

## From the Back Verandah

Here is the solution to Kwizz Gig 4 of Issue 43, May 2004.

— Fizzgig

1. What did composer Maurice Ravel do for harmonica virtuoso Larry Adler?

— In his will Ravel stipulated that Adler (1914-2001) could perform *Bolero* without ever paying royalties.

2. Which communication tool was invented by Ray Tomlinson in 1971?

— Email. (Yes, 1971.)

3. Why was Marie Grosholtz often to be seen at the foot of the guillotine during The Terror?

— Later becoming famous in England as Madame Tussaud (1761-1850), she used to attend executions and take death masks from the severed heads.

4. What did Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1749-1832) and William Carlos Williams (1883-1963) have in common?

— Not only were they poets, they were also scientists. Williams was a practising physician and Goethe a botanist and comparative anatomist.

5. Which jazz musician had the given names "Woodrow Charles"?

— Woody Herman, bandleader and clarinetist (1913-87).

6. What was Chuneer doing with 152 balls?

— Trying to avoid them. Chuneer, an elephant, was the star attraction at Edward Cross' Menagerie in London. In February 1826 he became unmanageable and tried to break out of his cage. It required 152 balls of ammunition, a

small cannon and a harpoon to kill him. The carcass was then skinned by nine butchers, and the viscera excised by a group of surgeons. This took all day, and by the time they'd finished the 10,000 pounds of elephant remains had created a nauseating stench in the district, all-pervasive and all too long-lasting.

7. What did Thomas Alva Edison do for his insomnia?

— Believing that insomnia is caused by the donning and doffing of one's clothes, he often slept fully dressed.

8. Which harpsichordist was executed in 1536?

— Mark Smeaton, court harpsichordist and dancer. Henry VIII had him put to death for adultery with Anne Boleyn. In fact, some have suggested that he was the father of Elizabeth I.

9. Why is the military tank so called?

— Developed by the British during World War I, the armoured vehicle was so secret that it was publicly referred to as a water cistern being made for Russian factories. Hence the name, which has been with us ever since.

10. Which Australian singer was one of the original sixteen distinguished soloists for whom Vaughan Williams in 1938 composed his *Serenade to Music*?

— Baritone Harold Williams (1893-1976).

# BIKWIL

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## Bedfellows Have Been Found

Two issues ago Harlish Goop introduced us to Eric Bentley and the cleriheiw verse form (No. 44, July 2004). This seems to have touched another quirky chord among our inspired readers.

Behold! Somewhere in the pages you're now reading are *Bikwil's* first original cleriheiw examples. Not in a column of their own, but as part of another piece where they belong.

And there's more to come: watch out soon for famous names from all professions, countries and eras.

By then we'll have begun a separate cleriheiw column. But here's the rub: we haven't come up with a suitable title for the series. Any suggestions?

Thanks to tireless researcher Bet Briggs, by the way, I can now bring you some info as to where the unusual name Cleriheiw (Bentley's second forename) came from. Bet reports that it was his mother's maiden name, but its ultimate origin is not given in the ref books. Harlish Goop can't find out either.

Is it Gaelic, perhaps? Scandinavian?

### Colophon

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*Back Issues Are Still Available*

I'm on a whisky diet. I've lost three days already.

Tommy Cooper

We're going to turn this team around 360 degrees.

Jason Kidd

## Quintessential Quirky Quotes

Last night I played a blank tape at full blast. The mime next door went nuts.

Stephen Wright

I stay away from natural foods. At my age I need all the preservatives I can get.

George Burns

People always ask me, 'Where were you when Kennedy was shot?' Well, I don't have an alibi.

Emo Phillips

man who enlivened it all, the genial giant himself, Graeme Bell. What a night it was: one of the happiest of my life! I have several photographs which capture some of its magic moments.

Another precious photograph I have is one which memorialises John dancing in Martin Place to the Graeme Bell All Stars on a spring or summer day in 1980.

My encounters with Graeme — not many, in truth, over the years — and my memories and the photographic reminders of them, I treasure. The most recent encounter, though indirect, happened one morning after his birthday. I heard Margaret Throsby on ABC FM talking with him by phone: a brief but

## *For Graeme Bell*

A Trio of Clerihews

Graeme Emerson Bell  
plays beaut piano, paints as well:  
our great Australian jazz man  
now also's a nonagenarian! olz

Gee whiz G.E.B.,  
where would we jazz lovers be  
without you? Becos  
you're the Grand Jazz Wizard of Aus!

Good on you, dear Graeme:  
long may you deliver us from mayhem  
with joyful artistry and sentiment  
and go on gently being a doubly gifted gent.

refreshing interview. I was struck with delight by the youthfulness of his voice answering her questions so enthusiastically, praising life and reflecting on his own and how much more there is for him to discover.

The quality of joy, I thought, is the very nature of the man!

At the time I'd been trying my hand at a particular verse form, "giving it a go" to borrow Graeme's words at the end of his book. After some practice I thought, "I'll try and write one for Graeme". The result — I'll call it an improvisation in words — is a non-jazzy, non-satirical effort supposed to be in the form mentioned in the title.

— Bet Briggs

## *Mary Bennet*

18

Apart from one or two things I was able to piece together later, I never learned precisely what was said in the Netherfield dining parlour after George and I had left it. I do know however that there was an exchange of letters between Papa and Mr Coates the following morning, after which all intercourse between Netherfield and Longbourn ceased.

But to return briefly to the concert — for I cannot entirely pass over an event, the memory of which was to sustain me through the melancholy years that followed — it was a brilliant success. Perhaps because of all that had gone before, I felt amazingly calm throughout: a nerveless, near exalted feeling wherein everything seemed fluid and connected, and the idea of a wrong note inconceivable.

And George seemed to share the feeling, for immediately after we ceased playing he spoke of the performance as "near perfect".

The applause too was such as I have never known, with people coming up to congratulate us afterwards. (I fondly recall Mr Knowles coming with his mother who was unashamedly wiping away tears; and the music master Mr Bray was similarly affected. I also recollect Mrs Allardyce coming forward with Mr Purvis, and whilst my head was being turned with compliments, I still possessed the wit to wonder why she had changed her gown.)

In all the excitement I did not notice the absence of Elizabeth, and I was therefore quite unprepared when Aunt Gardiner came to me and said hurriedly: "We are to set off for Longbourn at once, Mary. Sir William and Lady Lucas

have kindly offered to take you in their carriage.” (Taking my arm as she spoke.) “I am very sorry to hurry you away — George! you must excuse us — but there is no time to be lost.”

I had myself become agitated then. “Good heavens! Is there something the matter? Is somebody ill?”

Aunt continued to urge me forward, but at the same time endeavoured to speak calmly: “We are all well, everybody is well. There is no need to distress yourself. It is merely that Elizabeth — ” Here, she checked herself. “We will speak of it later, if you please. The Lucases must not be kept waiting.”

All the way home in the carriage, it was clear that Sir William and Lady Lucas knew something which they were at pains to keep from me. Aunt Gardiner had very unceremoniously bundled me into their carriage and shut the door on me, responding to my entreaties that she accompany me — that she at least tell me what was the matter: “We will talk

of it later, Mary. There is not time enough now to explain. Do try for a little self-control, my dear.” (For I was then beginning to cry that I had not said goodbye to George.) “These things must be discussed in private, when we are all returned to Longbourn.”

She had then turned to thank the Lucases before walking quickly — almost running — ahead down the driveway to be taken up by the waiting carriage of my own family.

The Lucases’ carriage — an antiquated travelling coach driven by an equally antiquated coachman — had proceeded at a snail’s pace with Sir William telling me at regular intervals how much he had enjoyed the concert and how superior George’s and my playing had been. And whenever I had ventured to interpose a question, either he or Lady Lucas had talked over the top of me, making observations about the weather (“Such a mild evening for October.”) or the dishes they had eaten (“Capital currant tart. You might ask their cook for a

## For Graeme Bell

On 7 September this year Graeme Bell, renowned Australian jazz pianist, band leader, composer and gifted painter as well, celebrated his 90th birthday. What a feat! What a treat for the jazz community **worldwide** to celebrate whole-heartedly, because Graeme Bell has been bringing joy to jazz lovers everywhere for decades. He still is.

His life in jazz and the significance of his contribution have been well-documented. In particular, Dr Bruce Johnson, also an outstanding jazz musician and jazz historian, in his book *The Oxford Companion to Australian Jazz* (1986) gives a meticulously researched account of Graeme Bell’s influence and stature, describing him as “a giant in the history of Australian jazz”.

Graeme **himself** at 72 shared the joy and adventure of his music-making in his very readable autobiography modestly titled *Graeme Bell: Australian Jazzman* (1988).

Then, in October 1993 at the 2nd Doubly Gifted Exhibition held in Waverley Library, Bruce Johnson delivered The Inaugural Bell Jazz Lecture, *Jazz & Society: Sound, Art, Music — Living*, introducing it as “an important tribute to an important part of Australia’s music history, and to a particular individual without whom that history would be much

poorer: I mean of course, Graeme Bell himself . . .”

Further on, Bruce succinctly describes the Bell achievement:

Graeme Bell’s tours of Europe in the late forties and early fifties actually generated jazz movements in those regions. The Bell Band radically altered the social function of jazz in the United Kingdom, changing the direction of its subsequent history and setting the stage for the “trad boom” of the early sixties. It established in the minds of European musicians the sense of an Australian jazz style which has inspired imitators, collectors and social historians.

That historic occasion was one of the very few times in my years in the jazz community that I have met Graeme.

His birthday is a historic occasion, too, and as a personal tribute to him I’d like to share a reminiscence of a very special encounter with him.

My late husband John Briggs and I had joined the Sydney jazz scene in the mid-1970s. In May 1978 on an autumn evening soft with surprise, John, in delightful conspiracy with my sister Carolyn and her husband Paul Creevey arranged a birthday party for me — very surprising, indeed, as there’s no formal significance about being 47, unlike being 21 or 50 or 90! That night, 26 years ago, I was totally and truly “surprised by joy” by the party itself, the friends present and by the piano

familiar with examples of such phenomena so you need little reminding of them here. Except, maybe, for some classified ads that I picked from various places around the Internet:

For sale by owner, *Encyclopedia Britannica*, excellent condition. No longer needed. Husband knows everything.

Our bikinis are exciting. They are simply the tops!

Wanted. Man to take care of cow that does not smoke or drink.

Illiterate? Write today for help.

One more digression before the foreign inadvertences I'm keeping you from — unintentional funny signs from English-speaking countries:

Eat Here and Get Gas

Don't kill your wife. Let our washing machine do the dirty work.

Would the person who took the step ladder yesterday bring it back, or further steps will be taken

Finally:

The Manager Has Personally Passed All the Water Served Here  
[Hotel, Acapulco]

Ladies Are Requested Not to Have Children in the Bar  
[Cocktail lounge, Norway]

The Lift is Being Fixed for the Next Day. During That Time we

Regret that You Will Be Unbearable.  
[Bucharest hotel lobby]

Because of the Impropriety of Entertaining Guests of the Opposite Sex in the Bedroom, It Is Suggested that the Lobby Be Used for This Purpose

[Hotel, Zurich]

In Case of Fire, Do Your Utmost to Alarm the Hotel Porter

[Hotel, Vienna]

We Take Your Bags and Send Them in All Directions

[Airline ticket office, Copenhagen]

Drop Your Trousers Here for the Best Results

[Dry cleaner's, Bangkok]

Please Do Not Spit Too Loud  
[Malaysia]

Please Take Care of the Sleeping Grass

[Somewhere in Asia]

Guests Are Requested Not to Smoke or Do Other Disgusting Behaviours in Bed

[Tokyo hotel's rules and regulations]

When Passenger of Foot Heave in Sight, Tootle the Horn. Trumpet Him Melodiously at First, but if He Still Obstacles Your Passage Then Tootle Him with Vigor.

[Driver's training brochure for foreigners, Tokyo]

— Harlish Goop

receipt, my dear — that is if Mrs Rossi has no objection.") A glance at me before reverting once more to the safety of the concert ("My dear Mary, never have I heard such superior playing — even at the Court of St James's.")

I was by now quite desperate to reach Longbourn, but when at last we arrived and I was set down — after which they immediately drove off — I could not bring myself to enter the house. For several minutes I stood outside in the darkness, fearing an attack of my old breathlessness, and even when that fear had subsided, I was seized with the most dreadful foreboding. Indeed, I now believe that the Lord in his wisdom had vouchsafed me a glimpse of what lay ahead, for as I finally nerved myself to sound the door knocker, the words of the twenty-seventh psalm came to me straight: *When my father and my mother forsake me, then the Lord will take me up.*

It was Gil Pender who let me in. And it was apparent that she too knew something, for she would not suffer me to

enter the drawing room before first going ahead herself to announce my arrival. I followed her with fast beating heart — a visitor in my own house — and upon Papa opening the door, I saw Elizabeth sitting white-faced on the sofa, still wearing her little beaded cap, and with Aunt sitting on one side of her and Jane on the other.

My mother was collapsed in a chair nearby, but on catching sight of me, she was able to exclaim: "Here she is at last — little Miss Mary Quite Contrary! Never a thought for what *we* have had to endure while she is a-playing her precious music."

And when Papa — after having first dismissed Gil — bade her hold her tongue, she burst out afresh: "Had it not been for her, none of this would have happened — they would have been mere common acquaintances — but she must needs go to Netherfield every day and live in his pocket —"

Here, Elizabeth spoke up, her voice trembling: "I beg

you, Mama. It is not Mary's fault. I am entirely to blame."

She was unable to continue, and it was then that Papa placed a hand on my shoulder and made me walk with him into the hall. Closing the door to the drawing room behind us, he motioned me to go ahead a little way before saying: "Now, Mary." There followed a pause as if he were weighing his words, and while waiting for him to continue — for he was not normally slow of speech — I was once more conscious of my fast-beating heart.

"George leaves for London in two days' time, does he not?" said he finally. And upon my confirming it, he continued: "Then you will not mind so much when I tell you that you are no longer to visit at Netherfield. Whilesomever Mr Coates and Mrs Rossi are living there, we none of us will visit. The acquaintance is to be entirely given up. You understand me, child?"

"Yes, sir."

He again placed his hand

upon my shoulder. "You are not of an age for me to explain my reasons, Mary, but Mr Coates has imposed upon us —" He broke off, gripping my shoulder. "You must accept my judgment in the matter."

It was one of the few completely serious exchanges I had ever had with him — but as he turned away, there was a glimmer of his old sarcasm: "I am sorry that this had to happen on the night of your great triumph."

He was on the point of returning to the drawing room when I burst out: "Papa! If you please, may I not say good-bye to George? May I not at least *write* to him?"

He shook his head without looking at me and opened the door, and once again I glimpsed Elizabeth. Only now her face was pressed against Aunt's shoulder and she was crying, her little cap all awry and her hair tumbling down.

— Jennifer Paynter

## A Word in Your Pink Shell-like

Now you didn't think, did you, that I'd ignore this funny line from a brochure for an Italian hotel on the back page of the previous issue?

This hotel is renowned for its peace and solitude. In fact, crowds from all over the world flock here to enjoy its solitude.

Signs too are a wonderful source of humour. Alas, they're only occasionally deliberate, and much more likely to be unintentional, as the above example and *Bikwil's* series *Spellbound* show. Today we have a look at both types.

Of the deliberate ones, many are graffiti and to a lot of people quite objectionable, so I thought you might like to smile at some of the rare non-scatological ones:

[In a shoe store window:]

We Give You a Fit and Serve You Right

[Outside a Sydney chemist shop in a building being renovated:]

Bismuth as Usual

[Outside a San Antonio Food Store:]

Shoplifters Will Be Beaten, Stabbed and Stomped. Survivors Will Be Prosecuted.

[Under a slogan on a wall calling for the release from gaol of Norman Gallagher (a notorious Melbourne union leader in the 70s and 80s) and reading "Free Norm":]

In Every Packet

But it's the unconscious errors in signs that give us the most fun, and none more so than those composed by people in foreign lands who are insufficiently versed in English — which is where *Pink Shell-like* at last comes in.

Did you know, by the way, what they call such usage? You've heard of *Franglais*, of course; well, now meet *Engrish* — presumably so called after the Japanese difficulty with the English "I".

But before I get on to *Engrish*, I should quickly mention advertising humour. You're all

## How are You Feeling?

Farmer Joe decided his injuries were serious enough to take the trucking company responsible for the accident to court. In the courtroom the trucking company's fancy lawyer was questioning him.

"Didn't you say, at the scene of the accident, 'I'm fine'?"

Farmer Joe responded, "Well I'll tell you what happened. I had just loaded my favorite mule Bessie into the . . ."

"I didn't ask for any details," the lawyer interrupted. "Just answer the question. Did you not say, at the scene of the accident, 'I'm fine'?"

Farmer Joe said, "well I had just got Bessie into the trailer and I was driving down the road . . ."

The lawyer interrupted again and said, "Judge, I am trying to establish the fact that, at the scene of the accident, this man told the highway patrolman on the scene that he was just fine. Now several weeks after the accident he is trying to sue my client. I believe he is a fraud. Please tell him to simply answer the question."

By this time the Judge was fairly interested in Farmer Joe's answer and said to the lawyer, "I'd like to hear what he has to say about his favourite mule Bessie."

Joe thanked the Judge and proceeded thus:

"Well as I was saying, I had just loaded Bessie, my favorite mule, into the trailer and was driving her down the highway when this huge semi-truck and trailer ran the stop sign and smacked my truck right in the side. I was thrown into one ditch and Bessie was thrown into the other. I was hurting real bad and didn't want to move. However, I could hear ole Bessie moaning and groaning. I knew she was in terrible shape just by her groans. Shortly after the accident a Highway Patrolman came on the scene. He could hear Bessie moaning and groaning so he went over to her. After he looked at her he took out his gun and shot her between the eyes. Then he came across the road with his gun in his hand and looked at me. He said, 'Your mule was in such bad shape I had to shoot her. How are you feeling?'"

- Forwarded by Trawler Travis

## Where Three Ways Meet

Note: This is a slightly edited version of a text to which there are many Google references, almost all the same — word for word, hundreds of them. Try as we might, however, we haven't been able to find the source. Can any reader shed light on the origin?

The next time you are washing your hands and complain because the water temperature isn't just how you like it, think about how things used to be. Here are some facts about the 1500s.

Most people got married in June because they took their yearly bath in May, and still smelled pretty good by June. However, they were starting to smell, so brides carried a bouquet of flowers to hide the body odour. Hence the custom today of carrying a bouquet when getting married.

Baths consisted of a big tub filled with hot water. The man of the house had the privilege of the nice clean water, then all the other sons and men, then the women and finally the children. Last of all the babies. By then the water was so dirty you could actually lose someone in it. Hence the saying, "Don't throw the baby out with the bath water."

Houses had thatched roofs — thick-straw-piled high, with no wood underneath. It was the only place for animals to get warm, so

all the cats and other small animals (mice, bugs) lived in the roof. When it rained it became slippery and sometimes the animals would slip and off the roof. Hence the saying "It's raining cats and dogs."

There was nothing to stop things from falling into the house. This posed a real problem in the bedroom where bugs and other droppings could mess up your nice clean bed. Hence, a bed with big posts and a sheet hung over the top afforded some protection. That's how canopy beds came into existence.

The floor was dirt. Only the wealthy had something other than dirt, whence the saying "dirt poor." The wealthy had slate floors that would get slippery in the winter when wet, so they spread thresh (straw) on floor to help keep their footing. As the winter wore on, they added more thresh until when you opened the door it would all start slipping outside. A piece of wood was placed in the entranceway. Which is the origin of the word "threshold" ("thresh-hold").

In those old days, they cooked in the kitchen with a big kettle that always hung over the fire. Every day they lit the fire and added things to the pot. They ate mostly vegetables and did not get much meat. They would eat the stew for dinner, leaving leftovers in the pot to get cold overnight and then start over the next day. Sometimes stew had food in it that had been there for quite a while. Hence the rhyme, "Peas porridge hot, peas porridge cold, peas porridge in the pot nine days old".

Sometimes they could obtain pork, which made them feel quite special. When visitors came over, they would hang up their bacon to show off. It was a sign of wealth that a man could "bring home the bacon". They would cut off a little to share with guests and would all sit around and "chew the fat".

Those with money had plates made of pewter. Food with high acid content caused some of the lead to leach onto the food, causing lead-poisoning death. This happened most often with tomatoes, so for the next 400 years or so, tomatoes were considered poisonous.

Bread was divided according to status. Workers got the burnt bottom of the loaf, the family got the middle, and guests got the top, or "upper crust".

Lead cups were used to drink ale or whisky. The combination would sometimes knock the imbibers out for a couple of days. Someone walking along the road would take them for dead and prepare them for burial. They were laid out on the kitchen table for a couple of days and the family would gather around and eat and drink and wait and see if they would wake up. That's how the custom of holding a "wake" arose.

England is old and small and the local folks started running out of places to bury people. So they would dig up coffins and would take the bones to a "bone-house" and reuse the grave. When reopening these coffins, one out of 25 coffins were found to have scratch marks on the inside and they realized they had been burying people alive. So they would tie a string on the wrist of the corpse, lead it through the coffin and up through the ground and tie it to a bell. Someone would have to sit out in the graveyard all night (the "graveyard shift") to listen for the bell; thus, someone could be "saved by the bell" or was considered a "dead ringer."

And that's the truth . . . Now, who ever said that History was boring!

— bubcol

## The Feral Joke Collector



### Who Cares Whether It's Factual, As Long As it's Bizarre?

A Charlotte (North Carolina) man, having purchased a box of 24 rare and very expensive cigars, insured them against fire. Within a month, having smoked his entire stockpile of fabulous cigars, and having yet to make a single premium payment on the policy, the man filed a claim against the insurance company. In his claim, the man stated that he had lost the cigars in "a series of small fires".

The insurance company refused to pay, citing the obvious reason: that the man had consumed the cigars in a normal fashion. The man sued, and won.

In delivering his ruling, the judge stated that the man held a policy from the company in which it was warranted that the cigars were insurable. The company, in the policy, had also guaranteed that it would insure the cigars against fire, without defining what it considered to be "unacceptable fire", and so the company was obligated to compensate the insured for his loss.

Rather than endure a lengthy and costly appeal process, the insurance company accepted the judge's ruling and paid the man \$15,000 for the rare cigars he had "lost in the fires".

However, shortly after the man cashed his check, the insurance company had him arrested on 24 counts of arson. With his own insurance claim and testimony from the previous case used as evidence against him, the man was convicted of intentionally burning the rare cigars and sentenced to 24 consecutive one-year prison terms.

– Forwarded by Banstick1e

those glimpses, wondering about the thoughts behind her eyes and the mysterious creative power in her small brown hands.

And he remembered thinking that this was a good way to hear music. First to talk. To be with a few others whose curiosities were greater than their fears, who, like himself, had discarded, or like Kavanagh, had consistently ignored, or, like Lois, had never acquired prejudices or pruderies, and who, in conversation, were like knives whetting each other to glittering sharpness and efficiency.

And then, in a silence made rich by that mutual exchange, mentally fed, mentally satisfied, to abandon oneself in semi-darkness to another feast. To shut one's eyes and to hear music like wings, like the lifting and falling, the beating and wheeling and soaring of wings, until with that illusion of flight the spirit grew wild and half-crazed with an ecstasy of freedom, and joy rose fiercely to that exquisite pitch where it becomes pain, the terrible birth-pangs of creative humanity...

He had sat there when it ended, feeling limp and relaxed, feeling light-headed, almost drunk with a mixture of emotions. He remembered seeing Kavanagh looming between himself and the firelight; hearing him say

something to Lois about a walk, and picturing him as he had seen him sometimes when he was called out at night, a great, bowed figure, shapeless in an ancient overcoat with a cape such as coachmen used to wear, walking and walking in the moonlight, the lamplight, the starlight, but never in the sun. A strange, nocturnal being, a huge shadow walking and muttering to itself, muttering phrases and cadences, cadences and rhythms, tearing out of itself with agony and toil some thought shaped at last into eternal words. And he remembered feeling, as he saw the old man go out, a vague bitterness, an envy of genius which had this dreadful gift – of one who could take that evening and its accumulated richness and make it everlasting, while he, into whom its wealth had flowed equally, had no creative outlet but the one common to all ordinary men.

— Michael Buhagiar

Brennan, Christopher. *Poems [1913]*. Intro. Robert Adamson. Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 1992.

Dark, Eleanor. *Sun Across the Sky*. New York: Macmillan, 1937. (Out of print).

*Web*

Everyone's talking about it, so why not *Bikwil*?

No doubt you've heard of the term *extreme* used in connection with certain sports. It refers to the performing by daredevil people of a land-based, water or aerial activity that is risk-taking and adventurous. Often the sole intent of participants is to experience the addictive adrenaline rush that comes from pushing their own limits of fear and physical ability.

That said, doubtless you can detect which of the following is a genuine competitive sport:

Bungee Jumping at Niagara Playing the Violin

Extreme Ironing anywhere

Nude Mountain Climbing in the Himalayas

Paragliding over Erupting Volcanoes

Skateboarding on the Sydney Opera House Sails

White-water Kayaking dressed in an Aardvark Costume.

Yes, you knew all along, didn't you?



*Line*

The direct and unpretentious definition given in the free Internet encyclopaedia *Wikipedia* reads:

Extreme Ironing (or EI) is an extreme sport in which people take an ironing board to a remote location and iron a few items of clothing . . . EI supposedly combines the excitement of an extreme sport with the satisfaction of freshly-ironed clothes.

For those of you who still think that this is a hoax, let me show you a few sites devoted to this phenomenon. First, though, a little background.

Extreme Ironing was invented in his back yard by a Leicester man named Phil Shaw. The year was 1997. According to *The Guardian*, it soon took on the character of traditional British eccentricity, being at first an underground organisation. But by 2002 it had become a global challenge (having been promoted single-handedly around the world by Shaw), especially after he ran into some German tourists in New Zealand with whom he

founded Extreme Ironing International. It now has competitive devotees everywhere — Austria, Australia, Croatia, Chile, Germany, New Zealand, South Africa, U.K., U.S. . . . As of 2003 there were about 1,000 of them worldwide.

So what sort of stunts do these extremists perform?

How about these?

while flying a Luftfahrzeug microlight aircraft

under water at a depth of 101m, in the sand arch of the Blue Hole, off the Egyptian coast

suspended from the Tyrolean Traverse, Wolfberg Cracks, Cederberg, South Africa.

Where will it all end?

Incidentally, “ironists” often give themselves appropriate nicknames. Phil Shaw calls himself Steam, his original Leicester housemate Paul used the name Spray and there are others today (men and women) going by monikers like

Crease Lightnin’  
D. Creasing  
De-Pressed  
Dr Iron Q  
Fabulon  
Frinkle Wee  
Hot Pants  
Hotplate  
Iron-Deficiency

IronManM  
Jeremy Irons  
Permanent Press Release  
Short Fuse  
Starch.

The official Web site, *Extreme Ironing Bureau*, offers most of the information you’ll ever need. Obviously, you must look at all the photos in the Galleries, read the Reviews and Forums, select your Downloads and get the book, the DVD and the calendar from the Shop. Links and Search facilities are also available.

And yes, there is an Aussie Web site — *Extreme Ironing Oz*.

It might consist primarily of photos of daring young folks in action, but these pics are well worth your attention. Also of special interest at the site are the humorous quotes. Here are two:

From the ironist known as Permanent Press Release:

I want to have the first Iron in space — in space, no one can hear you steam . . .

From the man calling himself Jeremy Irons:

Well, since it has now become a worldwide sport, it may be pursued by the Olympics. But I think it has a wider appeal and an EI Olympics will eventually eclipse the existing games. As conventional sports become boring and tedious, they will

What do I know? Myself alone,  
a gulf of uncreated night,  
wherein no star may e’er be shown  
save I create it in my might.

What have I done? Oh foolish word,  
and foolish deed your question craves!  
think ye the sleeping depths are stirr’d  
tho’ tempest hound the madden’d waves?

What do I seek? I seek the word  
that shall become the deed of might  
whereby the sullen gulfs are stirr’d  
and stars begotten on their night.

Oliver had walked up from his own house latish in the evening, he remembered, after a tiring and depressing day – a last routine visit for Chloe’s tonsillitis; and when he’d left her, rosy and laughing, curled up on her pillows with a book and a tin of butterscotch, Lois had said in her sudden, rather breathless way:

“Mr. Kavanagh’s here, Dr. Denning. You know him, don’t you. Won’t you stay and talk for a while? We’re going to have some music later on. I’ve just bought some new records.”

His hesitation had been only momentary. Kavanagh – music – the darkened room whose deep chairs and flickering fire he could just see

through the open doorway. It had been, for all either of them knew, a very harmless, very innocent temptation!

And then the night and his dejection, the night and her loneliness, the night and Kavanagh’s words and the singing triumph of Beethoven’s music...

He could hardly see her in her chair across the strip of carpet with its moving lights and shadows. But when she went to change the records her hands and her funny little dark face like the face of a serious elf would come into the light from an orange-shaded lamp over the gramophone, and he found himself watching for

In 1908 Brennan obtained a junior post at Sydney University, where he would later be appointed Associate Professor of German and Comparative Literature. The reminiscences of his students are testament to the inspirational power of his teaching; and I particularly treasure from Marcia Kirsten (Turnbull) the reflection that: “Chris was himself an argument against the necessity for efficiency, good management, method, predictability – qualities that are commonly seen as important. He was the greatest teacher I have ever known.” (*Southerly* 1971, p. 224). One wonders how he would fit into the modern university, with its sterile emphasis on formal pedagogy: a knowledge shop, with the satisfaction of its customers as its goal.

In 1919 he separated from his wife Elisabeth, a Prussian, after many years of unhappiness, probably stretching back to the Nineties. In 1922 he became attached to Vie Singer, a cultured and articulate woman seventeen years his junior; and his wife filed for divorce in 1925, citing adultery, which Brennan did not contest. The Senate of the University decided to terminate his employment – such was the petty morality of Australia in those days — and in 1925 he was dismissed from his post, some three months after Vie had been run down and killed by a tram while walking home late at night. The divorce petition had been withdrawn, but too late. The scholar, philosopher, and poet — arguably the greatest Australia has produced — spent his final years in and out of the slums of Sydney, sustained by the efforts of a few devoted family and friends, and finally a Commonwealth Literary Fund pension.

Eleanor Dark chose a poem of Brennan’s for an epigram to her novel. Let it also introduce this Memorable Moment in Music:

have to add Ironing as part of their discipline. Then we’ll see EI taken to the level of world domination. We’ll see the Millions in sponsorships and Prize money. This will be followed by corruption at all levels and sex scandals, followed by the EI Enhancing Drugs . . . I can’t wait !

How’s that for an idea whose time has come? Extreme Ironing in the Olympics. But no longer an idea, it’s now an Urban Myth, and rumoured all over the Net, for example:

Following Britain’s success at the rowing in Athens, five times Olympic gold medalist Sir Steve Redgrave has backed extreme ironing to become an Olympic sport.

Some of our local readers will have recently seen Australian daredevil Frinkle Wee performing in the Grose Valley (N.S.W.), where he demonstrated his death-defying base-jump ironing. ability. It was shown, in June 2004, I think, on the ABC’s popular

culture TV programme *Mondo Thingo*.

(For those not in the know, like me, the acronym B.A.S.E. stands for Buildings, Antennas, Spans and Earth, the four types of platforms used in this sport — a form of parachuting.)

Other international Web sites include

Extreme Ironing Team Austria  
Dutch Extreme Ironing  
Extreme Ironing on Pikes Peak,  
Colorado

But just watch out! Other extreme sports are on the march, such as Extreme Accounting. Some people even claim that there are such pastimes as Extreme Croquet, Extreme Unicycling and Extreme Wheelbarrow. Should I believe them?

— TR

### Internet sites referred to above:

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Main\\_Page](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Main_Page)  
<http://www.extremeironing.com/>  
<http://www.extremeironingoz.com/>  
<http://www.ironing.at/>  
[http://www.nuwijweer.nl/www/index\\_2004.php?id=407&archieff=1&sectie=archieffm/uk/](http://www.nuwijweer.nl/www/index_2004.php?id=407&archieff=1&sectie=archieffm/uk/)  
<http://www.stevegarufi.com/storyextremeironing.htm>  
<http://www.extreme-accounting.com>

## Geography Song

I held your place  
 in line in front of  
 The Coffee Jag Café  
 on half price night  
 and they were gonna play  
 those jumpy riffs  
 just for you  
 on the snare drums  
 and you said you  
 were just going out  
 for cigarettes and  
 just as that sank in  
 I got a postcard from you  
 with palm trees  
 and big gaudy red stamps  
 and a weird alphabet —  
 you always do that to me  
 but at least you always  
 come back and take  
 your place in line.

— John Birkbeck

[ Publication history of this poem: *Arcanum Cafe*, *Norfolk Poets*, SCTV, TV Interview, *ilovepoetry*, *Free-1*, *AllPoetry.com*, *Poemics*, *Beyond The Pale*, *Riverbabble*. ]

## “ . . . and Stars Begotten on Their Night ”

[ *Memorable Moments in Music* No. 6 ]

In *Sun Across the Sky* by the Australian novelist Eleanor Dark (1937), there appears in chapter nine a wonderful musical scene involving the Australian poet Christopher Brennan, a dimly lit room, and Beethoven. Eleanor Dark was the only daughter of Dowell O'Reilly, a writer and great friend of Brennan's in the early years of the century; and the inspiration she took from Brennan's example comes across powerfully in this scene. There is much to reflect on in the following brief extract, where Brennan appears as Patrick Nicholas Kavanagh. One might ponder, amongst much else, the tendency of time and progress to obliterate the opportunities for transformative episodes of this kind; the warmth and fullness of the old recording media, now mostly but a fond memory; and the power of music itself.

The inspirational and tragic story of Christopher Brennan is well enough known in Australia by now, but perhaps some rehearsal of it here might be useful. He was born in 1871 in Sydney into an Irish Catholic family, and showed early promise as a scholar. His precocity in Latin won him a scholarship to St. Ignatius College, Riverview, run by the Jesuit fathers, and renowned for its teaching of the Classics. Having starred both at Riverview and Sydney University, he won a scholarship to Germany where, instead of applying himself to his expected higher degree in Greek, he became immersed in the contemporary Symbolist poets, conceiving an especial regard for Stéphane Mallarmé. Most of his great work *Poems* [1913] was written before 1902; and Mallarmé would write to him that: “There is between you and I a kinship of dream” (“*il y a entre vous et moi une parentée de songe*”).