

## From the Back Verandah

Here once more is what seems to have become an annual event each May. (Solution in November)

### Kwizz Gig 3

1. By what name is Domenicos Theotocopoulos better known?
2. What is Tommy Flowers remembered for?
3. What makes Enheduanna notable in literary history?
4. Two of the most famous men of the 19th century were born February 12, 1809, but an ocean apart. Who were they?
5. While she was a medical student, author Gertrude Stein became convinced that she had a blood disease. What treatment did she prescribe herself?
6. What book is believed to contain the longest sentence written in a European language?
7. What inspired Sergei Prokofiev to compose *Peter and the Wolf*?
8. Although Samuel Morse invented the Morse Code, he did not actually invent the telegraph. Who did?
9. Which of the following composers suffered from syphilis?  
Frederick Delius,  
Gaetano Donizetti,  
Scott Joplin,  
Niccolò Paganini,  
Franz Schubert,  
Robert Schumann,  
Bedrich Smetana.
10. What is the literary significance of madeleine cakes?

— Fizzgig

# BIKWIL

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Oh, no! It's time for Quizz Gig 3.

## “Now We Are Six”

Yes, it's true. This month marks *Bikwil's* sixth anniversary.

The phrase, of course, is A.A. Milne's. *Now We Are Six* (1927) was the second of the four immensely popular books of stories and verse that featured Christopher Robin and Winnie-the-Pooh and their friends.

Contrary to established legend, Milne hardly ever read the poems and stories to his children. He preferred to amuse them by reading from the works of P.G. Wodehouse. Mind you, it's a safe bet that the kids would have been much older than six before they found the following passage about a “beautiful baby” contest funny.

There were, it seemed, to be three prizes and about the first one there could be no question at all. It went automatically to a heavy-weight mother with beetling eyebrows who looked as if she had just come from doing a spot of knitting at the foot of the guillotine. Just to see those eyebrows, Freddie tells me, was to hear the heads dropping into the basket, and he had no hesitation, as I say, in declaring her progeny the big winner.

The second and third prizes were a bit more difficult, but after some consideration he awarded them to two other female plug-uglies with suspicious bulges in their stockings.

[ From *Noblesse Oblige*, one of the stories in *Young Men in Spats* ]

Anyway, here's to *Bikwil's* seventh year! Your Time Starts Now. Onward and upward.

### Colophon

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Always look out for Number One and be careful not to step in Number Two.  
Rodney Dangerfield

Remember men, we're fighting for this woman's honour, which is probably more than she ever did.  
Groucho Marx

## Quintessential Quirky Quotes

You'll know you're old when everything hurts and what doesn't hurt doesn't work.  
George Burns

A good pun is its own reword.  
Anonymous

I write at high speed because boredom is bad for my health. It upsets my stomach more than anything else. I also avoid green vegetables. They're grossly overrated.  
Noel Coward

misconceptions) from the U.S. Naval Observatory's *Date of Easter*. Dates are given for all years up to 2024, so that should keep you happy for a while. If you want to go further, use the lovely formula provided.

Designed at Cornell Uni for teachers and students, the pages at *Discover Our Earth* contain "a wide range of information related to the Earth sciences, accompanied by images, graphs, maps, and movies". For teachers there are also curriculum guides, while for students there are also activities to test hypotheses. (Needs Java..)

"The ability to see Earth from space has forever changed our view of the planet. We are now able to look at the Earth as a whole, and observe how its atmosphere, oceans, landmasses, and life interact as global systems."

The *Earth Today* Web site provides a glimpse of the information presented in the exhibition in the Rocketry and Space Flight Gallery of the U.S. National Air and Space Museum.

M.C. Escher created fascinating works of art that exploit a wide range of mathematical ideas. In fact, he himself said "for me it remains an open question whether [this work] pertains to the realm of mathematics or to that of art". His drawings may be instantly recognisable today, but it was not until he was in his mid-fifties that he acquired his reputation. Visit *The Mathematical Art of M.C. Escher* to discover the background to his work.

— TR

[ This article will be concluded in the next issue. ]

### Internet sites referred to above:

<http://space.about.com/library/lessons/blastro1a.htm>  
<http://www.about.com/>  
<http://anzwers.org/free/universe/>  
<http://www.closetotruth.com/>  
<http://www.iath.virginia.edu/london/model/>  
<http://personal.cfw.com/~clayford/>  
<http://aa.usno.navy.mil/faq/docs/easter.html>  
<http://atlas.geo.cornell.edu/education/>  
<http://www.nasm.si.edu/earthtoday/>  
<http://www.mathacademy.com/pr/minitext/escher/>

## Taking the Long View

Ageing hippies among our readers may remember the name Stewart Brand from the 1960s and 70s. And if the name isn't familiar, what he created will be. For it was Brand who in 1968, at the ripe old age of 30, conceived and brought into existence that superlative "access to tools" known as *The Whole Earth Catalog*. I myself nearly missed it, myopically discovering it only in its "final" incarnation — *The Last Whole Earth Catalog* (1971; ISBN 0 394 70459 2). For me it was an exhilarating experience, akin to that when I first read Robert M. Persig's *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance*. To this day I still find compelling bits and pieces in the *Last WEC's* 450 tabloid-format pages. (For one thing, how intriguing it is to re-read Walter/Wendy Carlos' prophetic article on music synthesizers after 30 years.)

For younger or non-hippie readers, perhaps I should explain the purpose of *The Whole Earth Catalog*. Better yet, let it speak for itself:

We are as gods and might as well get good at it. So far remotely done

power and glory — as via government, big business, formal education, church — has succeeded to [the] point where gross defects obscure actual gains. In response to this dilemma and to these gains a realm of intimate, personal power is developing — power of the individual to conduct his own education, find his own inspiration, shape his own environment, and share his adventure with whoever is interested. Tools that aid this process are sought and promoted by the WHOLE EARTH CATALOG.

A sort of pre-home-computer Internet, if you wish, but certainly a directory of "what to get and where and how to do the getting". Importantly, almost every item listed is accompanied by editorial comment based on careful evaluation.

The title, *The Whole Earth Catalog*, derives from the famous 1967 NASA photograph of the full Earth taken from a satellite — an emblematic image which also gave rise to *WEC* catchphrase "We can't put it together. It is together". In 1966 Brand had thought up and sold buttons reading, "Why Haven't We Seen A Photograph of the Whole Earth Yet?" The story goes that this prompted NASA to hurry up and

make acceptable colour photos of Earth from distant space. Another legend has it that the ecology movement took shape in 1968-9 partially as a result of those photos. Certainly the first Earth Day was in 1970.

But whatever happened to Stewart Brand since the *Last WEC*? Did he just fade away into bohemian obscurity? Far from it.

In 1972, he received the U.S. National Book Award for *The Last Whole Earth Catalog*, which by then had sold 1.5 million copies. For the next twenty years he was involved in instigating, editing or authoring numerous books. Here are the highlights of his career in that period.

One of his own works was *Two Cybernetic Frontiers* (1974) on the subject of cutting-edge computer science. It had the first use of the term “personal computer” in print and was the first book to report on computer hackers. That same year he edited and published *The Whole Earth Epilog* — a nice title (even the pagination continues on from the *Last WEC*). In 1981-2 he edited and published *The Next Whole Earth Catalog*.

By the following year he was into a very new idea: online conferencing. This led to The

WELL (Whole Earth ‘Lectronic Link), a computer teleconference system for the San Francisco Bay Area — a sort of forerunner of the Internet. According to his friend John Brockman (literary agent, writer on high-tech culture and editor of *The Edge*), “Stewart is the king of initially obscure, ultimately compelling conceptual art. Call it reality”.

For the rest of the 80s and the early 90s he researched and wrote and lectured (e.g. at the School of Management and Strategic Studies, Western Behavioral Sciences Institute, La Jolla, California).

In 1994 he wrote the Foreword to *The Millennium Whole Earth Catalog*, “Access to Tools and Ideas for the Twenty-First Century”, edited by Howard Rheingold. This book was printed on recycled paper and the publisher HarperCollins undertook in addition to plant two trees for each tree used in the book’s manufacture.

Nineteen ninety-four was far more significant, however, for the publication of Brand’s *How Buildings Learn: What Happens After They’re Built*. This was a book that received so much acclaim that in 1996-1997 the BBC produced a 6-part TV series with

## Web

In this issue’s *Web Line* we begin an article devoted to sites about science and mathematics. (Some of these have been already mentioned at the *Bikwil* site.)

“Our infinite universe is merely a speck of dust . . .” The introductory course at *Astronomy 101* is part of the huge *About Network* of sites. There are ten lessons (including a history of astronomy) and many useful links.

*An Atlas of the Universe* begins at 12.5 light years from the sun and progresses as far out as 15 billion light years. There are nine main maps, each one approximately ten times the scale of the previous one, plus some quite useful links and a glossary.

*Closer to Truth* “brings together leading scientists, scholars and artists to debate the fundamental issues of our time.” *Brain & Mind, Creativity & Thinking, Health & Sex, Technology & Society, Universe & Meaning* — these are their main areas of concern. As well as the Web site, *CTT* is disseminated nationally on US public



## Line

TV, in a companion book and on video and audio tapes. The site has a special HyperForum for online discourse.

The *Crystal Palace* was erected for London’s Great Exhibition of 1851, using design and manufacturing technology that’s still considered state-of-the-art 150 years later. This site is dedicated to explaining those techniques, with textual discussion and an animated tour of its structure inside and externally. This latter feature needs QuickTime 5 and, being graphics-intensive, requires your patience, though you can look at still images instead, if you can’t wait.

At *Curious and Useful Math* you’ll find multiplication and division tricks, calculator tricks, Bible numbers, even square roots by hand . . . “There are also some entertaining trivia and math facts that are nice to slip into casual conversation.”

Do you know how to calculate the date of Easter Sunday for any given year? Get the full rundown on the matter (including common

# Sehnsucht

[ Dreadful Doggerel No. 6 ]

I wish I could be tutoring  
A backward child on Mars;  
For then I might go shooting  
With all the pretty stars.

I wish I were a pumpkin,  
So round and firm and green;  
For then I might go jumpkin'  
With my friend the bean.

I wish I could write poetry  
That didn't sound so forced;  
For then I might rhyme "moiety",  
Instead of making do with verse that's blank.

— Meistersinger Matthias

that title which Brand wrote and presented.

In essence the book consists of insights about the nature of change in buildings we imagine as permanent. Brand argues that any building is actually a hierarchy of system modules, each of which inherently changes at different rates.

One reviewer summed up the idea this way: "Age plus adaptivity is what makes a building come to be loved. The building learns from its occupants, and they learn from it".

During this period Brand was featured on the cover of *The Los Angeles Times Magazine*, which described him in these words: "Always two steps ahead of others . . . [he] is the least recognized, most influential thinker in America."

His background is an interesting one.

Dipping into a book like *How Buildings Learn*, say, or the space given in the *Last WEC* to things like Buckminster Fuller's geodesic domes, you might be forgiven for guessing that he might have been an architect before he took up his writing/inventing/inspirer/gadfly career. No, it's just that he is an intelligent and well-read feller.

(Actually he was educated originally as a biologist and later trained in the military.)

I suppose you could call Stewart Brand an ecologist at heart — a man who passionately believes in preservation in its widest sense. It is a characterisation that delivers us at last to the main business of this essay.

In 1995, with supercomputer designer Dr. Danny Hillis, Stewart Brand co-founded The Long Now Foundation, an organisation whose mission is to foster long-term responsibility. Long-term responsibility, note, not long-term planning, which is futile. The original concept was Hillis', who in 1993 had been contemplating

. . . a large (think Stonehenge) mechanical clock, powered by seasonal temperature changes. It ticks once a year, bongs once a century, and the cuckoo comes out every millennium.

The Board of The Long Now Foundation consists of some very interesting people:

The co-founder of Broderbund Software, Douglas Carlston;

Esther Dyson (the person responsible for of *Release 1.0*, a leading computer industry newsletter);

musician Brian Eno;

Mitchell Kapor (the founder of Lotus and co-founder of The Electronic Frontier Foundation);

Kevin Kelly (the executive director of *Wired* magazine);

Paul Saffo (spokesman for The Institute for the Future) and the chairman of Global Business Network, Peter Schwartz.

Brand serves as president. He and Hillis are co-chairmen.

In that list some of you will have certainly recognised the name of Brian Eno. An innovator through and through, he is. I know him above all as the “ambient music” recording artist, particularly for such albums as *Discreet Music* (1975), *Music for Films* (1978), *Music for Airports* (1979), *The Plateaux of Mirror [sic]* (1980), and *My Life in the Bush of Ghosts* (1981). “A music which was sort of suspended in an eternal present tense,” he called it.

It was Eno, too, who had supplied the music for Brand’s BBC *How Buildings Learn* series. And it was he who gave the Foundation its name.

As far back as 1979, when he was visiting some people who lived in a chic loft apartment in the more derelict neighbourhoods of New York, he had been struck by how many arty New Yorkers had such a narrow view of “here” and “now” — nothing beyond their individual front door or

either side of this week. He later wrote in his notebook, “More and more I find I want to be living in a Big Here and a Long Now”.

Then, fifteen years later in 1994, when email discussions arose about Hillis’ millennial clock, Eno suggested the name “The Clock of the Long Now”.

The core project of the Foundation is known as “Clock/Library” — the building of a 10,000-year Clock designed by Hillis together with an information service.

A 10,000-year Clock? Indeed yes. Brand explained it in an interview in this way:

. . . [Danny] was noticing that the year 2000 was acting like a wall for people, that the future was always the year 2000 and — when he was a young man, and then older, the future was getting shorter — shorter by a year every year of his life — which is probably a bad sign. So he wanted something that would pop through the millennium . . . Danny wanted to make an instrument that was not participating in those rapid exponential curves of population and technology growth and megabytes per dollar and so on, but something that just plugs along at the same pace as seasons — spring, summer, fall, winter, spring, summer, fall, winter — it’s the same 10000 years from now, probably as 10000 years ago.

We stepped into one of the shops, and Rivers tried to negotiate a simple purchase with a not-too-bright teenage girl who had no clue who her customer was. The girl couldn’t get anything right, and finally — in total frustration — Joan leaned over the counter, looked her in the eye, and asked “It’s not your career, is it?” I couldn’t control my outburst of laughter and scurried toward the exit.

One of the interviews Joan did was with a local radio personality who made her crack up by telling her “the thing about chickens is — no matter how much weight they gain, it never shows in their face.” She asked him if she could have the line, and he was pleased to give it to her. I saw her deliver it a few months later on television.

One of the last interviews we did was with my former live-in partner. I knew he would make Rivers laugh, and he did. About halfway through the interview, he took a break, and Rivers turned to me and said “You two have something going on, don’t you?”

I was startled she had picked this up, and I explained to her that we had once been an item but had broken up. I told her

what he had said when my mother had come to visit: “The whole time Diane’s mother was in town, I had to keep my Valium in a holster.” I promised her I’d get her the rights to this line, too.

After the interview, we waited in the hall for the elevator. When it opened, out stepped my ex’s current girlfriend, a local judge. “That’s who he’s with now,” I nudged Joan. “What?!” she called out loud enough to turn heads. “That tramp in the elevator?!”

Years passed. I saw Rivers one more time from a seat at one of her concerts. Her career soared, and throughout the world, we watched her deal with everything from the Johnny Carson snub to the death of her husband, Edgar Rosenberg. Every time I see her on television, I am reminded of the wild week we spent together in New Orleans, and of my favorite moment from that week. During one of our rare breaks, we sat in Joan’s suite drinking coffee and talking trash. At one point, after I said something that made her burst out laughing, she gestured toward me, turned to her little girl and said, “Melissa! Get rid of her. She’s funny.”

boss had gotten wind of the fact that the hotel hadn't cleaned the suite, and she was beside herself with rage.

When Joan Rivers arrived, with nine-year-old Melissa in tow, she was ready to get down to work. I explained to her that there were many interviewers, and that we were running a couple of hours behind schedule. Reporters were lined up in the hall outside the suite. "Send them in," she told me, and that was when we began playing a game that I might have been better at if I'd been told the rules.

"Come in, come in, have some coffee!" Rivers would tell a reporter. She was funny, charming and intelligent, answering all questions and paying close personal attention to each reporter. But when her interviewer leaned over to pour a cup of coffee or to get a fresh pad of paper, she would turn slightly toward me and mouth "Get rid of him!"

"I'm afraid we have to stop now. Ms. Rivers is running very late because of her flight. I'm really sorry."

"No, no, no!" Rivers would then assure the interviewer. "Finish your interview. Don't worry about the time. I insist."

Then she would roll her eyes toward me and almost imperceptibly motion *Get Him Out!* with her hand. Eventually, I became fairly adept at this new version of Good Cop/Bad Cop, though I had a terribly difficult time getting some of them out of the suite, what with Joan's grabbing them by the arm and saying "Stay, stay!"

At the end of the day, I had to deal with the Jewish mother aspect of Joan. "Eat, you're not eating enough," she would tell me at dinner in the hotel restaurant. She knew I was at the point of exhaustion, and she hovered over me. I was her connection to Things That Worked Right, and she didn't want to lose me. She was also a genuinely kind woman, inherently open and full of mischief.

One night, she decided she wanted to buy a T-shirt for Melissa, so she asked me to accompany her across Bourbon Street to one of the tacky T-shirt shops that line the Quarter. Rivers, like many entertainers, will tell you that when she's leading her non-stage life, she's not "on". Don't believe it. She couldn't help herself — she was almost always on, and I was almost always laughing myself sick.

There is an obvious irony here. Although the Clock of the Long Now is being designed by an expert in the fastest supercomputers, it is going to need the world's slowest computer driving its mechanism. Such an extraordinary undertaking must therefore be underpinned by farsighted principles, such as longevity, maintainability, transparency, evolvability and scalability.

Several prototypes have already been built.

As for the Library part of the vision, Hillis looks on the Library as "the Clock's evolutionary companion". By this he means that each embodies a different aspect of time. The Clock is physical time, the Library informational time. The Clock is all about past and future time, but it contains no content — unlike the Library, which is all about content. Manifested are the uses already suggested for the Library, but its fundamental characteristic is, as Brand puts it, that it will

... specialize in trends too slow to notice but that gradually dominate everything as they accumulate . . . Culture is where the Long Now operates. Culture's vast slow-motion dance keeps century and millennium time. Slower than political and economic history, it moves at the pace of

language and religion . . . The slow stuff is the serious stuff.

But in this age of the "pathologically short attention span", how and by whom is the Clock/Library to be tended? While it must not be allowed to become a religion, a Clock/Library created in the spirit of the Long Now must be taken care of and renewed according to certain guidelines, such as

1. Serve the long view (and the long viewer)
2. Foster responsibility
3. Reward patience
4. Mind mythic depth
5. Ally with competition
6. Take no sides
7. Leverage longevity.

All these ideas, and more, are explained and expanded in Brand's 1999 book *The Clock of the Long Now* (ISBN 0 297 64299 5). I found it well researched and quite motivating. When you get the chance, make sure you read its chapters on libraries. Chapter 12, *Burning Libraries*, could well disturb you, but Chapter 15, *10,000-Year Library*, should offer an encouraging antidote. Other chapters that appealed to me include Chapter 14, *Ending the Digital Dark Age* and Chapter 19, *Uses of the Past* — not forgetting Chapter 10, *Ben is Big*, which

describes Brand's and Eno's visit to the London clock in the mid 1990s.

Overall, Brand succeeds in blending technicalities and insight into an eminently readable whole. I was particularly exhilarated by the wealth of allusions and quotations he provides, from such a variety of fields — ideas from people from domains and periods as disparate as clockmaker Su Sung (late 11th century), novelist Nathaniel Hawthorne, archaeologist Mary Leakey, Yale School of Art dean Richard Benson, nanotechnology futurist Eric Drexler, plus of course the board members of the Long Now Foundation.

More recently the Foundation has initiated two spin-off projects.

The first of these is called The Rosetta Project. This is a global collaboration to survey and maintain an archive of 1,000 languages:

Our intention is to create a unique platform for comparative linguistic research and education as well as a functional linguistic tool that might help in the recovery of lost languages in unknown futures.

The second project is the Long Bets Foundation, in which anyone laying a wager must designate a non-profit organisation as the

ultimate recipient of the proceeds of the winning bet:

Long Bets is a public arena for enjoyably competitive predictions, of interest to society, with philanthropic money at stake. The foundation furnishes the continuity to see even the longest bets through to public resolution.

In all its endeavours the Long Now group encourages your involvement and mine, whether it be in the Clock/Library itself, the Rosetta Project or Long Bets. Visit their Web sites if you can, but at least read Brand's book. The germane Internet sites are:

<http://www.longnow.org>  
<http://www.rosettaproject.org>  
<http://www.longbets.com/>

To conclude, here is one of the more inspirational quotations in Brand's book. It's John Quincy Adams, lawyer, political philosopher, revolutionary and second President of the U.S.A., writing to his wife Abigail in 1780:

I must study politics and war that my sons may have liberty to study mathematics and philosophy. My sons ought to study mathematics and philosophy, geography, natural history, naval architecture, navigation, commerce, and agriculture, in order to give their children a right to study painting, poetry, music, architecture, statuary, tapestry, and porcelain.

— TR

## Can We Really Talk?

### My Week with Joan Rivers

In the late seventies, I was working at an urban slave's wage for a very small public relations agency in New Orleans. My boss was a talented publicist and an even better schmoozer, and we landed the regional Warner Bros. account. This meant that we handled public appearance tours for movie stars whose films were opening in the area. I worked with such stars as Gene Kelly, Michael Sarrazin and Lauren Hutton, and I have a trove of tellable tales, but none matches my memory of Joan Rivers.

It was 1978, and Rivers had just produced *Rabbit Test*, a mediocre comedy starring Billy Crystal, who played the first man to become pregnant. We had scheduled a rigorous itinerary of newspaper, wire, television and radio interviews for the director/comic, and almost all of the work had fallen on me. I was also a Rivers fan, and was looking forward to meeting her.

Our most active account was a famous French Quarter hotel, so naturally, we reserved a suite for

Rivers there. I showed up at the hotel very early the day Rivers was scheduled to arrive, did an inspection to make sure everything was perfect, and found that everything was abysmal. Not only was there no fruit basket and welcome note, but the floor hadn't been vacuumed, the bathroom was dirty, and the furniture needed dusting. The general manager's secretary — a compulsive, sometimes unpleasant woman — was angry with us for some imagined slight, and I was certain she had sabotaged the order to have the suite prepped for a celebrity visit.

A call to Housekeeping didn't get me much more than equipment, so I frantically cleaned the suite, expecting the star to arrive any moment.

Then I got word that Rivers' flight had been cancelled. I was already exhausted from normal preparations, not to mention all of the cleaning and vacuuming. I called members of the news media to tell them their interviews would be delayed, and they were not amused. By this time, my

user derision rather than of collegial irony. For that reason, perhaps, the insider joke now is for programmers to refer to a customer-reported bug as “an undocumented feature”.

Incidentally, a bug was originally (in the 14th century) “an object of terror, usually an imaginary one”, and is thought by some to derive from a Welsh word *bwg* (= “hobgoblin or scarecrow”). By the 17th century, the meaning of “insect” had superseded the earlier meaning, though that sense has persisted in words like *bugbear* and *bogyman*.

Other senses include “enthusiast” — as in *jitterbug* — and the verbal sense of “annoy”.

Speaking of the “annoy” sense of *bug* brings me to the similar-looking word *bugger*, one of whose meanings is “nuisance”.

But despite this apparent connection, the words are in actual fact etymologically unrelated.

Still labelled “coarse” in many dictionaries, *bugger* has a variety of other meanings — as noun, verb and interjection. These include “sodomite”, “bloke”, “wreck” and “damn”.

That first “serious” sense is the original meaning of *bugger* and it has an interesting etymology. It got into English via 14th century French (*bougre*, from Latin *Bulgarus*) as the name of a sect of heretics who had come from Bulgaria in the 11th century. It later was used to describe the Albigenian heretics and even heretics in general, especially those suspected of indulging in “abominable practices”.

A derived phrase well known to Aussies and Brits is *bugger-all* — meaning “absolutely nothing” (1930s). I remember a classic exchange in one of John Mortimer’s *Rumpole of the Bailey* stories that illustrates the phrase beautifully.

It went something like this:

His Honour addresses the Accused: “Do you have anything to say before I pass sentence?”

(Under his breath:) “Bugger-all, My Lord.”

(Addressing Counsel for the Prosecution:) “What did he say?”

“Ahem. He said ‘Bugger-all’, My Lord.”

“That’s strange. I could have sworn I saw his lips move.”

— Harlish Goop

## Say Love Now

Love not told  
to them we love  
by word or deed  
is love withheld

Unsaid I care I love  
is care ungiven  
love locked inside  
heart made inarticulate.

Say it now: to wait  
is to deny the word  
that swells the heart.

Say it now: delay  
will only cause regret  
and no one gains.

Denial and delay  
mean anguish unresolved,  
tears will not wash away the hurt  
when caring comes too late.

Time present is a gift  
too vital to forgo  
too precious to lament  
our forsaking it.

Say love now and let  
the heart be eloquent.

— Bet Briggs

## Mary Bennet

9

I did not hurry: I dawdled. And I did not ask Gil to help me change my gown either. I was extremely angry with my mother — she had pulled me about unmercifully and very likely in the process split the seam herself: certainly I had not noticed it earlier. And there had been something about her treatment of me, a contempt, which I very much resented and which I vowed I would make her sorry for.

I knew such a thought was sinful, that Mr Knowles would be shocked, would urge me to pray, to cleanse my mind and heart. But the idea of making Mama sorry was too sweet to relinquish in a hurry, and while I removed my spectacles and polished them (slowly) and put them back on and combed my hair and stared at my reflection in the glass, I meditated on how best I could punish her.

Meanwhile of course the Lucases and the Netherfield party

had arrived — loud-voiced greetings and bursts of laughter having gradually subsided into a general buzz of conversation — and by the time I had fixed on a most exquisite punishment, they had all gone in to dinner. The punishment was nothing more than that I had decided to return downstairs still wearing my torn gown — in fact I had made the split rather bigger.

I went directly to the breakfast room where Gil was serving up soup to Lydia and Kitty and the two Allardyce boys, but beyond a cursory nod in my direction and a “Where on earth have you been?” she paid me no attention. Consequently I was not introduced to either of the boys, and when I took my place at the table, the bigger (but as I later learned, younger) boy said in a loud impudent voice:

“And who might you be, Miss?”

Lydia thought this so amusing she spluttered her soup: “That is my sister Mary, you rude boy.”

## A Word in Your Pink Shell-like

The following couple of ideas have been reported in language circles before, but seeing that some readers might not have come in contact with them they are worth mentioning in this column.

First, let’s look at the phrase *computer bug*.

In Issue 11 (January 1999) Tony Rogers wrote a piece (*Programming with Grace*) in praise of computer pioneer Grace Hopper. Apart from being the driving force behind the computer language COBOL, it is Hopper to whom the first documented use of the term *computer bug* is attributed. Part of the *Bikwil* Hopper article reads as follows:

It was while working at Harvard that Grace Hopper is said to have coined the term “bug” for a computer fault. The bug she discovered was a moth which had caused a hardware error and which she duly pasted in the project logbook.

Now, strictly speaking, it wasn’t Hopper herself who found the moth; it was a technician who uncovered it between the contacts of an electromechanical relay.

More interesting, though, for us word explorers is this: notwithstanding the powerful nature of computing mythology, the word *bug* already had a long history in the sense of “problem”. According to the *Oxford* this sense of the word goes back at least to the 1880s, when Thomas Edison is quoted as using it to mean “difficulty”, implying that an imaginary insect had got inside the machinery and was causing failures.

So when Grace Hopper wrote her logbook comment sixty years later, she was actually using the word humorously, in the full knowledge that her co-workers would get the joke. I quote from the Jargon Dictionary Web site (<http://info.astrian.net/jargon/terms/b.html#bug>):

The text of the log entry (from September 9, 1947), reads “1545 Relay #70 Panel F (moth) in relay. First actual case of bug being found”. This wording establishes that the term was already in use at the time in its current specific sense . . .

These days, of course, computers are everywhere, not just in university laboratories, and computer bugs are the objects of

better I realized that although he was fond of studying his fellow creatures — as befits a writer of novels — he was not in the least censorious. He may have been cataloguing their imperfections, but he was far too fallible and self-deprecatingly aware of it to sit in judgment. And unlike Darcy, he was not reserved: he was more than ready to amuse and be amused.

In a word, Mr Coates was charming, but I fancy it was his laugh that made people, particularly young people and children, respond to him: it was an odd laugh — high and slightly cracked — an imperfection that made him irresistible, certainly to Elizabeth.

He was laughing now — in response to something Lydia had just said. When Mrs Rossi had announced that after dinner George was going to play Haydn in the drawing room, Lydia had understood her to mean the game of hide and seek: (“In the drawing room! Mama will never give him leave.”) But on learning her mistake she was not at all abashed, saying merely: “Oh! Well then Mary must play Haydn too. Mary is a capital player.”

Altogether it was an evening for misunderstandings for I later

learned that Mrs Allardyce believed me to be Gil Pender’s daughter. And although George would eventually set her right as to my parentage, I am convinced she persisted in seeing me as some sort of under-nurserymaid employed to assist Gil in looking after Kitty and Lydia. It is hard to completely disabuse people of faulty first impressions: having consigned me and my torn dress to the servant class, Mrs Allardyce was content for us to remain there. And when I was later called on to play a Haydn sonata in the Longbourn drawing room, it was much like the shepherd boy being called in by his betters to sing in the parlour.

I do not think I would ever have learned the true state of affairs at Netherfield if Mrs Allardyce had not entertained this view of me — that somehow I did not count. I was soon to become a regular visitor to the house, and in the ordinary way of children I became privy to many family secrets. But their most closely guarded secret I should never have learned if Mrs Allardyce had not been quite unconcerned about what she said and did in my presence.

— Jennifer Paynter

The boy was cramming bread into his mouth and talking at the same time. “Why is she dressed in rags then, pray? I thought she was a maidservant.”

More spluttering from Lydia, with Kitty copying her as usual, but now the other boy spoke up pretty sharp: “Stow it, Sam!” And then turning to me: “I’m George Allardyce and I apologise for my brother’s manners.”

He had a very pleasant, albeit foreign looking face, red-cheeked and full-lipped and with beautiful dark eyes — so dark it was hard to tell where pupil and iris met. (His brother in contrast was more conventionally English looking: fairer, larger and lighter-eyed.) George’s manner too struck me as slightly exotic; he inclined his head when he spoke and used formal phrases. But at the same time he was eager to talk and full of questions. And while Lydia and Sam and Kitty sniggered and spluttered and (when Gil’s back was turned) rolled little pills of bread and threw them at each other, George Jesuitically cross-examined me:

Did I enjoy living in the country? Had I lived at Longbourn all my life? How long had the Lucases lived at Lucas Lodge? He

had already met Maria Lucas and her brother William. But neither of them owned a pony. Did I have my own pony? Was I interested in music? Did I sing or play the pianoforte?

I endeavoured to answer all these questions and a dozen more besides — he was disappointed to learn that I did not own a pony and had never been taught to ride — after which I ventured to ask a couple of questions of my own: Had he and his brother always lived in London? And had they always lived with their uncle Mr Coates?

His reply surprised me. No indeed, Sam and he had not always lived in London. It was only in the last four years that they had lived there with Mr Coates — who by the bye was their *step*-uncle, not their *real* uncle. Before that, they had lived in Italy with their mother and grandmother.

“Nonna is Italian,” added George. “But her English is excellent I promise you. Two of her husbands were English, you see.”

“Two of her husbands!”

He nodded, smiling, but did not elaborate, turning his attention back to the business of eating, and I wondered perhaps if he was

ashamed of his grandmother because she was a fast woman and a foreigner. But even as I was wondering this, the lady herself marched into the room, clapping her hands and calling:

“So. Where are my grandsons hiding? Where are my beautiful boys concealing themselves? *Bene.*” (Raising her voice.) “Jasper! Christina! Here it is. I have found them. Here is the room.”

For a grandmother, Mrs Rossi was amazingly youthful looking. True, her hair was silver but it was scissored into a feathery cropped style and her figure was slender, her skin remarkably unlined. And she had the same black eyes and full red mouth as George.

She was now marching around the table — she had a mannish sort of arm-swinging walk — tousling George’s and Sam’s hair as she passed behind their chairs, calling Lydia and Kitty by their right names, helping herself to nuts from a bowl set out on the table, and finally stopping opposite me and pointing:

“So. This is the person I do not know. This is Miss *Mary* Bennet I think it must be? No, do not stand up. I am Lucia Rossi and

the mother of this boys’ mother and so now we know each other. And now you must call me Nonna too.”

Giving me a glorious white-toothed smile and crunching down on another nut. I was utterly dazzled; all I could do was smile weakly up at her. I am sure she was used to this sort of response and she continued to crunch nuts and nod approvingly at me for several seconds before turning her charm on Gil Pender, asking her whether she found the Bennet children extremely naughty ones.

But when it was obvious that poor Gil knew not how to reply to this, Mrs Rossi said swiftly: “Now I am the naughty one to ask the question, si? When they are lending us their little ears. And so you must talk to me later all about them, Gil — especially Miss *Lydia* the most naughtiest one of all.” (Calling again) “Christina! Jasper! Where are you? I am in the breakfast chamber, here!”

It seemed to take Mrs Allardyce and Mr Coates an age to obey her summons, and when they finally entered the room — Mrs Allardyce walking a little ahead — I had the impression

that they had been quarrelling. Mrs Allardyce was saying something to him in a foreign language, speaking very low, and then too suddenly a public smile came on her face.

Until she smiled, I thought her the most beautiful woman I had ever seen. She was wearing a black silk gown trimmed with seed pearls and her dark hair was coiled up and plaited with similar strands of pearls. She was more voluptuous, more slow-moving, than Mrs Rossi, but there was a marked resemblance to her mother about the eyes and mouth. Her smile however — in contrast to the gleaming energy of Mrs Rossi’s — was disappointing; even-toothed but small, even a little sly.

Mrs Rossi meantime had placed her hands on my shoulders. “Here is the person you and Jasper do not know, Christina.” And then nodding towards Gil: “Here is two persons!”

“Well, Mama, and so?”

I marvelled that Mrs Allardyce should adopt such a dismissive tone towards her own mother (resolving meanwhile to adopt a similar tone towards Mama as soon as ever I could) but Mrs Rossi seemed not in the least put

out and went on with her introductions: “This person here is Miss Mary Pender. And this one is Gil Bennet.”

At least that is what I *thought* she said — Bennet and Pender are similar sounding names after all and Mrs Rossi spoke with a foreign accent — but I did not like to correct her for fear of being thought impertinent and Mrs Allardyce did not seem to be paying attention anyway. She had moved off to bend over Sam, kissing him and tickling his cheek. Sam for his part reacted as if an insect was crawling on him, brushing away her hand and grimacing: “Mother *please!*”

But what of Mr Jasper Coates? How had he been occupied meanwhile? He had barely moved since first entering the room, intent on observing his company — as acute and unembarrassed an observer as ever Mr Fitzwilliam Darcy would later prove to be. He resembled Mr Darcy in appearance too — his person was equally fine, tall and well made.

The resemblance was only skin-deep of course: Mr Coates (as would later become apparent) was not a man of principle. But neither was he a hypocrite. And when I came to know him rather