



## A POST-PUBLICATION NOTE:

There are names from our lifetimes I'm certain people will remember when *homo sapiens* attains the farthest stars. Einstein is one, of course. Yuri Gagarin. Neil Armstrong.

Armstrong, in the words of Tom Poston, was one of those quiet guys made of carbon steel who with little thought for themselves accomplish wonders thought beyond human capability. In short, they do their thing, they do it well, and they move the race forward. Armstrong was a frustrating figure in that he was so aggressively and insistently private. I wanted to see him in person more than any other celebrity, and never got the chance. I'm told he had a good sense of humor, as shown by his tribute to James Doohan and some of the corny jokes he'd crack about the Moon. When nobody laughed he'd say, "I guess you had to have been there."

The triteness goes "If we can land a man on the Moon, we should be able to [whatever]!" That was the point. Moon landings were our culture's cathedrals, our symbolic celebrations of the fundamentals of our civilization. For the architects of Rheims and Notre Dame, that fundament was faith. For the architects of Apollo, it was engineering. By applying its principles –knowing how things work, experimenting, learning, remembering, having nerve, exerting skill – we are capable of wonders. In the words of another great soul that left us this summer, *we are the Idea Beasts*. There is nothing beyond us. There is nothing we cannot do.

After all, we walked on the Moon.

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# Challenger no. 35

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# GUTLESS WONDER

*Guy Lillian*

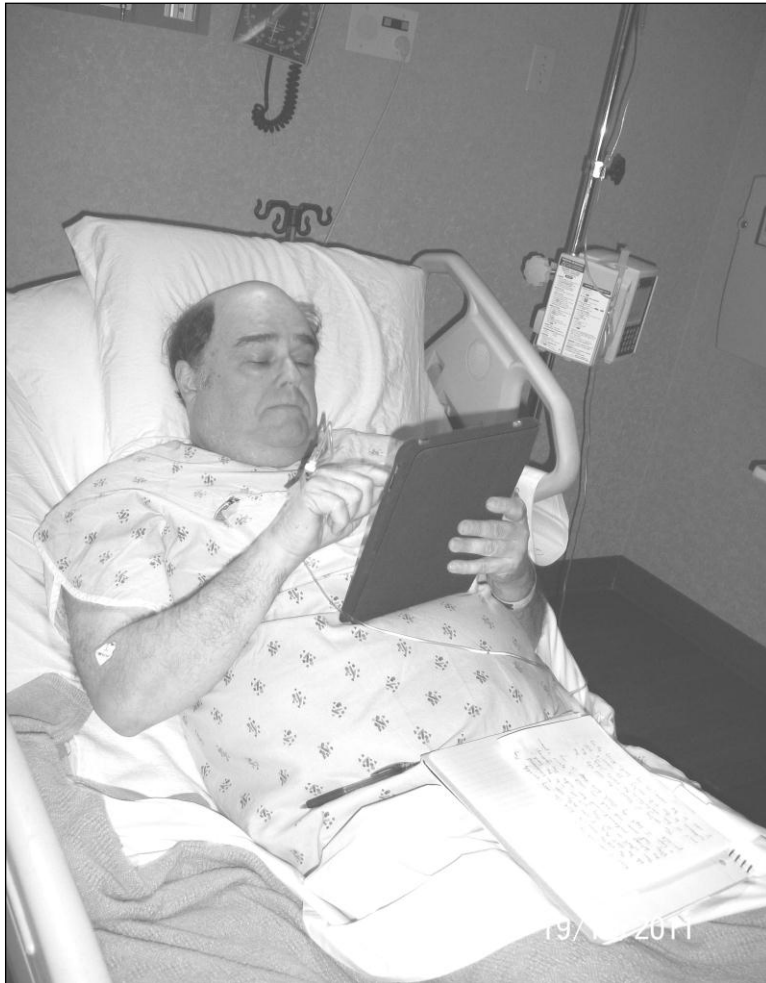
I was in a long line at Sam's Superstore, Rosy's Christmas gift in the basket, feeling annoyed at the poky cashier. I was trying to buy Rosy an iPod dock with speakers, concerned that they didn't have the Samsung depicted in the photo she'd sent me, only a Sony. As I watched the Sam's cashier dither and our line shuffle and moo, I gave *la belle* a call. She too was out shopping, looking forward to our traditional Christmas jaunt to Florida. I asked if *brand* was important to her. She said no. I leaned on the basket handle and

watched the cashier do nothing. The snack bar benches beyond her looked inviting.

It had been a rough few days. One lunchtime I'd eaten a Sonic's greaseburger and had paid for it in more than money. I'll avoid graphic detail and simply say that I handled "things" with Imodium. I couldn't wait to get out of that line. I felt blah. *Really* blah.

In fact, I felt *weird*. The world began to change. My head felt light. My hands and feet went totally numb. And the strangest association came over me – my 2009 *tornado*. Back then I found myself and my Mini Cooper in the middle of a swirling white witlessness as the whirlwind whipped past. No car in Sam's, of course, *but the white whirlwind was back*.

I stumbled to the register, blathered something about my cart and lurched towards the snack bar. A man appeared. His face was vague. "Sir, do you need –?" My butt banged down hard on the bench. I muttered something.



(\*)

My *legs* were on the bench. I was looking up past a circle of faces at the metal struts of Sam's ceiling. I remember that the paint job seemed perfect.

I'd been unconscious for 45 seconds.

EMTs came out of nowhere. After they established that my heart was OK and Rosy had shown up (I'd asked them to hide my unpurchased present from her), I acceded to caution and the medics' advice. To the horse-pistol!, I told them. I waved to the curious as the gurney bounced me out, and spent the drive admiring my supine reflection on the ambulance's metal roof.

Looking straight upward was disconcerting. It wasn't until we were inside the hospital and I was being shifted onto an ER bed that I could see around me. The Christmas stockings on the Emergency Room admit desk were a relief.

I was also relieved by what I heard. As Rosy sat nearby, a doctor

dealt with a lady in the next cubicle. Behind her curtain he told her that she had the bug that was “going around,” and that she should go home and relax the day away. “That’s me,” I nodded to *la belle*. Then a female ER physician came in, having read my blood results. She was very beautiful and very solemn. She asked me what had happened. When I reached the description “wine-colored,” she nodded, knelt and took my hand. Mr. Lillian, she said, they were admitting me (!), giving me a transfusion (!!), and be assured, she said, I would be *repaired* (???). “Mr. Lillian,” she said, “you are *profoundly anemic*.”

I was profoundly gobsmacked. It was December 18. On the morning of the 23<sup>rd</sup> Rosy and I planned on heading south for our usual Florida Christmas. I’d worked it out with my supervisor and all was set. This *couldn’t* happen *now*. Furthermore, except for a few slides through Emergency Rooms after car wrecks and suchlike, I’d only *worked* in hospitals (see articles elsewhere) for all but one night of my 62 1/2 years. That one day I’d sneezed wrong and popped an eardrum. I spent the evening enduring my roommate’s Spanish language TV and went home the next day. That was it. I never *got* sick. Still, there I lay. And upstairs I went.

They parked me in a private (!) room, which, I was delighted to learn, would cost us nigh-onto diddly-squat. (I’m on Rosy’s health insurance from her teaching job at LSU-S and it is *prime*.) They then scared me to death by telling me the procedures I’d be undergoing in the next two days: endoscopies of my upper and lower G.I. tracts. Vacuum cleaner hoses reaming me top and bottom? Pain beyond measure! Help! But they assured me that I’d be nicely doped for the procedures and hey, fool ... “profound anemia”? As in “life-threatening”? *Take it!*

In the meantime, have some blood. A young man hooked me to an IV tower, which beeped and squeaked. From it he fed me two units of whole O negative. It felt strange that someone else’s tissue was becoming part of my being.

Super-early the next morning they wrapped me up like Lionel Barrymore in *It’s a Wonderful Life* and wheeled me off. The hospital, Willis-Knighton, is the best in the area, and I was wowed by the technology the pretty nurses showed me ... although the “bite-mask” with the hole in the center struck me as suggestively B&D. In came the gastroenterologist, a sharp, cocky little guy with a moonwalker’s name and a tapdancer’s attitude. I liked him. Then a nurse stuck a needle into my IV and asked “Does this burn?” “No,” said I, “but I can *smell* it.” “People say that! How about *this* one?” “Maybe a lit- “

((\*))

What was this black rectangle looming before me? A mini-monolith? Was this *A Space Odyssey*? I stretched forth my hand, expecting to be morphed into a glowing foetus. Oh! It was my *TV*. I was back in my room.

They didn’t tell me much about the results of the upper G.I. – just that I had reflux, which would not have caused my faint or my anemia. They handed me a gallon jug of what looked like ditto fluid and told me to down it all before midnight. **Golyghtly**, it was (mis)named, and it was supposed to clear the path for tomorrow’s *fun* endoscope. It, uhh, worked.

The next morning, back I went to the same place, same doctor, same nurses, same exchange.

“You may feel a burning.” “Not at all.” “How about now?” “N-“

((\*))

That time I recall a flash of sitting in my wheelie, covered in blankets, before retreating again into unconsciousness. **Ver-Sed**, they call that juice, and it’s good stuff. No residual pain, either: the ‘scopes could have happened to someone else.

Once the little G.I. doctor came in and talked to me, I relaxed. My colon was fine. He’d have me do another test after the holidays, a *capsule endoscopy*, where I’d swallow a tiny pellet which would send a signal to a monitor – thus telling them the source of the blood loss. In the meantime, he said, enjoy Florida, and waving happily to the staff, out I went.

I felt well enough to finish my Christmas shopping – Rosy’s iPhone dock, and at a swank-o jewelry store, her big gift: a Mont Blanc pen with a rose gold cap. For dinner that night we had pizza,

pineapple and bacon, a new favorite. We packed. The next morning, we would load the car and be on our way to Florida.

*Sure* we would.

That Friday morning, December 23, I let Rosy sleep in. Time enough to rouse her and load the car after *one last check* of the old gutty-wuts. I went to the bathroom.

I never want to be frightened like that again.

I roused Rosy with my screeches and back we went to the ER. The first thing they did was slip me a Valium. I needed it. I was seriously freaking out.

To give me credit, I was more upset over the prospect of a ruined Christmas trip than with the disaster in our commode. Still, the explanation I conveyed to the Emergency Room was delivered with a bit of vindictiveness. *Dammit, I'd thought this was over.*

This time they gave me the room next door to the first one – and this time our cocky gastroenterologist met me there. He seemed a little embarrassed. Where was that blood coming from? “I’ve *been* up there,” he said, speaking rather unfortunately of my colon, “and there was *nothing*.” Forget the capsule, he said; we’ll do another test – with *radioactivity*.

Down I was trundled to Nuclear Medicine. Cheery Nurse Allison wore Santa Claus earrings. She took some Guy-gore, injected it with an isotope and conveyed the concoction back to my veins. She joked about turning me into Spider-man. A great flat machine went clackety-clack over my recumbent bod. I was invited to scan a monitor at bedside to see what it found.

Rosy’s stepfather Harold knew Joseph Heller during World War II. (Harold’s sister dated him.) The golden images on that green screen brought lines from *Catch-22* to mind.

*Man is matter.* “That’s your heart. That’s your liver.” *Drop him out of a window and he’ll fall.* “There’s your stomach ... your large intestine ...” *Set him on fire and he’ll burn.* “And your small intestine ...” *Bury him and he’ll rot, like other kinds of garbage.* “And ... wait ... look there ... That spreading glow, on the right?” *The spirit gone, man is garbage.* “We found it!” *Ripeness is all.*

They sent me two surgeons with confident smiles. They seemed *big*. (One turned out to be all of 5’4”; I guess you *want* your surgeon to be big.) I don’t remember much of what they said, just that I wasn’t scared. My body, I figured, is no longer mine. Into thy hands, I mentally told the physicians, I commend my corpus. Into Thy hands, I told the God I wasn’t certain was there, I commend everything else.

That night I sent my brother a “just-in-case” e-mail and wrote some “just-in-case” requests for Rosy. Just in case, I said, visit Stonehenge for me, and in Paris, tell the *Mona Lisa* it all worked out. (I was talking about her.) That about exhausted my Bucket List.

Before boarding my gurney the next morning, I insisted on shaving. Waiting for the anesthesiologist, I allowed myself a few memories. I remembered my first wife running down the concourse to me at Moussaint International in New Orleans, shooing old folks out of the way. She deserved my smile. I thought of Rosy. I remembered finding her at the Nolacon II party in 1986 and the look that passed between us. I remembered the 2000 Chicon, when I’d proposed, and our flights to Australia, when she’d held me together, and how moments ago she’d been there when I left my hospital room, and how she promised she’d be there when I returned. I didn’t waste an instant on old feuds or angers or humiliations or self-doubts, and I’m rather proud of that now. Without giving it a thought, I knew what mattered. *La belle, la belle, toujours, la b-*

(( (((\*)) )) )

T’was the night before Christmas. I remember wondering, in my stupefaction, if I’d yet gone under the knife. A touch on my belly bandage told me I had. Rosy says I spoke normally after coming to, and that she had to tell me to punch the button for my pain meds. I don’t remember that – which I suppose was the point. I do remember watching my Christmas movie – *Ben-Hur*. Jesus was in it. And a lot of horses. My nephews called. Rosy hung a wreath on my closet door. I kept expecting my surgeons to barge in dressed as Santa Claus. Instead, they wore hospital greens, but they did provide a gift of knowledge – like, what the matter was.



The reason my Joel Grey-clone of a gastroenterologist hadn't spotted my bleeding was that the site fell up inside my small intestine, above the reach of his colonoscope. The source of the wound was a **diverticulum**, which I understood to be an age-related sag between the segments of my gut. Everybody my age has them, but not everyone has the thrill and honor of having one *seep*. I'd been bleeding internally for some time. Fainting had been the indication that I was on a fast track to rupture and a far worse disease, peritonitis. Peritonitis can kill. No one would give me a time frame, but I gathered it was a matter of days. What if the critical moment had come on the road to Florida? I tried to count my blessings.

What they'd done was excise two feet or so of my intestines. My coecum, my appendix, my ileum, out they went. I later read the pathologist's report. My appendix was normal – still nice to be rid of it – and they'd found no cancer. *Mildly* good news, that. But some of the tissue they'd cleft from my bod was *necrotic*. That means *dead*. Maybe I ended up a little more gutless than I'd been before, but obviously, I was better off that way.

I entered recuperation riding a clothes dryer in the company of a hundred tin cans – in other words, in a cramped and noisy hospital bed, unable to sleep except on my back. Soon I was rid of the Foley – ladies, you don't want to know – and fighting congenital high blood pressure for the right to go home. I hated the requisite strolls about the floor, dragging my faithful robot companion – the IV bag and tower. My stomach staples pinched.

Alan White's brilliant cover to this issue notwithstanding, my nurses were magnificent. Theirs must be the noblest profession. Certainly it requires the most hardened stomachs. *La belle* is a teacher, not a nurse, but she too was simply heroic. She stayed with me almost the entire time, sleeping on a couch, listening to me re-learn digestion, seeing and hearing and smelling things no woman should ever see or hear or smell her husband doing. Our Christmas packages sat in a corner, awaiting return of my wits and spirit. *Her* wit and spirit never left.

There came the day when they disconnected my IV drip, and on New Year's Eve, I was home. Goodbye, 2011, and fare thee effing well. What a beast of a year.

Over the next 3½ weeks my belly healed enough that I could drive – and return to work. They changed my job to a less taxing one: representing schizophrenics at legal commitment hearings. Not as interesting but indeed, easier to sit through. Fannishly, I quit my executive post with Chicon 7 but kept the editing job on the last progress report and the souvenir book for DeepSouthCon 50. Rosy retained the editorship of the worldcon program book.

I'm recovering, and my surgeon said that I'm doing so in a nominal way. Not fast enough for me, but he's satisfied, and that has to suffice. "Your body is learning," he quipped, "but it's not a *speed reader*." After he snipped out the staples (*ouchouchouch*), he told me to expect to feel punk for months. (My scar no longer looks like a zipper. Now it looks like a sloppy map of the Mississippi River.)

Months have passed. Life is different. I tire easily. Though we made it to DeepSouthCon 50 – a magnificent experience – we had to pass on Mardi Gras; no way could I wander the French Quarter without a convenient commode at, uhh, hand. If I have any real complaint about my post-op treatment, it's that nobody took the time to tell me what I could or should not nosh. I can't *eat*. Milk products trumpet through me like the Jonestown Flood. As any sort of spice burns me like acid, so classic New Orleans cuisine is deadly. I can't have more than a sip or two of carbonated soft drinks. Daily I mourn Coca-Cola.

Rosy actually doesn't mind the change in my eating habits; the operation took 30 pounds off the beached whale depicted earlier, and she likes that. *I* think I look gaunt and old. I've never looked my age before, but I do now, and that bugs me.

But I know what's *really* bothering me. It's Old Man Mortality. I've experienced it. *I feel it*. Part of my body *died*, and almost hauled the rest – and that inexpressible spirit I call *me* – along. And *I think I know what death is like*. I think it's just like that timeless, soundless, dreamless blackness that came over me when the Ver-Sed hit – or the even emptier oblivion that came when they applied the *serious* stuff on Christmas Eve. Death is an endless blank.

Facing the operation, the prospect of death didn't bother me, but, I admit, it bothers me now. It's not that I find that I don't believe in an afterlife. I doubt I ever have. It's just that I *do* believe in the

worth of living, and – excuse me while I seek a cogent phrase – I don't think I've lived up to life. I've seen how short my time might be. How can I do right by what's left?

Well, for one thing I can try to be worthy of the person who's chosen to be my partner. I still find it all but unbelievable that anyone – let alone the most beautiful woman I've ever known – would stick with me through such a nightmare. But Rosy did. In the weeks after, she broke her arm – a stool collapsed beneath her – and she also suffered the misery of healing. I hope I was as supportive of her as she has been for me. She's been working steadily on the Chicon 7 program book – she's the editor – while I've been finishing up this *Challenger*, and her confidence, competence, conscientiousness and cool have put me to shame. I couldn't be more proud of her.

So – hampered as we've been, we keep on keepin' on. Coming up for us, Worldcon, and in October, Archon 36, at which I'm Fan Guest of Honor (thank you Rich & Michelle!). Ripeness, etc.

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A medically-themed issue of any fanzine is going to feature a lot of war stories – everybody likes to talk about their operations. John Purcell went through a trauma a lot like mine, as did Greg Benford. Rich Lynch and Alan White trooped through other travails, as did Brit Chris Murphy. We've got medical horror stories of different sorts from Mike Resnick and Steven Silver. But not everything dealing with medicine is a nightmare: our Aussie pal Bill Wright contributes a sercon piece about James White's Hospital Station series – that original pb cover really ignited my sensawunda back in the day – and my tribute to a fannish doctor friend is heartfelt. Missing, thanks to my illness and lethargy are tales of my first, grisly hospital job and a piece on abortion that I'm sure you can live without. Interwoven into the mix are non-medical articles and features by Martin Morse Wooster, Fred Lerner, Alan Stewart and my beloved *la belle* – just to lighten the load. *Challenger* #35 is GHLIII Press Publication #1128, July 2012. We hope you stay healthy and enjoy.

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I always loved this irreverent – but prideful – *B.C.* As we note and regret the passage of a great space and social pioneer, I hope we remember the humor it must have taken to handle the good-natured ribbing – ha, I made a funny -- Dr. Sally Ride endured when she became the first American woman in space. She got a lot of teasing – but that was entirely due to the incandescent pride this country had in her.

And she lived up to it, a triumphant member of my generation who broke through the glass ceiling with grace, genius, good humor, and purpose. She used her historic status not to proselytize but to inspire, a class act all the way. *Ride, Sally Ride.*



# Hearts and Hospitals:

## A Reflection, Three Years On

*Laura Haywood-Cory*

This weekend marks the third anniversary of my heart attack. I like to try to do something every year to mark the occasion.

That first anniversary, in 2010, was the most emotional. From listening to other women's experiences, I knew to expect something of an emotional roller coaster. My mother-in-law was in the final stages of the cancer that took her life, so my husband was down in Florida spending as much time as possible with her.

I didn't want to be alone, so I invited a very small group of friends to be with me to help me celebrate, and they stayed with me as I went from being thrilled to be alive one minute, to crying the next. I also got myself a manicure, under the rationale that I'd never survived a heart attack before, and I'd never had a manicure before, either.

The second anniversary, in 2011, was more upbeat and was dinner out at my favorite restaurant with Paul and a few friends.

This year, the third anniversary, the word seems to be "introspective." I woke up around 4am and my brain was going, thinking in particular about a recent news item from the UK, where a woman had shown up in the A&E (their equivalent to the ER), had three abnormal EKGs, but was discharged anyway, and died a few hours later.

I wish I could say that her story is unusual, but it's not. Go to any place – online or real-world – where female heart disease survivors hang out, and you'll hear endless horror stories about women with classic heart attack symptoms (pain in the center of the chest, nausea, shortness of breath, cold sweats), who are sent home from the doctor, told they're having acid reflux, or a panic attack, or that they need to get their gall bladder checked, because they're too young and too female, and it couldn't possibly be their heart. Except when it is. The persistent ones eventually get treated. Some die.

Even without the stark reminder from across the pond, each year around this time, I tend to re-live my week in the hospital. Friday was the actual anniversary of my heart attack. Yesterday was the anniversary of my first catheterization, where they'd discovered why a young woman with no cardiac risk factors had had a heart attack – one of my coronary arteries had dissected (e.g., torn), and it had to be repaired ASAP. In my case, that means I now have six stents.

Yesterday was also the anniversary of one of those incidents that wasn't funny at the time, but it is now.

You see, that first night in the hospital, I had gotten zero sleep. A doctor had come to my room around 8pm and given my husband and me the news that despite the long odds, I had indeed had a heart attack. He told us that I was scheduled for a cardiac catheterization the next day, to look around and see



what had happened, and that someone would be by with consent forms for us to sign. He left while I melted into a pool of “Why me?” and tears.

I was in a semi-private room, so my husband couldn’t stay with me that night (even though I never did get a roommate). So I had several hours alone to stare at the ceiling and grapple with the new reality of me and a heart attack.

To add to *that* major distraction, I had a bedsore-preventing bed that made a loud gronking, grinding RRRRRRR noise every few minutes as the bed readjusted itself.

Then there was the blood pressure cuff that went off automatically every hour and damn near squeezed my arm in two. Around 2am, I got so frustrated that I ripped it off and wrapped it around the metal bedframe. What kind of blood pressure does an ancient institutional metal bedframe have, you might ask. I don’t know. I can’t remember if anyone ever noticed the strange readings. Once I was moved to the cardiac ICU, the staff was more observant.

On top of the gronking, shifting bed, the blood pressure cuff, and my freaking out, there were the usual regular vital sign checks, and blood draws every few hours.

Suffice to say, shut-eye that first night was *not* happening.

Around 6am, a perky nurse bustled into my room and handed me a disposable razor and what under other circumstances would have been an adorably cute, tiny can of shaving cream.

Remember, I’d had no sleep; thus, I wasn’t quite sure what I was supposed to do with these objects. I blinked owlishly at the nurse, until she told me to go into the bathroom and shave myself.

The light finally dawned – the catheterization would be going in through the femoral artery and the medical team needed a clear field of view, as it were. I asked her how much I was supposed to shave – a bikini trim, a full Brazilian, what. She indicated something between a bikini trim and a landing strip.

Instructions delivered, she left the room and abandoned me to, on no sleep, mind, work out the logistics of getting myself, my attached heart monitor, and my tower of IVs and blinking, beeping things wedged into the bathroom.

Did I mention that they’d told me I couldn’t shower, either? I had to accomplish this miracle of grooming at the sink.

There I was, before sunrise on March 31<sup>st</sup>, 2009, in my Batman jammies and a hospital gown, heart monitor draped around my neck, attached to a metal tower of IVs and electronics, propping one foot on the toilet, balancing with one hand while running warm water in the sink, applying a washcloth, trying to put on shaving cream, and then shaving, and rinsing, all with the hand that didn’t have the oximeter attached to it, while having been awake for more than 24 hours straight...

I’ll say this: the logistics of the operation certainly distracted me from stewing about the heart attack.

Several hours later, I was finally wheeled into the cath lab. I kept being bumped for more emergent cases, but eventually things calmed down enough that they started my valium-morphine drip and took me down to the lab.

Where a big, burly nurse approached me, industrial-grade electric razor in hand. I weakly protested that I’d already shaved. She peeked under the sheet, made a dissatisfied noise, and went at me with the electric razor. I don’t know what they were expecting, a perfect shamrock?

At any other time, I might’ve bristled at having the competence of my body-care regimen called into question... but I mentioned the morphine and valium, yes?

Moral of the story: if you’re in the hospital and someone wants you to shave, have them do it for you, because they probably will anyway.



# The novels of James White (1928– 1999, Ireland)

*Bill Wright*

David Langford, peerless SF critic and unofficial guest of honor at Aussiecon Three (57<sup>th</sup> Worldcon in Melbourne, Australia, in 1999) includes the late James White among the greatest 20<sup>th</sup> century science fiction authors. He says of White's galactic hospital series, "*Sector General is one of the few places in SF that one would really, really like to exist.*"

White wrote twelve Sector General novels included in the annotated bibliography below. The first eight were anthologised in 2001-03 by Orbit Books in three omnibus volumes titled, respectively, *Beginning Operations* (2001), *Alien Emergencies* (2002) and *General Practice* (2003). [Please note that, in 2006, Orbit's parent company Little Brown was sold by Time Warner to the French publishing group Hachette Livre].

Three of the last four Sector General novels were anthologised by the Science Fiction Book Club in an omnibus volume titled *Tales of Sector General* (1999). To date, there would appear to be no leather bound collector's series of James White's Sector General novels in a standardised book format.

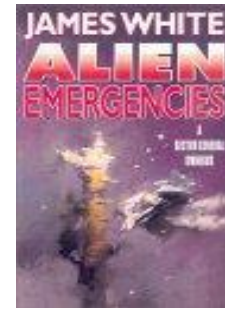
Following is an annotated bibliography. Stories anthologised by Orbit have front covers of the omnibus volumes pictured opposite. Three of James White's last four Sector General novels were released in the three years before his death on 23<sup>rd</sup> August 1999. 'Double Contact' was released posthumously.



- 1957 *The Secret Visitors* ([Amazon](#) - [Alibris](#))
- 1962 *Hospital Station* a Sector General novel in *Beginning Operations*
- 1962 *Second Ending* a novella later anthologised in *Monsters and Medics* (1977)
- 1963 *Star Surgeon* a Sector General novel in *Beginning Operations*
- 1964 *The Aliens Among Us*—includes one Sector General short story, "Countercharm"
- 1964 *Deadly Litter*
- 1964 *Escape Orbit, The*
- 1964 *Open Prison* (alternative title: *The Escape Orbit*)
- 1966 *Watch Below, The*
- 1968 *All Judgement Fled*
- 1971 *Major Operation* a Sector General novel in *Beginning Operations*
- 1971 *Tomorrow is Too Far*
- 1972 *Dark Inferno*



1974 *Dream Millenium, The*  
 1977 *Futures Past*  
 1977 *Monsters and Medics* – including “Second Ending,” the best short story ever!  
 1979 *Ambulance Ship* a Sector General novel in *Alien Emergencies*  
 1979 *Underkill*  
 1983 *Sector General* a Sector General novel in *Alien Emergencies*  
 1984 *Star Healer* a Sector General novel in *Alien Emergencies*  
 1985 *Interpreters, The*  
 1987 *Code Blue - Emergency!* a Sector General novel in *General Practice*  
 1988 *Federation World*  
 1991 *Silent Stars Go By, The*  
 1992 *Genocidal Healer, The* a Sector General novel in *General Practice*  
 1996 *Galactic Gourmet, The* a Sector General novel in *Tales of Sector General*  
 1997 *Final Diagnosis* a Sector General novel in *Tales of Sector General*  
 1998 *Mind Changer* a Sector General novel in *Tales of Sector General*  
 1998 *Double Contact* a Sector General novel not yet anthologised



Whilst I love all the Sector General novels and have read each of them several times, my favourite James White story is not part of that series at all, but the novella ‘Second Ending’ in the collection *Monsters and Medics* (Corgi Books, 1977). In the not too distant future, a plague wipes out the human race except for one hospital Intern cared for by robots whose *raison d'être* is to keep him alive, for eons if need be. Reading James White in the 1960s marked my transition via E E Smith and A E Van Vogt to literacy.

I am indebted to Dave Langford for an insight into multiple level puns inherent in White’s elegant four-letter classification system characterising intra-galactic species. At the outset this was designed to pay homage to “Doc” Smith’s human-centred vision from *Gray Lensman* and *Children of the Lens* in which true Homo Sapiens is classed AAAAAA, whereas the evil Ploorans in their horrid cryogenic metamorphosis register as “*straight Z’s to ten or twelve places.*”

Perhaps the most obscure, and funniest, of White’s classification puns concerns the unfortunate Goggleskan species from *Star Healer*, classification FOKT, who are almost unable to prevent themselves from coalescing into a mindlessly destructive gestalt.

&&



Next issue: Rosy suggests a PARTY theme, and of course, I consent. *Challenger* #36 will have as its abiding concern the magical art of *boogying down*. Of course and as usual, if you’re moved to write (or draw) about something else, feel free. Deadline? You must be joking. (Contact me.)

*Of all the people in all of fandom to write about  
barf, who would you least suspect? Right!*

# Thrilling Vomit Stories

**Rich Lynch**

It's been quite a while, more than two decades actually since it last happened, but this morning something about breakfast disagreed with me enough that much of it came back up again. There I was, in the garage heading out to retrieve the garbage can after the week-end trash pick-up and then I was doubled over looking at a big puddle of pureed banana, cereal and milk on the concrete floor.

I absolutely **hate** to vomit -- it's a phobia worse than almost anything else for me. Go ahead, confine me in some terrifying and claustrophobic dark and enclosed tunnel where I can't move forward or backward to escape, but **do not** make me so nauseous that I'll blow lunch all over the place! The last time before this that it happened was back about 1983 or so, on a business trip in California, when a combination of the flu and some awful Chinese food made me best friends with my hotel room's commode for about half an hour.

My most memorable vomit story is from my college days, of course. It happened back in the early 1970s, while I was a graduate student at Clarkson University in northern New York State, after a particularly trying day when, as I recall, I hadn't been very successful at pushing back the boundaries of science. I and a few other grad students decided to stop by the college rathskeller for a quick beer before heading on out for the evening. But it was a Friday night and the NHL playoffs were on the TV. We stayed. Pizzas soon followed, many of them, along with pitchers of beer, many of them. By the time the third period of the game rolled around, somebody behind the bar decided that beer was now a dollar a pitcher. The Rangers were winning big and everybody was in a party mood for the weekend.

You can see where this is leading. By the time the game ended I had consumed so much beer and pizza that my stomach had long since given up trying to get in touch with my brain to let it know that it was perhaps time to stop. And then... up it all came, all over the table in the middle of the place, where I was sitting. I don't remember too much after that, except that my roomies had to come for me, took me back to our apartment and dumped me under a cold shower. They told me afterwards that I'd succeeded in clearing the place out, no mean feat for the Clarkson rathskeller.

I realize this is probably Too Much Information, and I hope you're not reading this after a filling meal. But I can tell you that I've gained more common sense since then, and nothing like that is likely to happen again to me. Well, at least not for *another* two decades, anyway.





# MOZART

ON

# MORPHINE

-- memoir version, 1986 --

**GREGORY BENFORD**

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In August of 1985 I went running on the beach in Laguna at about 5 o'clock in the afternoon. It felt good as the finish to a day of hard work. The Sun was low and red and I muzzily watched the crumbling, thumping waves. I enjoyed the feel of running barefoot on the sand.

I paid no attention to the small crowd forming up ahead and so when the first shot came it took me completely by surprise. I saw the teenagers scattering and the long-haired man in his twenties poking the small silvery gun at them, yelling something I couldn't make out. I wondered if the gun was loaded with blanks because it wasn't very loud. The man started swearing at a kid near me who was moving to my right, and I was still automatically running the same way so when the second shot came I was just behind the kid and the round went *tssiiip!* by my head.

Not blanks, no. I did the next hundred meters in about ten seconds, digging into the sand and turning to look back only once. A third thin splatting sound followed me up the beach but no screams, just more swearing from the man who was backing up the gray concrete stairs and trying to keep the pack of kids from following him. I stood a hundred meters away and watched him fire one last time, not trying to hit anyone now but just to keep them at bay. He swore loudly and then turned and ran up the remaining stairs and onto the street beyond.

I ran back and asked the kids what had happened. A cacophony of conflicting stories. Then I ran back down the beach and at Main Beach saw a cop. I started to tell him what had happened and he said he had been sent down there to block this route, since the police were trying to track the man down in the streets. It was evidently a drug deal gone bust. The kids had started jazzing him around and he got mad.

Walking home, I thought about Churchill's saying, that there was nothing as exhilarating as being shot at and missed. I felt a touch of that, and remembered a similar time-compressing moment in June.

I had been visiting my parents on their 50th wedding anniversary, and with my father was on the way to the reception after that morning's church service. It was a mild sunny day in Fairhope, Alabama, and I was lazily breathing in the pine scent as my father stopped at a stop sign. He started off and from the corner of my vision I saw a sudden movement. It was a car that a nearby telephone junction box had hidden from view, coming from the right at 40 miles per hour.

I yelled, "Dad stop!" and he hit the brake and the other car smashed into our front end. Our seat belts restrained us but somehow coming forward I smacked my head into the roof of the car. Getting out, I realized dimly that if my father had not stomped down on the brake they would have come in on my side of the car and probably through the door. It was that close.



The other people were more shaken up than we were. The woman was driving without shoes, the car was borrowed, and she had broken her hand when their car went off the road and into a shallow ditch. My father took it all quite mildly and it seemed to me I could smell the pine trees even stronger now. The surge of mixed fear and elation came as I paced around, looking at the smashed cars.

In late September I was making my final plans to go to India when I developed pains in my stomach, high up. My children had the same symptoms, a standard flu that was going around, so I stayed in bed a few days and expected it to go away. I had to fly to northern California for a conference on Friday.

On Thursday I was doing pretty well, running a little fever, though the pain had moved down some. I was getting used to it and it didn't seem so bad. My plane tickets were ready and I picked them up. I went into the university and was sitting in my office at noon when the pain got a lot worse. I couldn't stand up.

It was pretty bad for half an hour. I called a doctor near the university and made an appointment for two o'clock and waited out the pain. It subsided by one o'clock and I began to think things were going to be okay, that I could still travel. But in the doctors' office I showed an elevated white count and a fever and some dehydration. When she poked my right side it hurt more. She thought it might be appendicitis and that I should go to an emergency room nearby.

I thought she was making too much of it and wanted some mild pain suppressors so I could fly the next day but on the other hand thought it might be good to check into matters. I wanted to go to the hospital in Laguna, where I knew a few doctors. She started to call an ambulance but I was pumped up by then and went out and got into my car and drove very fast into Laguna, skating fast down the canyon road. I stopped at home to tell Joan and she drove me into the emergency room.

It was the real thing of course and soon enough I was watching the fluorescent lights glide by as the anesthetist pushed me into the operating room. He said I must have a high tolerance for pain because the appendix was obviously swollen and sensitive. I asked him how quickly the drugs took effect, he said, "well...," and then I was staring at the ceiling of my hospital room and it was several hours later.

I had a good night, slept well. In the morning my doctor told me his suspicions had been right, that when the pain got bad in my office it had been my appendix bursting. By the time they opened me up the stuff had spread. I asked to see the appendix and they brought it up to me later, a red lumpy thing with white speckles all over the top of it. I asked what they were and the aide said casually, "Oh, that's gangrene. It's riddled with the stuff."

The doctor said there was a 60% chance the antibiotics would not take out the gangrene that had spread throughout my lower abdomen so of course I figured I would be in the lucky 40%. By the early hours of the next morning, Saturday, I knew I was wrong. I became more and more feverish. I had stood up and walked around in the afternoon but when the night nurse tried it with me again I couldn't get to my feet. I was throwing up vile sour stuff and the orderly was talking to me about inserting some tubes and then the tube was going in my nose and down my throat and a bottle nearby was filling with brown bile, lots of it, a steady flow.

I couldn't sleep, even with the drugs. There was talk about not giving me too many drugs for fear of suppressing my central nervous system too much, which didn't make much sense to me, but then, little did. Things began to run together. The doctor appeared around 6:30 and said the antibiotics weren't working, my white count was soaring. A man came by and reminded me to use the plastic tube with a ball in it that the nurse had given me the day before. You blew into it and kept a ball in the air and that was to exercise your general respiration. It seemed dumb to me, I could breathe fine, but I did it anyway and asked for some breakfast. I wasn't getting any, they were feeding me from the array of bottles going into my IV, and wouldn't give me more than ice chips to suck on.

There were more people around by that time and I realized blearily that this was very much like the descriptions in a short story of mine written a decade before, "White Creatures," and what these quickly moving white-smocked beings were doing was just as incomprehensible to me as it had been to the character in that story.

Time flowed. My fever was climbing a degree every two hours and Joan was patting my brow with a cool cloth and I wanted some food. I didn't see how they could expect a man to get better if they

didn't feed him. All they did was talk about stuff I couldn't follow very well, they spoke too fast, and added more bottles to the antibiotic array. They started oxygen but it didn't clear my head any. My IV closed off from vascular shock. A man kept punching my arms, trying to find a better way in and it hurt so I told him to knock it off if he couldn't do better.

Then they were tilting me back so the doctor could put a subclavial tube in close to my heart. It would monitor the flow there and provide a big easy access for the IV. Then I was wheeling beneath the soft cool fluorescents again and was in a big quiet room that was in the Intensive Care Unit. I lay for a time absolutely calm and restful and realized I was in trouble. The guy with the breathing tube and the ball was gone but the nurses made me do it anyway, which still struck me as dumb because I wasn't going to stop breathing, was I? If they would just give me some food I would get better.

But after the gusts of irritation passed I saw in a clear moment that I was enormously tired. I hadn't slept in the night and the tubes in my nose tugged at me when I moved. They had slipped a catheter into me, surprisingly painless, and I felt wired to the machines around me, no longer an independent entity but rather a collaboration. If I lay still with my hands curled on my chest I could maybe rest and if I could do that I could get through this and so I concentrated on that, on how blissful it felt after the nurse gave me another injection of morphine, how I could just forget about the world and let the world worry about me instead.

I woke in the evening and then the next morning the doctor startled me awake by saying that I was better. They had called in more exotic antibiotics and those had stopped the fever's rise, leveling it off at 105 degrees, where it held steady for a day and then slowly eased off. The room was still prickly with light but Joan came and I found her presence calming.

I listened to tapes on my Sony and every hour or so called for an injection. Within seconds it lifted me off the sheets and I spun through airy reaches, Mozart on morphine, skimming along the ceilings of rooms where well dressed people looked up at me with pleased expressions, interrupted as they dined on opulent plates of veal and cauliflower and rich pungent sauces, rooms where I would be again sometime, among people whom I knew but had no time for now, since I kept flying sedately along the softly lit yellow ceilings, above crimson couches and sparkling white tablecloths and smiles and mirth. Mozart had understood all of this and saw in this endless gavotte a way to loft and sweep and glide, going, to have ample ripe substance without weight. I was hungry but somehow here on the ceiling that did not matter.

When the doctor took the stitches out a week later he said casually, "Y'know, you were the closest call I've had in a year. Another twelve hours and you would've been gone."

In November I went to India anyway. I hadn't fully recovered but it seemed important to not let the calm acceptance of mortality I had now deflect me from life itself. My fear of death was largely gone. It wasn't any more a fabled place, but rather a dull zone beyond a gossamer-thin partition. Crossing that filmy divider would come in time but for me it no longer carried a gaudy, supercharged meaning. And for reasons I could not express a lot of things seemed less important now, little busynesses. People I knew were more vital to me and everything else seemed lesser, peripheral--including writing.

In Agra I arose at dawn to see the Taj Mahal by the rosy first glow. It shimmered above the gardens, deceptively toylike until you realized how huge the pure curved white marble thing was. The ruler who built it to hold his dead wife's body had intended to build a black Taj also, across the river which lies behind. He would lie buried there, a long arcing bridge linking the two of them. But his son, seeing how much the first Taj cost, confined his father to a red sandstone fort a mile away for the last seven years of his life. There the old man lay on a bed and watched the Taj in a mirror in his last days.

(CONTINUED ON PAGE 19)

# THE WIZARDING WORLD OF HARRY POTTER

*Martin Morse Wooster*

When I was last in Orlando in 2008 I learned that Disney was the theme park champion and Universal was firmly in second place. Disney had the best rides, the most attractive parks, and as long as you didn't do anything that would send you to the dungeons you'd have a good time.

Universal seemed to me a bunch of character attractions looking for a theme that wasn't there. You had the Terminator 3-D ride, which was authentic Cameron (and Schwarzenegger) but was also 14 years old. I couldn't imagine any kid being excited by the E.T. ride. And not being a fan of slime and glop I politely skipped the Fear Factor attraction.

But then Universal decided to up the stakes with The Wizarding World of Harry Potter and they became not only #1, but also a global cash cow. The *Financial Times* reported recently that Comcast bought the 20 percent of Universal Orlando it didn't already own for a billion dollars. Twenty percent of NBCUniversal's cash flow (i.e., the network and the movie studio) comes from people paying their \$85 to get into Universal Orlando—and most of those people are heading to see Harry Potter.

So over the President's Day weekend I decided to go to Orlando and see what Harry Potterville was like. Writers always need to explain their expertise, so I ought to establish my Harry Potter Street Cred.

- I read the novels (once).
- I saw all the movies (once).
- Thanks to the Glasgow Worldcons, I have been to two places in the movies. The Hogwarts Express is actually the Jacobite Steam Train, which runs between Fort William and Mallaig. The aqueduct the train roars over is the Glenfinnan Aqueduct, I also believe I have visited the area where the Quidditch tournament in *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire* was held, which is in a very rugged area called Kinlochleven, about 15 kilometers south of Fort William.
- I read two books *about* Harry Potter: Dave Langford's entertaining *The End of Harry Potter?* and Melissa Anelli's *Harry: A History*, which tells you more about really really obsessed Harry Potter fans than anyone would want to know, except for guys like me who like reading books about fans.
- I once donated \$15 to the University of Maryland Quidditch team and bought a t-shirt. The team had designed their own coat of arms, complete with a Latin motto that read something like "Don't wake a sleeping turtle." (The University of Maryland mascot is the terrapin.) For my money I also got an explanation of how Quidditch was played. It seemed like field hockey played with brooms except dodgeballs were thrown at you. The smallest and youngest member of the team offered to demonstrate the sport until the other members unanimously told her, "No! No demonstrations!"



So I think I was more familiar with Harry Potter than 95 percent of the people there. I also knew that all the details of the area were personally approved by J.K. Rowling, which could lead to some painful conversations. (“Jo? Jo, *baby*, how ya doin’? Are you OK with those I SERVED TIME IN AZKABAN T’s? I mean, Jo, Americans, we’re *crazy*! We *love* prison t-shirts!”)

So here I am in Hogsmeade! And even though it’s a sultry February day, it’s always December here, complete with glistening, ice-covered snow and a snowman with a carrot nose and a floppy black hat. None of the buildings in Hogsmeade is straight; everything is at a cockeyed angle.

Music is everywhere, mostly from the movies. Entertainment while waiting in line was provided by the Hogwarts Chorus, a funny act that included croaking animated frogs that had good harmony.

And Potter characters even talk to you in the men’s rooms! No, I’m not going to tell which character talks to you while you’re urinating. But one definitely does.

Everything has been *aged*. Even the tap handles at the Hog’s Head pub look like they were last cleaned in the previous century. A friend of mine, a book dealer, sold Universal several thousand books of no value (mostly old law books). The Universal staff then stripped them, scuffed them up, and turned them into premature relics strewn everywhere.

Hogsmeade of course supplies one of the goals of theme parks, which is loading up with stuff. You start off with the candy store, where you’ve got your exploding bonbons, your chocolate frogs, your salt-water taffy...

...Salt water taffy? What, you don’t remember the scene in *Order of the Phoenix* where Harry and the gang hotwire a car, bust out of Hogwarts and have a wild weekend in Atlantic City until they got caught sneaking into too many casinos?

Back to the cavalcade of stuff. You’ve got your Quidditch balls, your Hogwarts rugby shirts, your Hogwarts Express railroad caps, your Ministry of Magic baseball caps, your Mad-Eye Moody goggles, your Sirius Black picture frames...

I bought some toy rats and a Dumbledore hat. I’m too old to pretend to be a student but Dumbledore...I mean, who wouldn’t want to be Dumbledore? That guy had all the power! I’d much rather be Snape, but Snape didn’t have a hat, just a cloak.

Wands were actually sold at Ollivander’s Wand Shop, which had a long line because it was preceded by a little show in which the Wand Master told people how to select the right wand. I won’t describe the show except to say it is worth standing in line for and actually was like being in a Potter movie for a couple of minutes. The shop had 31 different kinds of character wands but I decided to get a well-made Gryffindor pillow in the house’s colors of yellow and red. The pillow has a place of honor on my couch, next to one showing another one of my favorite heroes, Snoopy.

As for food, the Three Broomsticks is an acceptable cafeteria. My fish and chips weren’t that bad. But what’s a Potter experience without butterbeer?

I knew that Rowling personally approved the butterbeer recipe and that Orlando is the only place you can drink it. It’s only available on draft, served from what looks like a mottled red wooden cask. Think of it as cream soda with a butterscotch topping. It was very tasty. Also worth trying is the pumpkin juice, which is a pumpkin soda.

The second half of the Wizarding World is Hogwarts, and just looking at it was quite enjoyable. Imagine your favorite fantasy world, and then imagine what it would be like standing there and *actually touching it*. That’s what it’s like with Hogwarts. The structure is 40-50 stories high, and is brooding, majestic, and Gothic. It really is a tremendous spectacle.

Hogwarts hosts the Harry Potter ride, in which participants are gobbled up like they’re entering the mines of Moria only to be spit out several minutes later. I wasn’t allowed to go on the ride because I’m too fat. I didn’t mind because I don’t like being on giant roller coasters. I asked three people who had been on the ride and was told that you were mostly with Harry Potter, though Hermione Granger and Ron Weasley show up once. You’re on a broomstick, running away from a dragon and playing Quidditch. After you land in Quidditch, dementors attack you. It’s five minutes of scary fun.

A few final points. I only saw two people at the Wizarding World with British accents: the Wand Master and the head of the Hogwarts Chorus. I only saw two customers in the park wearing Hogwarts outfits. Most everyone else was in Vacation T-Shirt mode.

While waiting to get into the wand shop, I did chat with a teenage girl wearing a t-shirt with the call box used by our other favorite British superhero.

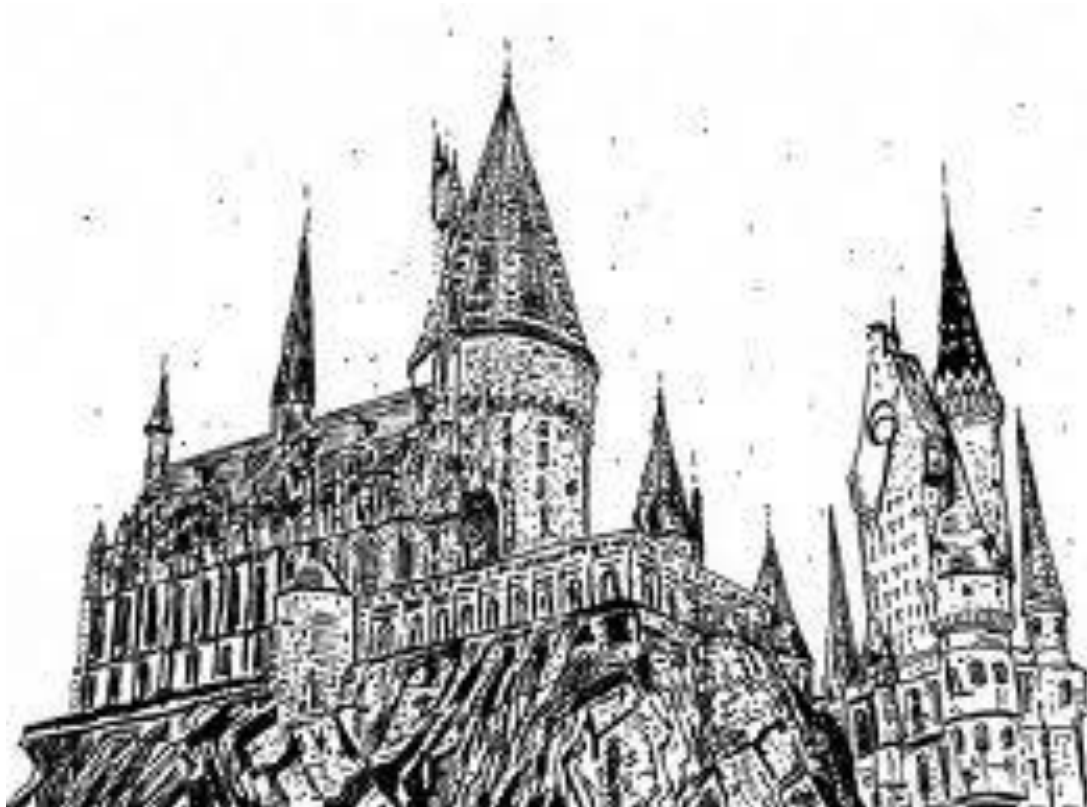
“Doctor Who?” I asked. “Aren’t you in the wrong park?”

“I can like both!” she said.

Is the Wizarding World of Harry Potter worth \$85? I think so, particularly if you make sure to see the Eighth Voyage of Sinbad nearby, a highly entertaining spectacle in which Sinbad, his sidekick, and his girl friend fight an evil sorceress and monsters with swords in a giant 25-foot stage giving ample room for swinging on ropes and running away from explosions.

I think the Harry Potter phenomenon will gradually fade, since there’s no new Potter material coming. With no new books or movies, Harry Potter is now part of the past. The novels will continue to be read and the movies seen, but I can’t imagine anyone being as excited about Potter in the future as we were five or ten years ago.

The Wizarding World of Harry Potter is the capstone of the Harry Potter experience. And when I’m down and blue, one look at my Gryffindor pillow will bring back fond memories of the great day I had in Florida.



# HOSPITAL

*Joseph Major*

Wikipedia says, “A **hospital** is a health care institution providing patient treatment by specialized staff and equipment.”

For someone who isn’t *that* unwell, I have spent far too much time this year in hospitals.

I haven’t been the sick one. It began on our anniversary. I got a call from church, where it seemed Lisa had fainted and been taken to the hospital. Grant offered to drive her car to work and home again, and I went out there to clear things up.

She was in Baptist East Hospital and I went on there. She had felt vertiginous – or dizzy, for the rest of us – and they had assumed the worst and sent her to medical care.

I spent some of the day there. For the next two days, I spent evenings with her between working and trying to maintain a normal life. Lisa had a test. Then she had another test. Then she had another test.

After two days they released her. The diagnosis was “there must be something wrong but we can’t find it.”

Then the bills started coming in for those tests. When I had had the series of tests a few years ago – the ones where I was getting up in the morning earlier than even when I go to work, and I was allegedly on vacation, and the man who took patients from the waiting room to the lab waiting room started recognizing me – the only charge was for the hospital itself.



Nowadays, hospitals “bundle”. That is, they only charge for putting a roof over your head and the like. All the tests and all the doctors send in individual bills. And there is the old rule that a doctor will walk down the hall, poke his head in and say, “Oh, there you are,” go off, and send in a bill for a consultation.

But that came later ...

In the middle of the month there came the news that Lisa’s father had a tumor on his duodenum. The procedure to remove this is called pancreaticoduodenectomy. (The spell checker exploded at that word.) For those who like having their operations described in shorter terms, it is also called a

Whipple procedure. Charmin.

Mr. Thomas was told he might not survive the procedure; it might not be worth the while; and so on. He figured it was worth a try. He drove himself to the hospital. (You understand, the time he had the stroke he also drove himself to the hospital.)

We followed and spent six very long and nerve wracking hours in the waiting room. Nowadays they keep patients informed by icons on flat-screen televisions. Having an up-to-date tracking keeps you better informed but less reassured.

The surgeon finally came in and informed us that the operation had gone well and the cancer was as best they could tell small and removed. As Dr. Norma, Lisa’s oldest sister, was on hand, there was a professional interpreter who spoke a similar dialect.

In the morning Mr. Thomas was not talking. He does not feel like conversation in the morning until he finishes his crossword puzzle.

Next weekend was Thanksgiving. We were there for the adjacent days, too. The hospital gave everyone free Thanksgiving meals, which was kind of them. Oh yes, the cafeteria was open and directions to other places were not unduly complicated and did not require numerous detours.



By Christmas, Mr. Thomas was well enough to drive to the grocery to get fried chicken for our family dinner. I have a picture of him with his daughter Esther, Esther's son, John, John's stepdaughter and her son. That's right, five generations.

In January, Tim Lane's condition was deteriorating even worse. He finally was persuaded to go to the hospital, where he learned that his massive weight gain, lack of energy, and even the sinisterly shiny skin on his lower legs all had a common cause. He had congestive heart failure.

He was out of the hospital fairly quickly, responding well to medication. He has lost sixty pounds at least.

Then, on a day in February, Grant tried to go to the bathroom and fell over. He was removed to Jewish Hospital here in town. I've written about this in more detail other places, but again, we found ourselves going to the hospital two and three times a week.

The problem wasn't getting into or through the hospital, the problem was parking. The parking garage charges a good bit on weeknights. Fortunately the streets are well lit so the muggers can see their targets coming a good distance off.

When Grant didn't need quite such intensive care they moved him to a rehabilitation facility. One we happened to know; it was where our WWI-era vet cousin Robley Rex lived the last years of his long life. It's a very nice place.

We visited him frequently, Carolyn Clowes did so too, Tim & Elizabeth did as well, and when R-Lauraine Tutihasi and Mike Weasner of *Feline Mewsings* came through town we took them there. So Grant had attention.

All these people agreed on some things. You don't get any sleep in hospitals. The joke, "Wake up, it's time for your sleeping pill!" doesn't apply because you're never asleep to begin with. The food is better than legend would have it. They don't want to keep you around any longer than absolutely necessary. And everybody sends in bills.

I don't want to go to hospitals again for a while.

Yo Yo

BENFORD: CONTINUED FROM PAGE 14

On the broad deck behind the Taj the river ran shallow since it was two months after the monsoon. On the right was a bathing spot for devotees. Some were splashing themselves with river water, others doing their meditation. To the left was a mortuary. The better off inhabitants of Agra had their bodies burned on pyres and then the lot was tossed into the river. If one could not afford the pyre, then after a simple ceremony the body was thrown off the sandstone quay and onto the mud flats or into the water if the river was high. This was usually done in early morning.

By the glimmering dawn radiance I watched buzzards picking apart something on the flats. They made quick work of it, deftly tearing away the cloth, and in five minutes had picked matters clean. They lost interest and flapped away. The Taj coasted in serene eternity behind me, its color subtly changing as the sun rose above the trees, its cool perfect dome glowing, banishing the shadows below. Somehow it made me recall drifting along on the ceiling, looking down at the opulent world below, where people laughed and lived.

Somehow in this worn alien place everything seemed to fit. Death just happened. From this simple fact came India's inertia. I thought of Mozart and heard a faint light rhythm, felt myself skimming effortlessly over a rumpled brown dusty world of endless sharp detail and unending fevered ferment, and watched the buzzards and the bathers and felt the slow sad sway of worlds apart.

*A great Aussie fan-ed tosses us a unique quiz.*

# Registration gets personal

*Alan Stewart*

Over the course of my trip to America I visited numerous fans who had personalised car number plates with a SFnal theme. See if you can match these fans with their number plates.

A 	ALTAIR 4	1 	Mark Loney
B 	FIJAGDH	2 	Bruce Pelz
C 	WASTREL	3  	Alex and Phyllis Eisenstein
D 	WOMBAT	4 	jan howard finder
E 	SMOF 2	5  	Dick and Leah Smith

(correct answers: A3, B5, C1, D4, E2)

*I admire the fact that, despite everything, you  
still maintain that calculated air of forced gaiety.*



# Changing Doctors:

## Not Always a Choice

*Steven H Silver*

When I moved back to Chicago in the 1990s, I found I needed a new doctor. I spoke to one of the managers at my office and received a recommendation for a doctor who was in practice not too amazingly far from where I lived. I made an appointment to see him for an annual checkup. When he entered the room, he asked about the book I was reading. When I showed him the cover of the SF novel, he commented that his father used to review science fiction for the *Chicago Sun-Times*. We hit it off quite well.

The last time I saw him was March 3, 2008. I again went in for my annual checkup and we talked about the ongoing sleep tests I was taking and about his recent divorce, in which he overshaed some information. I really didn't need to know (and only follow the footnote if you have strong prurient interest).<sup>1</sup> He gave me a prescription and sent me on my way, asking me to make a follow up appointment for June, which I did on my way out.

The following week, I received a call from the doctor's office. They wanted to let me know that my doctor was on an extended leave and at my June appointment I would be seeing one of his associates instead of him. It seemed an odd thing since he hadn't said anything at my appointment. My initial reaction was that there was some sort of malpractice situation, which didn't make me feel great.

I mentioned that I was undergoing sleep tests to determine if I had sleep apnea. (big surprise, I did, just like everyone else who undergoes those tests). Over the course of the tests, I had built up a rapport with one of the technicians. I asked if he knew anything about my doctor's disappearance and he

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<sup>1</sup> Are you sure you want to read this footnote? Does anyone really want to know that their Doctor's wife couldn't keep up with his sexual needs? Does anyone need to know that about any acquaintance of theirs? Aren't you sorry you followed the footnote?

told me he wasn't allowed to say anything. I pressed him and he furtively glanced around to make sure nobody was near and said, "If I say anything they'll fire me...but check the newspapers."

That couldn't be good.

When I got home, I fired up a web browser and prayed to the Ghreat Ghod Ghughle.

Ghughle revealed that my doctor had been arrested the evening I had last seen him. He was charged with manufacturing child pornography, criminal sexual assault, and child endangerment. The charges stemmed from a relationship he had struck up with a 17 year old girl in the wake of his divorce. Following the divorce, he began to host parties for the neighborhood kids in which he provided drugs, both prescription and illicit. He had been providing this girl with marijuana, cocaine, and heroin in return for sexual favors.

I had a tremendous sensation of "ick" come over me. It lasted several weeks every time I thought about the situation.

The girl was not a patient of my doctor's, which would be the only mitigating circumstance of the whole sordid story, and isn't even much of a mitigating circumstance since it meant that he was providing drugs to a non-patient.

The girl's parents were aware of her drug abuse, and may have known about my doctor's role in their daughter's issues. At one point they checked her into the rehab facility. Showing up at the facility, he used his credentials as a doctor to get in to visit with her and provide her with additional drugs.

Her parents were also the impetus for his eventually arrest. They intercepted a text he sent the girl to arrange to drive her into Chicago to a location where they could buy drugs. The parents used the information to go to the police, who wound up visiting my doctor at his home on that night on March 3.

In June, on the date I was supposed to have my follow-up appointment with him, his license to practice medicine was suspended for at least five years following a plea bargain. In August of 2011, his medical license was revoked.

I know he did some time in prison, but it wasn't very long. By the time his 18-year-old daughter was involved in a hit and run accident in May, 2010, he was already out of jail. His daughter was sentenced to probation, drug treatment, fines, and community service for hitting a fellow high school student while she was driving with alcohol and pot in her system. The sixteen year-old who was hit suffered a serious brain injury. She has since recuperated enough that earlier this year she appeared in a production of Eugene Ionesco's *Rhinoceros* at the high school the two girls attended.

I've moved on, talking to my brother-in-law the allergist to see if he could recommend a doctor who was relatively local to me. He gave me a few names and I chose one, mostly at random, who is convenient. I haven't developed any sort of rapport with him, but after my previous experience, I don't have a problem with that.



*Alan White doesn't restrict himself to brilliant artwork, as you see. Set your cringe controls on "max."*

# FREE THE BEANS

*Alan White*

When asked how he likes children, W.C. Fields replied "Well done". My personal feelings differed only in that I prefer them Teriyaki style.

As a committed bachelor and shameless hedonist, I had come to a point in life where corralling a voracious and capricious sex life was long overdue. The fact I had miraculously avoided catching the most inconsequential nor most horrifying of STDs, nor been blessed with any number of offspring hadn't fallen on a deaf libido.

I had grown up in Hollywood during the '60s where "Sex, Drugs and Rock 'n' Roll" was the well-worn mantra burned into the psyche of a legion of like-minded boomers who were "Letting it all hang out," with complete public (if regional) approval! In the end, the '60s was more about sanctioning irresponsibility. But at the time, I was just another horny teenager who wanted nothing more than to avoid reality, take drugs and get laid; simple and shallow as that.

I turned draft age in 1966 which petrified the crap out of me and sent a goodly number of comrades to scamper off to places unknown or jump blindly into the belly of the beast. Some never to return. Each pathway bespoke a commitment and responsibility I was not prepared to take. Yet, I was patriotic enough to enlist in the Navy and at least show up for the physical. Although my patriotism let me proceed no further than to throw up my arms and plead insanity. Much to my complete surprise (and relief) I was given an immediate, complete deferral and shown the door.

But what the hell. Though I am loath to admit it, somebody saw something in me that, in the end, saved the government a lot of time and money; and I had not the slightest doubt I would have proven more cowardly on the battlefield than in real life, if that was possible.

Let's face it. I admit to being completely, utterly, irresponsible and unprepared for parenthood with no patience for myself or anyone else. I had a crappy childhood full of absent parents, "touchy" uncles and music instructors, explorative babysitters, boorish and brutish peer groups and didn't know why I should pass the experience along to my progeny. Besides, there were too many people far better than myself who divorced, screwed up their kids and were now just as single as myself.

But here was the committed bachelor, after 44 years of single life, prepared to take the plunge into the sea of matrimony. Luckily, the bride was someone whose own offspring by a previous (see, I told you) had graciously flown the coop and who now possessed an intelligent and equal disdain for propagation. However, it fell upon myself to take the prophylactic procedure to prevent accidental creation. That drastic step is known in most circles as "Vasectomy."

Being the most caring of wives, she accompanied me to the bargain clinic and Vasectomy Shack (Chez Deferens) for a brief, yet compelling, lecture on the benefits of surgical birth control. And thus, I sat with 5 other quivering males and their supportive others weathering a rather banal pontification hardly suitable for a 6th grade biology class. Yet, I found more of interest in the faces of my fellow "Snip-ies," who winced with every description of what was to come, despite posing in their best "Tough Mug" ambiance, Wolverine facial hair, wifebeaters and "Death Before Dishonor" tattoos. Their palms were equally sweaty as if they were being made privy to the intimate details of their own execution.

The last person to explain such mechanics in these details was a huge and fascistic gym teacher in my first year of junior high whose first words to the Sex-Ed Class had been, "Should you be caught masturbating, yourself or anyone else, you can be arrested and your picture printed in the newspaper." I

checked the paper daily after that and hoped to catch a hint of the wave of illicit masturbation that ran rampant in my neighborhood, yet found none (my secret was safe!).

The lecture lady put everyone at ease with all the benign details and declared the Vasectomy operation was a marvelously "...quick and painless procedure," that after a few days' rest and relaxation you are back in action. She even related a sobering tale of a fellow who came in for the procedure after downing an entire bottle of Tequila. "All quite unnecessary," she chided and rolled her eyes to accentuate her disdain.

End of sermon, and we all (to the man) eagerly signed up for pre-Christmas openings with the same enthusiasm as if they were giving away pork chops.

A procedure that insured both the low cost and "in and out" time frame of the "Snip & Tie," was a request by the facility that you shave the target area yourself. Thankfully, they clearly defined the "Target Area" so there would be "...no funny business in the bush," so to speak; and defined a swath to be removed an inch above the fitfully dangling spectator to the farthest reaches of ever diminishing twins.

Now I must tell you: The wife, being a hair stylist par excellence, has assaulted a lot of hair in her day; so volunteering for this job was no big deal, technically speaking. That is, of course, until it came time to actually do the job.

The night before the operation we each managed to keep a straight face through the required medicinal shampooing of the aforementioned "Target Area," and determined the living room floor received enough light to serve as the operating theatre.

And so, it came to pass, that as I lay supine (read: "Belly Up"), and the wife whipped out that straight-razor like a hop-head in a bar fight, and brandished the weapon as would Mrs. Lovett or some dreadful '60's Italian splatter movie villain, we burst into screaming gales of tension relieving laughter. Regaining ourselves momentarily, until she raised that hellish, gleaming edge once more. I tell you, it went on for hours, but in the end, the job was done without a single nick. Don't think I wasn't aware of the sudden power shift and potential for bartering. "The fur coat? Of course darling."

Came the dawn; after a sleepless night where I envisioned all manner of horrible things and every imaginable outcome. Granted, even the most minimal procedures can still garner a certain qualm or two at the suggestion of slicing flesh whether based in reality or whimsy. I must relate a decided chill when I discovered the surgeon and assistant in charge were named (honest to God) Dr. Savage and Dr. Cutter! Initially I envisioned a bloodthirsty pair reminiscent of Burke and Hare, but they were quite the lively pair and equally (I should hope) proficient.

While I was given no doubt to suspect their qualifications, they did have a certain freewheeling aura of those who just might spend their lunch hour in their car knocking back a doobie and a carton of Ho-Hos!

The subject males and supportive counter-parts were ushered into a separate waiting room, made from a small bleacher like those found in a basketball court. My fellow "Snip-ies" had arrived earlier than myself, and appeared in various stages of unease.

Therefore, I was surprised to be the first called under the knife. The moment of truth was upon us. The wife gave me a slap on the ass, and I was lead down a hallway to the waiting table — gasp! No, the stirrups were not for me (what kind of a place is this anyway?). A nurse appeared for a signature and to transmit the simple and utilitarian command, "Everything below the waist, on the chair," and she was gone. And thus, I sat on the well tissue table, rather dapper from the waist up. From the waist down... not so much.

So we're all on the same page, the operation consists of the removal of a section of Vas Deferens, a tube that leads to (or from, depending if you're the cutt-ee or cutt-er) each testicle, then tying off and cauterizing whatever stub remains. This is to prevent an escape of any propagatory emissaries, not unlike Tim Robbins in "Shawshank Redemption."

The hardly formidable duo of docs appeared, and after a compliment on the superior haircut, I was draped with a specially prepared covering that allowed only my terrified scrotum to appear through an appropriately cut orifice — looking every bit like a runaway brussel sprout on a tablecloth.

Showtime! The pecking order was clear enough: Dr. Savage gives orders, Dr. Cutter obliges, and I just relax and throw my heritage out the window. There will be no one visiting me on my deathbed, nor the evil twins fighting over my meager possessions.



First item on the agenda is to anesthetize the first area of incursion. Oddly, there is no painkiller for administering the painkiller. I made this assumption when a hypo was forced through the skin of what appeared to be a terrified walnut and into one of the isolated tubes. This wasn't going to be the picnic the tour guide had promised.

Having thus gained access to an area where, normally, the sun don't shine, there was a snip, followed by another snip; and Doc Savage joyously waved what appeared to be an inch of pink elbow macaroni skewered on the end of a martini olive sword for my approval. Doc Cutter then went in with one of those old Unger Wood-burning tools to cauterize the tube. While any pain had been managed, the only distress was seeing a cloud of white smoke pirouetting from my crotch. It was a sight, not unlike that which could be seen when carelessly sitting in someone's ashtray while in the nude.

One tube down, one to go.

We were making good time, I must say. Now to proceed into the mysterious realm of testicle number two, and let that that puppy run free. "Run little macaroni! Run into the sunlight and freedom at last!"

But now, if I may digress ...

It should be known just how neat and clever these doctors are about all this. The actual incision of "Testicular Access," if we may call it that, was only, ummmmmm, perhaps a quarter-inch in length. Here, a tool, not dissimilar to grannie's buttonhook, was used to snag the pipeline of progeny (or gasoducto del progenie).

It was here I let a fly a girly shriek that I'll wager had those posers in the waiting room crapping their pants!

"Come on," said Dr. Savage, demeaningly. "Dr. Cutter just gave you a shot."

"Uhhh, no, I didn't," replied Dr. Cutter.

"Ooops!" said Dr. Savage. "Sorry about that," and he rolled back on his stool to let Dr. Cutter apply his killer hypo.

The final tube was snagged, sectioned, waved about with much fanfare for a job well done. Another dreamy ballet of smoke, and the slight essence of burning flesh filled the air.

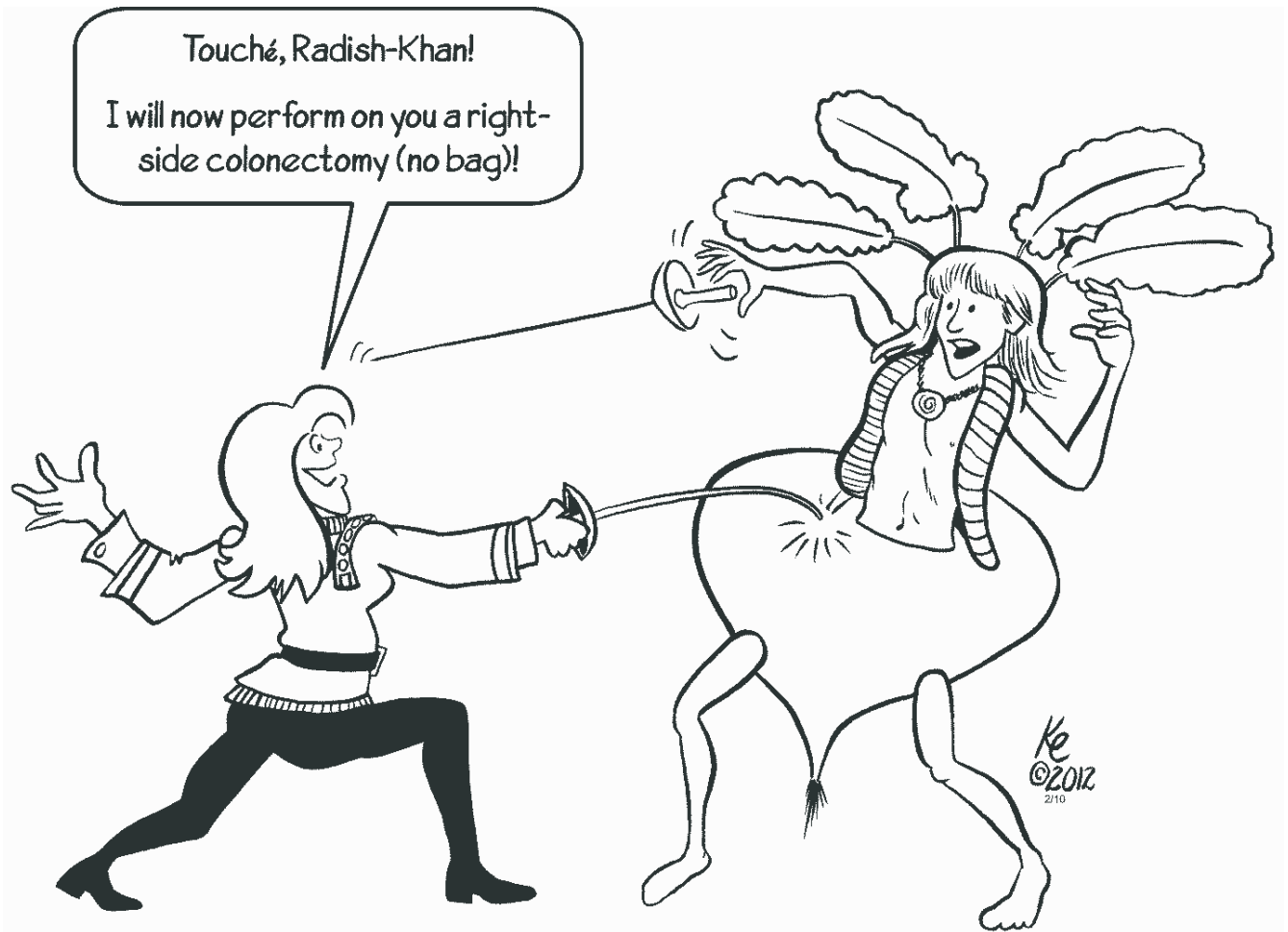
A few cheery stitches later and voila! The doctors grabbed their instruments, and left the room like thieves in the night; that I might pull myself together, my pants up, and take a moment to reflect.

I dared to glance down, expecting to find something similar to a pound of rotten hamburger dangling by a thread; and yet no blood, no bruise, and outside of a minuscule bit of stitchery, no evidence remained of my genitalia being brutalized by strange men in masks. I felt embarrassed feeling so much pain from such a damn small wound. As I sat on the edge of the table examining their handiwork, I couldn't help but think, "What the hell have I done?" I've made so few decisions that were truly irreconcilable, and this was one of them.

As an observation, it must be said that while you've actually paid complete strangers to monkey with your naughty bits, all the while this is going on, you need something to do with your hands. Since they didn't let me use the stirrups for handles, I found it more comfortable to rest my head upon my hands, and during the screamy bits, mash my hair all over the place like a crazed individual undergoing withdrawals.

When the ordeal was over, I was told to join the wife in the waiting room. I looked into a mirror; death warmed-over stared back, and it appeared as though I'd been drug through the street behind a car for the last 40 minutes. I accentuated my disheveled appearance by pulling my hair in every direction, tucking in half my shirt, and leaving my fly open. I slowly ambled into the waiting room, shaking like a zombie who had just been lobotomized and gave a low moan. Every face in the room went pale as alabaster, and one guy in the back poked his gal

(CONTINUED ON PAGE 28)



# Dr. April

*Guy Lillian*

She was dressed all in white – but April was by no means a bride. No, she was a *resident* – one of ten or 12 new doctors assigned to the place where I worked, Moses Cone Hospital, in Greensboro, North Carolina.

Greensboro was – and still is, I guess – a small city in the middle of the Tar Heel State. A decade before, I'd gone to graduate school there and met my first wife. Getting my Masters of Fine Arts had been a joy – endless late night bull sessions about writing and movies in the company of like-minded souls – and when I married Beth I had the idea that I could recover that delight. I was ignoring the wisdom of North Carolina's most revered writer, Thomas Wolfe – to wit, *You Can't Go Home Again*. Too true. Everyone I'd known as a writing student had moved on and I ended up at Moses Cone, as a welfare worker.

There were good things about the job. My wife also worked at MoCoHo (HoHoHaHaHeeHee), which made our penury – and possession of but one car – less burdensome. My position – sitting in solitude in a little office in an outpatient clinic, where I evaluated and approved applicants for county medical benefits – was stupefyingly dull, but it left me lots of time to myself. I spent 3/4 of every day working on fanzines or reading or talking with distant buddies on the phone, and another 8<sup>th</sup> at lunch. But this was more of a problem than a boon. I rightly felt that I was working beneath myself. Worse,

surrounding me – coming, going, seeing patients, helping people, ignoring lesser -- were all these young *doctors*, founts of intelligence and accomplishment and ego that frankly, rubbed it in.

Not that they meant to be snobbish, I think. They were just new at mankind's most demanding and responsible profession and didn't know how to handle themselves. In fact, several were quite cool – a sharp and friendly Iranian medic comes to mind, a doctor whose real passion was old stamps, and a department head who incessantly talked about Hitler (don't get the wrong idea; Greensboro abounded in American Nazis, but he was just a World War II buff) ... and April.

April was blonde and slender and had a cute, goofy face. I forget how we found out that we each were infected with the SF virus; maybe she noticed me typing out a mimeograph stencil or spotted a paperback on my desk. Whatever, she started wandering in and chatting, and soon a day without her presence became a joyless day indeed.

Of course, there was no suggestion of romance – we were both married, and as I say, I was acutely – even paranoiacally – aware of the chasm between us of *class*. Of course, that made no difference to her. Her husband, in fact, was a working guy in construction – and was possessed, she said dreamily, of the *most piercing* blue eyes ...

I kept my immediate feeling – that this was trouble – to myself.

April was possessed herself, of an almost superhuman enthusiasm. Occasionally it got a little weird – such as when she joyfully described to me a tiny adrenal nub she'd found at the base of the spines of several babies she'd autopsied (*EYAGGHH!*) – but most of the time it was delightful. For example, I was in line for my first viewing of *The Wrath of Khan* when, completely unexpected, up she ran; she was seeing it for the second time in as many days. The movie became multiple times as much fun. (She refused to tell me if Spock died. If you're wondering, my wife preferred *Star Wars* to *Star Trek* and didn't come.) And there was this *show* ...

MoCoHoHo had a tradition: once a year it forced its medical residents to dress up in stupid costumes and humiliate themselves in a silly skit on stage. April got into it. She wrote the story, designed the costumes, and played one of the lead roles. Many of the poor young doctors looked mortified in their giant vegetable array– funny to watch them affect their usual arrogance while clad as rutabagas and green beans – April was in her element. The skit's big scene was a sword fight between her, as champion of humanity, and the chief resident, clad as a radish. You thought Kurt Erichsen was *kidding* in his lead-off illo?

The radish vanquished, the revue was finished. April joined me in the audience – and was delighted to find her husband, with his piercing blue eyes, sitting silently on the aisle. He had a small smile.

When I finally woke up enough to take the LSAT, April was *not* at first encouraging. Too many lawyers in the world, she said, and too many law students. When my grade came in, though, she did a fast 180 – telling me I *had* to go. I owed it to myself. She was aware of my craziness about doctors, and knew how it could be cured. First, by testing myself with my own difficult endeavor. Second, by coming to understand a great truth: love and friendship conquer all.

Patient readers of *Challenger* may remember how my beginning law school – among other things – led to the bust-up of my marriage. I returned to New Orleans alone. April had long since moved west.

After I'd been in New Orleans a while, and suffered school, I decided to write to April. But where? The only clue I had to her whereabouts was the western state she'd come from. I put on my deer stalker cap and ferreted the info out through the state medical association. I wrote and praised her for the marvelous work she was doing, incidentally working in some righteous self-pity for my loneliness and anxiety – if there is anything less enjoyable than law school, it's spelled r-o-o-t c-a-n-a-l.

She wrote back. True to her innate wonderfulness, she complimented me on my thinking of her, even when I was obviously in *extremis*. And she asked me, rather nervously, how I'd found her. Turned out my instincts about Mister Piercing Blue Eyes were accurate. He turned out to be an angry, jealous abuser. She'd fled. She was in hiding. If I could find her, he could. I respected her unspoken fear, and after letting her in on my detecting, let her be. That was 1983.

29 years later, I began this issue of *Challenger* and thought of Dr. April. I wondered what life had done to the exuberance of this brilliant, kind, kooky genius. Since the early '80s the marvelous tool of tools – then Internet – had come into our lives. She's obviously no longer afraid, because through the

Net, I've found her again. She's a gastroenterologist out west. (Erichsen's cartoon is again spot on. A "right-side colonectomy [no bag]" is what *my* gastro-guy did to *me*.) I wonder – should I write her? Do I dare? Tell her about Rosy – *Challenger* – my career – Australia? What am I afraid of? What have I got to lose?



#### CONTINUED FROM PAGE 25

in the ribs and bolted from the room as though he were on fire, bouncing noisily down the bleachers and out the exit!

Looks like my job here was complete! And, actually, I felt well enough to go back to work. But then, waiting for me at home was a comfy couch, a dozen videos and as many bottles of Champagne. Besides, being babied for a couple of days will put things back in order.

A few weeks later, after supplying them with a number of fluidic specimens, I received my diploma of "Cumma Non Sperma," and yet otherwise, all was as it had been.

After all these years, I'd be hard pressed to think of money better spent.



*Mike's article originally appeared in Michael Burstein's **Burstzine** #2.*

# "...AND IN THIS CORNER, THE FLORIDA HEALTH CARE SYSTEM!"

## **An Ongoing Battle**

*Mike Resnick*

*In November of 1999, Carol and I flew down to Orlando, as we did two or three times every year, partly for a vacation, partly to visit my father, who was in an assisted-living facility down there. When we showed up at his place, we learned that he had collapsed earlier in the day and was in the local hospital.*

*While we were there he was returned on a stretcher, with the pronouncement that his heart was just fine. His feet were sticking out of the blankets, and you didn't have to be a genius to see that they both had gangrene. The hospital had never looked at him from the waist down.*

*It was not our first experience with Florida's notion of health care, but it was indicative. We called a different hospital and had him taken there. A few days later they performed surgery on the vascular system in his legs and moved him to what was described and rated as the finest full care facility within 100 miles.*

*He would never emerge from it again, except for medical emergencies.*

*We visited him in March of 2000, and the facility was almost indistinguishable from a hospital. They seemed to be taking very good care of him. Before we left, a middle-aged lady with the unlikely name of Charlie approached me, explained that she was the place's chief accountant, and regretfully informed me that Medicare only paid for his first 100 days there, and she would have to begin charging us beginning March 17.*

\*\*\*\*\*

April 21, 2000  
Charlie  
XXXXXX Health Care  
Altamonte Springs, FL.

Dear Charlie:

This is the fourth request I have made for a bill for my father's room, board and care. I appreciate the fact that everyone there seems to trust me, but I'd feel much better if you billed me on time, I paid on time, and I never had to worry about some higher-up tossing him out for non-payment.

It is already late April. PLEASE send me the bill for March 17-31.

Cordially,

Mike Resnick

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*Well, Charlie quit or was fired in early June—if the former, it was because she hardly ever sent anyone a bill; if the latter, it was doubtless for the same reason—and she was replaced by Pam, who made up for lost time.*

\*\*\*\*\*

June 16, 2000  
Pam  
XXXXXX Health Care  
Altamonte Springs, FL.

Dear Pam:

Since you didn't call me back Friday, I thought I'd send you the enclosed payment and we could work from there. First, I called Charlie 4 times in May, and asked her personally during a trip to Florida on May 29, to please send me the bill for May. She never did. The bill I am paying is for May and June. I think it's outrageous that you're charging me \$104.88 interest for late payment for May, since I wasn't billed until June 15, and I have withheld that amount of the bill.

Second, you seemed to have some doubt as to whether April had been paid for. My father's Medicare coverage ended after 100 days, on March 17, and Charlie eventually billed me—and I paid—\$5,945.76 for the last part of March plus April. A Xerox of the cancelled check is enclosed.

Third, someone there told the pharmacy you use that my father was no longer covered as of March 17. Wrong. He is a member of a Prudential Senior Healthcare HMO and his medications *are* covered. You've caused a lot of extra problems for me, for I am now being forced to spend many hours straightening out this mess between the ZZZZZZ Pharmacy and Prudential. I am enclosing a Xerox of both sides of his newest Prudential HMO card. Since I noticed when I was there 3 weeks ago that he hadn't opened his mail in almost two months, I feel uncomfortable about mailing him the card, but I will have a friend hand-deliver it to him in the next few days.

Fourth, if any of the expenses on the enclosed bill—and especially the \$682.00 for "Asap II Therapy Syst"—should have been billed to his HMO, please itemize them and let me know if you will take care of it or if I must.

Finally, he spent 8 days in the hospital in April. Charlie told me there would be some kind of rebate—I realize we had to pay to keep the room, but there were 24 meals he didn't eat and 8 days of nursing he didn't receive—but I don't see it reflected in the bill.

Hope we can straighten this out quickly and efficiently.

Yours,

Mike Resnick

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*I didn't hear from Pam again, so I decided to go over her head to the facility's administrator. I mean, how the hell many unreasonable people could one place employ?*

\*\*\*\*\*

July 13, 2000  
Administrator  
XXXXXX Health Care  
Altamonte Springs, FL.

Dear Administrator:



A copy of this is going to Pam, your chief accountant.

I am enclosing a check for \$6,115.91, which you tell me constitutes my father's expenses for June, plus his room/board for July. I think it's probably an overpayment, but I can't get anyone to talk to me about it.

I wrote to Pam on June 16 (copy enclosed), pointing out a number of things, including that my father is a fully-paid-up member of Prudential HealthCare SeniorCare (a fact you still haven't shared with the ZZZZZZ Pharmacy, which has billed me thousands of dollars since March 17), although I had a friend drop off his health care and prescription cards at your office in late June. (A Xerox copy of it is enclosed—again.).

I asked if any of the items expensed on his bill—and I ask again for the current bill—are covered by his HMO, and I have not yet received the courtesy of a reply. I asked why we were being charged interest for a late payment when we did not receive his May and June bills until June 16 (and I see you are charging me for a late payment again, stating that the enclosed bill had to be paid by July 10—whereas I did not receive it until today, July 13.) I asked if there was some reduction in what he owed for April, when he spent 8 days in the hospital and therefore did not eat 24 meals at XXXXXX or require 8 days' worth of nursing services. (Charlie told me there would be a deduction, but she's gone and no one else has addressed the question.)

I visited XXXXXX back in May. You have a beautiful facility and caring attendants, and I am quite willing to pay what my father owes—but to date I cannot get an answer to my questions out of anyone. I contacted Charlie four times in April, practically begging her to send me a bill so that I could pay it on time; she never did. Pam promised to get back to me in a day or two concerning all the items I listed in my letter of June 16; she never did.

I don't want to cause trouble. I don't want to get out of paying what I legitimately owe. I would just like someone to please answer my questions.

I really don't think that's an unreasonable request.

Yours,

Mike Resnick

\*\*\*\*\*

*While all this was going on, a local pharmacy somehow or other got their hands on my father's Visa card number. They then racked up thousands of dollars on his card for prescriptions that should have been covered by Medicare.*

\*\*\*\*\*

July 26, 2000  
Visa Card Administration  
YYYY Bank  
Columbus, Ohio

Dear Sirs:

My father, who owns Visa account # QQQQ QQQQ QQQQ QQQQ (see enclosed copy of his latest bill from you), is 88 years old, confined to a full-care nursing home, and is unable even to open his mail, let alone read it and pay his bills. For the past few years you have been sending his bills to me, at this address, and I have been paying them.

It has come to my attention that the nursing home is in possession of his credit card, and is authorizing expenditures without first clearing it with me. At the same time, the current bill tells me that you have increased his credit limit. Since there seems to be no way to control what the nursing home uses his card for, I want the limit DECREASED to \$1,500.00.

When I phoned and requested this last night, I was told that I would have to show you my power of attorney first. Copies of two such powers of attorney, one for health expenditures and one for all other things, are enclosed in this envelope.

Please acknowledge receipt of this letter, and please acknowledge the lowering of my father's credit limit.

Thank you.  
Sincerely,  
Mike Resnick

\*\*\*\*\*

*One week later I got a form letter from them thanking me for writing them, and stating that I, William Resnick, was such a good customer they were INCREASING my credit limit to \$7,500.00*

*Finally, thank Ghod, Ghu, Ngai, and any other deities who want credit for it, I found Amy. Amy and the organization she runs are specialists in handling the affairs of the aged, especially those whose families are not on the scene—and boy, do they have a lot of business!*

\*\*\*\*\*

August 4, 2000

Dear Amy:

I can't tell you how glad I am to have finally found someone on the scene who knows how these damned bureaucracies work.

Here is the situation. My father, William Resnick, resided in Vince Accardi's Caring Hearts of Lake Mary home for assisted living for more than two years. In October of 1999 he fell and broke a hip. By November he had developed gangrene in both feet, and after a week in the hospital was moved to XXXXXX Health Care. He'll never be coming out of it.

Over the years he has become increasingly unable to handle his own affairs, and I took over his checkbook about three years ago. On March 17 of this year, a female accountant named Charlie called and told me that his 100 days of Medicare were up, and that he would now have to start paying for XXXXXX's facilities. I told her to send the bills to me, and gave her my father's Prudential HealthCare SeniorCare number. He was to be billed \$134.00 per day for a private room.

I had to phone Charley four different times reminding her to send me the bill before she finally got around to it in early May. It was for 6 weeks, and came to just under \$6,000, which seemed about right. I pointed out that he had spent 8 days in the hospital in April, during which time he had not used any of XXXXXX's services, and she agreed to make a reduction in the price which would be reflected on the next bill. I never heard from her again.

Came June, I started getting bills from the ZZZZZZ Pharmacy, which eventually totaled over \$2,500 for a couple of months. I called them and explained that my father was a paid-up member of an HMO and faxed them a copy of his prescription card. They sent another (considerably larger) bill two weeks ago, with a letter explaining that they did not deal with HMOs, and that I should pay them and bill Prudential. The woman I spoke to gave me a phone number to call for a claim form. It came, I filled it out, made copies of the bills, and sent them to a Kentucky address. I never heard from Prudential about them again, not even that the claim form documents had been received.

At the same time, I got a bill for over \$6,000 for one month from XXXXXX. I was probably wrong to pay it, but I explained in a covering letter that I needed to know why I was being billed for all these things—3 pages of them—when surely some of them had to be covered by his Prudential SeniorCare plan. The accountant was a woman called Pam, who promised to call me later in the day and sort out which bills I would be reimbursed for. She never called back. I phoned her the next day. This time she promised to call back after the weekend (this was in June). To date, I have not heard from her.

I phoned Prudential in Tampa—though he bought his insurance in Orlando, no Orlando operator could find a local branch, although they connected me to a hell of a lot of drug stores, doctors' offices, and private homes—and asked about the procedure. They told me to send the bills to XXXXXX, and have XXXXXX pay them and bill Prudential. I phoned XXXXXX, spoke to Nancy, the new Administrator, and she agreed to pay the bills and bill Prudential. She also agreed to look into the newest huge bill I had received from XXXXXX—I only paid room and board on this, on the assumption that if I continue to pay for everything and ask for adjustments, they will have no incentive to make those adjustments—and she asked me to send her copies of the bill. I did so. To date, I have not heard from her again.

I also faxed copies of XXXXXX's bills to a woman named Cynthia (she refused to give me her last name) at Prudential's Tampa office. To date, I have not heard from her again.

XXXXXX is once again late billing me—it's August 4, and if this month is like every other one, the bill will arrive around the 15th, with an interest charge added because I did not pay it by the 10th.

I don't know if XXXXXX ever paid the ZZZZZZ Pharmacy, but they seem to have transferred my father's prescriptions to another pharmacy, the QQQQQQ Pharmacy of Winter Park. The first I knew of this was when Visa sent me a bill showing that QQQQQQ had charged administrator's office and had been paid (by phone) with my father's Visa card. I phoned QQQQQQ a week ago, the day I received the bill, got their fax number, faxed them a copy of the Visa bill (I'm attaching a copy to this letter), and asked them to itemize it so I could start working to get Prudential to pay for some or all of it. To date, I have not heard back from them.

So that's the situation. I pay his insurance every month. XXXXXX tacks on a couple of grand of extras every month, promises to look into it, and never calls back. QQQQQQ Pharmacy promises to give me an itemized bill and never calls or faxes back. XXXXXX's new administrator seems incredibly friendly and helpful on the phone, but never calls back. Prudential, in both Florida and Kentucky, asks for forms and bills but never acknowledges receiving them and never calls back. The only person who responds to me is the lady from the ZZZZZZ Pharmacy, and all she's willing to say is that they don't honor HMOs or prescription cards.

I'm a thousand miles away and feeling *very* frustrated.

I really NEED you, Amy.

Help!

Sincerely,

Mike Resnick

\*\*\*\*\*

*When Amy told me she would represent me down there, I could have kissed her. That did not, however, mean that the frustrations were over.*

*It turns out that the facility hadn't transferred my father's medications from the ZZZZZZ pharmacy to the QQQQQQ pharmacy, the one with his Visa card number. That turned out to be an entirely separate idiotic problem.*

\*\*\*\*\*

August 6, 2000

Dear Amy:

I finally heard from the pharmacy that had billed my father's credit card for \$2,072. I'm faxing the four pages they sent me, which just arrived Saturday. At one time Vince Accardi apparently changed pharmacies, because he found one—QQQQQQ—that would deliver to assisted-living homes. My father, a trusting and unworldly soul, evidently left his credit card number with the pharmacy.

The Visa bill, which as I say was received less than 2 weeks ago, is for prescription medications—most or all of which I'm sure were covered by his HMO—from December 17, 1998 until November 12, 1999, a week before my father went into the hospital (and never returned to Vince's).

That's right. These guys are just now billing his credit card for prescriptions they filled in 1998, and for which he was almost certainly covered.

I am a science fiction writer by trade. In the 30+ years I've been at it, I don't think I've ever described anything requiring quite such a major suspension of disbelief as the billing practices of the Orlando health care industry.

Yours,  
Mike Resnick

\*\*\*\*\*

*XXXXXX was creative, if nothing else. Which is to say, they found brand-new ways to drive me crazy every month. Check numbers 2 and 4, especially.*

\*\*\*\*\*

August 25, 2000  
Nancy, Health Care Administrator  
XXXXXX Health Care  
Altamonte Springs, FL.

Dear Nancy:

Thank you for your letter of August 18. Amy Cameron will represent me for any and all billing and technical problems. I mailed a check to Pam today, which will bring my father's bill down to zero. I hope the following non-billing problems have been or are being resolved:

1. I have yet to receive a bill during the first ten days of *any* calendar month.
2. I want to be notified by XXXXXX any time my father goes into the hospital. When he went there to have his leg amputated, I didn't know he was in the hospital until Orlando Regional phoned me for permission to perform the surgery because he was too grogged up on medications to give his consent. I was required to give my consent without knowing anything about his condition.
3. Any time he goes to the hospital in the future, I want him checked out of XXXXXX. We'll take our chances on getting his room back, but he's in no position to pay thousands of dollars for a room, meals and services that he's not receiving. (Please acknowledge that you have read and understood this paragraph.)
4. The one time you got him a doctor—a Dr. Kaplan, who worked on his remaining gangrenous foot—it was a doctor who was out of network, and whom I have had to pay in full at the same time my father was covered by his HMO. Will somebody there please *look* at his HMO card and see whose services it covers before you do this again?
5. I gather you have an in-house doctor. Since you now know that my father is in Prudential's SeniorCare HMO, could you please have your doctor see if he can replace all those generic prescriptions not covered by Prudential with generics that *are* covered?
6. Thus far, the people I have spoken with at XXXXXX—Charlie, Pam, and yourself—have all promised to get back to me within a day or two of my phoning them. To date, two have not responded at all, and your letter was considerably delayed.

I want to be a good citizen. I want to pay what I owe. I have not, I believe, contacted you with frivolous problems. If you guys will just *communicate* with me, maybe we can resolve future problems a little more rapidly.

Yours,  
Mike Resnick  
cc: Amy

\*\*\*\*\*

*So I hired Amy in the first week of August, and we went to war, and you would think everything would have been solved by October, wouldn't you?*

*I would have thought so. Then I got yet another bill, and I concluded that Pam the accountant must be a major stockholder in the facility.*

\*\*\*\*\*

October 11, 2000  
Pam  
XXXXXX Health Care  
Altamonte Springs, FL.

Dear Pam:

Enclosed is a check for \$4,954.14, in payment for my father's current bill.

Your note said I must pay within ten days of the date you mailed the bill. Sorry, but this is totally unacceptable. You mailed it—in two separate parts, Lord knows why—on October 3. I received one part on October 6 and one on October 8. I feel that it is not unreasonable to allow me 10 days from the day I receive the bill.

If the bill were the same amount every month, I could set up some means to pay by the 10th of each month, whether I am at home or not. But the bill is different every month, and hence I cannot pay it until I receive it and find out what the total is.

I will guarantee to pay within 10 days *if you get it to me on the first of the month*, like any reasonable billing service. But I travel all over the world—I have been to France, Austria, Slovakia and Canada in the past 5 months—and I cannot and will not adjust my schedule simply because you are incapable of sending me my father's bills in a timely manner.

For example, I will not be home from November 3 through November 18. If you get the bill to me on the first, I'll pay it before I leave—but if it comes on the 8th or the 10th of the month, as usual, there is no way I can pay it until I get home, and I will absolutely not pay interest because you cannot bill me in a timely manner.

Last month was a perfect example. I was in Europe from the 12th to the 23rd, as I had informed you I would be. The bill arrived on the 13th—and you tried to charge me interest dating from the 10th! Tenants would lynch any landlord who tried that trick.

I'll pay what I owe, but I won't be held up.

Sincerely,

Mike Resnick

cc: Amy

\*\*\*\*\*

*Amy went to bat again, and got a major concession from them: They wouldn't charge me for interest I didn't owe.*

*Except when they did.*

\*\*\*\*\*

October 23, 2000  
Pam

XXXXXX Health Care  
Altamonte Springs, FL.

Dear Pam:

Thank you for your letter of October 18, which was received this afternoon.

My understanding of it is that when you say "the payment must be in the facility before 2pm of the last business day of the month", and that it was effective beginning in September, you mean just that: that there will be no late fee or interest fee if you receive my check by the last day on the month in which I received your bill.

This is perfectly acceptable. It does not, however, explain why, *in the same letter*, you are still charging me interest beginning September 10 on a bill I received September 12, since the same letter states that I had until 2:00 PM on September 30 to get the check into your hands.

Mike Resnick

cc: Amy

\*\*\*\*\*

*My father died on July 15, 2001, exactly fifteen days after running through the last of his money and going on Medicaid. I was now through fighting with the health care facility and the various pharmacies (I still get bills, but now I tell them to sue my father and that I'm responsible for my debts only)—but then a new opponent climbed into the ring.*

\*\*\*\*\*

August 20, 2001  
Social Security Administration  
15 E. Sunnybrook Drive  
Cincinnati, OH. 45237-2103

Dear Sirs:

In response to your enclosed letter of August 16, it is quite impossible to speak to William Resnick, as he died on July 15. The people representing me in Florida, where he passed away, have informed the Social Security Administration office down there that he is dead. I wrote your Chicago office on July 15 and your Cincinnati office on July 16 to inform you of his death. I know you're having a difficult time with this, but he is really, truly dead. Technically, one could say that he has entered into a long-term state of non-life. He cannot supply any of the things you requested, as he is dead. I cannot ask him for any of the things you requested, as he lived 1,000 miles away from me, and furthermore is deceased. Please do not write to him again, at this or any other address. Being dead, there is very little likelihood that he will answer you.

Sincerely,

Mike Resnick

\*\*\*\*\*

*They only wrote him three more times in 2001, and twice in 2002, proving they are faster on the uptake than most governmental agencies.*

*But they also paid him after he was dead . . .*

\*\*\*\*\*

August 21, 2001  
Social Security Administration:  
P.O. Box 8018  
Chicago, IL. 60680-8018

Dear Sirs:

My father, William Resnick, soc. sec. # 321-14-3353, died in July (see attached death certificate).  
You deposited his monthly payment of \$689.00 in his account. I am sending you a check for that amount, as it was deposited 3 weeks after his death.

Please update your records so that no further payments are made.

Thank you.

Mike Resnick

\*\*\*\*\*

*On August 25, just as we were preparing to leave for the Philadelphia Worldcon, I got a letter from Philadelphia. Unlike most of the others I received from Philadelphia that month, which had to do with hotel reservations and panel assignments and the like, this one came from the Philadelphia branch of the Social Security Administration, demanding that I return the \$689.00 they had deposited in my father's account after he died.*

*I explained that, being an honest citizen, I had already written a check and sent it to the Chicago branch, where he had originally lived and registered for Social Security, as that is what the Florida branch instructed me to do.*

*The Philadelphia branch, ever thoughtful and considerate, threatened to throw me in jail if I didn't send them \$689.00.*

*I waited until the Worldcon was over and I was safely out of Pennsylvania, and then told the Philadelphia branch that I wasn't paying them twice and they could go biologically impossible themselves. They promptly put a freeze on my father's bank account, which had 83 cents in it—but the freeze meant that I couldn't close it and would have to pay \$10.00 a month as a service charge since 83 cents was \$999.17 below the minimum balance the bank would accept with no service charge.*

*Three months later the Chicago branch returned the check with no covering letter. I sent it to Philadelphia, and have not heard from them since, though the Cincinnati branch writes chatty little notes to my father about every two or three months.*

*\*sigh\* The IRS, on the other hand . . .*

-end-







## THE *CHALLENGER* TRIBUTE: DR. JANET DAVIS

She wasn't a doctor when I first met Janet Davis – in fact, she wasn't even 17. She was attending her first SF con in Atlanta and Hank Reinhardt put his arm around her shoulders and declared her to be the prize in that convention's Hearts contest! Years later, she'd *win* the DeepSouthCon Hearts tournament, and the right to take herself home.

At the DeepSouthCon in 1974, she fell into this pose with John Ellis – even though they'd never met before. Which do you think makes the better Manhunter?

The next year Janet came to New York City ifor a *Star Trek* convention and went thoroughly crazy when she found herself in an elevator with George Takei and Nichelle Nichols.

But now Janet's a physician, a mother and a martial arts champion (see below). She doesn't show up at SF conventions much anymore – but she was unforgettable when she did.

Come back, Janet!



## **back pain so severe & other poems**

### **back pain so severe**

When it rains the aged arthritic weatherman  
in my lower back (red hot hatchet in his hands,  
chopping at my mushy muscles  
and rickety lopsided spine) reminds me  
of that karate teacher I had years ago  
when I was in college who would yell, "Pain  
reminds us we're alive, girls!"  
when he'd see the grimace on my face  
after he had punched or kicked me  
just a little too hard.

### **DR. JOE FROM NEW MEXICO**

sitting bent over at the Chiropractor's my first ever visit suddenly I'm feeling so old Dr. Joe they call him  
(from a "school" someplace in New Mexico I think or maybe from across the border) he's a nice young  
man choppy dark hair somewhat unkempt a few scars gleaming faintly from his forehead & the bridge of  
his nose (from being struck no doubt with a bottle or a pool cue in a bar fight in Tijuana) stooping  
forward slightly or maybe it's just that his arms are too long for his body he shows me the X-rays of my  
spinal column the vertebrae tilting to the left like a lopsided stack of coins leaning like the Tower of Pisa  
"the stiffness in your lower back, more specifically your acute tortipelvis, the exacerbation of bilateral  
lumbar strain with vertebral subluxation complexes and associated paravertebral myalgia along with  
muscle spasms and antalgic posture deformation, is caused by advanced diffuse lumbar intervertebral disc  
degeneration resulting primarily from the surgical fusion of the L4/L5 motor unit that was done on you  
years ago." OK, well, that's cool I stand cocked at the hip like usual my mouth open the pains shooting  
down my tired wobbly legs while he circles the problem areas with a thick red grease-pencil flicks on  
another X-ray panel so I can see what a healthy normal back looks like (of a woman a little older than me  
he says & I can tell it's a woman because I see the outline of her bra-cup holding up a rather hefty  
although not, at least from this vantage point, unattractive breast) next I lie down on this table with a  
"drop-down" middle he positions himself his entire bodyweight over me sizing me up hovering like one  
of those fat-bellied helicopters they used in Nam then he pounces snaps down hard Jesus H. Christ on the  
bones of my spine they make loud cracking-popping noises like the sounds of giant hand knuckles being  
cracked & popped I gasp as he rolls me over & does it again on the other side then onto my neck crack-  
pop to let the carbon dioxide out of the spaces in the joints (come on you can't really expect anyone to  
believe such silliness can you?) next it's off to this medieval torture chamber wall-to-wall racks & tables  
& rolling-pin-like machines I lie face-down on a hard bench for my Cryotherapy a young Igoresque  
woman with no make-up on & pimples & stringy not terribly clean hair (maybe she tangled with that  
grease-pencil of Dr. Joe's) sticks 4 cold electrodes over the muscles in my lower back slaps on one of  
those wet ice-cold-cold-packs football players use when they've sprained an ankle then she turns the  
electricity on holy cow I feel like Rambo when that Russian General was electroshocking him on that

rusted box-spring-like apparatus "if your muscles start to spasm or twitch just give a holler I'm always within hollering range" & off she stumps. I lie here quietly listening to the muffled sounds of back crackings & breathful gruntings lie here still as a cement post in an empty park on a winter's day feeling so old decrepit with my cracked-popped spine cold & sizzling at the same time I lie here wondering when they'll be bringing in the leaches & which parts of my limp pathetic body they'll be sticking them on.

## **Reptile**

Rain makes the flesh reverberate over the degenerated clutter of fused bones forming the base of my spine, a lopsided stack of oxidized coins.

Rain makes it raw, so raw, and tender, and sensitive, like I'm in a Chinese water torture, gasping, wanting to scream out in pain.

Raining or not sometimes I stare at my sad pale reflection in the mirror trying not to feel silly that I am simply another simpering, weak modern man struggling hard not to cry.

Sisyphus (that bastard reptile) smirks as he crawls and claws, snaking his serrated boulder up and down my wobbly worn out useless old spine.

## **FRED, MY OLD FRIEND**

I wonder, who would I be without my back pain,  
so chronic, so severe, so noticeable, so ever-there,  
so unrelenting, so unforgiving, so predictable,  
so reliable, so forceful, so undeniable,  
so impossible to deny, ignore, slough-off or spurn.  
My back pain, my old friend, all mine,  
my constant companion. I should name him, maybe Fred  
or Charles or Peter, William, or Ralph. Hi So-And-So,  
I'd like to introduce you to Fred, my beloved back pain,  
with me through sunshine and rain, through thick and thin,  
with me literally to the end, because I am certainly  
taking him to my grave with me. I wonder,  
will I be leaving him there or will he accompany me  
into the great beyond wherever that may be.

## **old gnarled tree**

My back's throbbing  
and I'm bent over again like an old man,  
an old stupid man, like an old  
gnarled tree covered in moss  
and gray shelf mushrooms, trying not  
to feel the hurt, trying to will it all away,  
wishing my wife were here  
so I could hold her hand and feel  
the soft warm glow of her sweet rich  
feminine soul soothe me like nothing else  
in the world possibly can.

### **Grace Under Fire**

Is not such an easy thing  
to pull off especially  
when the pain  
comes throbbing through your bones  
like a locomotive in the night,  
like an angry sea raging  
against the leaky hull of an ancient  
ship run aground.  
Composure does not come easy  
when there is no respite  
from the waves and waves,  
the throbbing waves of ceaseless pain,  
when there is no end in sight  
other than the obvious solution  
to all life's unsolvable problems,  
which is what my Uncle Bill did  
with a shotgun to his chest  
when the pains in his legs  
got the better of him  
one long and hot and terribly lonely  
and unfriendly night.

### **HERNIA**

had my old hernia  
fixed by  
a Doc with a leathery  
wrinkled face like  
a tortoise face  
from too much sunning  
down in  
Florida.  
he didn't put  
me out completely  
& while I couldn't feel  
his knife as it  
cut so  
smoothly through  
my pale passive flesh  
I do remember  
joking  
groggily coaching  
him not to  
slip not to miss his  
mark but the old  
fuck didn't smirk or  
smile or even  
nod at me.  
so I shut up pressed my  
dried out lips together  
& shut up  
so as not to piss  
him off.

# ROSY'S PHOTO ALBUM



*Rose-Marie Lillian didn't take these photos from her album – she believes her father's friend Charley Wise did at an Apollo launch. Above, Polly Freas, Poul Anderson (hand typically cupped over his ear), Gordon R. Dickson and Joseph L. Green listen to Mission Control at the Press Site.*



Richard Hoagland appeared at one of the Apollo Prelaunch parties held at the Greenhouse (specific one forgotten; over time they blend together in memory) dragging the Russian poet Yevgeny Yevtushenko. They were 'making the rounds' and only stayed for about an hour. But during that time Yevgeny somewhat loudly (in good English) started bemoaning the fact the U.S. had recently escalated the war in Vietnam by bombing Haiphong Harbor. At the time he was sitting across the kitchen table from, among others, Poul Anderson, who responded immediately, defending the U.S. action. The two got into an intense and somewhat loud argument. Hearing this, I hurried over and, as their host, intervened, pointing out that this was a party to celebrate one of mankind's greatest achievements, not a time for political squabbles. Both men calmed down, and Yevgeny and Richard Hoagland soon left. The party, as usual, continued on until the wee hours. Only later did I learn that Yevtushenko was one of Russia's most famous poets, and had at times been accused of being anti-Soviet and not allowed to travel abroad. At the party he followed the straight Soviet line.

*– Joseph L. Green*

# By The Numbers

*John Purcell*

*illo by KURT ERICHSEN*

*No, you can't always get what you want  
You can't always get what you want  
You can't always get what you want  
And if you try sometime you just might find  
You get what you need*

Mick Jagger, Keith Richards ("You Can't Always Get What You Want", 1968)  
Released on album *Let It Bleed* (1969)

While I definitely agree with the existentialist sentiment of this lyric, I had to get what I really needed – let alone wanted – in late May of 1999. Simply put, I needed blood. Literally. Want to know why? Well, since you're all gathered here, let me explain.

There is one rather important event in my life that I have not discussed at length in my recent incarnation in fandom. In short, in 1999, a year my wife and I were glad to see go bye-bye, I almost went bye-bye myself. The next time you see me at a convention, ask to see my surgery scar. It's a beautiful reminder of my near death that May.

That should get y'all interested. A bit of warning: some of the descriptions to follow are a bit blunt and graphic, so don't eat anything while you're reading this.

Essentially, on Sunday, May 23<sup>rd</sup> that year, after a lovely barbecued dinner of lemon chicken (one of my grilling specialties) at our Marshalltown, Iowa home, I felt a bit queasy in the stomach, went to the bathroom, and had one of those liquid diarrhea blowouts that lasted all of five seconds. It left me feeling very light-headed, so I figured, "Sheesh, maybe I ate too much or the chicken wasn't cooked enough." Asking around, nobody else felt that way, so I told my wife that I was going to lie down and let this pass. Within the next half hour, I staggered back into the bathroom for yet another liquid magma explosion.

"Man," I thought. "This has *got* to be the flu." The rest of that night and next day were spent in bed; Valerie called in sick for me Monday morning before she left for work herself after dropping our 3-year old son Daniel off at the daycare.

Needless to say, even though I need to say it, I didn't have any more of those nasty blow-outs, but the queasiness and light-headedness didn't get any better. Early Monday, I got up to let the dogs outside to do their doggie duties, staggering to the backdoor the whole way. In the kitchen I nearly passed out, so I sat down, leaning against the wall while waiting for the dogs to finish and come back inside. Then I crawled back to bed. Seriously. I really *crawled* on all fours all the way from the back door to the bedroom, with Timmy and Pulcinella escorting me like a pair of canine dolphins. Tuesday was more of the same, so Valerie took me to the doctor to figure out what was going on. After describing my symptoms, our lady doctor asked, "What did your diarrhea look like? Was it brown, black, or what?"

"Black," I answered from the supine position on the examination table, then a moment later added, "Kind of a blackish brown, actually."

"Ah-hah," she ah-hahed. "Pull down your pants and roll over." Since I was in no condition to argue – this was a phrase that Val hadn't even said to me in almost a year, if ever – I did so, and felt the doctor's gloved fingers probing my anus for only a few seconds.

Straightening up, she then asked me to stand up. So I did. Rather I "tried" to stand up. The doctor attempted to take a standing BP (blood pressure) on me, but the light-headedness immediately returned as my heartbeat starting racing. My face felt clammy, and I sat right back down. The doctor sighed, and pronounced, "I believe you have had a discharge of an internal bleeding. A lot, too. I can't get a standing BP on you, and that's not good. We're going to get you to the hospital."

My wife and I looked at each other. Valerie said, “Okay. I’ll drive him over.”

“No way,” the doctor emphatically said. “He needs an ambulance.”

“Oh, shit!” I swore dejectedly, thinking of the insurance copayment we’d have to shell out for that. All of our attempts to dissuade our doctor from this need were in vain, so about ten minutes later I was loaded onto a gurney and wheeled out the clinic’s back door – going out through the lobby probably would have freaked out the waiting clientele – into an ambulance waiting to whisk me off to Marshalltown Medical and Surgical Center.

Now, it really must be understood at this time that MMSC is not where any sane human being would want to have life-saving surgery performed. An equestrian veterinarian would probably do a better job. No matter. I was admitted to Intensive Care, promptly hooked up to an IV, and a unit of blood was started to replenish my blood supply and bring my BP back up. After two and a half days in ICU there, during which I received 3 units of blood, the doctors couldn’t quite figure out what in the heck was going on. (Like I said, a horse doctor would have known better.) I did, however, get scoped, but the surgeon couldn’t see anything and didn’t impress us anyway, so we opted to get another and more learned opinion. Eventually it would turn out that the MMSC surgeon would have operated *in the wrong spot!* Thank Great Ghu my wife Valerie stepped in and said “NO!” to the idjits at MMSC.

See, Valerie used to work for a specialist clinic called DGA in Des Moines, Iowa in the early 90s as their receptionist – “Diagnostic Gastroenterology Associates, can I help you?” – so she called them, and the head honcho, Dr. James Callahan, said “bring John to Mercy here in Des Moines.” So on Thursday morning, May 27<sup>th</sup>, I was transported by a 45-minute ambulance ride from Marshalltown to Mercy Hospital in Des Moines. They had me laying on my back and facing out the rear of the van so I could see only the overcast sky, and felt every bump and hill on that stretch of Highway 330. If I hadn’t been so sick from loss of blood I would have been sick from losing my lunch or breakfast during that trip – that is, if I had eaten anything, which I hadn’t since Sunday evening except for a couple bowls of chicken noodle soup on Monday and Tuesday.

Once ensconced in the intensive care unit at Mercy Hospital, I had the distinct pleasure of having every orifice in my body entubed in some way. I had tubes going in and out of my body in various locations. They were in the back of both hands, a vein in my left arm, up my nose, down the throat, plus I was catheterized (thank Ghu I was unconscious when *that* was inserted!) and butt-bagged – well, actually a colostomy bag was installed. Lordy, but I must have been a sight. I had no clue what was happening except that I needed surgery. Throughout all of this, I was fairly whacked out on pain meds, so I had no idea what the heck was going on except the basic knowledge that Something Was Seriously Wrong.

At Mercy, two more gastroscopings were performed, on Thursday and Friday, looking for that elusive spot of leakage; nothing definitive was revealed. The X-rays weren’t very helpful either, so the only way the doctors could really find the spot – the surgeon had a pretty good idea (in the lower stomach area where it connected to the upper colon), but had to know for sure – was to open me up and poke around. So while all of these diagnostic procedures were being done, more blood was being pumped into my body.

Factoid: The hemoglobin count of an adult 45 year old male should be around 19; mine was a mere 3.4. If you do the math, this meant I had lost an estimated 80% of my total blood volume. Technically, I should have been dead. Most people don’t survive that kind of blood loss. Needless to say, everybody was puzzled as hell as to why there wasn’t a white sheet covering my face. (Valerie still threatens to do this, but those are other stories to tell some year.)

And so during the day, my blood pressure and hemoglobin count would go up because I was receiving fresh blood, but then both would gradually go down at night when the transfusion drip was stopped. This meant that there was a leak inside me *somewhere* and they couldn’t pin the location down. This puzzled the doctors. This worried my wife. This didn’t register on me at all since morphine and assorted other goodies, like anticoagulants and whatever, make for a **wonderful** drug cocktail. I wasn’t feeling or caring about anything.

My surgeon was Dr. Thomas Condoleon, and he looked like a young Andre Agassiz (the tennis star) complete with the shaved head and perpetual 4-day growth of dark beard. Condoleon had been recommended by Dr. James Callahan, who was now the senior surgeon at DGA, describing the Agassiz look-alike as an “excellent diagnostician with steady hands.” Well, that would help.



Doctors Condoleon and Callahan – an Italian and an Irishman; there’s a great medical combination: “would you like either wine or whiskey in your IV drip?” - took Valerie aside before the surgery on Saturday morning and told her that things weren’t looking good. In fact, Val told me a few days later that they had warned her that I “might not make it.” Another fact I haven’t mentioned yet and should have is that I had been listed as in critical condition since first being admitted to the hospital up in Marshalltown. The doctors were thus a bit doubtful of my survival by this point.

That pretty much said it all about my condition. It was a very sobering thought, even for someone in my drug-hazy mind.

Even so, that day an answer was finally discovered. Naturally, I really don’t remember anything about the actual surgery, either before or after, except that marvelous head-separating effect when the anesthesiologist injected the anesthetic agent into my IV. A moment later all was black, and the next thing I do remember is waking up in post-op with even *more* tubes in me – as if I needed them –and electrodes attached to various points of interest on my body. My entire abdomen felt numb, almost as if it wasn’t there. I could barely move my head to even try to see what they had done to me. What I could see was a mite disconcerting.

It was a zipper. Well, that’s what it looked like. From just below the sternum and extending in a line that finished on the top lip of my belly button was a series of large metal surgical staples covered with steri-strip tape. My counting skills weren’t operational yet, so when my wife came into the recovery room I pointed at them and somehow croaked out, “How many?”

“Nineteen,” Valerie answered. “You look like they could unzip your belly and dive right back in if you start leaking again.”

“\*Nnnrrff\* That was me trying to laugh. “Ouch!” That was me after trying to laugh.

Valerie held my hand. “You were in surgery for almost three hours,” she informed me. “Dr. Condoleon told me that you did very well, but he said that he had to look around for awhile to find the bleeder, but he finally found it. He said it was hiding behind an ulcer.”

Doctors Condoleon and Callahan then joined us. They both looked relieved, and even though they explained the whole procedure to us, I can’t remember much else since my brain was still non-functional from the after-effects of full anesthesia. Over the next few days, I was able to cobble together the following tale of the surgery.

Once Condoleon and crew opened me up, he literally felt his way through my abdomen, moving my innards around, trying to find that bleeder. Once he did, it was a simple matter of sewing the hole, which was in an artery hiding behind a self-healed ulcer in my duodenum. I never knew I had this ulcer, but they said that this sort of thing is quite common; small ulcers occur frequently, sometimes closing themselves. In my case, a modest-sized ulcer self-healed, but the built up scar tissue had scraped a hole in this adjacent artery. Thus, apparently what had been happening inside me was every time my heart beat, blood was pumped out this hole and into my abdominal cavity. It wasn’t a very big hole, but over time, that’s all it needed to cause a major league problem. Eventually this blood built up to the point where it had to go *somewhere* like a clogged sink drain, so out it came at high speed on that just passed Sunday afternoon. During my recovery is when Val and Dr. Condoleon informed me of just how much blood they figured I had lost, and why they were still continuing transfusions to rebuild the supply. The best analogy I can think of is having a car’s radiator completely flushed and refilled. In fact, they couldn’t operate until my hemoglobin count, blood pressure and other vitals had reached a certain level so that my body could tolerate the surgery with a reasonable chance of survival.

My recovery from surgery took awhile, but considering that I had lost so much blood it really didn’t surprise me. The fact that I was alive at *all* was the surprise. I remember walking the ICU hallway twice each day for therapy – must exercise those muscles, legs and all – chatting with my wife, nurses, and other patients. The following Tuesday broke drab and gray, and during my mid-morning walk, we were sitting on a bench in ICU’s outdoor garden (third floor of Mercy Hospital) looking at the flowers, potted trees, listening to the birds singing, then suddenly I started to cry.

“I can’t believe this,” I sobbed into my hands. “I almost died. I nearly left you and the kids.”

Holding me, Valerie said, “You didn’t know. There was really nothing you could have done about it. Nobody knew.”

Hanging my head in wonderment, I tried wiping tears away. “You would have been alone. Our kids wouldn’t have had a father anymore. I’d never see them grow up.” The thoughts were almost as numbing as the pain medication, and the tears kept coming. It was difficult to talk while crying, so I just sat there and let them abate on their own.

“But you’re still here,” my wife quietly said. “That didn’t happen.”

“It sure makes me wonder why I’m still here, then.”

“There must be a reason.” Valerie then added, “To every season...”

“Turn, turn, turn,” I finished the quote, winced at the pain of laughter. “Don’t get ecclesiastical on me.”

“I always did like that song.”

“Electrified folk, circa 1968, or something like that,” I said, glanced at Val’s wristwatch, then stood up. “Well, let’s keep walking. Let’s get back to my room for *The Price Is Right*. I’m feeling lucky today.” Just before we stepped back into the ICU hallway, the sun briefly came out. I took that as a very good sign.



On Wednesday, June 2<sup>nd</sup>, my condition was upgraded to fair. I was finally off the critical list. All of my vital signs were improving, although the dipstick showed I still needed a couple more quarts to reach the full mark. That milestone was finally reached on Friday. The IV that had been keeping me alive was removed on Wednesday night, but they left the connection tube in the back of my left hand “just in case.” Well, I could understand that even though I didn’t want to think about it. This meant that I could finally eat *real food*.

Unbelievably, even the thought of hospital food sounded appetizing.

One of the most memorable moments of this entire experience was

having that first taste. I had not eaten anything for over ten days, and my initial “meal” consisted of a liquid diet, which was to be the deal for the next two days. I could not be discharged until I had eaten – and kept down – solid food. So my first dinner was chicken broth, lemon-lime Jell-O, and room temperature 7-Up.

I have to admit that first sip of chicken broth tasted like manna from heaven. Waves of gastronomic euphoria washed over me, my mouth rejoicing in the abundance of *FLAVOR* long absent. If taste buds could talk, mine would have probably screamed “Yummy!” over and over. The coolness of the Jell-O was delightful, so I let it lie on my tongue, letting it swish all over the insides of my mouth before swallowing. Unbelievable how good a little meal like that could be such a feast. As the old saying goes, “You don’t know what you’ve got until it’s gone.” While enjoying my first meal, an old Rolling Stones song played in my head. Dinner music is always a good idea.

Friday evening Dr. Condoleon figured it was time to remove the abdominal drainage tube he had installed; like its name implies, this “short” 6-inch nylon tube was suctioning out excess blood not only still left from the initial leak, but also sucking out blood caused by the surgery. So when Condoleon saw that hardly anything was draining, he decided to take it out.

But this really meant “pulling” it out.

“Will it hurt?” I asked.

“Not really,” he said. “It’s more like a burn since the tube will be rubbing against the sides of the incision.”

“Do I get a local anesthetic?” I asked.

“Naw. Just breathe rapidly when I say so. You’ll be fine.”

*Oh, great, I thought. This ain’t gonna be fun...*

Condoleon leaned over me from the right side of my bed, Valerie held my left hand, a nurse stood by with a surgical tray, and then the doctor spoke that dreaded word: “Ready?”

*Fuck me, Hannah, this is gonna hurt real bad, I just know it...* I exhaled, said, “Yeah.”

“Good,” he said, “start breathing rapidly NOW!” and started tugging on the tube.

Sweet Jesus, Mary, and Joseph! but it *burned*, made me yelp while gasping for breath. It felt like he was pulling for minutes, even though I know it was only a few seconds. That six-inch tube felt like it was more like six-feet long. But it was soon over; the burn flamed out, and a quick suturing of the hole fixed it up nice and neat, like patching a flat tire. The scar from this drainage spot is still visible, in case you’re interested.

Things would eventually turn out just fine. Both doctors Condoleon and Callahan came in to visit each day over that final weekend, checking on my progress, and remarking on my remarkable recovery. To this day I am positive that there’s an article about me in some AMA journal discussing the life-saving surgery of this patient who should not have survived his initial blood loss.

I was finally discharged on late Sunday morning, June 6, 1999. My entire hospital stay had been nearly two weeks long, and when I consider the cold, hard data, it is all really amazing.

- Estimated blood loss: 80% of total volume.
- Total number of units of blood received: 13.
- Number of tubes in my body: 7.
- Number of new holes created in my body: 4.
- Number of days on critical list: 9
- Length of surgery: three hours
- Number of surgical staples shot into my abdomen: 19
- First sight of wife and family in recovery room: priceless

Okay, so that last bit references a bit of crass commercialism, but it is so very true. It really was a delight to see them, even through the haze of post-anesthesia. I really must get a supply of that stuff someday...

The bottom line is that if you went by the numbers, I really should have died on the kitchen floor on Monday morning, May 24, 1999, in Marshalltown, Iowa, while waiting for our dogs to finish their first pee and poop of the day. Why I didn’t is anybody’s guess.

What caused all this to happen? Well, thinking back about it from the vantage point of time, this becomes very obvious. It was a cumulative effect thing. I had just completed my first year of study for my Masters Degree in Applied Linguistics at Iowa State University in Ames, which was a 42-mile drive each way from Marshalltown. Besides pursuing that degree full-time, I was working full-time at Swift & Company, the pig packing plant in town, which meant 6 or 7 days a week, 10 hours or more each day, since I was in Maintenance Management Support.

Meanwhile my home life entailed the care and feeding of my family: we had pets and three children; when all this went down, Penny was 14, Josie, 8, and Daniel was 3.

In other words, for nearly a year I lived a hectic schedule, averaging only 3 hours of sleep each night. I basically wore my body out, which created that ulcer, which self-healed, and the resultant scar tissue tore that hole in that artery. Not only that, but the physical nature of my job – lots of heavy lifting, running around the plant and all – aided my survival. How ironic. I was in pretty good shape thanks to working there, built up great endurance, and didn’t smoke or drink, even ate healthily, too. We had a huge vegetable garden in our backyard, and tending that also contributed to my overall well-being.

Thus it was great to finally get back home and begin my convalescence. The following week I had an appointment to see Dr. Condoleon again down in Des Moines, but he noted emphatically that I could not return to work at the packing plant until my health was back to 100%. Technically, I was on short-term disability until after the 4<sup>th</sup> of July.

But all was not completely over and done with quite yet that Sunday.

This time it was nice to be able to sit up in the car while Valerie drove, and I enjoying watching the rolling fields of Iowa, ripe with growing stalks of corn and wheat, instead of only sky. The sun was out, and all seemed right in the world.

Once home, Val and the kids helped me up the stairs and into the bedroom, where Valerie propped me up with pillows, a couple books, television remote, with a TV tray at bedside. To quote an old John Denver song, "Gee, it's good to be back home again."

Apparently, the pets thought so, too, especially fat cat Marmalade, who at that time wasn't quite two years old but was already packing on the pounds. Once he saw the bed being set up with me in it, he happily thought, "Naptime!" and leaped up, landing squarely on my belly zipper.

*"AAAUUUUGGGHHH!!!!!!!!!"*

That was me screaming, as Valerie yelled, "MARMALADE!" grabbing for the cat. She missed, but I didn't.

*"MMMRRROOOooooowwwrrrrr.....!"*

That was Marmalade, as I catapulted him across the room. He landed heavily on all fours, then skedaddled from the room to hide in a distant basement corner.

"I didn't know that cats could fly," Valerie commented.

"Neither did Marmalade," I said, picking up the remote. "Dumb cat!"

She smiled, said, "Welcome home to your madhouse."

I grinned. "Ain't that the truth," I agreed. "One man's family. Long may it wave."



# Best Before October 2011

Taral Wayne

Although I may well have exceeded my shelf-life this October, what a wonderful present for my 60<sup>th</sup> birthday!

For some time now, I've been aware that I have a neurological condition called Myasthenia Gravis. It's not as serious as it might sound. In most cases, it's not life-threatening. What it is, is a confounded nuisance to me. The cause of Myasthenia is not entirely understood but falls into a broad spectrum of auto-immune disorders such as diabetes, cancers and Alzheimer's. The fact that so many diseases are collected under the same tag line suggests only some common causal mechanism, but says nothing about the disorder itself.



In my case, muscle cells are less sensitive to the chemical signals given them by nerve fibers than they ought to be. In a sense, my muscles have developed an "immunity" to nerve impulses. As a result, they tire easily and perform poorly. The only visible symptom I have is that my right eyelid droops, which interferes with vision. On a good day, I hardly notice it. Lately, I've been having *bad* days when my right eye is virtually closed unless I make a real effort to open it.

I may also tire easily from walking, but I have no way of knowing whether that's the Myasthenia at work or whether I'm just terribly out of shape because I get too little exercise. Having one eye half-or-more closed is a terrific inducement to stay at home and get flabby. I also have a touch of what I think is arthritis in my hips that limits how far I can comfortably walk in any case.

My body is nickel and diming me to death, it seems. Still, it could be worse and I'm perfectly fine at home, in my own company.

But, yesterday things *got* worse.

I noticed the first signs the night before, while indulging in a late-night snack. I was having a bit of trouble swallowing food that got in that little space under my tongue, just behind my teeth. It was as if nothing in that spot could be reached with the tip of my tongue. Food or drink just sat there. After a minute, the peculiar experience would pass... then return. I thought I might have been sucking on too many diet Hall's candies, or something, and having a "reaction" to too much eucalyptus, if that was possible. In any case, I thought I remembered it *had* happened now and then... even if never this noticeably before. I thought nothing more of it, and turned out the light.

Next morning, however, I found I couldn't talk. I knew what I wanted to say, and certain sounds came out just as intended, but any of those that were formed with the tip of the tongue came out as mush. If I said out loud, "what's causing this situation," it came out "hruzsh cauzingth zhish zhishooyashn."

Now, I know you're thinking *stroke*. But I was fairly sure I hadn't had one. For one thing, I didn't recall

any dizziness or headaches. I wasn't numb anywhere and didn't notice any paralysis. Moreover, I knew perfectly well what I was trying to say – no aphasia or memory loss. I just didn't seem to be able to get all of my tongue in working order.

As it happens, I had read a great deal on the subject of Myasthenia Gravis since being diagnosed a couple of years ago, and recalled that another common symptom was difficulty speaking. And my eye was almost closed *completely* that day. I surmised that the Myasthenia was particularly bad for some reason. The Fall weather outside was bloody gorgeous and for some time I've suspected that the M.G. tends to be worst when I would most enjoy getting outside for some sun and air. And it seems best when the day is gloomy and wet, and I have no desire to leave the house. The perversity of the universe is not to be underestimated, after all.

To make matters worse, my friend Steven was coming over that evening, to hang out for my birthday. Maybe we would order a pizza. Maybe watch a movie, or natter until some tender hour.

Instead, we discussed my condition, and spent the night in the emergency clinic at St. Joseph's hospital. Although I didn't feel there was any urgency, in the end I agreed with Steven that it was best to be sure.

I need to mention that I had the worst personal physician in the world. Dr. Woe (which is pretty close) has many failings, but the worst of them is that he has no interest in doing anything but making an elementary exam of me every two months, writing a prescription for my blood pressure and collecting a substantial payment from the government for his five minute work-out. He must have *seen* my drooping eyelid for months, and said nothing about it until I complained that it was so bad I could not see out of it properly. He sent me to a neurologist, who diagnosed Myasthenia and suggested medication.

At the time, I just plain couldn't afford it. Health care is largely free in Canada, but the pharmacists or drug industry must have been more clever than the Canadian Medical Association, because drugs are not covered federally. Nor was I on a provincial plan at the time. A couple of months ago, however, I realized that my social assistance included coverage of my prescription drugs. I *could* try the medication for my Myasthenia. I had prudently saved the neurologist's note, and took it to Dr. Woe. To my astonishment, he flatly refused to write a prescription. The note was too old he said.

He didn't offer to have his secretary phone the neurologist, however. Nor did he want to prescribe this regular medication for the Myasthenia Gravis that he *knew* I had himself. He just didn't want to do anything. He didn't quite say, "I've taken your blood pressure reading, made my hundred bucks, now don't waste any more of my time," but he might as well have. My health was no concern of his.

I have to mention, also, that I had papers from social assistance that I had brought for him to fill out. The social worker had decided I should seek disability payments, since I was plainly unemployable as things stood. (High unemployment figures, no work history since I was self-employed, going on 60, vision impaired, difficulty walking.) She said I should have no trouble with them since the doctor would be paid for the paperwork, minimal as it was. I also had the impression she would phone ahead.

However, Dr. Woe refused to fill out the forms I presented to him. "*You* don't need a disability pension, Mr. Wayne." Dr. Woe had decided. Nothing more to discuss. Set beside *his* god-like judgment, what did the opinion of the social worker amount to? Or the well-being of his patient?

Suspicion of reverse-racism filled my thoughts. I was white, male, urban, middle-class, middle-aged and English speaking – under no circumstances short of quadriplegia do such privileged people *ever* qualify for assistance. It's a sign of their sense of entitlement that they might even apply.

However, I really have *no* idea *what* axe Dr. Woe was grinding. Maybe he just didn't like me. I wouldn't lose weight when he told me to. Not that I didn't try sometimes, and I would periodically lose ten

pounds, whether I was trying or not. Then I would gain it back, whether I was trying or not. Worse, he had predicted that I would develop Type II Diabetes as the *inevitable* outcome of not following his orders. Diabolically, I refused to become diabetic. It didn't matter that I already ate a low-salt, low-sugar, low-fat diet, didn't smoke, never drank to excess, had virtually no vices and had been very active up the onset of my Myasthenia. "Exercise is no good," he said, "it only makes you hungry." When I substituted grapes for junk food, he said grapes were fattening too. His main beef, I suppose, was just that I was *supposed* to reap the consequences of my doctor's infallible judgments, and had defied him. No wonder he didn't like me.

If what you're thinking is that it was high time for a new personal doctor, you're right. Unfortunately, the application for the disability was time sensitive, and I was already crowding the calendar badly. By refusing to fill in the blanks on some sheets of pink and yellow paper, Dr. Woe may well have decided for me that I would have to subsist on a \$325 a month stipend until I qualified for the Guaranteed Annual Income at age 65. On that budget, it would be even odds I would last five more years.

The up-side was that my social worker was appalled by the doctor's refusal, and gave me a deadline extension. I have yet to find a new doctor, despite some effort. Finding one isn't as easy as saying it. Thanks to the short-sighted budgeting of Reagan-legacy governments, there's a shortage of them. Most general practitioners are not taking new patients.

Returning to the events of last night, Steven drove me the short distance to St. Joe's – like most hospitals, a spreading Gormenghast of Victorian red brick and modern additions. Service was prompt, pleasant and efficient – notwithstanding the two cops dragging a screaming drug freak who came in behind me. I was shown to a doctor within something like half an hour. Next time Glen Beck tells you that Canadians are dying in dumpsters outside their boarded-up hospitals because of our socialized medicine, know him for the lying liar he is. The staff of this hospital conducted an electrocardiogram, a CT scan and blood tests right then and there, taking about half-an-hour for each procedure. I admit, Steven and I waited more than an hour for the results after all the tests were done, but it seemed a reasonable delay... considering. The emergency ward grew more and more busy around us as the evening wore on. Many of the newly-arrived were wheeled in on gurneys, and looked like serious cases. By comparison, my business simply wasn't that urgent.

In a way, Steven and I had our evening of hanging-out after all. We talked before being admitted to see a doctor, we gabbed between tests and we shot the breeze while waiting for the results. It was a pity we left the vanilla, caramel and chocolate-bit frozen yogurt at home. If we'd brought it with spoons and dishes, we would hardly have noticed we were sitting in a clinic. If I ever needed proof of Steven's friendship, I had it that night. We were supposed to be spending a pleasant evening together, and despite a lively conversation, we were not at home in the privacy and comfort of my apartment, but in a busy, public space. He stuck with me the whole night, though. More than that, if left to my own inertia, I likely would have "waited out" the problem – as I too often do – and not sought medical attention. He drove me there and home again after. He provided me with an indispensable set of ears that heard my name being paged when I wouldn't have. And he served as an interpreter when my tongue would only produce gibberish.

To add insult to injury, today I'm eating the frozen yogurt that Steven brought over. Poor Steven never tasted a single spoonful. It's delicious. How does a selfish bastard like me deserve friends like that?

The verdict from my battery of tests? It was as I expected. My Myasthenia was just having a bad day. In fact, while we waited and chewed the fat, Steven pointed out that my speech got clearer for a while then got worse again, on and off. The results of the blood work, the scan and the ECG revealed no telltale signs of a stroke or brain tumor. I was no better off than I had been before, of course, but at least I knew I was no worse.

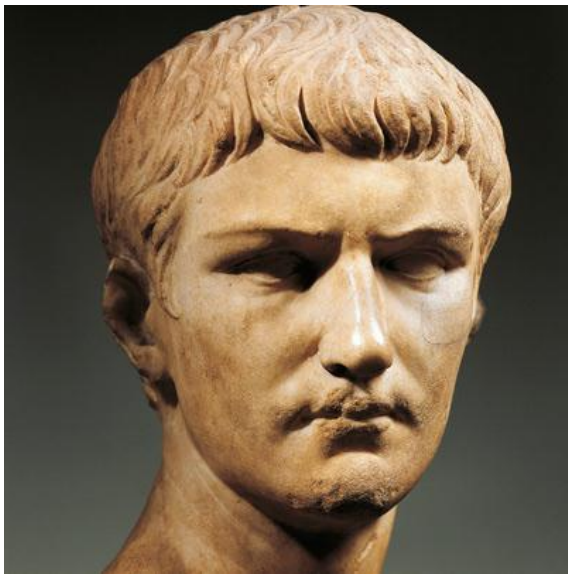


On the other hand, hospital records turned up a CT scan that I was supposed to have had two years ago. It was scheduled for November 2009. Only I was never informed of the date. Dr. Woe's work, if I read the signs correctly... or the lack of them. Very likely the difficulties I experienced at the Reno Worldcon could have been avoided had I had that scan, and been able to have the subsequent minor corrective surgery on my eyelid. I squinted at ghost-towns, mountains and desert, and very nearly absented myself for the Hugo photo session because of that delinquent eye. For the same reason, my once-in-a-lifetime experience as a GoH at Anticipation was much diminished. I owe Dr. Woe a formal complaint laid with the college of physicians and surgeons at some point in the near future. But first things first. A new doctor has to be my priority, not the least so that I can pursue my disability application. See to my medical needs. *Then*, step on the nasty little cockroach.

I didn't mean to be sarcastic about the birthday gift mentioned at the beginning of all this. Quite the opposite. I showed the neurologist's two year old note to the attending physician at St. Joe's. He said, "what the fuck... why didn't Dr. Woe write you a prescription?" Then he did it himself. I have a prescription now to take to the pharmacy, and a drug plan to pay for it. So just maybe I'll not have to sound like the Dick Tracy villain, Mumbles, ever again... and maybe, just maybe get my right eye fully open again, so that I can see properly.

That would be a helluva birthday present indeed.

□



On August 31<sup>st</sup>, 2012 ...  
HAPPY 2000<sup>TH</sup>  
BIRTHDAY TO  
**CALIGULA**  
(Gaius Julius Caesar  
Augustus Germanicus)

A man who loves his  
horse  
Can't be all bad

# THE LANGUAGE OF PTSD, OR, CONFESSIONS OF A PSYCHOTRAUMA BIBLIOGRAPHER

*Fred Lerner*

Twenty-three years ago I spent the better part of a week reading about posttraumatic stress disorder. I don't think I'd ever heard of PTSD — it's not the sort of thing I'd normally choose to read about. But as I had just been hired by the National Center for PTSD to create a bibliographical database devoted to the subject, it seemed like a good idea to learn something about it.

There was quite a bit to learn. For one thing, its more popular identity as “post-Vietnam syndrome” was inaccurate. Veterans of earlier wars had suffered similar after-effects. As early as 1871 the medical literature reported “irritable heart” among men who had fought in the American Civil War. World War I produced many cases of “shell shock”, and “war neuroses” afflicted many World War II combatants and veterans. Literary-minded historians found in the works of Homer and Shakespeare passages that could be read as describing similar afflictions.

Studies of Holocaust survivors revealed a “concentration camp syndrome”, and “rape trauma syndrome” was identified in survivors of sexual assault. In both cases the psychological and psychophysiological effects closely resembled those found in war veterans. This was also true in people who had experienced major disasters and other forms of extreme danger.

This suggested that research into PTSD among veterans should be informed by lessons learned from other traumatised populations, and that work done for the benefit of veterans would be applicable to many other populations. And it suggested to me that although the National Center for PTSD was a program of the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, its database should not be limited to publications dealing with veterans.

As I knew practically nothing about psychiatry or psychology, what qualified me for this job?

I held a doctorate in library science, and had twenty years of experience in library work. In my previous position (at an engineering firm) I had used many online bibliographical databases to search the patent literature and the chemistry and physics journals, as well as business and economics publications. (This gave me a strong feeling for ways in which databases might be improved.) One of my duties would be to superintend the production of a quarterly newsletter — and I had done a bit of that sort of thing in my time.

My ignorance of psychiatry and psychology meant that I came to the task of indexing the PTSD literature unencumbered with ties to either discipline. This meant that I was free to approach this interdisciplinary literature from an outsider's viewpoint; to consider how best to serve the informational needs of researchers, clinicians, and policy makers from all the fields involved with traumatic stress studies; and to borrow from a wide range of sources.

I might have known nothing about the subject matter, but I did know how to assess the informational needs of the people whom my database was meant to serve, and how to learn enough about PTSD to develop an indexing vocabulary to describe the field.

Any time that two or more people are talking about something, the discussion will be more productive if everyone involved agrees on the meaning of the words they are using. That's why the Official Rules of Baseball prescribe a specific definition for words such as "ball" and "strike", and why our system of weights and measures is based upon universally agreed physical constants.

A bibliographical database attempts to describe the content of a document in terms that are as unambiguous as possible. This cannot rely upon the terminology used by the author of the document, which often depends upon his nationality, disciplinary background, or ideological stance — when it does not reflect his idiosyncratic preferences. It is entirely possible for there to be several papers on exactly the same topic whose titles and abstracts do not employ the same words to describe their content.

So databases use a controlled indexing vocabulary to describe the content and format of the documents they cover. This is contained in a "thesaurus" that shows various relationships among the terms, allowing indexers to discover the appropriate words and phrases to use in describing documents, and allowing searchers to discover the terms to use in finding documents relevant to their interests. Typically these terms are arranged in a hierarchy ranging from broader to narrower, so that "Treatment" includes the narrower term "Psychotherapy", which in turn includes such terms as "Group Psychotherapy" and "Psychoanalytic Psychotherapy".

While it is possible to search a database without using its thesaurus, the results of such a search are likely to be less satisfactory than one that employs the controlled vocabulary. The searcher who doesn't bother to consult the thesaurus and simply types in the phrase "group therapy" may not retrieve important publications whose authors have used "group psychotherapy" to describe their work. And the searcher who types in "Indians" instead of the descriptor "Native Americans" may find himself inundated with scores of references, most of which are utterly irrelevant to his needs.

As I often explain to users of the PILOTS Database, the advantage of using our controlled vocabulary is that, instead of guessing at all the terms that 50,000 people have used to describe the content of their publications, they need only to guess at the terms that I use — and I've published those in the *PILOTS Database User's Guide* to make it easy for them.



Does that mean that people actually use the controlled vocabulary to which I've devoted so much time and effort?

Most people who use computers to search for things have been conditioned by their experience with Google to type a word or phrase in a box, click the "Search" button, and scroll through the first screen or two of the results that process retrieves. ProQuest, the database vendor on whose system the PILOTS Database is made publicly available, offers its users a default "Quick Search" that intentionally mimics the Google experience. After all, that's what they know best. Most people never use the "Advanced Search" or "Command Search" options, nor consult the online version of the PILOTS Thesaurus.

This failure is not limited to casual searchers, or to users of the PILOTS database. The authors of literature reviews and meta analyses, who of all people should know how to conduct literature searches properly, often disclose when describing their methodology that they are unfamiliar with the concept of a controlled vocabulary, or unwilling to take the trouble to use one. I have never understood the tolerance

displayed by journal editors for inadequate bibliographic methodology. These same editors would never accept for publication a study whose statistical methodology was half as sloppy.

I know wherein my limitations lie. I am not smart enough to produce an index that can translate someone's unformed description of what he requires into a list of precisely those publications that will satisfy his needs. The best that I can do is to set up a system that will enable someone to identify a manageable group of publications likely to be relevant to his concerns — providing that he is willing to learn how to navigate through a complex international interdisciplinary literature.

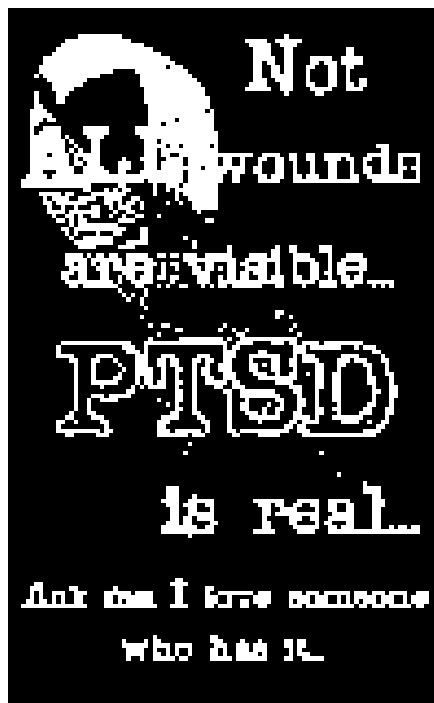
How many people are willing to acquire this skill? Not as many as I would like. I console myself with the knowledge that many of the people who benefit from my bibliographical work may never have heard of the PILOTS Database or the controlled vocabulary that I have put so much effort into constructing. A good literature review or meta analysis, or a book chapter or fact sheet written by an expert who has used the database properly — or who has enlisted the aid of a librarian or expert searcher to do this for him — can translate the information contained in the publications we have indexed into work that can direct future research into promising paths or advance the treatment of psychotrauma sufferers. I can derive some satisfaction from playing a part in this.

I came into this work ignorant of psychology and disdainful of psychiatry. A profound lack of interest in rat behavior kept me out of Columbia's introductory psychology course. The dubious ethical standards of its practitioners, and the lack of scientific evidence for its teachings, left me with little confidence in psychiatry.

In the past two decades I have seen psychiatry evolve into a scientifically based branch of medicine that looks more to chemistry and genetics than to psychoanalysis for the underlying causes of behavioral phenomena. I have seen a growing insistence on evidence-based treatment in the psychology literature. And I have seen the people with whom I work playing a leading role in this transformation.

Twenty-three years ago I knew nothing about posttraumatic stress disorder. Today I can claim to have seen more literature on PTSD than anybody on the planet. At last count I've looked at more than 46,000 publications on the subject.

There are people who claim that there is really no such thing as PTSD. Perhaps from the psychiatric or psychological point of view they are right. But from the bibliographic point of view I can tell you that PTSD surely does exist. And if you ever find yourself in White River Junction, Vermont, I can take you into a room that contains almost all of those 46,000 publications and let you judge for yourself.



*So what's illness like across the Pond? Thanks to Nic Farey for directing Chris to us and us to Chris.*

# SICK NOTES

*Chris Murphy*

*In mid-December 1999, I caught flu. This took me out of work for a few days and I thought no more about it. Then new symptoms began: more coughing, a high temperature and an odd sensation like liquid running down inside my chest.*

*I assumed this was a recurrence of my recent illness and did not go to the doctor. I had seen the British government's publicity campaign that told everyone that if they had flu they should take painkillers and go to bed without bothering their physicians.*

*On December 22nd I was forced to leave the office at lunchtime. I spent Christmas Eve and Christmas Day at home, not seeing friends and family as planned. My Christmas presents stayed unopened. I was drinking small amounts of cold water, unable to keep anything else down. Coughing fits were keeping me awake at night.*

*Despite feeling increasingly ill and lethargic, I believed I would soon get better. The crisis came on December 26th.*

## First Day

I've slept in my lounge, sitting in an easy chair, because lying down makes the coughing worse. This hasn't been too bad apart from my cats jumping on me for attention.

Around eight in the morning I stand up and immediately become queasy, unsteady and woolly-minded, as if drunk and hung over at the same time. Feeding the cats is a feat of concentration. I find I have to 'program' every movement, things like opening a can have become complex and difficult. Eventually I finish the job. With no inclination to eat anything myself I retreat to my bedroom (crawling up the stairs) and collapse in another chair.

Suddenly it's early afternoon. I've slept and feel better. Standing up destroys this illusion of improvement. I take two steps and topple onto my bed. Coughing or no coughing, I'm going to have to stay here. Just for a while.

Now it's late afternoon. I've slept again, but I've been troubled by a repetitive dream in which someone is reading a list of names and dates to me. These are appointments of some kind. I make responses, without having any idea what I'm talking about.

I decide that this has gone far enough. Time to get to the phone and call for help. I start to move and touch a part of the bed I haven't been lying on. It can only be cool, but a sensation of fierce cold shoots through my hand like an electric shock. I'm stunned by this and lie still. While telling myself I must get up, I discover that someone disagrees. It's as though my body has acquired an advocate in my head and he's got a veto on my decisions. He doesn't want to go anywhere.

Presently I become aware that there's a third player in the game. A voice is speaking quietly and continually, saying "Help. Help me," over and over again. It's mine. This doesn't alarm me, because for some reason my emotions have stopped working. It seems interesting, though. And strange. And serious.

Eventually (after an hour, two hours?) the part of my mind that can still reason persuades the body's lawyer that all it has to do is put on some clothes, go downstairs and sit down by the phone. What could be easier? OK, let's do it. I get up and immediately Body-Lawyer protests that this much distress wasn't in the agreement. If I try to get dressed I'll just fall back on the bed. Go! I'm stumbling down the stairs half-naked, my hands slapping against the wall for support. Into the unlit lounge, scattering the cats. There's a chair. Sit.

Now what? I'm bewildered and at last a little anxious. Who shall I call? The only number I can remember is my sister's, so I dial that. It's awkward to find the right buttons in the unlit room, especially in my clumsy state, but I can't summon up the will to walk as far as a light switch.

My brother-in-law answers. Whatever I say to him, it doesn't make much sense. He hands me over to Pauline, my sister. I'm still babbling, but manage to convey that I'm in trouble. She says she'll come straight over. I put down the phone and decide to rest. Body-Lawyer concurs with this and Voice has gone quiet. It occurs to me that I'll have to get to the door and let my sister in. No matter.

The phone rings. It's Pauline, calling from outside the house on her cell phone. Her stepson has given her a lift here. Right, Body, here we go again. I somehow take myself to the front door, moving like an old-time brass-helmet diver underwater. Pauline is on the other side. Realising that the door's locked and that I've left the key upstairs, I stagger to the back door and open that.

I have to sit down again. Pauline is talking to me, surrounded by chilled air, but all I can say is that I feel very thirsty. She feels my forehead, frowns and says she's going to make a phone call. Her stepson is left to 'watch' me. The person he's watching must look pretty pathetic. I thank him for coming over and he smiles.

Pauline returns and says she's requested an ambulance. This surprises me. Is my condition really that bad? She brings me a glass of water.

Two paramedics seem to arrive almost instantly. I'm being examined and questioned. It's agreed that I should go to a hospital. The paramedics help me get dressed, then I sit in a wheelchair and they roll me out into the dark, indifferent street. The lights inside the ambulance seem harshly bright. I'm lying down with an oxygen mask over my face and Pauline is beside me. The fresh gas feels wonderful and my head clears slightly. I understand that I'm helpless and don't care.

## First Night

They have me lying uncomfortably on a gurney. I've been parked in a cubicle with Pauline. Elsewhere drunk or disturbed people are shouting and quarrelling with the staff. We wait. I'm feeling light-headed and cough frequently. The experience seems both immediate and interminable. Later I'll be told that we were here for about five hours. At some point they take me away to X-ray my chest and then put me back again.

I complain about the situation, sometimes to Pauline and sometimes to the world in general. She's worried that I sound confused and tries to reassure me. Eventually a doctor appears. He talks to me and then to Pauline, who is a much better source of information. He tells me I'm being admitted as a patient. Whatever.

Pauline says goodnight and promises to come back tomorrow. The gurney is wheeled quickly through wide corridors, into a lift and out to what I recognise as a ward. Nurses roll me onto a bed and strip me down to my underpants. They're concerned about my temperature so only a sheet is pulled over me. Someone in another bed speaks and I make a reply of sorts.

There is a pink plastic valve in the back of my left hand (where did that come from?) to which a drip is being connected. They give me an oxygen mask, which is cumbersome with its trailing tube but brings relief. Then I'm left in the dim light to look around me.

Opposite lie two old women. One is still, the other writhes and gestures in obvious discomfort. There are men on either side of me. Time stretches out again like a rubber band. I have to keep taking off the mask to cough. The wakeful old woman kicks slowly as if performing a bizarre dance. Unseen nurses talk to each other. What time is it? Don't have my watch. Presently, I suppose, I go to sleep.

## Second Day

I'm woken, too early, by the lights being switched on. It takes me some time to understand that the lights are on because it's morning. I'm offered breakfast, which I decline, and wash behind curtains from a bowl by my bed. A nurse warns me that the button beside the bed which is supposed to summon assistance doesn't work. She brings me a pair of pyjamas, which are a poor fit, and a plastic tub to collect coughed-up gunge in.

A consultant arrives with an entourage of lesser doctors. She's very assertive and talks about me as if I'm not there. They stare at my X-rays in disapproval and seem almost excited by the stuff I've coughed into the tub. Finally she says something directly to me: "You're not leaving here until this has stopped." Oh good. They move on. I receive a new drip and some paracetamol.

Tired of using a bottle, I decide I will walk to the lavatory (rest room). Off I go with a nurse holding my arm, shuffling like an old man and telling myself I could do this on my own. Once inside I shut the door, turn around and catch sight of someone in the mirror. He's pale, weary, dishevelled and looks shocked. He shocks me. That face should be on a character who eats flies in a Dracula movie, not being reflected as my own. Feeling concerned (how ill am I?), I let myself be escorted back to the chair by my bed. We 'chest cases' are expected to spend the day sitting up.

As the day wears on I observe my fellow patients, who are all much older than me. There are men on either side. The right-hand one says little, the left-hand one grumbles occasionally.

On the other side of the 'bay', which has room for six beds, are three women. To the left, a sociable one who seems annoyed by the grumbling man. Apparently she wants to watch television but he objects to it being on. In the middle, a quiet one who refuses to get out of bed. To the right, the one who was restless in the night. I think that she was once beautiful and her dark eyes are still striking. Now she is frail, silent and lost in private misery.

The nurses are attentive and efficient, but obviously under pressure. I am impressed by the Sister in charge of the ward, who radiates authority without ever being overbearing or condescending. The ward itself is a bleak, functional place. It's hard to imagine that it was Christmas here less than two days ago.

I put on my oxygen mask, but it brings no relief. Unnoticed by me or anyone else, its tube has become disconnected and will remain so until tomorrow. Dinner comes and goes, again declined by me. I'm still coughing steadily and feel weak.

My friend Dave Cox comes to visit me. He's looking after my cats, for which I'm very grateful, and puts up with my stilted conversation. The old woman on the right is visited by a younger one, perhaps her daughter, who simply sits hugging her.

The Sister urges me to eat something, so I take some soup at teatime. Dave visits again, bringing my watch. At least I know what time it is, but the evening drags as a consequence. The woman in the middle who won't get up is shifted onto a gurney and taken somewhere else. Her bed is immediately remade but remains empty.

Three times a day they take our blood pressures, pulses and temperatures. This is all done electronically. I am intrigued by the device for measuring the pulse, which clips over the end of my finger and glows laser-red inside.

Bedtime. I climb in between the sheets, put on my useless mask and descend into Hell.

## **Second Night**

I can't sleep. Between the drip and the mask, it's impossible to find a comfortable position. The coughing is gradually subsiding, but is still a nuisance. The ward, I am beginning to realise, is overheated.

Commotion: a team of orderlies arrives and wheels away the old lady to my right. Another bed is quickly brought into position and a younger woman put into it. Nurses and a couple of friends or relatives fuss over her for a while and then she is left to rest. If she can.

Unaware that I'm getting no oxygen, I wheeze and study the ceiling and the wall over the bed opposite. This is becoming pretty unpleasant. I close my eyes and try to randomise my thoughts, but they race and rally against my will. Now there's another outbreak of noise and movement. An elderly woman is installed in the bed opposite.

They're worried about her. Her breathing sounds laboured, painful under her mask. She's shuddering. I can see that her face is horribly bruised, as if she's fallen or someone has hit her.

They write up her identity over the bed. She has the same second name as an old girlfriend of mine, who came from this part of England. I wonder idly if she is related. They fetch an electric fan, desperately trying to lower her temperature. (Why don't they just turn the heating down?) One of the nurses says something about not being able to give her any more antibiotics yet.



They've gone. I try once more for an escape into sleep. Lie on my right side, no good. Lie on my left side, no good. Lie on my back, the same. Across the bay the new patient trembles ceaselessly. From time to time she speaks in a whimpering tone, her words unintelligible. She begins pulling off her nightdress, exposing herself. I study the ceiling again, but I can clearly hear her fighting suffocation.

The nurses are back. They adjust her nightdress, talking to her like a child. A box with glowing gauges and a repertoire of beeping sounds is brought in. It's being connected to her, somehow, and they study it for a while. Then they leave again.

The box beeps and her suffering continues. My pity for her changes to dull, helpless anger. No one deserves to be in that state. She's talking again. Pleading? Praying? I hope she's too far out of it to understand what's happening.

She makes another attempt to undress herself. I hear a nurse come along and gently tell her to keep covered up, because, 'There are gentlemen on the ward.' If no men were here, would she be allowed the faint relief of removing her clothes? I begin to feel that I am contributing to this woman's torture. The box beeps.

The impossible happens. I'm asleep, wandering through shapeless dreams. Abruptly things snap into focus. Here's a twilight street among shadowy, damaged buildings. A group of men are walking away from me. Their leader is a giant, perhaps seven feet tall and bulky. The three or four following him are of more average height and build. They wear dark, close-fitting clothes.

One of the followers turns and looks directly at me. His face is suddenly illuminated, as though by a spotlight. It's a spider's face, covered in fine grey hair which looks damp. There are several glaring eyes, not fixed in position but seeming to creep about among the fur. I feel almost physically the intense cold hostility which flows from him, it.

The bottom of the spider mask where the fangs are folded splits open to reveal pale, glistening flesh, like the white of a boiled egg. It bulges in a way I find vaguely obscene. Then the vision literally shatters, breaks apart with the violence of ice under a hammer. I'm half-awake, I think. For a while.

I wake again with a shock. I've rolled over and rammed my mask into the bedside cabinet. Look up. It's just getting light outside. Curtains are drawn around the bed opposite, which is silent and unlit. She's dead.

### **Third Day**

Hospital workers come and go behind the curtains. "She's gone, then?" says one of them in a failed attempt at a whisper. Presently a large box on castors is dragged in. It looks like a laundry cart, but its real purpose is quite clear. They draw the curtains around all our beds while the body is removed. I hear one of the orderlies comment that this ritual is a waste of time, because everyone can easily guess what's going on.

Later the daily routine of the ward begins. After drinking a cup of tea (the coffee is too bitter) I'm caught out by a viciously sudden attack of diarrhoea. My bed has to be changed. This doesn't worry me much, I seem to have gone beyond embarrassment.

Apparently loose bowels may be a side effect of the antibiotics, which are periodically coming in via the drip. At least I am able to visit the lavatory unaided. While washing I hear urgent voices and the sound of running feet outside the bathroom. A patient in the next bay to mine has gone into cardiac arrest. After a while the laundry box goes past and our curtains are drawn again.

I have a brief talk with the ward Sister, who thinks me "very formal." Perhaps I am, but it's hard to relax here.

Three times a day, when our life signs are checked and drugs dispensed, I am given a nebuliser. This is a special breathing mask which feeds a mist of medicine into my lungs. It is mildly irritating and the spray keeps stopping. Eventually they replace the mask with a new one, which doesn't work properly either.

Fortunately today's first nebuliser treatment leads to the discovery that my oxygen line is not connected. On a thirty-five per cent oxygen mixture, the world becomes a nicer place. Nicer, but not nice. My sister comes to visit me with my father. I'm worried about how he will react to seeing me like this, but he appears concerned rather than distressed.

Despite this morning's diarrhoea I eat two meals today. Dave comes back with another friend, Dave Packwood. They bring me some books. I'm glad to see them, although I find holding a conversation with two people a strain.

There are more changes in the bay. Grumpy Man on my left is replaced by another elderly male, who seems equally surly. He argues with the nurses about his medication and perches oddly on his chair, squatting above the seat with his feet on the armrests. The bed opposite is now occupied by a grey-haired woman. To my right, the man with little to say receives a stream of visitors. The younger patient brought in during the night says nothing and looks scared. I'm not surprised.

### **Third Night**

I need a good night's sleep. A couple of times I've asked the nurses if I can be given something to help with this, but they haven't responded. Sleeping tablets must be against policy.

When the last antibiotics drip of the day is attached, shortly before the bay lights are turned off, the needle 'tissues' or slips out of the vein. This hurts. The needle is removed and another put into my right hand (blood spurts over my fingers for a moment).

The Sister sets up the bay for the night, drawing curtains to partly hide the illuminated corridor. I appreciate this, although I don't sleep for a long time. My left hand is sore, my mask feels as awkward as ever and it's still too hot in here. At least no patients are moved in or out. I can occasionally hear the nurses' voices, the Sister's among them. She gives somebody a lengthy rebuke.

Eventually I doze, then wake before dozing again. I lose count of how many times this cycle repeats before morning. In my conscious intervals my mind entertains strange thoughts, perhaps left over from my dreams. At one point I'm convinced that I'm in Australia. At another I find the Britney Spears hit "Baby One More Time" running through my head, over and over again. I don't even like the song.

### **Fourth Day**

I wake with my lungs working enthusiastically after a whole night on oxygen. My ribcage feels as though it's heaving like an exaggerated anatomical model. I have another bout of diarrhoea, so I don't eat much today. Apart from being very tired, I seem to be getting better. Two young female doctors examine me. The consultant hasn't come back because she's ill herself, apparently. They tell my temperature is almost back to normal, but don't say anything else about my progress.

I read the books the two Daves brought. The day proceeds through the timetable of meals and medication. Both Daves visit once again, as does Pauline, and I talk to them through a haze of fatigue. One of my ex-partner's daughters drops in to see how I am.

Blue plastic bags are put on my bed and that of the woman over to my left. We wonder what this means. The answer comes when her property is bundled into the bag and off she goes to another ward. The bed is not empty for long. In comes another old woman escorted by a gaggle of relatives. She's upset and they're trying to comfort her. More relatives arrive and present her with flowers.

The nurses say the hospital is so busy that extra workers are being brought in. Where are they being spared from? 'Baby One More Time' won't stop repeating in my mind. In one of John Wyndham's short stories a character complains that tunes have a way of 'squirrelling around' in his brain. I know exactly what he means.

In the evening my friend Drew Wood and his partner Linda visit me. She tells me I look very pale. While we are talking a brisk nurse arrives and says I'm being moved, now. Drew volunteers to carry my bag of stuff and I'm put in a wheelchair. We head off through the corridors, ride the lift and arrive in a different world.

The new ward is almost cheerful. There are Christmas decorations and no oxygen masks. I'm installed in a bay with only two other occupants, both male and quiet. They're watching James Stewart being heroic in a western on television. While sorting my things out, I see a sign over the bed saying that a particular nurse is personally responsible for my welfare under some service charter or other. I've no idea who she is and I never meet her.

There is less stress in the atmosphere here. Patients are walking about. One old fellow is wearing a cloth cap with his pyjamas. A young woman strolls past in a short bathrobe, catching my attention. I'm glad to have noticed her, because it's an indication that I'm on the way to recovery.

I've taken to wearing my own trousers instead of the embarrassing undersized pyjama bottoms, so I could also walk around if I wanted. I don't. After reading again I try to watch television. There's now an action movie on, but I can't follow the plot and my interest in it fades. Time for sleep.

#### **Fourth Night**

And I do sleep, not deeply or enough, but I sleep. Wonderful.

#### **Fifth Day**

This morning I decide to take a shower, but after five minutes waiting for warm water to come out of the nozzle I give up and have a wash at the sink instead. Although I'm still coughing I'm not so tired and generally feel more alive, if fragile.

The antibiotics have been stopped, so the drip needle is taken out of my hand. The two female doctors return and tell me that tests have shown no sign of infection. They start interrogating me about my lifestyle, repeatedly asking me how much I drink. Do they think I'm an alcoholic? That I've been faking these symptoms? What is really behind these questions, they don't say. I'm annoyed and when they tell me that I may be discharged today I hope they mean it.

I'm certainly well enough to be bored. The rest of the day seems as interminable as that first night. Dinner is served, followed by the medication round. At last a male doctor I haven't seen before comes to talk to me. I can leave, but he thinks it would be better if I stayed another night. My decision is to go, I've had enough.

I phone Dave Cox, who drives out to pick me up, then remember I'll need a sick note for work. A nurse calls the doctor back for me. He arrives at the same time as Dave, who has Dave Packwood with him. The doctor signs me off work for another week. (The Daves think it should have been longer.) He doesn't seem too sure about what's been wrong with me, but describes my illness as "pneumonia" on the form.

We begin a long slow walk to the exit. Further along the ward we pass the woman who arrived early in the second night, before the horror started. She must be improving to have been brought here, but she hasn't lost that scared look.

Eventually we get outside and I find myself in cold, damp air under a grey sky. Afternoon is dimming into dusk. The day after tomorrow the year 2000 will begin. I was looking forward to that, but now it doesn't seem to matter to me at all.

*I made a full recovery. I'm grateful to my family and friends for the support they gave me, especially as I must have been a pain to be with at times. The experience gave me an emotional jolt and resulted in some decisions. One was to look for a new partner and I'm now married.*

*What happened to me wasn't necessarily typical of what goes on in British hospitals, but it undermined my confidence in our National Health Service. I've heard and read plenty of bad accounts of its performance in the 12 years since the time of my story. Decades of underfunding and mismanagement have left it shamefully inefficient. The many dedicated, professional people who work in its hospitals and clinics deserve better, as do its patients.*





# BATMEMORIES

*Guy H. Lillian III*

As a once and future, maybe, criminal defense lawyer, I can't help but see the Colorado *Dark Knight* massacre from that perspective. How would I defend James Holmes?

Not Guilty by Reason of Insanity, of course – although the plea in Louisiana would read Not Guilty *and* Not Guilty by Reason of Insanity – but I have some doubts. No doubts about Holmes' mental state – he was and probably remains a clear psychopath – but insanity are a legal term, subject to legal analysis. An insane person, under our law and probably Colorado's, has to suffer from a mental disease or defect and not appreciate the social wrongness of his act. Holmes planned his atrocity, wore body armor and bought gas bombs, set booby traps for the cops he knew would be invading his apartment. Such preparation shows awareness of how society would view him and what he did.

So while Holmes is undeniably psychopathic, there is an argument that he wasn't *psychotic*, so disconnected from reality that he didn't know what he was doing and therefore, not accountable. I hope Colorado slams the guy into a rubber room and leaves him there for all time – but it might not turn out that way.

Such is the reaction of the lawyer in me. The mere human reaction is both simpler and more complex. Memory is involved. Personal factors.

So much is so fundamentally offensive about the Aurora massacre of July 20, 2012 that I hesitate to wax personal. The murder of innocents – especially a child – is so obscene that any additional considerations seem trivial, even reprehensible. But personal revulsion is real, too.

James Holmes struck on the anniversary of truly wonderful and/or just events – Apollo 11's moon landing, Viking's first soft touch on Mars, the Wolf's Lair attempt on Hitler, the births of Diana Rigg and Sir Edmund Hilary ... and myself. I hate seeing such a great date sullied with psychosis and pointless violence. Psychosis and violence are diseases in the flesh of Man. They're foreign to the right way to be.

Just ask Bruce Wayne. For the specific, personal, unique disgust one feels towards the act of James Holmes extends beyond the date that he did it. It touches also on *where* he did it. On behalf of everyone who ever read a Julie Schwartz or Frank Robbins comic, cringed at the Adam West TV show, watched a Tim Burton or Chris Nolan movie, I feel that a special part of our lives has been violated. An idea that enriched and excited our lives has been befouled.

I claim a special right to anger, and not just because of my birthday. As you might know, many years ago I was quite a prolific contributor to the comics' lettercols. Julie Schwartz called me his "Favorite Guy." My connections with comics fandom led me to a year at D.C. Comics as an editorial

assistant. It was my first job, and it was a wonderful job, and I came away from it with stories and stories and more stories. One or two of which involve Bob Kane.

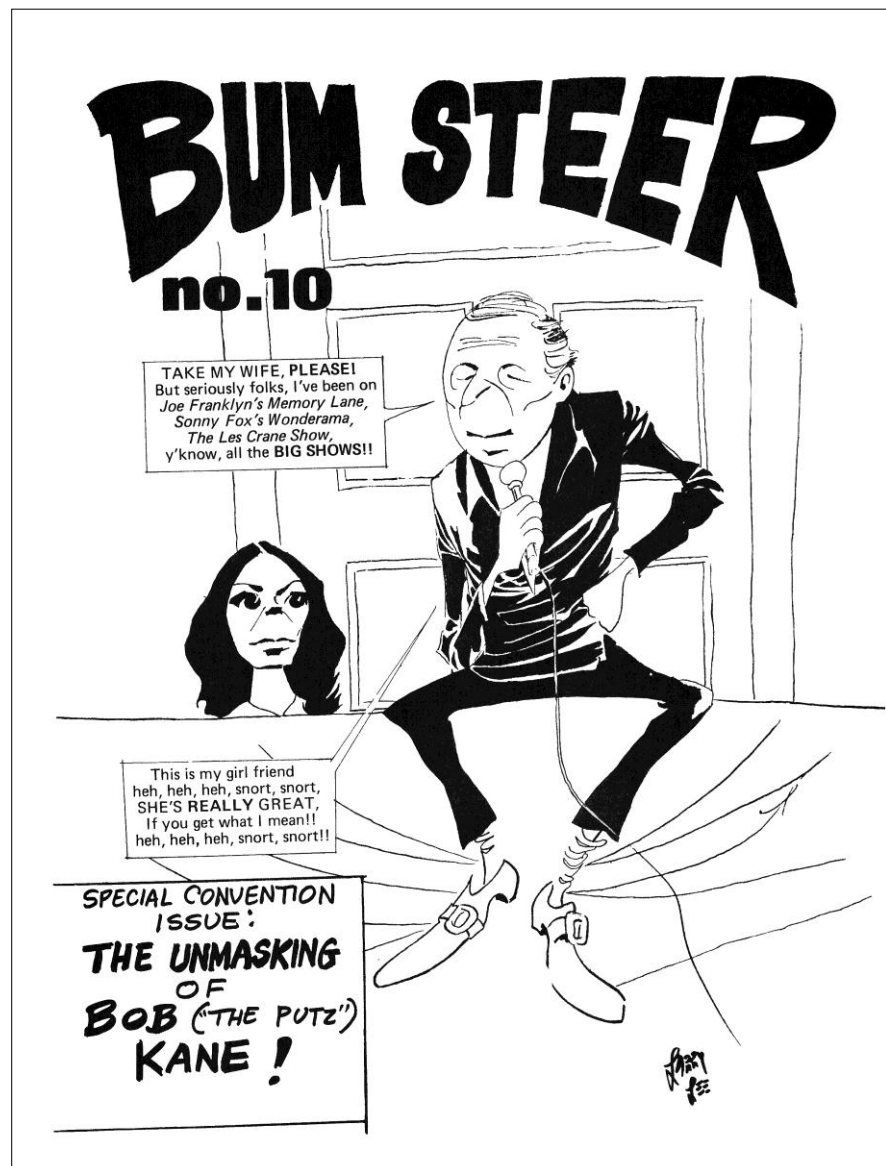
The first time I set eyes on the creator of Batman was at one of Phil Seuling's comic-cons in New York, before I started my DC sojourn. Looking natty, Kane sat on the edge of a table, chatted about his teenage creation, responded defensively to a few questions about the creation of the Joker, and made more-than-slightly sleazy references to the young lady who had accompanied him. He didn't impress the comics fans I sat with. In fact, the word I heard *batted* about was ... was ... (Rick?) ... *putz*, *putz*, that's it. Larry Lee's classic cover to Rick Spanier's K-a zine on the subject sits below.

I didn't get to meet Kane personally until after I began work at DC. One day I was told to go over to his apartment and return some paintings. It was a lush assignment; I was driven to the east side building in a Mercedes-Benz by a genuine chauffeur – who normally drove around the President of Warner Communications. For a kid who normally came to work in ratty blue jeans, it was a treat. When I knocked on Kane's door he told me to wait in the living room.

Kane's living room was decorated with the best collection of original comic art that I'd ever seen. Outstanding was a *Prince Valiant* page by Hal Foster. I'd never seen such meticulous inks. The only other piece I remember was a cel from a cartoon series called *Courageous Cat & Minute Mouse*, which he bragged on. I asked to use the bathroom. It had wallpaper based on Carmine Infantino's interpretation of Batman and Robin, and on the sink aerosol cans which sprayed strings of soap out of Batman and Robin's mouths. I wondered if the manufacturer had shipped Kane a crate of the stuff.

En route to the warehouse Kane sat with the driver and talked about the numbers racket and the perils of young girlfriends. We were met by Kane's cigar-chomping cronies, to whom he showed off his very simple paintings of various Bat-characters – the Penguin, Catwoman, etc. "Don't you think they'd be great pop art?" he asked his pals. I schlepped the lot upstairs. No tip. (I think Sol Harrison slipped me a fiver when I got back to the office.)

I went up to apartment 7B one other time, to interview Kane for the in-house magazine we "Junior Woodchucks" had founded that year, *The Amazing World of DC Comics*. I'd done an extensive interview with Joe Kubert, pieces on Denny O'Neil, Cary Bates and Elliot



Maggin, and the long article on Julie Schwartz I reprinted in *Challenger* when Julie passed on. With intercession from no less than DC Publisher Carmine Infantino, I'd wrangled an interview with Kane. His call inviting me to come over was shall-we-say muted in its enthusiasm.

Still, he gave me stats of a lot of artwork and the easiest interview I ever conducted. While I wandered the room examining his incredible art collection, he sat on his couch and talked and talked into the tape recorder, gesticulating, lost in his favorite story.

The article never ran. Kane called DC a few weeks later and kiboshed it, saying its appearance



would hurt projected sales of his autobiography. Carmine was furious, the issue was changed to an appreciation of Kane's estranged assistant, Jerry Robinson – and I moved on to interview Mort Weisinger. I never saw Kane again. He died in Los Angeles in 1998.

This was the guy who created Batman?

Well, yes -- plus Bill Finger, the scripter – and since Batman has been an evolutionary creation, many have had a role. Jerrv Robinson created him too. Dick Sprang. The editors, Jack Schiff and Julie Schwartz. He was brilliantly reimagined by Frank Robbins, and the movie makers who brought Robbins' vision of the Dark Knight to life, Tim Burton and Chris Nolan. (I refuse to include Joel Schumacher.) But ask who created Batman, the superhero who has known no equal but two – Supes and Wonder Woman – and in fairness there is only one absolute answer: Bob Kane. Despite all the above, when the horror came through from Colorado, I was very glad he didn't live to see it. Batman meant everything to him.

And not just Kane. When I looked through my 1974 diaries for details about those days, a line leapt out at me. "Got a letter today from a kid who was just thrilled to get a letter from Batman. I am the voice of the Caped Crusader."

It's for that little guy, whoever he was, and all the little guys who loved Batman, that I feel a special loathing for the psychosis that overwhelmed James Holmes on July 20<sup>th</sup>. I don't single out the gun lobby, or Holmes' psychiatrist, or some social factor, or anything except the infinitely-faced evil of Madness. *And still our ancient foe doth seek to work us woe.* The people of Colorado found a way to counter that foe: their resiliency, their compassion – and their law. I dare risk flippancy by saying that the Dark Knight would approve.





Tara Wayne

# The CHORUS LINES

**Alexis Gilliland**  
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Thank you for *Challenger* #34, with its beautiful and polished Brad Foster cover that most unusually had a couple of infelicities in draftsmanship. The first is the figure of the girl, whose legs and torso are turned toward the reader's right while her head and shoulders are turned to the reader's left, with only the area around the first and second thoracic vertebrae available for the turning. The second is her magic sword. How can I tell that it's magic? The sword looks like it ought to have at least a hand and a half hilt; as drawn, the hilt has no grip at all, while the girl's hand is resting on a pommel-like knob set flush with the guard. If it isn't magic it's unweildable.

Your account of your summer vacation probably gives a better excuse than most for missing a Worldcon in which your fanzine was in nomination for a Hugo. The loss of a job is one of the major catastrophes in life, along with divorce or a death in the family, and at 62+ you have less flexibility to reinvent yourself. Indeed, at that age you are approaching one of the natural transition points, retirement, and the realization that here it comes, ready or not, can be disconcerting. As you clearly understood, the new job starting the Monday before Renovation had an absolute priority over your hobby. From what you said, the new job will provide a small Louisiana pension to supplement your social security – which will increase the longer you are able to defer taking it. Still, the way you spent your Christmas holiday reminds us that pensions and retirements are problematical rather than any sort of guarantee.

All that discussion of health segues to Friday, when I went in for my annual check up, and for my age, the doctor tells me, I am doing pretty good. Will I live to be a hundred? Maybe, maybe not, but since my mother made it to 94 hitting the century mark isn't totally impossible. You may take this as a tip of the hat to the medical theme in *Challenger*'s next issue, one that tastefully omits my various symptoms.

“Except for the Plumbing” by Greg Benford touched on a lot of interesting subjects. As for instance, Edmond O. Wilson’s rejection of the notion that the human mind is a *tabula rasa* upon which the cognoscenti can inscribe the latest theories of the day. It turns out that the human mind comes to life heavily programmed by evolution, which greatly limits the influence of would-be teachers to do other than what evolution has selected. Their efforts to create a New Man does very little except make the Old Man crazier than he might otherwise have been. Why must nature be so perverse? In every species which we have studied about ten percent of the population is homosexual, a sin in that it prevents individuals from passing on their genes, but a trait conserved by nature, perhaps because it enhances the survival of the group.

Taral Wayne’s seven page essay, “Whose Royals Are They, Anyway?” is a fine example of why you shouldn’t write about subjects which bore you. One tends to miss the good gossip. For example, when Prince Charles married Princess Diana – whom Taral chose not to mention by name – Charles’ mistress Camilla went along on the honeymoon. Charles had wanted to marry Camilla, but couldn’t because the Queen Mother felt that she was beneath him, possibly because Camilla’s grandfather had slandered the Queen Mother back when she was a mere slip of a girl. Later, after Diana’s death, Queen Elizabeth (who resented Diana taking her place in the sun) was forced to a public expression of grief by Prime Minister Blair’s threat to seek the abolition of the monarchy if she didn’t. Prince William, dismissed as totally boring, defied precedent by marrying a commoner, which shows more spunk than his father did. Nor was Mary II the last of the Stuarts; that would have been Queen Anne, her younger sister, who presided over the War of the Spanish Succession (1703-1713), an ultimately successful war of attrition leaving England as the dominant power in Europe. When the Duke of Marlborough petitioned her to be named commander in chief for life as a reward for his notable victories in the field, Anne fired him because Louis XIV had offered an acceptable peace treaty that the Duke had rejected. And who can forget that when Henry VIII died, his bloated carcass fermented in its coffin, and exploded during the funeral services?

Chris Garcia’s piece reminds me that if I knew then what I know now, I’d make the same mistakes, only I’d make them sooner. Mature wisdom is a lot like being too tired to bother. The tribute to Bobbi Armbruster reminds me that she is indeed a classy lady.

**WAHF: Sheryl Birkhead.** “Roger Zelazny is another fan/pro who left us entirely too soon.”

**Joy V. Smith**

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First of all, I hope you're feeling better. Sprightly would be nice. That's right, I want reassurance. (You know I

was happy when you got your new job.)

*Better, yes. Sprightly, no.*

Secondly, Good issue. I appreciated men sharing some of their inward thoughts on sex...

Thirdly, Well, at least the woman on the cover has a cloak for protection, but when I see scantily-clad men and women, I always wonder if they spend most of their time romping on manicured lawns and avoiding thickets, cat's claw vines, sand spurs, Tread Softly, bougainvillea's, etc. and critters with claws. (I work outside a lot--pruning--and often have scratches from cats and dogs too. Snakes--not so much, but oh those fire ants!)

Interesting article by Earl Kemp, which included right-on advice to writers. I enjoyed the background in other articles too, including Mike Resnick's, but I especially loved Darlene Marshall's article because I so totally agree with her about *Wuthering Heights*. Romantic, hell! And I enjoyed her look at *Jane Eyre*, which is not one of my favorite novels. And she knows--and likes--*Mara, Daughter of the Nile*. I'm glad to hear it's still in print because I got my copy from the Tampa library when they were culling books. I'd read it years earlier. (I also picked up *Nine Brides* and *Granny Hite* there. They're dumping the classics!) I also enjoyed the fun story by Joseph Major, the photos, and the letters.

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In *Challenger #34*, Greg Benford has written an article that is certain to provoke a lot of comments. Talking about sex always does that. The subject itself is incredibly complex, and there are dozens of ways of approaching the subject. I'm sure we will figure out a faster than light drive before we figure out everything about sex and gender. We continue to baffle ourselves.

It might be mentioned that the basic function of sex is reproduction. I know churches are always saying that, and it isn't very popular. However, as a teenager, I was warned to park carefully because accidents could cause people. While we don't want to produce a baby with every sexual act, we do sometimes want to produce babies. If none of us produce babies, we will become extinct. I'm not sure why, but I have a strong feeling we wouldn't like being extinct.

We don't have instincts any more. We used to have instincts, but they were revoked after WWII. Nazis liked instincts, so instincts were evil, and we got rid of instincts. However, we still seem to come into the world with some feelings. Stories involving damsels in distress seem to exist throughout history and in all cultures. Most men feel they ought to protect their womenfolk. This is particularly true of pregnant women. This is obviously a survival trait. Have you ever noticed how many people have the urge to touch a pregnant woman's stomach? I don't think we were ever taught to do that, but we do it anyway.

When you think about it we don't usually think of childbirth being related to sex. These days we aren't supposed to talk about sex in the workplace or make sexual references. However, I've heard people of both sexes talk quite openly about preparing for childbirth, childbirth itself, and dealing with babies. It's a good thing this isn't related to sex, or we couldn't talk about it.

We keep coming across things that seem like "human nature." I believe humans come equipped with what amounts to arrays of switches that control our behavior. Some combinations make us do particular things, and other combinations make us stop. Some switches make us feel hunger, and we eat. At some point, some of the switches toggle, and we stop. If the switches are defective, we keep eating until we are so obese we can't walk. One theory says that insanity is the inability to experience satiation. There must be switches to produce satiation associated with every urge.

There was a thing called the Calhoun Experiment which involved rats in a closed environment. Initially, they had enough space, enough to eat, and their wastes were removed. As they continued reproducing, they became more crowded. With crowding, their behavior changed. Some rats became homosexual. Others committed rape and became extremely violent. These were things rats didn't usually do.

Most people come into the world with their switches set for heterosexual behavior. Some have them set for homosexual behavior. There are those who have switches that toggle pretty easily between the two. Sometimes, unrelated switches can become associated, and we develop fetishes.

I've read SF stories where homosexuality was the default option and heterosexuality was considered a perversion. I took those stories to be allegories. I remember John Varley's stories that involved quick change sexuality. [*"Options," I believe.*] There was a poll in fandom back in the forties or fifties that asked if changing your sex was painless and easily reversed, would you try it? The majority of fans at the time said they would.

I think all humans are born with the same arrays of switches. Some may be irrelevant because of an individual's situation. Some of the switches may be defective, and some may be activated at the wrong times or places. Our plumbing is almost never just a matter of plumbing.

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Remembering Mike Resnick's previous line of work, I don't see where he would be so put out by being worried about disabled-porn channels being available at the hotel. Diversity is the name of the game these days. Those *Penthouse* letter columns ...

Nice cover by Brad Foster, by the way. Not very *practicable*, but very nice.

**How I Spent My “Summer” “Vacation”:** The blonde babes will neither remember nor care that they saw human beings mount to the heavens. They’ll be too busy tweeting about the latest tweets they got from their favorite slut-rock singer. As the technology it stimulated spreads, the use of it declines.

How long before Moon Hoax beliefs become the norm? No, not the old *New York Sun* story about looking at it with a super telescope and seeing intelligent beings, but rather the belief that the flights to there were as real. In a conceptual world where the mere indication that someone in authority advocates a thesis is sufficient proof of its absolute falsity and malign intent, not very long.

Not to mention the problems of Worldcon. Which seems to be becoming Corflu, writ large. All the cool people go to ComicCon and Dragon\*Con, where there are mobs of people, a vast program, and no there there.

**6 Songs, 7 Women:** I’m sorry Chris Garcia seems to have such bad luck with his romances. As for his musical preferences ...

**Donald Gilmore’s Lechery Lessons;** There’s no fool like an old fool, you can’t beat experience. More seriously ... I wish more writers would take those guidelines Don laid (all right all right) down more to heart. Not as hard (all right all right) and fast rules, but as indications of what constitutes not-bad writing. One experience that I seriously doubt will ever receive the analysis it should is the formative methods learned in writing pornography. I think this after reading too many books where things happen without connection to any other things, it seems. At the moment I am about a hundred pages into Neal Stephenson’s *Reamde* which is probably on track for a Hugo nomination, and so far it’s all establishing material. Now if he’d learned under Don’s mentorage.

**Big Mac:** And I recall being faintly disappointed at seeing that the seventh floor of the Muehlbach was being renovated, so there could be no party in Room 770. Nowadays, nobody cares.

**The Night I Proposed:** Did Steven Silver ever hear of the man who ate lunch at the Eiffel Tower restaurant every day? He was asked why he did that, since he despised the place. To which he replied, “It’s the only place in Paris where I can’t see the Tower.”

When *Robin Hood: Prince of Thieves* came out, there was a comparison in, of all places, *USA Today* evaluating the three top Robin Hoods in ten categories. Not surprisingly, Errol Flynn won, with five out of ten. Costner got a disappointing one-half point (the question being whether or not it was a stunt butt). And second place, with four points was ... **Daffy Duck.** *To trip, to trip, to trip trip trip trip*  
**\*SPLASH\***

*Yoiks, and away!*

**Except for the Plumbing:** And Benford’s comments about Varley’s Malleable Man fixation echo that article in *The Patchin Review*, thirty years ago, which pretty much disabused me of any idea I might have had of Varley being a particularly notable writer.

**I Love a Happy Ending:** Literary fiction is not supposed to have happy endings. Everyone dies, after a miserable life. Oh the embarrassment! The one time I read *Evangeline* I kept on saying, “Why don’t you find someone else?” Particularly with their charming habit of **just missing** each other.

**Why So Serious?** While I am responsible for writing this down, I have to say it’s Taral’s fault I started doing these. He had, you will recall, wondered whether a re-edit of *The Dark Knight* with Batman cut out and (say) John McClane introduced wouldn’t be better. Look out for the *Clockwork Orange* sequel where Alex goes out for some drugs only to find a really outré expert at the old ultra-violence.

**The Chorus Lines;** And that one page (from my letter, of course) that got printed out of order is confusing. Reminds me of *Funky Winkerbean* in the old days (before Batiuk got all serious and meaningful) where Les Moore always had a pimple pop out on the end of his nose the day they were taking school pictures. The one time that didn’t happen, they printed his picture upside down.

*Inexcusable sloppiness for which I grovel – your letter problem, I mean, not Winkerbean’s pimple.*

**Chris Garcia:** Sadly enough, Zelazny’s story in *Dangerous Visions*, “Auto-Da-Fe”, is one of those things that probably sounded better when it was pitched. Even someone as imaginative and skilled as Zelazny was can slip up.

However, I’d read the first Amber series and imagine the second never existed. I used to really get excited when one of those was announced, and when I bogged down halfway through *Sign of Chaos*

(third book of the second series) I felt a poignant pang of realization, that a writer who I admired and found worthwhile could decline.

There are decent translations of Jules Verne finally coming out. What happened, understand, was that he was such a Hot Item that translators rushed their work out. Skill was secondary, particularly since they weren't paying royalties, either. Perhaps that was why Verne didn't care about putting a 1800 foot high hill in Florida, an active volcano in North Carolina, or a French wedding ceremony in Virginia.

**Martin Morse Wooster:** And similarly, Theda Bara's own copies of her movies deteriorated the same way, though I don't think she had cigarettes. Whereas the studio's copies blew up, quite spectacularly. (Look up, as I recall, "Fox Movie Archives Fire" on YouTube.)

**R-Laurraine Tutihasi:** The last two tornadoes here have been in the winter. There was one last week. Since when do tornadoes come in January? We foregathered in the hall on the first floor in case the storm came by, listening to the driving rain. That was at 11:30. Half an hour later, when I went home for lunch, the rain was but showers, and by one, when I came back, the sun was coming out.

**Me:** The version [of *Metropolis*] shown at the first Worldcon was probably an edited one. If you view *The Complete Metropolis*, it's pretty obvious what the newly rediscovered scenes are; they are not in the best of shape.

The discussion at the SH/ACD Symposium discussed *all* the versions of *The Lost World*, from the original Willis O'Brien one to the latest TV series. Focusing particularly on how the women's roles grew, from the shy and silent daughter of Maple White in the first movie to the female version of Tarzan in the TV show.

**Richard Dengrove:** *A Night at the Opera* has some serious cuts, too. The establishing scenes setting the beginning in Italy were cut due to objections by the Italian government. They no want-a tutsi-frutsi ice cream? And the scene in *Horse Feathers* where all four brothers try to romance Thelma Todd is so badly cut as to be incomprehensible.

And Maya Lin asked Frederick Hart, sculptor of the Three Soldiers statue added to the memorial, if the models for the soldiers hadn't complained when the plaster was pulled off their faces. She couldn't seem to imagine any method of doing such other than casting.

**Steve Green**

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Quick footnote to Taral's article: the heir to the English throne can choose to use any one of his (or, less often, her) forenames for their reign. Although I would much rather the entire farce pulled down the shutters with the death of the current incumbent, her eldest son still seems eager to take over the family business, but "Charles III" would bring with it a considerable amount of historical baggage. I have heard he might prefer to follow the example of his grandfather (whose first name was Albert) and become George VII.

**M. Lee Rogers**

**Hixson, TN**

After being so late with a LoC to the previous issue of *Challenger*, it is meet, right, and my bounden duty to respond to the current number more promptly.

Does anyone read this or other fanzines on computer or E-reader? Too old for that, so it's print out the pages. At least I thought I had printed out the pages. When the article about the strip joint cut off after the first page, it appeared something was amiss. Another trip to the printer later, I have the entire issue. For now, I will comment on the parts I have read and come back to the others later.

The cover impresses, as does all of Brad's art. It is good to know that he actually knows how to draw the human body. Not all fan artists can do that.

Liked Resnick's joke on the title page. It made me laugh, which is not that easy to do these days.

Is there a reason for no page numbers? It would help keep things together.

*The print edition had page numbers.*

Glad to know that you were able to find a new position relatively quickly. Had you considered criminal defense work? If your accounts are accurate, you are more than adequate at defending people in court.

I have never seen a space shot live. Given the soon-to-come end of the American manned space program, I probably never will. Cross that item off the bucket list.

Need to check out *Mind over Mood*. Let us say that you are not the only person who has felt the desire for such help. Unfortunately, I always find the therapists who refuse to admit that a person is extremely shy and introverted. They always believe that everything goes back to lack of self-esteem. This is a load of stinking cow offal. Self-esteem is nice to have, but it has almost nothing to do with how well a person interacts with others. This belief in self-esteem is one of the most ridiculous heresies of the modern era. Bah humbug.

I've come to prefer the old roads. Freeways are fine for getting there, but man, are they b-o-r-i-n-g. Unless they are so crowded as to be terrifying. The next time I go to Florida, one of the old roads would be much more pleasant if time allowed.

Chris Garcia should have submitted his article to a major magazine. This could run in *The New Yorker*.

On the illo of the Constitution being wiped out by a policeman: you probably think the right-wingers are the real danger. That is not totally incorrect. But I still see much greater danger from the left. Perhaps we can agree that freedom is not a popular topic in this part of the world. A lot of folks want to tell everyone else what to do.

Benford's article could get him into a lot of trouble in many academic environments. He sounds like a man who believes that the two sexes are not interchangeable. The commissars will land on him like hounds on a fox. To the gallows! (By the way, the author was named Marta Randall, not Matra.) I remember reading some of Varley's gender-flipping works. He made it sound so easy. It probably is not that simple and never will be. This is why I have all the sympathy in the world for Chaz Bono, but will never be able to imagine her as anything but Chastity Bono.

Never read anything by McCaffrey. Dragons turn me off. Read a book of essays from Russ and enjoyed it. She had a good head on her shoulders. She seemed to be one SF academic who understood that the science mattered, too.

Glad to see that Eve is doing well. People have forgotten that she was the anchor (presenter for Brits) of the ConFederation TV coverage much too long ago.

In Major's piece, is The Big Man supposed to refer to some particular character?

*Reference is close to Mr. Big, the villain in **Live and Let Die**, the second James Bond novel.*

Had never considered the situation with British royalty, but Taral appears to have done them in with mockery. From French to Scot to Hanoverian/German, most of them are a bunch of twits. Even a stalwart like Liz II reminds one of Victoria. The less said about Chuck III the better. The best story about them is that, in a rare burst of German humor, Kaiser Wilhelm reacted to the news of the Windsor name by ordering a performance of *The Merry Wives of Saxe-Coburg-Gotha*.

It might be possible to make up a yarn like "The Kingpin". But no publisher would touch it. I wonder what the difference was between the "hardcore" stuff that Resnick would not do and this material. At least it is one way to learn the craft of writing and editing.

The article on the Platinum Plus is a masterpiece of gonzo journalism. Hunter S. Thompson could not have written it. In the end, you summarize the reasons why I never went to a strip club. The overwhelming purpose of a strip club is to strip men of their hard-earned money. In fact, both sexes are being objectified and manipulated in such settings. I still remember the court cases regarding The Gold Club in Atlanta (next to a MARTA station, which thrilled them to no end). All of these guys were seeing hundreds of dollars of extra charges on their credit cards. Surprise! In theory, the erotic game can be completely beautiful and uplifting. It never is. It is almost always sleazy beyond end.

Besides. A potato!? How desperate must a guy be?

One last point about your change of jobs. In our society, benefits matter. One of the worst mistakes America has ever made was to let health care become tied in with our jobs. Will we ever be able to afford medical care again? Yes, many people advocate a government-based system. A lot of people like such systems. My reading suggests that they are mostly a mockery of medical care. Why do Canadians end up coming here for procedures that they cannot wait for? The bigger problem is that medicine is too damned expensive in any form. What do we do about that?

Now I will read the letters and see if anything demands comment.

Foster on reality TV: there are few things in life less real than a reality television program. The reality shows with competitive elements are really just disguised game shows. The early panel shows like *I've Got a Secret* and *To Tell the Truth* stimulated the mind. Most of today's dreck game shows are not worth noticing. The sad part is that reality TV is pushing other forms off the air, like the bad driving out the sorta bad.

*Trouble is, the shows that really did "stimulate the mind" – like 21 and The \$64,000 Question – turned out to be crooked. I'm so old I remember that scandal.*

Wiscon and Elizabeth Moon: In my early days of fandom, I remember being castigated in an issue of *Janus* for some comment that was interpreted as male chauvinist piggish. Ever since the beginning of the women's movement, I had considered myself a bit of a feminist. It seemed silly to waste half the human race when they could contribute so much more to society. Now, an action like banning Moon is just another day at the office for the political correctness police. I would not expect anything less.

Hoaxing: That long drive back from Dallas after FenCon gave me time to think about a hoax. I decided not to do it, but it might have been fun. It would have been a hoax DeepSouthCon bid. Rock City Con. Convention hotel: The Chanticleer Lodge (real place on Lookout Mountain). Overflow hotels: every other hotel in the Chattanooga metro area. Program items held at Point Park overlooking the intown area (really a spectacular view if you have never seen it). Banquet at the Mount Vernon Restaurant at the foot of the mountain (still popular). Not sure about Guest of Honor, but Fan Ghost of Honor: Irvin Koch. One could go on and on. But considering that at least one hoax DSC bid won, it was too much of a risk.

Loved *Rocky and His Friends (Rocky and Bullwinkle)*. I have always wondered how they got William Conrad's voice to sound so high when he actually had a deep and very gruff voice (check out the movie with Jack Webb about newspaper life or the TV series *Cannon*). "Stay tuned for our next exciting episode: 'Rocky Takes a Mickey' or 'The Taming of the Shmoo.'"

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Ah, sex and romance. I think most of us are at the age, where we're getting less of the former, but more of the latter, and we are just fine with that.

I know exactly what you're going through re employment. I probably write far too much about it in my LoCs, and most editors trim it out, to their credit. I did all the things you're supposed to when you're unemployed, and none of it has worked. Bless the agencies who I'm registered with, they are getting me work where I seem unable to do so myself. Good for you for finding work in your chosen profession; may the rest of us be as fortunate. (Two of those blessed agencies may have something for me soon, but I will believe it when I see it.)

"6 Songs, 7 Women" ... I think Chris Garcia might be the only fan I know who'd be willing to open up his private life for public consumption. Bless him for that, too.

Trying to explain human sexuality may be the ultimate exercise in futility. A good try, though, Greg. But then, there's also the old line about leaving a little mystery. If we ever do figure out why we do the things we do, would we want to do them anymore? We'd need to find other things to turn our cranks, and when the Web reveals on occasion some of the fetishes we like...well, I'll shudder in reaction, and hope we never really figure it all out.

While I do not read romance fiction, I heartily agree with Darlene/Eve on the popularity of the genre. In an age where publishing has never had less support, the most stable, and possibly the most profitable, publisher in the world has to be Harlequin Publishers, owned by Torstar Limited, and head-officed right here in Toronto. I've been trying to get on with them for years, without any luck.

I wish the Windsors well, and Taral is right, the title Royal seems everywhere around here sometimes. I just got back from work where I do a little rekey work for Royal LePage Real Estate for the Globe and Mail. This is a royal-loving country, and the Monarchist League of Canada wouldn't have it any other way. (Taral would like to know that I recently purchased a large British penny from the reign of George III, dated 1766. It cost me \$1. Not sure who came out ahead financially, but it is now the oldest coin I own.)

The bin Laden Justice cartoon...what kind of justice? I guess the world had already convicted him, he admitted his crimes, but bin Laden was an educated man. I still think the best way to conquer your enemy is to learn how and what he thinks and believes. I wish we could have been captured, returned to the US, and interrogated. Instead, he was shot and deep-sixed, and there's so much we will never know. IMHO...vengeance is not justice.

*Imagine what would have happened had we taken bin Laden alive and considered him a criminal defendant. After his inevitable conviction, he would have been sentenced to die. His execution would have been hurried along, as was Timothy McVeigh's, and survivors of the 3,000+ victims of 9/11 would have clamored to witness it. Just as in McVeigh's case, they would have been set up in a stadium someplace with a giant-sized TV screen and the whole thing would have been reduced to a vengeful vulgarity. Obama chose to treat the raid as a military mission against an enemy of the American people, not as a police action against a criminal, and while we may have missed the chance to waterboard bin Laden for information, not that that repellant practice works, we gained plenty of intel from the computers and notes seized at his compound. No, even as a committed civil libertarian to whom due process is Holy, I fully approve of the raid, its aim, its tactics, and its result.*

True, my Russian contacts have gone ... Yuri Savchenko, I hope you got to marry Natascha. But I still have a contact or two through Facebook, like Olexandr Vasilkivski. He and a friend sent me zine decades ago now. Wish the memory worked better on these things... We're making London in 2014 our last Worldcon because we are both in our fifties, we've had a difficult time finding good-paying work, so we have little put away for an impending retirement, and even traveling within Canada is expensive, so traveling outside of it is even more so. We've decided that as much fun as they are, Worldcons are such a financial drain, and we have to be more fiscally prudent if we want to have something even remotely resembling golden years.

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Great to get the new issue in the mail this week, and always a kick to have someone feature my art on the cover. Appreciate it as well these days since I know it involves extra expense to get the color done. Thanks!

*I appreciate your words but still apologize for the poor color repro on your cover. The 'rox machine couldn't capture the richness and vibrancy of your original.*

By the way, Cindy picked this one up while it was on the table between our two desks, and ended up reading huge parts of it, and enjoying it so much she wants to see some of the back issues as well. She's not really a LoC writer, but wanted to let you know another set of appreciative eyes have gone through this. She did mention that, among other parts, she particularly liked Chris Garcia's article. I, on the other hand, while thought it was fine writing, was too consumed by simmering jealousy at this ladies'-man bragging of all the women in his life! The cad!

I laughed out loud at Mark Verheiden's riff on *Frankenstein* at the beginning. In fact, had to read it out-loud, just to get the feel of the sleazy-guy dialog just right. Disturbingly enough, I was able to do sleazy-guy dialog very well.

*The wit of "Urban Frankenstein" is to be expected from the creator of **Timecop** and one of the geniuses behind **Smallville** – and a longtime member of the Southern Fandom Press Alliance.*

Glad your summer vacation tale turned out so well on the job front! You set that one up as a nail-biter at the start. Good you had the financial cushion to be able to do the job search right, and not have to just grab whatever came your way first. (And a -teeney- bit jealous of the 2-3 years safety thing. Our lives are more around the 2-3 months ahead thing. Beyond that, if anything bad happens now, we're in trouble! Sigh. Who was it who forced me into being a cartoonist? Oh, yeah, that would be me ...)

Laughed when got to the part where you said you didn't get the job because of "not enough experience working with kids." I would have thought that working with fans would have been major plus in that regard. Sure, we may be old and grey chronologically, but damn, what a bunch of kids otherwise!

Cindy and I were lucky enough to be able to swing by KSC several years ago when in Florida, the Vehicle Assembly Building was way cool in person!

Enjoyed Taral's "Whose Royals" article. Normally the topic might be something I'd just do a quick-scan over, but with Taral's byline, knew I should take the time to read it all. Great stuff as usual from the Wayne man. (Prince Philip, possible vampire? It makes sense...)

Liked the two pieces from Earl Kemp and Mike Resnick as well. So many authors have labored in the fields of smut, but will never admit it. These guys not only worked there, but have some great stories to share about it all.

Finally, enjoyed your tale of the strip joint. If you can believe it, I've only been to a strip club once ... well, went to five of them, but all in one night. Years ago had a friend who convinced me to drive him around one evening to various clubs. He knew I didn't drink, and so could be his driver while he got tanked. (He did make me order clear sodas, so it would at least look like I might possibly be drinking alcohol, and thus not embarrass him!) He spent most of the time at each club talking to other people, and I just watched the shows. Disappointed in how boring it was, most of the gals basically seemed to think that just being naked was enough, not much of a show. Save for *one* place, where a gal came out and just flew around the stage and pole in the most amazing ways. And I don't think it was a show, it was just her doing what she liked, since there were really only about four people in the club at the time. Now *tha-* was entertaining! But, after that evening, never gone back again. Too busy drawing my own naughty pictures, I guess!

Stay happy!

**Eric Mayer**  
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Thanks for a terrific issue of *Challenger*. Brad Foster's cover alone is worth the download! My eye is immediately drawn to the menacing dark shapes of the bare tree branches against the fiery sky ... yeah right ...

Coincidentally, the last LoC I wrote, to Chris Garcia, centered on the subject of LOCcing and I admitted that although I have tried to be diligent about writing to faneds whose zines I enjoy, I could seldom bring myself to LoC very long fanzines. The prospect was too daunting. How could I do such a zine justice? Which articles should I comment on and would I be slighting those I ignored? Faced with a huge, excellent zine I find myself fearing that any letter I would have energy to produce would be an insult.

Of course, as a faned myself, I realize that isn't the case, but still, that's my state of mind as I sit here deciding what to say. So much of *Challenger* was highly fascinating and educational, but I know absolutely nothing – for example – about the porn writing business described by Earl Kemp and Mike Resnick. How could I comment? Well, I did just read *Thirty*, an early sixties soft-core porn novel by Lawrence Block. I've been reading his Matt Scudder books and picked *Thirty* up out of curiosity. Alas, written porn has never done much for me. Maybe I am just a visual sort of person. But even within the limited confines of the genre Block got off (well, perhaps a bad term...) some good lines and interesting observations. The book was not badly written, I thought. Block must think so too since he is having a raft of them rereleased.

Your strip club adventure falls into the same category. Wonderfully well-written but as far as eliciting comments beyond my experience.

Likewise Greg Benford's article was very interesting. I learned some things I had not known before. I love the concept of homosexuality being an evolutionary trait that has been passed on because it is useful. It cuts the legs out from under so many of the haters. I had two elderly courtesy cousins who spent more than fifty years together and died in the same year. Wonderful men. But they were never allowed to marry or even fairly characterize their relationship. Yet theirs was one of the longest and most solid relationships I have seen.

Then there was Steven Silver's proposal. Nice story. I never did that proposal thing. I was living with both my wives for a time before we got married and the marriage just kind of naturally happened. Wait. That sounds like I'm a Mormon or something. My two marriages came thirteen years apart, honest. Probably I should have proposed anyhow. At least I'd have had something extra to put in this LoC. I'm not much of a Romantic. More's the pity.

Hey, Steven's proposal was better than Frankenstein's proposal in that cartoon. That cracked me up, as did Schirm's illo on the next page.

Chris Garcia certainly shows off his writing chops – and a lot of his personal life – in his seven women article. Jeez, if he'd conserve his energy maybe he'd be able to publish a few more fanzines. Does this explain why we no longer see Sabean and Judith in *Drink Tank*? I rather enjoyed their stuff.

I am not into self-revelation, which is another reason this issue is hard to comment on. Taral's piece I can say more about. My favorite royal wedding was the Astaire movie.

I wouldn't be too dismissive of royal families, though. Yes, they cost a lot and are useless, but they don't cost as much as CEOs and offer better entertainment value, if your tastes incline that way.

I am glad to see Taral agrees with me about Charles. I like him, despite that his choice in women is bizarre and his morals suspect. But at least he's a thinker. And unlike most people in public life is willing to voice decidedly weird ideas. And he has some good ideas mixed in with some outlandish ones. But even the good ones are so far out of the mainstream that he only gets mocked for them. I expect if he's around when the Queen dies he might hold the crown long enough to turn it over to William. I hope he at least allows himself to be King for a Day so to speak, after waiting so long.

Oddly, because I don't generally like poetry, I thought maybe the best piece, most touching certainly, was Michael Estabrook's "Poems". Mary and I didn't meet until we were in our forties, so our marriage is a mere nineteen years old, but that's a relatively long time and both of us are getting older – I'm 62 soon. And yet, the attraction doesn't change. Michael captures that perfectly. It is something that we have recently noticed, how as we age things don't fundamentally change, as one might think they would when younger. Fine illos by Frankie MacDonald too.

I am sorry to hear about your dreadful year. Loss of a job and illness both is about as bad as it gets. All I can say is that you are lucky to have such a good marriage. As I get older I sometimes think what a horror it would be were I still trapped in my first, awful empty marriage. And Mary and I have sometimes thought, as you have, what a shame it is we did not get together until it was too late for children. So I appreciate the value of having a wonderful partner. I hope things go better for you in the future.

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I do not doubt that Taral Wayne is guilty of *lese majeste* and may well discover that there is some obscure law still on the books which will have his head. English law is like that. Sprague de Camp mentioned somewhat an instance from the early 19th century in which a party in a lawsuit discovered that the old trial-by-combat laws were still in force, challenged his opponent, showed up in full armor, and won by forfeit.

But more to the point, there are some historical errors in Taral's article, the weirdest of which occurs at the top of page 40 in which he somehow conflates William IV with Edward VI. William IV was not a Tudor, nor was he a contemporary of Tudors or even wear tights, but was in fact the brother of George IV, and he reigned most unmemorably between 1830 and 1837. He had been a naval officer, but was apparently a predecessor to the modern-day boring royals. His public record does not seem to have been very enlightened. He opposed anti-slavery measures in the House of Lords before he was king, and also supported the extravagances of his brother, George IV, formerly Prince Regent, as portrayed by Hugh Laurie in *Black Adder* III. (William himself was too dull to be in the series at all.) He did not reproduce, which can sometimes be a blessing in boring royals (see: Spanish Hapsburgs) but managed to be Victoria's uncle. He arguably *is* the least memorable English king. Someone of the era described him as "a suit of clothes with nothing in it" or words to that effect.

Edward V was by contrast quite memorable, for all he had the shortest non-reign in history, because he was so memorably smothered with a pillow (usually offstage) by the minions of a hunchbacked villain in a Shakespeare play.



Edward VI, the teenaged consumptive, actually was the son and successor to Henry VIII, and is pretty unmemorable. His significance is that he left an opening for the tragic pretender Jane Grey, who "reigned" for nine days and then lost her head over it.

Edmund Blackadder, I point out, was by no means a really English royal person by any stretch of the imagination. As is made clear in the first episode of *Black Adder* I, he is a Plantagenet, his father being none other than Richard, Duke of York, the younger brother of the memorably smothered Edward V, i.e. the second of the two Princes In The Tower. However, if *Black Adder* is to be believed, kindly King Dickie (Richard III) would never have done such a thing, as he loved his nephews. Richard grew up to be Brian Blessed with rather alarming speed, then reigned gloriously as Richard IV, after the tragic and accidental death of Dickie at Bosworth field. Edmund Blackadder would have been the grandson of Edward IV. What happened to Edward V is not revealed.

Was the office of Roman emperor ever officially abolished? Taral says no. Officially it was, in 1806 when Holy Roman Emperor Francis II renounced this title in order to become Francis I of Austria. He did this largely to prevent Napoleon from declaring himself emperor of the Romans, as I am sure Napoleon, who was keenly aware of historical echoes, would have been only too happy to do. This does not, however, put paid to the claims of various \_eastern\_ Roman pretenders. There are still claimed descendants of the Paleologos house running around, for all that, of the two chief heirs who survived the fall of Constantinople in 1453, one disappears from history shortly thereafter and the other spent the rest of his life selling his throne to assorted Italians. (Hey, it was a living.) So there are still claimants to the title of Basileus Romaion, which translates more or less as Roman Emperor. The Canadian SF writer Derwin Mak, who is of Chinese descent, is nevertheless a Byzantine (Romaion) duke these days, because he made the acquaintance of someone who claims to be the emperor of Trebizond, which was a post-Fourth Crusade Byzantine fragmentary state on the Black Sea, run by the Comnenus family. So this chap would perhaps more accurately be (though recognized by no country) the Grand Comnenus of Trebizond. Anyway, he made Derwin a duke of some obscure place in Asia Minor (nowadays called Turkey by its conquerors), and Derwin plans to issue coinage, so he tells me, starting with one which commemorates the 1700th anniversary of Constantine the Great's vision. The Roman Empire lives!

Taral does raise the larger question of why Canadians should care about royalty. I can't really answer that, being neither Canadian nor British. It is possible that some people find royalty entertaining. In the film *The King's Speech* the elderly George V tells his son Edward (soon to be VIII) that in the old days all you had to do to be king is wear your uniform properly and not fall off your horse. But with the advent of modern media (specifically radio) the royals had become "actors" and had to perform, which was of course George VI's big problem and the theme of the movie.

Taral tells us that many Canadians are not all that big on the Empire these days. Possibly they just take it for granted. Quite a contrast with H.P. Lovecraft, a lifelong Tory who felt the "American War" of 1775-81 had turned out "unfavorably." When HPL visited Quebec in the 1930s, he went into paroxysms of loyalist ecstasy at the very thought of setting foot on actual "British" territory.

The shortcoming of being Imperial, of course is that you end up fighting other people's wars and not even getting much credit for it. The Scots, I gather, have stronger feelings about this, but I have sometimes met Canadians who are actually proud of the fact that "they" defeated the United States in two wars, i.e. the American Revolution and the War of 1812. No they did not. These wars were between the United States (or the 13 Colonies) and the British Empire, and if the Canadians had not been part of same, they would not have needed to fire a shot. In both cases the American incursions were turned back by British forces, but the Americans, having lost most of the battles, actually achieved their major goals, i.e. independence in the first case, and freedom of the seas and unhampered expansion into the Mississippi Valley in the second, and therefore must be declared the winners. It is to be admitted that American attempts to conquer Canada were a monumentally bad idea, but were in both wars more of a diversion rather than the principal war-aim. Canada needs to remain its own country. For one thing, suppose the Republicans get their way and eliminate taxes for the rich and for corporations while removing all social safety nets for everyone else (as when Newt Gingrich recently talked about abolishing unemployment benefits), and reduce the vast American population to squalid serfdom lorded over by a neo-feudal oligarchy. Where would there be left to flee to if the US had short-sightedly annexed Canada two hundred

years ago? There may come a time when the remaining Blue States, hat in hand, must beg the Canadians to annex them.

When that happens, you can be sure, royalty will become popular again, because Americans seem fixated on such things.

As for the Edgar Rice Burroughs stamp (p. 76), of course the first American writer of fantastic and imaginative fiction to be put on a stamp was Edgar Allan Poe (twice). I think Nathaniel Hawthorne got a stamp too. There has been some push for an H.P. Lovecraft stamp, which could still happen, maybe in 2037, on the centennial of his death. It is true that HPL could be politically incorrect at times, although so could ERB. A Bradbury stamp would be a real possibility, although he would have to be dead first, and so he is presently disqualified. [*Alas, only as you wrote.*] A Heinlein stamp? That depends on how much influence RAH continues to have in the rest of the world, outside of SF fandom. He might well fade away. Yes, he was a prophet of the Space Age, but the Space Age seems to be on life-support these days. Certainly his heirs are doing a grave disservice to his chances by releasing the bad, unedited versions of his books, which will hold back any serious critical recognition for many years. How about a Philip K. Dick stamp? I suspect it would only deliver letters in alternate universes, though. There would be something odd about it. Isaac Asimov might be a good candidate. His centennial is coming up soon, in 2020.

Meanwhile. hooray for ERB, and just in time for the *John Carter* movie. I wonder if in time he will be better known for Barsoom books than for Tarzan, since, for many kids today, Barsoom may be far more believable than his Africa.

*Not based on that lame flick, that's for sure. Sorry – I know you liked John Carter.*

Joseph Green's article on the predictions of H.G. Wells only shows what happens when you apply the wrong critical tool. It reminds me of some fans I saw in a book-discussion ground rather pathetically trying to find both the historical reality and historical consistency in *The Once and Future King*, while completely missing the book's whimsy, romance, and stark tragedy. Science fiction isn't predictive in any specific sense. Certainly Wells was not trying to be predictive, as he made extremely clear in his introduction to *Seven Famous Novels*. SF is more about what change feels or means like than the specific change. Wells is at his best for the short, mythic visions that occur in his early novels, usually toward the end. Ursula Le Guin has called the last few pages of *The Time Machine* "the most beautiful nightmare in literature," and that decidedly unscientific chapter at the end of *The Island of Dr. Moreau* in which the men-beasts revert to being animals again is the core and climax of the book. It was precisely when Wells lost his ability to reach such heights that his later works became preachments, and far less interesting.

To Joseph Major on Gordon Dickson, I will point out that what probably thwarted Dickson's grand design of three historical novels, three modern novels, and three science fiction novels to comprise the Childe Cycle – Dickson described this to me in detail in an interview I did with him in the '70s – was the publishing reality that he was only established as a writer in science fiction. He could not sell the historical or mainstream novels, being an unknown and a "first novelist" in those fields. Publishers were a little less rigid then than they are today, but even then if a publisher were to invest in Gordon Dickson, historical or mainstream novelist, he would have to hope that Dickson would produce more than three such novels and build himself up to profitability by aiming more books at those audiences. And the audience for the mainstream novels (or the historicals) might not have been interested in Dickson's science fiction. This is why stray mainstream novels (think of *Passing through the Flame* by Norman Spinrad, *Fire and the Night* by Philip Jose Farmer, or *The Wilderness of Spring* by Edgar Pangborn) tend to get lost, and become remembered only as marginal, associational items for the writer's science fiction readers. The kind of thing Dickson had in mind more fit into the strategies of 19th century publishing, when a major Man of Letters might have his Works issued in a uniform edition, containing all sorts of material which sold on the basis of the writer's general reputation. But Dickson couldn't do that.

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I almost lost *Challenger* #34 in my LOC folder. However, I didn't. Or did I originally put it in the wrong folder? If I did, it's back. And now I'm going to try to make out the chicken scratches that pass for notes; and answer it.

Since the theme of the issue is supposed to be romance, I can start out with a comment on romance in early SF. There was lots. Of course, it didn't spoil the hard science or soft fantasy. And it certainly didn't spoil all the action adventure and other manly things. However, early editors insisted there be a romance. Often, I gather, the villain made off with the heroine; and the object of the plot is to save her from a fate worse than death.

Having said that, I can wend my way through the issue. In all honesty, it was hard for the authors to stay on theme. For instance, in Chris Garcia's, while there's lot of real enough romance, there's very little SF. He discusses real or imagined women and finds they embody metaphors. While those metaphors make any romance rocky, isn't that the idea behind tales of romance? Faint heart never won the fair maiden. On the other hand, there's too little detail about any lady for an full-scale romance.

You can make Steven Silver's article "The Night I Proposed," which in its way is the polar opposite of Chris', into a full romance. Chris is talking about the world of the unattached. Steven is talking about the world of the attached. As the article begins, he is attached to Elaine. All they have to do is tie the knot. And he tries to soften her up by taking her to a play. When the play proves the turkey of turkeys, he shows her the best view of Chicago, and proposes. Good for him. Unfortunately, for a romance, it lacks glamor. Steven is too nice a guy.

*My proposal to Rosy was even less "glamorous." We were standing next to a steam engine at Chicago's Museum of Science & Industry.*

As opposed to Steven's article, Greg Benford's "Except For The Plumbing" is not about romance. Greg is even impelled to argue there is difference between the sexes: the very premise of romance. We're definitely not even talking about relationships here. I have to say Greg does argue his case well enough. The Post-Moderns have been acting silly wishing la différence into the corn field. Of course, technology either biological or mechanical may yet bridge the gaps between the sexes? We may yet be populated by Sturgeon's hermaphroditic Ledoms. And then the debate will morph into something even less romantic.

While Greg may be in the same ballpark as romance, Joseph Green with "The Predictions of H.G. Wells" is in another ball park entirely. His essay, instead, concerns Wells' anticipation of later developments. Of course, Wells' predicted the future as accurately as other science fiction writer, which means not at all. Also, as Joseph pointed out, he admitted what he was writing was more fantasy than science. On the other hand, although he failed to foreshadow later social, technical and cultural developments, he foreshadowed modern science fiction. For that, he had to be more in touch with his feelings than the facts. Which may be why he never obtained his degree in biology.

Although Joseph Green does not include romances in his article, we get a few torrid romances in Taral Wayne's "Whose Royals Are They Anyway?" The royals have had a few. However, the big romance Taral misses. It is the romance with the trappings of the British Empire. The pomp and circumstance. It makes a great wish dream that women the world over, and a number of men, feed into for sustenance. Taral claims it no longer exists. That's not quite true. It never existed except in the part of the little grey matter that digs romance novels. Myths carefully staged so as to uphold the monarchy when it became the puppet of secular politicians.

While Taral writes about our romance with the British Empire, Mike Resnick writes about Reuben Struma, a sincere pornographer. You can't get any less romantic than that. It feels the antithesis of actual romance because male porn has made a lot of women feel dirty. At one point, Reuben gives a project to Mike, the Doc Johnson number's racket book. For me, the name Doc Johnson conjures another memory. I recall going into Boston's red light district, the Combat Zone; and seeing Doc Johnson sex toys. I wonder if there is any relation even though that Doc Johnson was white.

Now, we go from the antithesis of romance to something neutral, the *Myth busters* show. Brad Foster says in his letter one of the two Reality Shows he sees is *Mythbusters*. While I watched it: usually other activities take precedence over TV: I loved it. It is the only show, and the only approach, which is scientific. Or at least a close approximation thereof. Myths are tested and factors are taken into account. Talk is straight. Of course, the myths busted are not the ones people hang onto for dear life. They're the

ones people believe in passing. I can't take the *Mythbusters* staff too much to task, though, because that's the only way a show using the scientific method is going to be popular.

While *Mythbusters* gives us real rahs rahs for science, John Purcell in his letter tries to put the kibosh on its claims. He says that the scientific method only works for those who accept its assumptions. No, it works for those who don't. For instance, Relativity and Quantum Mechanics works even for the unbelievers. If they do the experiments right, they get the same results. In addition, modern science has, albeit often indirectly, given us modern "miracles": computers, aircraft, medicine, nuclear power, electricity, etc. No, the problem is not that modern science disappears if you make other assumptions. The problem is that modern science is useless in telling us a lot of things we need and yearn to know. As a mega example, it is useless for the purpose and meaning of life. What you might very well need for that is religion.

However, the statement of "fact" I am going to make is not science. It is purely unfocused human experience. R.-Laurraine Tutihasi mentioned identical twins she knew in high school, and how they differed enough in physique. Then, Guy, you mention you could tell identical twins apart by their personality. I have an identical twin story too, my mother and her aunt. Originally, I could tell them apart by their personality. My mother was more affable and my aunt more resentful. With the years, the gap between them separated from a crack to a chasm. By my aunt's death twenty years before my mother, they didn't even look alike.

We go from twin stories – would they be the product of romance? – to war stories. I guess diametrically opposed to romance in another way. You know make love not war. Joseph Major, commenting on a book about air men captured by the Nazis during World War II, tells one about his Cousin Vaden's captured by the Nazis during the Battle of the Bulge. I heard another story, a stone's throw from there. A Jewish Czech was interned by the Nazis, and they put him on train bound for Dachau. When he entered Romanian territory, however, he knew the political situation there and jumped from the train. For the moment, since he was on Romanian soil, he knew he was no longer subject to the laws of the Nazis. If they stopped to pick him up, the Romanian authorities would impound the train and free the prisoners. So the Nazi guards waved bye-bye to him and he waved bye-bye to them.

*Considering the Nazis' respect for law in general and other nations' sovereignty in particular, he was lucky they didn't bid him farewell with a 21-Luger salute.*

We go from making war not love to at least a few romances, the Hugo winners of 2010. Joseph considers it a bad year for novels. With *Wind-up Girl* and *Julian Comstock*, I didn't find it that bad a year. Of course, it was one of the few times in years I broke down, abandoned my scholarly readings, and read novels of fiction with plots. So take that whereof you want.

**WAHF: John Hertz.** "As you know I find you most interesting when you're least laboring to provoke or protest."

Now we come to my letter and another thing I didn't find bad, the court judgment for the viciously anti-gay Reverend Phelps. I gave several reasons last time. And now, because of your comment, Guy, I have another. The judgment seems to have meant that the publicity seeking Phelps was no longer news.

However, at best, we have to be *comme ci comme ca* with Reverend Phelps. One thing I don't have to be *comme ci comme ca* about; in fact, I found it great, Maya Linn's Vietnam Memorial. This is despite Ross Perot's comment, and others, that the memorial was insufficiently glorious. Its gloriousness didn't bother me because, for me, glitz is not everything.

Of course, these patriots fail to examine the nature of glory. And while I admire Bob Jennings, in one of his comments, I think he has a problem with the nature of glory too. He complains that the life of Frank Buckles, the last American veteran of World War I, wasn't defined by his military experience or his age. Too true. Yet a combo of the two is the only reason his name is up in lights. That it defines only a minuscule portion of anyone at best is the nature of glory; and it isn't always the portion we wish to be known for.

Not only is the nature of glory treated in a fuzzy fashion; so is the nature of victory. Victory may be the ultimate solution to everything, as Heinlein said. However, victory often gets us into more hot water. Previous allies immediately morph into enemies. Among other things, enemies with more horrible

weapons than ever. Even a necessary war, like World War II, resulted in the Cold War between the US and Russia for forty-five years after.

Not only is the nature of victory a problem; the nature of war is a problem too. I can't say I feel as strongly as you do, Guy, that women shouldn't be permitted to fight in the battlefield because those support positions manned by women are a hop, skip and jump from it. Sometimes they even require weapons and shooting, I gather. What I will say is that women shouldn't be sent to the battlefield – and men shouldn't either. Of course, that's utopian, isn't it?

With that, we leave the letters of comment, and war, for articles ostensibly with the romance theme. Unfortunately, the next article concerns romance less than most of the articles. Yours Guy concerns a strip joint, "the greatest" in the world. No matter how great, the article still concerns a diametrical opposite of romance, this time sex. The reptile brain.

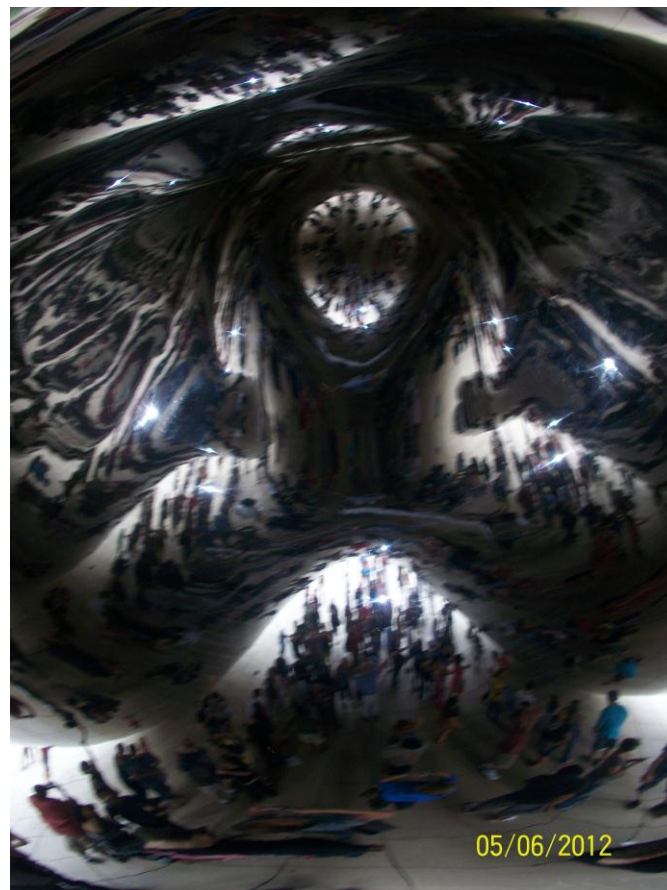
It is appropriate, however, while your article concerned the diametrical opposite, Kent's story that follows it actually does concern a romance. Unfortunately, it was a failed one as far as human beings were concerned. The man was unwilling to compromise. Of course, you could say it succeeded because the couple, in a way, lived together forever. I wouldn't, though.

It is inappropriate for romance, but more appropriate for *Challenger*, that the last story concerned not romance but health. Guy, you had a health problem; and while you make little of it, we know from what you said elsewhere it must have been a whooper.

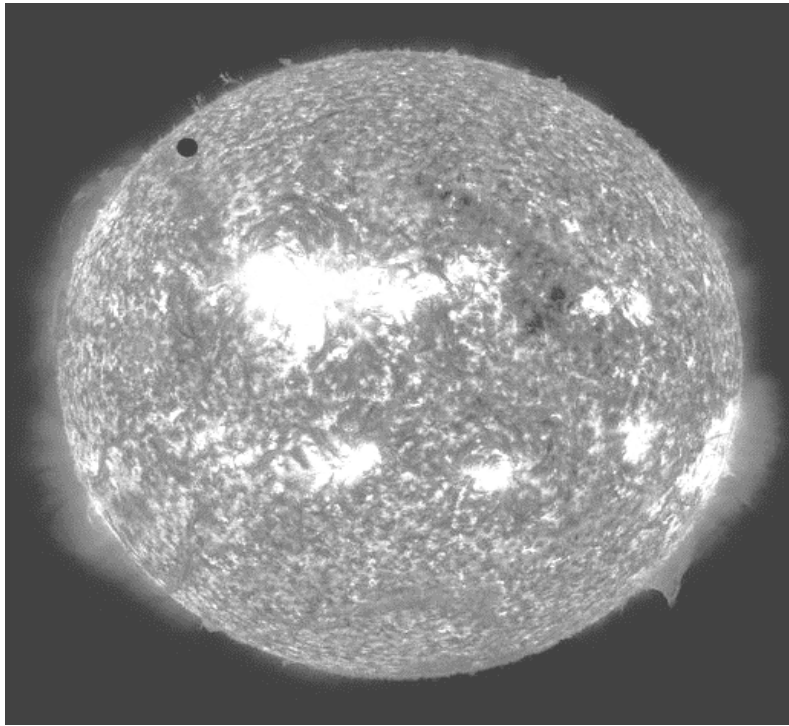
*More like a "pooper."*

Thus, from all the articles and stories taken together, I learned a lot of in this *Challenger*. And all knowledge is valuable. Possibly I needed to know more about the Platinum Plus club. Definitely, it's good to know about real romances. As for the ideal romance, I may not have learned so much, but don't we go to the theaters for that?

#### FROM CHICON 7: INSIDE THE BEAN



# GOLDEN APPLES OF THE SUN...



It was *hot* out there, but we were glad of it. The heat came from the glare of the sun, free for the time being from the clouds that lo'ured over Shreveport, blazing bright and hot above the excited crowd milling about the Worley Observatory. Seven or eight miles south of the city, in the middle of farmers' fields, the old dome looked funny in the light; we'd been there many times but for Star Parties, and of course, they came at night.

But now we needed the sun, towards which all the many scopes were turned. There must have been twenty amateur astronomers out there, and we scampered from eyepiece to eyepiece, sampling every one of the prized telescopes and their views. All were turned to one object today, or should I say

two. Through each scope we could see them – the broad sunspot-marked face of Sol, our progenitor star, and the small round dot near its edge – Venus. A golden apple of the sun.

We don't know how we missed the last Transit of Venus – these events come in pairs, we're told, and there was one in 2004. But there won't be another until 2117 – and I'll be a *very* old man then. We wouldn't trust to luck; we'd catch it now, June 5, 2012. And there she was, there *they* were -- Sol pumpkin yellow through the filters, the planet of love a neat circle in its expanse. So small a space it took in Sol's countenance – so freaky to realize that this would be how we would look to Martian astronomers contemplating a Transit of Earth ...

Finally, clouds came up and swallowed the view shortly after we left. We left in ecstasy. That old cosmic mechanism in motion – and though we didn't know it then, a salute.

I needn't tell you to whom the sun and Venus paid tribute, because you felt it too – that ripple through the space-time continuum when, that very day, Ray Bradbury went the way of all flesh. Certainly the community of science fiction felt it – a seismic upheaval, with aftershocks for days. Ray Bradbury, man. Our prophet. Our poet. Our magician. Our magic.

I remember being a kid in the adults' science fiction section of the library in Tonawanda, New York, looking at the evocative and strange covers of the wonderful, somewhat frightening books. Groff Conklin's *Thinking Machines*. The apocalyptic novel *One in Three Hundred* – people on the cover fighting to get to the spaceship which would take them off the doomed world, a reflection of the atomic terror of the times. And Ray Bradbury's *The Martian Chronicles*. I was too young to read it then. I lived for the day I would.

I remember the day. I got my dad to front me the thirty-five cents to buy the paperback when it appeared on the rack in Rosamond, California, one weekend when we were visiting my grandparents. I probably read the whole book that weekend. To preserve it, I put electrical tape on the spine and painted the title onto the tape. I still have that paperback; I still have all those Pocket Books pbs I collected as a boy, with all those evocative names: *The October Country*, with its suggestion, even in deepest summer,

of autumn chill and charm. *Something Wicked this Way Comes*, a rare novel. *The Illustrated Man*. *A Medicine for Melancholy*. *The Golden Apples of the Sun*. The paperback edition of *20,000 Leagues under the Sea* with the special introduction, “The Ardent Blasphemers” ... by Ray Bradbury. At Confederation in 1986 Bradbury delivered a Guest of Honor speech that was as much an evangelical oration – and he mentioned that essay. I nearly wept. I remembered it, and its effect on me, that well.

Between those two moments I had worked at DC Comics and actually had personal dealings with Bradbury. I wrote a piece on Julius Schwartz for *Amazing World of DC Comics* and had asked Ray for a quote about his old friend and agent. (Julie sold many of Bradbury’s early *Dark Carnival* stories.) He responded with a short note about Julie that I worked into my article. Ray Bradbury and Guy H. Lillian III – collaborators.

But yes ... Confederation. The best convention I ever attended, for so many reasons. One of them: I got to see Bradbury in the flesh. Confederation had the wit to ask Ray to be Guest of Honor. Two moments adjacent in time come to me from that convention. One was Ray’s speech, of course, that rousing evangelical oration I mentioned before. “*We are the idea beasts!*” He had fandom doing epileptic flips in the aisles. Right afterwards, in the heady glow that followed that incredible sermon from the mount, Ray bowed to Nolacon’s harlequin Sara Fensterer and she placed a set of beads about his neck. I about collapsed.

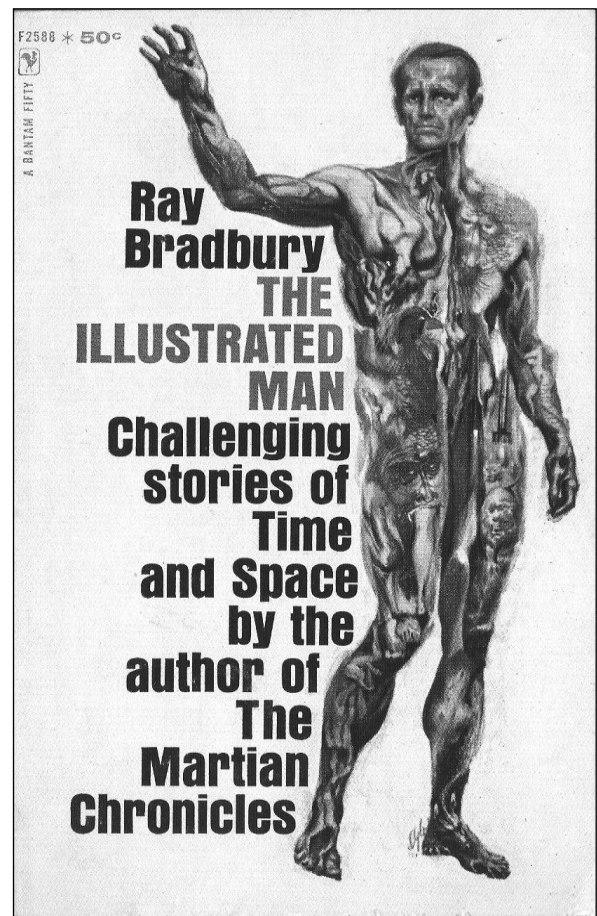
I was walking through LACon III when I saw him again, giving another of his patented pep talks, but this was an even more special moment because I was hanging with the beautiful German girl Inge Glass ... and Julius Schwartz. Julie was Ray’s first agent; he sold most of the stories in *Dark Carnival*. Schwartz asked Inge and me to follow the two of them as they patrolled the dealers’ room, just in case Ray needed something. Incredible experience – all those suddenly widened eyes and the whispers, “Ray Bradbury! *Ray Bradbury!*” as the big white-haired man in the wonderful ice cream suit made his way.

I wrote about Bradbury at that convention for *Challenger*, and by so doing actually managed to impress a Nawlins friend-slash-client. “*You know Ray Bradbury?*” she asked in amazement. Yeah, I said. I do.

There came another LACon, IV by number, and the years were piling up. Julie was gone by then, and I was married to Rosy, and when we saw Bradbury we could both tell things were coming to an end. Ray was in a wheelchair, sprawling, like all the ligatures were coming loose, and though his words were as wonderful as ever, the voice was in its 9<sup>th</sup> decade, and weak. *Surround yourself with your loves*. I stood back and watched as the infinite autograph line wound its way to him, until Rosy, understanding, came up. “Come on,” she said. “It’s time to say goodbye.”

What was his quality? The week of his death, as I watched him recite “If Only We Had Taller Been” (seated next to Arthur C. Clarke, two down from Carl Sagan) and flub the last answer on *You Bet Your Life* (“*The Heiress!*” I kept shouting), both on YouTube, I wondered, Why did science fiction mourn this man so profoundly? I’ve never seen a loss rock our world to such a degree – not even Sir Arthur’s. What was it about Bradbury that had me – and no doubt, others – close to weeping?

A lot of it was his fame, of course – everybody knew the name, everybody associated it with science fiction – but there was substance and distinction beyond the fame. Bradbury’s science fiction was





not based in technology or politics – or really, in the future at all. His fiction was rooted in nostalgia, in the dreams and hopes of his youth, in *love*, as he said, the love of a dreamer for life's myriad joys. For Lon Chaney movies, and comic books, and dinosaurs, and spaceships, and vampires, and Mars, for all the things that make imagination soar in kids and kids-at-heart. For the work and the soul of Ray Bradbury.

**The fence we walked between the years did balance us serene.  
It was a place half in the sky wearing the green of leaf and promising of peach.  
We'd reach our hand and touch and almost touch the sky.  
If we could reach and touch we said, it would teach us not to, never to, be dead.**

**We ached and almost touched that stuff; our reach was never quite enough.  
If only we had taller been and touched God's cuff, his, his hem.  
We would not have to go with them who've gone before,  
who short as us stood tall as they could stand,  
and hoped by stretching, tall, that they might keep their land,  
their home, their hearth, their flesh and soul,  
but they like us were standing in a hole.**

**Oh Thomas, will a race one day stand really tall?  
Across the void, across the universe and all,  
and measured out with rocket fire,  
at last put Adam's finger forth; as on the Sistine ceiling,  
and God's hand come down the other way, to measure man,  
and find him good, and gift him with forever's day?**

**I work for that, short man, large dream.  
I send my rockets forth between my ears,  
hoping an inch of good is worth a pound of years.  
Aching to hear a voice cry back along the universal mall,  
"We've reached Alpha Centauri.. We're tall... Oh God, we're tall!"**

**"If Only We Had Taller Been"  
Ray Bradbury**





## A FINAL NOTE ...

I had intended to allow Bradbury's poem to be the last word in this issue of *Challenger*, but I'm forced by circumstance to add a sheet to the mix. The specific circumstance is a sad one: the death on August 12, 2012 of the legendary comic artist, Joe Kubert, a great man who was very kind to me when I was a boy working at DC Comics. He represented the antithesis of Bob Kane and in a way I'm glad I get to mention his genial decency here, to contrast with Kane's weird arrogance – my year at DC was wondrous and I wouldn't have it perceived any other way. Joe's work is of course, well-known and impossible to miscredit. I didn't see much of his *Viking Prince* strip but of course, grew up with *Sgt. Rock in Our Army at War*. His *Hawkman* issues of *Brave & the Bold* were superb – he was much better suited to the character than Murphy Anderson, superb artist though Anderson was. His *Enemy Ace* was exemplary, probably his best collaboration with the difficult genius of Bob Kanigher, and there could be no other artist in his era for *Tarzan* – who else could give the jungle lord that savage, feral look? I was surprised to find that he inked Carmine Infantino's pencils on the first Silver Age *Flash* and I won't forget his newspaper strip, *Tales of the Green Beret*. In short, the guy was a unique, original, unforgettable and flawless comic book artist.

Unsurprisingly, Kubert was a muscular guy with a confident, cheery personality. When we “Junior Woodchucks” on the DC staff – under Sol Harrison's guidance – created *The Amazing World of DC Comics*, interviewing Joe was the first assignment I sought. He was quite amenable, so, armed with Sol's malfunctioning tape recorder, I rode a bus out into the wilds of New Jersey one evening to see him. I think I remember climbing a hill. I know I saw one of his family treasures, a frame from *Gertie the Dinosaur*. While Joe sat at a drawing table, he talked. I remember only a little of what was said – and re-reading the finished article, “The Celebrated Mr. K”, does little to help, since Joe re-wrote the entire piece. Two moments remain in my mind, though: a bad *King Kong* joke I made and a wonderful story Kubert told of his youth. He and Norman Maurer, as young teens, nervily visited Alex Raymond at his home in Connecticut. The great artist graciously welcomed them, but they were so nervous they refused to sit down or accept so much as a glass of water. Such are the joy and the jitters of meeting an idol. My year at DC Comics was like that, almost every day.

Joe had a great humor to him, immense patience, tremendous professionalism, serene security. His sons Adam and Andy carry on his work, as do graduates of the Joe Kubert School of Cartooning. He will be forever missed, and never forgotten.

On the flip side of this page is a doodle Joe did during an editorial conference at DC. Behold the interior of a great talent's mind. Look at it! A biplane. A crucifixion. Rocky Horror lips. Stampeding stallions. A diving bird of prey. A rhino. And central to all, a proud lion.

