

sunstroke



10p

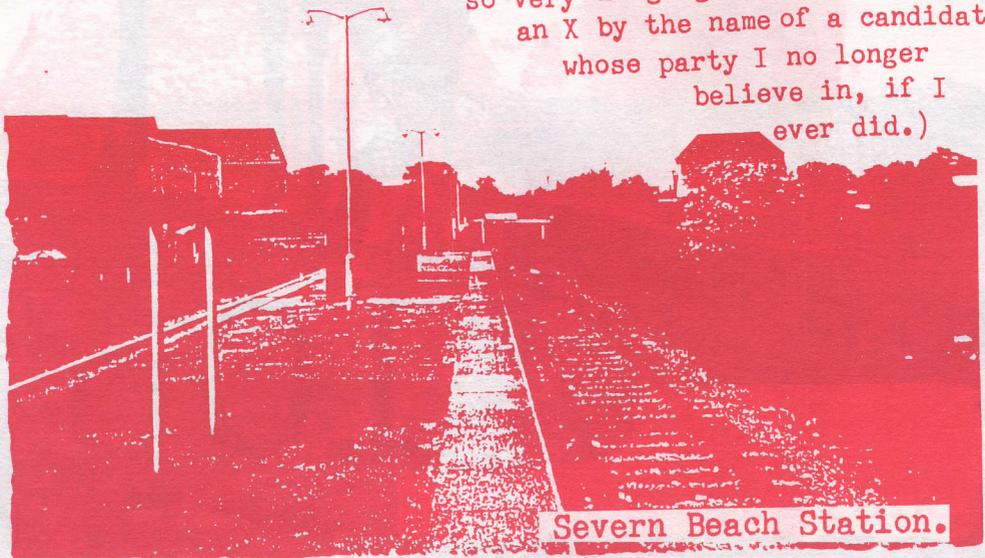
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August - December 1989

A man in a grey suit. He has close-set brilliant blue eyes and a small thin nose. He leans forward. He's on the television. Some authority. Something. Called in to explain the current situation to the public and to offer his advice. He leans forward and offers his advice.

"Until more is known about the current situation, I strongly advise the public that under no circumstances should they...". I turn it off.

(I gave blood last week. Had to queue 45 minutes amid scores of people, mostly young, on their lunch hours. People having to take up an entire lunch-time and more giving blood. (Of course most firms don't give time off for such idle pastimes.) I sort of half believe giving blood ought to be compulsory. Like voting; that ought to sort of half be compulsory. People die you know, people DIE because, because... for people like you and me...for things we have and...people die. People broke shop windows not so very long ago so I could put an X by the name of a candidate whose party I no longer believe in, if I ever did.)



Severn Beach Station.

"Until more is known about the current situation, I strongly advise the public, that under no circumstances should they eat hazelnut yoghurt of any make whatsoever."

I have these weird dreams every so often. Slightly surreal dreams. Sometimes he wakes me up in the middle, and I smile quietly to myself before it all fades. I dreamt about The Legend! once.

I was sitting on the platform of Severn Beach station the other day, sniffing and sneezing and rubbing my eyes, rubbing my arms, rubbing my legs, and inbetween, looking about me. Looking, wonderingly, at the new houses popping up before my very eyes towards the river, looking at the money spiders scurrying about the platform, looking down the platform to the nothingness beyond; the absolute desolation that the railway line, single track, weaves through on its way to Avonmouth. I rub my eyes again. Scratch my arm. Hayfever and eczema are a lethal combination. More than anything else in the world, right now I want to be home. To strip off and shower. Lie down. With a duvet over my head so my eyes can stop trying and a hot mug of tea beside me. The sun is beating down so hard my head aches. My legs have taken on a pink tinge. And the train is nearly due.

I believe in lots of things. I believe in love and hate and...I believe in...I used to even believe in God some days. Usually about once a month. Somebody to pray to about something beyond my control, and then someone to thank, to love, to smile at when it happened and I didn't need to pray anymore. (Usually in French lessons because they were so boring there was time to worry.)

I believe in love and hate and I hate the English in summer. Summer brings out the worst in English people. Glaring white flabby flesh haunts my dreams. Nightmares about flapping red limbs, loud scorched burning shades under shorts and tops and dresses that reveal all. My stomach is too weak for this honesty, this confrontation with reality.

This is going to be another long hot summer.. It has been already. It's the end of June and already week upon week of brilliant sunshine, of rainless days and close

insomnia nights, made worse by neighbours who play the bongos outside or turn up the music at 1-30 am (usually) waking the young heroine who has only just dozed off, necessitating the shutting of the only window to keep the noise out, so the room gets hotter and hotter and the duvet gets thrown off and the eczema gets worse and worse, and eventually we muddle through to the 7am alarm call, groan audibly and crawl into a reviving shower. This goes on for weeks.

(I remember the long hot summer of '76. We went to The Lake District and I climbed Great Gable for the first time. We must have gone from Honister Pass, Seatoller, something like that, up Windy Gap, and then onto the top. I was eight years old and topless and haven't climbed Great Gable by that route since. (I haven't climbed Great Gable topless since either.) Last time, we cut across from Haystacks to Green Gable, where there's no real path. The summit of Green Gable is my favourite sunbathing place. NOBODY GOES THERE, BUT NOBODY. Great Gable, half an hour away, is as packed as Broadmead on a Saturday afternoon; you have to WAIT to get to the summit, FIGHT to sit down, and then endure the noisy attentions of countless children and dogs, and the noisy conversation of countless idiots, instead of savouring the moment. In front of me I can see the Ennerdale Valley with the ever-receding forest in front of the lake, and Black Sail Hut just visible on the right-hand slopes. Working clockwise, Buttermere and Crummock on Honister Pass lie over the other side of the ridge, Derwentwater, Wastwater, and Scafell Pike, looming as usual. I can see the whole world out there. I can see the coast in the distance. I can see Scotland. I can see ...I can see just what I want to see. I can see everything there is to see.

In 1976 I first sat on the top of Great Gable and it was very hot. Thirteen years later, it's very hot again. Already people with hosepipes are using up the water, so that soon there won't be any left. There's water running down the streets of Britain. But there's blood running down the streets of China.

(BLOOD. Running down the streets. BODIES. Being burned.

These people want democracy. The right to elect a government. The right to vote. We...we have the right to vote. But half of us don't use it. These people aren't just dying for democracy in China, they're dying for democracy worldwide. For me. And you. And I won't believe you're anything other than lazy and worthless unless you at least go along and spoil your ballot paper if you want to say no to all the parties.)

So, in China we have people dying for democracy. In Britain we have a long hot summer. In Hong Kong we have a panic. In Japan we have incredibly high infant- mortality rates because so many children travel in the front-seats of cars without safety belts. And on the television we have a man in a suit, advising us not to eat hazelnut yoghurt. And then later, another man, a German, saying:

"Here in Germany - perhaps it's hard for you to understand - but we don't understand your system of voting at all. To us, it's a very very unfair system, and an undemocratic system..."

And I'm thinking hear hear, let's hear it for proportional representation, and really the fact that the Labour Party aren't fighting for it really does make them nothing but selfish and ridiculous and worthless. But whilst we're all fiddling about with PURISM the Right are all rallying round and are taking POWER again...so, let's face it, what's the alternative?

Meanwhile, in Severn Reach, the train never came. A coach came instead. A man in BR uniform ambled over and said were we waiting for the train, because if so it'd blown up and the coach was instead (I don't believe the



train had blown up because there was nothing about it on the local news that night). We said no-thank-you-very-much, actually we wanted a train; we'd got return bus tickets if it had to be roads, so we could do without the coach, and off they went again. Severn Beach is a funny buggler of a place. But it played a very important part in my life, and my world wouldn't be the same without it.

(I was lying in the St. James' Church Hall (behind Marlborough Road bus station) the other day, with blood pouring out of my arm, and down the streets of China, with my hand squeezing and unsqueezing some small object, talking with a man. He was a nurse. And he was watching the blood pour out of my arm. And asking me questions. When I'd last had aspirin. If I'd been in contact with glandula fever. If I'd been to Africa. If I'd been to China. If I'd had a proper lunch. If I'd had hazelnut yoghurt. That sort of thing.)

I went to Rawtenstall on Friday. Wandered up a little hill in Waterfoot, just by the river, above what seemed to be a derelict railway tunnel, and sniffed the air. Smelt the North Of England, the peat, the outside of it all. It smelt like Ingleborough or the Lake District, and it made me homesick. We slept up there on the hillside on the damp grass, after the The Field Mice and Another Sunny Day had entertained us at the Royal Hotel. We held off the 3am downpour with an umbrella and rose at six to walk back through Rawtenstall for the 6-53 to Manchester from outside Our Price, the most beautiful bus in the whole wide world. (Actually it was a coach, but still, it only had about five passengers, and it slipped through the silent sleepy valleys with the hills stacked up all around, and deposited us on Piccadilly Plaza at 7-30am for our first real visit to Manchester.

I haven't made up my mind about Manchester yet.

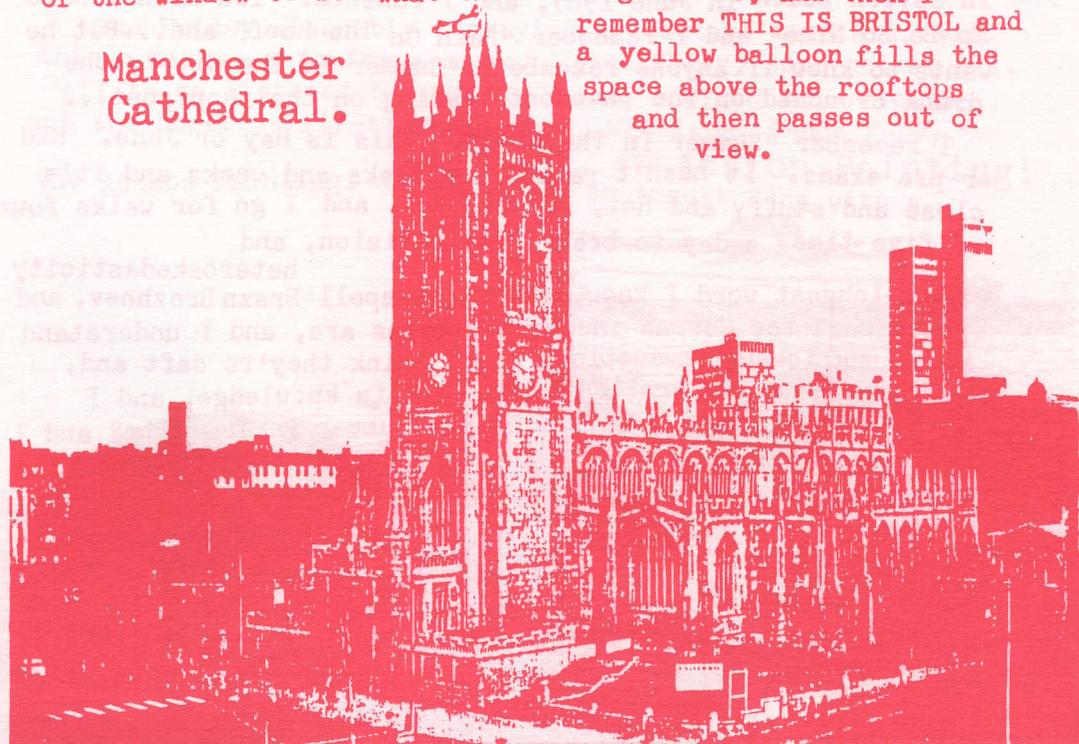
On Sunday afternoon, the three of us followed a leaflet called "A Stroll Around Manchester". Past the library and the Town Hall, the Free Trade Hall, and St. Mary's Church (the hidden gem), Chinatown; the Roman Fort, the Cathedral

(so delicate and fragile and light outside, but then inside jampacked with red darkness, so cold...), and on and on, with shoes that'd been wet since Friday morning when we'd started the day-hitch north, and a new Field Mice single (a cassette pressed into my anxious hand after the gig the night before) packed carefully in my rucksac.

And we got home to a blue envelope from Ric Menck, and nervously opened a yellow letter that should've been full of recriminations, but instead was just full of sadness... "Bouquet" was to have been the most beautiful LP ever. I've never heard it and I never will. But it was to have been an LP by The Springfields. Ric destroyed the master-tapes, there exists only one cassette, and that the other side of the Atlantic. And I lie in bed with a full-moon glaring in through the window, and I mourn the loss of something I never even had, something the that never even was.

And just as I get sad, a roaring in the distance. Sounds like a lawnmower down below. And then I remember this is Bristol, not the leafy Harrogate of my youth, and down below is not lawns, but tarmac and houses, and so I look out of the window to see what the roaring can be, and then I remember THIS IS BRISTOL and a yellow balloon fills the space above the rooftops and then passes out of view.

Manchester Cathedral.



We missed the Balloon Fiesta this year. Went instead to Rawtenstall, a small town in the Rossendale Valley, with an imposing landscape of heathered spurs and a smell of peat and a plethora of clothing warehouses and almost every house a grey stone terrace, to watch The Field Mice and Another Sunny Day playing in a room above a pub called The Royal Hotel. We slept out that night. With a sleeping bag and a binliner, an umbrella and half a packet of Sainsbury's vegetarian ginger-nuts. Up on the hillside with the open night sky, and with the cars roaring along the road, and the rasping choaking cough of a man in the terrace below to punctuate our night. The hillside was damp and boggy, and the sun didn't seem to really rise (and anyway we were on the wrong side of the hill.) At 6am we walked back through Waterfoot as the newsagents were opening up, and...

...Every few minutes a new roaring, each more distant than the first, and a new brightly coloured bulbshape comes into view against the white sky, and smoothly journeys by. I love balloons. I love the bright colours and the shape. I love the blue and white sky.

The drunk outside JCR News wants to know if anyone remembers the Lovin' Spoonful. I do, but I don't tell him. I just smile softly and remember. I remember a blustery day in Severn Beach in June 1987, and I remember "You Didn't Have To Be So Nice" and I remember "Rain On The Roof" and...But he wants to know if anyone remembers "Summer In The City", the drunk crouched on the pavement leaning on the shopfront...

I remember "Summer In The City". This is May or June. Mid or pre exams. It hasn't rained for weeks and weeks and it's close and stuffy and hot, so very hot, and I go for walks four or five times a day to break from revision, and heteroskedasticity is the longest word I know, and I can spell BreznBrezhnev, and I know what the German income tax rates are, and I understand about English-Dutch auctions and I think they're daft and, and...my head is bursting with all this knowledge, and I can't even breathe, and I remember "Summer In The City" and I wish it wasn't, and I wish it would rain, and I wish all the exams were over, and then suddenly they are.

I hate Saturday morning exams because nobody settles. Behind me, someone grunting, adjacent, slurping ribena from a carton, in front, Richard dropping things. Every five minutes somebody goes to the toilet, and then Helen passing out in the doorway half an hour from the end. She gets her

highest mark in that paper. I get my second highest.

"Do not, repeat, do not, for the time being, eat hazelnut yoghurt of any make whatsoever."

When I first went to Severn Beach I was nineteen years old. It was Saturday afternoon in early summer, and blustery. We walked along the front and back and then went home. I still have the train ticket. (I also still have the ticket from the first time I saw The Orchids, a blue cloakroom ticket with a number 3 on it. And my travelcard from the day "Emma's House" was recorded. And a Midland Red Bus ticket from hitching up to Birmingham for the mixing of "Pristine Christine".) I keep all these things in a box labelled "Box" along with twenty-three different postcards of the Clifton Suspension Bridge.)

In Manchester, the day after Rawtenstall, St. Christopher and The Field Mice played at The Boardwalk. And I met Chris of The Purple Tulips. And he told me they'd written a new song. And I said if they ever felt like becoming a POP BAND then there was a recording deal awaiting them, but he said thank-you-very-much, but that would take all the fun out of it, though we could hear the new song if we wanted to.

One Friday miserably surveying a demotape mountain; most things listened to for a moment, some fully, some not at all.

All to be listened to properly, and replied to. Picking out the hopefuls first; Sunflowers, Williams, Panda Pops, and Action Painting!
The Action Painting! demo arrived on August 23rd with a



Action Painting!

typically bizarre and illegible letter from Andy. A letter about a band formed in mid-August, failed 'A' levels, Jean-Paul Sartre, and the desire to create a sunshine death harvest of guitars. They did. Action Painting! Two songs. Something like St. Christopher meets the Happy Mondays with a splash of Wedding Present strumming, and a strained angry (fluish) vocal packed full of dreams and hopes. A demotape that is ALIVE. A demotape that is fresh and enthusiastic and arrogant and - just everything a demotape ever should be.

Two new demotapes. One fragile and fluttery and floating, the other thwacking and thumping and hurtling. Two new pop bands. (Gentle Despite and Action Painting!) Two new dreams. Two new phone numbers and two new addresses. Two new catalogue numbers and two new recording dates. In one week... two new BEGINNINGS!!!

November 1989 and usually I get up late. Somehow I just can't seem to get enough sleep. One day at lunchtime he says oh, by the way, the Berlin Wall's come down. And he's right. (The Berlin Wall was built before I was born. There have been two Germanies all my life. And I knew of Germany as a "friendly" country before I ever heard of the world wars or Hitler or the Third Reich or...)

And now, on the lunchtime news, some of the most heart scenes I've ever seen. Hundreds and thousands of ^{reading} excited people, happy people, people unable to find words - not just in English, but in any language - to express it all. In the kitchen over brown sauce sandwiches, I'm choking back the tears. The happiness is overwhelming. West Berliners buying flowers and champagne for the East Berliners, hugs and kisses, helping hands onto the wall, guitarists strumming, dancing, singing, the surprise, the euphoria of it all...

Followed, as I should have expected, by the inevitable dampener. I wouldn't have thought ANYONE could watch those elated people and see the opening of the Wall as anything but GOOD, but the British Legion members fear a United Germany, and Margaret Thatcher thinks they're all going too fast and it's early days yet, and increasingly I want to stomp and scream and shout "It's none of your business; leave the Germans to decide, or for a day or so at the very least, let them DREAM!"

Somehow a fanzine that started off about an increasingly mad and manic world has lost its way. In June things just

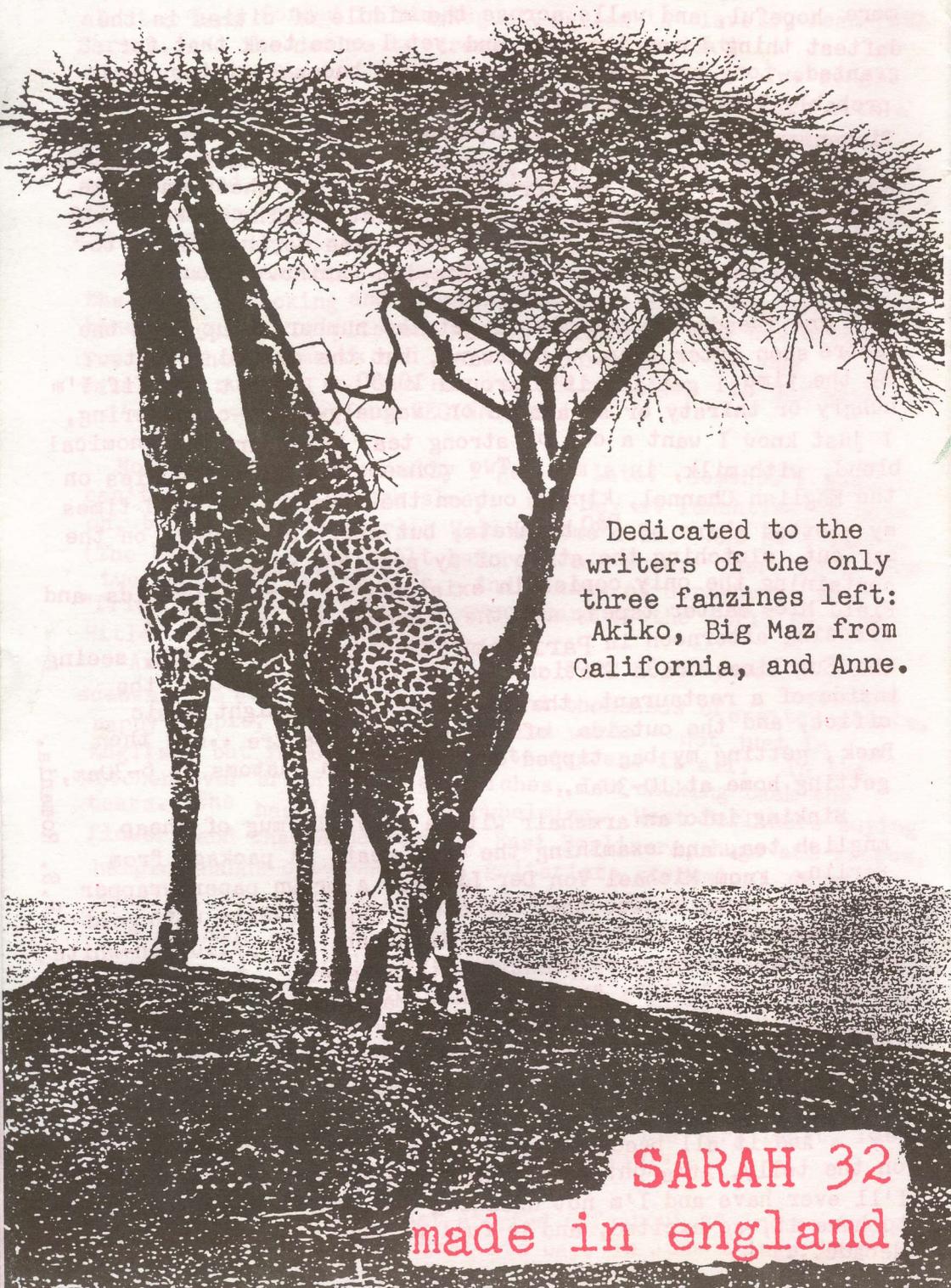
seemed insane, and increasingly so; now more sensible and more hopeful, and walls across the middle of cities is the daftest thing I can imagine, and yet I once took that for granted. Long hot summer became autumn becomes winter, and probably I'm being naively optimistic, and maybe like Tiananmen Square, Wenceslas Square or some other Square next week or next month or next year will end in a hail of bullets and a shower of red, but for the moment I see cheer and hope, I see governments resigning, I see East talking to West. There's a long way to go and I don't see North talking to South (in fact I see another Ethiopian famine...) but...

One Tuesday in December I get the number 40 up from the Centre soon after 10am. It's warm, but the ground is wet. By the time I get in, it's around 10-30. I don't know if I'm hungry or thirsty or exhausted or vaguely-alert-considering, I just know I want a cup of strong tea, Sainsbury's economical blend, with milk, in a mug. Two consecutive night ferries on the English Channel, kipped out on the floor with three times my allotted share of P&O blankets, but still shivering; on the way out, clutching the strap of my precious rucksac, containing the only copies in existence of various Orchids and Field Mice master tapes, all the through the night. A freezing afternoon in Paris, my first trip since 1973, seeing the Eurolines Coach Station, the inside of the metro, the inside of a restaurant, the inside of the Midnight Music office, and the outside of the Pompidou Centre ..and then Back, getting my bag tipped out by British Customs at 6-30am, getting home at 10-30am.

Sinking into an armchair with a heavenly mug of cheap English tea, and examining the days post. A package from Berlin. From Michael Von Der Linde. A brown paper wrapper reveals a box, inside that Christmas paper (white with gold trees and stars, like the lights in Rouen, all yellowish-white and 3D; quite the most beautiful thing ever). I look at the customs declaration. "Mauerstein". Mauerstein. A piece of the Berlin Wall. About four inches by two inches by one inch of grey concrete, sprayed reddish-orange on the one smooth side. Hey, it's Christmas 1989 and there's a piece of the Berlin Wall on our fridge!

And it all becomes real at last. It's not just pictures on the telly, it's oh! Look, this is the best Christmas present I'll ever have and I'm not dreaming and, oh, I'm just so proud to have it, so excited, and so full of hope for the next decade...

P.S. Romania.



Dedicated to the
writers of the only
three fanzines left:
Akiko, Big Maz from
California, and Anne.

SARAH 32
made in england