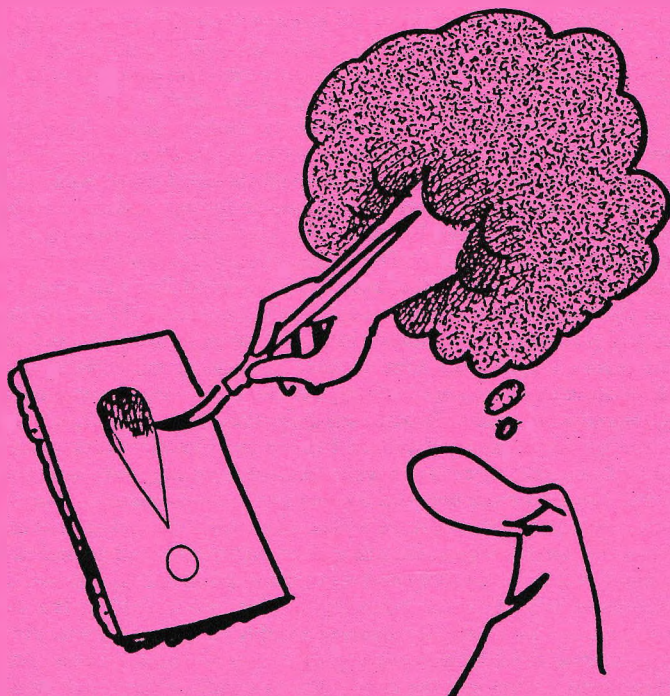


THE NORTHERN CALIFORNIAN

Number 6

July 1998



Another Farm Fragment: In the earliest days of The Farm, there were very few people interested in stepping foot off the land, preferring to focus entirely on communing with nature and the building of the community. Needless to say, I wasn't one of the stay-at-home crowd. I found it desirable for my mental health to go out into the community, do things that I regarded normal, such as shopping, bookstore browsing, and mixing with a wider range of people than could be found in the community. This soon led to one of my earliest jobs, that of "store man," running the community grocery store, which got me off the land pretty frequently. Why, would you believe that in these early days at least one person referred to me as "saintly" for being willing to go to town!

Actually, grocery store was something of a misnomer. In the earliest days, the "store" consisted of putting out all the newly acquired food at a distribution point for a few hours while people came and got their share. At first, most of The Farm's groceries – food and sundries – were bought through a catalogue that was issued by a wholesale grocer in Parsons, Tennessee, well west of the community, and delivered by a huge truck that would make its way down our often muddy dirt road to drop off the week's haul. This was the same truck that delivered to all the little country stores dotting the highways and byways around The Farm, and we learned of it from a friendly Summertown grocer.

But that method soon proved to be too limited – and too expensive – for our needs. That was when I was asked to go out and establish relations with various other suppliers to get better prices by purchasing more in bulk. From Columbia Mill and Elevator I would buy 100-pound bags of soybeans (until later, when we grew our own), wheat berries and flour. That was an interesting place, located in a huge metal building on a railroad spur in an industrial part of Columbia. The soybeans and wheat berries were kept in huge piles on concrete floors inside the building; when I'd come around to order, an elderly black man would be assigned to bag up my order and I'd help him load it in my truck. (Actually he was supposed to load it all himself, but I refused to let them treat him that way.) Early on, one of the managers offered to give me a tour of the establishment, and I learned that in addition to beans and grains they also did a big business in country hams. They had a whole air-conditioned room full of the things hanging on hooks. I wasn't so much of a vegetarian that I couldn't appreciate the deep, rich ham smell, even though I didn't want to eat any.

For a time we found another, more natural source for our flour: the Readyville Mill, an old water-driven mill that had been brought back from near-extinction by a guy named Joe. Readyville was about 100 miles east of The Farm, southeast of Murfreesboro, on a secondary highway. It was a beautiful ride. Whenever I came around, Joe was always ready to take a break and show me some of the workings of the mill operation. He was an interesting talker – quite proud, and justly so, of the renovations he'd made to bring this old mill back to life.

One of the trucks I used from time to time to pick up large loads was known as the Cracker Truck because in an earlier incarnation it had been used by some baking company to deliver their goods to wholesalers. It was a medium-sized bobtail truck, not the largest I ever drove but pretty big. One day I noticed, as I drove the Cracker Truck out to Readyville to pick up a load of flour, that there was a weird noise happening every now and then from up front somewhere, sort of a cross between a grind and a deep squeak. I worried about it, but was no mechanic myself and didn't have a clue as to what the noises meant. I crossed my fingers and drove on. On the way back, still around eighty miles out as darkness began to fall, back, trouble finally struck when there was a emphatic grind and squeak – and the right front wheel suddenly came off. I saw it bouncing off far into a field in the periphery of the headlights and then out of sight. By steering sharply to the left, I was able to jockey the vehicle onto the narrow shoulder without tipping it over and shut it down. As I pondered my situation, darkness fell further and the rural highway's traffic thinned out considerably. I was about three miles east of some small town and set out to walk there, thumbing as I went along

and finally getting a ride from a grizzled old man in an ancient pick-up truck about halfway there. He took me to a small sheriff's office in the town, but no one was there. I went to a grocery store and used their pay phone to call The Farm, where after much confusion and hassle I was able to talk to one of the mechanics. He explained that someone who apparently didn't know as much as he claimed had been working on the Cracker Truck the day before, repacking the front wheel bearings, and apparently had torqued down a couple of nuts that were supposed to be hand-tightened and cotter-pinned. He was surprised that both wheels hadn't come off long before that point, and said he'd come get me as soon as he could.

After that I passed through the hands of several good old boys in this tiny town before ending up with a loquacious but generous sort who fed me dinner and offered to let me stay on a recliner until my ride came. Which took a long time; it was after midnight when I finally returned home, and I had to go out early the next day with the mechanic who'd screwed up to retrieve the truck, its missing tire, and its two-ton load of flour.

Things weren't *always* so exciting. My usual stops were more prosaic, and closer to home. I would go several times a month to Nashville to pick up five-gallon cans of cooking oil, 50- and 100-pound bags of beans (not soy), and the like at the Robert Orr restaurant supply warehouse. In Columbia I made weekly visits to Norton & Steely, a wholesale grocery warehouse, for things like laundry and dish soap, toilet paper, feminine supplies and the like. Usually I dealt with Mr. Steely, a tall guy who looked a little like Phil Silvers in his Sgt. Bilko days, and spoke with a high voice. "How ya doin', buddy?" was his perennial greeting. Then he'd tell me which brands of various products were having special promotions, meaning lower wholesale prices, and we'd go out in the warehouse and pull the order together, shooting the breeze all the time. Mr. Steely was quite interested, though he did his best to act cool, in what our community was all about, and was constantly testing me to see how cool I was. Usually this would involve making racist remarks that I would call him on, and we'd have a little "discussion." He was always pretty graceful about seeing my point of view. Mr. Norton, on the other hand, was usually hunched over the books during my visits and only took care of me if Steely was gone or tied up with another customer or on the phone with their suppliers. He was short, more taciturn and business-like, though friendly. They made an interesting pair, sort of a Southern Mutt and Jeff, and I liked them.

Before long, the temporary grocery bazaar concept on The Farm gave way to a 16 x 32 foot Army surplus tent that was pitched on a wooden platform and had a framed-in front door that could be locked. More items were available for longer periods of time, and I had made a pact with the people I reported to that I would never run out of Kotex and Tampax so those were always available even when other necessities were scarce. I was given an inadequate amount of money each week and had to figure out what were the best things to buy. If money was flush, sometimes I would be able to give The Farm a treat, like bringing in big boxes of ready-made pasta, for instance, or maybe fresh fruit.

Practically all the outside food items were distributed on a strict rationing system, so much per person per household per week. This applied to things like cooking oil, margarine, rice, and flour. Soybeans were always plentiful. One of the more popular items—and one of the most expensive—was Red Star Nutritional Yeast (T6635 Large Flake). As total (non-dairy) vegetarians, we'd gotten into nutritional yeast because it supplied Vitamin B-12, which was otherwise lacking in our diet. I'd been part of a committee, early on, that researched, sampled and selected the nutritional yeast we would adopt as a community standard. Red Star T6635 Large Flake won based on flavor. (Later we would repackage and market it as "Good-Tasting Nutritional Yeast.") Its arrival and distribution was always a scene, since it was often unavailable (due to lack of money) for extended periods. But something weird happened around nutritional yeast. Someone developed a recipe for a soufflé that used a lot of the stuff. A household could use up its entire ration of nutritional yeast—meant to last a month or more—in one or two meals featuring this soufflé. Then some people would begin going door to door, trying to "borrow" nutritional yeast from other households. This was always a bone of contention for me, since it seemed unfair not to forget greedy, but others (like my wife) didn't see it my way and would give away some of *our* share of nutritional yeast to the soufflé addicts.

I ran the Farm Grocery for over a year before I got pulled off to become the Promo Guy for the newly-formed Farm Band. This was because of my experience back in 1969/70 working for Columbia Records in San Francisco. I was given the use of a late-model Oldsmobile Cutlass that belonged to a guy from Georgia who'd recently joined up, and sent off to get airplay for the Farm Band on various stations throughout the south. I had mixed results in my efforts, but that (and my eventual return to running the store and doing other purchasing activities) is another story.

COMMENTS ON
203

Ned Brooks: You say to Harry Warner Jr. in the course of missing his presence in SFPA that "the way things are going all of the last old apans may wind up in FAPA when there aren't enough of us left to support but one apa." Things aren't that dire yet, but as it happens FAPA has been running somewhat short of a full roster for the past few mailings and has immediate openings. It would be good to have some SFPAn on FAPA's roster, especially if you want to continue to read Harry Warner Jr.'s apazines. Unlike SFPA's hectic pace, mailings are only quarterly and minimum activity is eight pages *a year*—which can be done (after the first year) at any time during the "membership year." Annual dues are \$15. I'm the Secretary-Treasurer, so anyone interested can apply to me. ☺ I'm more obsessive about bills than you are: I pay them the day they arrive to get them out of the way and so I won't forget them in a stack of paper. ☺ Thanks for franking in the Blake booklet, and I hope that by this reading you've at least begun to settle into your new Lilburn digs.

Richard Lynch: Enjoyed your eastern European adventures and misadventures—the latter being when you had to ask directions. I also like to think I know where I am all the time, and usually do, so I can relate. ☺ At work I run WordPerfect 5.1+ in a DOS shell (on Windows NT 4.0) and it works just fine. I hardly use it anymore, but there are a few very powerful macros that apply to certain things I do to certain documents periodically that I still venture over to use. However, I've largely gotten over the idea of putting it on my eventual replacement computer here at home. (I haven't yet mentioned to SFPA that at home I use an 11-year-old XT clone running WordPerfect 5.0 and DOS 2.1. I suspect I may be the last person on the planet using that version of DOS. Nothing has ever crashed and burned; it does what I need; and so I see no particular reason to replace it. Being able to be on-line isn't sufficient reason, yet.)

Guy Lillian: Somewhere amidst your kipple, you should have a copy of the first issue of *Demi-TAFF American*, Ulrika O'Brien's newsletter, in which the U.S. voters in the last TAFF race are all listed (including you). I don't see sufficient L.A. voters listed to lend credence to your assertion that she "won principally because of backing from LASFS," although there are a number of names unfamiliar to me. ☺ Ted White didn't invent the term KTF and your definition of it is incorrect. It came into being in British fandom in the '70s and characterized the fanzine-reviewing techniques of (mainly) Joseph Nicholas and Greg Pickersgill. When I got to read these years after reading about them, I didn't find them any more KTF than what F. Towner Lañey used to do in his "Fanzine Scope" column in the '40s. ☺ Fred Chappell was one of your teachers!?! Great that he was named Poet Laureate of North Carolina, but wonder who else was considered? I had some contact with Chappell a few years ago—I was doing a reprint column for the Las Vegas fanzine, *Wild Heirs*, and wanted to run Fred's critique abd take-off on Sam Moskowitz and *The Immortal Storm* that appeared in *Grue* No. 29, about the second or third fanzine I ever received. Even though the rankest of neofen when I first read it, I howled with laughter at the piece, which begins, "Sam Moskowitz' book, *The Immortal Storm*, is at once one of fandom's greatest assets and one of its major losses." He goes on to present a mock chapter from *TIS* which is even more of a screamer. I noticed a copy of one of his poetry volumes at a bookstore in Berkeley (Pegasus on upper Solano in north Berkeley) and peeked inside. The liner notes revealed where he was teaching, and I wrote him in care of the college asking permission to reprint, which he graciously granted. However, this was several years ago—Arnie didn't want to use Fred's pastiche while SaM was

alive because of his concern over Sam's feelings about it, and now *WH* is so infrequent I despair its ever appearing. I may run it myself sometime. ☺ That was typically generous of Terry Carr to photocopy a set of the *Barrington Bull* for you. I have the originals from which he made them in my collection (along with the rest of his file copies of every fanzine he ever did except a few *Fantasy Rotators*). A kick to see Rotsler cartoons in a college paper! ☺ My old friend Paul Williams had nothing to do with the trade paperbacks of the collected short stories appearing out of order so "We Can Remember It For You Wholesale" could be featured in bookstores at the same time the movie *Total Recall* was in theaters. The collection first appeared as a five-volume boxed set from Underwood-Miller in 1987. There were 400 copies, of which I have No. 363. The first 100 were a special *expensive* edition with a tipped-in PKD signature (from a stash of Phil's canceled checks). ☺ As long as the Republicans in Congress keep kissing up to their right-wing/evangelical/ultra-conservative/kill-the-poor lunatic fringe and pushing their extreme proposals, Al Gore has every chance of winning even over the likes of Bush Jr. Especially if the economy stays as good as it's been. I think that more and more the right-wingest of the Republicans in Congress are too far to the right of the American mainstream, and I hope they'll lose their twin Congressional majority in 2000, too. ☺ Back in the '60s I was in any number of San Francisco flats that had the overhead tank with pull chain sort of toilet, and I encountered a number of them during my TAFF trip in 1989. Actually, England was replete with unusual toilets; I seem to recall that the Willises' old place, Strathclyde, had one that was nearly large (deep) enough to rent out as a bedsit. When it flushed, I could swear the water level of the Irish Sea (which you could see out the window) would drop. ☺ The 100th SFPA mailing at 1,750 pages will probably stand for all time as the largest fannish apa mailing. FAPA's 100th weighed in at 1,219 pages (which makes it the second-largest fannish apa mailing ever, well above SFPA's second-largest of 1,033) and SAPS' 100th at 690½ (of which 13 were yours). I shed a tear at not being able to participate in the 100th FAPA mailing—I was No. 1 on the waiting list that quarter, and got to join with the 101st, which was a pretty small mailing. I was fasia when SAPS had its 100th, and hadn't been a member for nearly eight years at that point. ☺ Glad you revised your favorite 1998 film on the back page from your earlier *Primary Colors* to *The Butcher Boy*. I'd put the latter on my top ten so far, too, but perhaps my favorite to date is *A Friend of the Deceased*, a French-Ukrainian production filmed in and around Kiev that starkly sets forth the changed nature of relationships in the FSU. But there've been a bunch of others I've also found excellent; it's been a good year so far.

Richard Dengrove: In the photo of you on page 2, you remind me of Canadian fan Murray Moore. ☺ The difference between Nixon/Watergate and Clinton/Zippergate is that Nixon was revealed as actively and obviously evil and Clinton is a man of the people, sharing many of their foibles and taking their side against the multinationals. The centrist position he's taken that you also note (apparently favorably) is the key to his popularity and success even in the face of the likes of Ken Starr, Trent Lott and Newt Gingrich. I haven't agreed with everything he's done (especially "welfare reform") but on balance his presidency has been much better than a second Bush term would've been, and whoever would've succeeded him if the GOP kept winning—under that scenario, the total screwing of working people and thirdworldization of the U.S. would have continued apace, even picked up speed. (Remember when Bush wanted to abolish the minimum wage, for instance?) It's not reversed now, but it's slowed. ☺ While I only met Ray Mungo once—he's an old friend of Paul Williams and showed up here in Glen Ellen one day—I definitely knew of him before then and have a number of his books around. One of the more interesting to me was *Return to Sender*, an account of a trip Ray and Paul took to Japan—including their meeting Paul's first wife, Sachiko. As for Verandah Porche, I have writing by her in several issues of the *Green Mountain Post*, from the '60s. I think some of it is poetry, but I don't remember just where it is to dig it out and check.

David Schlosser: What sort of wood stove do you use, and how large is your house? I remember when I lived on The Farm the Ashley and Wood King stoves were the most

avored. Both had thermostats that allowed a fair amount of control over how much heat was put out: that, and the choice of firewood. For overnight warmth on a subzero night (which The Farm occasionally had), there's nothing like a huge round of hickory or oak in a banked-down thermostatic stove. Do you have any back-up heating? ☺ An SF convention in Eureka!? I guess I shouldn't be so surprised; Santa Rosa had its Octocons during the '80s.

Janice Gelb: I think I might be able to tolerate someone upstairs or downstairs from me as a renter, but if I were buying I would avoid such units. ☺ I also get paid every two weeks and like the two months a year with *three* pay days. The other ten months I simply assume I have two checks a month and plan my expenditures/bill paying accordingly. When one of those three-check months arrives, it's an occasion to get ahead, or catch up as the case may be. I don't have direct deposit, preferring to drive the quarter mile to the local branch of my bank each pay day and deal with an actual human (yes, my bank is retro that way). Since I'm constantly receiving checks in the form of FAPA dues and for various publications I sell, I'd have to go to the bank frequently, anyway. This way, I take out a sufficient quantity of cash with each visit to cover my usual outlays for the next two-week period and don't have to deal with ATMs. I have a card—they keep sending them every couple years despite my *never* having used them—but I don't remember my PIN number anymore. I'm as retro as my bank about this stuff. ☺ The California state sales tax might be 8.75% in your area, but it varies from county to county. The "base" is 7.25%; here in Sonoma County it's 7.5% (the additional funding an open space acquisition district). But whatever the percent, it's high enough that I make almost all my clothing purchases through catalogues, mainly Lands End and L. L. Bean. If you order enough to pay their top shipping fee, the charge is well below what you'd have to pay in sales tax.

Steve Hughes: Congratulations to you and Suzanne—and thanks for sharing your wedding pictures! ☺ I also use different versions of my name and addresses (in addition to Box 30, I also have a street address) in order to track the origins of junk mail. In the past year I've had a minor explosion of odd and (to me) irrelevant catalogues after ordering a mold-resistant vinyl shower curtain ("the kind hotels use") from an alien catalogue. One nice thing about having a post office box, though, is that none of this gets out the lobby door. ☺ Like you, I find it difficult to spend time doing things like riding a stationary bike to Get Exercise, but have been doing it. One of my sons gave me a mountain bike years ago—well, actually, he left it when he moved and later renounced it—and several months ago I put it up on a "trainer" and pedal it (except on very hot days) while watching the local evening news. ☺ I'm 55 now and I agree that it takes longer for some stuff to heal. I twisted my ankle badly around Halloween last year, severely stretching various tendons. It took until just a few months ago to no longer feel its after-effects every day—and I still notice it when I make certain movements, which of course I avoid.

Richard Brandt: Congratulations to Michelle—a 1980 Honda Prelude is a cool car! If it hasn't been abused and doesn't already have more than a quarter-million miles or so on it, the thing might last you a while. One of my sons (the same one who renounced his bike) owns a 1985 Prelude, dark blue, with which he's inordinately happy. I test-drove it with him the night he bought it, and can attest to its tightness and gutsiness. ☺ How many apas are you in besides this one and FAPA? ☺ Your company's vacation usage strictures are much more stringent than mine. I can save up to 240 hours before accrual stops, and it's much easier to get to take it when one wants. Since I'm mostly uninterested in vacationing when the weather is hot, I rarely have any coverage conflicts with my group of employees. In addition, each year we get two floating holidays; but these we have to take during the year or lose them. ☺ Probably you were just kidding when you said Denny's had trademarked the word "food." Actually they've trademarked the slogan you quoted.

George Wells: In your comment to Meade, you mention having a lot of old fanzines that "take up a lot of room" and that you "may have to get severe sometime soon." Perhaps I

should send you my fanzine wantlist and see if you can help me out. (If I remember, this comment may already be anticlimactic.)

Gary Robe: Your tale of walking around the trade show exchanging freebies with other exhibitors takes me back to the days when I did the same. When I was working for the Book Publishing Company on The Farm, I went to the American Booksellers' Convention, the Consumer Electronics Show, several "premium" and "gift" shows, and even an alternative birth trade show. Every one of them had those quiet periods you describe—and if you weren't taking the success or failure of your firm's exhibit personally, they were good times. As an exhibitor, though that day was balanced out at the ABA and the CES by the day the general public was allowed to come in. We'd put away our samples on those days and only offer brochures. Exhibitors who didn't experienced major glomming often accompanied by ugly behavior. ☺ I drove up to Kingsport a couple of times in the late '70s to pick up press runs of various Farm books from Kingsport Press, which did our more popular titles—the ones we couldn't keep up with on our in-house presses. I remember it not being very flat. But it's hard to imagine a 75-foot drop from your roof to your back yard. You must be on an *extreme* hill. ☺ I began getting AARP solicitations when I was about 45 and threw them all away (or sent them back if they provided prepaid envelopes, which like you I do with all junk mail when possible). Finally I joined in 1997 so I could get a 15% discount for several days at the Motel 6 in Walnut Creek for last year's Corflu. What I saved more than made up for the cost of membership, and I was curious to see what membership involved. Mostly it seems to mean getting *lots* of mailing from their various insurance entities. Most of their literature doesn't get out of the post office lobby (as per above), but I bring *Modern Maturity* home so I can send back all the prepaid cards they line it with. ☺ It's nice to know I was upsetting your parents by living on The Farm. I still have a box full of clippings about The Farm from various sources, as well as copies of a lot of internal publications, and hope someday to find the time to string them together with some narrative and anecdotal stuff into some sort of Farm picture book and with any luck peddle it to a publisher.

Gary Brown: Interesting to read about your collection of food toys. I have one small, specialized food toy collection myself: a bunch of plastic heads on pedestals that used to have little sugar pill candies in them. My kids consumed these when much younger and passed on the heads to me. I have Alf, ET, Yoda, Ren & Stimpy, Howard the Duck, and Audrey the man-eating plant from the old Roger Corman movie, *Little Shop of Horrors* (well, actually, its from the remake with Rick Moranis *et al*). ☺ Thanks for sharing your layouts with us. They're fine, but what's interesting is seeing the similarity between the types of stories covered in Palm Beach as compared to, say, Santa Rosa. There are contested annexations, losses of funding, and allegedly underperforming employees everywhere, it would seem. ☺ I can't stand tailgaters either; if they don't look like the type to pull out a gun and start shooting, I try to warn them off by tapping my brakes a few times and slowing a few miles per hour. Here you can be going 75 in a 65 zone and still have people on your ass (and not just in the fast lane). People who cut you off real close are also bothersome, but not as dangerous. ☺ I never was able to find the first issue of *Howard the Duck* when the comic was hot, but after the movie bombed in the '80s I got a nice one for five bucks and was happy to finally complete my collection. ☺ I messed up my back around 1975 when I ran the grocery store on The Farm for a couple years. We used to get Red Star Nutritional Yeast in 65-pound cardboard barrels and I would heft these things out of the truck (hugging them around their mid-section) and into a storage room single-handed until one day when something popped. I didn't mess myself up as badly as you describe, but my days of barrel-hefting were over and I still have to watch I don't over-stress my back when lifting.

mike weber: I never read *The Girl, The Gold Watch, and Everything* but the TV movie made of it was very popular with me and my sons when we were all much younger. They were initially attracted to it because Pam Dawber (who they previously knew as Mindy) was the female lead, but then were totally fantisted when time stopped. (We all agreed that the sequel

sucked, though.) ☺ Yes, this is my standard apazine format and, as you point out, I get a lot more text on each of these pages than I would on a standard page in pica type. For instance, there are nearly 6,000 words in this issue. ☺ If the Berkeley Cinema Guild chain met its demise by the murder of the manager by an employee, I never heard of it. It was still going when I left the Bay Area for Tennessee in 1971, but was gone by the time I returned in 1980. ☺ “The Farm logic behind ditching nicknames” was to “honor” the name you were given. Remember, this was back when some people gave themselves some really weird names!

Jeff Copeland: I don't know if I should mention this, but although I was living in Glen Ellen, California, I was part of that “New York Fanzine Cabal” that took out an advertisement in *Science Fiction Chronicle* – my name appeared with the others. Those of us who pooled resources to run that ad simply agreed that none of the fanzines nominated that year were all that good – certainly not of Hugo quality, in our minds – and suggested that voters consider “No Award.” We (or at least I) had no particular animosity towards Marty Cantor or George Laskowski – I traded *Trap Door* for both of their fanzines. I wish I had a copy of that advertisement. I don't have that issue of Andy Porter's fanzine but it seems to me the advertisement was reprinted in some other fanzine. That's the problem with all knowledge being contained in fanzines; there's no good search engine. (However, you might want to watch out for me on general principles; I'm closer to being part of the so-called Ted White Group Mind than anyone else in this apa, so my opinion is probably automatically suspect.)

God invented the orgasm so we would know when to stop. – RL, ca. 1960

Number Two Son Arthur, who had been traveling since mid-March 1997 suddenly returned home in mid-June. He'd been spending his final weeks in Thailand enjoying one particular beach outside Bangkok and anticipating his next move: to Japan where he hoped to quickly get an English teaching job and work for maybe a year to refuel his savings and experience Japan. But he didn't like it once he got there, and Japan itself was sinking into recession so no jobs materialized. So he flew home – with short layovers in Hong Kong (like a beehive in highrises, he said) and Seoul (where he never got away from the airport) – and I picked him up at San Francisco airport one Thursday afternoon, taking time off work to do so. He was pretty mindblown to have changed course so suddenly and be back in the USA, and he didn't stick around long.

He camped out for a couple of weeks in a 'guest room carved out of his mother's garage, and then he was off with a new friend he met in Nepal. They headed out to Boulder for a week, and then were going on to Chicago. Art was going to catch a bus to Tennessee from there, and arrive in time to attend the annual “Ragweed Festival,” so named for that early morning in June 1980 (about a week after I moved away) when all manner of law enforcement personnel arrived by land and air to bust a field of ragweed that their airborne snoops had mistakenly decided was marijuana.

Unless he changes his travel arrangements, he'll be back in Sonoma County around the deadline for this mailing.

Backtracking, all my kids were in town that Thursday evening. Joe was recently back from a couple weeks spent in New Mexico, visiting with friends and picking up a big load of his stuff (he'd been living there for over a year), and I hadn't seen him since his return. Gabe and his girlfriend Azure were up from Santa Cruz, to see Art and go to some graduation parties. My oldest son Ben had a meeting earlier in the evening so my ex-wife Lani was watching our granddaughter Arianna (age two). Ben showed up to get Ari just as I was leaving, and then stopped over to see me on his way out. It was truly a great evening – and good to have all four sons in the area again, albeit not for long.

Mid-July as I write, and the garden is cooking along. With any luck and enough warm weather, around the time you're reading this I'll be eating the first ripe tomato! [–RL]