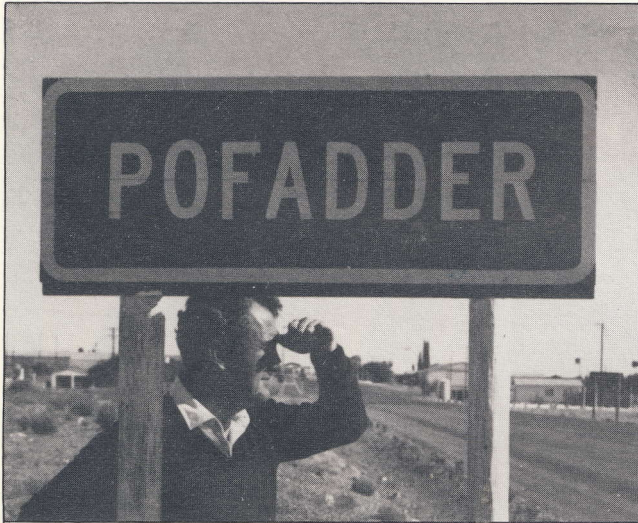


# Logorrhoea

by Chris Ellis



I thought I would introduce you to a new diagnosis this month: logorrhoea. The rrhoea part is fairly well known in medicine and has a element of flow to it, a lubricity of movement.

The logo is from logos, the Greek for “word”. So there you have it, your actual verbal running words. The Penguin Dictionary of Curious and Interesting Words defines it as “uncontrollable or uncontrolled and usually incomprehensible running off at the mouth’. It’s a condition that’s quite common around our way, in fact it’s endemic.

A favourite patient of mine, a diminutive brunette who bears a perennially intense expression on her face is afflicted with it. She speaks so quickly that the ends and the beginnings of the words run into each other. It sounds like a train coming out of a tunnel. This is compounded by an unfortunate complication: her false teeth. The upper ones are slightly loose. Once a sentence is begun, they start almost immediately to lag behind. They never seem to catch up with the sounds

coming out so that after the launch off, the upper denture is usually about a second behind by the time the verb in the next sentence is reached. It is usually moving upwards when it should be going down.

This fascinates me so much that I find myself transfixed like a cat in front of a rattlesnake, eyeing the moving ivories. Sometimes if the sentences get too long or she gives a rapid fireburst the denture actually gives up and hovers paralysed in a mid position with the lips moving around it rather similar to a raft caught at the bottom of a waterfall. When she stops abruptly there is about a second’s delay before the denture clatters to a halt and then as she issues forth again it slowly starts to build up it’s inevitable momentum like a close up shot of the wheels of the train as it pulls out of a station. My mind is so utterly taken off the contents of her history that invariably when she has finished I have to improvise an answer.

I once discussed this with her dentist. He went quite pale when he heard me mention her name. Apparently she used to arrive with a plastic bag full of her old dentures which she would hold up in her fist, the rows of teeth looking out at him through the plastic like trophies from a burial ground. She would then pour them out in a cascade onto his receptionist’s table.

Now that’s what I call logorrhoea.

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