

From the Back Verandah

If you're like me, you love picking up non-fiction bargains among the remaindered miseries in your local bookshop. But what a motley collection you find.

Dr. Doug's Daring Diet next to *Sally Simpson's Sneaky Snacks* beside *Greasy Grahame's Fatsafe Feasts for Passionate Portly People on Opulent Occasions*.

Or *New Age Thinking for Readers of a Certain Age* rubbing worn shoulders with *Create Your Own Religion for the Very Young*.

Or *Windows 3.1 Exposed* nestling on top of *Secrets of Typewriter Maintenance for Non-Technicians*, in turn challenged by *Shorthand for Lefthanders*.

And so the list goes on, but you don't need telling: you know the sort of wretched tome I mean.

Inevitably, being non-fiction they're way out-of-date, and for my part I always hesitate when tempted, wondering if I'm doing the prudent thing buying something ostensibly based on fact but patently from the shadowy past and that no one else wants.

Sometimes it doesn't matter a lot, of course. Some subjects

have an eternal quality that transcends mere up-to-the-minute state-of-the-art-ness. Take this recent acquisition of mine: *The Past in Perspective: An Introduction to Human Prehistory*, by Kenneth L. Feder. Five hundred luscious pages of fascinating text with photos, charts and graphs. Marked down to \$15. A good deal not to be merrily passed up under any circumstances. Ancient history for university students like your granddaughter and white-haired armchair paleo-anthropologists like me.

Just looking at the photo of Canyonlands National Park in Utah on the front cover and reading the persuasive back-cover praise by the author's academic peers made my mouth water. Irresistible. All I needed to know, and then some, on "why we walk upright, the meaning of toolmaking, the implications of food production (sorry, Doug, Sally and Graham), the impacts of social complexity . . ."

All I want now are some stolen hours of social simplicity to read the bloody thing.

— Fizzgig

BIKWIL

The Magazine of Quiet Enthusiasms

Editor: Tony Rogers

ISSN 1328-7842

No. 39

September 2003

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Rags to Riches. Not.

Here are a few things I've learned since I began *Bikwil*. These five lessons I offer to readers in the spirit of wise-after-the-event advice, just in case someone among you is thinking of starting a specialised magazine yourself.

In no particular order, they are:

1. You can't make money from publishing a specialised magazine.
2. Publish a specialised magazine and make money? You're kidding.
3. You can't make money from publishing a specialised magazine.
4. Make money from publishing a specialised magazine? No way.

And what was the fifth thing?

Wait . . . Don't tell me . . . Ah, yes, I remember.

5. You can't . . .

. . . But, look here, you have a lot of joy along the way (six and a half years of it so far), and I can't say fairer than that. Moreover, before you all rush donations to your starving editor, muse upon this.

If it weren't for the ongoing generosity of my contributors, most of whom pay *me* (in the form of postal subscriptions) instead of getting a fee themselves, absolutely none of that stimulating joy would be possible.

So again, thank you all — and please keep writing.

Colophon

Bikwil
18 Pembury Ave.
NORTH ROCKS. N.S.W. 2151.
AUSTRALIA.

tony@bikwil.zip.com.au
www.bikwil.zip.com.au

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From the moment I picked your book up
until I laid it down I was convulsed with
laughter. Some day I intend reading it.
Groucho Marx

Classical music is the kind we keep hoping will turn into a tune.
Kin Hubbard

Quintessential Quirky Quotes

A great many people think they are thinking when they are
merely rearranging their prejudices.
William James

We're overpaying him, but he's
worth it.
Samuel Goldwyn

If you aren't fired with enthusiasm, you will be fired
with enthusiasm.
Vince Lombardi

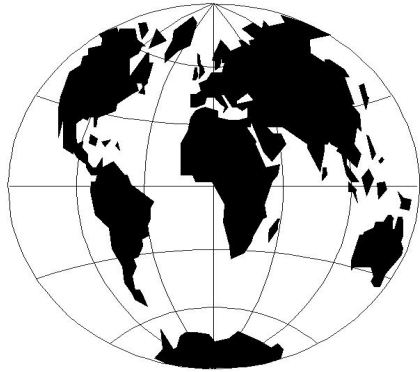
Web

This time, here are some “good causes” Web sites.

Let's start with the *M.K. Gandhi Institute for Non-violence*. This is a site that will inform

and perhaps inspire all but the most diehard cynic. The Institute, founded and run by Arun Gandhi (Mahatma Gandhi's grandson) and his wife, promotes “the philosophy and practice on nonviolence to help reduce the violence that consumes our hearts, our homes, and our societies”. Several great essays are provided, such as *Terrorism and Nonviolence* and *Nonviolence — a Way of Life*.

Médicins sans Frontières is the independent humanitarian medical aid agency whose twin objectives are providing medical assistance wherever needed and raising awareness of the plight of the



Line

people it helps. Chechnya, Congo, Afghanistan, Liberia, Ethiopia . . .

The set of pages at *Network for Good — Africa* is just part of a much larger benevolent site. Its intent is to illuminate the myriad problems plaguing Africa — AIDS and other diseases, poverty, debt, education deficits being the more obvious ones. Donate, volunteer, support the people of this desperate beleaguered continent.

The Hunger Site is a wonderful place where you can donate money to feed the world's starving without spending a cent. When you click on the button provided, a bowl of food is provided by the site's sponsors. It has several sister sites, including The Animal Rescue Site and The Rainforest Site.

— TR

Internet sites referred to above:

<http://www.gandhiinstitute.org/>
<http://www.msf.org/>
<http://www.networkforgood.org/channels/international/africa/>
<http://www.thehungersite.com/>
<http://www.theanimalrescuesite.com/>
<http://www.therainforestsite.com/>

Our Australian Flag

There's been a lot of talk about our Australian flag. One mob is itching to get rid of it, the other mob wants to cling on, at all costs.

But let's not rush in. Before we can even consider a flag-changing programme, we must first address an issue that has huge ramifications for the mental health of our citizenry.

Have you noticed that some people in Australia have a flagpole in their yard?

And have you noticed what are they flying on this flagpole?

The one with the stars and the Union Jack!!!

As a famous American professor said when he was investigating puzzling phenomena “Why is that so?”

Why do people fly the Australian flag in Australia?

The only conclusion I can come to is this: they don't know they're in Australia. They think they're in a foreign land and are claiming a small patch of an alien shore for God, Queen and Country.

I've thought about it from all angles and that's all I can come up with. They are suffering from amnesia. They believe everything outside their own patch of dirt is foreign. I

link the problem with the increasing pressure for an ‘R’, such a move has obviously created an historical fugue* in some citizens.

They simply don't know where they are.

I am deeply concerned: This delusion will spread with a change from the old flag to the new and trigger off a psychic pandemic. I'm also worried that the milder ones will tip over the edge and that the more extreme will go completely gaga — they'll develop agoraphobia and put moats around their houses and mount guard with a musket at the ready to ward off attempts to make them change to some newfangled ‘R- - - - - can’ banderole.

Think carefully, we don't want more people to develop historical fugues. We must counsel all the citizenry at risk. We must do a house to house pamphlet drop, erect huge billboards on the main highways, giant TV screens at shopping centres, anything that will assure these poor creatures, who live on an altogether different planet: “This is *Australia Mate* and you *are living in it.*”

— Eileen Marshall

[* *Fugue* is a technical term for the loss of memory.]

Winter Harvest

That frosty night was a harvest for hearts:
 nature was nurture in the silent garden.
 Too troubled to sleep I'd ventured out
 and found intense cold less a burden
 than I hoped. Such hunger stirred
 my heart's furrow I could feel
 its pang more keenly than the chill
 turning my startled breath to cloud.

Gaunt from seasons of loss, regrets
 and grief I couldn't disclose or dispel,
 enduring as I had, others' exits,
 I watched that mist of breath, frail
 as a ghost fragmenting as I moved,
 knew then what I too would become.
 No need to go on questioning my pain:
 guilt, unresolved, begins the slow death

Italian lady, a widow, many years older than himself. He falls in love with her but then he discovers she is actually the widow of his own father —”

Papa looked up from the letter he was reading. “I take it this is Mr Coates’ version of *Oedipus*?”

Aunt laughed. “Oh no! the lady is his *step*-mother merely. But then, a little later, he meets her daughter — of whose existence he had hitherto been completely unaware . . .” Aunt paused in her recital, perhaps belatedly conscious that the story was not suited to the dinner table where there were children present.

Mama of course had no such reservations. “Go on, sister. What then?”

“Oh! the usual vicissitudes. It’s a great while since I read it.”

Mama was peeling an apple for Lydia. “I daresay it was a bit warm, was it? Most of your novels are.”

Aunt and Elizabeth exchanged smiles (they were constantly exchanging smiles) but Aunt said merely: “I daresay. But very convincing nonetheless.”

“Founded upon his own experience perhaps.” Papa

pocketed his letter and rose from the table.

There was general laughter then, although Mama cried out: “My dear Mr Bennet! You’re surely not suggesting that Mrs Rossi —”

“What was the name of the book, Aunt?” Elizabeth had become adept at heading Mama off whenever she sailed too close to the wind.

“It was called *Renata*. But you won’t find it in the circulating library. The author had a change of heart shortly after the book was bound and tried to arrest publication. When that failed, he bought up every copy he could lay his hands on.”

I sat very still, experiencing one of those moments when one recognizes a truth both logically and intuitively. Nonna’s second name was Renata and Mr Coates not infrequently called her by it. And innocent and ignorant as I was, I had long sensed that Mrs Allardyce’s hostility towards Nonna was founded on jealousy.

— Jennifer Paynter

Reflecting on all this up in my little room, I was conscious of feeling out of all proportion vexed, stirred into a state of restless, unpleasant excitement. I had come to regard Mr Coates — indeed everyone at Netherfield — as peculiarly *my* property. I was resigned to playing fifth fiddle to my sisters everywhere else, but at Netherfield it was *Mary* Bennet who was petted and preferred. Netherfield was *my* kingdom, the place where I had garnered up my heart.

All my old dislike and mistrust of Elizabeth came flooding back. It was as if we had never enjoyed that earlier rapprochement. How did she contrive to so *insinuate* herself into people's hearts? Within her own family, she had all but annexed Jane and appropriated our father. And Aunt Gardiner too was fast becoming her exclusive property. Aunt was presently visiting Longbourn with her two little girls, and she and Elizabeth were forever walking together in the shrubbery, parasols held at the exact same angle and height. (Elizabeth had grown prodigiously in the past year.)

In an effort to check these envious thoughts — and ever mindful of Mr Knowles' teaching — I

threw open the lid of my piano-forte, resolving to devote the remaining hour before dinner to my music. But even as I played the opening bars of the Mozart sonata, my thoughts flew back to the morning's quarrel. Mrs Alardyce had accused Mr Coates of wanting to be rid of her — "First my mother, then me." What had she meant by those words? Mr Coates seemed sincerely attached to Nonna. And I had never heard him express dissatisfaction with the way Nonna ran his household. On the contrary, he was always thanking her, grateful for the least little thing. Why should Mrs Alardyce make such an accusation?

By the time Gil came to summon me to dinner, I was no closer to solving this riddle. It was Aunt Gardiner who unwittingly provided me with a clue. Aunt had never met Mr Coates — her last visit to Longbourn had been at Christmas, long before Netherfield was let — but she had read his very first novel.

"I may say I read it 'hot off the press'. A friend of Edward's has an interest in a publishing house and he very kindly gave us a copy. I enjoyed it immensely. All about a young man who sets off on the Grand Tour and meets an

of the heart. It was clear I must relinquish
the burden of reproof; useless to insist
I'd glean from sorrow a season of joy
or fuel the furrow from its own anguish.
To restore the perishable clay
there must first be silences and rest,
the fallow heart must then reach out
beyond itself for nourishment,

open again to change and chance.
Drawn into, infused by night's stillness
I could hear the sound behind silence.
I let the garden of night enclose
me astonished at its eloquence:
frost spread the earth like pollen
And close by the honeysuckle fence

even the plum tree's gaunt repose
 could not contain its sense of promise;
 leafless now and long in limbs and years,
 rocked in earth, its heart endured
 to catch generative fire. Drawn
 within its generous ambit I sensed
 a tremor, one which has no sound.
 The tree's ancient branches caught

and softly held the little moon.
 Suddenly I, too, was held
 in a moment of pure beauty
 and I could see a vision crowning:
 old limbs quickening with strange seed,
 the moon yellowing like a plum;
 a remembered fragrance tantalised
 me and I craved to share the moment,

to savour winter's flowering:
 as the moon ripened and branches blazed
 more abundant than in summer
 with their unaccustomed fruit
 I entered tree's firmament to feast
 on tender windfalls of light.

"Come." With his free hand he took hold of her arm. "We will talk of this above stairs."

"How dare you, Jasper! I will not — *Unhand me!*"

Mr Coates now rather spoilt the effect by laughing — although he did not let her go. "Don't write any more invitations, Nonna. Tina and I will be happy to finish them — won't we, Tina?"

Mrs Allardyce's response was spoken in Italian but unfortunately I did not understand one word of it.

Later, after I had returned to Longbourn, I wondered very much about this quarrel. It seemed preposterous that Mrs Allardyce should be jealous of Elizabeth — a fourteen year old girl with no particular claim to beauty and an inflated idea of her own intellect and powers of penetration. But the more I thought about it, the more probable it seemed: incidents which at the time had appeared trivial and unrelated now struck me as part of a pattern.

I had often observed Mr Coates talking to Elizabeth; he clearly enjoyed joking with her and teasing her. On a recent visit

to Hays Park they had spent half the afternoon playing at battledore and shuttlecock together. And they frequently, inexplicably, laughed at the same things — things which to my mind were not in the least funny — such as when poor Mr Knowles was badly scratched by Lydia's cat Beelzebub. (On being told that the sty on his eyelid might be cured by rubbing it back and forth with the tail of a black cat, Mr Knowles had rather unwisely selected Beelzebub for the purpose.)

They were also very curious about each other, especially Elizabeth about Mr Coates. She asked numerous seemingly casual questions of me. How did they all behave at Netherfield in private, and in particular how did Mr Coates conduct himself? Was he good tempered? Considerate towards the servants? Mr Coates for his part had often asked me whether *both* my elder sisters were to be present on such and such an occasion. And once when Nonna was praising Jane's beauty to the skies, he had said (impatiently, speaking over the top of his newspaper) that yes, Jane Bennet was undoubtedly a very pretty girl but Elizabeth was infinitely more *taking*.

She then snatched the list back from her mother and spoke rapidly in Italian, only some of which I understood. The confusion had arisen because two distinct classes of guest were to be invited: the first lot were to come to dinner while the second “inferior” group were to come later in the evening merely to hear the music. Mrs Allardyce now wanted Mr Purvis to be included in the first group.

“And I notice,” said she, “that Jasper’s beloved Bennets are asked to dine.”

“Oh for God’s sake, Tina.”

Mr Coates was now looking and sounding quite exasperated, but it was Nonna who finally exploded: “*Sono stufo!* All morning the children and me are writing and no person is never grateful!” So saying, she swept the pile of completed cards off the table so that they scattered in all directions.

Mr Coates immediately tossed aside his riding whip and began to pick them up, saying: “Dear Nonna Renata. We are most grateful, I assure you.”

Much to my surprise Mrs Allardyce also began to pick them up, catching up the train of her riding habit and bending

gracefully. “Really, Mama. What a fuss.”

Nonna was not in the least mollified. She had earlier placed a hand on my shoulder, preventing me from rising to retrieve the cards and now I could feel her trembling. “It was *me* who is asking the Bennets to dine, Christina — not Jasper —”

“Really Mama, I couldn’t care less.”

“The parents of this little person.” (Gripping my shoulder.) “Of course I ask them to dine — and I ask her two old sisters Eliza and Jane also.”

Mrs Allardyce laid the last card back upon the table. “Well Mama — provided Elizabeth Bennet is placed next to Jasper and Mr Purvis is seated next to myself —”

“Tina. That’s enough.”

I had never heard Mr Coates speak so sharply. He had collected his riding whip from the table and now he took a step towards Mrs Allardyce who immediately accused him in a high breathless voice of “threatening” her. “Oh!” said she with a little laugh, a mere “ha” of furious breath. “I know you want to be rid of me. First my mother, then me —”

A Word in Your Pink Shell-like

A while back (Issue 24, November 2002) I wrote about difficulties faced by newcomers to English learning to pronounce our language. In that column my subject was the vowel known as *schwa*, or “mute e”.

This time it’s a consonant which sometimes causes problems for learners that I’d like to look at — though, as you’ll see, the trouble it causes for the foreign student is by no means the only noteworthy thing about it.

Actually, it’s a pair of consonants we’re dealing with here: both are written *th*, but the sound is slightly different in each.

Belonging to the group of sounds known to linguists as “fricatives” (a group that includes *s* and *sh*), the two sounds represented by *th* in modern English are pronounced by friction produced at a narrow constriction in the mouth when the tongue protrudes slightly through the front teeth.

The two sounds are distinguished one from the other by the characteristic of “voice”. The one is said to be “voiced”,

because vibration of the vocal cords occurs as the sound is articulated, and the other is described as “voiceless”.

Here are five “minimal pairs” (a linguistic term used to show two similar utterances that differ in one sound only), which distinguish between the voiceless and voiced forms of *th*:

thigh/ty
ether/either
mouth (noun)/mouth (verb)
wreath/wreathe
thistle/this’ll.

Etymologically, *th* in English corresponds to the similar sounds in Old Norse and Ancient Greek, but while Norse had both the voiced and voiceless forms, as far as I’m aware Greek had (and has) just the voiceless sound — represented in writing by the letter *theta* (θ). To paraphrase the *OED*, the Romans had neither the sound nor the symbol, and so represented the letter by *th*, but apparently this was pronounced, at least in late Latin (whence all the Romance languages) as a simple *t*. The *OED* gives the example of the Greek word *θεωρία*, which in Latin is *theoria*, Italian

and Spanish *teoria*, Portuguese *theoria* and French *théorie* (the latter spelt with *th* and pronounced with *t*).

A handful of examples in English, by the way, where *th* is pronounced as *t*, are the words *Thomas*, *Thames* and *thyme*. There are also words where in writing *t* is followed by *h*, but in a different syllable. In these, the *t* and the *h* are pronounced separately, as in *lighthouse* and *anthill*.

Speaking of Norse, the names of the voiceless and voiced *th* sounds in that language were called *thorn* and *edh*. They were written as *þ* and *ð*, respectively, and belonged to the Runic alphabet. This had been formed by modifying the letters of the Roman and Greek alphabets so as to avoid horizontal and curved strokes. This rendered cutting them on wood or stone easier.

According to my *Funk and Wagnalls New Encyclopedia*, runes are derived

. . . from a northern Etruscan alphabet used in the eastern Alps among Italic tribes, and . . . were developed in the 2nd or 3rd century AD by a Germanic people living in the region of modern Bohemia . . . A form of runes was used by laymen in Scandinavia throughout the Middle Ages as an alternative to Latin [used

by the clergy], and runes were used in Sweden until modern times [17th century].

More to our point here, by the end of the ninth century the runic letters *þ* and *ð* were being used in English manuscripts for the corresponding English voiceless and voiced sounds, but gradually they became used interchangeably. The *OED* continues:

After 1250 the *ð* speedily became obsolete; *þ* remained in use, but was gradually restricted more or less to the pronominal and demonstrative words [e.g. *thou*, *thee*, *their*, *this*, *that*, *those* . . .]. In later times its MS. form approached, and at times became identical with, that of *y* (the latter being sometimes distinguished by having a dot placed over it).

In handwriting, this practice continued well into the 19th century.

But when printing presses started to be set up in Britain in the 1470s, the type and typesetters all came from Continental Europe, where *thorn* was not in use. England's first printer William Caxton substituted *th*, on the European model (he'd learnt the art of printing in Cologne), but in Scotland printers began using the similar-looking *y*.

And this is how, ultimately, the modern attempt to appear quaint got it wrong. In "Ye Olde

A date was accordingly fixed and then came the business of deciding who was to be invited. It was during the course of these preparations that I witnessed a dreadful quarrel between Nonna, Mrs Allardyce and Mr Coates.

George, Sam and I had been seated at the great chart table in the library transcribing under Nonna's supervision the names of guests on to cards of invitation. We had filled in about half the cards when Mr Coates and Mrs Allardyce walked into the room. They had been out riding and looked dishevelled and hot and — in Mrs Allardyce case — out of temper.

"Good God!" said she, surveying the piles of blank cards. "Have you not finished yet?"

"*Che cosa!*" said Nonna indignantly. "We have *thirty-six* invitations to be writing, Christina."

Mr Coates had come to stand behind my chair. "Very elegant handwriting, Mary."

Mrs Allardyce then plucked the list of guests from Nonna's grasp and walked about perusing it, the skirt of her riding habit trailing on the floor behind her.

And now everybody seemed to speak at once:

"Christina! I am needing the list *per favore!*"

"What about *my* handwriting, Uncle Jasper?" Sam held up a barely legible specimen.

"Agh!" George scoffed. "Yours is good for nothing. You scribble so and make great blots." (All of which was perfectly true and all of which Sam denied shrilly.)

"Well well." (this from Mr Coates) "I'm forever blotting my copybook too, Sam."

"How is it —" Mrs Allardyce's voice rose above the rest. "How is it that Mr Frederick Purvis has not been invited?"

There was a sudden hush and then Mr Coates gave one of his odd laughs. "The builder? Fellow who wears corsets?"

"Mr Purvis *is* in the list," said Nonna. "You tell me yesterday to put him in, Christina and I do."

"Well I can't see his name, Mama." Mrs Allardyce thrust the list at her mother.

"Why the devil do you want to ask Purvis?" said Mr Coates.

Mrs Allardyce answered him in Italian, speaking sarcastically and pointedly, perhaps forgetting I was now able to understand: "Because he has a lot of money."

Mary Bennet

11

Everyone at Netherfield, even Mrs Allardyce, now seemed especially anxious to reassure me that I was welcome: I was not to consider myself a visitor, I was part of the family. Nonna immediately set about teaching me Italian, in which I made such rapid progress that my grasp of the language soon rivalled that of Elizabeth — much to her annoyance. But when Mr Coates tried to teach me to ride, the outcome was rather less happy. I simply could not conquer my fear of horses, their snorting and eye-rolling and unpredictable tricks, although for George's sake I persevered with lessons for several weeks.

Fortunately, this did not affect our friendship. By now, George and I were much too fond of each other to allow anything or anyone to come between us: we absolutely *confided* in each other. I could tell him about my sisters — how I felt excluded from Kitty and Lydia's juvenile pursuits and equally shut out from Jane and Elizabeth's new adult world, or worse, included as an act of charity. George for his part could

talk to me of Sam's oafishness and childish clowning. There was also the exquisite comfort of complaining about our respective mothers, their partiality and caprice. And George even confided — swearing me to secrecy — that his father was not dead but very much alive, having divorced his mother years ago when they all were still living in Italy.

But of course over and above everything, we had our music — an *excess of it* so far as Mrs Allardyce was concerned — and it was at this time that George and I first began to rehearse Mozart's Two-piano Sonata in D major. (Recalling the experience still has the power to bring tears into my eyes — and this despite its being one of the happiest of Mozart's compositions, *galant* from first to last.) Not long after we began practising it under the direction of Mr Bray, Mr Coates decided that a Musical Evening must be held at Netherfield. First, there would be a dinner, after which George and I would perform the sonata before an audience of appreciative guests.

Shophe" the word "Ye" contains the *thorn* substitute, not a true *y*. It should be pronounced "The".

Coming back to pronunciation, even native English speakers can have a problem with *th*. This often occurs with children who can't be bothered putting their tongues forward enough. The sounds of *f* and *v* are the result. The phenomenon also is to be found in the speech of certain (adult) pockets of so-called "Black English".

Believe it or not, the opposite happens too. The *OED* tells us, "Dialectically *th* is sometimes substituted for *f*".

Another problem that new and experienced English speakers alike can have is with clusters of consonants containing a *th* sound. Examples include the words *sixth* and *months*.

Some people who have trouble pronouncing the *ll* sound in Welsh (as in names like *Llewellyn*), and who don't want to just say *l*, mistakenly treat it as a sort of *th*. Welsh *ll* is called an "aspirated *l*" (sometimes a "voiceless lateral fricative"), and the means of utterance is different from that of *th*. Some people advocate "try saying *h* and *l* simultaneously", but easier

advice to follow, perhaps, is to "place the tongue so as to say *l* and hiss out of the side of the mouth". (Go on, try it.)

So far, we have speakers of Latin and French who find the *th* sound difficult. Certainly not speakers of Greek or Spanish, though, where the sound already exists in their language. In Spanish *c* (before *e* and *i*) and *z* are pronounced similarly to English *th*. The latter, however, is not the case in South American Spanish, where *z* is pronounced like *s*.

Other languages whose speakers have to assiduously practise saying *th* include Chinese and Japanese.

And what of German?

At university I encountered an unmistakable example of what we might call "phonetic denial" on this very point. Old Dr. von B. — one of two lecturers from Germany on the staff of the German Department — once asked the class what we reckoned the most difficult sound of English for Germans was. (He had *w* in mind, I think.)

Several of us volunteered *th*.

"Ach, nein. Zat is kvite easy."

— Harlish Goop

Jacob's Ladder

The floors to the top are numbered five

Where shelves of Shakespeare live:

Ten flights to the top where I might strive

For the fruits high branches give.

A lift runs up, and I could choose

To give these legs a rest,

And save the time I else would lose

On that small Everest.

Yet climb I always do, in mood

Of scaling mountain sides,

With snow and shelves of rock endued,

Nor hung with carriage-rides.

— Michael Buhagiar

Came the day of discharge and the physio department supplied me with a list of exercises to do at home. Rigorous these are, and religiously must they be performed. According to all I've read, continuing the exercise programme after leaving hospital is more important than taking regular walks.

My departure was low key, made more so by another of my futile attempts at irony. After thanking the nurses, I declared, "Well, I'll say goodbye now — the novelty's worn off."

Furrowed brows, then a lukewarm smile or two.

In the sixth week after the operation I visited the surgeon in his consulting room and had an X-ray taken.

"Progress good. Try a walking stick now. Be careful. Stay away from uneven ground. Confidence will gradually return."

It was liberating to put away the crutches and take up the stick. The same sense of freedom arrived in week nine, when I was first allowed to sleep on my side. By week twelve I was able to start sitting in progressively lower chairs.

Yes, the recovery process has been slow and inconvenient, one that's plagued my dignity now and then, but it's been a journey not

without its merits and certainly of more than theoretical curiosity.

Some examples:

I've learnt that the question "Are you a Hip or a Knee?" might conceivably serve as a party ice-breaker, but it'd have to be a dreadfully exclusive gathering.

I'm the proud owner of a fifteen-thousand-dollar artificial hip joint, which, I'm reliably informed, will outlast me at the crematorium.

I have a top-secret 22 cm scar. Reality TV beckons!

I may still have one leg shorter than the other (the rack was getting repaired just when I needed it), but whichever way you look at the whole experience, the hip arthritis pain is gone.

Whether or not I "never look back", I know I won't easily forget one particular episode.

Yes, you've guessed it: our imperious milady in full cry after her evening throne.

But enough of these rollicking reminiscences. It's time I was off on my daily walk.

Hang on! Who's got my fish-net stockings?

— TR

It all relies on the kitchen staff's training: they've been taught — allegedly on pain of instant dismissal if they use their initiative — to take everything you tick absolutely literally.

For breakfast, say, you might forget to tick “milk” for your cereal. Sure enough, the cereal and its bowl are delivered — but no milk. Now the following conversation ensues:

“Excuse me, I didn't get any milk.”

“Let's see your menu . . . ah, there's the problem: you didn't order it.”

“But . . . but . . .”

“No. You see, some people like the orange juice on their cereal.”

This business happens most with breakfast cereal, but can occur with any meal. So, for dinner once I ordered roast lamb with mint sauce. Both duly came, but no vegetables. I'd forgotten again.

I was tempted to try writing “two slices of carrot and one pea” next time, to see what would happen. Better sense prevailed, however.

By the time you come to the end of your exercise programme, there are two further tasks to learn. The first is to master ascending and descending stairs.

If you have never had leg surgery you probably aren't familiar with the mnemonics associated with negotiating stairs. They're considered necessary because people on crutches or walking sticks have to be sure of putting the correct leg forward first, to prevent accidents. And it's one leg first for going up stairs, and the other for going down.

All those years ago, in that previous broken-leg life of mine, I was taught, “Good leg to heaven, bad leg to hell”. In other words, when going up use the uninjured leg first, and when going down the operated one.

This time I learnt a new mnemonic — “GBS” (George Bernard Shaw). That's for going up: Good, Bad, Sticks. Going down you use the reverse, “Swinging Benny Goodman”.

Always an intimidating lesson, stairs, especially descending.

Your final hurdle is to learn how to get into and out of the passenger seat of a car safely. It's connected with that “90 degrees” rule, since bucket car seats can be quite low.

Meanwhile, we had arranged to buy or hire all the goodies you need as recovery aids — high “lounge” chair, raised toilet seat, dressing stick, reaching and grasping aid, sock aid . . .

Bone on Bone

[Part 2 and conclusion of an essay begun in the last issue.]

I haven't made it explicit, but the physiotherapy department at my rehab hospital conducts both a standard exercise programme and a hydrotherapy one. These supervised programmes — run seven days a week — are designed to improve your strength, balance, mobility and endurance, and comprise the centrepiece of your stay in rehab.

Apart from regular walking, which you're expected to do several times a day in the ward corridor, there are two types of physio exercises. One group you perform lying on a bed, the other you do standing, holding on to a horizontal bar.

I can't speak highly enough of those physio and hydro exercises. Without them you'd be wasting your time and may just as well have gone straight home from the acute-care hospital.

I remember, for instance, the first time the physiotherapist asked me to do a set of abduction exercises. Abduction in this sense means that, lying supine on the bed with your legs straight and together, you slide your operated leg

out to the side away from the other, and then back.

Well, when I tried it, I couldn't move the leg a single millimetre, such was the wastage of the muscle in question. Now, of course, after much regular exertion I'm quite adept at it — not great (no ballet dancer, believe me), but acceptable.

Not that I can point to a day when I had the Eureka experience with that exercise — or any other for that matter. Such is your progress through a course of physiotherapy: no dramatic revelatory moments, just imperceptible improvement.

The physio department (including the two pools) stood in a different building from the main one housing the wards. This meant that for those of us not yet strong enough to do the distance on our crutches, “porters” were at hand. It was their job to ferry patients back and forth in wheelchairs to the physio room or the pool.

One of these young porters turned out to be the most popular member of staff. Always cheery, he made a point of addressing every patient by name — and he remembered it. I asked him if he'd

always wanted to work in rehab, as he seemed to have a natural talent for it.

“Oh no, Mr. Rogers, working in a hospital is something I always swore I wouldn’t take on.”

Anyway, here he was, and making everyone’s day happier. He was so helpful, he often volunteered to work at other duties when there were staff shortages, even delivering meals or polishing floors.

I asked him if he lived close by. “You always seem to be here.” He told me that he lived on the premises.

This came about in the following way. Originally he’d been driving 35 kilometres to and from the hospital, but then he discovered the ancient disused psychiatric ward. He made some enquiries, and then an extraordinary proposal. If he could sleep in one of the rooms there free of charge, he would clean and paint the building’s interior.

The management agreed and he did paint the walls and he does sleep there.

The miraculous thing about hydrotherapy is that in the water you are able to perform movements that would be far too painful on land. Something as simple as walking around on the pool floor uses your

leg muscles in a way you wouldn’t be able to do in the normal course of events for weeks and weeks.

Even so, there’s a surprise in store each time you use the pool. As you emerge (by ramp or ladder) you find your body becoming heavier and heavier. Almost unbearably heavier the first couple of times.

Lest I leave you with the impression that everything at the rehab hospital revolved around joint replacement patients, let me record here how my days in the physio room and the pool brought me face to face with two poignant examples of an old saying.

One of these I saw in the physio room. This is a large room with about eight beds, plus other equipment. On this particular day a stroke patient lay strapped into a special bed in the corner and the bed was tilted so that he “stood” almost upright. And there were his wife and adult daughter throwing a ball to him, which he had to try to throw back. A sad but inspiring sight.

The other, equally moving, example was the case of young man with cerebral palsy, whom I encountered several times in the pool. He was a day patient who came regularly with his quite elderly

parents for muscle and co-ordination treatment.

Indeed: you don’t have to look far to find someone worse off than yourself.

Before I forget, I’d better return to that bizarre exercise timetable.

As I’ve mentioned, the physio-hydro roster varies from one day to the next. I have reluctantly come to believe that this is no accident, nor, despite appearances, ungrounded in reason, but a carefully planned tactic mounted against boredom and complacency. You can deduce this from the hospital brochure, which quite openly warns that prospective visitors should always ring the patient the night before, in case they arrive when you’re exercising.

What the powers-that-be do is clear away the dinner things, ritually scratch their heads, assign people to times (perhaps randomly) and then print multiple copies of the roster sheet, one for each bedroom, highlighting the names for that room. Naturally they’re always running late, and sometimes it isn’t till after nine pm that they’re pinned up in the rooms. This means that some patients actually have to be woken up to be told their schedule. And as for the visitors . . .

I have just realised that another thing I’ve not yet mentioned is food. How could I have been so remiss? What better topic could there be to chronicle when reliving one’s adventures in a sanatorium?

Actually — and I know this is going to be an offensive disappointment to those of you who have already experienced tasteless hospital mush — the food was quite good. There was something for everyone, from fruit-salad-laden lunches to cholesterol-rich egg-and-bacon breakfasts.

Have we stumbled upon the start of a trend here? Is this the “stretched forefinger” of a signpost to the future? Have all hospitals seen the error of their ways?

I doubt it, but with any luck we won’t have the opportunity to find out.

There’s one tradition in the kitchen I found peculiar. It concerns the choices you make when you fill out your menu the day before. You see, it contains a devious trap for the unwary. I fell into it myself, not once, but a couple of times, and I saw other patients do the same. Of course, you don’t find out the bad news till the next day (when you’ve forgotten what you ordered), so it’s all the more mystifying.