

Aging gracefully: A personal perspective on the Adult Education Research Conference

Roger Boshier
University of British Columbia, Vancouver

- 1974.** Nixon in disgrace, the U.S. defeated in Vietnam, OPEC has tripled oil prices. Americans punch each other at gas stations and, in the South Pacific, we prepare for the latest round of French nuclear tests in the atmosphere. A.E.R.C. is in Chicago and I have told people I will be there. But more important business was at hand. We decide to send a "peace fleet" to stand-off Mururoa atoll to embarrass the French, evoke action from our government, and stop the tests. A motley crew. Faded hippies in new cause. One trawler, donated by a Dutchman - now missing in the Pacific. The radio has faded but our hopes are high. We send Tamure, named for a Polynesian dance, doing a steady 7 knots, heading for the blast zone. Sir Edmund Hillary makes a personal appeal in Paris. We dispatch Magic Isle, an ironic name for a 40' ferroceement sloop sent to stop a bomb. Our Minister of Maori Affairs is aboard. On the day of the 1974 AERC, I wait in hot sun for a big bang. There is a phone call from Chicago and hurried explanations. But across a vast ocean, the excuse for absence fades and the feeling is incomplete.
- 1975.** St. Louis. The airport. There is no sign of a research conference but this Ramada Inn has a lot of T.V. channels and is perched at the end of the runway. F-111's just through the airport fence to be hit with a well aimed stone. I came a day early in pursuit of Tom Sawyer. This is a sad place. But the conference will be explosive. My paper has been rejected. The judges have given the thumbs down to an experiment where I used reinforcement as a treatment designed to encourage silent people to talk in class. My results show marked differences in the behaviour of the treatment and control groups. Later I take revenge by publishing it in Adult Education.

In more liberal circles it would have been accepted but, as I quickly discover, orthodox adult education in North America is liberal and humanistic. Nobody thinks, let alone talks about behaviour modification, operants and stimulus control. I still believe this emotional response is scientifically irresponsible. Moreover operant approaches are, in some respects, more "humanistic" than the chaotic and shapeless bundle of humanism and third force psychology that buttresses American adult education. But, in 1975 I am sensitive to reinforcers and extinguish the undesired behaviour. Even a brain partially fried by southern hemisphere sun and French bombs can turn bread to see which side the butter is on. Besides I've heard that the learned judges know their business. Later I modify this view but, right now, I wait to catch a glimpse of Mr. Borich, Mr. Griffith, Miss Joan Wright and Miss Diana Ironside.

The first day of the conference is a mystery. There is simply nothing in this Ramada Inn to suggest that a conference will be held. I begin to think I am in the wrong city. Outside, it sounds like the American air force is warming up for a last blast across the Gulf of Tonkin. I lurk in the lobby. Still nothing. Finally, at noon a van pulls up at the main door, a table is unloaded and an escapee from an afternoon television show gets a felt pen, creases a card and prints A (dot) E (dot) R (dot) C (dot).

Much later, after the opening session has started, a large and familiar figure heaves through the front door. Of course, it is fashionable to be late for the opening session and now I realize I had just witnessed a long-standing AERC ritual - Mary Jane arriving early, John Niemi late. I am relieved because Niemi and I now work together in Canada. Things move quickly and we jam into a hot room where I learn that the fellow ruling the session with an iron hand is the voice of Chicago that phoned New Zealand in the midst of the nuclear hoo-ha! He has with him Paul Delker, Burton Krietlow and a lady with an apt name - Lois Ellen-Datta. They talk about Title I, money, Title I, money, Title I and money. No research is reported, no data presented and, when participants plead for buzz groups, the chairman admonishes them and ploughs on with the incomprehensible panel discussion.

At first Delker, Krietlow and Datta pause each time an F-111 or 747 flies through the conference room. Krietlow appears to have a sense of humour, crosses himself, looks at the heavens and, in an occasional reprieve, speaks of boondoggle. The aircraft was just 70 or 80 feet above the roof and, as we look up, all are reminded that when it comes to program planning and the selection of optimal environments for adult learning, you can depend on adult educators. Finally, the speakers try to shout through the roar of jet engines. The chairman can see the session falling apart but declines another plea for buzz groups.

1976. Toronto. King Edward Hotel. No 747's here. Only rattling water pipes and the faded opulence of times past. I share a room with Adrian Blunt. Once again, the voice from Chicago chairs the opening session and surprise, surprise, the subject is money. It is a preoccupation of North American researchers. To this day I think it is a distraction that diverts energy from thought, which is the essence of good research.

Now there will be a symposium with Allen Tough and his students. The room is packed. Sex, drugs and self-directed learning. Today we know right-wing Ministers of Education adore the so-called "iceberg" theory. Central to this was the notion that nearly all adults engage in learning projects. Eighty or ninety percent of all learning occurs outside of institutional settings. Ipso facto, save the beleaguered taxpayers some money by closing adult education institutions. When the adult educators complain, show them data gathered by one of their own! Q.E.D.

Nobody has established the reliability, let alone the validity, of instruments used to count "learning projects". But in 1976 there wasn't a cloud on the horizon and the OISE students faced an adoring audience. One gentleman recalled how he had travelled to West Africa to ask CUSO workers about their learning projects. He had discovered that they recalled them better when intoxicated by marijuana. Moreover when he was stoned as well, the interviews went better. The audience was amused by this and similar tales from other parts of the world. They didn't seem to mind. Tres hip. Very Liberal. Allen handled the questions with aplomb. My slow brain was unable to comprehend how a university would give degrees for nonsense like this. Moreover, I was worried about the reliability and validity of observations made when the interviewer and interviewee are both under the influence of marijuana. I asked a question along these lines and was told that such concerns are "old fashioned" and betray a lack of sympathy for the "new" qualitative research methodologies. I walked out. Unfortunately, nobody noticed and I am only telling you today because this was one of the highest and lowest points in the history of this conference. Today we might say this is simply a manifestation of post-modernist pluralism. But I had my doubts then and they're even more pronounced now.

1977. Minneapolis. The Curtis hotel surpassed even the tackiness of the King Edward, the year before. The money men have gone now and Lynn Davie, Mary Jane Even, Burton Kreitlow and John Niemi sit in judgement. Krietlow is a mischievous fellow and, seeking contrast, has handed the opening session to a left-wing conspiracy consisting of Carlson and Boshier. I talk of the world problematique and the biosphere. Somewhat ahead of the times, I'd say.

Since 1975 I had carefully avoided all reference to behaviorism and thus had my papers accepted. Unfortunately, like much of what I do, they were too long. Presenters had to lug 150 copies of their paper to the conference site. Will you be selling these, asks the customs man. It was always a relief to dump them amongst the water jugs at the meeting room door. But then there was the problem of getting the other papers. Also, there was always the standing order for the library and the people who didn't make it. Only the most aggressive would sneak into a room, filch a paper and then go to the more interesting presentation down the hall. The frequency of this behaviour could be extinguished (there I go again) by taking your 150 papers up front to the podium. I was pretty good at this game and, when presenting a paper myself, had an agent unobtrusively collecting papers in the other rooms.

1978. In some ways, 1978 was a turning point because down in San Antonio, Frank Spikes had found a cow paddock well removed from the temptations of town and shunted us from place to place in the back of a bus. Moreover, there was a colour-coded program, a barbecue and kegs of beer under willow trees in the back yard of a large house. John Ohliger smoked cigars in the car that also contained Jerry Apps, myself and Dan Pratt.

This was the last of the big paper chases because we voted to issue proceedings. Just as well, because my bag, like others, was heavier on the way home than on the way into San Antonio. Spikes, a refugee from Northern Illinois, hasn't been seen since but did a good job and charged only \$25.00. This was also the year the hometown crowd voted two of the local lads onto the executive. We should have learned something from this but didn't.

1979. At Ann Arbor it snowed, a vaunted tradition was sacrificed, and the airline lost Dan Pratt's bags. The latter occurrence caused personal anguish because, as Dan and I shared a room, I had to lend him my

clothes and shaving gear. Have you ever looked across a room and seen someone that you know is wearing your undies ? Dan's problem was compounded by the fact we let the conference fall into the hands of Floyd Pennington. The Marriott Inn in Ann Arbor was dreadful place with running water, toilets, debonair waiters and suave waitresses. There was thick carpet everywhere, the colors seemed to match and although we listened carefully, the pipes did not rattle. The purple nights at Minneapolis, the nocturnal rattles at the King Edward and the deafening noise of St. Louis were either bizarre memories or the meanderings of a demented imagination. Frankly, I was concerned by this and the sneaky increase in the registration fee which now stood at \$35.00. But Howard McClusky did a good job at the opening session. My paper in the honey-thunder room. I do not lie.

During the Annual Meeting we saw the beginning of a new tradition that, since then, has been terribly perverted. People from Vancouver wanted the 1980 conference and were up against the notion that it cannot go west of the Mississippi River. These rules had been created by people living east of the Mississippi but, in some ways, Spikes and the San Antonio cow paddock had already upset that tradition and eased the way. The Canadians had a secret weapon in the form of a narrated slide show. There were slides of Vancouver in spring. Daffodils dancing, sailboats sailing, lovely persons walking on sun drenched beaches. You know what I mean. It was snowing in Ann Arbor and people said the slide show was a lie. Since then, the AGM has had to sit through a lot of rubbish produced by travel agents, mayors and other merchants wanting to slide a hand into the back pocket of the adult education research community. At Ann Arbor I joined the selection committee. This ensured that my papers would be selected during the next two years and provided a window through which I could view the somewhat shaky judging process.

- 1980.** There were new developments in Vancouver. The organizer had not forgiven Pennington and lowered the registration fee to \$20.00 (less for students). Moreover, in an echo of Minneapolis, the proceedings were perfect bound in purple covers showing a birthday cake to remind us that AERC was 21 years old. Canadians used this meeting as an opportunity to found CASAE (Canadian Association for the Study of Adult Education), the opening session was on the recently released report to the Club of Rome entitled No Limits to Learning and, at the Annual Meeting, a New Zealander not related to me in any way, was presented with the first Graduate Student Award.

More importantly, there was a large contingent of Swedes whose capacity for schnapps far exceeded that of the locals. But, during the swimming relay race held at the UBC aquatic centre, they were well and truly whopped by the Western Canadian team. The real winners should have been the New Zealanders but they deliberately went slow and had a couple of children on the team so as not to offend the local hosts. We also tried some "match-up" sessions, a cross between Illich's learning exchange and the roundtable used at AERC. De Kalb and Nebraska were bidding for the 1981 conference. Both had Chamber of Commerce type slide shows. After the lush landscape of British Columbia, a salmon barbecue and a good conference, it was to be corn city versus city corn in 1981.

- 1981.** De Kalb couldn't match the facilities at the UBC aquatic centre. It was felt that the swimming competition favoured those from the coast and was thus replaced with an earthquake that rocked Illinois immediately after the conference. An ugly but unfounded rumour concerning the behaviour and whereabouts of Phyllis Cunningham and John Niemi at the precise moment of the earthquake was started by Mary Jane who was still smarting at the fact Nebraska would have to wait another year. I had given a paper at every meeting since 1976 and was in a quandary over this one because, on the day of the conference, I was riding a surfboard at Noosa Heads, Queensland, Australia. But it was a simple matter to have my jointly authored paper accepted and, from what I hear, my colleague and coinvestigator Grant Clarke did a good job presenting it.
- 1982.** This was the year of the horizontal snow in Lincoln, Nebraska. Tom Sork had warned that this was a bizarre place. Sun-bathing one minute, freezing the next. But it was a good conference. Even Mary-Jane was positively basking in the good feelings here. I presented an historical perspective concerning army education in World War I. The faithful Phyllis Cunningham had recovered from her antics back home and gave lots of reinforcement. Dave Williams made a slashing condemnation of participation research and said that my historical project showed I'd been "born again". If you speak of regression or factor

analysis, then, ipso facto, you are out of step with the times and probably voted for Reagan, Bush or Mulroney. Thus, I listened when Dave spoke and, cheered by his assessment, became part of an enthusiastic audience in a symposium on the characteristics and relative merits of "British" and "American" research.

In this discussion Stephen Brookfield had an advantage because of his tweed coat, leather patches, accent, and the fact he presented the same paper twice. But at least, on this occasion, it was his work. Bob Carlson, an under utilized resource, wanted the Brits to be Brits and the Yanks to be Yanks. He dealt with the curious case of Canada which, in some respects, is more British and American than anywhere else. John Collins and I presented a large-scale E.P.S. data set at this conference. But it was out of step with the cheerful anarchy of the other sessions and largely ignored.

But amongst the goodwill there was a sour note. The steering committee had solicited entries for the Graduate Student Award. One particularly good piece of research that has since been published in Adult Education was submitted. Its receipt was not acknowledged. The student heard nothing but, when sitting in the Annual Meeting, was astonished to learn that no award would be given in 1982 because "only one entry was received". If we can't manage awards, let's drop the idea. And tell the winners to quit grandstanding.

- 1983.** We went to "La Belle Province" (Quebec). Canadians were delighted to have the conference back home and we hope the recurring forays into the far north will be continued. This was a good conference. The faithful Swedes were there, as was Burton Krietlow this time accompanied by his wife. There was no way in which the effervescent Krietlow could be mistaken for Ringo Starr who, posing as Michael Law, showed up for his first AERC in '83. As the years wore on this Michael fellow became a lovable cherub. Although we have yet to see his doctoral dissertation he scooped the "best student" award on several occasions and, if everybody here asks about his thesis, it might get finished. Mike should stop being a beetle and become a student - just for a few weeks. Its not much to ask.

Of course 1983 would be the acid test of the "meet with AERA" theory. Like Kathie Rockhill and others, I've pondered this problem and thus looked for familiar faces at AERA, which began the day AERC ended. Only a handful of AERC types stayed on. None of the most ardent advocates of the "meet with AERA" brigade actually showed up at AERA. But despite the dismal showing at AERA we were getting back to our roots. There were some good papers and, for the first time in years, symposia that were worth something. Most importantly, Mr. Cervero, speaking on behalf of the steering committee, promised that cockroaches would carry our bags into the facilities chosen for subsequent conferences. There had been a feeling that Roger Axford in Arizona might turn out to be another Pennington and get ideas above our station. We do not want a "spouses program", fancy hotels and fees to match. These things are killing the Commission of Professors and those of us who fled the vacuous meetings of the AAACE will leave AERC if it happens here.

- 1984.** North Carolina. Many attendees were lucky to survive the flight into Raleigh/Durham. Lightning lashed the aircraft, thunder roared and, at the opening session at the North Raleigh Hilton, Ed Boone did his best to make us feel welcome. But true to form it was not long before Wayne Schroeder's pipe activated the smoke alarm and the rooms were emptied. But this was only a minor portent of more incendiary things soon to be arranged by Roger Axford. I did my paper on "Beyond Ambulance Driving" - a critique of the 'felt needs' approach and another of those sterling contributions that fades quickly and has no impact on the field.

Over the years UBC people have fashioned a tradition around AERC. We like to fly to a distant city, rent a car and drive the last three, four or 500 miles and argue about epistemology. I have made some great friendships and done irreparable damage to others on these trips. After AERC at Raleigh we rented a car with David Little and went to Kittyhawk to see the Wright Bros and Cape Hatteras to look at the boats. David is an Irishmen from Boston and was a buoy snatcher in the U.S. Coastguard. Despite his forays into Habermas he is a good driver. But when we get to Kittyhawk there's a stiff wind and the former buoy snatcher doesn't want to get out of the car. Come on, says I, we won't get off the ground sitting around here. So we walk the field where Orville and Wilbur did their stuff. Unfortunately, these

Ohio bicycle dealers were not first. That honour belongs to Richard Pearce, a New Zealander, and years later, at another AERC, this topic will be examined in greater detail.

- 1985.** There was great anxiety about the extent to which Roger Axford would remain faithful to AERC norms when we handed the 1985 conference to Arizona. He tried a few tricks - like billing it as a conference on "higher" education. But, in accord with the need to arrange an earthquake, storm or some other reminder of human foibles, the fire alarms at the Howard Johnson Hotel clanged into life at 3 a.m. We had been out training for the Vancouver marathon and felt like sleeping. It was clearly a false alarm arranged by Axford. But Pratt was paying for the room and, as is the custom at these things, four of us were jammed in there. He said "get up" so we joined the other zonked people in the parking lot. The best part of this were Bob Bruce's pyjamas.

My paper was on "revolting soldiers" - a small history of army education in W.W. I and, as is usual, faithful Phyllis was there to applaud the absence of factor loadings and eigen values. I was sorry that David Williams had disappeared. The post-conference trip - with Little, Candy and Courtney - was to the Grand Canyon. Unfortunately, I missed the opportunity to throw Sean Courtney off a cliff and so now we have to put up with that conceptually-muddled chapter in the Merriam/Cuningham Handbook and his off-target attacks on the literature concerning motivational orientations.

- 1986.** Syracuse. The prize for the most primitive accommodation goes either to Syracuse or Boddington Hall. Roger Hiemstra had organized people with video cameras to wander through the halls recording "evaluation data". We never saw these tapes but, I am behooved to say (and I ain't often behooved) that this was one of the better conferences we've attended. The only sour note was at the opening session a lot of people bowed, scraped and otherwise ingratiated themselves at the feet of Arlon Elser who, in those days, had a big bag of money made from cornflakes. Not a pretty sight and, quite frankly, I think Kellogg could do better things with their money. Good research doesn't require money. But this heresy is part of another story.

At Syracuse I did a paper on training adult educators, Mike Collins did a phenomenological study of prison education. There was a large contingent of people from the No. 2 Institute of Education in Shanghai and, in the most creative title contest, Tom Sork won with "Yellow Brick Road or Great Dismal Swamp: Pathways to Objectives in Program Planning". At the talent show Ringo Starr insisted that we sing workers anthems such as the Ballad of Joe Hill. Roger Hiemstra's barbershop quartet was polished and in tune. Good stuff.

The UBC crew had driven from Ottawa and explored the meaning of psychoanalysis with Wilhem Mader, a German scholar and nice guy who spent a year with us in Vancouver. Now he was jammed into the back of an Alamo car designed for four but which, with a squeeze and push, accommodated seven. Even at the tackiest roadside hamburger joints we continued our journeys into the defense mechanisms of the ego. Some of our best education occurs inside the Alamo rent-a-car. Is this formal, nonformal or informal? But Syracuse was a good conference and, on the way back, we stayed in an ancient hotel overlooking Niagara Falls. Thank god for wretched excess.

- 1987.** Wyoming. Burt Sisco beamed but there was controversy at the Annual Meeting. Should candidates for the steering committee, or their representatives, be allowed to say a few words prior to the election? Conti was angry and nearly blew his hard disc. He was opposed to the idea - said it would destroy the family feeling. Others said yes. Sork and Hiemstra won the horseshoe tossing and other farm-related events. When we went to the cowboy dance downtown some of us felt like anthropologists who had arrived from another nation. Jane Munro read her poems - paradigm apartments.

Our post-conference trip had now swelled to n=15 and we cruised into Colorado in two cars. But there was a snow storm and myself and two students got stuck on one side of a mountain pass while other Faculty members and students were at Estes Park on the other side. Somewhere in the woods I was bitten by a tick and a few days later ended up in the University Hospital in Vancouver with Rocky Mountain tick fever. My friends went to the Medical Library and came back with the news that there are

two tick fevers. One is fatal, the other not. I lost 25 pounds and wondered if this might be my last AERC. It had always been dangerous, what with F-111's, John Niemi lumbering around, fires, alarms, storm and tempest.

- 1988.** Calgary and Leeds. There was great anxiety about whether people would go to both Calgary and Leeds but it all worked out in fine style. At the University of Leeds Boddington Hall was peaking on primitiveness. Those English certainly believed the student mind should be focussed on the "Transatlantic Dialogue", not the pleasures of the flesh.

We were still running marathons (wretched excess) so some of us padded through the English countryside in the early morning and, when we tried to take a second glass of orange juice at breakfast, were roundly rebuked by the caterer who wasn't putting up with nonsense from mere colonials. I gave a paper on Singapore, Davy Deshler did something on heuristic tools, Hal Beder was revisiting ABE, Colin Griffin excoriated Brookfield on the subject of critical thinking and critical theory (frequently confused by people who should know better) and, Ringo and Rubenson presented something with a title - "Andragogy: The Return of the Jedi" - that had nothing to do with the content of the paper. Jane Munro had her "Leeds for Dialogue: Poems". Nod Miller and Miriam Zukas led a novel icebreaker designed to foster dialogue. The young Marxists wore ties. There were formal introductions and smoking in sessions. Paula Allman got the biggest laugh when she said she was a reformed psychologist. But, in general, this was what it was billed to be - a transatlantic dialogue. It was here that we discovered Barry Bright plays lead guitar, Ilsey sings and Stickleback Brookfield had imprinted on Buddy Holly.

During the post-conference trip David Little and I ate fish and chips in delightful Yorkshire villages and went looking for William Wordsworth and Beatrix Potter and to Lake Conniston to see Sir Donald Campbell. But, like the Wrights Bros, they were all gone and the Campbell exhibit in the museum at Conniston was a big disappointment but the Lake District was a delight. We got a lot of parking tickets which we gave to Colin Titmus.

Calgary was a good conference too but, when you live in Vancouver what can be said about the neighbour over the hill ?

- 1989.** Wisconsin. Here's Phyllis. At the front door of the conference hall she signals me to a spot behind a pillar. Whisper, chuckle, whisper. She has enrolled in a behaviour control program where participants put their names in a jar and get a prize if they accomplish their goals. I think it is good when people can feast on the entrails of critical theory but, at the same time, dance merrily through the peat bogs of behaviorism. I applauded Phyllis's ecumenical attitude and effort. Don't be surprised if Mike Welton's soon starts espousing psychoanalysis.

At the critical theory preconference Tom Popkewitz lectures us on political sociology. UBC was well represented at Wisconsin, considering we were far from home, and we had one of the earliest of the pieces by Collard and Law, which have since become something of a standard. My paper on "Jumping to Conclusions on the Post-Positivist Bandwagon" was roundly condemned by my friends, who are critics of the worst and most volatile kind. It quickly sank to the bottom of Lake Wisconsin and only appears when I attempt to slip it to unsuspecting students.

At this conference, Hal Beder did a session on popular education in Latin America, Jack Mezirow was there talking about therapeutic learning and dear John, the faded hippie Ohliger, was on about "works of the imagination".

- 1990.** Georgia. As is the custom we flew to Atlanta, rented the biggest Yank Tank that Alamo could find, and cruised down the highway looking for seeds, ribs and hominy grits. We found all three and the seeds subsequently grew into wild flowers on a beautiful isle off the coast of Vancouver.

Back in 1983 Ron Cervero had promised cockroaches and, sure enough, in the room I shared with Tom Sork, there they were right on the second floor of the Kellogg Centre. We can only marvel at the

programming skills of people like Axford and Cervero. They have a long memory and an extraordinary commitment to detail. However, our sympathy for these impoverished Prof's attempting to "get by" in Georgia soon evaporated when we saw the mansion where Tom Valentine laid on beer and a B-B-Q. There was also an excellent dance at some sort of forestry centre out in the bush. Brookfield was fully into his Buddy Holly gig and Brad Courtney was posing as a New Zealander by running around in short pants. Barry Bright had come all the way the way from the U.K. but didn't get to play. You'd need to be an ego psychologist to make sense of all this.

At this conference I sort of redeemed myself after Wisconsin with what I thought was a pretty good paper on a topic that deserves our attention. Eight-thirty in the morning is an indecent hour to be talking about AIDS but, for me, it was gratifying to have more than a 100 people at that kind of session. This was an excellent conference. The first paper I attended was by Von Pittman. He's a taciturn Dean of Something in Ohio who did a session on "andragogy goes to Hollywood". I've always thought more people should be interested in the intersections between popular culture and adult education and his film clips of Bing Crosby trying to enrol in a community college and other such absurdities, illustrated much of our theory about participation, learning and so on. This session was a grand hoot.

In the next session I went to hear Lorraine Cavalliere's analysis of the diaries written by the Wright Bros (also from Ohio). Even though Lorraine had to be lectured about Richard Pearce and the Kiwi connection, it was one of the most creative and interesting papers I'd ever heard at an AERC. It was still the morning of the first day and my rule of thumb for conferences is - one new idea justifies the cost of getting there. We already had two first-rate and enjoyable papers. There was also a good session with Jack Mezirow who, by this time, had acquired cult status due to the fact nobody had the slightest clue concerning how they would recognize a "meaning perspective" if they tripped over one in the university library or a dark alley.

The worst thing about this conference was the fact I had to rush back to Vancouver to teach. No post-conference fish and chips with David Little. But some of the UBC'ers went to Savannah in a rented convertible. A sort of Gary Glitter goes to Georgia routine. Wretched excess.

- 1991.** Oklahoma. The UBC crew flew to Dallas/Forth Worth, rented the biggest Yank Tank that Alamo could provide and set off for the University of Oklahoma. We were Malongo Mlozi, Dan Pratt, Elizabeth Carriere and myself. Lloyd Korhonen had been talking to the state governor and, in a brilliant move designed to resuscitate the economy, didn't tell us when the conference was to start. So we all arrived two days early and had to spend a lot of extra money. Lucky for Lloyd he had some fancy "cottages" so we used the spare time driving to Tulsa (despite Oral Roberts, not exactly your tourist destination for average Canadians). Malongo went to the preconference for international students and was promptly hijacked by Phyllis who stuffed him into a car for a long drive back to Illinois. The rest of us got embroiled in a tornado and had to shelter amongst some barbequed ribs in a roadside restaurant. At the conference Buddy Holly tried to answer Colin Griffin by talking about critical thinking, Ringo Law and Susie Collard did a nice piece of work on critical theory, I did a show on AIDS discourse, Jack Mezirow continued violating the principle of parsimony with his "transformative theory" of adult learning while Paul Armstrong put on his red tie for the long trip from the U.K. to present a paper on "extending equity". At the Annual Meeting Adrian Blunt was exceedingly charming and, on a promise of recycled paper and no snow, people voted for Saskatoon without knowing if it is part of Boston or Baffin Island.

Something got screwed up in the University of Oklahoma accounting system and, to this day, the university thinks that I, Pratt and many others all owe it \$60 USD each. That's about \$75.00 CDN. Last week I had a letter which threatened to withdraw my parking privileges at the University of Oklahoma. I am deeply concerned about this. Of course Lloyd left Oklahoma soon after AERC so he's not there to sort it out. I have written to their computer telling its hard disk to get fried. But, unless Long Huey or somebody does something, we'll never get into Dallas/Ft. Worth again. In any event, considering the typhoons and tornadoes down there we were lucky to get out alive. But this trip may have changed my life. More on that later.

1992. Saskatoon would be a breeze. I had now attended seventeen conferences and presented a paper at all except that fateful behaviour modification debacle in St. Louis. My old running partner Stalker was now on the committee. So was Quigley - he's bursting to get back to Canada. Annie Brooks - she's married to a New Zealander. Betty Hayes - ex Rutgers, friend of U.B.C. So ... no problem, all round. This time I submitted something with an n of 35,000. And conceptually sound.

So ... what happened ? There is no time for rumination. What's this ? E-mail from Blunt in Saskatchewan. Big bytes from Bitnet. Chair of the AERC local arrangements committee. Toronto, 1976. Same guy. Older. But not wiser. Has a message.

"Roger", it says "we're having pasta and cheap red wine. If you promise to be brief and not mention anyone by name you can say a few words about the history of AERC. Remember, no names. Be brief. And please don't mention Michael Law's thesis."

Adrian, I promise. You have my word(s).