

ANTOJ ANTOJREANA

C.K. Starr's newsletter to family and friends

No. 40 St Augustine, Trinidad 25 November 2003

It's Geoffrey Chaucher's 663rd birthday. Okay to crack jokes, but keep it dry.

Cultural Conjectures

MISSING THE POINT

One of our students recently showed me a newspaper spread of the contestants for the title of Miss Environment. Having convinced ourselves that it was not an intentional spoof, we had a good laugh at the absurdity of it. The idea that any legitimate public concern could be degraded into a beauty contest seemed so ... but then I got to seeing the possibilities. Rather than attempting to stifle the trend, couldn't we expand and enhance it? Here are my suggestions for beauty contests in need of existence, together with a few notes for the guidance of the judges.

Miss Born Again

Single-mindedness is everything. Must be prepared to detail sins of past life extemporaneously and with conviction.

Miss Conflict of Interests

Open only to employees of sponsoring organizations and relatives of organizers and judges.

Miss Food Security

Will keep nutritious and self-replenishing snacks fresh in a discreet zip-lock bag during each event.

Miss Hurricane Watch

Should demonstrate a judicious balance between under- and over-cautiousness, while alarming none of the judges.

Miss Intellectual Property Rights

Requires plausible claim to ownership of a folk song, quotation from Shakespeare and, if at all possible, either fire or the wheel.

Miss Islamic Jihad

Must somehow convey an air of intense, yet demure struggle while bagged from head to toe.

Miss Neighbourhood Watch

Expected to keep an eye on the judges and question their motives several times in the evening, but without violating their civil rights.

Miss Organ Donor

Should be prepared to give her all to the cause.

Miss Parental Guidance

Gown and bathing suit chosen by parent or guardian.

Miss National Unity

Must convincingly balance the tenets that a) we are all in this together and must love each other, and b) anyone who disagrees is hateful and a legitimate target.

Miss Patriotism

Affirmation that one's country is the greatest on Earth is just the beginning. Maximum points if contestant can uphold the illusion that her flag and anthem are different from all the others. Especially relevant to tiny little interchangeable islands.

Miss Sustainable Development

Proof of on-going hormone treatments is required.

Miss Transparency in Government

Well, yes, transparency. I think you can all see where this one is going.

Miss Truth in Advertising

Contestant must exude sincerity at all time. Falsies and push-up bras strictly prohibited.

Miss Uplift of the Disadvantaged

Falsies and/or push-up bra required. Must really care about the poor children in Belarus, Bosnia, Botswana and any other region beginning with the bulbous letter B.

Miss Excellence

Must come across as an earnest "high achiever" without encouraging the judges and audience to want to strangle her. Fluency with buzz-words a definite plus. Winner of the Miss Born Again contest is an automatic semi-finalist.

Cultural Conjectures

NOT THE ORIGINAL KURT VONNEGUT

One evening last year, Dave Hardy & I pulled into a familiar bar/restaurant on the outskirts of Baltimore for the purpose of eating, drinking and socializing with a few of the regulars. We each had a large, dark beer and the Friday-night specialty, prime rib, which seemed like an unusually good start.

Sitting right by us was a pleasant-looking old dude. He was just minding his own business, but Americans are easily approachable, so I asked him amiably whether he got annoyed at people telling him all the time that he looked like Kurt Vonnegut. He told me that it made him want to punch the bejesus out of such people, to which I noted that I was glad I had made no such suggestion, myself, only asked how he felt about such a hypothetical situation. Now, he was a retired English teacher with a special interest in Emily Dickinson. I've never had much appetite for her, so I was especially keen to hear his remarks, and he did have some things to say about her great economy of expression. He then noted that he couldn't abide Whitman, as it took him forever to say what was on his mind. Now, I certainly didn't agree, but I kept it to myself, as Dave had chimed in right away that he too had no use for Whitman, and I certainly didn't want to encourage any distraction from the topic at hand, which was Emily Dickinson.

We continued on this topic for a while, and the final thing that the old lad said really tickled me. A colleague had once pointed out to him, he told us, that you could sing just about any of Emily Dickinson's poems to "The Yellow Rose of Texas".

Dave later told me that he had often seen the old lad in that place, even sat beside him on occasion, and had taken him for a complete wash-out. He freely admitted how mistaken he had been.

I haven't been back to that place since, but Dave goes there from time to time, and he tells me that the word is that Kurt Vonnegut look-alike has died. We never did know his name -- either that or we forgot it right away -- but I doubt that either of us will ever forget his parting remark. To salute his passage through this world, I now transcribe a couple of short poems from Emily Dickinson. If it's not too much to ask, I would be much obliged if each and every one of you would rise and sing them to the tune of "The Yellow Rose of Texas".

The Grass

The grass so little has to do, --
A sphere of simple green,
With only butterflies to brood,
And bees to entertain.

And stir all day to pretty tunes
The breezes fetch along,
And hold the sunshine in its lap
And bow to everything;

And thread the dews all night, like pearls,
And make itself so fine, --
A duchess were too common
For such a noticing.

Purple Clover

There is a flower that bees prefer,
And butterflies desire;
To gain the purple democrat
The humming-birds aspire.

And whatsoever insect pass,
A honey bears away

Proportioned to his several dearth
And her capacity.

Her face is rounder than the moon,
And ruddier than the gown
Of orchis in the pasture,
Or rhododendron worn.

SO WHO'S COMING TO DINNER, ANYWAY?

In a book of lists, I found 17 sets of "10 Favorite Dinner Guests from All History" compiled by various notables. Vincent Price's list was the most entertaining. Most consistently present was Oscar Wilde (in 5 lists, versus 4 for Samuel Johnson). I put these lists in my "Faculty Board" file, and there they sat for a while. You see, administrative meetings tend not to engage one's whole attention, so I keep a file of amusing and useful things to do on such occasions. The lists popped up recently during just such a meeting. I took another look at them and then got to formulating my own list. It is still a bit rough, much too long and biased toward men, but here it is. In many cases an alternate is given in round brackets, in case the preferred guest cannot make it.

Reinhold Aman
Anacaona
Aristotle (Heraclitus)
Henry Walter Bates (Alfred Russel Wallace)
Ruth Benedict (Margaret Mead)
Ambrose Bierce (Edgar Allan Poe)
Steve Biko (Oliver Tambo)
Simón Bolívar (Antonio de Sucre)
Hermann Bondi (Nils Bohr)
André Breton (Marcel Duchamps)
Luis Buñuel
Alejo Carpentier
Chuang-zi
Leroy Clarke (Wilfredo Lam)
Cleopatra
Samuel Taylor Coleridge (William Blake)
John Coltrane (Ornette Coleman)
Marie Curie
Georges-Jacques Danton (Jean-Paul Marat)
Frederick Douglass
Isidore Ducasse [=Count of Lautréamont]
Isadora Duncan
Euripides (Sophocles)
Charles Fort
George Fox (John Woolman)
Galileo (Tycho Brahe)
Marcus Garvey
Owain Glyndwr [=Owen Glendower]
Johann Wolfgang von Goethe
Emma Goldman
Francisco de Goya
Woody Guthrie (Joe Hill)

Wilson Harris
William Harvey (Andreas Vesalius)
Lafcadio Hearn
Alfred Hitchcock
Anthony Hopkins (Harry Dean Stanton)
David Hume (John Locke)
Jan Hus (Giordano Bruno)
Ibn Sina [=Avicenna]
Isaiah
C.L.R. James
Thomas Jefferson (Benjamin Franklin)
Peter Kropotkin (Mikhail Bakunin)
Leonardo (Michelangelo)
Toussaint L'Ouverture (Jean-Jacques Dessalines)
H.P. Lovecraft
Ferdinand Magellan (Antonio Pigafetta)
Malcolm X
José Martí (Máximo Gómez)
Groucho Marx (Buster Keaton)
Rigoberta Menchú
Maria Sibylla Merian (John James Audubon)
Henry Miller
Marilyn Monroe (Tallulah Bankhead)
Moses (Jeremiah)
Peter I of Russia
Pontiac (Poundmaker)
Arthur Rimbaud
Margaret Rutherford
D.A.F. de Sade
Lou Andreas-Salomé
Sappho (Catullus)
William Shakespeare
Francis Starr (Russell Beck)
Jonathan Swift (Christoph Georg Lichtenberg)
Dylan Thomas (Brendan Behan)
Henry David Thoreau (John Muir)
Leon Trotsky (Vladimir Ilyich Lenin)
Harriet Tubman (Sojourner Truth)
Barbara Tuchman (Hugh Trevor-Roper)
Mark Twain
John Tyndall (Nikola Tesla)
William Wallace (Robert the Bruce)
Walt Whitman
Emiliano Zapata (Genovevo de la O).

A Reader's Notes

THREE RECENT BOOKS ON LANGUAGE

Geoffrey K. Pullum 1991. *The Great Eskimo Vocabulary Hoax*. Chicago: Univ. Chicago Press 236 pp.

John McWhorter 2001. *The Power of Babel*. New York: Henry Holt 327 pp.

S. Robert Ramsey 1987. *The Languages of China*. Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press 340 pp.

These three very engaging books deal in quite different realms of linguistics.

McWhorter's is a popular treatise on how language works. As such, it will have by far the broadest appeal and is certainly the most generally accessible to the literate public. I have a very long-standing interest in language and am a devoted member of the Amici Linguarum international linguistics society, but I am also very much an amateur.

The Power of Babel, despite its lame title, really grabbed me. It is exactly the book that I needed to answer a number of questions that have been rattling around in the Starr head for far too long.

A key theme here is how much of a language is really necessary to let it do the job, and how much is just useless elaboration -- he calls it "crud" at one point -- that collects and won't go away. McWhorter makes the point well and entertainingly that every language comes to be burdened with a great deal of excess baggage. As elsewhere in the book, he makes use of a wealth of examples and illustrations from personal experience. In the case of excess baggage, for example, he points out that the definite and indefinite articles that we take for granted as an integral part of English are really quite unnecessary. The Russians and Chinese, among others, get along perfectly well without them.

The evolutionary history of languages, and in particular the process by which one language splits to become two, has been of considerable interest to me since Don Cameron introduced me to the problem in the 1970s. I have long supposed that languages divide in a manner closely analogous to that of species, and that the boundaries between them are more or less distinct if we can only identify them. Now I am not so sure. Is there sometimes a continuum between indisputably different languages, such that they intergrade without any definite boundary? McWhorter doesn't address this question head-on -- perhaps because he just assumes that there is -- but I now have to wonder about people in the Pyrenees who may speak neither French nor Spanish, nor something that is distinct from the two.

Geoffrey Pullum's book came to my attention, in a round-about way, through something that Vicki Funk wrote. She opened a piece on the history of cladistics with the trite old saw about "May you live in interesting times" being a classical chinese curse. Now, this is something that I have heard from any number of people over the years, and you probably have too. So let me ask you something. Was any of the people who told you that this is a classical chinese curse chinese? No, I thought not, and it amazes me that educated people who should know better keep repeating this without bothering to ask whether any of the various people who told it to them is likely to have any clue about things chinese. None of the few chinese people that I have asked about "May you live in interesting times" recognized it, and I'm not surprised. It bears no resemblance to chinese cheng-yu, the idiomatic sayings that almost always comprise either four or (less often) eight characters. And while I'm at it, let me point out another thing for the benefit of Vicki and other dear friends who should know better: The "chinese" saying "If we do not change our direction, we are likely to end up where we are going" is almost certainly bogus.

Well, to come closer to the point, this got me to wondering about another bit of smug public wisdom that one often hears from those who should know better, that the Eskimos have 47 (or however many) different words for snow. Now, you have heard this plenty of times, I'm sure, and you may even have been so careless as to have said it, in which case I now pose the deliberately embarrassing question of how you know that they have 47 different words for snow. Well, how do you know? As I suspected, you know it because somebody who never thought to ask an Eskimo about it told you. Did it even occur to you to wonder whether the Eskimos all speak one language? Uh huh, again as I suspected. Well, don't let me catch you being so foolish again.

So I sent an inquiry over the wire to the Amici Linguarum, and this led me to *The Great Eskimo Vocabulary Hoax*. This is the title of just one of the chapters in this book, drawn from Pullum's columns in a journal for

professional linguists. Much of it is about controversies in grammar, which are not readily accessible to us amateurs, but it serves well to convey the flavour of the kinds of things that move real linguists. And the title essay calls down delicious ridicule on the heads of the people who should know better.

Robert Ramsey's *The Languages of China* is about just what the title says, and it is a thoroughly satisfying treatment. I have read several books on various aspects of this general topic, but this is the first to deal in clear, accessible, yet authoritative terms with the sorts of things that anyone with an interest in Chinese language is likely to want to know. Much of it was already familiar to me, and some was of only marginal interest, but there was much satisfaction in having some of my long-standing questions addressed.

The foremost of these is whether what we commonly know as Chinese is one language or several. I am referring here to just the language(s) of the Han peoples, although other languages spoken in China are treated in this book. In any event, some smart, knowledgeable people have over the years told me firmly that Chinese is one language and I should stop arguing about it, but I confess that I have never been able to see how this could be so, given the standard criterion of mutual intelligibility. The relationship between the written and spoken languages in China is something of a complicating factor here, but I don't believe it pertains to the core of this problem of one language or many. The upshot from Ramsey's discussion is that I may have been looking at the problem wrong, or at least that those who argue for one and those who argue for many have likely been talking at cross purposes.

This is the best single book that I have read on Chinese language. Like the others, it is highly recommended.

Mailbag

SUPERNOVA YERAKINA SOUNDS OFF

[Your editor has been putting out this newsletter since 1974. Not long ago I put together a package of back issues and sent them off to SuperNova and Francis for their amusement and edification. SuperNova has seen fit to proffer comment in a letter dated 7 October 2002.]

Dear Daddy,

Today I got all of the newsletters that you sent. Wow! You have really lived a cool life. I think I read about 90% of the newsletters. Although some of the things you write about are really nonsense stuff. Like the stuff about a woman you used to like that got married, chinese insults, and religion. Geez! Do people really care about that stuff? The really interesting stuff is how you refer to yourself in the third person and all about your darling daughter, SuperNova.

Daddy, I think that you are too opinionated about things and that you always elaborate forever on whatever your opinion is on a topic. That is my opinion about your opinion.

Love,
Nova Starr

PARALLEL LIVES

In the previous issue I gave my responses to a questionnaire from a former student and at the same time asked the hard-working newsletter readers of this planet to take a moment to fill in their own answers and sling it back to me. Four of you did just that. The respondents are:

Reinhold Aman (MAL) is editor and publisher of *Maledicta*, the International Journal for Verbal Aggression, for which he is affectionately known as Uncle Maledictus.

I am forever grateful to Uncle Mal for helping me to define my identity many years ago by casually referring to me as "that old bug-watcher". I guess he was in a mellow mood

that day, because more recently he called me a "Freudian commie dog-eater". He seems to get that way every 28 days.

Allan W. Hook (AWH), also known as the Mad Dog of Milledge Avenue, was my dear Brother in Hell-Raising at Georgia long ago, when the world was young. He continues to be fairly dissolute, but now he's sneaky about it.

Readers of these pages will be familiar with the editor's darling firstborn, SuperNova Yerakina Starr (NYS), now a high-school student in Toronto.

And the editor's dear uncle, Stuart Steven Starr (SSS), is a farmer near Lake

Huron, in Ontario. When the world was very young, Uncle Stuart used to call me by the honourific "Mugwump" (decidedly smoother than one of my professors at Georgia, who addressed me as "Scheissvogel"). I have lately taken to referring to the young lads up my valley in Trinidad as mugwumps, which has only added to my legend.

LIVING ARRANGEMENT?

MAL I'm renting a two-bedroom house for my five cats and me in a semi-rural area 45 miles north of San Francisco, California.

AWH I own my house. [Gee, Al, thanks for sharing. Is there anything in particular about this house that might interest us?]

NYS Sleep on a bed, in a room, live in the rest of the area.

SSS Big old farm house, jointly owned with my wife. One bachelor son resides here

also.

WHAT'S ON YOUR MOUSE PAD?

MAL Apple.

AWH Nikon.

NYS Poo! Ha ha ha! A cat ... going ...

"Yummy!"

SSS

FAVOURITE GAME TO PLAY?

MAL Seducing young wimmen.

AWH Strip poker, though I've never played it. Perhaps spin the bottle, then.

NYS Hide and seek! And football!

SSS

FAVOURITE SPORT TO WATCH?

MAL None. Occasionally soccer.

AWH College football or ice hockey.

NYS Hockey! And maybe football.

SSS

FAVOURITE MAGAZINES?

MAL Printed: *Maledicta*, because it's my life.

Online: *The Onion*.

AWH *Natural History* and *Asian Babes*.

NYS *Cosmopolitan*, *Cosmogirl*, ... um ... all the girly ones.

SSS

WHAT BOOK(S) ARE YOU READING NOW?

MAL The *Microsoft Encarta College Dictionary*.

AWH I read a lot of mysteries, science fiction, natural history. Right now I'm reading a book called *Subterranean*.

NYS All my school text books. Right here at the library I'm reading something on buddhist art.

SSS

WHAT IS THE BEST BOOK EVER WRITTEN?

MAL A good dictionary. [That's the spirit. Nothing shows a rarified mind like lexicophilia. I just made up that word.]

AWH The hell if I know.

NYS *A Tree Grows in Brooklyn* by Betty Smith.

SSS

FAVOURITE SMELLS?

MAL A clean young woman's engorged pussy.

AWH Ethyl acetate (tells me I'm around bug collectors), pine forests, ocean smells. In Trinidad I love the smell of curry emanating from east-indian kitchens.

NYS New car smell, gasoline, kitchen upstairs at school.

SSS Hot maple syrup in the evaporator.

LEAST FAVOURITE SMELLS?

MAL Chris wrote that the excreta of cats is the worst and asked if I wanted to dispute this. Absolutely. The worst smell is pig shit, far worse than cat shit.

AWH Smells from organic chemistry or microbiology labs.

NYS Francis and anything that has to do with Francis, especially his feet!

SSS

FAVOURITE SOUND?

MAL An orgiastic woman's moans and stifled cries.

AWH Buzzzz-splat, the sound of a dung beetle hitting a fresh cow-pie.

NYS The click when you open a glass sealed bottle, and the flick of a light switch.

SSS The happy laughter of little children.

FAVOURITE COLOUR?

MAL Royal blue, followed by hot red.

AWH ???

NYS Red is supercool. And PINK!

SSS It depends. Red for a car or tractor, but the early greening of the trees in spring is a mighty pretty sight.

WORST FEELING IN THE WORLD?

MAL Not knowing how to pay next month's rent.

AWH When I'm unprepared for a lecture.

NYS Being peed on after getting beaten up in a fight. Well, that's what my friends say.

[Nova goes to an all-girls high school. A very tough all-girls school.]

SSS I'm not sure, but hearing an ominous rattle or clank in your vehicle when you're on a busy highway ain't no fun!

WHAT IS THE FIRST THING YOU THINK OF WHEN YOU GET UP IN THE MORNING?

MAL Cigarettes.

AWH Will there be anything of interest on the sports page of the paper?

NYS Is it saturday yet? Nope? Okay, back to sleep I go.

SSS

HOW MANY RINGS BEFORE YOU ANSWER THE PHONE?

MAL Two.

AWH

NYS Enough before the machine picks it up. So I don't sound desperate. LOL. I do have a life, you know! Duh!

SSS Depends on whether I'm sitting right there beside it, or sitting on the toilet.

FUTURE CHILD'S NAME?

MAL No more kids.

AWH Crabro.

NYS Mackenzie! [Not quite as bad as Al's answer about favourite profession, but a contender.]

SSS

WHAT IS MOST IMPORTANT IN YOUR LIFE?

MAL Love, cats, computers, books.

AWH Being in the field or on a trip with bugologists/biologists.

NYS Right now, making the grades to get into university.

SSS

FAVOURITE FOODS?

MAL Potato dumplings and fried pork with gravy. [Rey is originally from central Europe, in case you hadn't already picked up on

that.]

AWH Italian, Chinese (especially "hot pot").
Crab is delectable, and javelina is wonderful.

NYS Chocolate.

SSS

CHOCOLATE OR VANILLA?

MAL Vanilla.

AWH I'll stick with Chris's answer:
Chocolate; you don't have to be Dr Freud to
see what this question is really about.

NYS See above.

SSS

DO YOU LIKE TO DRIVE FAST?

MAL No.

AWH Yes, when I was young. No, now that
I'm older and more mature.

NYS Yes! It's very thrilling!

SSS

DO YOU SLEEP WITH STUFFED ANIMALS?

MAL No. But when I was first married to
that stupid animal, Shirley, I stuffed her every
night. Does that make her a stuffed animal?

AWH No.

NYS Duh! Doesn't everyone?

SSS

STORMS -- COOL OR SCARY?

MAL Cool.

AWH Cool.

NYS Definitely cool! And then telling freaky
stories and scaring the crap outta yourselves.

SSS

WHAT TYPE WAS YOUR FIRST CAR?

MAL A black 1957 Volkswagen, bought in
Montréal.

AWH 1976 Toyota pickup.

NYS Barbie mobile.

SSS I still have fond memories of your grandpa's '40 Hudson. I drove it to high school one year (using bootlet gas ration coupons). In '49 we drove it all the way to Vancouver and back.

IF YOU COULD MEET ONE PERSON DEAD OR ALIVE?

MAL H.L. Mencken.

AWH Humans are not all that interesting. Perhaps a Neanderthal or *Homo habilis*.

NYS Alive, please. [This puts one in mind of Ewan MacGregor's response in *A Life Less Ordinary* when Holly Hunter said "We can do this with or without violence. It's up to you."]

SSS Our cousin, Herbert Hoover. Not everybody has a president for a cousin. I have visited his grave at West Branch, Iowa. Other choices: our notorious kinsman, Rob

Roy, and maybe our other noted cousin, Buffalo Bill. [Some confusion here, Uncle Stuart. Robert Roy McGregor was legendary, while Herbert Hoover was notorious.]

FAVOURITE ALCOHOLIC DRINK?

MAL None.

AWH Guinness is good for you. In a warm climate I do like gin and tonic. Wine is always nice.

NYS Mike's hard lemonade.

SSS A wee sip of Southern Comfort, or maybe Seagram's V.O. (Don't tell Grandma.)

ZODIAC SIGN?

MAL Aries.

AWH Scorpio.

NYS Pisces.

SSS [Yes, I think that's just about the answer that this question deserves.]

DO YOU EAT THE STEMS OF BROCCOLI?

MAL Yes, unless they're too hard.

AWH Only in stir fry, after I slice off the cuticle.

NYS Yes!

SSS

IF YOU COULD HAVE ANY JOB OR PROFESSION YOU WANTED?

MAL Editor and publisher -- the one I have now.

AWH Eunuch (harem attendant). [Uh, Al, have you really thought about this? You know, the entrance requirement. The surgical entrance requirement. Are you getting my drift here, Al?]

NYS Getting paid to smile and look pretty! [There you have it, folks. Only 16 years old, and already she wants to be Governor

General of Canada.]

SSS I'm an old stick-in-the-mud -- you can't beat farming. Of course, it would be fun to take another batch of cattle to South America by rail and ship! [My father, Uncle Stuart, I and my little brother have all worked for the same big export farm in southern Ontario from time to time. Dad and Uncle Stuart each made two trips for that outfit, taking cattle to Central and South America. I once took a trainload of cattle bound for El Paso, but when we got to St Louis I was ordered back, and the cattle went on without me. I don't know if Annu ever moved cattle for them.]

WOULD YOU DYE YOUR HAIR ANY COLOUR?

MAL No.

AWH

NYS No, not any colour. Maybe red someday, though.
SSS

HAVE YOU EVER BEEN IN LOVE?

MAL Yes, three or four times.

AWH Yes.

NYS How?

SSS

IS THE GLASS HALF EMPTY OR HALF FULL?

MAL Empty.

AWH Yes.

NYS Half full, definitely!

SSS Depends on whether you are looking at the top or bottom. Your answer of "Yes" is probably the most erudite statement you have ever made. [Glad that you noticed. I wouldn't want the kinfolk to think all that

expensive education is going to waste.]

FAVOURITE MOVIES?

MAL Those of Woody Allen, Monty Python, Mel Brooks, early Charlie Chaplin, Buster Keaton, W.C. Fields, Humphrey Bogart 1940s and '50s gangster movies. Some romantic and musicals, like *An American in Paris*, *Showboat*, *Oklahoma!*, *Porgy and Bess*.

AWH Science fiction and war movies.

NYS I just saw *Elf*, and its soooo great! Will Farrell is the best! I can't wait for it to come out on dvd. I'm sooo gonna watch it over and over and over again!

SSS

DO YOU TYPE WITH YOUR FINGERS ON THE RIGHT KEYS?

MAL No. Speedy two-finger typist.
AWH No. And I did take typing.
NYS Yes, sometimes. [What's this? No exclamation mark?]
SSS I took the three-year commercial course in high school and graduated a qualified secretary (shorthand, typing, filing, etc), bookkeeper or office manager.

WHAT'S UNDER YOUR BED?

MAL Usually two cats, Fluffy and Mama.
AWH Girlie magazines.
NYS Shoes and swimming gear and dust bunnies.
SSS A few pairs of shoes and books, some of them many years old. An assortment of papers and magazines, also old, and lots of dust.

WHAT IS YOUR FAVOURITE PLACE?

MAL Bed.
AWH In Texas it's probably the Devil's River. Otherwise, there are too many favorite places.
NYS Probably Trinidad.
SSS Like you, Starr Elms. But I'm content here. It's home now.