COLLOQUY

DON HAUPTMAN, *Word Ways*' punster in residence, submits the following brief memoir:

This incident occurred on Dick Cavett's prime-time or late-night TV talk show. These programs ran between 1969 and 1975, which means that I've remembered it for 40 or more years.

In an audience Q&A, someone asked the host: "Do you patronize prostitutes?" "No," he replied without missing a beat. "I treat them as equals."

The exchange was surely scripted, although it was cleverly designed to appear ad-libbed. Cavett's shows were renowned for being literate and cerebral. It's difficult to imagine humor so intelligent and subtle on broadcast television today.

Cavett is still around, writing books and blogging; he turns 79 this month. In 1992, we met briefly at "The Wonderful World of Words," an annual weekend gathering of logophiles in upstate New York where we were both speakers, but I neglected to mention my recollection. (This event still occurs each fall, and is now under the auspices of famed crossword guru and *Word Ways* subscriber Will Shortz.)

Postscript: Earlier this year, I was at a restaurant with a dozen friends. At one point, the conversation turned to the issue of legalizing prostitution. It was the perfect lead-in, so I quoted the witticism. Several seconds of silence ensued . . . then everyone simultaneously burst into laughter. Clearly, the members of the group didn't immediately "get" the double meaning, needing time to access their vocabulary neurons. I'll bet that this anecdote would provide insights to psychologists and linguists and humor scholars who investigate how the brain processes language.

Several people offered praise and congratulations, but I humbly demurred, giving all credit to Cavett—or his writers.

ED WOLPOW comments: Anil's article (Aug 2015, p. 184) lists "self-addressed towns" whose names include their 2-letter state abbreviations. Enlarging the list: yAZzi, Arizona / FLagler Beach, Florida / mIDdleton, Idaho / suN Valley, Nevada / liNColnton, North Carolina / monckS Corner, South Carolina / aeTNa, Tennessee / soUTh jordan, Utah. And rocKY hill, Kentucky permits a solution which does not require the state name Kentucky for a solution.

DAN TILQUE comments:

Richard Ledderer's article in the May WW "Letter Perfect" is unfortunately, not so perfect. The set of words at the top of page 135 has some problems. Thesewords are intended to be "words in which a letter is sounded even though that letter is not included in the spelling of the word". There are three things wrong with this list.

1) The entry "L: salmon" is outright wrong. It's a word with a silent L and belongs (and, in fact, is) in the list near the bottom of page 134. Unfortunately, I can't think of any suitable replacement except for the same entry that B has (W).

2) Some of the entries have the letter name in them rather than the sound that the letter makes. Specifically, H: nature, Q: cue, and Y: wine. May I suggest replacing these with H: jalapeno, Q: choir, and Y: union.

3) A number of letters don't have a single sound associated with them, but rather two of them. The vowels all have both a short and a long sound, but the list has only the long sounds. C and G both have soft and hard sounds, but the list has only the soft ones. I'm sure there's one out there, but I can't think of any for short-A. Otherwise, the other short vowels could be represented by E: many, I: women, O: autumn, U: some. Hard C and G can be represented by C: keep, G: exile.

The list of grammagrams can be augmented by ODM "odium" and REOC "ariosi" (plural of arioso).

If you wish to extend the concept of grammagrams beyond alphanumeric characters, you can consider the additional characters on the keyboard. For instance, one of the several names of # is "sharp". This gives #N "sharpen". Another name for it is "pound", giving #L "poundal". These may seem somewhat of a cheat, but no worse than 8E "eighty" and 6T "sixty" that are already in the list.

The "at" sign @ is fairly productive: C@L "Seattle", @ND "attendee", @NU8 "attenuate".

No doubt readers can add more of these.

SIMON NORTON writes:

I have the following comments on the article "Disjoint Word Chains" by Sean A. Irvine (WW 48/3).

1. For the chemical elements, it is easy to prove that the longest possible chain has 31 elements. Every edge of the chain must have at least one element without an "i"; there are 16 such elements; but Mercury and Gold together can account for at most 3 edges, and Hydrogen for at most 1; so there can be at most 30 edges, or 31 elements.

2. Some elements have variant spellings (Aluminium or Aluminum, Sulfur or Sulphur, Caesium or Cesium). In each case it doesn't matter which one uses. This is obvious for Al, while the choice of spelling for S has no effect on which other elements are joined to it; as for Cs, using the shorter spelling does add some new edges but this doesn't affect the above argument which gives the maximum chain length.

3. I don't like using names such as "Ununtrium", which are essentially temporary names till a person or place has been chosen to receive the honour of naming an element. The only such name that appears in the graph shown is Ununtrium, and as this doesn't occur in the first of the chains shown removing it does not affect the maximum chain length.

4. While all elements with permanent names may be considered valid, given a choice I'd prefer to see the names of elements that occur naturally, or, better still, are non-radioactive. I therefore suggest changing the graph shown to replace Bohrium by Iron and Actinium by Cerium. Curium, Darmstadtium, Fermium, Hassium and Radium can be removed without affecting the maximum chain length, but the removal of Radon, which lacks an "i", reduces the maximum chain length by 2 (e.g. by removing Radon and Lithium from the first chain shown).

On another subject, Gematria was mentioned in Anil's article "Self Defining Numbers" (and has also been mentioned in several preceding issues). But surely the best analogue of the traditional use of Gematria, in both Hebrew and Greek, would assign values 1-9 to the letters A-I, 10-90 to the letters J-R and 100-800 to the letters S-Z. One of the first things that came to my mind when I thought of this is that one can at last identify the "beast" associated with the number 666: it is a FOX.