

Over the Fence



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MY FLEETING ONLINE LIAISON

Isn't the internet amazing? The technology of it is just beyond me, and the opportunities it offers for communications, education, business and entertainment seem limitless. Recently a cousin in the United States sent me an email that had reference to a site which had a profile of a woman's face on it and which invited me to type some words into a box below, click 'talk', and immediately she would respond by speaking that which I had written.



I thought I would put her to the test and so typed in that alluring offer of hospitality from



Mae West

Mae West: "Come on in – all I've got on is the radio". To spice it up a bit I included "you sexy beast". Sure enough, in a sensual American accent I was commanded to *come on in you sexy beast – all I've got on is the radio*. Gee, there could be the makings of a meaningful relationship here. Probably it would be going too far to say she sounded desperate, but she certainly seemed agreeable enough.

I thought I would be up front about this new friendship and tell Cynthia. To my relief she was completely relaxed about it. Shrugging her shoulders, she said nonchalantly, "Go for it! She's welcome to you!"

What a wife! I really am a lucky man.

So I figured I would give my new lady friend directions from Hastings to our country address (wink, wink). So I typed in *Pakipaki-Pekapeka-Poukawa-Te Hauke-Te Aute-Pukehou-Kiakoura-Waipawa-Tukituki-Tamumu-Hautope*. Then to make sure she had it right I clicked 'talk'. I was devastated. The woman turned out to be completely illiterate! To heck with this,

I want a bit of intellectual stimulation as well, so I dropped her. I guess it's probably for the best. As they say, there's no fool like an old fool.

ESSAY – The Town Country Relationship

Never too much passion, but maybe more than just a marriage of convenience

It is interesting to observe the urban/ rural relationship throughout our history and to follow the changes in it and consider the reasons. Hawke's Bay is as good a region to consider this as anywhere.

In the early days of settlement it was pretty one-sided in that virtually all the population was involved with the land. Napier was the only town of note and even then it was very small. In 1870, twenty or so years after the establishment of the sheep industry, its population was about 2,000. Other urban settlements were very tiny, and Hastings virtually didn't exist.

By today's standards life was tough for the pioneer settlers of Hawke's Bay, whether they were town or country. Of course the big land holders were accumulating wealth and capital, and with it the dominant political and social influence in the young province. But it wasn't until the decades either side of the turn of the Century that they began to become seriously wealthy. Nothing heralded this more than the grand homesteads they constructed – we're into the second and even third generations of the first pioneers here – and many of these stately homes remain today to illustrate that wealth. Many have regrettably been lost through fire (mainly) and neglect, but photos tell of their glory.

This was a time when the wealth between town and country was at its most disproportionate, but don't forget that there were many small struggling farmers too, especially in the 'bush' country where they eked out a living milking a few shorthorn cows and doing a bit of casual work to help out. Further, the isolation of the farming districts added to the social divide. Inevitably there was more than a little element of 'us and them' – perhaps an aloofness on the part of the so-called landed gentry, and some resentment on the part of the townies. Slowly the wealth gap closed as on the one hand holdings were subdivided, driven by legislation and family expansion, and on the other urban businessmen and professionals became more prosperous.

In the 1930s the growth of horticulture and process crop growing on the Heretaunga Plains tended to bring the rural economy closer to town, especially Hastings. This accelerated after WW2. Further, for a couple of decades from the mid 1960s division of wealth started to really level out. Prices for a range of farm outputs – the days of the wool barons had long gone – languished and successive governments (and not just in New Zealand either) responded to languishing fortunes by allowed inflation to reach double digits, the regulated Kiwi dollar was over-valued to try and reduce the raises in the cost of living, and farm costs went through the roof. (In a 24 month period in the early 1980s farm costs as measured officially rose by a massive 50%)

The response of governments, but especially that under Sir Robert Muldoon, tried to relieve farming with a range of financial assistance, paid for out of the public purse or, if not, through inflation. Town folk, or at least many of them, were struggling too, and so having to fund farmers, many of whom were still pretty well established anyway, did not appeal at all. Inevitably there were resentments, and from farmers too, as they saw powerful unions winning unsustainable pay raises to compensate for the increase in the cost of living. They were unsustainable alright, and many businesses failed, as was inevitable. But the intransigent and ignorant professional union boss – they weren't all in that category it must be said – just didn't get it. There are now a generation of adult Kiwis that have no real memory of strikes in the freezing, pulp & paper, steel construction, inter-island shipping industries. Those were the bad old days, gone, and good riddance.

But then came Rogernomics, now held in considerable public odium. I see it differently, and yes, I went through the farming restructuring and it was tough. But Douglas – and the Labour Government to which he was responsible (even Labour looks the other way now) – took New Zealand from a state of denial to reality. (Maybe we are losing touch with reality again. Then it could be that our economic position is not so dire as we may think it

... and speaking of Mae West



Great Battle of Britain leader, Air Chief Marshal New Zealander Sir Keith Park wearing his "Mae West".

is, but that's another story.)

The restructuring of the late 1980s really placed town/county fortunes on a level playing field – farmers were unsubsidised (unique in the developed world), and secondary industry unprotected. The result, in my assessment anyway, is that it has led to an era of respect and mutual recognition of our utter interdependence. This has been assisted by other factors. The first is ever-improving communications, whether physical or electronic. The second, largely enabled by the first, is the common situation of female farming partners working in town. This has led to the integration of social circles, and I believe a factor unrecognised by sociologists.

And the third is that this country remains dependent on the land to underpin our economy. This has always been the case but over those 162 years since 3,000 merinos arrived at Purerere the diversity of our land-based industries has changed in a way undreamed of by those steadfast pioneers. And as far ahead as we can see this is the way it is going to remain. There was a time when it was seen that for this country to prosper it would have to break its dependence on primary production. The most vigorous proponent of this was Dr Bill Sutch, but there were others. They've long-since been discredited. New Zealand is, as it has always been, a trading nation, and our future is clearly in the production of high quality processed (preferably) food and fibre.

But there is a threat to this mutually respected urban/rural marriage. It is the ideological environmentalists who see the word 'farmers' and read 'polluters'. This especially applies to the dairy industry, the earner of a cool 23% of our overseas exchange. They fear the intensification of land use, a process that began perhaps eight thousand years ago when man made clearings in the forest and planted a few genetically primitive grains, and which now feeds nearly seven billion people.

Intensification will continue, as it must if we are to fulfil our material wants, which is a normal human aspiration, and one held it would appear by the greenies. But this is not to discredit the message that we must lift our environment stewardship. Indeed we must, but taking a dogmatic reactionary stand against progress, especially farming progress, will achieve little. This is the task of all of the Hawke's Bay community; working together to advance our fortunes but insuring that this is to enhance rather than exploit the resources of the region, the birthright of those who follow. Farmers are entitled to something better than the abusive rhetoric they are being subjected to from some quarters – armchair, or perhaps keyboard environmentalists that enjoy the fruits of an economically progressive and literate society, but make political capital out of denigrating those on the land.

Still. I believe that this marriage between Mr and Mrs Town/country is in pretty good shape. Not made in Heaven maybe, but pretty solid here in the Bay.



OPERATION SEDUCTION

You can't take it away from the French, they may be losers when it comes to fighting wars (well, one in particular), but they seem to know how to handle their women. Here the then French President focuses his charms on the then US First Lady. He appears to be getting away to a good start.

On the other hand, didn't her husband make a goat of himself by pinching or patting (or whatever) the bottom of the Lady Chancellor of Germany? Perhaps the English have not left a legacy of the ethos of chivalry that some Continental cultures have. But then, who's to say that Kiwi women don't love their blokes just as we are?

TREES OF HAWKE'S BAY



The Three Sisters – old radiate pines at Kuripapango.

WELL SAID

Recently, a great but somewhat forgotten American liberal leader Hubert Humphrey would have turned 100 if he were alive. (Humphrey was Vice President under Lyndon Johnson and was narrowly beaten by Nixon in the 1968 presidential election.)

In November 1977 the then-Senator Humphrey was given the rare privilege of addressing the full House. In a letter to the *New York Times*, freshman Congressman – and later under Clinton Secretary of Agriculture – Dan Clickman recalled Humphrey's advice on the occasion:

“While quite ill at the time, he gave us all very sound words of advice, and while I never wrote them down, I remember him encouraging us to fight every legislative battle as if it were the most important battle of our lives. But after the battle was over, we were not to treat it as if it were a war, and we should go over to our adversary and shake his or her hand because our adversary today would be our ally tomorrow.”

These are sound words for any legislator in any era, more true today than ever. Hubert Humphrey knew more than most folks what was needed to nourish our democracy, and what is so lacking today”.

And now the words of a conservative:

Margaret Thatcher: ***“The problem with socialism is that you eventually run out of other people's money.”***

On one occasion Margaret Thatcher's office made an approach to Buckingham Palace, suggesting that there should be communications prior to them both attending the same function so that they wouldn't turn out in similar outfits. Back came the reply: “When Her Majesty is in attendance, no one notices anyone else's outfit”.

LAST WORD

If you haven't already, don't forget to take a look at my website:

www.overthefence.org.nz

And if you think a friend would like to read Over the Fence then feel free to forward it.

Cheers, Ewan Mac