stage is a wading pool in summer and a skating rink in winter. It is a natural gathering area for Calgarians, definitely not a white elephant gathering dust. Theatre groups put on noon hour shows on weekdays. Whenever something happens in Calgary that calls for celebration, people instinctively head for the Plaza, much the same as Londoners gather in front of Buckingham Palace or Berliners go to the Brandenburg Gates.

The Olympic Arts Festival started ahead of the Games. An Olympic Writers Festival and Book Fair went January 31 to February 4. (The Games were February 13 to 28.) It had some SF content. The Writers Festival received big-time advertising budgets. Spider Robinson was featured in full-page newspaper ads alongside Pierre Berton, photos of both staring out at the unwary reader. The Festival was held in the Convention Centre next to the Plaza; in fact, it was on the same floor space taken over during the Games by OLYMPEx. About 1500 people showed up for the opening ceremonies, conducted by Grant MacEwan. He is a former Lieutenant-Governor of Alberta (the Queen's representative, or head of state; there is no Governor). A

prolific writer in his retirement, he has published dozens of books on the history of western Canada. He cut the usual ribbon and expressed surprise at the large crowd, saying he figured only about a dozen people would show up. The Writers Festival had readings in the evenings and panels in the day. Unfortunately most people were at work during the day, and additionally there was a \$5 fee to attend each panel. The Book Fair closed at 19h30 each night, which crippled it since few would be prepared to rush home from work, then fight traffic downtown to beat the theatre-goers, all just for a half hour or so before the place closed.

A panel "The World of Science Fiction" was held on Monday morning, February 1. On it were Spider Robinson, Dave Duncan, Monica Hughes, and Candace Dorsey. Hughes was quoted as saying that SF is becoming so popular it could leave the ghetto and become part of the mainstream. Robinson said he writes SF because it was the only genre he has discovered which assumes there will be a future. The following day, also in the morning, a panel called "The World of the Fantastic" had Alberto Manguel, Barbara Smith, Robert Kroetsch, and Guy Gabriel Kay. The Writers Festival covered a wide range of topics, from writing screenplays to the future of publishing. I watched Pierre Berton give a reading from his latest book, whatever it was; I can't remember. An Australian writer, Rodney Hall, took a stroll along the banks of the nearby Bow River and returned in a state of excitement about the fantastic sight of a frozen river. The Irishman J.P. Donleavy apparently was walking about downtown Calgary's Plus 15 system, a network of elevated pedestrian overpasses linking buildings. It is possible to walk across most of downtown without going outside. Donleavy must have gone through them after the peak hours. He spoke of "All that space, those long corridors with nobody in them, the cafes with a single person sitting inside, enjoying himself. It's Kafkaesque."

The Writers Festival published a daily newsletter, which I managed to collect a complete set. Local high schoolers used a desktop publishing system to produce it. For the snobs, an invitation-only event was held at the adjacent Centre for Performing Arts, when the 1987 Governor-General Literary Awards were handed out. (The G-G is the Queen's representative for the federal government, equivalent to a provincial Lt.-Governor.)

For the lower classes (and slumming snobs), a local nightclub held the Olympic Poetry Sweatshop, billed as the official trashsport of the Calgary Games. Contestants were given a page torn out of Roget's Thesaurus. They select one word for a title and theme, and have thirty minutes to produce deathless poetry. The event was not serious. A poet was judged as much on acting ability as on literary merit. One bystander remarked "All that's lacking is a trampoline and a high wire.". The news media came out in force to cover the event.

I take my vacation in February each year to break up the monotony of continuous tree pruning from November to March. This gave me the opportunity to relax during the Games and do as I felt. In collecting souvenirs, I concentrated on the freebies that were given away and on ephemera that most people don't think to collect. The stuff sold in the stores will be common enough. I got a reasonably complete collection of Olympic postcards, postmarks, and stamps. Posters were sold everywhere, but the ones I wanted were the 'working' posters announcing events and torn down after without thought for posterity. This included the 'error' poster for OLYMPLEX 88 that was recalled and replaced by another. It was surprising what the best selling items were in stores. The Hudson Bay Company has sold a distinctive style of clothing for more than a century (it was founded in 1670 and originally owned western Canada outright). That style caught on with international visitors, and the downtown Bay had to call in stocks of its winter parka from stores across Canada to keep up with demand.

The Calgary Tower was a popular visual focus because it had an Olympic flame on its top. (The tower looks like a shorter version of the CN Tower in Toronto or the Seattle Space Needle.) The flame burned throughout the duration of the Games and is occasionally relit for important events, provided someone agrees to pay the cost of the natural gas. Even way down on the Plaza, far below the flame, one could hear the muted roar as it burned. When the flame mechanism was installed before the Games, it was airlifted by helicopter, which then hovered overhead while workers crawled out to the edge of the tower to fasten the bolts. I can't find out the exact height of the tower offhand but it is about forty stories tall.

The Olympic flame originated in Greece, was flown to Newfoundland, then run across Canada in a meandering route that zigzagged by relays of runners through each province and territory. It finally was galumphed up the main streets of Calgary into the stadium where a young girl had the honour of lighting the cauldron. From there, it was spread in bits and pieces all over town. Petro Canada, which sponsored the flame relay, also had special candles for sale for those who wanted to grab a light off the passing Olympic torch. I'm not sure if anyone was so crude as to light their cigarette off the Olympic flame; I hope not but I wouldn't be surprised.

In 1983, for the first time in its history, Calgary had lost population, an aftereffect of the collapse of the oil boom. In 1986, oil prices slumped even worse. What kept Calgary from being turned into a total basket case was the money being spent on facilities for the Games of 1988. At the time Calgary won the bid, in 1981, the oil boom was at its peak. No one particularly supported the bid for its economic advantage; it was mainly pride and the honour of the thing. But by the time the Games arrived, they were the inadvertent saviour of the local economy.

SING OUT FOR STANFIELD

During the 1960s, the leader of the federal Social Credit party was Robert Thompson, who represented our home town of Red Deer. Thompson had been a missionary in Ethiopia before coming back to Alberta and taking up a farm south of Red Deer. My father being both a Socred and a vet who treated the occasional sick cow at the Thompson place, we came to know them as friends. Thompson led the party in its dying days as a federal presence (it was to hang on provincially another two decades in Alberta and B.C.) and when it became apparent that the Socreds were dead, stood as a Tory candidate. That was about 1968, and Robert Stanfield was the new Tory leader. The Stanfield family was old-money, specifically undergarments, and to this very day, Stanfield underwear is found in department stores everywhere. Being a young lad not yet old enough to drive, I had to use my bicycle to follow Thompson's bandwagon around the Red Deer suburbs as he campaigned. It was a flatdeck trailer, the kind farmers use for baling hay, and now that I think about it, I think it was one of my father's. I can't remember whether it was towed by a truck or tractor. I spent hours pedalling behind it, on a bicycle that kept stripping its chain every so often, usually as I was climbing a hill. The band was loud and proud, and I memorized the official Tory campaign song as I travelled behind the bandwagon. I feel safe in saying that there are few if any Canadians besides myself who still remember that song, done to the tune of "This Land Is Your Land, This Land Is My Land".

"Sing out for Stanfield, for Robert Stanfield, the Nova Scotian with the winning way.
Come on let's hear it, get in the spirit,
Stanfield's the man to lead the way."

Stanfield, of course, got run over by the Trudeau bandwagon, and was never more than Opposition Leader. Old money had no chance against a swinger who dated Barbra Streisand.

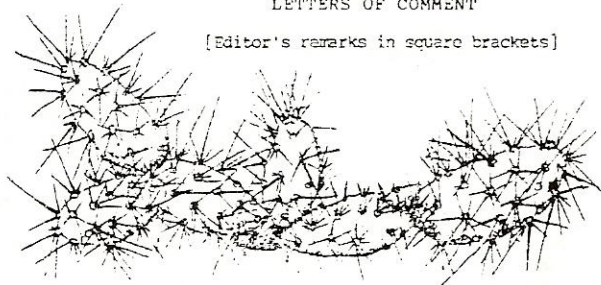
In the wider world, Thompson is remembered for his malapropisms, oxymorons, and undiplomatic freudian slips. He wasn't always suited to the rough-and-tumble of the House of Commons, saying that "Social Credit is above politics" and complaining that "Parliament is being turned into a political arena". Excited by a new idea, he said that "If this thing catches fire, it could snowball right across the country". He chastised some opponents by telling them "You've buttered your bread, now you have to lie in it". His most famous statement was a remark that most Canadians agreed with but wish he had said more diplomatically; "The Americans are our best friends, whether we like it or not".

SQUIRRELLY MAGPIE

Scattered some leftover popcorn along the fence outside my office window. A magpie came round eventually and began feeding. At first it gulped down kernels, shaking apart the bigger ones. With one large kernel, it hopped up on a fencepost. The magpie held the kernel down with its foot and tore pieces off with its beak. When finally full, the bird began hoarding the remainder of the popcorn. Filling its beak with as many kernels as possible, it hopped about the lawn, looking for a suitable location. Having found one, it hammered a hole into the ground with its beak and stuffed the popcorn in. The magpie then hunted around for bits of thatch and fallen leaves, and packed them down on top of the popcorn for camouflage. The bird made caches in several spots in the turf. It was interrupted once by having to chase away another magpie making for the popcorn. After three caches, it filled its beak a final time and flew off.

LETTERS OF COMMENT

[Editor's remarks in square brackets]



FROM: Holger Eliasson
Box 171
S-11479 Stockholm, Sweden

1993-12-1

[Holger's loc is longer than some zines I get, so I have extracted only a small portion. If you are a zine editor looking for copy, send an ish to Holger.]

Fandom sure is fun at times, considering how far your words might spread across the globe. I've edited fanzines on and off for about 14 years now (in my native language) and even gone as far as having tried to publish my own rubbish internationally at least three or four times. I often do such things (writing locs) mostly because I don't have the opportunity to make full-length fanzines out of my own contributions.

I've just embarked on a new career of poetry readings all thanks to Anders 'Q' Svensson, that strange country fan from Vetlanda, Smaland. Anders, who is a whole lot of years younger than me, currently keeps busy with a writers workshop at a local 'folk' high school somewhere over on Northside. He suddenly phoned me up one night to tell me

of "Poeternas Estrad", a series of impromptu theatre performances in which positively anyone can get on a stage and perform readings of his/her poetry. This sort of thing has been going on at diverse Southside clubs and establishments for quite a while now, but this is the first time I've tried it. The centre of activity is Mosebacke Etablissement, a popular watering-hole inside the main building of the Southside theatre, facing Mosebacke Square, a part of the old Katarina Heights section which has stood since at least the 1600s. They hold two open nights a month and usually give about fifteen minutes to each entry, or sometimes more depending on the programme.

The first time I tried this, Anders of course chickened out, and I was left to face a crowd of sixty or so with my fannish poems, notably one about Bruno K. Hoijer, one of the most 'in' poets at the moment, apart from musical artists like Thomas DiLeva or Lars Demian (both do rave, accompanied by loud and ununderstandable music) or Kristina Lugn (whose performances together with Flesh Quartet or Hockey-Horan [= The Hockey Whore] still are legendary). I don't really know how to characterize Bruno K. Hoijer for you, but one can picture him as a 1960s-retro kind of Dylan imitator, decked out in a halo of frizzy white hair and black sunglasses, whose life consists chiefly of nonchalantly leaning towards the bar of the Café Opera with a drink in the hand and calling all ladies present by the name of 'babe' or something similar. The less said about him, the better. I don't like him much anyhow. The sort of poetry I like is the poetry of the people, and not of the glitterati.

Now it only so happened that in the evening of Sunday the 17th of October, another well-known (or should I say infamous) figure in the local cultural establishment had rented himself the better part of the Mosebacke Etablissement for his 50th birthday. This was Rolf Borj- lind, who in the 1970s made quite a name for himself by way of a series of fake 'portrait' interviews in the

[continued next page]

leading national evening newspaper EXPRESSEN. In them, he pictured Lasse Ericksson, head of the Teamster's union, a man known as Sweden's answer to Jimmy Hoffa, as a closet transvestite, attacked Prime Minister Torbjörn Fälldin for being a genetically-defective retard, and so forth. The Fälldin case is the most famous one since the Prime Minister sued EXPRESSEN, got a symbolic 1 kr in legal compensation and the case strongly contributed to his later downfall. I have always held Rolf Borjlind in great awe and regarded him as one of my literary idols, up to this very evening that is. But let's not move ahead of things.

The first thing I saw upon entering the Mosebacke Etablissement was Bruno K. Høijer, nonchalantly leaning towards the bar with a drink in one hand and chatting with a group of suitably adoring and openly submissive women, just like usual. I thought twice about reading my opening poem about what I really think of Bruno K. but decided to go ahead with it. The Borjlind party was housed in the big dining hall, and the rest of us were crowded together in the Cornelis Room, facing the Old Town and Stadsgården harbour. I noticed that Borjlind, with his hair dyed white and cut in a 1980s fashion, looks just like a corporate executive nowadays. A bad omen, and a sign of what he has become.

After two large beers, I finally got my go-ahead and muscled my way on stage (this was necessary since the 10 m x 15 m room was very crowded). Some joker, who has never been identified (Anders later claimed he was innocent) opened the dividing screens leading into the big dining area so that Borjlind and his glitterati friends could hear what was going on inside our little forum. I'm still not quite sure if I did good or bad, but the usual poetry reading crowd seemed totally appalled at whatever I said. The crowd was largely divided into two separate camps (literary wannabes of some or high quality, plus the terminally ill, the deranged, and the nerds, jerks, and nincompoops) and only the ordinary passers-by seemed to like me. I shall never forget the postmaster from Brandbergen,

who immediately bought me four large beers after the performance. Truly the only way to hail a poet!

After the reading and the four beers, I went down the narrow corridor that led to the bar and suddenly became aware of the fact that people seemed to notice me. Especially Bruno's ladyfriends. "There he is", I heard them whisper, and "Watch his eyes!". I thought these comments to be positive, until I again stumbled into this Bruno K. character, who came tromping out of the dining hall in a very agitated mood. I shall not repeat what he said or how he reacted, since it's sufficient to say that he chased me in circles about a round table for the better part of two minutes, screaming that I had destroyed his image, and a lot of other things besides. In the middle of this, Borjlind himself came running, together with a large group of other people. I was quite shocked but managed to hold my ground until the proprietor of Mosebacke Etablissement solemnly asked me and Bruno to leave the premises, and not to come back for more poetry readings unless we were sober.

As I stumbled down the stairs leading out onto Mosebacke Square, I could still hear the whining voice of Høijer, the famous poet, somewhere behind me, but in the end I broke free. I ran across the square to a house that was due to have its facade renovated and consequently had a lot of building materials lying on the pavement before it. Here I picked up a metre-long piece of steel piping, and turned around to face my antagonist and a few other guests from the Borjlind party, who had followed behind us. Even though I was still outnumbered by more than ten to one, none of these people had any stomach to continue, and at the sight of that I laughed, partly because I couldn't believe what I had just seen. Truly this was a war of poets, one of the most silly types of brawls one ever could imagine. Both Høijer and Borjlind are well over forty but they still react as twenty-year-olds, as soon as anyone dares to behave to them as they behaved to everyone else a few years back.

FROM: Walter Willis 1993-12-24
32 Warren Road
Donaghadee, Northern Ireland BT21 OPD

Your general remarks about Calgary are always of interest to me because I compare them with what Bob Shaw told me about Calgary when he went there to work in the fifties. He thought it was a terrible place, at least at first. At that time the only other fan who lived in the area was Georgina Ellis, later to become Georgina Clarke. It became a fannish legend that she had become a fan because she had read a copy of HYPHEN discarded in the Calgary bus station, on what we described as a 'read litter day'. Bob and Sadie invited her one evening and served a typical Irish Fandom supper, which was quite a sumptuous repast. Georgina commented that it was "almost like a meal" which rather offended Sadie, to whom it was never anything else, albeit not a meal served at a table.

FROM: Judith Hanna and Joseph Nicholas 1993-12-21
15 Jansons Road, Tottenham
London N15 4JU, England

Yet more bourgeois cultural respectability looms for aging radicals Judith Hanna and Joseph Nicholas. Having married ten years ago, they are now buying a house! (Well, going hugely into debt with a building society, anyway.)

Connoisseurs of our fanzine writings may suspect that the purchase and furnishing of a house could seriously hinder our foreign travel plans. This supposition may not be incorrect. Instead of reports of our journeys to curious Near Eastern destinations, then, they should expect exciting, fact-packed tales of midnight snailhunts, excursions to the compost heap at the bottom of the garden, and spending sprees in DIY superstores. Hours of fun for every fan of suburban domesticana.

[Your letter arrived just as I spent \$2049 to reshingle

the roof on my house, so all I'll say is "Welcome to the poor side of town.".]

FROM: Alexander Vasilkovsky 1993-12-24
poste restante, General P.O.
252001, Kiev-1, Ukraine

During the recent months it became apparent that no government appointed by this Parliament and this President will be able to pull Ukraine from the morass of not merely the economic crisis but rather the economic catastrophe. In this situation only the election will be the first small step toward the good solution of all the problems, but ... See what Russian election lead to. I'm afraid that Ukraine will have even more reactionary Parliament after the March election. God save us from the communists and their hidden supporters. Enough of them. God save us also from swashbuck radicals who are better in opposition but not in power. The worst thing is there's no true leader in the Parliamentary opposition. There's no truly bright economists who may lead the government to reform.

FROM: Chester Cuthbert 1994-1-6
1104 Mulvey Avenue
Winnipeg, Manitoba R3M 1J5

I enjoyed your summary of the political scene, and no doubt you will be writing about the changes which are occurring in Alberta under the new government. I find disgusting the cutbacks which are creating so much suffering, and which are so unnecessary if we use technology as it should be used, to benefit people instead of oppressing them. Untold wealth is everywhere about us, unused because it is made available only if people can buy it. Surely it is obvious that we would not have so many unemployed people if their work were necessary. The work is being done by machines. And those machines could

[continued next page]

do much more work than they do if the economic system permitted them to do so. So could people. The current revolution in Mexico is merely an example of what will happen in Canada if current thinking isn't changed. People must be recognized as more important than money. Alberta Premier Ralph Klein said on TV that 20% must be cut across the board but did he say that the interest rate on Alberta government bonds must be cut likewise?

We must quit thinking of money as wealth. Look at money is worth in Russia or Brazil, and then look at what Canadian money is worth by comparison with US funds. To let pieces of paper rule our thinking is sheer stupidity.

FROM: Harry Andruschak 1994-1-3
Box 5309
Torrance, California 90510-5309

Alright! Coyotes! We have a huge problem with them here in southern California. On one side are those who hate to see them trapped and killed. On the other are owners of cats, dogs, and other animals who have seen their pets munched by raiding coyotes. Laws are being passed and changed yearly on whether homeowners can trap, kill, or do somethin about the coyotes or just endure their attacks.

Regarding trews. The original concept of trews was of a skin-tight garment, of tartan cut on the bias, and including a covering for the foot, worn inside the shoe. Very much like the tights used by runners nowadays. Some Highland regiments still have what they call trews and which are actually very slender trousers. But mostly what you get nowadays from the tailors as trews is plain old slacks that just happen to be made of tartan. Frankly, I would never bother to wear them myself. I'll stick to my kilt, and if the need arises, I will change over to ho-hum trousers and avoid the tartan tamfoolery.

By the way, today after work I came home and changed to my kilt for the heck of it before going to the library, the post office, the bank, and the supermarket. As usual, no notice was taken of the fact that I was wearing a kilt. I am not sure what the reaction would be in Calgary, but here in southern California it would be gauche to point at and snicker at someone in the kilt.

[Kilts are quite common in Calgary because the Calgary Highlanders militia regiment trains every Wednesday at the downtown armoury. Immigrants from India or Muslim countries quite often wear their national dress, so few Calgarians pay any attention to what is routinely seen every day.]

FROM: Buck Coulson 1994-1-6
2677W-500N
Hartford City, Indiana 47348

The Canadian training for Bosnia [in schoolyards] sounds like it might be somewhat of a help. Too logical for the USA though, which is a pity; on some schoolgrounds the troops could get experience both with handling civilians and with unfriendly fire.

[Some Canadian regiments train their military surgeons in American emergency wards because up here they might go years between one gunshot wound treatment and the next.]

FROM: Joseph Major 1994-1-7
4701 Taylor Boulevard #8
Louisville, Kentucky 40215-2343

The Galaxy (C-5) and the Starlifter (C-141) are two different transports, the Galaxy being the larger of the two. While driving past Fort Campbell one day many years

ago, I once saw a Galaxy coming in to pick up troops for some maneuver somewhere else. Seeing a small building come dropping down from the sky at you can be nerve wracking. Some people may remember the case of A. Ernest Fitzgerald the Air Force employee who became the first whistleblower over the suppression of design problems of the C-5. Some of those may have been startled by the reliable performance of the plane since then.

FROM: Harry Warner Jr.
423 Summit Avenue
Hagerstown, Maryland 21740

1994-1-7

Your description of the student walkout and protest made me remember that the Canadian comic strip FOR BETTER OR FOR WORSE, which is run in the Hagerstown afternoon paper, had a quite similar sequence that lasted about two weeks. As far as I can remember it was two or three months ago, just about the same time as the Calgary demonstration. So I wonder if it was a coincidence or if the creator of the comic strip somehow managed to get a graphic version of it rushed into print. I think there's normally an interval of three or four weeks, maybe longer, between the time a strip is turned over to the syndicate and its publication.

[Lynn Johnston, the creator of the comic strip, ran that episode several months before the Calgary protest. But thanks for reminding me about it because I had forgotten about it. The episode in the strip was remarkably true to life compared to the Calgary incident.]

FROM: John Thiel
30 North 19th Street
Lafayette, Indiana 47904

1994-3-3

The more I look at your cover motif, the more I think it must represent something. Perhaps your name is involved; the cacti have, so to speak, spears, and are found in a

dale, if not a desert. Too, Calgary sounds like Calvary, and one is reminded of Christ's crown of thorns. I know opuntias are a type of cacti, but since they are native to South America, I wonder why you, in Canada, choose this title for your fanzine. The only relation I can think of that it might have to SF is that a North American equivalent might be found in some of those proving grounds, such as White Sands.

[The genus Opuntia is found in all three Americas, from Alberta to Patagonia. We have two species in Alberta, on which I have published articles in my capacity as a professional horticulturist. Opuntias are the prickly-pears and chollas. My name is not pronounced 'spears', but rather 'spires', being a Scottish name derived from some distant ancestor in the Border Counties who was a spyer, or watchman. Calgary is named after the village of Calgary, Scotland, on the isle of Mull. The name is translated as "the farm on the bay". I choose the title OPUNTIA for this zine not for any symbolic reason, but because I wanted a short title that could be used even if I abandon SF and veer the zine towards, say, stamp collecting or conspiracy theories (Elvis shot JFK).]

I ALSO HEARD FROM: Henry Welch, Randall Tin-ear