



AND THIS IS SUSAN
WOOD FROM
CANADA,



Snow is falling on Vancouver, the large white flakes turning trees into fairyland, Christmas-card, enchanted scenes. Though I have Technical Writing exams to mark, five books to review, a stack of reading, and letters unanswered from February, it seems appropriate to begin

AMOR 16

the 18th issue of a letter-substitute for my friends... the special Christmas/New Year's/we've survived/joy to the world issue of The Amor de Cosmos People's Memorial Quasirevolutionary Susanzine, from Susan Wood, 2236 Allison Rd., Vancouver, Canada, V6T 1T6. First stencil begun Dec. 9, 1977, and the goddess knows when I'll get it finished and mailed. Lion's Gate Press Publication #27.

Never mind that my desk and my dining room table and my desk upstairs and my desk at the office are covered with work I "should" do before leaving for Ottawa on the 19th. I'm alone in my house, with my two feisty kittens.... snow making magic outside, and a lot of thoughts swirling in my head.... about "communication" and "personal journalism" and magic. Especially magic. About energy, and shared communication. About what a horrible, stress-filled, unhappy three months it's been, for me and for many of you. About the death of the old year, the festivities and rites to mark the new. About joy. And about a friend of mine, who went down into death... and laughed with me today. Especially, I want to talk about him.

But I think I have to back into this, making sense of my thoughts as I shape them on stencil. So, some quotations.

From a letter from Eric Lindsay: (on the "personal journalism" speculations in AMOR 14):
Is "honest, open" communication really either? I never really felt I could express, in words or any other way, anything that is really important to me. Even if it is communicating, it is certainly safer than personal confrontation, with the risk of getting some treasured self-image dashed on the rocks of disbelief. Yet that distancing effect can be helpful, in some ways. I believe some people will write to those at a distance in an attempt to communicate, simply because by being distant, these people are "safe" for the receipt of confidences that would otherwise never be attempted at all. It may be limited, and self-indulgent, but isn't it better than nothing?

From Paul Williams' new book, *Coming*, Entwhistle Books, P.O. Box 611, Glen Ellen, CA95442, \$2.95... a collection of what may seem to be truths or clichés, depending on your state of receptiveness or Fashionable Ennui... Paul got through to me, anyway:
I keep rediscovering things. That's what I want to talk about. I keep rediscovering little parts of myself I'd forgotten about completely. I keep realizing I'm the same person I've always been-- I remember the child, the teenager-- and I want to reach out and take hold of these realizations, hang on to them, not forget this time. I want to be whole... whatever that is.

And I enjoy these rediscoveries. There is a fearful and wonderful pleasure in the shock of recognition.

....Nurture the spirit. Or at least let it be. There is this search for balance. I want all the parts of me to coexist, to be visible, to be alive.

It's a very ambitious undertaking.

....This is what I believe: the problems facing us can only be solved by making better use of human energy. Any other solutions are trivial and worse than useless because they don't go to the heart of the matter.

The only way to act on this information-- to turn theory into practice-- is for each of us to dedicate ourselves to making better use of our own energies in our daily lives.... Don't hold back.

When it's time to give, give everything. When it's time to act, don't set aside some part of your energy to save for a rainy day-- and then fail, and then say, "I knew I couldn't do it"-- your actions are important, they need to be done right. You can't afford to do anything else but give all of yourself to right action at this moment.

.... Don't underestimate the importance of this moment.

It's the only moment there is.

From my long-time friend, and sort-of adopted brother Richard Labonté, two quotations that meant something to us both:

Constant labour of one uniform kind destroys the intensity and flow of man's spirits, which find recreation and delight in mere change of activity.--Karl Marx--

*You can never know too much about the shadow line and the people who walk it.
--Raymond Chandler--*

Finally, from actor-luthier-farmer-writer-artist's husband David Miller, a letter I've already quoted in *Genre Plat* about the "point" of learning to read literature intelligently, or "bothering" with art, or "anything that's not strictly necessary"--

I don't know the answer for your classes, but I know the answer for me: it's a matter of sheer unadulterated greed. I've got a limited number of years to trot about on this orb, and I intend to cram as much into them as I can. A piece of poetry, a painting, a dance may give me the insight to aid me in extracting 61 seconds of life out of a minute. Maybe 65 or 68 seconds, if I work at it. My minutes are getting longer, and deeper. I'm going to live to be at least a thousand.

/To people who are bored with school/
If you know you don't belong, then fuck off instantly. Go where you should be, or where you think maybe you should be. But



if you stay... DON'T WASTE IT! So why am I telling you this, Susan? You know it. Oh well, maybe it'll buck you up some time to think that there's a non-academic out here who thinks you're giving people an extension to their lease on life.

Dear David, thank you, I hope so, I try. I'm not a Scholar; but I am a Teacher and becoming, I rather hope, a good one. I see my function partly as David describes it: to be an interface between people who aren't living fully, and literature which I love, which, perhaps, I can show them how to enjoy more fully. I also believe in rather abstract concepts of excellence, of rigorous pursuit of the best one can do, of the full application of the intelligence (Dorothy Sayers says it better than I can, in *Gaudy Night*; go ask her.) Specifically, I try to concentrate my energy on bullying, persuading, encouraging, exhorting, and sometimes instructing people in the art of clear thinking and clear self-expression in English prose... to wit, the art of writing coherent Standard English. The technical writing class, which I had dreaded, turned out to be a joy and a delight, because I had a room full of very bright people all engaged in the practical tasks of improving their everyday communications skills (writing business letters, and job applications, and lengthy, logical, non-jargonistic reports.) It is interesting to me to note that 50% of the students were women, who *uniformly* did better, neater, more logical and well-expressed work than the men. They were also fascinating, highly motivated people. One of them, for example, a tiny, lovely blonde woman training to be a medical researcher includes among her job qualifications the ability to drive a 5-ton truck and groom and show Hereford bulls.... Another wrote a lucid report on sorting procedures for incoming Vancouver mail which confirmed all my worst fears... overseas mail gets sorted only when incoming mail from Canada is caught up, which is never... But I digress.

I like being a teacher. But as I complained at great length in the last AMOR, I'm also a full-time administrator, a presenter-of-material-to-totally-uninterested-bodies, and (this term) marker of one set of second-year papers which wouldn't have met high school literacy standards (average mark, C-minus.) Mostly, though, I loathe and resent the administration (thought I am very good at it), and the overload on overload which limits, say, the time I have to spend with each one of my 4 honours students.

It's also been a bad 3 months. For me, personally... the flu in October left me depressed, I've been having stomach trouble, I feel tired.... and after our long, long tenants' fight, and our brave plans to buy these buildings and run them as a tenants' co-op, the deal fell through (during Westercon) and a Developer owns the property as of Dec. 1... so all we can do is sigh, in a tired sort of way, and start the fight to block demolition-for-a-highrise again.

It's been a bad fall all round. Illness. Non-communication. People whom I care about, in trouble. People, misunderstanding me, and me having neither time nor energy to deal with the angry or painful or just puzzled letters. And on our big, impersonal, lonely campus... three rapists in the area. A maniac with a knife, deliberately slashing tires, methodically, in campus lots at night. Bomb threats in the library, during the panic-stricken weeks before exams. Illness leading to depression and hysteria among the students: flu, mono, what-have-you. A rash of suicides and attempts in the residences. Awesome family tragedies... it seems I'm the only person around who gives extensions on essays on compassionate grounds, who keeps office hours, is simply AROUND... til 5:30 or six, or missing lunch, because people (not even my students) just need some human person to talk to, to hand them Kleenex, to recognize they are alive. And sometimes it doesn't work... and one of my Honours students found the words on the page didn't make sense as he read them, and cracked up, and dropped out... and on, and on.... I felt drained, exhausted, not doing my job, on the verge of collapsing myself, and ready to do physical violence each time another problem landed on my desk (thanks to our administrator, and no, Alexis love, complaints about him are just ignored...) : I was NOT living fully, I was NOT enhancing life (least of all mine), and the only reason I didn't quit was because our department head cancelled my appointment to see him and left early, the day I finally cracked.

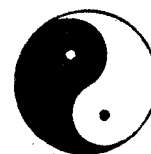
So where do I get MY extra seconds? Well, yes, Eli, who's been very supportive... and who has been working overtime with a faulty new computer system, which is just as well since I come home, mumble at him, and mark essays (muttering as I do so.) Reading is what I do to termpapers, though I'm starting, now that classes are over, to really investigate the power and function of fantasy (for the children's lit class, and mostly for my own head. Re-read Robertson Davies' Deptford trilogy-- I'm supervising a thesis on it-- and was blown away yet again by the brilliance and the *wisdom* of *Fifth Business*.) The *Pacific Northwest Review of Books* appeared, and I got a contact high from John and Loren's achievement... and took John to a Weird Lit'ry Party here... and have been going to Receptions and Parties and Lunches for Visiting Poets as a member in good standing of The Canlit Lit'ry Coterie, Westcoast branch. Eli and I have gone to the theatre, seen a very few movies, and took a night off to celebrate end-of-classes with another viewing of *Star Wars*.

But mostly, for me, I get energy from music: rock, folk, almost anything. Ten years ago, when Canada was 100 and I was 19, and the whole world seemed fresh and open, a man already famous sat in a crowded coffeehouse, Le Hibou, in Ottawa, and sang a new song: "The Canadian Railroad Trilogy." And I learned about magic. I learned how words and melody and vision could give me directly a sense of pride in my country, of hope... of joy. I learned that music, some of it, from someone who cared about reaching out to touch each listener's heart, could give us each another 5 or 6 seconds a minute.

I still go to Lightfoot concerts, hoping for the same miracle. Last year's was at the Colosseum, under bad circumstances. This year-- buying expensive tickets, to relieve depression with anticipation-- I blamed the problems on the setting, and hoped for magic. But: but. "Eli," I said, in a panic as we approached the theatre (The Queen Elizabeth Theatre; glossy printed programmes; all the Established Star trappings), "Eli, have we got the right place? Check the tickets. Look at the crowd!" Paunchy young execs in \$300 "leisure suits" and over-dressed ageing matrons, and furs and middle-class dowdiness, and... Is this what we've become? Comfortable, complacent, contemplating dinner, and coughing and rustling and coming in late during the opening act, an excellent classical guitarist out of place here... Leona Boyd, watch for her.

And yes... the lines are inaudible because the voice has gone. And the tempos are slowed. And the new songs sound like the old songs. And mostly, he's rich, he's our generation's Sinatra, he doesn't give a shit, and the only excitement now at a Lightfoot concert is: "Is he sober enough to make it through the show?" (Barely, but his few attempts to joke to the audience were inaudible, incomprehensible and/or embarrassing. We walked out into the rain, and I felt old, old and depressed.

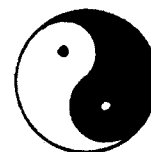
The next night was the Coliseum, crowded and smoky, raucous animals throwing toilet paper and sparklers, a wilderness of abandoned bottles at the gates where we were frisked. I HATE the Coliseum, and was there only because I really wanted to see YES, as did Eli. I dunno what the kids behind us were there for... evading curfew, maybe. A gaggle of pre-pubescent darlings behind us... The sound crew put on the Stones to check the amps, and as "Ruby Tuesday" boomed over the surging mob, one babe squealed "Oooh, I just love that old Beatles stuff!" Eli moaned, and I felt 64. (Will you still need me...?) After an hour and a half of animal noise, the opening act came on. Remember Donovan? The kids around us didn't. The ageing kids-at-heart, Susan and Eli, remembered only too well.



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(Patrick Hayden, I'm truly sorry if I sound ageist, but you yourself keep noting the difference between you-at-18, and most of your peers. This audience was "juvenile" in the worst sense: stupid, selfishly making noise through the music, destructive animals with no self-discipline and the potential to hurt people badly with their flying firecrackers and burning garbage raining down. I was *scared*.)

Donovan--trying to make a comeback--appeared before these people who'd never heard his name, dressed in a sleazy white jumpsuit, flashing a loud electric guitar. (Denny Lien, you were right to stay home.) At the end of each number, he'd look at his second guitarist (who didn't play any better than he), and his bassist, and they'd do a calculated Rock Star Jump. Thump. "Remember 'Sunshine Super... oh, no!'", and I buried my face in Eli's shoulder, half-crying and half-laughing at the electrified version. It was like a trip down Memory Lane lined with distorting mirrors... Donovan's Greatest Hits, for electric guitar and electric robot. No magic.

YES, on the other hand, with Wakeman back on keyboards, were great. (I am the granddaughter and sister of stage techs, though, and I missed the fancy Roger Dean sets and lightshows.) There was lots of energy flowing from them to us... I emerged with a pounding headache, a big smile, and a light heart. Apologies to John Carl and all the Arty Pretentious rock freaks out there; I won't make fun of YES again.

They made me feel good. So did Murray McLaughlin, who gets better every year, now successfully completed the transition to rocker... with the Incredible Ben Mink and the Silver Tractors, doing each song, even if it's nine years old, freshly, for each audience. I walked for 2 hours to get downtown when snow paralysed Vancouver, to see the *incredible* Phoebe Snow, now a full-fledged gospel-style singer, jokin' add laughin' and introducing her band... even the bus driver... and sharing good times, energy, and that unbelievable voice.... reaching out to tell each one of us she felt happy to be singing. The same energy came from The Hometown Band, a group of local musicians (remember that CBC concert, Christine?) who, in less than a year, have solidified into a folk-rock-jazz assemblage of immense energy, behind a joyous lady named Shari Ulrich, whose smile at sharing her music with her long-time fans was only matched by their joy in seeing her emerge as a star at last.

But I found the real magic, enough to get me through two very bad weeks, where I'd been promised it, oh, seven? eight? years ago... in Crosby, Stills and Nash. From the opening bars of "Love the One You're With," the love and energy flowed between them and us, as they gave us the live performance we'd always known they could give if they cared enough. The magic flowed: from Still's truly amazing guitar playing (they did "Judy Blue Eyes" as the opener to their second, acoustic set, with Stills singing and playing impeccable guitar, and C&N in perfect harmony on the backups, and at the end, everyone was just screaming, on their feet. "Whew, I'm glad we got through that one," Stills admitted... and did some superb blues solos later.) The magic flowed from Nash's singing and guitar and piano work. But mostly it flowed from David Crosby: a middle-aged, paunchy, balding teddy-bear, boogying around the stage, singing and playing at his limits and beyond because he cared so obviously about getting it *right*. Crosby having the time of his life. Crosby with a smile of pure joy on his face... giving that joy to a stadium full of fans.

I admit they had help. They'd insisted on reserved seating in the cavern of the Coliseum, which tended to cut down on the animal acts. They'd hung all their amps and equipment above the stage, to ensure we could see them. Eli and I had good seats, and I think the crowd was prepared to love them even if their concert had been the usual mess. But it wasn't. It was fairly loose--- they joked around a lot, and kidded each other. At one point, someone said "what'll we play?" "4:20" said Stills. "Four and Twenty Blackbirds?" quipped Nash. "Why not?" said Stills, and they all began to sing Lennon's "Blackbird"... very well, too. They played for 2½ hours, old material and new, rock plus an acoustic set highlighted by "Wind

on the Waters" backed up by a Cousteau Society film of graceful whales. But what they gave us was not just good music, but shared joy, doing what they loved and doing it for people who loved it. They communicated joy... their own joy in being together, surviving, getting better (joking and hugging each other and smiling.) "Carry On" closed the first set, and somehow "Carry on/Love is coming/Love is coming to us all" became a cry of promise, that the hope of the '60's would be fulfilled, and that the despair and disillusionment that the generation I teach (10 years and light years removed from mine) inherited, can and will be overcome.

No more naive political songs: no more "Ohio" or "Woodstock," but songs of hope, love, concern, from men who've grown older, but maybe more wise, and have the joy of survivors. A few people recently have shared pain and joy with me, made me feel more human: Pete Seeger, Tom Paxton, Phoebe Snow. And CSN: a promise redeemed. They didn't want to leave the stage.... so they came back and did a 10-minute version of "Wooden Ships," and stood smiling at us. And left, slowly, and came back... "Help us sing, our voices are gone," said Nash, opening "Teach Your Children." And from the golden glow uniting 8,000 people, we sang... and when the notes faded, they stood there, with their backup men and their crew, hugging each other, and smiling, and smiling, while we stood and applauded, and smiled with tears in our eyes. They, we, stood together in the magic.

Me? I fell helplessly in love with David Crosby, dancing about the stage for 2½ hours radiating a glow of pure joy, at being alive and being here and being able to share his happiness in doing what he does best, with people who understood and cared.

I saw that smile of joy again today-- on the face of a friend, talking about fantasy. Talking, Ursula, about the Earthsea books, as a bridge between his study of western and eastern mythology... with the unspoken addition that he, like so many of us, had crossed the dry river of *The Farthest Shore* and returned with knowledge, and with his life. He was talking with me, in my office, on December 9, when on October 4... as I was sitting in my office, with the phone ringing, and 3 chemical engineers waiting in the hall to talk about techwriting, and my honours (fantasy reading class) student Rhondda drifting in to see if her course proposal had been approved, and my colleague Bill New drifting in to scan my shelves for a book he needed, and Jeffrey Gow from English 202 sitting in the hot seat being gently reamed out for his utter carelessness in writing, talking through class, and etc... when on the usual mad school day 2 months ago, when I was missing lunch and surrounded by distractions, this same person had called me from Vancouver General Hospital.

"Hi, it's Richard. I'm sorry I missed your party two weeks ago. I wanted to say hello... was afraid you'd think I'd died."

"That's ok. I had flu myself, it's a killer. Were you sick?"

"Well, actually... I'm in hospital. The doctors discovered, all of a sudden, I had cancer." "Aughhhhhh" I gasped, and Richard could be seen giving his usual black-humour, don't-let-anything-show shrug, over the phone. "Yeah, the black plague of the '70's. Well, they removed a tumour, and tomorrow I'm having another operation to take out all my lymph nodes, because apparently it's all through my body. I sort of wanted to call up and tell you what was happening, and maybe say goodbye."

I sat, shaking, trying not to cry before Jeffrey Gow and the chemical engineers and everyone. "Not goodbye. I'll visit you, where are you?"

"Vancouver General. Sure, come round when I'm out of intensive care, and all the tubes are out. I've gotta make some more calls... sort of put my affairs in order. Thanks for everything. 'Bye."

Between us, unspoken, behind the ironic tone and my desperate feeling-- "Richard, there are a dozen people in the hall and my office, I can't talk to you now"-- there

I thought of all this, as I contemplated the probability that Richard would die...soon.

Why am I telling *you* this? Am I betraying his trust? I just don't know. Richard isn't his real name. He's encountered fandom only peripherally, and only one or two of you have met him. I do not intend to show him *Amor*, and trust you not to mention it... all this may preserve the privacy he values. Besides, this isn't a piece about Richard. It's about me, about what he means to me. Before October 4, Richard was a student of mine, and in some ways a friend.

((No, we are not lovers, and will not be. That potential existed, of course. I dealt with it firmly, for myself, last spring. (Richard has a very attractive smile.) There was a bad day this winter when he appeared at my door, said "I'm uncomfortable around you and won't come to see you any more," and vanished. Two weeks later, he reappeared, saying "Now about that reading class..." Richard is married, with a child. I am not looking for a lover, and much prefer friends. More important, we don't even talk about "personal" things in the sense of everyday life. What we share is some private joy in books, too precious to shatter with a sordid "affair."))

What I felt for Richard was the delight and awe of a teacher who sees the promise of brilliance beyond my reach, and says "Let me show you the first steps... then *you* can show *me* new worlds." Besides, he's good to talk to.

After October 4, his meaning to me is rather different. I called the hospital on Saturday, was told he was out of I.C. and "satisfactory." Taking this as a good omen, despite feeling ill myself, I drove to Seattle for Vonda's party. I thought about Richard... dying, maybe; and communication. I thought about a former friend, to whom I kept making myself open and vulnerable, saying "We share so much, *talk* to me, let's work out what's wrong"-- and he'd (humiliatingly) put me on probation, refuse to talk, and blame *me* for "mis-communication." I realized, in the silent rainy hours alone on I-5 (the only time these days I have to think) some Basic Truths. Pain, hurt feelings, mis-communication, false pride, the world's opinion-- none of that matters. What matters is the cold fact of death: and the warmth of human friendship. We fight death with love, with communication, with caring. We accept its reality, and learn joy. (My friend refused to listen...)

I cried for Richard, for myself... and resolved again to live more fully. Then the following Thursday I called Bill Gibson and said "I need moral support. We're going to the hospital to see Richard." Bill dislikes hospitals, especially after Deb's difficult labour with their son. I spent most of my childhood visiting a chronically-ill father and grandfather, and cannot *bear* hospitals. But I picked a rose from my garden, and collected some nice light sf books and a copy of Dennis Lee's new book of children's poems, *Garbage Delight*. (I'd had it inscribed that day, by visiting friend Dennis, "To Richard, with much garbage.") We set off to Cheer the Patient Up.

Richard, one week after his second bout of major surgery, was sitting up, un-tubed. He smiled at us, not his usual twisted grin, but a smile of delight. I handed him *Garbage Delight*, saying "You can read these to Nicola, when she's old enough." (Cheer the patient up, Susan. Pretend he'll be ok.)

The smile widened. "I got the pathologist's report today. They were wrong. The lymph nodes were clean. Looks like I'll be ok."

Bill and I, clenched for the worst, nearly bounced off the ceiling. For half an hour or so, we talked... "Yeah, I have an incision, from my collarbone to my crotch. It's held together with 58 staples. How are your classes, Susan?" "Yeah, it hurts like hell," said calmly, with a smile. And "Yeah, I've been through hell. Really had to look at my life-- discovered I'm already doing what I want to do, so I'll go on doing it. How's *your* kid, Bill?" Bill and I, coming to Cheer Up, were made to feel Bubbly-Glad. Leaving, we looked at each other with awe. "Man, that guy is *tough*," said Bill. Then we floated home to adore his baby, have tea with Deb, and think about the sheer courage,

determination to live, and sheer delight in being alive we'd just witnessed.

A week later, Richard-- cold-turkeyed off 8 shots of morphine a day onto some very mild codeine tablets ("That's all I need") called to say he was at home and feeling fine. Three weeks later, he was back in classes: a little greyer, a little frailer, and smiling a new smile. Because he had to drop a class, he's now working out a spring-summer reading class with me, on fantasy: its nature, all its forms, its functions, especially as shown by comparing western with Oriental fantasy. It's an unpaid overload class, for me. I think I'll learn a *lot*.

That's why Richard was in my office today: talking about the class. Smiling when *my* doctor called to say *my* second set of stomach x-rays were clean. (I'd had a couple of scarey days there, too.) Talking about books. Talking about fantasy, as a key, perhaps, to making sense of this seemingly senseless life of ours... to understanding the imagination, that communicates, and conquers death. We sat sharing ideas, and the joy of discovering and sharing ideas.

And Richard was smiling.

And Richard is *alive*.

And Richard's courage, and his joy, and his sense of purpose and meaning: these things have sustained *me*, all these long weeks. That's his gift to me.

May you all know such joy, in the year to come.

--love, Susan

* * * * *

Thank you, everyone who wrote about *Amor* 15. My final thoughts to this point about women-in-sf-and-fnndom are embodied in a 17-page (in double-spaced draft) paper for the Wiscon issue of *Janus*: \$1.00 from Janice Bogstad and Jeanne Gomoll, c/o SF³, Box 1624, Madison, WI 53701. If you're interested, write to them for a copy of the issue; I have really said all I have to say right now (and I'm tired.) : My New Year's resolution is to Catch Up on the Mail, but I know I won't make it... Next *Amor* will come out eventually, and will probably be Chatty and Frivolous... So how are YOU these days?....

Electrostencils by Victoria Wayne. Mimeo assistance by Saintly Eli Cohen, master of the balky disc-drive, gourmet cook, and calming influence. Art, p. 1 Gloria Ptacek Andersson, p. 2 Bill Rotsler, p. 3 Jim McLeod. Merry Christmas to all, and to all a good night.

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