

BROKEN TOYS 5

Broken Toys is a personalzine by **Taral Wayne**, and in no way implies that my other zine, New Toy, is a dead letter. The letter column this issue is a big improvement over last, but be sure to write if you can! As has been the case for more than 20 years now, I live at 245 Dunn Ave., Apt. 2111, Toronto Ontario M6K 1S6. Or loc me at Taral@Teksavvy.com The date is middle or late **June 2012**, and this is ExtraTaraltoriality (or Kiddelidivee Books & Art) 254. Retro copyrighted.

An End to Definitions

Arnie Katz has been defining fandom again ... As usual, this has plunged all fandom into a minor war of re-definitions, counter-definitions and outright refusals to define fandom altogether. Honestly ... it's so 1970s. Trying to reconcile the numerous points of view with the requirement that the body in question retain some semblance of shape or identity is hopeless – there is always somebody left out that somebody else demands be included. In the end everybody is a fan, even Mitt Romney, who apparently likes *Battlefield Earth*. Clearly, no definition this loose is any use at all. However, any definition more exclusive is guaranteed to offend some portion of fandom. There is simply no practical way to overcome this dilemma.

So, I will present a draconian solution, the one I have used all along anyway:

*I hereby declare fandom to be invitational, and I will authorize or not authorize people who apply to fandom the same way I do people who want to be "friends" on FaceBook. It may not be fair, it may not be sensible, but it sure as hell will be bulletproof, and there will be no more attempts to define what fandom is! – from a June letter to Dave Locke's **Unstuck in Time**.*

Now, let us move on to something more interesting...

Just Say Yes to Drugs

I take two completely different pharmaceuticals for my condition now. One is *Pyridostygmine*, also known as *Mestinon*. I take it for a disorder called *Myasthenia Gravis*, that causes the muscles to goof off on the job.

In more technical terms, there is a neurotransmitter called *acetylcholine* that moves across the synapses between nerve cells and muscle tissue, telling the muscle to contract. An enzyme called *acetylcholinesterase* has the job of mopping up the leftover *acetylcholine*. In people with my disorder, the neurotransmitter stimulation is weak, so the drug I take inhibits the formation of the

enzyme. This allows the neurotransmitter to persist longer in the synapse, giving *acetylcholine* more time to stimulate my muscles.

Got all that?

Actually, it's more complicated than I've described, as *Myasthenia Gravis* is an autoimmune disorder involving antibodies blocking the *acetylcholine* receptors in the muscles, but how much do you really want to know?

Now it appears that I have a second, unrelated disorder that nobody really understands, so they call it *Neuropathy*. This just means "nerve pain." The number of types and causes of *Neuropathy* is **huge**, and by no means do I intend to discuss them all here. The most likely causes, in my case, are pre-diabetic symptoms, or ... about as likely, "just one of those things."

"Pre-diabetic." Don't you just love that phrase? It means that even if you aren't sick yet, you should be regarded as sick anyway. It's a concept begging for abuse. Aren't we *all* "pre-sick" in some way, and therefore *already* sick and in need of treatment? My blood sugar was a little high on the last test, but nobody is actually throwing the "pre" word in my face just yet. I'll be taking another blood test shortly, and there may have been an improvement. I even lost three pounds.

The diagnosis of *Neuropathy* was fundamentally an acknowledgement that I was suffering a great deal of pain in one leg. I had originally suspected that arthritis played a role, but X-Rays have more or less ruled this out. I have slight arthritic development in the right hip, but nothing likely to cause serious discomfort. As well, the location of the pain was typical of a neuropathic pattern, as were the shooting pains down the leg, partial numbness, intermittent muscle spasms and, of all things, an irritating itch that periodically appeared on the upper part of my foot and drove me crazy when I tried to sleep. Curiously, I have exhibited some of these symptoms in mild form all my life – that little involuntary kick my leg made sometimes before I fell asleep, muscles that occasionally "danced" all by themselves and infrequent appearances of "restless leg syndrome" – all go back as far as I can remember.

Now that I'm diagnosed with *Neuropathy* of some sort, what does it mean in practical terms? Correct – another drug;. The new prescription is for *Gabapentin*, a drug quite different from the other one that I take for my *Myasthenia*. *GABA* is yet another neurotransmitter, an amino acid that *inhibits* muscle excitation. *Gabapentin* is a chemical analog of the molecule, and suppresses the unwanted muscle activity and sensitivity that causes me pain.

Have you got all *that*?

What's most curious about all this is that I now take one drug to increase nerve activity (*Pyridostigmine*) and another drug (*Gabapentin*) to suppress it. How they don't cancel each other out, I'll never know.

I take these two drugs on top of the *Nifedipine* (*Adalat*), *Terazosin*, *Rosuvastatin*, *Losartan* and *Allopurinol* that I am also prescribed every month. Most are to control mild hypertension and heartbeat, the statin removes Low Density Lipoproteins from the blood and damned if I know what the *Allopurinol* is for. Normally, it's prescribed for gout, but it's beginning to look as though I never had gout. The sensitivity associated with gout is as easily accounted for by the *Neuropathy* I suffer.

The remarkable thing about all this pharmacological clutter is that it works! My blood pressure is under control. The droopy eyelid and slurred speech that were the signs of *Myesthenia Gravis* are much abated. And the shooting pains and burning aches in my hip only trouble me when I've been walking, not merely while lying in bed trying to sleep. The dosage of *Gabapentin* I take for the *Neuropathy* has just been doubled, and so far appears to have resulted in even greater improvement.

The doctor suggested I should take up using a cane as well, but bugged if I can figure out what to do with one. I have my mother's aluminum cane, a keepsake I hung onto after she died. It's not a bad "prop," but no matter which hand I use it with, the entire business seems more awkward than it's worth. Do I move it ahead of me, or with the weak leg? And do I put my weight on the cane, or on the *other* leg? My doctor's advice doesn't seem to make sense ... or to work for me. I've asked people who use canes, and have been given several conflicting answers.

Never mind, I've done the doctor one better.

Back in the Walk of Life?

I suppose it can be called good luck. I was out today in the murderous heat, but there were things to be done that couldn't be put off. I needed to fill my prescriptions, Xerox legal papers, replace a torn mop head and buy more beans, because last time I was shopping I didn't buy any garbanzos for my salad.

My right leg practically dragged and as usual after around 50 steps, I began to endure shooting pains, numbness and increasing stiffness. At that point, sitting down becomes mandatory, even if only on the water meter plumbing outside a shop front. There is at least one of those suitable to support *la derrière* every few shops.

I happened to pass an elderly man with a walker, and stopped to ask him a few questions. He drooled and walked away as though he didn't hear me. Maybe it's as well he didn't.

But, a few minutes later I passed another elderly man resting on a walker, and this one *didn't* drool. What I wanted to ask him was about the availability of walkers, the cost, whether there were government subsidies and so forth. I didn't think I could carry on, the way my walking has been lately. This guy hardly spoke English; however, I was able make out enough to understand that he had a *spare walker* that he would *give me*. I was unsure about my interpretation, but it seemed to be what he was saying. The extra walker was too big for him. He tried to give me his address, but at that point communication broke down. He kept saying "Damizhone" over and over, but I knew no street by that name in Parkdale.

Fortunately, his wife came by just that moment and straightened it all out. Yes, I could have the walker, and she wrote down the address on a slip of paper I had. They lived on Jameson Avenue, which was only a couple of blocks away! She and her husband were still shopping, however, and wouldn't be home again for about an hour.

Fine, I said, I'd wait out the time in the nearby used book store ... which was exactly what I did. I gave them about an hour and a half before showing up at their apartment door, and sure enough, they introduced me to a somewhat used, and really *large* walker. It looked as though it had been made for 300- and 400-pounders. The space between the handlebars was 24 inches across, as I measured

it later. The frame was robust to say the least, and that made it *heavy* as well as large. There were a few signs of wear, but that was mostly cosmetic. The brakes didn't grab, though ... perhaps the brake cable could be adjusted, though it might need new rubber pads. I gave the couple my heartiest thanks three or four times, and was on my way.

Using it on the walk home, I found the going a hell of a lot easier than the way out. I almost breezed along at my old-time clip. Keeping a substantial part of my weight off the bum leg made it easy to move it almost normally. Of course, now I have the problem that my arms get tired taking the weight off my legs. But I may grow used to that as they get more of a workout. And, if not, I have a perfectly good seat on the walker, so I can sit wherever I happen to need to rest. The elderly couple even threw in a carrying basket, which didn't belong to the walker and so doesn't fit well, but this is a minor problem. If the whole shebang turns out to be a genuine aid, perhaps I should eventually think of getting a new one, better suited to me. The other possibility is that the medication I'm taking will have greater effect at a higher dose – which might obviate the need for the walker entirely. In the meantime – even if it is awkward getting through doors – ain't walking great?



Gregory Benford, xbenford@gmail.com

I've enjoyed *Broken Toys* and nod in agreement often. On the Euromess, of course reverting to Drachmas would help Greece, and I think is inevitable. Spain, Ireland...harder cases. I'm clearing out all my holdings in Euros and expect when I visit France & UK next year the Euro will be below the \$. **I invest longterm...** the only sane strategy unless you're a fast trader. Eric Mayer is right about the derivative traders, too – and a tax on millisecond trading would erase some of the problem.

Unfortunately, the pundits of economics and politics are unanimous in the opinion that the only certain outcome of the Greeks abandoning the Euro is disaster – within weeks, parents will be selling their children to kebab shops and the IMF will foreclose on the Parthenon. There is no path to a sound economy, in their view, except decades of self-imposed poverty. For some reason I don't trust this pessimistic view – perhaps because only people who are in no danger of missing a meal or a payment on their Mercedes thinks this way.

“I don't care to belong to any group where this behavior is permitted!”

Ah, delicious. Commanding parity in unequal situations is typical authoritarian thinking, not surprising among the enlightened few who spend much time in the blogosphere. But remember, you don't have to go there at all. Nor do I.

GREG

Ned Brooks, nedbrooks@sprynet.com

Thanks for the zine. I agree with you about gender equality in fandom - but then I am an Old White Male. In my experience there was always a shortage of females in fandom - and any that were interested were welcome! Nor were they expected to stay in the kitchen and make brownies - fandom was something that came in the mail after all. I saw no sign that Janie Lamb or Harriett Kolchak or Bjo Trimble or Juanita

Coulson felt oppressed. Lee Hoffman did have a gender-free name and Walt Willis was apparently surprised that she was a woman - but it didn't bother him.

Funny story about Steven and his Edwardian house - I can well imagine that the upkeep is expensive. This 1975 house is bad enough. His A/C may be due for replacement - the coils are not supposed to ice up, but it does happen. I think the newer systems protect themselves from it.

I was talking with Steven the other day about his most recent problem with the house. The air conditioning was on the fritz again, he told me. On a hunch, I guessed that his A/C had been damaged by icing up. Yep. Motor's burned out and all the tubing leaky! The only fix was total replacement. About the only thing that could be saved were the ducts.

I use art from the Net in apazines and assume that is "fair use." In *It Goes On The Shelf* I am more careful. Many Net images are long since in the public domain. Because I have only a LaserJet style printer, I prefer line art with little or no tone. No one has any claim on the work of Albrecht Durer or his contemporaries.

My 18 apazines a year are not that much - about 60-70 pages, and not all of that is text. Not much more than a page a week, though that's not the way I do them.

Bunnies are generally nekkid - that's why Alice was surprised to see one in a waistcoat. I saw one last night in the driveway, headed for the azalea bushes. A large part of the front yard by the driveway is a thicket accessible only to such small animals.

I have one of those UV LED pocket lights that the lady mouse in the tailpiece illo is trying to sunbathe by, sold by American Science & Surplus with the claim that it can be used to detect scorpions, as they glow under UV. I have not tried it on other bugs. I hope there are no scorpions here!

Best, Ned

Eric Mayer, groggy.tales@gmail.com

Pretty soon it will be all I can do just to keep up with *Broken Toys* and *Fanstuff*. However, both are entertaining in their own ways so I am not complaining. Fanzine fandom seems to have a bit of a pulse lately.

It is hard for me to imagine living in a house like your friend Steven's. Our "house" is a 450 square foot cottage that we really shouldn't live in year round. (*I think Eric's measure leaves out the kitchen. By comparison, my living room and one bedroom are 335 sq. ft.*) Even so, we have faced an endless succession of repairs. Last year alone the furnace needed to be fixed twice, the toilet sprang a leak and the well pump had to be replaced. The phone jack the computers are hooked up to also went bad, causing a momentary panic when we totally lost Internet and phone, but when I diagnosed the problem it was easily fixable. So I can imagine Steven's repair problems. The bigger the place, the more sophisticated the equipment, the more to go wrong.

But ice like that in the summer?!! I'm not surprised a wimpy hair dryer wouldn't do the job. A few times the water pipes under our house froze during cold spells. (As I said, the place wasn't designed for winter living. The former owners drained the system before leaving in September) I used a heat gun to thaw them. That made quick work of the blockage.

There's not much I can say about sex equality on Worldcon panels except....jeez, gimme a break....is there anything people won't waste time fighting about? Does this mean that male and female Worldcon attendance is exactly equal? If not, should it be made so? Or should panels be composed of males and females in proportion to how many males and females attend Worldcon? Then again, there are somewhat more females

than males in the world, aren't there? So perhaps every Worldcon panel should feature 100 panelists, or 1,000 or however damn many it takes to get the proportion exactly right. By the way, both your drawings were of females and one was showing off her boobs, you sexist swine!

To be fair, one should have been male, and showing off his man-boobs. But I don't like drawing that kind as much.

Ah yes, those poor Greeks, expecting to be able to have decent schools and not live in total poverty. How unrealistic. Haven't they learned that the rights of banks and corporations are more important than the rights of mere human beings? Obviously the sheep of the US electorate have learned well, and thus we approach the election of a Republican president and Senate in addition to our Republican Congress and Supreme Court. What will the sheep think when they have no Medicare or Social Security? I suppose they will insist that we live in the best of all possible worlds and if we weren't all homeless and starving to death to further engorge the wealthy parasites, why things would be even worse for us!

Are the bunnies in our back yards really nekkid as Dave Locke contends? I'm shocked. I never thought of them that way. They do, after all, have fur, so they don't look nekkid to me. Then again, they have not covered their naughty bits so I guess that counts as nekkid. If I mowed the lawn in socks, shoes, t-shirt and no trousers, I suppose I would be functionally nekkid.

Every so often we get a whiff of a passing skunk, but I haven't seen any here except dead on the highway. My closest encounter with a skunk occurred one night when I was hauling a trash bag out of the house in Rochester. I set it down beside the other bag already there, and practically stepped on the striped stinker. The last thing I saw -- and something you don't want to see -- was the skunk turning its back toward me. No, you don't want to be mooned by a skunk. Luckily I was pretty quick then, and beat the blast to the door.
Best,

Eric

Lloyd Penney, penneys@bell.net

I am back to get caught up with more of the zines you've been producing lately. Looks like *Broken Toys* may be monthly, or as monthly as you can make it, so I will offer comments on issue 3, and will get to issue 4 *asap*.

*Monthly? Horrors! I have **no** definite schedule, in fact. I publish whenever I have sufficient short, lightweight material and some letters.*

Yup, Hugo time again. We've all been told that one should never ask or even desire these chunks of wood or stone and metal, whatever they're making the Hugos out of any particular year. Yet, once you are considered, the egoboo is considerable, and you'd like to win. When I was on the ballot in 2010, the feelgood was amazing, and it took a while to calm. Would I like to win a silver rocket? Of course! And so would you, and anyone who says they wouldn't want to or wouldn't care is self-delusional. We all have aspirations to do well in our chosen fields.

Caesar Augustus was shouting in all caps through his coins? How rude! No need to shout! (Sigh...I fear for this species. It's too dumb to live. This may be apocryphal, but I wouldn't be surprised if it's true.)

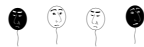
Guns were toys I never wanted and didn't have when I was a kid. For me, it was hockey, soccer and my bicycle, but I also collected paperbacks from series I enjoyed, like Ripley's Believe It Or Not!, MAD Magazine, and assorted comic strips, like B.C. I was a bookish type from a very early age, I guess.

I have had a tough time keeping up with Chris Garcia's run of the *Drink Tank* when it comes to response, but some issues are about movies I haven't seen, and what little I can say wouldn't make for a good letter. Put two or three issues together these days, and I can make a page's worth of comments. Then again, there are a lot of zines coming in, and I do want to contribute comments to them all.

Indeed, the letter of comment was the currency of old fandom, and that currency sufficed in the gift economy of the physical paper fanzine. Today, the e-zine is deemed worthless by so many, but I would like to keep the currency going. To me, it is still currency, and my responding to e-zines is my investment in fanzines. I've already gotten my return on investment.

The other currency much neglected these days is the fanzine review. Every other zine had a review column once, but the number in evidence these days can be numbered on one hand.

All done for this issue, comments on 4 yet to come.



I've got here with me *Broken Toys 4*...it's time to get with it, and build up that letter column. Life's been busy and a little hectic, or this would have been written up a while ago.

Yes, Steven does have a lot of stories, and on the rare occasion in which he joins us for the Third Monday pubnight at Orwell's Grill & Pub, he shares them with us. With the Euro Cup of soccer, he was very much afraid of the things that could happen should the Italian team win or lose. There was one murder anyway. It was Spain and Italy in the final, Spain won, and I can only imagine what those pubs looked like after the Italians were drubbed 4-0.

Gender parity on panels at conventions is a great idea. However, the best panel make-up, I'd think, are the four or five most conversant people with the topic, whether they are all male, all female, or half-and-half. Parity might be a little too PC for some, and the intentions are the best, but my intentions are pretty good, too. The local...when I first got online, there were people who might think you were mistaken in your opinions, they would growl at you, and angrily demand that you **get it right!!!** How dare I, I guess, be mistaken? These types seem to have disappeared, and that's just fine with me.

Skunks are wonderful animals. I've told my own skunk story too many times, but I'd like to hold one again some time. They're like big, inquisitive kittens that smell bad. There's a reason why they are called *les bels puantes* in Quebec French. (Beautiful stinkers.)

Time to let it go, and get this to you...you're probably working right now on issue 5. Many thanks, and I'll keep an eye out for the next one.

Yours, *Lloyd Penney*

John Nielsen Hall, johnsila32@gmail.com

In relation to #3 and your complaints about the restrictions on toy guns, I have some sympathy for your views, but I would still rather that children brought up in a violent society – and in the society to your south, where adults have a constitutional right to go armed – found identification with that violence, via symbols such as toys, much less of an automatic process. I accept that humans are a warlike vicious predatory species, and that we would do better to work on that, rather than a trivial by-product like toy guns, but all the same – let's start somewhere.

Your economic analysis is perhaps a tad simplistic. Debt has always been part of the investment picture. Debt is the natural corollary of an asset, most of the cars and houses we buy, we buy on credit, the airliners needed by airlines are leased or loaned, many many things are bought with debt, yet are still valued as assets. It's why

any business, from the shop on the corner to the mega oil corporation, produces a Balance Sheet as a reckoning of its worth: Profits + Assets – Debt = Worth. Where things can, and did, go wrong is in the use of debt as if it were an asset in itself- of putting together a lot of debts in a box, as it were, and saying the box of debts is worth something, ignoring the fact that the debts are worth only what they have been used to buy and then only while they are regularly serviced. This is madness, and it's not even new, it's simply that the boxes were a lot shinier and prettier this time, as they had to be to discourage close examination of the contents. And this particular rush of insanity was not the problem in and of itself. Rather, it was the fear on the part of those who had not bought the boxes of what the boxes might contain and what that would mean for those who had bought the boxes. When that fear grew so widespread that nobody would trust anyone else in case they had some of the boxes, then the money supply dried up. When that happened, the boxes were, rightly, seen as valueless, but that meant that the Balance Sheets of banks themselves had to restated with a great many less zeroes in them. The rest, as they say, is history, excepting only that over here in Europe the institutions of the single currency have conspired to slow the frame rate of the meltdown that occurred in North America down to a glacial pace, so that it is only now that Governments and national banks are realising that they actually don't have or cannot get any money (unless the Germans agree to it, at least- and they are not going to keep on doing that). But that's just a very macabre side show.

Simplifying is what articles do. A full and authoritative treatment of a complicated situation such as international economics would and probably does fill a wing of the Library of Congress. My poor little article, a few hundred words long, can scarcely be anything but simple. I agree with you that debt is a useful tool for planning a nation's budget. It enables a government to finance over long periods without having to have empty-ump billions of dollars in a lump sum in the national mattress under the President's or Prime Minister's bed. It would make for a poor night's sleep, if nothing else.

I would have hoped that would satisfy you , but in #4, you tune up for an overture on the crisis in the Eurozone. Here you are guilty of a couple of bum notes. Firstly, you state that returning to the drachma would give Greece the ability to pay its debts, but you overlook the fact that the drachma would be worth nothing because of those debts. If Greece leaves the Euro, it will have reneged on its debts. If it were subsequently to attempt to honour even some of those debts, it would find that difficult because the debts will still be denominated in Euros (unless the whole single currency project falls apart, of course, but lets not complicate the issue) and the new drachma would be valueless or, assuming some time has passed, at the very least, worth a fraction of a Euro. Greece has no option but either to stay in, and pay what it owes no matter what the cost to its society and politics, or leave and be a lot poorer possibly for even longer than it would have been had it stayed in. You then go on to question the value of the whole single currency project, in very much the same terms as most British politicians have done from the outset, which is why- fortunately as things have turned out- the UK remains outside it. The thing I think you overlook is that the single currency was never meant to be a thing in isolation. It was supposed to be a tool that brought the members closer to being one single state with one single economy. This has not happened, primarily because the political process has never matched the financial and economic one, and the result is that now times are much tougher (for the reasons I outlined above) there is no political will to carry on with the single economy project, leaving the European Finance Ministers to rush about fighting fires. If that goes on for long enough, ironically, it could well usher in a single economy of sorts, one where the German economy supplants all the others. But I think the German electorate will lose patience long before that can happen. Meanwhile, poor old Blighty will be left like the last shop open on a derelict street, without its old customers and without the means to attract new ones. Think yourself lucky you live in the sensible bit of North America.

John

The Drachma – should the Greeks return to it – would indeed be worth very little. But the Euro will have to make up the difference between what it, and the Drachma, are worth if the Greeks go on using it. The whole point of returning to their own currency is that it would virtually rule out the Greeks importing any new German BMWs and Japanese computers. They would even have to budget important purchases. The

advantage of the Drachma is that Greeks would be forced to make things for themselves, create jobs, and begin to export inexpensive Greek-made goods to balance trade. A separate currency accomplishes the same thing as IMF-imposed austerity programs, without the damage that a one-size-fits-all solution causes. Just because imported cars are no longer affordable is no reason that doctors, educators or barbers should be too. All the more so, pension plans and savings should still be worth something within Greek borders. However, none of the options available to Greece at the moment are likely to be painless.



Trading on Death

Recently, I read on a news site about the discovery of a stash of old baseball trading cards in a trunk of someone's attic. They are incredibly rare and in superb condition – estimates put their value at as high as \$3,000,000. I've no interest in baseball cards, but I have the collecting mania in other fields, so I know what it must feel like to come across something this awesome.

The pity of it is that the collection will likely be broken up and sold piecemeal at auction, to increase the return. But... who could afford to buy *all* of them? No matter how avid a collector you are, 3,000,000 bucks is a terrific amount of money to spend on – what did the news item say, 37? – 37 little rectangles of printed cardboard. Maybe they really belong in a museum, or whatever baseball hall of fame there is, wherever it is. Cooperstown, maybe?

Now, if only *I* had an attic, and if only *I* had a grandfather who kept anything, and if only he'd considerately died and left me something ... but, instead, his second wife, and my grandmother-in-law, took it all with her to her family in Pennsylvania after the funeral. All I got was a wristwatch that broke down a year later. I still have it, but it's not much of a keepsake ... the brass has turned all green and pitted.

Do I hear \$3,000,000, anyone?

(Ahem) \$3, maybe?

Nuts.

You and Whose Army?

A recent book by a British military expert slammed Canada's participation in the war in Afghanistan. This is somewhat shocking to Canadians, who – whether they support the war or not – imagine that we've done a good job with the limited resources at our disposal. The author contends that we bit off far more than we could chew and that conditions in the Kandahar sector actually worsened during our tenure there.

Maybe so, maybe not. One book, one opinion.

If the book is factual, however, I don't suppose any of this should come as a surprise. For most of the last two generations, Canada has not been a militarized nation – unlike the US or the United Kingdom. The armed forces we had were suited to our modest self-identity and minimal need for national defense. Then along comes the 1980s, and greater demands were put on us by NATO and the US to militarize ourselves, and take up a larger role in protecting Western interests. The decision to give in to this pressure was made at the highest levels in Ottawa, and never referred to the public. Small wonder ... Canadians have traditionally valued good schools, universal health care and pothole-free roads over pushing other countries around. But, because nobody asked the Canadian public, we ended up where we are ... trying to carry more than we can hold.

There's no question that – if this recent criticism of Canadian arms is heard at all in Ottawa – the answer our political masters will come up to solve our military shortcomings is to spend even more money to further militarize the country. Standing tall with our allies will seem more important to the ruling Conservatives Party than scientific pursuits, reliable sources of drinking water, fair opportunities for education, the environment, the arts, or the long-term security of our elders. So, get ready for more tanks, more warships, more invisible, magic-death-ray airplanes and whatever else Ottawa thinks we need to march in step with America and Europe. And save your pennies for your old age, because Ottawa will turn a deaf ear when you hit 65... or should I say 67? By then, maybe 70.

A Rose is Not a Rose

Lately, I've been witness to a bit of a donnybrook on FaceBook. Someone used the word "queer" in a very questionable way, and war broke out between those who thought the word had no longer had any acceptable meaning whatsoever, those who thought it was unobjectionable in some contexts, and the witless soul who first uttered the word "queer," who seemed opaque to the idea that there were any grounds to object at all.

When I grew up, when someone was queer, they were peculiar in some way, an eccentric. I don't think I heard "queer" used for homosexual until I was in my teens, and "gay" was no more the correct meaning for the word than was "weird."

Yet, according to Wikipedia, the homosexual implications date to the 19th century. It cites the use of the word "queer" – to mean "odd" – in a late Sherlock Holmes story, "The Adventure of the Second Stain," written in 1904. Then, the article goes on to state that the offensive use of "queer" has been its dominant use in the 20th century.

Well, maybe I was sheltered. Or maybe Wikipedia is wrong, the author biased toward a certain view. You might as well put your money on my being wrong, though, since the memory of 60-year-old bloggers is nothing to rely on.

But the fact is that my upbringing doesn't seem to have prepared me for the present day at all. Not only have words like "fag," "gay" and "queer" entirely lost their original innocent meanings, but what counts as acceptable behavior in society has changed as well. In fact, changes in behavior have been the driving force behind changes in language. When I was kid ... I was told never to call children "kids," because a kid was a newborn goat.

Let me start over ... when I was a kid, homosexuality, unusual sexual practices like cross-dressing and fetishes such as rubber and bondage, were outside the pale. They happened in dark corners, deepest privacy, in sleazy establishments the police kept their eyes on, but ordinary people were not supposed to have any clear idea of what was involved. Of course, most people knew a lot more than they let on, and many, no doubt, had strange costumes and peculiar toys in their own closets or dresser drawers which they never spoke about. But these private idiosyncrasies were not supposed to be out in the open, and it was possible to go about your daily life without hearing anything out of the ordinary.

As, for the most part, I did.

Perceptions among the general public changed slowly. They changed rather abruptly for *me*, though, when I was drawn together with a number of other artists to form furry fandom. In short order, our relatively prim comics, featuring nothing spicier than occasional nudity, attracted almost every sort of sexual nonconformist that was ever cataloged – even people who wanted to have sex with tiny, cartoon ponies. To our astonishment, these people never went away, but only attracted more and more of the same. It took the stretching of certain conceptual muscles to remain associated with furry fandom after that – not all of the old crowd were able to stomach it, and dropped out. Somehow, I endured.

Yet, I still think of myself as a bit of a prude. Now and then, I find myself in the presence of some serious hanky-panky, and find it difficult to be cool about it. I recall one con where I was asleep on the floor. I woke when the fans whose room it was came in, quite late, and, rather than initiate a conversation I doubt any of us wanted, I didn't move. To my surprise, only a few minutes later, I heard the proverbial bedsprings creaking. I risked opening one eye slightly and found He and She hard at it. I have never in person seen *anyone* in the act before, except in pictures and movies. Still, if I could stand furry fandom, I wasn't about to let anything as tame as straight sex agitate me. So I fell asleep again.

Despite that example of nonchalance, I'm not comfortable with other people's sexuality. Mine is about all I can handle. My thinking is that people can indulge themselves in any sexual activities they like, *so long as they don't tell me about it*. If I want to know, I'll ask – and I probably won't. If you want to suck cock or fuck bum, I'd appreciate it if you waited for another time, or found a different place to do it. I'm not an appreciative audience.

Now, how many of the readers jumped to the conclusion that I'm still not cool about gay sex, I wonder? I didn't say anything *about* gay. Straights suck cock and perform rear entry, too. So who's prejudiced *now*?

Standing Orders

A couple of days ago I read an online news story about *sitting*. Apparently, health pundits have determined that if we sit for longer than 3 hours a day, we run a grave risk to our health.

Think about that. Some people spend longer in their car, going to and from work. Having used up their allowance of sitting for the day, they must then go through the next 8 hours doing their office job while standing up. Presumably, a special work desk could be built to meet the need, with arm rests if the job requires a keyboard. Those who live closer to home and spend less time on the road might be granted the luxury of sitting during their lunch break.

Many people have jobs in retail, on assembly lines or in warehouses, however. They are lucky enough not to risk excess sitting on the job, but still face a challenge when they come home in the evening. Perhaps dinner tables could be built with longer legs, to permit meals while standing. Nor is there any reason why people cannot enjoy a little television while remaining on their feet. Instead of sofas and coffee tables, living rooms could be furnished with waist-high counters. Enjoy all the down-home comfort of your local Mr. Sub right at home!

What about weekends, though? Certainly, a little rest and recreation while in a sitting position may be permitted ... as long as we stay out from behind the steering wheel, that is. But once the 3-hour limit has been reached, the rest of the day must be spent in a desperate round of active sports, long walks, dancing, swimming, surfing, judo matches or just about any old damn thing, so long as it isn't the deadly peril of sitting!

Good luck getting the public to pay the least attention to this, most recent “good advice” from the health community!

