

The Devniad, Book 17

Bob Devney

25 Johnson Street, North Attleboro, MA 02760

508-699-7885 bobdevney@aol.com

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[In June, several of my family gallivanted around southern Britain without me. Here are reports by two of them, rubbing it in.]

Liz's title below refers to a bitter comment by me that I was GLAD, GLAD I wasn't going, since by Day 2 of their journey they'd all be sick of being cooped up together in a small car and would fall to squabbling like rabid weasels.

They all claim nothing could be further from the truth. Methinks the weasels do protest too much.

Occasional editorial sarcasm etc. is italicized within brackets. Like this.]

My Family and Other Weasels by Elizabeth Devney

Being a journal written in a tired, telegraphic style of how I, Liz Devney, with my brother Michael and my sister Darcy and her husband Bob Kuhn, set out to see more places in England and Wales in 10 days than any sane person would have contemplated, and of our various adventures along the way, written as an account to console my brother Bob at home, who was pining away because he was unable to accompany us, and in hopes that my husband Jimmy, who was glad not to accompany us because he hates museums and house tours and can see horses at home, would read it and want to come next time, and including a special addendum, also in the telegraphic manner, recounting the further four days that my sister Darcy and her husband Bob K. spent in York.

I was going to do a fake journal of encounters with English animals, given that my three obsessions in life are horses, cats, and other animals and that brother Bob dislikes my stories about them, but I'm tired and so you'll have to take the truth.

Tuesday, June 4

Flight takes 6 hours; lots of food and free drinks. All my pants are too tight already. Bob K. has four shrimp salads on plane because we three Devneys don't want ours. Flight is uneventful, considering my best scenario had us in a raft with the sharks circling. Am wearing a long-sleeved shirt on plane so won't sunburn in raft (plus excess material to rip up for bandages).

Did I mention I don't fly much? Darcy and Bob K. have been to England before (Bob K. several times), but this is first trip overseas for Mike and I.

Land at Heathrow 4:30 a.m. Brit time. Bless Bob Kuhn, who has reservations on Airbus (like a limo bus). Takes us right to St. Ermin's Hotel on Caxton Street. Bus driver says it is safest hotel in London because New Scotland Yard is opposite it.

There are two cat statues in front of St. Ermin's. Mike calls them Whosis and Whatsis.

We are right around the corner from Tothill Fields, which is now a small park. Dump all luggage in Darcy and Bob's room, go out.

Get tube passes at Victoria Station per Bob K.'s advance information. Find

out Victoria is named for the state of Victoria in Australia, not vice versa as we all thought. Join hordes of Londoners jamming tube.

Go to Fortnum and Mason's for breakfast. Superb! Ham, marmalade, scones. Windows have plaster models of herons and partridges.

Already lost index card with notes on it of all this. Forget important points. Writer's cramp. Too tired to calculate how long without sleep — didn't sleep on plane.

Jermyn St. adverts speak of two and three thousand dollar suits, custom-made. We see a plaque noting Sir Isaac Newton lived on this street once.

Take London Pride red double-decker one and one-half hour bus tour. Actually, take it a lot. Hop on and off at various spots. Spaced out. Getting sunburn. Too tired/excited to care.

Scene of Bob K. standing up to take photos on top of lurching double-decker bus: Darcy grabbing his belt loops; Mike watching for overhanging objects — I'm obliviously watching scenery.

Incredible to be here and see the NAMES!

See (from outside, anyway): Tower of London, Hoare's Bank, **Trafalgar Square!** Wellington's Arch — never knew it was right next to his house! White's on St. James St., Green Park, Hyde Park, trooping of colours (from a distance), Lambeth Palace, St. James Palace, Sherlock Holmes pub/museum, Piccadilly Circus (walk around briefly), St. Paul's Cathedral, Cleopatra's Needle, Nelson's Column back at Trafalgar Square, St.-Martin-in-the-Fields, Westminster Cathedral, Westminster Abbey, Tower Bridge, Harrods, Victoria and Albert Museum, Hard Rock Cafe, National Gallery, Big Ben, Houses of Parliament.

Darcy realizes Big Ben is striking noon as we go by. Fleet St. has unbelievably gorgeous buildings none of us knew it had.

Eat lunch at Southwark Cathedral. Amazed at all the London office people laying on grass eating lunch or sleeping. In business suits and silks! Women's skirts extremely short. Amazed what they don't mind displaying (**aren't** keeping knees pressed together). Food good at cafe inside.

I have statue of Eros in Piccadilly Circus confused with Winged Victory. See lots of horse statues. Also statue of Florence Nightingale.

Eat dinner at Aberdeen Steak House. Walk past Buckingham Palace, the Guards, and St. James Park. Bob K. is impressed by ornamental water in middle of St. James Park. Interesting and pretty.

Walk by Green Park too. Supposedly Charles II's wife saw him picking flowers for his mistress there and had all the blossoms pulled up.

Back to hotel; planning session. Now 10:00 p.m. of a very very long day. And so to bed.

Wednesday, June 5

We split up today. Mike and I go down the Thames; Bob and Darcy go to Brighton in the morning and the Victoria and Albert Museum (V&A) in the afternoon.

London is enduring a heat wave. The nights are terrible for sleeping; the days too hot for walking. Mike has to talk me into joining his boat ride down the Thames. I am kicking, screaming, reluctant. Turns out to be an excellent choice. The river is so cool!

Mike and I are happy in the boat; reportedly, Darcy is too hot in Brighton.

Darcy has hissy fits. All Londoners think weather is wonderful.

Brighton Royal Pavilion has spectacular chandeliers, the largest as big as Bob and Darcy's kitchen, as tall as their house. Also amazing wrought iron staircase that looks like bamboo.

Darcy finds Brighton Pavilion restoration interesting. Had two major disasters, the Hurricane of '87 (don't know which century) and a firebombed Music Room (I assume during WWII). She and Bob have tea in Pavilion at Queen Adelaide's Tearoom.

Bob says they find another gem each time they go to V&A. This visit, see ironwork collection with railings, fences, and panels. Just lovely. They close the place.

Also saw collection of German stained glass. Bob's impression of this (and other?) German medieval art: surprisingly ugly portraits of mostly violent, ugly, brutish people.

Suddenly, telling this story, Bob K. and Darcy break into Tom Lehrer song:

Darcy: "Stories of tortures..."

Bob K.: "...Used by debauchers..."

Together: "...Lurid, licentious, and vile/Make me smile."

They report the V&A also has wonderful but pitifully displayed costume collection. A gem was a 202-year-old woman's top half/jacket and portrait of the woman wearing it. This is new type of display, called a "sister set," with clothing and then the wearer's picture displayed together.

This collection is very good, but modern collection (1960s-80s) is awful. The curators did Designer Outrageous versus what real/normal people wore. Darcy says, "No kids' clothes. No women's business suits. Why wouldn't you show that stuff?" Of course, in older

collection, it's all dress-up party clothes because that's all that lasted.

Meanwhile, on our boat ride, Mike and I go all the way to the Thames Barrier, then back for a brief stop at Greenwich. Mobs of French students all over boat and sites.

Learn from tour patter that John Harvard of the Harvard Library bequest was a butcher's son. Mike can't wait to tell his colleagues back at Harvard U.

Also see Cleopatra's Needle and outside of Globe Theater while going down and up Thames. Cross the Prime Meridian in boat on way to Barrier.

The Thames Barrier keeps the sea from flooding upriver during storm surges. Mike says the Barrier's been raised 22 times (unscheduled) since built in 1980. He wonders if some of those were for political reasons. Raised once per month for maintenance.

Development inside barrier has increased, with restoration of rotting wharves, condos, etc. The tour includes an excellent working model 4 feet high, 3 feet square of Barrier.

At Greenwich, see Naval College from outside. Henry VIII's birthplace. Very green, very lovely. We miss Greenwich observatory.

Did see *Cutty Sark*, my first clipper ship. I find it interesting to see how tea is packed in ship. Entire 'tween-decks area stacked with square cases 2-3 feet across, lead and bamboo-lined. Sealed specially. Entire hold washed, repainted before tea loaded every voyage. Salt air deadly to tea.

Cutty Sark in drydock now, so could actually fill lock and sail away. Also, now I know how captain and crew of 18 housed. Not as bad as I thought. Very efficient, sparse stowage. Captain's quarters solitary, not that big. Every

spare square inch on boat was packed with tea during its voyages.

Mike and I fast all day until 4 p.m. Then have sandwich in small teahouse in Greenwich. Clean, good food.

Mike waxes on about how building is lovely, clean, neat, simplistic, etc.; i.e., Mike is falling for the blonde waitress.

He also says I tried to alienate affections of someone's cat in Greenwich. Really, I just begged a chance to play with it.

Later we all four go to Leicester Square to meet Marti Leimbach for dinner in Movenpick Restaurant in Swiss Centre building. I carefully teach Mike to pronounce "Leicester" as LICE-ter. Later, Bob K. tell us it's LES-ter.

Anyway, Square is amazing combination of Georgetown; Washington Square, N.Y.C.; and Cambridge. We suffer a Glockenspiel performance for 15 minutes while waiting outside restaurant for Marti. Announce I am now rethinking visiting Switzerland. (Glockenspiel loud, and, to my ear, extremely unmelodious).

Marti Leimbach is old Harvard friend of Darcy and Bob's, who sold her first novel for billions even before they made a Julia Roberts movies out of it. (*Dying Young*.) She married a Brit, now lives outside London.

On arrival, Marti proves pregnant with second kid. Bob K. rephrases this. Says Marti is set to launch two books and baby. At dinner, we discuss efficiencies in local beds and plumbing. Marti has no English accent. Yet.

It is now 12:41 a.m. and Mike is trying to sleep. I am trying to write in journal. Do you realize what a sacrifice this is? I'm supposed to ride a horse in Hyde Park today — in 5 hours, at 7 a.m.

Sorry, Bob, but schedule is too crowded and I am too tired. Nine hours total sleep since we got here. Good night.

Thursday, June 6

It's 6:10 p.m. Only slept about 4 hours last night (which Mike says means he only slept 2), so I didn't go riding this morning. Now sitting in hotel room trying to wind down. Did Tower of London and Templar's church today with Mike.

Mike talked me into Templar's Church. I was mildly curious; had no idea it would be fantastic. Church is one of hidden treasures of London, built 1185. I got that "old" feeling from it, untouristy, unadulterated and entire, really for the first time in this visit.

Weather still perfect if you like really hot. Mike off trying to buy warm-weather clothes like T shirts at High and Mighty shopping area in Knightsbridge. (The heavy sweatshirts he was advised to bring have been a disaster as pajamas.) Haven't seen Bob and Darcy all day. We all tried to connect up for Globe Theater, but didn't make connection — or theater.

Londoners continue pleasant and helpful. I feel safer in this city than I have in any city since I was 9 years old running around Boston.

Have now only had 13 hours sleep Mon-Tues-Wed nights total. Sure hope I do better tonight. First couple of days, tried to remember stuff for journal. By now, can't even make mental note to remember.

I wish I hadn't read Mark Olson's trip reports in the newsletters my brother Bob lent me. They make mine look sick.

So tired I was making comments, in Tower of London queue for Crown

Jewels, that were not well-received. We trudge along endless squiggly lines of people, watching Coronation videos. Every muscle in my body hurt and we just shuffle along — I hate lines.

I thought the endless waiting was stupid, i.e., WHERE were real jewels? Then realized everyone else was fascinated by videos, ambiance, etc. Guess they still reverence the Queen. As I muttered, Mike kept glancing nervously from me to the crowd and back, in case they went for me.

Also at Tower: incredible to see execution site of Anne Boleyn, Katherine Howard, Jane Grey, Robert Devereaux, and Margaret of Salisbury. Also took tour of St. John's Chapel. Mary Tudor was married by proxy there; Elizabeth of York laid in state; and the two young princes' bodies were found under that very staircase.

Statues everywhere. Also parks with Londoners on every inch of green grass. Have noticed they all tend to herd together — where Americans will get as far apart as possible, for example in a restaurant, Londoners will join long tables already occupied and ignore empty tables.

Can't believe how much we haven't seen, or how zombied I am. Now 6:40 p.m. This is the most restful hour I've had since we got here.

The excitement is beyond anything, and so hard to turn off. All these names, familiar from so many books! We're leaving London for the country tomorrow and I still can't really believe I'm here. I can definitely see why people love this city.

What'd Johnson say about London?

[“When a man is tired of London, he is tired of life; for there is in London all that life can afford.”]

I haven't liked cities in a long time, but this one is so nice and clean and controlled. There's apparently a lot to be said for repressing your feelings.

Darcy wins prize. Samuel Johnson wrote quote about bored with London, bored with life.

[Close enough, ladies.]

If you ever manage to go, Bob, you must try to go with Bob Kuhn and Darcy. Darcy says Bob K. did all the prep work. All I can say is that his organization so far is beyond anything.

Maps of buses and subways, all sizes; hotel reservations; free and discount passes for everything; reams of info on what to do, where go, etc., etc.

For instance, you know I brought nothing but an Easy Map. I've never used it. In my pockets since we got here are credit card-sized subway maps, London Discount cards, subway pass, Heritage free passes, bus schedules, large & small scale maps, coupons, etc.

Bob and Darcy know of every restaurant everywhere; all have been good. This is not coincidence, it's advance planning on the scale of a battle.

We go to see Westminster Abbey tomorrow and then pick up car to go to Shrewsbury.

Sat in bar of hotel 4-5 p.m. today with Mike. Came back hoping to get Bob K. and Darcy but no luck.

Anyhow, Mike and I kept poor bartender (a South African) running. Fetch phone book. Fetch drinks. What are “half shirts”? (Mike was calling clothing stores to locate T shirts. We're still not sure if half shirts are T shirts or men's dress shirts with short sleeves.)

By the way, Mike, the world's most generous brother and roommate, is actually letting me smoke in the hotel room. Words cannot express my

gratitude for this self-sacrifice. I don't know what I would have done if I had to leave room every time I want a smoke, especially when I can't sleep and it's 2 a.m. Bless him forever. You should too, Bob, because this journal would not exist without this help.

Random, dreamy thought: If I lived in London I would reside at Fortnum and Mason's and weigh 1000 pounds.

Caught up with Darcy and Bob, who later updated us on their activities. They had nice breakfast at Muffin Man. Darcy got something called an "American muffin," which she said was like our chocolate cupcake. Bob had crumpets and was in pig heaven.

Then they went to Royal Shakespeare Company — "Taming of the Shrew" at the Barbican. Apparently Darcy was whiny. In fact, at the "peak of whininess," according to Bob K.

Very interesting restoration of play; they put back the intro and the end piece/frame story so the whole thing made sense. Good Kate and Petruchio.

Bob K. says he's seen a better shrew.
[I wonder where?]

Darcy says she was crankier than ever by evening. On way to Leicester Square, coming out of the subway, they walked over a block in the wrong direction. Bob K. realized their mistake, said "Wrong way."

Darcy replied, "I HATE this city. I hate London. No air conditioning. No screens. They're all stuck up. It's not your fault, Bob. What do they have to be stuck up about?"

Anyway, out of our whole day, Templar's Church is definitely a don't-miss. You must ask Mike to borrow booklet on it. It's all in there, so I won't

try to repeat. (Hmm — have I got an idea here?) Now 7:10 p.m. Enough.

Friday, June 7th

Westminster Abbey beyond anything! Saw Kipling's grave!

Get there at 8 a.m. It doesn't open 'til 9. But because I've done my homework (only time so far), I slither in a back door and get to walk around the cloisters in same peace monks must have known. Choir was singing somewhere. Lovely!

I spend most of my time in that church smiling (cloisters) or jaw-dropping (nave). Tombs of Elizabeth I! And Mary Tudor! And everybody! They're all in there together.

Bob K. joins me at 9 a.m. We walk into nave. He immediately says, "Look at the roof!" This is exactly what guidebook says to do. He hasn't read guidebook.

By 9:30 a.m., still not past nave of church. Huge tour groups, no movement.

I get rather excited and approach the most impressive churchman I can find and say, "We're leaving London in 1/2 hour and I want to see the rest of the church. Can you help?"

Within five minutes, they split tour groups off and let single customers like us in. So Bob K. and I get Abbey tour almost by ourselves, in spite of guidebook which says be prepared for hordes of other tourists. I am eternally grateful to that churchman.

Pick up car. Bob K. drives 5 hours northwest to Shrewsbury. Traffic jams. Confluence M5 into M6: hell on earth.

One and one-half hour to get out of London, one hour to get out of Birmingham, rest good. We decide car has British air conditioning, i.e., next to

none. (Mechanic next day says "Actually, none.")

At rest stop, a young woman is driving a stalled car, while people push. She heads it straight towards the restaurant. Boyfriend is yelling, "Yes! Yes! STOP!"

Bob K. driving, and Mike and Darcy alternately navigating, actually gets us straight to our Shrewsbury hotel without directions. Bob K.'s driving skill is A++.

Lovely place, lovely room. Our particular room is reserved for families. Some German couple across hall tries to get our room. Actually checks that we are a family: where's usual husband, wife, child? Cross-examines Mike on whether we deserve the room. He sticks by his guns that brother and sister are a family. The Allies win again. Beautifully decorated room, quite large, especially after that cubbyhole in London.

Shrewsbury is positively medieval. An English-Welsh border town. Bob K. is teaching me to identify genuine Tudor architecture in buildings. Plenty here to practice on.

At one point, I am smoking outside a restaurant waiting for others, looking at incredible Tudor buildings, and start hearing a flute playing medieval tunes. One of those fine moments.

Walk along Severn River after dinner. "O peaceful England."

My writing light is keeping Mike up; have to stop now.

Saturday, June 8

Last night, best night's sleep so far.

We just left Shrewsbury Abbey, and are discussing the family story about the Kubla Khan poem. So you see, Bob Devney, you are with us in spirit.

(Aside: Bob D. later claims he doesn't remember this one. So for him and my mystery readers — when we were teens, Bob quoted the first five lines of Coleridge's "Xanadu" continually for weeks, because he loved the sound of it. Plus his own voice. I got so sick of it I memorized the entire poem. Blew him right out of the water.)

Another sidenote: Getting new glasses for trip, and equipping them with transitions lenses, was a great idea. Sharp vision, no messing with sunglasses. Thanks, Mike.

Mike and Darcy and Bob are great at maps AND extremely lucky in navigational guesswork

I've looked up three times during the last three sentences to cries of "Look!" We are on our way to Powys, northwest toward Wales. Sample of conversation in car:

Darcy: "Look at the mountains."

Mike: "Are they the Black Mountains?"

Bob K: "They are NOT the Black Mountains!"

Darcy: "How do you know so much?"

Bob K: "Because I pored over the maps for 2 months."

Thus convicting the rest of us of not doing our homework.

It's all so green! That's my biggest impression since leaving London. Beautiful, beautiful, beautiful! Sheep on hillsides. Lucky horses with huge pastures. Drive and walk past my first English hedgerows.

You were right about keeping this journal, Bob, so much is already slipping away.

Shrewsbury Abbey — Roger Montgomery, second-in-command at

Hastings, became first Earl of Shrewsbury, founded abbey, and later joined as monk. He was buried in church, but site was lost during Dissolution of monasteries in 1500s.

I just missed my first thatched roof. This journal keeping has its risks.

Did I say London got up to around 86 degrees? And stayed there for much of our visit. Now it's much cooler. Great! First brief rain last night while walking around Shrewsbury.

12:05 p.m. Just entered WALES!

Powys Castle is fantastic. I could live here and love it. In June, anyway. Rooms elaborate but comfortable. Now I know what English/Welsh country houses were like in the early 1900s, because that was the last redecoration here. Gorgeous gardens. Seat of Duke of Powys. Formal Italianate gardens in one section. Library — twelve shelves tall with window seats. Mike notices every room in house has bellpulls everywhere to call servants.

Darcy wants me to put in: Bob K. and Mike were in Clive Museum in Powys Castle, and overheard a conversation between child and one of the Castle's docents. Child's voice pipes something, inaudible. Docent replies, "Well, in plain English, dear, we looted them." Meaning the objects Clive brought back from India.

Drive on, eventually get to Three Cocks hotel, a 500 year-old inn. Lovely, comfortable. Darcy and Bob's favorite of the trip.

Go into Hay-on-Wye — the famous Town of Used Bookstores — for quick pasta dinner. Most bookstores (and there are lots) are closed, including the

science fiction one. Booth's is only one open. Richard Booth was the guy who started Hay-on-Wye as a bookstore town. I go nuts; you would have too.

Only had a half hour because it closed at 8. Need a year to properly investigate. You'll love this — I look desperately for books for us, old favorites we can't find anywhere — Cecelia Holland? Dorothy Dunnett? Manning Coles? Nevil Shute? No luck.

Then, leaving, grab a C. S. Forester with nice cover on shelf near Mike. I say, "Bob will love this." Mike objects, "But, Liz, that's the book I'm buying!"

Also, we get into conversation with bookseller, who tells us Booth's owner is in **Boston** buying books all this week.

Got first decent night's sleep last night in Shrewsbury. Hope to repeat starting right about now. Good night!

Sunday, June 9

Titles: The "Ruined" Day (visit three different ruins) or "If this is Sunday, it must be Chepstow..."

We leave the Three Cocks this morning, head out over the famous Black Mountains of Wales. They are 600-700 feet high, gorgeous views, with sheep and horses all over. In fact, the road goes through the animals' pastures. Sometimes we have to wait for animals to cross the road. There are hikers, and in general it feels a little like New Hampshire's White Mountains.

Then on to three different ruins. First Llanthony Priory.

Bob K. goes crazy taking pictures. It's in a beautiful setting, surrounded by mountains. I appreciate them, and then slither off to the outbuildings adjacent, where I check out my first Welsh stable.

We move on to Caerleon. First the Roman baths they've dug up. Really get

a great idea of how they worked — a well-done display, definitely worth a visit (like practically everything else we've seen).

I now know what hypocaust and baths looked like. Caerleon was home to the 2nd Augustan legion from 75 A.D., so it's definitely the oldest place we've seen. Feels like it was a fun spot, almost 2000 years ago.

On to Roman amphitheater — mostly weathered stone covered with grass. The old circle of tragedies is now the site for picnickers and sunbathers.

I don't believe Arthur was crowned here as the legend says. There would have been too many bad memories of all the Britons tortured and killed all over this amphitheater for years.

Last, Chepstow Castle, the oldest stone castle left in Britain. Vastly extend my knowledge of what baileys, barbicans, and towers were, and how people lived back then. An important guy from the Battle of Hastings started the first section here in 1067. Later, **the** William Marshal and his sons kept improving it, followed by Roger Bigod.

They were all "techies" in matters of defense then, so the structure illustrates various stages of improvements in castle building. The posted explanations keep referring to the "safe" eastern side, which I only understand when I see the sheer rock falling away on west side down down down to the river Wye.

Today may be the best journal entry, since we got back to hotel at 6:30 p.m. Well, Darcy and I did. Mike and Bob K. climbed city wall.

Anyway, time to organize thoughts. Have hardly slept since trip started. Don't know why. Excitement? Novelty? The perversity of the universe? But only

about 25 hours total sleep Tues through Sat. Do better tonight?

Writing this journal has meant I read NO books on this trip (sob). Thoughts go out of my head faster than they appear, keep losing them.

Miscellaneous stuff:

It stays light in England 'til 10 p.m., in June anyway.

Did I say that in England they cover windows with muslin curtains, in Wales not? No screens either country.

Bob K. says trip is costing us \$8 an hour, so why sleep?

Mike has been the finest roommate a person could ask for. Considerate, supportive, generous, thoughtful. His mechanical ability has matured from 30 years ago. (E.g., how to work the showers). He also has common-sense suggestions when needed, lets me SMOKE, puts up with me waking/pacing and waking him up all night.

Weather continues perfect. Only that one rainstorm (in Shrewsbury). London was too hot; country has been perfect. I think it may be cloudy sometimes, but too tired to really notice.

Mostly Mike and I forget where we are now, and when we did what. Another reason journal idea a good one.

This trip is an amazing amount of work. Bob K. is doing magnificent job driving. You should see his skill on the roundabouts/rotaries. Advance prep flawless too. I can barely hold up my small end of being ready on time (can't think what else I contribute).

Bought husband Jimmy nice green sweatshirt. Says "Wales" on it in bright multicolored thread. Also picture of dragon. Worried about presents for others — no time, no ideas. Oh, my.

It's 9:50 and Mike is going to try to sleep, so I'll stop.

Oh — can see Chepstow Castle right across the street. I mean we're practically on top of it.

[Gee, Toto, we're not in Bellingham any more.]

Monday, June 10

Try to begin this. Can't.

Say, "Mike, where did we go today?"

Mike responds, "Periwinkle..."

I try again: "Clovelley?"

He corrects me. "No, thatched roofs."

I say, "You're right, Mike.

Stepworthy and the Periwinkle teahouse!"

Actually, it's called Selworthy. Small village of five thatched-roof houses in Somerset. One native has lived there all his life; never left except for 2 years in the army in Kent.

I can see why — a small slice of paradise on Earth. Beautiful views, flowers all around cottages, lovely. We were going to have tea in the Periwinkle House there, but it was closed.

On over Exmoor (or maybe that was before Somerset). Darcy thought the moors were desolate, but I loved them. People riding horses. Strange pretty twisted yellow bushes that the sheep ate. The road was their pasture again.

We wander down a country road on Exmoor, turn a corner and there are 22 white and gold, young foxhounds — with one whipper-in maintaining superb discipline to keep them from running out among the cars. These beautiful dogs are lined up like soldiers at presidential review.

Bob K. claims I was bouncing up and down in the seat.

Devon. Fall into our first tourist trap at Clovelley. We have to pay 1.70 pounds sterling just to get in.

Nasty, steep, horrible cobbled $\frac{1}{2}$ -mile lane down into village. Really treacherous footing for everybody. Then the place turns out to be just a typical village/quay on the sea, like you can see for free all over the Devon coast.

Take Land Rover ride back up, supposedly for .70 pence, supposedly all the way to parking lot. Driver charges us .80, only takes us $\frac{2}{3}$ way, and goes so fast we all almost fall out.

Oh, this a.m. had my first grilled tomatoes in Chepstow. Ordered them with breakfast just to see what they were like. Also, in otherwise crummy Clovelley, did have lovely tea with clotted cream.

Wondered all my life what those two items were. So now I know. LOVE Devonshire clotted cream!!

Oh, yes, I think we have our vicarious revenge on Clovelley, nightly.

Every house had a cat. And every cat was a tom. All scarred, missing ear pieces, etc. Every night in that town must be made hideous by catfights.

Next drive as fast as possible to Tintagel. Drive all over town looking for castle. Find path. Is 5 p.m. Closes at 6.

Darcy stays in car, while Bob K. and Mike and I run up cliffs to take pictures and see sights. Worth it! Ruins of 12th century castle. But spectacular view of Cornish cliffsides. Oh the beauty! Bob K. got some good pictures, I hope.

Probably, he says, people looking for Camelot (Tintagel is supposedly Arthur's birthplace) are disappointed, but the natural beauty of the place is sufficient. I loved it.

Have good meal at reasonable prices at Wooton Arms. I should have recorded more on food and hotels. Bob K. says

Wooton Arms was the best meal he's had so far. I've liked everything. Bob and Darcy pick hotels, eats by consulting Tourist Board and English and Welsh listings; food listings from Frommer's, Fodor's, Cheap Eats in London; and various other sources.

Brother Bob, tonight was night I left the message saying we were all fine, on your answering machine. Time coordination is really hard. Hope daily postcard flow has reassured Jimmy.

Only 2 1/2 days left. Real tired, but sorry to stop seeing stuff.

You should see how adept Mike and I have become at settling into strange hotel room. Quicker every night.

Sidenote: Petrol (a.k.a. gas) costs three times the US price. Is .50-70 pence (out of 100 pence/pound) per liter, 4 liters equals 1 U.S. gallon. Current exchange rate: 1.54 pounds to dollar.

Bob K. drove over 9 hours today, mostly on narrow twisty windy English roads. He says they're just as bad as everyone says they are, only worse. Narrow, green, and shrouded by hedgerows. Actually, as a passenger, I love the look of them.

Tuesday, June 11

Drive all over Cornwall/Devon. Cows all over road. Quick looks at Perrenporth and St. Ives. First rainy, chilly, truly English day.

Funny moment as car is groping through the fog, we trying to find Druid-leftover mini-Stonehenge standing stones.

Peering ahead, Mike questions, "Is that a standing stone?"

Bob K: "That's a standing cow."

Later, Bob K. admits, in Mike's defense, mist heavy, cows still.

I don't think Bob K. ever realized that Mike was right — those **were** the

stones we were looking for. I thought so as we passed them and was sure of it when we backtracked.

Finally, Mike and Bob K. are trudging off into a cold, foggy cow pasture while I crouch in lee of car for wind shelter, smoking.

As Mike treads cautiously (cow pasture, remember?) toward what appear to be five standing stones of uncertain size and distance, he calls back a suspicion that farmers stuck stones there as joke.

A minute later, apparently after close encounter, he calls back indignant warning. Stones are only crotch high. Literally.

Darcy is laughing hysterically in car while guys gaze at stunted stones, body language saying "Is this all there is?"

Bob K. still smarting hours later. Says we made him give up his rocks (other road not taken to yet more and better standing stones) and then laughed at him.

We stop for lunch at Lord Nelson's Pub in Penzance. It has smoke-blackened walls from a Spanish invasion in 1595. Mike says even he would have washed the walls by now.

The pub has one of the finest collection of Nelson prints in Britain. A good one of *Victory* with recognizable figures on deck. Nelson, Hardy, Adair the Captain of Marines, two others I can't remember. Also, full size rectangular picture of *The Death of Nelson*. Mike says he has never seen the full picture before, only copies of the center detail. This makes him more cultured than me. I'd never seen any of the picture before. Anyway, nice prints.

Go to St. Michael's Mount — great. Like famous one in France, it's a castle on a island that has causeway to

mainland only at low tide. Twice a day, cut off by rising waters. Choppy ride in ferry but pretty. Gardens very pretty.

Many of St. Aubyn family of St. Michael's Mount died in WWII and other conflicts, according to plaques in chapel. Brings home to me what the aristocracy in this country pays for their privileges. Also, many books in other great houses we've seen have military themes: "3 Months in Soudan," "Wellington's Campaigns," and of course "Peninsular Wars," etc. Lots of duplicates among the libraries I saw.

Oh, yes, Cornish water does have a blue tinge.

For ferry ride back, we're first on. Bob K. has us scrunch up in a corner. Herd of passengers dutifully do ditto, clearing nice view for Bob's photo op of castle and island across the water.

Then I notice older woman in kerchief coming along quay. Our boatman waits for her, and I see the other seamen glaring at him. Think at first it's because he is hogging all the ferry passengers.

She gets on, sits down right beside Bob K., ruining his photo views. He tries explaining to her; she doesn't quite get it; then moves. Bob K.: "Actually, you're more in my way there." She just looks at him, doesn't budge.

After we arrive at quay, Bob hears the boatmen address the woman as "milady." Also children calling to her from car in parking lot.

Bob finally recognizes from pictures we had seen in castle that she is the lady of the manor, i.e., St. Michael's Mount's Lady Susan St. Aubyn. So ever since, I tell people that Bob K. kicked Her Ladyship off her own ferryboat.

Drive into Plymouth next. Plymouth is on River Plym (mouth of Plym).

Do laundry this evening. Bob K. is off near machines, Mike and Darcy and I are trying and failing to make some minor decision without him.

Darcy intones, "Leaderless, the penguins milled around," and Pepsi goes up my nose.

Cough, spit, laugh all over laundromat. Edifying spectacle.

This country is soaked in history. Pub next to laundry is where Captain Cook ate before his last three voyages.

Get lost in Plymouth. But Mike has unerring instinct for fast food joints, even without map. Find Pizza Hut. Park. Looked around for usual English parking ticket vending machine.

Me to someone offering us an unused ticket: "We're Americans; we don't know anything."

The reply: "Oh. Right."

Pizza Hut, a superbly helpful waitress, and food help us all regain a few wits. Back to hotel; 10:45 p.m. now. Bed.

Wednesday, June 12

Plymouth 6:15 a.m. My first rational thought upon waking, surveying the hotel room is, "Blast! The little bugger's packed already!" Meaning Mike.

Incidentally, this blasting and buggering is not a reflection of my assimilating English slang, but of February's Boskone and all the Bujolds I reread before and after. Notice I have now sneakily gotten one science fiction reference in, Bob D., so you can put this trip report in your NESFA newsletter.

On the road again. We stop between St. Ives and St. Just at Chysauster, where there's an Iron Age (100-300 A.D.) settlement of eight huts.

Way up in the heath with a nasty wind blowing. Beautiful wildflowers.

Narrow entrance through stone/earth-banked walls into central courtyard, with tiny circular rooms opening off.

This was how our ancestors lived.

The huts cut off the wind really well in June. Can't imagine this in December.

Reading this journal to others in car. Bob K. says he can't understand all this stuff about sleep deprivation; he slept soundly all but one night. Darcy just blew him a raspberry.

Mike says he finally figured out that the reason the English can write directions ON the road, right on it, is because they have so little snow.

Just passed sign: "Crinkley Bottom at Cricket St. Thomas." Sign had picture of elephant. I knew elephants had wrinkled **hides**, but...

Note to Pepsi Corporation — why no Pepsi Free in England? Much discussion in car about this.

Visit Chalice Well at Glastonbury, where Joseph of Arimathea supposedly buried Holy Grail. Lovely small garden. Nearby, Glastonbury Tor sits over Vale of Avalon. (A tor is an abrupt hill.)

Soft green country, this Somerset. Bob K. takes pics of Tor. No time to walk up. Legend says King Arthur's men are still there; come out every 7 years to water their horses. Waiting for when England needs them and Arthur again. Legend also says Art and Gwen were married at Glastonbury Abbey.

Go on to Longleat House, seat of Marquess of Bath. House beautiful; Italian Elizabethan with copies of Renaissance motifs. Parts of it are definitely tourist trap, though, like the safari park, railroad, and maze. Informative guides. Bob K. delights them by asking lots of questions.

Arrive in Bath; hotel is the beautiful Villa Magdalen.

Once at hotel, Mike and Bob K. begin figuring out who owes whom what, over 9 mixed-up days. Example: someone paid 80 pence for lorry ride, which, it is mutually agreed, "sucked."

Oh, wait. Mike just claimed, "I kept excellent accounts."

Bob K. counters, "Which you couldn't read."

Mike replies, wounded. "That's petty, Bob."

Get to Bath in time to take another two-decker bus trip. Royal Crescent, Laura Place, Abbey, Assembly Rooms, rail to London, Jane Austen's rooms, old canal system, Pultenay Bridge, Avon River, Queen Anne-Marianne. Great!

On tour, learn meaning of phrase "daylight robbery." Seems there was once a luxury tax on windows. So people blocked them off or painted them over. Thus the government literally robbed people of their daylight.

Also phrase "cash on the nail." The Nail was a stone in the Bath Guildhall where bargainers laid their pounds down, whereupon the price was agreed.

Also heard that reflecting light from light-colored, then-new Georgian buildings hurt Jane Austen's eyes when she lived here.

Walk on Pultenay Bridge with Bob K. later. Apparently this and the Ponte Vecchio in Florence are the only two bridges in world with shops built on them. Then Darcy, me, Bob do Bath's Abbey of St. Peter and St. Paul.

Split up. Do Pump Room with Bob K. and Darcy. Mike goes off to see Roman baths.

Then, great dinner all together at Beau Nash's house. (He was arbiter of

fashion at Assembly Rooms in Regency Bath.) Beautiful weather all day.

Mike saw beautiful mountainside entrance for old canal today. Which, I note, he selfishly didn't point out at the time.

Mike: "Whenever I talk when you're writing, you tell me to 'shuddup.'"

Miscellaneous: Bob K. wins a prize today by providing title of this journal, a take-off on Gerald Durrell's "My Family and Other Animals." Also a tribute to Bob Devney's prediction that we'd soon be squabbling like weasels.

When visiting foreign climes, bring earplugs! Save your life when the hotel room is on a noisy street. I couldn't stand to use them at home. But rapidly saw benefits in England.

Wear loosest possible clothing on plane. Take something like Bob K.'s inflatable neck pillows; Darcy gave us each one when we boarded.

Others spend all day fumbling in and out of bags in packed car. I stuff essentials into pockets of my spring parka, carry it everywhere, no worries.

Only place anywhere in the British Isles where you can get enough ice in your drink is McDonald's in London.

At highest point between London and Bath (Westbury, Wiltshire), there's a white horse on hillside. Turf cut out, image shows up on chalky rock. I can never get enough horse worship.

They bale hay, cover it with green garbage bags here, probably because of rain. Not as scenic as it sounds.

Thursday, June 13

Avebury in Wiltshire, just below Swindon, is our last tour stop. Avebury's stones date from 3500 B.C., therefore are 5000 years old. Finest henge in world and on par with Taj Mahal as monument, says the brochure.

Bob K. sees another group of tourists making prayer circle or something by holding hands around one of the other standing stones.

Not being a New Age fan, he screams over, "It's RISING, it's RISING." We are all gratified by how many of them check to be sure it isn't.

Darcy looks incredibly cute in a flowing white shirt and baseball cap, wandering around Avebury. I badly want a picture of how she looks to keep forever, but at the moment Bob K. is far out of sight across the cow-patted fields. Looking for more rocks.

The rest of us are constantly in raptures about the beautiful countryside. Mike, who is mechanical, is in raptures about the beautiful 1893 steam engine tractor converted to a planter that he spots in a farmyard as we drive past Avebury.

Michael is getting sick of landscapes. "I've never wanted to see a modern building so much in my life."

In our last adventure of day (and trip), Mike is sent to find West Kennet Long Burrow. Runs into good-looking woman with beautiful collie. Woman, giving directions, also asks Mike if we would like to see crop circle. Oh yes! We all crane necks looking around the horizon for this distant wonder.

The woman takes Mike's arm and points to a spot about seven steps behind us. Yup, there's the crop circle.

Mike's new girlfriend says circle has "light energy." Darcy and I stand and watch Mike and Bob K. neck deep in green, waving grass, taking pictures.

I don't know about "light energy," but the scene certainly has an earthly beauty all its own.

Darcy says, "This has been a magic vacation." I, of course, have fulfilled a lifetime dream. But now, home home home! Jimmy Jimmy Jimmy!

England Very Dry: We're Sometimes Shaken, Not Particularly Stirred

by Darcy Campion Devney

[Darcy continues the (neverending) story, with one paragraph of overlap.]

Thursday, June 13

The four of us reach Avebury at mid-morning; it has older rocks than Stonehenge in a circle. (I'm completely unimpressed, but if you're into that sort of thing, you'll probably like it.) Also, unlike Stonehenge, you can touch and walk on these. One-half mile away, finally, a CROP CIRCLE (yippee!).

We drop Liz and Mike at Heathrow. (Which, by the way, is hellishly badly signposted, making Logan look good. Plus, of course, somebody has added several double(!) rotaries to confuse the jet-lagged, which-side-of-the-road-is-which? traveler.)

So Bob and I hurtle on alone, heading north for 4 days in Yorkshire. We take M roads all the way to York — 85 miles per hour, but bumper-to-bumper, making Bob a bit tense.

Friday, June 14

Bob misreads clock, so we take showers at 5 am.

After breakfast, we drive right through Micklegate to Jorvik Viking Centre, an archeological dig (now museum) underneath a Faneuil Hall-type mall.

You move backwards (literally) in a "timecar" through re-created Viking city — including the latest Smell-o-Rama

techniques — and through the archeological dig. As usual with museums, I'm continually aware of behind-the-scenes administrative details — for example, I imagine the committee meeting where someone said "how about we do it backward, you know, backward through time?"

Bob goes off to Clifford's Tower for a quick photo op and view of York. The Tower was the site in 1190 of a Jewish massacre (150 people). Incited by nobles who owed money, wanted to "wipe out debt by wiping out the Jews they owed it to..." (Bob's words).

Then we meet up at the Museum of Automata — nifty! (And quite small.) We spend 2 hours there. It has displays of mechanicals through the centuries (some quite crude/violent jokes).

My vote for most impressive is a 1860 Japanese archer. The thing actually chooses one of four arrows, nocks, shoots, arrow is released and hits where it's aimed. In 1996, that still can't be done by computerized robots. Bob's fave, though, is a Birth of Venus (on a half-shell).

We walk through the Shambles, the only shops in England where we want to buy something. All kinds of neat stuff. The shops have display ledges outside (kind of like a big window sill) that say something like "THIS SHELF IS OLDER THAN YOUR GREAT-GREAT-ANCESTOR'S BUTTOCKS. PLEASE DON'T SIT ON IT."

York Minster *[the main cathedral of York]* is breathtaking. I think, 6-foot ceilings are good enough for the sons of Adam (see any medieval dwelling not for royalty), but for God, only an order of magnitude bigger will do. So the ceilings are 60 feet high.

I'm staring awestruck at the unbelievably gorgeous ceiling in the many-sided Chapter House, when, as

happens frequently in England, the prosaic intrudes. The gift shop is temporarily located in this room. So I'm distracted by tourists milling around, intently studying key chains.

When Bob gets in, I point out the ceiling, and he says "The floor's not too bad, either." He's right, and people are WALKING on it, oblivious.

We have a quick drink at the Treasurer's House. Why are so many National Trust teahouses located in cellars? Probably because they figure few people are interested in re-creating the "working" parts of a historic building. Me, I think of the popularity of *Upstairs, Downstairs* ...

We walk over to the new Richard III museum in Monksgate Bar. The exhibits are all text, simulated as the "Trial of the Century," complete with *Enquirer*-type headlines and copy.

Lovely quiet tea at the deserted Assembly Rooms (Regency, quite nice). Bob finally gets his thick porter — Theakston's Old Peculier — for dinner at the Punchbowl (Georgian). He drinks 2 pints and licks his mustache.

We have a fascinating conversation over dinner about forensic anthropology. The Jorvik Viking Centre claims you'll "see the faces of the past" in their exhibits, because they used computer modeling on skulls dug up to make molds for people on display.

We like York a lot.

[Who wouldn't, what with massacres, Japanese archers, skulls, and weird beer?]

Saturday, June 15

Drive to Castle Howard, which is somewhat disappointing: house closed, famous Rose Garden barely a bud. Drive on to Rievaulx Terrace and see tiny, tiny shrew.

On to lovely tea in Thirsk [James Herriot's fictional Darrowby in lovable Yorkshire vet books].

We drive to Herriot's (real name: James Alfred Wight) surgery, which they're trying to make into a museum.

The Tourist Info lady knew "Alfie." She talks about him curing her very sick cat in the middle of the night. And she says he had a lovely soft voice. (He was from Glasgow. In the books, he thinks his accent is ugly.)

On to Hawes, and a real Yorkshire pudding and roast beef for dinner. Bob drinks Rigwelter from a brewery called Black Sheep. The name of this beer means "sheep on back," and that's also the symbol on the bottle. 'Cause that's how you'll end up after a few pints.

Sunday, June 16

Hawes receives my vote for nicest innkeeper and worst bed. I feel a lot like Richard III myself this morning.

Fountains Abbey is a World Heritage site, the largest monastic ruin in the world. Must say, I still prefer Llanthony Priory.

Studley Royal is a water park built by the next-door neighbor to view the abbey. I don't bother to trudge over. Bob does; reports that water is extremely mucky and stagnant.

Then we're off to Harewood House to see the famous exotic bird garden.

We're starving by now, but it's Sunday. Almost no food places open. The ones that are have that annoying English "We only serve food for one-half hour, and this isn't it" problem.

They'll serve you alcohol, of course, anytime. Did changing the licensing hours really improve anything?

We decide to have tea at Harewood House.

BAD Decision. It's Father's Day (though no-one can take Dad out for

dinner, because of aforementioned restricted eating hours), and Harewood House is holding a Classic Car rally. This event is incredibly poorly organized (my event planner mode takes over, and I'm appalled). To wit:

We get hot in stop-and-go, bumper-to-bumper traffic for 1 mile (also 1 hour) from entrance to gate. Where someone finally tells us to drive through the "parking lot" (a meadow) BACK to the gate to park. THEN walk BACK to rally.

"But we just want to see the garden," we whine plaintively ... no luck. One-half mile stuck in "out" line (full of irritable people like us) to exit. Which dumps you about 100 yards ahead of entrance to car rally. Did I mention the car is overheating?

My opinion of today? Unprintable.

We arrive at Pymgate Lodge for evening (Cromwell stayed here). Innkeeper says two of his guests were in Manchester bombing yesterday, but they're OK.

I used to think that English news was more international, less local than the U.S. news. But the TV and paper have been nothing but IRA, IRA, IRA, even before the bombing.

Our room is small, pretty, and much too hot (only one 12 by 12 inch window). Did I mention that I haven't seen a screen window or door in all of England and Wales?

To mollify me, Bob agrees to hit McDonald's for dinner. I eat one of those gluey hot apple "pies" that you can't get in the U.S. anymore. Yummy!

We go back to the inn; Bob watches soccer and drinks with the innkeeper.

Monday, June 17

Last morning. We drive back down to Heathrow. It's a madhouse, with stepped-up security precautions.

Home to a real shower ... it's been very dry in England.

[We now switch back to our regular channel, WBOB.]

FlimFan

Noteworthy movies seen in the last month or so: *Courage Under Fire*, *Lone Star*, *A Time to Kill*, *Kingpin*, *Matilda*, *Supercop*, *Cold Comfort Farm*, *Tin Cup*.

The top gun: *Lone Star*. As usual, great indie writer/director John Sayles takes his time, showing you a modern-day Texas sheriff facing a murder mystery that goes back a generation and involves every single interesting character in a bordertown that's full of them. This is great big dish of chili: rich, thick, with spice and bite; best savored slowly for maximum satisfaction.

Backchat on APA:NESFA #314, July 1996

To Jim Mann

Excellent reviews. *The Moon Is a Harsh Mistress* was in my thoughts while reading about the revolution in *Red Mars*, but I hadn't considered it in the light of a direct response. Thinking about it, I'm sure you're right. Was terrific to see the names Diaspar, Alvin, and Shalmirane again after so many years. Must forklift *The City and the Stars* over to my reread warehouse.

Snap additions for your most thoughtful list of SF books to recommend for literature majors would be Maureen McHugh's *China Mountain Zhang* and (especially for Dickens fans) Neal Stephenson's *The Diamond Age*. I do like how you've got plenty of newer writers on the list to give fresh balance

against the classics. But thanks for Pangborn's *Davy* (for Fielding fans, perhaps), which far too few remember

To Paula Lieberman

Good to see you at Readercon, albeit briefly. And welcome to the APA again! Although sounds like you were here previously, before the earth cooled.

Had to look up what those melameds were in your ancestry: teachers in Hebrew school. Thanks for the new word. Did you inherit any didactic instinct?

Your favorite book today is *Seeker's Mask* by P. C. Hodgell? Don't know that one. Maybe a review from you would start a run on it among APA readers.

A lot of your examples of material that would immediately be banned under the Communications Decency Act seem unlikely to me. But I always get chilly when the government even dips its toe into topics like this, because power granted is easily, often inevitably, power abused. Call me a toe-jerk freedom of speech absolutist.

To Nicholas Shectman

I don't get the middle rank in your capsule book review system: "No rating." When I read that on a book, seems like you didn't read it, or it didn't fit into your system, or something. How about "Average" or "Mildly Recommended?"

Agreed that Delany's *Babel-17* was one of the best SF books of the 60s. Certain images recur to me regularly, almost 30 years later.

To Tony Lewis

Oh please, please **do** tell what *Locus* editor Charles N. Brown's middle initial stands for. Nevermore?

Nebuchadnezzar? Nebula? (That last would be the male form of Beulah.)

Thanks for the definition of Panshin's Syndrome. I remember, at one of my earliest cons, entering the dealer's room and seeing Alexei Panshin at his own table, hawking his wares — mostly some religious or pseudo-religious books, do I have that right? Shiite? Sufi? Scientology? I had loved his *Rite of Passage* and been transported with joy when I'd discovered his *Heinlein in Dimension* in the Yale library. Now here he was, a mere huckster. It was one of my first disillusioning experiences in seeing a writer off his pedestal . . . Later, of course, I met Darrell Schweitzer, and my education was complete.

Thanks also for the letter from Zhirinovsky to Buchanan. OK, I guess there **is** someone who if he ran would force me to vote for Pat.

To Nomi Burstein

Great to see you at Readercon. We must arrange to end up at the same party and really talk.

Having trouble planning kosher restaurant meals in a city you've never visited, in this case L. A.? Since to a person with a hammer everything looks like a nail, to this net newbie this looks like a case for Burstein's KosherKruiser™ Web Site. Folks e-mail in from all over the world with suggestions, reviews, etc. How is the borsht in Beijing, the flaken in Flanders, the latkes in Libya? Let's just punch up NomiNet.

I too liked *The Phantom*, but can't say it had the impact on me that the first *Batman* movie had. *The Phantom* was just a lot of fun, and I think most people who read this would enjoy it.

To Paul Giguere

Agree with the tenor of your remarks supporting the First Amendment. And let's talk about the assets forfeiture laws some time, as an example of bad law that's not only passed but is used with glee by half the law enforcers in the land to ride roughshod over citizens' right.

Granted, most victims probably are drug dealers and other villains. But read the great dialog in Robert Bolt's play *A Man for All Seasons*. Thomas More's son-in-law says he'd cut down every law in England to get after the Devil.

More responds, "And when the last law was down, and the Devil turned round on you — where would you hide, Roper, the laws all being flat? ... Yes, I'd give the Devil benefit of law, for my own safety's sake."

Wow, I get chills just looking it up to quote.

GREAT idea to do a sequel to your *Proper Boskonian* article on SF and the net. It was terrific; can't wait to have an up-to-date version, since the net seems to change every minute.

To Mark Hertel

Thanks for the primer on prepress production for NESFA Press book covers. Your #3 method — where the film house "rips" a high-res image for themselves and gives us an easily transported, stored, and manipulated low-res copy to play with and make all changes to, then the film house merges our changed low-res back with the high-res for final output to film — I believe that's the method that the ad agency I work for uses. But your explanation of the process was clearer than any I've ever gotten from our production people. Mostly I just create the golden words and let others worry about what the Japanese probably call "production hell."

Sounds like I enjoyed Readercon more than you. But I agree they've had better. I did manage to find time to buy a pile of books, all hand-picked by your discriminating consort Lisa.

How do I "find time to see movies and read and work and have a life?" Who said anything about a life? I slave away at work, then see movies and watch TV and read, and write brobdingnagian amounts of stuff for NESFA zines, and that's it. Ask my increasingly wrathful bride Maureen.

To Elisabeth Carey

William McNeill's *Keeping Together in Time: Dance and Drill in Human History* sounds like another great one from this most freethinking of modern historians. But my first reaction to your description was that being able to work together in large groups is surely not a uniquely human advantage. Birds do it, bees do it, even uneducated termites do it — but halfway through my tune I looked again, and he seems to mean you don't see drill or dance among our closest relatives, I suppose the primates. OK, never seen chimps form a conga line outside of maybe a Disney toon.

To Michael Burstein

Go ahead, sing at the podium if you win a Campbell. The worst that can happen is that everyone in the audience makes a private vow never to nominate or vote for you for anything else ever again as long as you live.

Roy Blount had a wonderful article years ago about "Aid for the Singing Impaired," which he maintains is a much-abused majority in America. Just thought I'd mention it.

Thanks for kind words about my fan writing. Should see my fan dancing.

I keep meaning to at least write some LoCs for other fanzines, but

feeling is always strongest when I'm reading and reviewing thousands of pages of fanzines for *Proper Boskonian*, and when that lot has been shifted I can't bear to look a fanzine in the face for a while.

Since you ask, Maureen and I have been married since May 30, 1981. An eternity of bliss.

To Mark Olson

The Friesner alternate-history Roman novel *Child of the Eagle* sounds good. As does *The White Papers* — must order my copy posthaste.

Your stories about some roadwork delays on your trip to/fro Midwestcon reminds me of something I was told in Toronto. "In Canada, we have two seasons: Winter and Construction."

Thanks for your usual enjoyable geology and history lessons — in this case, of the Bluegrass region, Mammoth Caves, and the Cave Wars. John McPhee had better watch his back.

Spoonbread sounds good enough to be dangerous. Combining quiche, cornbread, and pudding, with lots of egg — why don't they just run a wire straight into your pleasure center?

To Anna Hillier

So the Hubble Space Telescope makers **assumed** the mirror was correct. You know what they say assumption is mother of.

Did you know that Zagreb was in Croatia without looking it up? I'm still extremely hazy on my post-Soviet geography. I've got a pretty good fix on Moscow, and that's about it...