

# CLAYTON KENT MOOMAW

1940-1958

AT 10:00, the morning of October 13, 1958, Kent Moomaw left his home to register at the local Selective Service office. He did not return home. When he did not show up that night, his parents reported him missing.

The next day, his body was found in a park, throat and wrists slashed, and under the body a razor blade.

Those are the brute facts. They appeared on radio, television, and in the newspapers in the Cincinnati area. I got them from Don Ford in a hurried long-distance phone call after receiving a card from Ron Ellick in which he said, "Stan Skirvin has written me, enclosing a newspaper clipping as proof, that a Clayton Kent Moomaw was found dead. If this is Kent Moomaw the fan, I am very unhappy about several things I had said to him in the Cult ... such as get out of the rut you're in, and so forth."

Kent's death--and it was the Kent Moomaw we know in fandom--is presumed suicide. It is still difficult for me to believe this, although there are indications pointing towards it in recent correspondence of his.

The Kent Moomaw I knew was a bit shy in person--no one really noticed him at the first Midwestcon he attended two years ago, and he stayed in the background of last year's--but once he felt he knew you, he could be drawn out, and I found him a very pleasant person to know and talk to. In print, Kent was bolder, often taking definite and sometimes unpopular stands on controversial matters. His letters and articles were both notable for the amount of thought he put into them. He did not hint at the ideas he was expressing; he put them down in well- and completely-thought out form. A letter from him (often many pages in length) was a pleasure to read, and often worth printing. (I succumbed once to editing two of his letters into a column which I printed.)

In print, Kent was one of the most mature of the younger crop of fans, one of the most level-headed and outspokenly sensible of that generation which may some day be known as eighthfandom. I personally looked to him to actively spearhead a resurgence of general fanac with the revival of ABERRATION, his own fanzine, the fourth issue of which he had been working on. Kent was enthusiastic about fandom and his plans for Abby. He hoped to make it a monthly, and he had enough material on hand to be able to do so. Only the lack of a regular income kept him from his goal. (His letters almost always carried the latest news on the job situation, and his hopes for early employment once he reached eighteen.)

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Kent had published three issues of ABERRATION, and in those three issues built it into one of the better fanzines currently appearing. He was writing a column for Greg Benford's VOID, and writing letters voluminously to many other fans and zines. Recently, he resigned from SAPS because he wanted to channel more fanactivity into general fanac.

If the picture I've built up here of Kent (a pretty subjective one, I realize) paints him as a sensitive but enthusiastic youth, of above average intelligence, then I have successfully communicated my own picture of him.

Why, then, suicide? I don't know. I feel I may have an understanding, but yet how can I--we--know? Was it a spur-of-the-moment thing, done in a moment of despondency? I can't honestly picture it any other way. Kent had no job, and no immediate plans for college. He had spoken wistfully about those fortunate enough to have even enough possessions to sell for money when things got tight. He was an introvert, far from Popular tastes, and sensitive about his differences. From what he has said about the Army, I know he did not like it, or the idea of being in it. The thought of draft can be frightening to someone of Kent's state of mind. He had just turned eighteen, and had to register for the draft. I don't know what the quota situation is in Cincinnati, but it seems likely that with no deferments, he found himself classified 1-A and put on the active list. This would help to explain the situation, but it no longer really matters. Whatever the reason, Kent must have suddenly found his future, the immediate one at least, unbearable.

I knew Kent. I liked him and I considered him a close friend. I can picture the way he might have felt, and even as I sit here typing this, I am shocked. Shocked that someone I knew, and felt close to, especially someone as young and as promising as Kent, should find it necessary to take his own life. Shocked too, because I have lost a friend.

-Ted E. White

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