

A FUNNY THING HAPPENED
ON THE WAY TO POUGHKEEPSIE



THE TRANSCENDENTAL FANNE

These eight pages represent the most arduous and wild-eyed labour of a once actifan, gone GAFIA and FAFIA for quite some time, now returning to the fold with great apprehension.

This is Googie Publication #beats me!, from Miriam Knight, 43 Noxon Street, Poughkeepsie, N.Y. (This address will be good 'till April 1, then after April 15 we will be at 2106 Spaulding Avenue, Berkeley 3, Calif.) A Funny Thing Happened To Me on the Way to Poughkeepsie is for FAPA mailing #102, February 1963.

Published by Ted White, whose tyer this is, on the QWERTYUIOPress -- long-suffering, kindly Ted White, who has put up with my procrastination and disorganization in a most long-suffering and kindly manner.

Jerry Knight, my lord and master, who has done more work on this 'zine than he will accept egoboo (?) for, and whose credentials this might be, will probably become an instant FAPAn after he gets finished with all this IBM school.

Steve Stiles did the cover. And ran it off. Blessings on him!

These exerpts from letters are not Margo Newkom's first fanzine appearance. Her song, "Good St. Leibowitz" was published by Calvin W. Demmon. She has been described as "the fannish wife of a fringe fan" and is Sanly Bowitts' #1 fan. The fringe fan in question is the redoubtable Jack (J.G.) Newkom, terror of So. Gate and Good Man about Berkeley. (I published a letter from Jack in '58 and Real Soon Now I'll publish some poetry he sent me then that Jean Young illustrated in '59.)

And that completes the cast of characters for thish, unless Les Gerber helps to collate it. Les gave me some beautiful pink fuzzy ear-muffs, which I even wear on the phone.

MY TRIP TO NEW YORK

On Tuesday, the 16th of October, Jerry was late getting home from work, and I had a premonition that something was up. Not like a traffic jam or an auto accident, but like he was discussing something Important with his manager. I had a feeling he was going to be sent to IBM school in San Jose, an event which has happened twice before and I didn't like it. Jerry called up at one point to say that he'd be a little late and that he was being sent to a school. "San Jose?" I moaned. "No," he said, "New York." I goshwowed for a minute, then we hung up. I had visions for the next hour or so of a glorious trip to New York City. We would fly there after the first of the year and spend about a month having a perfectly marvelous time going to museums and art galleries and buying exotic sweets from pushcart-peddlers in Little Italy. I had completely forgotten that New York means a state as well as a city. When Jerry came home he told me we had to leave Friday at the latest and would be spending close to six months in Poughkeepsie, a small city seventy-five miles up the Hudson from the Great Melting Pot. I was heartbroken. I cried. I

carried on. I felt as though a death sentence had been passed on us. But just the same, we did come.

After much fussing it was decided that Andy Main would find us a subtenant. So we set out with the least possible organization several hours behind schedule with David Heron, an acquaintance, to help Jerry with the driving. Sanly Bowitts, our grey fuzzy cat, a red dishpan, and a supply of cat sand. We also brought what we thought might be winter clothes, and a few other possessions. Sanly was wearing a blue harness and leash so we could keep him from leaping out of the car when we paid trolls. We were all huddled in the knee-chest position for the next six days, as this is quite a lot of stuff to put into a Volkswagen.

We drove a thousand miles and saw the West, and a thousand more and saw the Mid-West and stopped off for a few hours in Chicago to visit the Kemps. We drove a thousand more and saw the East, and then we were in Poughkeepsie, and we were completely croggled. The first thing we did was call Avram and Grania Davidson, who invited us to visit them for the weekend (They still lived in Manhattan then). They had a party, at which we met for the first time Steve Stiles, George and Peachy Willick, and Carol Carr. The party was good, and so was the weekend. And that was our first introduction to New York Fandom.

MY FAVORITE TV SHOW

My favorite TV show is on at nine o'clock in the morning, so I don't always get to see it. It is the Jack La Lanne Show, and is sponsored by La Lanne Products. I tuned it in accidentally one morning to see what was on at such an hour, and was quite startled to see a well-built man in silhouette doing the jumping-jack exercise. On either side of him were two large dogs. There was organ music in the background. Then the lights came up and none other than Jack La Lanne told Happy and Smiley, for those were the dogs names, to go sit on a nearby couch. Then he said, "Good morning, boys and girls. Go get Mommy, wherever she is, and tell her it's time for TRIMNASTICS!"

For the next half hour Mr. La Lanne led a series of exercises that seemed to be quite sound for keeping someone in trim. His manner was very "show biz'" and "let's all join in," and like that. He used a lot of weedy expressions like, "This one's to firm up that Old Back Porch." (Mr. La Lanne's Old Back Porch is quite firm indeed.) The whole show is extremely clever. There is "inspirational" organ music to help one keep in time with Mr. La Lanne while he Shows You How. There are no props required for the exercises other than occasionally a straight backed chair. Mr. L wears a tight open throat short sleeved jersey shirt of the type often worn by physical-culture types, rather unstylish (they have pleats) slacks, socks, I suppose, and ballet slippers.

At the end of the show he sings a verse of "O Sole Mio" that I've never heard elsewhere, that doesn't even rhyme, and ends up "and God bless YOU." At the word "YOU" the large white dogs leap off the couch, arrange themselves on either side of him, the lights dim, and he starts doing the jumping jack exercise. Then a voice comes in from the distance and says,

"If you appreciate the dedicated work of this inspired man, please tell your friends about this program." All this time he has been jumping up and down like a madman and the dogs are sitting there like idiots with their tongues hanging out, and then the program is over, and one experiences a huge letdown, like at the end of High Mass or something. It's the most far out thing I've ever seen anywhere.

Better than Roller Derby.

-- Miri

IN MEMORIAM: DUTCHESS COUNTY

The first time I was Poughkeepsie was October of last year. Although winter was some weeks away the little old town was starting to shutter its windows and move indoors away from the cold. Sleet was falling, and buffeted by the wind, it sparkled and danced in the light of our headlights. The cold wind outside found every crack around the doors and windows of the car, and we shivered in spite of the heater. We were lonely and afraid, three thousand miles from home.

I guess I should explain. My name is Gerald King, and I am writing all this down in case anyone should...well, I'd rather not even think about it. The company I work for, Business Machines, Inc., transferred me here last fall to work at their factory here in Poughkeepsie. My wife Mary and I thought it would be an interesting experience for us to live in the East for a while; both of us are from California.

Anyway, after we had been here a few days we started looking around for an apartment. It was my wife who found the place. If I have ever wished to turn back the clock, I wish it now. God! if I could only go back to that black and terrible day, grab Mary by the arm, and lead her away from there forever! But now it is too late. Mary cannot leave the house, and I am not much better able to exist now in the outside world. But I am getting ahead of the story.

It was the evening of our fourth day here. When I arrived after work at the hotel Mary told me she had found us an apartment a few blocks away. I was delighted, as we were fast running out of the spending money we had brought on the trip and we needed to start living thriftily again. We walked to the apartment. The weather was clear and the temperature well below freezing. My scarf crackled with static electricity as I put it on.

The house was old, very old, and it leaned a little to one side; all of its angles were just a trifle odd. But it had obviously been well cared for. The exterior paint was fresh and bright, and the finish on the oak front door was deep and rich. Mary pressed the bell, and after a minute or so an elderly man with sparse white hair opened the door. "You...ah...you're Mr. and Mrs...now...King, aren't you?" he said, peering through thick spectacles. "That's right," I replied. "Mmmm. Yes," he murmured. "We came to see your apartment," I prompted. "Oh, yes, now... of course," he said. "Follow me."

The apartment was three rooms on the second floor. It was a typical furnished apartment -- better than some

though not better than most -- but the rent was quite reasonable and we decided we'd take the place.

We gave him a check (Mary had opened an account for us at a local bank), and he gave us a receipt. "It's very quiet here," he said. "You needn't worry about being disturbed." "Oh, that's all right," I said. We went out into the hall. There were half a dozen other doors off the hallway. All were closed. "By the way," I said, "how many other tenants have you?"

"Oh," he said, "you're the only ones."

The first few weeks in our new home went pretty well. We felt a little edgy, but we attributed that to the bad weather and living in a strange town. I hadn't yet made any good friends at work and we mostly spent our evenings reading or listening to the radio. It was during one of those quiet evenings that we blew a fuse. An electrical one, I mean. Mary plugged the steam iron into the wall and all the lights went out. I struck a match and located one of our "dinner" candles, and with it I made my way down the stairs to tell our landlord. I knocked on his door. I pounded on it, and got no response. I decided the fuse box must be in the basement, so I opened the basement door and started down the steps.

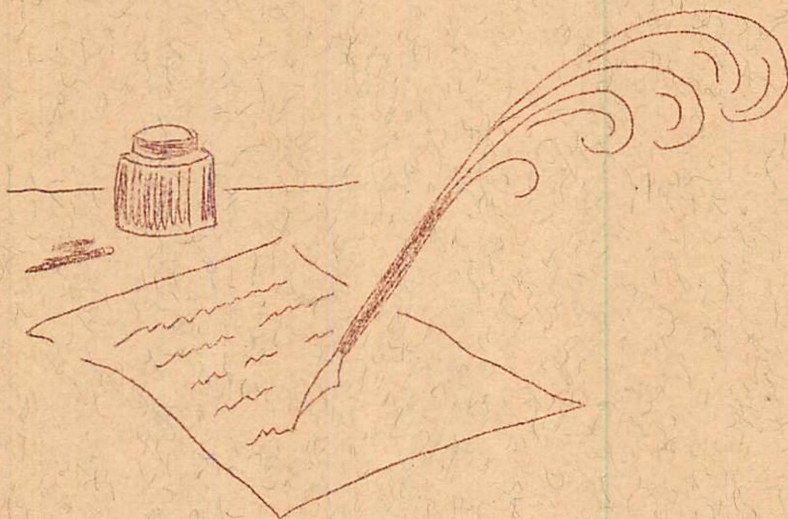
I did not find the fuse box. For when I had almost reached the bottom of the steps I stopped and looked out into the basement. The candle flared up brightly for a moment, and in that moment I took in the whole scene. The basement was a foot deep in water, and three black shapes glided noiselessly about through it. One of them turned and swam toward me, and I could tell even before it opened its mouth that it was an immense crocodile. For the first time I noticed the swampy, musky odor emanating from the creatures, and recognized it as the peculiar smell I had noticed ever since we had moved in. At that moment a freak gust of air blew my candle out and slammed the basement door shut above me. There was a grunting sound very near me, and the odor became so powerful that my head swam. I threw down the extinguished candle and ran desperately up the stairs. The basement door was stuck, but it finally gave in to my frenzied blows. I ran up the stairs to our rooms, and almost knocked myself out running into the door frame.

That was in November. It is now January, I think, or February. Six weeks ago we started showing the signs. Mary first, then me. The shortening of the arms and legs. The lump appearing at the base of the spine, and then continuing, horribly, to grow. Mary and I never talk now. She spends most of her time in the bathtub or down in the basement with the others. Soon, I suppose, I shall be the same. The landlord takes good care of us and feeds us, but our door into the hall is locked if anyone else comes around. But I keep thinking of something I saw behind the shrubbery at one of the front corners of the house just before the madness began. A block of granite set into the foundation, and on it carved:

TO THE ELDER GODS BE
THIS HOUSE DEDICATED
1853 HPL

-- Jerry

DEAR SILLIES-



by margo

Dear Sillies: The scheduled G.G.F.S. meeting took place on the evening of the day after you left. The event was your official Wake. Poor Calvin arrived in deep mourning. Toward the end of the evening Ray Nelson came to life, and to cheer everyone up he did the Twist in the nude. All during this performance I dozed away insensible on the sofa -- really just dead-tired, not blasé, but how's that for one-upmanship?...

We envisioned the three (or four) of you racing to cross the Great Plains in the little Volkswagen, all packed in and hunched up in the knee/chest position, with Bowitz (poor, befuddled fluff) in a state of near-collapse. We kept receiving cryptic postcards from David, one of which stated darkly that your fuzzy kitty had not "eaten nor excreted" for twenty-four hours. This alarmed us thoroughly, and silently we prayed

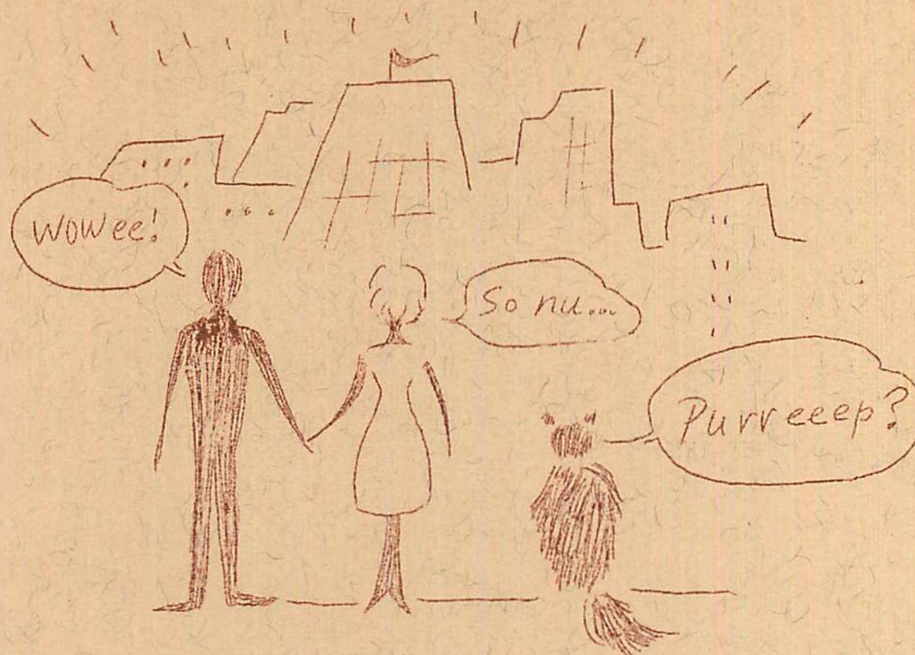
"Bowitz-baby -- Eat!! Excrete!! Live!!!!

"O Bury Him Not on the Lone Prairie..."

In our minds' eye we saw you Crossing the Plains -- POUGHKEE PSIE OR BUST -- pressing over eastward, reversing the direction of oncoming legions of westward-migrating neo-pioneers. Overhead -- streaming across the Vast Sky -- jet planes and satellites and birds (and prairie-grass seed and

insects and chewing-gum wrappers, and stuff).

And finally -- your arrival on the East Coast!



Jerry, Miri, and 'Bowitz --

BABES IN MANHATTEN

David, your erstwhile travelling companion, has now returned to our midst -- to our surprise, since we received a false radio report that when he was halfway home from the rigors of the East Coast climate the continuing National Emergency persuaded him to drop everything and join the military service of his country! Nothing of the kind occurred, however, and he is here again with us, having hitch-hiked part of the way West, pausing only to go into Retreat for four days at the Our Lady of Grethsemane Trappist Monastery in Kentucky. Duncan Hines apparently ignored these lodgings, but David recommends the Spiritual atmosphere and the delicious homemade bread and cheese. (Did the good monks give him a splinter of the True Cross for a toothpick? He does not say...)

...Recently Bat Fang ((Sanly's yellow half brother. mk)) has been showing much fluctuation in appetite, sometimes going all day without touching his proper victuals. At first we worried -- "Cuddlecats-muffot! Fluff-bunny! Fuzzbear! (kiss, kiss) Are you sick? SPEAK to us!!" Then we began to notice that not only was he still fat and sassy but that his fur and muzzle often smelled of garlic, bacon grease, roast turkey, perfume -- none of which traces he had likely acquired at home. And so we realized that others were feeding him and/or he was raiding garbage cans -- the varmint!

...At Poul and

Karen Anderson's recent Orinda session Al ~~ba~~Levy declared himself ready to throw over everything and go to Israel. Sid Rogers kept telling him, "Promises, promises!"

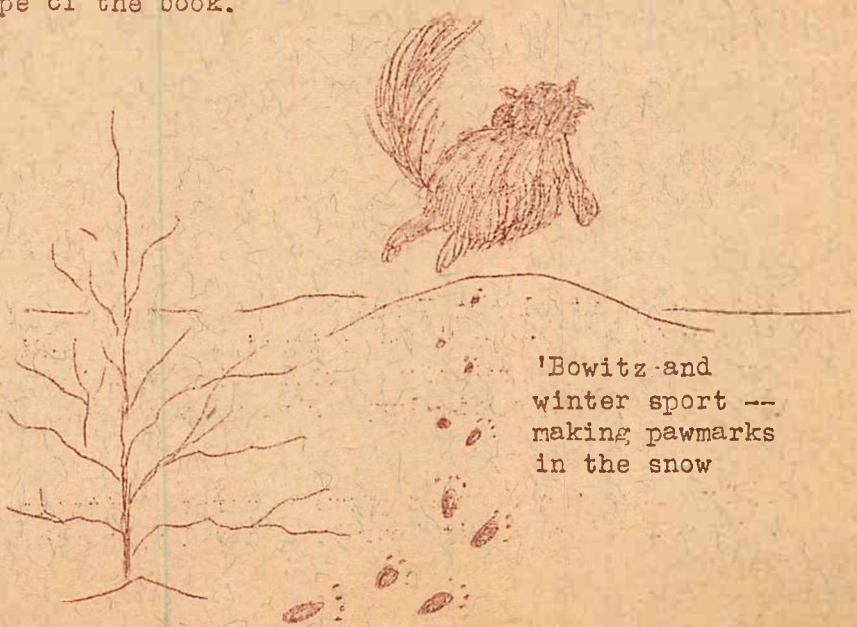
...The recent London/San Francisco Exchange Festival (Foororah Week) saw much import of British Culture: Union Jacks, a genuine London bus which trundled around Union Square, replicas of the Crown Jewels, the Cockney "Pearly" King and Queen, free tea, and like that. Also H.R.H. Prince Phillip (in S.F. to address the English-Speaking Union), who with his entourage and motorcycle escort crossed the Bay to the University for the guided tour.

Well, you know no one in cool, disengaged Berkeley is going to admit curiosity about a visiting celebrity -- especially a Prince Consort, for heaven's sake! Nevertheless, a number of us citizens just happened to be ambling by or pausing a moment to scratch near the designated route and tour stops at just the right time. I saw him coming out of the Student Union. He looked just like himself in the newsreels, only twice as natural. Smiling and nodding he climbed into the waiting limousine and was driven off.

Only much later that day, at the Co-Op, was I jolted out of this fairy tale atmosphere by the title of a paperback on the book rack: The Survival Handbook. And of course it's a treatise on how to stay alive in the Wilderness -- such as, for instance, following a nuclear explosive attack and Total Chaos. The book is deadly serious. It tells how to rub two stones together for the igniting spark and how to dig a pit for sleeping purposes. Quotes from Thoreau's writing are used to give authority and tone. The recipe section ("First catch your moose...") says that many small insects may be eaten with impunity for nutritive value, and that cannibalism is sometimes resorted to in cases of extreme deprivation (!). Since this is not The Donner Party Cookbook specific recipes for cannibalism are not given. Ethical considerations are touched on, however, though not what seems to me the essential point that one eats those one likes least first. The problem of possible radioactivity is apparently not with the scope of the book.

This Foughkeepsie --
is it really as I picture
it -- a smoke-clogged
grimeslag on the blackened,
snowcrusted riverbank (the
river itself a sluggish,
half-frozen current of icy
sewage)? ((No. mk))

The
name itself, Foughkeepsie,
like so many other place-
names in that area -- the
map gives me "Schenectady,"
"Ossining," etc. -- grates
on the ear. How preferable
are the mellifluous desig-



'Bowitz and
winter sport --
making pawmarks
in the snow



nations for our California communities. In the East Bay alone I think of El Cerrito, Pinole, Emeryville... Oh, well.

...We read about the Big Chill on the Eastern Seaboard. You poor little hothouse plants! It gives me a pang to think of Simple Sanly's changing into a transcontinental, big-city kitty. Bowitz, the blasé sophisticat.

If it gets any worse even 'Bowitz will need an (additional) fur coat.

On this same subject -- tell me it's not true -- the shocking rumor from a Source I Dare Not Name -- that Leibowitz, arch-huggable fuzzycat, is actually

a 73-year-old, faggoty little dwarf wearing a fur coat and false whiskers!!!!

Soon comes the Great Disclosure of the formulations about planet Venus based on decodings of Mariner II data -- squee!! So now we can judge which scientists and sci-fi writers have come the closest in their speculations previously. Is Venus a sphere of oceans and vapors, a barren, acrid lump or a burnt marshmallow?

-- Margo Newkom

((Thus ends the fannish parts, exerpted without permission, of Margo Newkom's letters. If we don't hear from her lawyers there may be more another time. mk))