

Degler! #5

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Too Many ABAs/Book Expos

At least that's what it says on my badge, during this farewell tour as I fade away. Gee, and I'm only 59. But I've been in publishing, one way or another, for 45 years...

I honestly can't remember when I first attended the ABA convention. I started going to science fiction conventions in DC in 1965. Some in later years were held at the Shoreham and the Sheraton-Park, which perhaps simultaneously held those ABAs.

For many years the ABA exhibits were simply cardtables in the Shoreham's underground parking lot/exhibit space. I think I can remember going through at least one of these, but on the other hand we're talking about events at least 35 years ago, so it's all very hazy.

I do remember listening to a Count Basie concert from under the stage during an SF convention, because it backed up on a door from the outside corridor. One fan got an Andre Norton book autographed by Basie—was that concert part of the ABA?

Although I always thought my first ABA was in San Francisco in 1975, in the exhibit hall under Union Square Park, that might have been an ALA. It was July 4th weekend, after all. So that would make my first ABA 1976, in Chicago. I hit every ABA thereafter until 1998, then the last one in NYC, in 2002.

And this, most likely, is The End. Having burned out on news writing and having sold *Science Fiction Chronicle* in 2000, I've found that I can live without *Publishers Weekly*, without the unending deadlines, without a constant stream of publishing news. Besides, publishing as I knew it, starting in the 1960's with my monthly column in *SF Times*, then in *Degler!/SF Weekly* and later [not to mention such oddities as editorial jobs at Walter Zacharius's Lancer Books, Cahners Publishing, F&SF and Fawcett Publishing] has changed so enormously that it is a different animal entirely. Almost everyone I know/knew has gone on to other publishers, other fields, or that great exhibit booth in the sky. I'm doing my best to fade away, frankly.

But I remember...

So many ABAs, especially after they started growing enormously in the early 1980's. For instance, the blue building that's a very small part of the LA Convention Center held the entire convention in 1979. And total warm body count—exhibitors, booksellers, press—was a few thousand. Likewise, ABA outgrew a whole bunch of places including DC's new (and now old) convention center, where in 1987 disgruntled exhibitors wore "American Bookcellar Convention" buttons because they didn't like being in the lower level.

Atlanta, 1978 and 1981: I remember the happy faces in 1978, then how paranoid everyone was in 1981, because the city was going through the Wayne Williams serial child killings. All strangers were suspect that year. But both times there were wonderful senior proms with kids dressed to the nines, enormous limos, and Paul Krassner, being interviewed in a men's room...

Dallas, 1983: The empty sidewalks. You could walk for blocks without encountering anyone at all, because they all

drove, everywhere. I stayed at what was Conrad Hilton's first hotel, a dump with fauna to match the brown carpets. There was a Daughters of the Confederacy monument outside the convention center with virulent anti-Yankee sentiments on all sides.

Washington, DC, 1984: I was warned not to go out at night, and to stay away from Dupont Circle. Where my hotel was... I came down with Sciatica the last day of the convention, from lugging too much stuff in too many tote bags. Which I still have, alas.

New Orleans, 1986: The mid afternoon thunderstorms were impressive because you could have gone white water canoeing in the down spouts from the Convention Center. And the French Quarter was a block from my hotel.

Las Vegas, 1990: I watched what I thought was the quaint local custom of walking around clutching a water bottle—only to nearly pass out from dehydration on returning to my hotel. They were having a late spring heat wave, about 104 as I recall. I drank a lot of water that weekend yet rarely had to relieve myself...

New York, 1991: Everyone complained because bosses expected people to put in a full day on the exhibit floor while simultaneously attending to business at the office. And everyone realized that the best part of going away was coming back to a room where someone else made the bed and vacuumed.

Miami Beach, 1993: An ultramodern convention center, while so many of the hotels turned out to be dumps. My first room at the Shelborne was missing part of one wall, which I found out when I pulled back a heavy curtain. No wonder the air conditioning was on full blast. One woman told me the room in her hotel had bloodstains. Part of the Fountainebleu was closed and musty, but it was used for the ABA. The Workman beach party was held in a ballroom with sand on the floor, because it rained so much. And walking toward the convention center, there was Samuel R. Delany walking directly towards me. A small universe, indeed. And the wonders of South Beach and parties at night.

Over the years, I also discovered that the ABA hotel rates were sometimes higher than the regular prices, especially in Anaheim, where only by paying more could the ABA assure itself of rooms otherwise sure to be filled by Disneyland attendees. The Swiss Hotel in Chicago had incredibly low rates for their first ABA, then incredibly high ones a few years later.

The extravagant booths. Repainting the Bantam booth every evening in a new color. The Taschen booth, with one wall later strategically covered. The tiger at the Brigham Young University Press booth. The enormous sand castle, worked on every day and finished on the last hour of the last day.

The copies of the galleys and books, the signed posters, what would become collectors items for good or bad (like the 1,500 copy signed Stanley Elkin proof; Elkin himself dying suddenly just before the book was published and the publicity tour cancelled). I've still got too many posters, too many tote bags to ever use fully. Remember the

Penguin Books tote that was so successful they did one the next year, which unfortunately rubbed off orange onto everyone's clothing? Workman's preppy tote; now *there* was a publishing phenomenon. I still use my Hyperion Books tote bag (and despite what the tag says, you really *can* wash it).

All the people, now gone or moved on. Seeing Ian Ballantine as his hair slowly got whiter and thinner over the years. Frank Herbert promoting *Dune*. Piers Anthony at his own booth, not too sure what he was promoting. Susan Allison at the Berkley booth with so many tie-ins to *Santa Claus: The Movie*, which sank without a trace. Tom Doherty through the years as Tor got bigger and bigger.

All the minor people who every year became more major players. The frenetic reporters from *Publishers Weekly*, and watching as Calvin Reid's hair slowly turned white. Watching Helen Marcus taking photos for PW. Don and Elsie Wollheim at the DAW booth. Peter Stampfel with his kids in a baby carriage. Mary Elizabeth Hart's baby crawling over Lou Aronica's lap.

The famous people at ABA because they had books coming out, or just want to rub shoulders with those who did. Garrison Keillor causing a traffic jam on the show floor. Jessica Savidge before her death. Loni Anderson with a really low-cut dress. Taking pictures of William Kotzwinkle and a bear at a Warner Books signing. Ron Busch, tactlessly calling Lana Turner a Really Bad Name within earshot of a reporter. Ted Turner and the Turner Prize, so much money for so few sales. The people, organizations and publishers I can't talk about in print because they're still around (like the one with one author and the great tote bag that no one really wants to use). Four years in a row in Chicago, where "been there done that" really meant something.

All the women who wore high heels because they wanted to look good. Everyone else who wore comfortable shoes because they were smart.

Hanging out at the Tor booth, until St. Martin's Press discovered they could fund their sales force for a year for what exhibiting cost (but they're back, now). All the SF/fantasy in general, until there was less and less of it. Will graphic novels fade away, too?

All the publishers and important people wearing jeans and T-shirts during set-up (I've got great shots of Rena Wolner and Tom Dunne in jeans, to name two) then so elegantly dressed for the show.

The heartbreak of LA in 1979, when the DC-10 full of Playboy Press, Hammond Books, and Children's Press personnel [including my prep school English teacher, Frank Gemme, and his wife] crashed on take-off from O'Hare. The empty booths in LA, silent and deserted.

Perhaps most of all, in those days before so many companies and imprints were owned by so few—and the bottom line was all—extravagant parties and events. A preview of *The Goonies* before they'd put in the special effects and pirate ship at the end. A screening in LA of *Alien* before anyone had heard of the infamous chest burster scene. Seeing several *Star Wars* films, courtesy Judy Lynn del Rey, whose life was cut way too short. I've got a Rock Bottom Reminders limited edition T-shirt, from their first concert, signed by everyone. The party at Hugh Hefner's mansion in Los Angeles, with its peacocks, drip fed redwoods, fabulous women and a mansion ripped from Olde England. The paddle wheel steamer that hosted the DAW Books party in New Orleans. Perhaps best of all, the wonderful party at the DC mansion of the Italian

Ambassador to the USA for *The Name of the Rose*.

Farewell, ABA/BEA attendees. It's been fun.

Where Sprint™ Comes From

I've had Sprint since the end of the 1960's, when Ma Bell was the only long distance company (remember those hilarious Lily Tomlin sketches of the infuriating AT&T operator?). It seems that the Southern Pacific Railroad set up a microwave relay system to keep track of where all their freight-cars were, and discovered that they were using only a fraction of the system's capacity. So they thought up a name based on the initials SPR, and started selling it as a much cheaper alternative to AT&T. Admittedly, you had to call a central (800) number, use a tone generator to punch in your account number and then the area code and phone number.

And initially, Sprint only served major cities in Southern and central California. Gradually, other cities in Calif. and the Southwest were added, then more cities, then suburbs, then Canada, etc. I have an area code directory from Summer, 1983, by which time the company was owned by GTE, in which you could look up the area codes served in specific states. Even then, Montana, North and South Dakota, Vermont and Maine were not served, and only Portland, Seattle, Boise, and Casper and Cheyenne, Wyoming in the Pacific Northwest. But it was still less than half as much as AT&T.

Now, whenever I call someone in customer service at Sprint, I get to relate to them where their company comes from—which almost no one apparently knows. I wonder how much other corporate history has been forgotten.

June Pro/Fan Birthdays

Adrienne Fein, 6/1/47; Mike Meara, 6/1/48; Allen Spencer Willey, 6/1/54; Lester del Rey, 6/2/15; Robert A. Madle, 6/2/20; Leigh Edmonds, 6/2/48; Marion Zimmer Bradley, 6/3/30; John Norman, 6/3/31; Steve Schultheis, 6/4/30; Wendy Pini, 6/4/51; Noreen Shaw, 6/6/30; Ron Salomon, 6/6/48; Kit Reed, 6/7/42; Jon White, 6/7/46; John W. Campbell, Jr., 6/8/10; Robert F. Young, 6/8/15; Kate Wilhelm, 6/8/29; Roger Sims, 6/8/30; Elizabeth Lynn, 6/8/46; Leo R. Summers, Keith Laumer, 6/9/25; Lin Carter, 6/9/30; Joe Haldeman, 6/9/43; Drew Sanders, 6/9/49; Jim Glass, 6/9/51; Keith Berdak, 6/9/55; Ed Naha, 6/10/50; Sylvia Stevens, 6/11/52; Galen Tripp, 6/11/59; Henry Slesar, 6/12/27; Alan Hershey, 6/13/17; Doreen Webbert, 6/13/34; Rebecca Henderson, 6/13/44; Stephen Tall (Compton Crook), 6/14/08; J.F. Bone, 6/15/16; Chandra Sargent, 6/15/53; Murray Leinster (Will F. Jenkins), 6/16/1896; Ted Dikty, 6/16/20; Ted Johnstone, 6/16/39; David Stever, 6/16; Wally Wood, 6/17/27; Sandy Cohen, 6/17/48; Phyllis Weinberg, 6/17/53; Dick Spelman, 6/18/31; Robert Moore Williams, 6/19/07; Julius Schwartz, 6/19/15; William Tuning, 6/21/35; Sally Syrjala, 6/21/48; Mike Morman, 6/21/50; H. Rider Haggard, 6/22/1856; Octavia E. Butler, 6/22/47; John-Henri Holmberg, Lillian Stewart Carl, 6/22/49; Fred Hoyle, 6/24/15; Charles N. Brown, 6/24/37; Stephen Silverberg, 6/24/41; Earl Evers, 6/24/42; Susan Ellison, 6/24; Hal Shapiro, 6/26/30; Charles Lee Jackson II, 6/26/50; James P. Hogan, 6/27/41; Tim Gatewood, 6/27/59; Joe Schaumburger, 6/28/30; Peggy Rae Sapienza, 6/28/44; Jon M. Gustafson, 6/28/45; Richard Harter, 6/29/35; David Mattingly, 6/29/56; Michael Whelan, 6/29/50; Sam Moskowitz, 6/30/20. Unless stated otherwise, all birthdays are in the 20th century.

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