

## *From the Kitchen*

15 February 2012



It started with an innocent nail clipper. At least I thought it was innocent, but I was not allowed to take it on the flight to Perth. As it was sternly removed from my carry-on luggage, I imagined that someone bent on violence could have wrestled it from my grasp as I trimmed my toenails in seat 23D. She could then have used it to pull out the fingernails of one of the cabin staff for serving cold coffee and stale scones.

Soon after this disarming incident, before boarding a flight from Sydney, my computer bag was relieved of tweezers I had forgotten about. I formed an image of plucking out the eyelashes of a fellow passenger who insisted on boring me with tales of his X-rated exploits in Thailand. What wasn't taken by the otherwise thorough security person at the airport was the thin, metre-long, high-tensile steel cable which I use to padlock my computer case to something solid if I have to fetch my hot breakfast while waiting for my flight. Perfect wire for all sorts of nasty activities.

I understand that it is far simpler to remove from all passengers anything that might be used for nefarious purposes, than identifying those very few people who are likely to carry out such purposes. And I do appreciate that my welfare and that of others is being looked after.

Therefore, I was not surprised when my ISP informed me that I would have my internet access taken away (under new legislation) because two people in my suburb had been caught using their internet connection for paedophile activities. The denial of service is aimed at stopping all Mount Eliza residents from engaging in such activities because it is difficult to predict who might become a perpetrator. Fair enough.

I now use the internet at the local library, where there is access only to 'nice' sites. Our society will be better for it. Of course, decent suburbs where there are no paedophiles will have their www access left intact.

I must say that I was a little taken aback last night when, at the railway station, I was asked to place my shoes in a special bag which was then sealed with a lock by a station assistant. I was able to have the bag unlocked at my destination. It was explained to me and a crowd of other disgruntled commuters that too many disreputable people were sticking the boot into other passengers on evening services and this was the simple response. I must agree, I suppose, for how can you tell the reps from the disreps?

The federal government is currently drafting legislation to make road travel safer. All new vehicles will have a top speed of 40 km/h and all existing vehicles will have their engines fitted with governors or software throttles. Some of the side benefits will be that the limited petroleum reserves will stretch further and I will be able to listen to more radio.

There has been a great deal of controversy of late over the declaration of inherently dangerous breeds of dogs. Because they cannot be distinguished through their DNA and all dogs are capable of inflicting terrible damage to human flesh, the government has mandated that all dogs are to have their teeth removed. After all, teeth are not needed (by the dogs) to eat canned food.

How effective will all these measures be? We have been described from time to time as *Homo ludens* and most people enjoy a challenge. I am sure that there will be smart-alecks who will find workarounds for these and future restrictions. In fact, we may reach a situation in which the only enjoyable pastime will be finding ways of avoiding the restrictions or nullifying them.

There are other examples of laws enacted to protect us, with unforeseen or unwanted consequences.

I recently changed my car insurer. Two days later I received a phone call from a business (the caller gave me the name). He said that he was aware that I had just changed my insurer and that my car was ten years old. He suggested that I consider trading it in on a new vehicle, which his business could organise. I told him that he was totally mistaken (I was not admitting to anything), but where did he get this false information? He couldn't tell me because of the constraints of privacy laws that were aimed at protecting me. Their aim was obviously way off. I looked up the business name on the internet (at the library) and drew a blank – either it did not exist or it was not a 'nice' site. I rang the insurer to enquire how a third party could have come upon such accurate information. They couldn't say because there were privacy laws aimed at ...

Now I'm on my way to the library again to ask the nice librarian if I may please post this week's column.