

The Metaphysical Review 22/23

November 1995

84 pages

The People Issue

The People Who Started It All

Race Mathews

People in the Seventies

Sally Yeoland and John Bangsund

People: Incidents and Accidents

Terry Frost, Gerald Murnane, Don Ashby

People: Life and Times

Shayne McCormack, Henry Gasko, Dave Piper, John Brosnan, Robert Day,
Mark Lawson, Jeanne Mealy, Casey June Wolf

People Missing in Action: Memories of Lost Friends and Relatives

Bruce Gillespie, John Brosnan, Andy Sawyer, Jeanne Mealy, Paul Anderson,
Mae Strelkov, Mark Loney, Chris Chittleburgh, Ben Indick, Doug Barbour,
Henry Gasko, John Newman, David Lake



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THE METAPHYSICAL REVIEW No. 22/23, November 1995, is edited and published by Bruce Gillespie, 59 Keele Street, Collingwood, Victoria 3066, Australia (ph: (03) 9419-4797). Printed by Copy Place, Melbourne.

Available for subscriptions (\$A25 within Australia, equivalent of \$A35 (airmail) overseas), written or graphic contributions, traded publications, or donations. All cheques to 'Bruce Gillespie'.

ART

All photographs processed by Ellikon Printers. **Front cover:** (Left to right) Leigh Edmonds, Lee Harding, Sally Yeoland, John Bangsund at Aussiecon I, 1975. Photo by Kelvin Roberts (?), as for p. 36. **Interior photographs:** Elaine Cochrane (p. 4); David Parker (p. 6); Lee Harding (p. 13); unknown (pp. 17, 22), John Bangsund (p. 31), John Litchen (pp. 24 and 35). **Graphics:** Terry Frost (pp. 45-51), Ditmar Jenssen (pp. 64 and 71).

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Spot the boo-boo

Elaine did not proofread *TMR* 19/20/21, therefore the issue is riddled with boo-boos.

The very worst mistake appears on the cover, and in several places in the text. Roger Weddall was *not* born in 1953, but in 1956.

He met Walt Willis at MagiCon, *not* Conspiracy.

And, of course, my postcode is now 3066, not 3001, as it says in the colophon.

It's Moor Street, Fitzroy, *not* Moore Street.

Cat news

Since No. 19/20/21 was written, the truly wonderful Monty died from liver cancer. At first we thought we could never replace him. It seemed that Sophie would kill any attempted intruder. When four kittens were dumped on us at the beginning of 1995, Elaine found homes for three of them (thanks, Alan and Judy, and LynC and Clive). We hired a large cage, in which the fourth kitten, Polly, lived until the other cats were used to her. Polly, a grey kitten with problems with one of her eyes (hence Polyphemus = Polly), is no fool. She set out to charm Sophie, and succeeded, and soon charmed all the others except Theodore. Theodore does not like rival prima donnas.

Happy birthday, Brian

Happy birthday, Brian Aldiss. I read about this occasion in *Locus*. This issue is my birthday card.

I guess you're as surprised to reach the age of 70 as I was to reach the age of 48 in February this year.

That's not what it says inside my head. The real me is always 26, or perhaps younger. What age is the real Brian Aldiss? I think of you as in your late thirties, matching the first pictures I saw of you, on those early Faber & Faber hardbacks. Or perhaps at the age of 49, the age you were when we met in England in early 1974. But 49 is the age I turn next year!

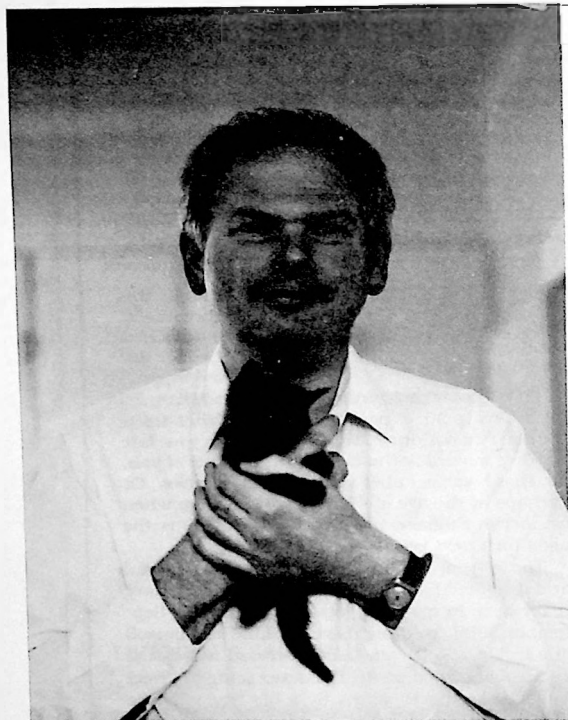
The 70-year-old Brian Aldiss seems as cheerful and delighted by life as ever. 'My best years have really been in my 60s,' you say (*Locus* 416, September 1995, p. 85). 'There's a kind of Plimsoll line in life . . . It came to me when I was 50. It suddenly dawned on me I'm never going to direct a movie! I'm never gonna fly a big transatlantic plane . . . It also dawned on me that in fact these negatives were positives. All these things were boyhood fantasies, and if you get rid of them, you cure yourself not of disillusionment — you cure yourself of illusion, and you curtail your expectation . . . you think, "Jesus, life is wonderful! How did I do this?"'

That's only a selection from this wonderful page of Aldissisms — the essence of the person I would like to have been. He's also the writer I would like to have been: not only for the quality of novels like *Hothouse*, *Barefoot in the Head* and *Forgotten Life*, critical work like *Trillion Year Spree* and stories like 'The Worm That Flies' and 'The Saliva Tree', but for the sheer variety of work over more than 40 years.

Happy birthday, Brian!

The fast forward button on the VCR of life

Every optimistic Aldiss has to be balanced by a pessimistic Gillespie. And Gillespie at 48-nearly-49 feels that he's well and truly reached the Plimsoll line of life when all the illusions have disappeared. Truth to tell, I can't see myself doing any of the things I'd really like to be doing, although I'm the first to admit I've achieved many things I never imagined myself doing. I had the



A still from the VCR of life:
Bruce Gillespie at the beginning of 1995,
plus Polly, who is now much larger.

unbelievable luck to live in Australia during the second half of the twentieth century. I had the unbelievable luck to find Elaine for my life's partner. I'm one of the few people still making a living from something I'm good at.

But I've never been able to earn a living from any activity that really satisfies me. I can't find it in myself to write fiction — and even if I could write the stuff, I doubt if I could make a living from doing it. The good luck is that occasionally, very occasionally, I can find the time and money to publish a fanzine, which is what I like doing.

For more than 25 years, I've used this column as a diary of the events in the Life of Bruce. I can't do that any more. There are hardly any events to write about. Somebody seems to have pushed the fast forward button on the VCR of life.

My 1995 was divided into two sections — two large textbooks I was desktop-publishing — separated by short 'holidays' in which I tried to finish this issue. Elaine has been working almost non-stop, editing at home, so we haven't taken a holiday away from home for five years. I've seen few films at the cinema, I've been to five concerts in the last two years, and we've even cut back on our restaurant outings. The highlights of these years have been the CDs I've listened to, the books I've read, the films I've watched, dinners with friends, Nova Mob meetings, a monthly film-watching gathering, local Neighbourhood Watch meetings, the arrival of Polly the kitten, letters I've received (more than 50 per cent response rate on *TMR* 19/20/21), and three conventions (Constantinople, ANZAPACon and Arcon), two of which were unashamedly devoted to nostalgia.

It's been a good life, but nothing much to write about. Nearly two years later, I cannot remember a great deal about being one of the Fan Guests of Honour at Constantinople (Easter 1994). It was very enjoyable. Being a Guest of Honour gave me a chance to meet people I'd heard about but never set eyes on. I got some idea of the complex pattern that is Australian fandom these days. And it was a wonderful surprise to receive a Ditmar for Best Fan Writer at the end of it all. (The battle between Terry Frost and me for Best Fan Writer Ditmar is told in Terry's articles.)

Thanks to Perry Middlemiss and Marc Ortlieb, the two most visible organisers of ANZAPACon (October 1993) and Arcon (September 1993). There seem to be hundreds of media conventions each year in Australia, so we old farts struck back.

Justin Semmel, at the age of 30 or so, was the youngest person at ANZAPACon, which celebrated 25 years of Australia's oldest and best-established amateur publishing association. The highlight of that convention was yarning to Gary Mason, who has mellowed even more than I have.

Arcon was designed to celebrate 20 years since Aussiecon I (the World Convention held in Melbourne in 1975) and ten years since Aussiecon II (1985, the second time the World Convention came to Melbourne). Like ANZAPACon, it had an ideal size (100–150 attendees), and brought together people who remember when Australian fandom was one group, before it split into splinter groups. Lots of nostalgic slides, a showing of the Aussiefan film, nostalgic panellists, and the appearance of Don Ashby helped to make this into a Mellowcon. Not that all was backward looking: panel items about fanzine publishing turned into arcane discussions of the ins and outs of Internet publishing. Me? I don't have a modem yet.

(Continued on Page 67)

RACE MATHEWS was, as this article shows, one of the founder members of the Melbourne Science Fiction Club, and since 1992 has returned to an active interest in sf. To the rest of the world, however, he is Director of the Institute of Politics and Public Affairs in the Graduate School of Government at Monash University. He was Victoria's Minister for Community Services (1987–88) and Minister for the Arts and Minister for Police and Emergency Services (1982–87). He represented Oakleigh in the Victorian Legislative Assembly from 1979 to 1992, and Casey in the federal House of Representatives from 1972 to 1975, and was a Councillor for the City of Croydon from 1964 to 1966. He was Principal Private Secretary to the Leader of the Opposition in Victoria (1976–79) and federally (1967–72). His *Australia's First Fabians: Middle-Class Radicals, Labour Activists and the Early Labour Movement* was published by Cambridge University Press in 1993, and he is currently writing about the co-operative movement in Britain, Canada and Spain.

Race Mathews opened each of the 1975 and 1985 Worldcons, both held in Melbourne.

BEGINNINGS OF THE MELBOURNE SCIENCE FICTION CLUB

WHIRLAWAY TO THRILLING WONDER STORIES:

Boyhood reading in wartime and postwar Melbourne

by Race Mathews

(Paper on the origins of the Melbourne Science Fiction Group presented for the Nova Mob by Race Mathews, 7 September 1994.)

First encounters

Any account of the origins of the Melbourne Science Fiction Group, which later became the Melbourne Science Fiction Club, must in the nature of things be as much about biography as history. In order to understand how the MSFG (Melbourne Science Fiction Group) was established, it is necessary also to understand how in the first place the Group's founders acquired tastes for science fiction which were tantamount to an addiction, and what it was that led them on further to the point where an organisation was required. In as much as what follows sets out the development of my own reading habits to the point of my discovery of science fiction and membership of the MSFG, it is offered as a paradigm from which the experiences of others may differ in detail, but which in a broad sense reflects the group as a whole.

By definition, there are as many accounts of first encounters with science fiction as there are readers of science fiction. The English novelist Kingsley Amis has described how, at the age of 'twelve or so', he discovered science fiction while rummaging through a display bin

in a neighbourhood Woolworth's store. The bin was labelled 'Yank Magazines: Interesting Reading'. Frederik Pohl — a prominent American science fiction writer — has described coming across his first copy of *Science Wonder Stories Quarterly* when he was nine. Predictably, a scaly green monster dominated its cover. As Pohl recalls, 'I opened it up. The irremediable virus entered my veins.'

There is a common thread that links these episodes and the pre-war science fiction experience more generally. Science fiction, once discovered, was abundant and readily accessible. As Pohl has pointed out: 'Magazines were a Depression business. If you couldn't afford fifty cents to take the family to the movies, you could probably scrape up a dime or twenty cents to buy a magazine, and then pass the magazine back and forth to multiply the investment.' For Amis, in Britain, the price would have been even lower. The 'Yank Magazines' from his Woolworth's bin would almost certainly have been unsold copies returned to the publishers from newsstands across America. 'Returns' were shipped out of the country by weight to England and Australia, and resold by department stores at a price marginally higher than their value as scrap paper.

A further common thread exists in the relative ease with which pre-war science fiction readers were able to make



Race Mathews.

contact with one another. Pohl belonged in quick succession to the Brooklyn Science Fiction League, the East New York Science Fiction League, the Independent League, the International Cosmos Fiction Club and the Futurians. To quote him for the last time: 'We changed clubs the way Detroit changes tail fins, every year had a new one and last year's was junk.' In the unlikely event that Kingsley Amis had wanted to join a fan club, the choice open to him in pre-war Britain would have included various chapters of Hugo Gernsback's Science Fiction Association and the British Interplanetary Society. Pre-war Australian readers had a Futurian Society of Melbourne and a Futurian Society of Sydney.

The situation in immediately postwar Melbourne was different. There is a passage in Arthur Clarke's short story 'The Sentinel' which, even today, those of us who were growing up at the time cannot read without emotion. Clarke wrote:

Nearly a hundred thousand million stars are turning in the circle of the Milky Way, and long ago races in the worlds of other suns must have scaled and passed the heights that we have reached. Think of such civilisations, far back in time against the fading afterglow of Creation, masters of a universe so young that life as yet had come to only a handful of worlds. Theirs must have been a loneliness we cannot imagine, the loneliness of gods looking out across infinity and finding none to share their thoughts.

Science fiction seemed to us in Melbourne in the late nineteen-forties and early nineteen-fifties to be truly 'a

universe so young that life as yet had come to only a few worlds'. Being a science fiction fan at the time was still mostly a solitary pursuit, involving something akin truly to 'the loneliness of gods looking out across infinity and finding none to share their thoughts'. Books and magazines were few and far between. Those which turned up through painstaking searching and scrounging had to be savoured, eked out and repeatedly re-read. Often a point was reached where a favourite story was known virtually by heart. We had reason to understand better than most the much-quoted paraphrase of a famous 1949 *Astounding Science Fiction* punchline: 'It is a proud and lonely thing to be a fan'.

Proto-fan

It was my good luck to be born into a household where science fiction was accepted and appreciated, at a time when reading was not yet in the process of being supplanted for entertainment purpose by the electronic media. My father before me had been an avid reader of H. G. Wells, Jules Verne, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle and Sir Henry Rider Haggard, and a keen collector of the early American science fiction magazine *Amazing Stories*. The sale of his collection to meet mid-Depression household expenses around the time of my birth was in a sense a metaphor for a life which was largely given over to sacrifice of his and my mother's interests to those of their children.

As a small child, I was walked up and down in my father's arms while he recited over and over again from memory poems such as 'Horatius' and 'The Battle of Lake Regulus' from Macaulay's *Lays of Ancient Rome*,

Tennyson's 'Ulysses'; Blake's 'The Tiger'; Byron's 'The Destruction of Sennacherib'; Coleridge's 'Kubla Khan' and 'The Ancient Mariner'; Cowper's 'Boadicea'; and 'The Ballad of East and West' and 'Gunga Din' from Kipling's *Barrack Room Ballads*. In time, the recitations became participative. He might select for example a passage from Macaulay reading:

But when the face of Sextus was seen among the
foe

A yell that rent the firmament from all the town
arose.

On the housetops were no woman but spat
towards him and hissed,

No child but screamed out curses and . . .

At that point there would be a pause, and I would be expected to complete the line with the missing words 'shook his little fist'. A passage from Tennyson might read:

That which we are, we are —

One equal temper of heroic hearts

Made weak by time and fate

But strong in will to strive, to seek, to find and . . .

I would supply the missing words 'not to yield' with — as my father later reported it — the lisping approximation 'oo mustn't 'ield'.

My father also took turns with my mother at satisfying my insistent demand to have books and stories read to me. The books mostly were borrowed from the children's shelves of the Melbourne Public Lending Library in Latrobe Street, now long since closed. At the age of five or six I began reading for myself, but the reading aloud by my parents continued. It was their habit to periodically take a break for a cup of tea or — in my father's case — a smoke. I very much resented the interruptions, and responded by hiding — and on notable occasions destroying — the cigarettes. In the longer term, my frustration immunised me permanently against ever becoming either a tea-drinker or a smoker. It is open to conjecture what consequences might have followed if the breaks had been — and I had known them to be — for sex.

The books I most liked to have read to me — and ultimately re-read for myself — included H. C. F. Morant's neglected classic Australian fantasy *Whirlaway*; Hugh Lofting's Dr Doolittle stories; *The Midnight Folk* and *The Box of Delights* by the poet laureate, John Masefield; Kathleen Tozer's Mumfie stories; *An Experiment with St George* by the mathematician J. W. Dunne, who also wrote the much better known *An Experiment With Time*; and the geneticist J. B. S. Haldane's *My Friend Mr Leaky*. Other favourites were T. H. White's *The Sword in the Stone*, Walter De La Mare's *The Three Mulga-Mulgass*, A. E. Coppard's *Pink Furniture*, Norman Hunter's *The Incredible Adventures of Professor Branestawm* with the inspired illustrations by Heath Robinson; and C. S. Forester's *Poo-Poo and the Dragons*.

Whirlaway featured an eleven-year-old heroine, Helen, who set out on her adventures in the company of her pet koala, Tirri, and Whirlaway himself, who was a friendly sunbeam. A hidden lift in the cellar of her

newly occupied family home carried them downwards through successive geological strata and backwards in time, to the dawn of life in the Archaeozoic Era or 'Age of Oldest Things'. The return journey took place by a series of doors, each opening into a new geological epoch, which the party was able to explore. At each stage, new inventories of exotic creatures — trilobites and sea-lillies in the Cambrian sea, dinosaurs in the Jurassic and Cretaceous swamps and forests and dawn-horses and sabre-toothed tigers on the grassy plains of the Pliocene — unfolded for them. Like Helen and her companions, I was captivated. Dinosaurs preoccupied me, to the exclusion virtually of all else. Helen's home — 'Lyell Lodge' — was described as having been named after the great geologist, Sir Charles Lyell. Lyell instantly became my hero. A geologist was what I wanted to be. My tongue began finding its way around perplexingly polysyllabic words such as 'archcopteryx' and 'paleozoic'. When I was six, and the birth of my first brother was imminent, my parents consulted widely about a suitable name. My contribution was 'Lyell'. Other claims had to be accommodated, but William Alwyn Lyell Mathews he duly became. All this was to go for nothing. My enthusiasm for rocks turned out to have been premature. A year or so later, I discovered my father's copy of Leonard C. Woolley's *Ur of the Chaldees*. It was plain immediately that geology was a second-best. What I really wanted was to be an archaeologist.

Whirlaway was a World War II casualty. Its appearance from the English publisher Hutchinson in the late 1930s coincided with the lead-up to hostilities. Under wartime conditions, few copies ever reached Australia, and the London stocks were destroyed in the Blitz. All but a tiny minority of Australian children — in which by good luck I was included — missed out on what otherwise would undoubtedly have become an enduring favourite to rival *Snugglypot* and *Cuddlepie*, *The Adventures of Blinky Bill* and *The Magic Pudding*. In the absence of a proven market for Morant's unique way of introducing children to science, his sequel — *The Ether Chariot*, which was to have done for astronomy what *Whirlaway* was intended to do for geology and palaeontology — was never completed. An exhibition of Jean Elder's superb illustrations at the Gould Gallery in 1987 prompted hopes that a new edition of *Whirlaway* might be produced, but no action was taken. A further opportunity was lost in 1993, when a re-release could have been co-incided with the marketing of Steven Spielberg's *Jurassic Park*. It remains for some enlightened publisher to give back to Australian children the classic which they have so long and needlessly been denied.

Upwey — where we went to live in 1941 — had a small library attached to its post office, where I learned for the first time to choose books for myself and how they were borrowed. It was there that I came across the Budge and Betty books, with their stories about elves and fairies, and toy ships and cars which could be increased to life size at the touch of a magic ring and travelled in to remote and exotic places. The syllabus at the Upwey Higher Elementary School included a smattering of myths and legends of Greece, Rome and Scandinavia, which whetted my appetite for adventures involving

gods and heroes. J. R. R. Tolkien's *The Hobbit* was brought home for me by my father one night from the Public Lending Library in Melbourne. I and later my brothers asked to have it back so repeatedly that it must have seemed to other would-be borrowers to have been permanently unavailable. At some stage we sent a letter to Tolkien, asking him the sort of questions about Moria, Gondolin and the Necromancer which are now known to have reached him in all but overwhelming numbers. There was no reply, but the effort was not wasted. Our names must have been filed for future reference by the publishers, Allen & Unwin. In 1953, when I was eighteen, they sent me the prospectus for a further story about hobbits, which was to be issued in three volumes as *The Lord of the Rings*. As a result, I was able to savour the exquisite suspense of waiting months after *The Fellowship of the Ring* reached me for *The Two Towers* to be published, and months again for *The Return of the King*.

The war reduced the availability of new books for children to a trickle. In as much as I acquired books as opposed to borrowing them, it was mostly at impatiently waited-for birthdays and Christmases. These were usually secondhand copies — or 'wartime austerity editions' — of books my parents had read in their childhoods. Long before I heard of Edith Nesbit as a founder member of the Fabian Society — a body to which I later belonged — her name was familiar to me as the author of *The Magic World* and *The Railway Children* which were presents given to me at Upwey, as well as *The Would-Be-Goods*, *Five Children and It*, *The Phoenix and the Carpet* and *The Story of the Amulet* which came my way later.

Somebody's chance recommendation of Richmal Crompton's William books to a generous grandmother caused all the titles then in print to be included in the pillow case which served as my Christmas stocking in 1943. My parents regarded Crompton's work as trash, but I doted on it. Reading and thinking about William and his friends Ginger, Douglas and Henry — known collectively as 'the Outlaws' — preoccupied me for months. At night, I dreamed about them. The humour of the stories was largely lost on me. What mattered was that, whatever William's faults may have been, he thought big. His flights of imagination and freedom from inhibition might repeatedly land him in trouble, but they were very much what I wanted for myself.

Christmas 1943 also brought me the first of a number of volumes of the boys' weekly *Chums* which for years figured among my most highly valued possessions, and prompted me to interest myself increasingly in history. *Chums* — dedicated on its title page 'To the Boys of the Empire on which the Sun Never Sets' — had had a lifespan from 1892 to 1941, which coincided roughly with the high tide of the British Empire. The contents reflected the full range of topics in which the Empire's future citizens were expected to interest themselves. School stories by masters of the genre such as P. G. Wodehouse, L. C. Douthwaite and Gunby Hadath alternated with adventure stories from the pens of Frank H. Shaw, Charles Gilson and John Hunter.

Most of all there were serials on historical themes by S. Walkey. Walkey — by trade a staff controller in a bank

— was introduced to *Chums* in 1895 by Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch, and was writing for it as late as 1940. He was a master of suspense and colour, who specialised in settings such as the Crusades, the Spanish Armada, the English Civil War, the Monmouth Rebellion and the French Revolution. His plots were carried forward at breakneck speed, and lifted by a flair for dialogue. Typical titles were 'Rogues of the Fiery Cross', 'Hurrah for Merry Sherwood', 'Under Nelson's Flag' and 'The Sword of Tallifer Trueblade'. Illustrations were by Paul Hardy. Hardy — a frequent exhibitor of watercolours at the Royal Academy — used live models, period costumes and authentic artifacts such as muskets and cutlasses to achieve the meticulous and etching-like precision of the work in *Chums* for which he was so much more widely known. It was years before I was finally able to see past his snarling sans-culottes and brutal Roundheads to the realities of history which he and Walkey largely disregarded.

The war also drastically reduced the availability of comics. What comics meant to me initially was mostly *Chicks' Own*, *Rainbow* and other picture papers from Britain. There were also intermittently — courtesy of the department store trade in 'returns' — comics from the American 'Famous Funnies' stable such as *Onkey-Doakes*, *Alley-Oop*, *Buck Rogers* and — a special favourite of mine — *The Search for the Long Lost Swink Treasure*. I graduated in time to *Knockout*, *Radio Fun*, *Film Fun* and *Beano*. Later again, there were *Champion*, *Wizard*, *Rover*, *Hotspur* and *Adventure*. The paper shortage meant that the size of comics was drastically reduced. Supplies had to run the gauntlet of submarines and other wartime hazards before appearing for sale on Wednesdays at the local newsagency. Keeping up with the serials which their contents largely comprised acquired a special quality of heightened expectancy. It was never certain, from one Wednesday to the next, whether the latest installments about my favourite characters — the Iron Teacher, Wilson the superhuman athlete, Rockfist Rogan RAF and the Lost Commandos — might not already be lying somewhere on the bottom of the sea.

The gaps were filled for me in part by a store of annuals and boys' weeklies from the 1920s which had belonged to my father and uncles. These had survived in the garden shed of my grandparents' home at 120 Brighton Road, Elsternwick, where we moved from Upwey in 1943, so that I could enter the Melbourne Grammar preparatory school at Grimwade House in Caulfield the following year. Further fragments of *Chums* apart, the item which initially most attracted me was a battered copy of the *Greyfriars Holiday Annual* for 1929. The contents — school stories over the names of Frank Richards, Martin Clifford and Owen Conquest — were in reality all written by the master school story writer Charles Hamilton. Hamilton's major creations and the weekly papers in which they featured — Harry Wharton and Co. and Billy Bunter of Greyfriars in the *Magnet*, Tom Merry and Co. and Arthur Augustus D'Arcy of St Jim's in the *Gem* and Jimmy Silver and Co. in the *Popular* — were household words throughout most of the British Empire for the first half of the twentieth century. The subject of Hamilton's lead story for my 1929 *Holiday Annual* — 'When Billy Bunter

Forgot' — was Bunter losing his memory and becoming a reformed character after diving headfirst into an empty swimming pool. Hamilton's second contribution — 'Tom Merry's Minor' — was about mishaps and misunderstandings at St Jim's following the rescue of a monkey from a cruel owner who turned out to have taught it to steal for him. A third Hamilton story — 'A Rift at Rookwood' — described a falling-out and reconciliation within the 'Fiscal Four' as Jimmy Silver and his three closest friends were known to their schoolmates. 'The mental world of the *Gem* and the *Magnet*' — as some have seen it — was attacked later on grounds ranging from snobbery and cheap patriotism to having shied off references to sex, by critics as far removed ideologically from one another as George Orwell and Noel Coward. For me at the time, Hamilton's work was unalloyed delight. Unhappily my exposure to it was short-lived. The *Holiday Annual*, as I to my abiding disappointment now learned, had been discontinued in 1940, along with the *Magnet* and the *Gem*. Secondhand copies had for practical purposes similarly vanished from sale. It was not until well into the postwar era that facsimile editions of the 'companion papers' as I had by then learned to call them were re-issued, to widespread acclaim, by the Howard Baker Press.

None of this meant that, as a nine or ten year old, my appetite for school stories was frustrated. Denied *Magnets* and *Gems*, I revisited in the shed at Elsternwick copies of another boys' weekly — the *Nelson Lee Library* — whose crudely illustrated covers and small print had previously been off-putting. The stock consisted of about 200 or so issues, dated roughly between 1924, when my father was fourteen years old, and his nineteenth birthday in 1929. The author, Edwy Searles Brooks, was less talented as a writer than Hamilton, but had a much more colourful imagination. Originally a straightforward detective in the mould of Sexton Blake, Nelson Lee had been taken over by Brooks from his originator, Maxwell Scott, and re-invented as the schoolmaster detective for whom Brooks is now best remembered. Lee and his boy assistant, Nipper, were originally required to take up residence at St Frank's school on a temporary basis, in the course of an investigation. The consequent combination of the two most popular genres of the day — school stories and detective stories — was retained by popular demand. While pure detective stories still on occasion made their appearance in the *Nelson Lee Library*, the emphasis was on adventure, both in and around the school and in often-exotic locations overseas.

Touring parties of St Frank's students encountered descendants of cut-off Roman legions in the Sahara desert, forgotten settlers from Elizabethan England in the Antarctic, and the lost city of Eldorado — complete with a lake of molten gold — in a region of South America populated in part by dinosaurs. A typical holiday series had the students searching for pearls on Paradise Island in the Pacific, where their luxury yacht, the *Wanderer*, was seized by hijackers. The island was devastated by a hurricane, which carried out to sea one of the students on the broken-off top of a palm tree. Native pearl divers landed by the hijackers went berserk and attacked the St Frank's party in their camp.

Attempts to explore a sunken galleon were interrupted by an undersea earthquake. Giant seaweed brought up from the depths by the upheaval immobilised the *Wanderer*, and sea-serpents and giant squids similarly displaced from their normal habitats menaced the passengers and crew. The chief hijacker was dragged under the weed to his death by an unseen monster while attempting to make off with the pearls. Installing a giant blade on the bow of the *Wanderer* finally enabled the party to cut its way through the weed to freedom, and return in triumph for the new term at St Frank's. Domestically, there was a great fire of St Frank's, several great floods and periodic destructions of the school by earthquakes and explosions. Disruptive newcomers had to be discouraged from conducting gambling dens in disused classrooms and engaging in séances and black magic. Headmasters were driven mad by scheming rivals or had attractive young wives who turned out to be drug addicts. Tyranny — on the part either of the school authorities or outsiders such as the renegade German-American millionaire William K. Smith — provoked mutinies and barring-outs. Christmases were spent at country mansions which could be counted on to be haunted. My *Nelson Lees* were also borrowed eagerly by a number of my contemporaries. Sam Wisel — my closest boyhood friend, whose family lived around the corner from us in Elsternwick — used to savour them in breaks between his afterschool Hebrew classes, and perhaps remembers them kindly in the kibbutz in Israel where the greater part of his adult life has been spent.

The Old Boys' Book Club (Australasian Branch)

My taste for the story papers of my father's generation had the side effect of involving me for the first time when I was sixteen in the establishment of a new organisation — the Old Boys' Book Club (Australasian Branch). E. S. Turner's *Boys Will Be Boys* — published in 1948 and widely reviewed — was the first comprehensive account of how story-paper collecting was becoming a widespread hobby, with its own clubs and journals. Thanks to Turner, I was able to subscribe to Herbert Leckenby's *Collector's Digest* from York in England, Bill Gander's *Story Paper Collector* from Manitoba in Canada and the distinctively American *Reckless Ralph's Dime Novel Roundup*. Leckenby put me in touch with Bill Martin, a London milkman with a profitable sideline in supplying story papers to a worldwide clientele, and also with the secretaries of the London, Midlands and Northern branches of the British Old Boys' Book Club. Meanwhile, my local search for further copies of *Chums* and the *Nelson Lee Library* — and for the *Magnets* and *Gems* I had never actually seen — led me to the Reference Room at the Melbourne Public Library. The librarian to whom my inquiries were directed — Gordon Kirby — turned out to have a story-paper collection of his own, focused largely on weeklies for girls such as those featuring Billy Bunter's sister Bessie and the Cliff House school. Gordon was also an aspiring playwright, who later had an adaptation of Zola's *Nana* produced commercially by the Melbourne Theatre Company. Other local collectors I met included Sheila Stevens and Tom Dobson — respectively a PMG telephonist and a local

postmaster — Howard Sharpe who worked for the Wright Stephenson pastoral agency and Don Wicks who was self-employed, perhaps as an accountant. A classmate of mine at Melbourne Grammar — Jim Merralls, now a QC — turned out unexpectedly to be a collector of the *Union Jack* and the *Saxon Blake Library*, which featured Blake and his boy assistant, Tinker. The upshot of all this was a meeting at my home on 24 August 1951, where the Old Boy's Book Club (Australasian Branch) was formed. Don Wicks became the president, and I was the secretary. A regular meeting venue at the Victorian Railways Institute was acquired, four issues of the *Old Boys' Book Club (Australasian Branch) Newsletter* were produced and corresponding members from as far away as New Zealand and South Africa were recruited. The *Newsletter* lapsed when I stepped down as secretary in 1952, but the meetings continued. The episode foreshadowed in the diversity of the ages and occupations of those involved and the manner of their coming together the establishment of the Melbourne Science Fiction Group with which it briefly overlapped.

Earlier on, in the middle 1940s, I had been introduced through the library at Grimwade House to Erich Kastner's *Emil and the Detectives*, Van Loon's *Lives by Hendrik Van Loon*, Arkadi Gaidar's *Timur and His Team* — an exotic Soviet import — and the Biggles and Gimlet books by Captain W. E. Johns. John Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress* and Dickens' *David Copperfield*, *Oliver Twist* and *Nicholas Nickleby* were other favourites, which I read repeatedly. A tobacconist in the main street of Middle Brighton operated a commercial lending library, where I borrowed thrillers by Leslie Charteris, John Creasey, Manning Coles and Denis Wheatley, and the Tarzan and John Carter novels by Edgar Rice Burroughs. My father had given me Rider Haggard's *The Ivory Child* and *Alan Quartermain*, and there was a circuit of secondhand bookshops — Bird's, Frankley's, Franklin's and Hall's in the city, Quaine's in Commercial Road and Hall's in Chapel Street — which I visited regularly in search of such harder-to-get Rider Haggard titles as *Nada the Lily* and *Maiwa's Revenge*. At the same time, I was on the watch increasingly for the American comic books whose colour print so largely set them aside from their drab wartime British counterparts. Comics such as *Captain Marvel*, *Superman*, *Batman*, *Torch and Torro* and *Green Lantern* were highly prized at school, and jealously guarded by the relatively few students who had access to them through links with American servicemen or fathers whose businesses took them overseas. Such copies as found their way into the secondhand shops were usually priced at 2/6, which was my entire week's pocket money.

First contact with science fiction

It was in the course of window-shopping for American comics that I came in touch for the first time with science fiction. The circumstances of the encounter were much the same as for Amis or Pohl. The year was 1944. I, too, was nine years old. Travelling to school involved a change of trams at the junction of Balaclava Road and High Street in St Kilda. Close by the tram stop, second-hand comics and magazines were sold by a down-at-heel shop with a verandah which carried in

faded letters the word 'Saddler', alongside a life-size wooden horsehead. 'Saddler' in due course became my name for the equally down-at-heel proprietor. At first the daily wait for my change of trams was passed simply staring at such publications as found their way into Saddler's window. American comics — when available — were given pride of place, on a special display stand. One Thursday, room had had to be made for a thicker magazine, with untrimmed edges. The cover featured a couple of bulbous red bipeds, directing something like an old-fashioned movie camera at a man and woman dressed for tropical exploration and confined in a cage. It was the tenth anniversary issue of *Thrilling Wonder Stories*, published five years earlier, in 1939. As in the case of the American comics, the price was 2/6.

The effect on me was instantaneous. No glittering prize in later life has ever beckoned me quite so alluringly. I lived on tenterhooks for the next two days, hoping against hope that no other buyer would appear before my pocket money came due on Saturday morning. In the event, no such disaster eventuated. The precious 2/6 passed across the counter to Saddler, and I walked back up High Street to the tram stop, engrossed in John Taine's 'The Ultimate Catalyst'. The issue also contained 'Dawn of Flame' by Stanley Weinbaum, 'The Man Without a World' by two sons of Edgar Rice Burroughs, and one of the 'Via' series by Gordon A. Giles, which for years afterwards exercised a special grip on my imagination. As the weeks went by, further pre-war issues of *Thrilling Wonder Stories* made their appearance in Saddler's window, along with occasional copies of *Amazing*, *Startling Stories*, *Astounding* and *Famous Fantastic Mysteries*. I bought all that I could afford, and, where all else failed, endured the exquisite agony of swapping from the among the least favoured items already in my possession.

The great McComas/Healy anthology *Adventures in Time and Space* and Groff Conklin's *The Best of Science Fiction* were among my 1947 Christmas presents. Newsagents, I discovered, stocked the pitifully thin British reprint editions of *Astounding* and *Unknown Worlds* from which, unbeknown to Australian readers, the great serials of the 1940s — novels such as *Slan*, *The Weapon Makers*, *The Children of the Lens* and a dozen or so more of comparable quality — were consistently omitted. What remained was magical. For thirty and more years the memory has remained with me of savouring for the first time stories such as Clifford Simak's 'City' series; 'Vintage Season', 'Mimsy Were the Borogroves' and the 'Baldy' series by Henry Kuttner; 'Rescue Party' by Arthur C. Clarke; 'Child's Play' by William Tenn; 'Tomorrow's Children' by Poul Anderson; 'Hobbyist' by Eric Frank Russell; 'He Walked Around the Horses' by H. Beam Piper; 'In Hiding' by Wilmar H. Shiras; and Murray Leinster's 'The Strange Case of John Kingman'. It became my strong conviction that the test of a good piece of science fiction was whether the editor of *Astounding*, John W. Campbell Jr had a place for it in his magazine.

By 1950, I was buying my science fiction by mail from Britain. My suppliers were the Science Fantasy Service (SFS) — later Milcross Book Service — in Liverpool, and G. Ken Chapman of 23 Farnley Road, South Nor-

wood, in London. SFS did business on a strictly impersonal basis, through addressograph plates and invoices on coloured duplicating paper. Ken by contrast was a bookseller of the old school, who corresponded voluminously in the style subsequently immortalised by Helene Hanff in her *84 Charing Cross Road*. As with Frank Doel of Hanff's Marks & Co, nothing was too much trouble for Ken, and I looked forward almost as much to his letters as to his parcels. Thirty years after our dealings lapsed in the early 1960s, I wrote to him again for some item which I was finding hard to get, and received an immediate response which took up where we had left off. We remained in touch until his death a year or so later.

Fellow fans

An advertisement in one of my purchases introduced me to Ken Slater's 'Operation Fantast' network. Slater was a captain with the British Army on the Rhine. His purpose in life was putting science fiction readers in touch with one another. He also supplied American magazines and paperbacks to countries where the post-war dollar shortage meant they were otherwise unavailable. Operation Fantast linked me with Roger Dard in Perth, who was Slater's Australian representative. Roger turned out to be a fellow admirer of the *Nelson Lee Library* and also of the Aldine Press *Dick Turpin Library*, which had been a favourite of my grandfather's generation. I loaned him my *Lees* and was loaned in return prewar issues of *Astounding* and *Thrilling Wonder Stories*. Roger was also my introduction to fanzines — magazines produced on an amateur basis by science fiction enthusiasts, and devoted to reviews, gossip and creative writing — through his sporadically published *Star Rover*. His interests as a collector included the American *Weird Tales*, which for some inscrutable reason the Customs authorities had classified as a prohibited import. Roger's efforts to reverse or circumvent the ban earned him a blacklisting on the part of officialdom, with the effect that his overseas parcels were routinely searched and items from them wherever possible confiscated. The persecution extended to the raiding of Roger's home and seizure of parts of his collection. The aim plainly was to cower him into submission. Observing his difficulties and frustrations was a significant contribution to my education in the need for constant vigilance against censorship and petty bureaucracy in all their forms.

Roger in his turn gave me the address of Don Tuck, a 29-year-old Tasmanian fan who was boarding in Footscray. Don, Roger told me, had a collection of more than 1200 magazines, which was one of the biggest outside Britain and America. The first letter I received from him was written on the letterhead of the American National Fantasy Fan Federation. It described such meagre contact with other Melbourne fans as he had been able to establish:

I get a lot of interest out of just meeting one at a time and yarning with them. I met Gordon McDonald about six months ago and have a pow-wow with him every month or so now . . . I know of two others of the older mould — prewar but neither is active these

days. Hockley in South Yarra I lend my books, and he is now quite keen on getting a few *Astoundings*. The other chap is McLennan, East Brunswick, who has every mag bar 2 up to the ban in 1940 but hasn't much since; he's a peculiar chap, very henpecked, and it is no pleasure seeing him so I haven't dropped over for a couple of years.

Don, Gordon McDonald and I had a happy evening together in Gordon's home at 40 Lees Street, Mackinnon, browsing over a collection of *Astoundings* which was nearly complete. Less happily, Don was shortly posted back to Tasmania, where his energies were devoted subsequently to the preparation of the mammoth *Handbook of Science-Fiction* — the precursor of Peter Nicholls' *Encyclopedia of Science Fiction* — for which his place in fan history is forever assured. Gordon continued to collect magazines, but refused resolutely to involve himself in fandom. My appetite for contact having once been whetted, I hungered for more.

It was by Roger again that I was put in touch with Graham Stone, who was running the Australian Science Fiction Society (ASFS) from Box 61 in the Student Union House at Sydney University. Graham was the most diligent Australian fan organiser of the day. His ASFS was formed in 1951, as 'a loose affair, without constitution, rules or planned activities beyond locating fans introducing them to each other and issuing a more or less regular newsheet to keep them posted'. A typical monthly mailing to members might include a copy of Graham's fanzine *Stopgap*, publicity material about forthcoming books from science fiction publishers such as Gnome Press and Fantasy Press and other Australian fanzines such as *Science Fiction Review* and *Vertical Horizons*. The annual subscription was initially 2/6 and later 5/-. I was enrolled as member number 47, and attended the first postwar Australian science fiction convention, which the ASFS organised in Sydney on 22 March 1952.

In due course — on 28 August 1952 — I became the ASFS Local Secretary for Melbourne. Graham's duty statement for the position read in part:

To enrol new members of ASFS. Please forward addresses promptly to me, when serial numbers will be allotted and membership cards issued.

To collect all new and renewed subscriptions of 5/- per year from members in the Melbourne metropolitan area; to retain these moneys as a fund to defray expenses of office; to recommend cancellation of expired memberships.

To distribute to members in the metropolitan area all ASFS publications.

To make the benefits of the Society known to readers of science fiction in general.

To represent science fiction fandom in Melbourne externally: that is, to keep me advised of its activities, to act as a spokesman and contact bureau operative in connection with external correspondence, and in general to assume responsibility for its public relations as required.

By December 1952, membership Australiawide stood at 132. Graham commented that that was 'not bad

going': 'On a straight population basis a national organisation in the US would have 2600 at least; in the UK, over 900'. My personal experiences with the ASFS were less than uniformly satisfactory, through nobody's fault but my own. My attendance at the 1952 convention had to be cut short when I left my wallet in a taxi and had only my small change to tide me over until I could scramble on to the earliest possible return flight for Melbourne. My appointment as Local Secretary for Melbourne was resigned on 19 September 1953, following sustained — and justified — complaints from Graham that my studies and other activities were causing me to devote insufficient time to the job.

Meanwhile, in August 1951, a middle-aged school-teacher named Bob McCubbin struck up a conversation with me while we were browsing side by side over the Franklin Lending Library's stock of pre-war science fiction magazines in the Eastern Market, now long since replaced by the Southern Cross Hotel. As recalled by Lee Harding, an aspiring professional photographer at the time, who has since become a notable science fiction writer:

Old Man Franklin kept a booming paperback and marriage-manual business. At the rear of his shop, he also ran the largest lending library in the city. Some time prior to 1952 he bought up a lot of pre-war pulps from somewhere and had them individually bound, and opened a special SF section of the said library. The joining fee was a whopper, and indicated the importance placed upon 'American Magazines' in those days: £2/10/0 as against 10/6 for regular library membership. In those dry days before the 1959 deluge (when most publishers must have dumped in Australia the accumulated backlog of five years publishing), dozens and dozens of eager fans must have found their way to Franklin's and cavorted happily amongst the hundreds of volumes to be had . . . I can remember weekends — and WHAT weekends! — struggling home on a tram loaded up with five or six hardcover *Startlings* or *Thrilling Wonders*.

My monthly copies of *Astounding* were passed to me across the counter at the McGill's newsagency in Elizabeth Street by a shop assistant who ultimately introduced himself as Mervyn Binns. Through Graham Stone, I renewed acquaintances with Dick Jenssen, a student at the school I had just left, who subsequently credited me with having introduced him to the *Nelson Lee Library*, American comics and science fiction. Dick's given name was more formally 'Ditmar', and it was as 'Ditmars' that Australia's annual science fiction awards — counterparts of the American 'Hugo' and 'Nebula' awards — were ultimately introduced. A memoir of the times to which he has contributed reads in part:

It was the ubiquitous Race Thorson Mathews who first seduced me into the delights of the never-never world of science fiction, just as earlier, much earlier, he had corrupted my mind with the garish, and much-sought after publications known as (hush!) American comics. Race, I recall, had a large collec-

tion of English penny dreadfuls — the *Nelson Lee Library* — and I had a father in Shanghai, and then in Hong Kong, who supplied me with American comics. We arranged a swap, and matters progressed satisfactorily until the Customs began to clamp down on the dreadful influx of corrupting literature threatening to engulf our youth in a decadent tide of Nyokas and Captain Marvels, and Batmen, and Sheenas, and Heaps, and Airboys, and Stu Taylors, and Dr Sivanas, and Mr Mxyzptlks, and etc. *Nelson Lees* dwindled as did the heady wonders of Buck Rogers in Fulcolour.

Trust Race, though. Before you could say SHAZAM! twice he had discovered a tiny place, quite near school and the St Kilda Junction, which had a supply, small it is true, but a supply nonetheless, of the forbidden fruits. Life was again livable. Well, Race was in the class below me at school, and I soon had to leave Grimwade House to enter the 'Big School'. St Kilda Junction was out of bounds for a boarder, and I no longer had the pocket money I had been accustomed to, so I stopped frequenting the shop. But not Race.

About 18 months later, I was taken away from school on a whim of my father's and whirled around the world to the East and England for a year, to absorb God knows what, and when I returned Race and I were in the same classes together. He reintroduced me to the little shop, this time not for comics, but for a far more insidious poison, one which still courses through my veins — science fiction. *Astounding*, *Planet*, *Super Science*. . . ah! even the British titles were hued with wonder, drenched in the promise of interplanetary orgies. Life was again worth living. I remember distinctly the first true SF magazine I ever read — a present from Race — *Galaxy* for May 1951, with 'The Wind Between the Worlds' by Lester Del Rey, 'Tyrann' by Asimov, 'Goodnight Mr James' by Simak, plus many others. I have never been the same since. It would also have been Race who introduced me to Franklin's library — I doubt if I would have found it myself — and I know he put me on to Slater, Chapman, and the other big sellers of the stuff.

Graham Stone also passed on my name to Lee — or, as he was then known, Leo — Harding. Lee's letter introducing himself to me in April 1952 read in part:

I'm fifteen years of old age, a stf fan for five and an intelligent one for two. Get what I mean? I know the difference between a Bradbury and a Kuttner. I know my pen names too . . . At the moment I'm just a newcomer to Fandom, but in three months I've (1) joined Ken Slater's 'Operation Fantast', (2) subscribed to Stone's *Stopgap*, etc., (3) become a member of the Australian Science Fiction Society, (4) subscribed to *Woomera*, (5) have made arrangements to get good US magazines regularly, and all the British dittoes, except of course the four Spencer mags (ugh!), (7) (Am I boring you?) Stopped getting *Thrills Inc.* (again, ugh!), made contact with booksellers Carnell and Chapman, (9) (Phew!) Begun my



The founders:

Some of the people who were there at the beginning of the Melbourne Science Fiction Group
(which became the Melbourne Science Fiction Club):

Back row: Mervyn Binns, Dick Jenssen.

Front row: Bob McCubbin, A. Bertram Chandler, Race Mathews.

(Photographer: Lee Harding. A time exposure, using an old plate camera and existing light.)

career of collecting rejection slips from stf magazines, under the guidance of Roger Dard.

Recalling our first meeting years later, he wrote:

I cleaned myself up one Sunday and went — in suit and collar and tie on an exceedingly warm summer's day — to meet Mr Mathews. Race was sitting on the front lawn when I arrived, engrossed in 'The Onslaught from Rigel' in *Wonder Stories Annual*, and after a rather un-certain handshake was exchanged, he took off his dark glasses and escorted me inside. He was a remarkably baby-faced youth of eighteen, long and lean and lanky, with legs that sprawled

upon carpets like a tarantula. We chatted of things SFictional for a few hours, and I left with a vague promise that I would attend a fannish gathering he had planned at his home in a few weeks time — this was to be the unofficial inaugural meeting of what became known as the Melbourne Science Fiction Group.

Lee and I became good friends. This did not mean that we were uncritical of one another. When I failed to answer his letters regularly enough or at acceptable length, he remonstrated:

I've just about had it. If you don't want your books

back, okay. If you don't want to correspond with me, okay again, but I still think its a dirty show. There's plenty of important fans who don't think its going out of their way to write to me regularly — Dard, Stone, Haddon, Solnsteff, Slater, Carnell and the rest. Tell me, how important are you?

A week later peace was restored. A further letter from Lee commenced:

I'm a cad! I'm a bounder. I'm ungrateful. I'm a Yank. I'm a no-hoper . . . Please, tear up or atomise that letter I wrote you. I've buried yours!

Lee was not alone in bringing a certain frenzy to everything he did. All our activities were coloured by the frenetic quality which prompted Sam Moskowitz to title his history of early American fandom *The Immortal Storm*.

The sheer frustration of dealing with fellow fans sometimes drove to distraction those who were at heart serious-minded organisers. In December 1951, Graham Stone poured out his feelings in a letter to me which read in part:

There can be no doubt that many readers of science fiction are inadequate individuals — what used to be called 'escapists', although the term is unsatisfactory. They make up for their defects in ordinary life by building themselves up in their own estimation. And you can't think of yourself as superman very effectively if you admit others as your equals.

Graham continued:

Many fans, while living more or less well-adjusted lives and not tending to paranoid superiority, are extreme intellectual snobs; ever critical of others, finding faults which might well be over-looked and so on . . . such fans are likely to adopt a reserved attitude to other fans, which will be reinforced by inspection of escapists, who are usually painfully obvious second-raters.

It may well be that these attitudes explain why the affairs of Sydney fans were conducted frequently in an atmosphere reminiscent of the Wars of the Roses.

A representative rift in the ranks of Sydney fandom concerned the Futurian Society of Sydney library. Graham supposed the library to be vested in a trust of which he was a member, and resigned on the grounds that the rules had been being broken since its inception, and breaches were continuing to occur. Others no less familiar with the facts of the matter adopted an opposite interpretation. The merits of the argument were less important than the heat and vituperation which it generated, or the fact that the effectiveness of the library was compromised throughout and beyond the duration of the dispute. Graham's critics — notably Arthur Haddon, David Cohen and Bill Veney — attributed the fracas to an excess of ambition on Graham's part, while the Stone camp — notably Graham and Vol Molesworth — saw similar flaws as characterising the critics. 'Graham', Bill Veney wrote, 'has done a lot to help fandom

in Australia and there will always be a big and important place for him but he seems to be obsessed with a queer idea of making out that he is a "big name fan" and other fans just don't exist'. 'It is believed', wrote David Cohen at a later stage in the protracted controversy, 'that Stone-Molesworth would like to get their claws on the Library, but from what my spies tell me, some people would sooner burn it all up first':

Do you know that there is more hate for these two among the Futurians than there is among all the rest put together? They were barred from the Futurian committees in the end and told that if they put up for positions they would be voted out.

Unsurprisingly, the library issue was seen by Graham as involving misconceptions which were in part 'falsehoods deliberately spread'. The situation in reality was that the protagonists were friendly correspondents and associates with fans in other states on an individual basis, but competitive and combative in the extreme with one another in the heat of Sydney fan politics. An attempt at conciliation on my part was rejected out of hand by Graham. 'I don't know', he wrote, 'what this reconciliation line is in aid of. Why should I try to cultivate the favour of fandom's disruptive elements?'

The Melbourne Science Fiction Group

Melbourne tackled matters in a different spirit. The five of us — Bob McCubbin, Mervyn Binns, Dick Jenssen, Lee Harding and myself — made up the core of the Melbourne Science Fiction Group. The inaugural meeting of the MSFG took place in the living room of my home in Hampton on 9 May 1952. Lee records the occasion as having been instigated by 'a sort of collaboration between Bob McCubbin and Race Mathews'. In Dick's characteristically tongue-in-cheek view:

Race, I'm sure, was the guiding light in the foundation of the Melbourne Science Fiction Group, for it was he who brought together those who would constitute its nucleus. (If it seems remarkable that a 16-year-old could accomplish this — that is, the formation of the club, not the seduction to science fiction of a youth of but 15 tender years (me) — it must be remembered that Race was a boy of remarkable precocity. He always seemed old to me — an Olympian of wisdom. Baby-faced he was, Lee, but rather in the manner I've always imagined Odd John would be).

Turning to the inaugural meeting, Dick continued:

The fen of Melbourne began to meet in each other's houses sometime in 1951, I believe, and the first I attended was at Race's. That bus trip from the station, Middle Brighton, was a focal point of space-time, for on my journey I met Bob McCubbin. We were, as I recall, the only two on the vehicle and somehow as these things happen, began to talk and discuss our common passion. I soon discovered, however, that Bob had many another passion, and by the time we had reached Race's I had learned that Japa-

nese women had beautiful (the word conveys most inadequately Bob's look of remembered joy) purple nipples, firm and delightful to touch, hold and squeeze. My mind had been opened up to whole new worlds, for Bob had been loquacious on subjects whose delicacy forbids my mentioning them here...

Bob's tendency to hold forth at length at the drop of the proverbial hat on the sexual attributes of women in Japan — where he had served as an Army Education Officer with the occupying forces — was to assume legendary status in fan circles. Exposed to it — albeit in modified form — on the occasion of his first visit to my home shortly after our initial encounter in Franklin's, my parents concluded that he was a paedophile, with designs on my body, and further meetings with him were for a time forbidden. In fact, Bob's proclivities were in my experience exclusively heterosexual and theoretical. Asked on one occasion how she felt about science fiction, his wife replied that it kept him away from chasing other women. If at that stage of his life he harboured any active aspiration to stray — as opposed to relishing past episodes in retrospect — it remained a well-kept secret.

By Lee's account, the inaugural meeting was 'a great success':

Many of the oldtimers turned up: Bob McCubbin was there, and I'm pretty sure Marshal McLennan and Wog Hockley were, too. From then on the group held monthly meetings at members' houses in rotation — those members who had decent homes and whose wives/parents et al. were tolerant enough to allow the onslaught of eighteen to twenty fans plus supper afterwards.

Lee had missed out on the inaugural meeting as he did on those immediately following it because his work as a photographer was constantly taking him to country areas remote from Melbourne. Vol Molesworth's *A History of Australian Fandom 1935-1963* adds to the list of those present Gordon Kirby from the OBBC. The overlap between story-paper collecting and fandom was illustrated again when Jack Murtagh — an OBBC member from New Zealand, and the owner of one of the largest story-paper collections in the world, the largest collection of cigarette cards outside Britain and New Zealand's largest collection of movie memorabilia — attended the fourth Sydney SF Convention.

Melbourne exemplified the unfractionary face of Australian fandom. Meetings revolved around talk, letters, barter and chess. Puritanism too was pervasive. At a relatively early stage — following a night when 19 fans packed into the modest living room of Bob's house in Auburn — proceedings transferred to a Swanston Street cafe called Val's. Shock and horror prevailed when Val's turned out to be a meeting place for some of the more courageous lesbians of the day, whose coming-out from the closet was just getting underway. Dick has recalled being taken aside by his family's landlady and warned in a conspiratorial whisper 'Be careful, Dick, they're a bunch of queens'. His account continued 'I didn't know

what a queen was, but if she had said "poofers" I should have caught her meaning instantly'. Bob McCubbin was insistent that 'Extroverts and introverts we may be, but perverts never'. Given that the membership of the MSFG at that stage was exclusively male, its interest for Val's clientele is unlikely to have been other than minuscule. Nevertheless, future meetings were held in the austere asexual surroundings of the basement room of the Latrobe Street Manchester United Order of Oddfellows (MUOOF) hall, in comforting proximity to the Russell Street police headquarters.

A letter of 17 December 1952 over the signature of the Grand Secretary and Past Grand Master of the MUOOF — a Mr G. L. Coulter — confirmed fortnightly bookings throughout 1953, at a nightly cost of 12/6. According to Lee:

We had the basement room and the use of a cupboard for the library in the hall outside. Hardly convivial, but in those days we weren't particularly interested in the comforts of the home. Despite the endeavours of the more voracious fans — myself included — the Group staunchly resisted any attempt to 'organise' itself in any way, and still manages to do so until this day. Bob McCubbin was the self-elected Chairman at all times, but there were no organised evenings and no minutes were kept. We were just a bunch of guys getting together and swapping yarns — and trading a few magazines at the same time.

A further activity was arranging to have magazines bound professionally by Don Latimer, whose family had a binding business. Although Don's bindings in many instances were works of art, the niceties of collecting were neglected sometimes by his workmates. My set of the *Arkham Sampler* was returned to me resplendent in three full leather volumes, but with the original magazine covers carefully removed. Such were the passions of the day that, prior to Don's arrival on the MSFG scene, I had had magazines such as my set of *Famous Fantastic Mysteries* and my British Reprint Edition copies of *Unknown Worlds* bound for me by a fan in Wales. Bob McCubbin as I recall followed a policy of having Don bind everything he owned. Personalised bookplates by professional SF illustrators such as those whose work featured regularly in *Astounding* were available from overseas suppliers, but MSFG members preferred the local product from Keith Maclelland, a fellow fan and talented commercial artist. The content of some collections seemed at times to be secondary in the eyes of their owners to their often opulent appearances.

MSFG members went together at times to such SF films as were screened commercially, but that the MSFG might arrange screenings of its own had as yet not occurred to us. Remo Parlanti and Tony Santos became the first MSFG members who reflected in name at least the changing ethnic composition of Australian society. A less welcome recruit was Gordon Walkenden, who sold me my first LP records — the 'Forest Murmurs' from *Siegfried* and the *Rienzi* overture — and shortly moved to Adelaide. A subsequent letter from a leading Adelaide fan of the day — a Mrs Joyce — to Graham

Stone read in part:

Gordon Walkenden of Melbourne now lives at 153 South Terrace, Adelaide, and oh! how we all wish he was back in Melbourne! He has a voice like a foghorn and loves to hear it raised in song. In the last three meetings we have had him to the point that, if he keeps it up the others will either gang up on him or stop coming. Never have I seen such a pill! I even told him to shut up, a thing I didn't think I was capable of saying to a guest, and he continued merrily on!

The Val's episode illustrated a further quirk of Australian fandom. Women were not only largely absent from our activities but mostly unsought. When Rosemary Simmons applied for membership of the Futurian Society of Sydney in 1952, her application was rejected on the grounds that, in Vol Molesworth's words: '... the admission of women had caused trouble in the pre-war days of the club'. The poet Lex Banning intervened with the query 'Are we Futurians or are we Victorians?' but the Society's all-male membership went ahead to vote down Ms Simmons by a two-thirds majority. Extensive organisation was required to reverse the decision at a subsequent meeting and dispel as much as possible the richly merited ignominy. Melbourne's first woman member — Betty Garbutt — was accompanied to her first meeting by her sister, as a chaperon or source of moral support. The sister, to the best of my recollection, did not reappear. Betty remained the sole representative of her sex until I began bringing along Jill McKeown, to whom I shortly became engaged.

Amateur Fantasy Publications of Australia

The creative side of the MSFG was instigated by Lee and Dick. 'We', Lee told Dick in 1952, 'must put out a fanzine.' What resulted after lengthy gestation was not one fanzine but five, titled respectively *Perhaps*, *Bacchanalia*, *Etherline*, *Question Mark* and *Antipodes*. The vehicle for all this activity was Amateur Fantasy Publications of Australia (AFPA), which owned the group's stencils, paper and ink, and in due course — after extensive experimentation with less satisfactory devices — had the carriage of its purchase of a Roneo 500 duplicator. The initial membership of AFPA was Lee, Dick and Mervyn Binns. I was a latecomer, and two new arrivals in the MSFG, Ian Crozier and Kevin Whelahan, joined later again. By Dick's account:

Leo not only provided the push, but he did most of the work. He wrote letters, contacted people, suggested story ideas and cover illustrations, solved layout problems, told Mervyn when to turn the duplicator handle, and in short was the driving force (spiritual) behind *Perhaps*. Mervyn Binns was the driving force (material): he found us a duplicator, fixed it when it went wrong, forced it into action and was, in short, indefatigable on the production side. I obeyed orders, and produced all the little fillers designed to round out those big blank spaces between the highpowered stories and articles. Any-

way, most of my stuff was rejected.

It was Lee's dream that *Perhaps*, the publication for which he was primarily responsible, would live up to its subtitle, as 'The International Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction'. I hoped to make my *Bacchanalia* an antipodean counterpart for two outstanding American fanzines, *Nekromantik* and *Fanscient*, which I had accepted on loan from Graham Stone, unwarily allowed Kevin Whelahan to borrow from me and — to Graham's rage and my enduring shame — never been able to induce Kevin to return. Inevitably, reality in the case of both Lee's first issue and my own fell short by far of our aspirations. 'At the time' Lee has recorded, 'I was dismally disappointed'. He to his great credit persisted. An incomparably more polished *Perhaps* 2 — and ultimately a *Perhaps* 3 — appeared, laying in part the foundations for his success as a professional writer. My enthusiasm waned, and the *Bacchanalia* 2 which finally came out was the work of a new editor. AFPA's outstanding success story turned out ironically to be the publication in which fewest hopes and least foresight had been invested. *Etherline* — a newszine produced largely on a collective basis — established what may well have been a record for the fan publishing circles of the day, by appearing regularly at fortnightly intervals for 100 issues, from 1953 until 1958.

Well before the appearance of *Bacchanalia* 2 in 1956, my active involvement in fandom had ceased. My courtship of my future wife had been funded largely by the selling-off of the greater part of my science-fiction collection at successive MSFG meetings over the best part of a two-year period. I was reading much more widely. The Melbourne Grammar library and Parliamentary Society had already fanned my long-standing interest in politics, and the lecturers at Toorak Teachers' College were further developing my liking for music and theatre. My three months national service training in early 1954 and my marriage two years later were circuit-breakers, marking the point where I moved on irrevocably from the world of science fiction to the preoccupations which subsequently shaped my life. The ties which held together our little circle of friends were likewise loosening. Bob McCubbin died before his time, while Dick Jenssen was detached ultimately by the demands of teaching and research in the Science Faculty at Melbourne University. It remained for Lee Harding to become the author of a series of outstanding science fiction novels which includes — to date — *Displaced Person* and *Future Sanctuary*, and for Mervyn Binns to establish — and, sadly, later close down — Melbourne's Space Age Bookshop. Meanwhile, the MSFG has endured, in forms re-invented by successive generations of fans to serve their changing emphases, and the expanding opportunities held out to them by new technologies. Along with many like us, virtually in every country on earth, we remain indebted deeply to science fiction for the pleasures to which it has introduced us, the enduring friendships it has enabled us to establish and the additional edge which it has imparted to our curiosity, imagination and pursuit of ideas.

— Race Mathews, 1994

This article began innocently enough. In an ANZAPA mailing comment in 1993, SALLY YEOLAND wrote: 'The following is at last a response to Bruce's mailing comment that he'd like to hear about my life before I met John Bangsund.' So she wrote about her life before meeting John. In following issues she also wrote about life *after* meeting John, and their early years together, quoting large sections of John's own accounts of the same years. In turn, this has become the story of all of us who were around at the time (mid-1970s).

SALLY AND JOHN: THE EARLY YEARS

by SALLY YEOLAND,
with large sections of the writing of
JOHN BANGSUND

Editor's note:

I hope I can make a satisfactory separation between Sally's contributions and John's:

- Sally's contributions are in 9 pt Bookman.
- John's contributions are in 8 pt Baskerville, like this.

Life before I met John

In January 1970 I went to Canberra, just to visit, as my parents thought. I had other ideas. Having bombed out in my first year exams at Uni in Hobart in 1969, I thought of joining the public service and following in my brother's footsteps so to speak. He and his wife had moved to Canberra in 1966 and liked the lifestyle there very much. I had been promising to go up and visit them but had never quite got around to it.

My only other interstate trip prior to this had been a visit to Melbourne in December 1964 and January 1965. I had a great-aunt Dot, my mother's aunt, living at Mt Eliza with her husband, and all her grownup children and their families living within half a mile or so of her house. I went to stay with her for a week, knowing that I would get on with her, as she and Uncle Warwick had visited Hobart many times in the past. It was a tremendous holiday and I enjoyed my second cousins' (all ten of them) company so much that I didn't want to go back. The week extended to four, by which time I had had several phone calls from my parents asking when I might be coming home!



Sally Yeoland in the early 1970s.

I suppose this was really a trial run for finally leaving home in 1970 and going to Canberra. I needed to get away from Hobart. Don't misunderstand me though. Hobart and Tasmania are beautiful places and whenever I go back there for a visit, usually once a year, I appreciate the beauty of the place all over again. But I found it very provincial, rather like a country town, where everyone knows everyone, etc. This had a very claustrophobic effect, because great emphasis was put on not who you were, but rather who your

parents were and what they did for a living. My father was a motor mechanic and had his own business in Hobart. This was not considered to be an acceptable occupation in some social circles, which really annoyed me at the time. The expectation, not so much by my parents, but my peers and their parents, was that I should remain a 'nice' girl, be a member of the Liberal Party and marry the right sort of bloke and settle down in the suburbs and have two or three children. Well, firstly I have never been a Liberal voter, and secondly I didn't particularly want to get married, and thirdly I wasn't keen about having children, so I failed on three out of three!

In 1967 I was liberated when I spent my last year of school at Hobart Matriculation College, which was co-ed, and I discovered boys! I should say I had discovered them a few years earlier, but they weren't always in close proximity. Peter Pierce and Stephen Alomes were in my class. They were easily the brightest students and both went on to do Arts at Uni, with high distinctions in everything. I ran into Stephen a few years ago at Deakin Uni where he is lecturing in politics. I came across Peter last year when he addressed a Society of Editors meeting. He lectures in English at Monash Uni. We had probably last seen each other in 1969, so it was interesting to catch up on the years in between.

I also met Barbara Loneragan at Hobart Matric and then got to know her family. Her father was director of the ABC in Hobart. The family had moved from Melbourne to Hobart in 1965, where Barbara's mother was originally from. They were Labor voters. Believe it or not, they were the first people that I became friends with who were not Liberal voters. All my relatives and friends at that time were Liberal voters, including my brother. I had even been to a Young Liberals meeting at this time. Barbara's mother Margaret, had a very laid-back approach to life, almost bohemian in today's terms. Housework wasn't a priority for her! I think she was a feminist before the word was invented. Although she didn't drink or smoke, she didn't mind people who did, and their house was a wonderful place for all sorts of people dropping in. I mention all these things, not because I have anything against drinking etc, but it was all so different from my parents. My father was a very social person, but my mother was not. When Margaret's husband died, Margaret came back to Melbourne and lived with, then more recently married, John Hepworth. I still see Barbara and her family when I go to Hobart and most years go to Margaret and John's Twelfth Night party. They had a Suicide party a couple of months ago which I didn't get to. No, the pre-requisite is not to commit suicide!

So meeting Barbara and her family was the beginning of things changing for me. She was a

Dylan fan and at the time had every single one of his records, even some bootlegs as I recall. I suppose I was doing all the usual things that teenagers did in those days and rebelling against established values. My first real boyfriend in 1966 and 1967 was Benedict Leung, a friend of one of my cousins. Ben was a Hong Kong student who had decided to stay in Hobart when he finished his studies. That was a fairly courageous thing for him to do in those days, as Hobart mainly had migrants who had migrated post World War II with mainly Anglo-Saxon or European backgrounds. There were a few Asian overseas students, but not many compared to the mainland. At the beginning of 1967 I had to do the right thing and be a debutante at Collegiate, my old school. I broke the rules by asking Ben to be my partner, which he graciously accepted. By breaking the rules I mean that I was the first person to have a partner who did not have an Anglo-Saxon background. This raised a few eyebrows at the time, but everything went fairly smoothly. I think Ben and I started to part ways in 1967, when I became a lot more aware of what I wanted out of life. I was becoming much more interested in politics. He wanted to get married etc. That was about the last thing that I wanted to do at that time, which was probably very sensible in retrospect, as I was still very naive and had little experience of the world.

Also, I got my driving licence in 1967 which gave me a great deal of freedom. As my parents lived out of the city where there were only a couple of buses a day to the city, my father had always had to give me a lift to various places. This now meant I could choose to stay the night with my paternal grandmother, who lived in a lovely old place in Sandy Bay, just down the road from where my father worked. I had always got on particularly well with her. She was the family member who was absolutely mad about cats and usually had half a dozen or so at a time. She was very civilised and let them have the run of the house, including them sleeping on the ends of beds etc. so I loved staying there. She was also a brilliant gardener, something that I have not inherited. I was driving an Austin A40 at the time and was so poor I used to collect cordial bottles so I could collect the refunds and buy petrol, sometimes only 50 cents worth.

In 1968 I spent a year at teachers' college and started to participate in anti-Vietnam marches etc. I decided at the end of 1968 that I didn't really want to teach primary school children, which is what the course was for, and I didn't want to be on a bond with the Education Department for four years after I had finished the two-year course. The deal was that for every year you spent studying free of charge you had to pay back by working two years for the Education Department. I preferred to change courses at the end of 1968 and go to

Uni to get an Arts degree then a Dip. Ed. and teach secondary school students. I had waist-length hair at this stage, wore jeans for the first time and bare feet. This continued through 1969, much to the despair of my father!

I was reminded of these days in January 1991 when I attended a service at St Paul's Cathedral (Anglican) two days before the UN deadline re the Gulf War was up. There were about 2000 people there, all of very different religious persuasions. An Imam, a Rabbi, an Anglican Archbishop, a Catholic Archbishop and a Uniting Church minister all addressed the congregation and offered prayers for peace. It was a very moving experience reminiscent of the days of the anti-Vietnam demonstrations and gatherings. The difference was that these days I put a much greater value on human life than I did then.

I was becoming a lefty. I went to meetings at Uni, where most of my friends were in 1968 and 1969, for the ALP. I went to many late-night sessions of folk music and jazz. I discovered alcohol and cigarettes. The only thing my father and I ever disagreed on was politics. He could not understand why I did not support Australia and the US in the Vietnam war and why I wasn't a Liberal voter. I remember very clearly writing a very emotional piece for an assignment in 1969, on whether there was any such thing as a just war, which at the time I believed there wasn't, a view I still hold very firmly. I started reading Che Guevara, Huxley, Orwell and others. I had started to change out of the mould and the world my parents had grown up in. The move to Canberra seemed very appropriate then and now in retrospect.

I made the mistake of moving out of home in the middle of 1969 to a cottage at the back of a lovely old house in Sandy Bay, Manresa, which had been built in the early 1800s. The cottage used to be for the servants and I shared it with three other girls I had been at Collegiate with. I say it was a mistake, because up till then I had been getting good marks at Uni. But I then discovered a social life which I hadn't previously experienced and study took second place. I still managed to hand in assignments on time, but they were usually done at the last minute, especially English. I can remember writing an essay on George Herbert's poetry and I hadn't even read any of it! This all came to a crunch at the end of the year when I only passed Australian History and just failed the other subjects. English, Politics and Ancient Civilisations. I can recall having a look at the notice board where the students could look up their results and getting a sinking feeling as I read them.

I wasn't surprised, but my concern was how I was going to tell my parents! I didn't tell them straight away. I went to visit a friend that Friday

night, who was babysitting at a house down Sandy Bay. It had been pouring with rain and she was visiting a house in Lower Sandy Bay, up on a hill. There was a dirt road up to the place. As I was slowly driving up the hill, the car started to slide off the road and ended up in a very deep ditch. There were two problems involved. I had to get the car out of there, but it was also blocking the road and stopping the people going out for the evening, who my friend was babysitting for! We ended up having to get a tow truck to get the car out. The next day when I finally went home, my parents took the news of my exam results fairly calmly. My father was more upset at me calling a towtruck, as he could have towed me out of there for nothing!

I wasn't sure what my future was at that stage and how or at what I was going to earn a living. I saw little point in going back to Uni and I didn't want to be a financial drain on my parents for another year or so. I had been getting part-time jobs during holiday periods for the previous few years. This started off as helping in the local shop, then I progressed to fruitpacking at Jones' at the wharf in Hobart. I particularly recall the local shop as I remember turning up for work in November 1963 and being told of Kennedy's assassination. I became quite an expert at packing cool-store apples and eventually when I got my driver's licence, I did deliveries to various shops and supermarkets.

I went to Canberra just after Christmas 1969 and sat a public service selection test at the end of January 1970. I was offered a choice of departments and chose Immigration, because I thought it might lead to overseas travel later on. I lived with my brother Graeme and sister-in-law Helen in their Braddon flat for several months, until I could get hostel accommodation. For those of you who don't know Canberra, presumably because of the large public service population, special hostels were started up to house public servants, who are mostly from interstate. The standard of accommodation varied from hostel to hostel. I chose Lawley House, which boasted a fairly high standard, with meals included. The hostel was presumably built just after World War II. The rooms were very comfortable and the residents quite reasonable. I remember paying something like \$49 a fortnight for full board when I first moved in there and this included three meals a day. I think I was earning about \$81 a fortnight at the time, so \$49 seemed a lot of money. I moved there at the end of April 1970 as Helen was very pregnant at the time and I felt it was time to move out and be independent.

My previous attempt at this was on 24 April, when I moved into Barton House, not one of the better establishments. A friend from work lived there, but she was ten years older than me and a

lot more world wise. I'll talk about Robyn Price later on. Graeme dropped me off at Barton House late in the afternoon. Unlike Lawley, Barton had share accommodation. This seemed OK as Graeme and I had met the other female I would be sharing a room with and she seemed all right. I went downstairs and had a meal and then watched TV in the community lounge room. When I went upstairs later in the evening, I noticed that I wasn't just sharing with the other female, but with her boyfriend as well. I can't recall whether they were in bed or not at this stage. This didn't particularly bother me as I was pretty tired so I went to bed and straight to sleep. I was woken up by some talking later in the night about 1.00 a.m. or so. The female's boyfriend and his bkie mates wanted to see if I wanted to have some fun. I think I told them politely to bugger off as I wanted to go to sleep, which amazingly they did! Maybe my naivety at that stage wasn't a bad thing. The next day Graeme picked me up to attend the Anzac Day service at the War Memorial. He asked me how the accommodation was, and I remember clearly sitting in the back of his car, relating what had happened to Helen and Graeme in the front. He seemed slightly stunned. Later, after the service, he confronted the manager of Barton about the sharing facilities. Needless to say, I didn't get to spend another night at Barton!

I spent nine months at Lawley in rather better circumstances. The good thing about hostel life was that I made lots of friends and had a really good time socialising. Most of the people I was working with also lived in hostels, so there was a tendency to socialise a lot more with workmates out of working hours. I met Robyn Price on my first day at work at Immigration, 13 April 1970, my twenty-first birthday. She gave me a lift back to my brother's house at Aranda in her little mini and asked me if I had heard of Tolkien and *Lord of the Rings*. No, I said, and she promptly handed me a paperback copy of *The Lord of the Rings* and said I could borrow it for a while. This was the beginning of a very interesting friendship. My only regret now is that when Robyn went overseas in 1976 to England, we lost touch. Several years ago, I remembered that she was supered out of the public service, so that presumably the Superannuation Board in Canberra might still be paying her super and might know where she was. I rang them, and amazingly they not only told me she was still in England, but gave me her address. I have written once but not received a response. I will check out the address again and see if she has changed her name or something before I write again.

Before I met Robyn, the most daring films I had seen were Stan Barstow's *A Kind of Loving* and *The Graduate* and all the Bond films, which now seem incredibly sexist, *The Great Race*, *The Sound*

of Music, *Dr Zhivago* and other similar stuff. The exception to this was *The War Game*, which I saw in the late 60s. It had a profound effect on me at the time and I decided then that I'm not sure that I would want to be a survivor after a nuclear war. Robyn introduced me to Bergman, Visconti and many other directors of foreign films who I had never heard of. In 1970 I saw *Easy Rider*, *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid*, *Five Easy Pieces* and *Death In Venice*. *Death in Venice* was my introduction to Mahler. I found it an absolutely amazing film and I have always been a great fan of Dirk Bogarde.

I had an interest in classical music as I had learnt to play the piano at school and most of the music I played was classical. Unfortunately for my music teacher, I had initially learnt to play by ear, which she was forever telling me was a disadvantage to any serious study I might have intended. I concentrated on Beethoven, Chopin, Schumann and Debussy. When I first learnt the piano formally, I found the elderly Anglican nun who taught me had a novel way of letting me know when I had made a mistake, by rapping me on the fingers with a ruler, a practice which would not be acceptable today, I hope! I had belonged to various choral groups at school and Uni. I recall performing in Carl Orff's *Carmina Burana*, *The Messiah*, Haydn's *Nelson Mass* and Vivaldi's *Gloria* at the Hobart Town Hall in the late 60s. I had grown up with a cousin who loved Gilbert and Sullivan and delighted in playing records to me at every opportunity. However I also had a particular fondness for jazz and folk music, not so much trad jazz, but more in the style of Brubeck, Monk and Davis. My record collection was very meagre and included Streisand, Peter Paul and Mary, Glen Miller, Rossini and a couple of other classical records.

Robyn also introduced me to Cordon Bleu cooking, the Folio Society and Le Creuset cookware, although not in that order! Robyn was doing some study at the ANU and I recall sitting in on some of Manning Clark's lectures in Australian history, which I enjoyed very much. I had been fortunate at Uni in Hobart to have James McAuley as a lecturer in English. I read Germaine Greer's *The Female Eunuch* in 1970, *Portnoy's Complaint*, and Richard Neville's *Playpower*, which actually described in detail how to grow marijuana. I found both Greer and Neville amazing. They offered alternatives which I never knew existed. I joined WEL, which had only just started in Australia. I discovered sex, pot and other pleasures early in 1971. Robyn had the *Alice B. Toklas Cookbook*, which she delighted in using. I'm not sure that the interesting omelette with a parsley-like substance which I had on my twenty-second birthday came from this recipe book. I remember it having an amazing effect!

Robyn sold her Mini at the end of 1970 and bought an Austin-Healey Sprite. This was rather influenced by the fact that both of us fell in love with the same blond blue-eyed Ross, who specialised in doing up old Sprites and Peugeots in his spare time. Ross introduced me to Leonard Cohen's music and pot very early one Sunday morning (long before my twenty-second birthday), a very interesting combination! I moved into a flat with Robyn at the end of 1970.

1971 was a year for experimenting with a lot of things and for learning to ride a motor bike. I decided not to try LSD and other drugs, for which I am glad. However, Robyn and others experimented with lots of prescription drugs which were easily available at the time. Thankfully I survived all of this fairly well. I decided that my meagre wage was not going very far and waitressed at a nearby motel and cleaned public service offices in my spare time.

Early in 1971 Robyn had a horseriding accident and fractured several vertebrae. This left her in a great deal of pain and changed her lifestyle rather radically. Sadly, she became increasingly difficult to live with, so we parted ways early in 1972, but still remained friends. At this stage I had bought a VW Beetle and travelled a great deal of the ACT and NSW in it. Before this Robyn lent me the Sprite every so often which I thoroughly enjoyed driving. The most amusing incident I can recall was one evening at the drive-in in the middle of winter, when I was on my own. It was snowing lightly and I couldn't get the hood down, much to the amusement of the people around me. It made for very chilly viewing that night! I was particularly fond of going to the coast with friends or often on my own and staying overnight, particularly at Boydtown, just south of Eden on the south coast of NSW. There was a hotel called the Seahorse Inn on the waterfront. There were no other buildings close by, except the ruins of an old church which was supposed to be haunted up on a hill. A lot of the people who stayed there were regulars and worked around the area. I remember very late at night after some red wine, sitting at the piano with an open fire and the sound of the waves breaking, moonlight on the water, playing all sorts of music to them. I had also done this quite often at the hostel very late at night, with a few friends around and candle light, being careful not to get wax on the piano. Towards the end of 1971 Robyn moved to Gundaroo, a little country town a few miles from Canberra. There were probably only about forty houses in the whole town, and a wine bar. It had previously had a licence to sell beer and other beverages, but apparently one of the locals had got a bit out of control one day, so the bar lost part of its licence and was restricted to selling wine. Robyn moved into a little cottage which was built last century.

I remember about five years ago seeing an item on the ABC about the wine bar and Matt Crowe, who had been the owner when I used to visit there and was still running the place. Robyn had a black-and-white cat called Pippin, a horse, some geese and an outside dunny. I used to visit Robyn and often stayed the night. It wasn't uncommon to be sitting on the dunny and see the door open and a large horse peer around the door to see what was happening.

Life had become a bit complicated for me. I had this habit of getting involved with the wrong sort of fellow. One was married and a Federal policeman, another was bisexual, which didn't particularly worry me, one was an Irishman who had lived in England and was one of those many children who was separated from his parents and brought out to Perth by the Catholic Church just after the war, against his wishes, another was a Vietnam veteran and various others who were unsuitable for one reason or another. Maybe it was some deepseated psychological thing that I didn't want to be involved with someone who might offer a more permanent sort of relationship.

In 1972 I met Denis, who again was married. We had an affair, which was complicated because he had a kidney disease and was waiting for a transplant. He had to have dialysis several times a week. His father had exactly the same problem and had died at a young age. Denis's wife was also having an affair at the time, so maybe I felt it was OK. I had very different ethics in those days and didn't care too much about the consequences of what I was doing. He was a member of the Australia Party and very involved with Alan Fitzgerald, a Canberra journalist and cartoonist. The irony of it all was that I became good friends with Denis's wife and children. Anyway, in January 1973 Denis became ill as the dialysis was now failing to do the job it was supposed to and he was admitted to hospital. His stepfather knew that I was involved with him and thought it might be better if I stayed away from the hospital for a while. At the same time my father had a minor heart attack in Hobart. I arranged a three month transfer to Hobart with Immigration. It turned out to be an interesting experience and my parents were delighted to have me home again. I enjoyed living with them for that period, and was quite a different person to the one who had left home. I had grown up. I received a call from a friend of Denis's and Robyn early in March 1973 to tell me that it had all been too much for Denis. His heart had not been able to last the distance. He was only thirty-one. I was pretty upset at the time. It was the first time in my life that someone I had been close to had died. Of course I wanted to go to his funeral, but Robyn and other friends wisely advised against it.



When Sally met John.

I returned to Canberra before Easter 1973. It was good to see all my friends again as I had felt a bit cut off from them in Hobart. One of my very favorite newspapers at the time and for some years previously was *Nation Review*. For those of you who aren't familiar with it, it was a fairly radical left-wing weekly newspaper which served as a means to criticise the then Liberal government. Because John Hepworth was writing for it, Barbara had introduced me to it in 1969, when it was still called the *Sunday Review*. *Nation Review* had a 'dalliance' column, which Robyn had used on a couple of occasions. She suggested I put an ad in their columns and see what happened, which I did. I can't remember exactly what I said, but it was something like 'I'm an Arles who likes to laugh.' Robyn and I collected all the answers and took the letters with us to Sydney for the weekend early in May 1973. A friend of ours was selling *World Book Encyclopedia* on the side, as well as being a public servant. World Book was offering a free weekend in Sydney for people who might want to become involved. Robyn and I decided to take them up on it and went to Sydney for a very pleasant weekend. I can recall on the Saturday night we had all the letters spread out on the floor, trying to decide which ones we would reject or accept. There were several who sounded rather interesting.

One of the letters was from a John Bangsund. He said that he was companionable, but that his ex-wife preferred to maintain this companionship at a distance of 400 miles. He mentioned that he had some pretty weird interests — science fiction,

classical music and reading *Nation Review* — and that he couldn't think of anything that didn't interest him. He said that the previous Christmas he had enjoyed himself immensely smoking pot and listening to heavy rock at a party in Fitzroy; drinking beer and watching the cricket on telly with his brother-in-law; and talking about poetry and group dynamics over an excellent claret with an elderly novelist.

The following week I decided to ring John at work. I liked the sound of his voice on the phone and we arranged to meet the following weekend on a Saturday night. We went to the local Chinese restaurant, owned by a Greek called Tom Bobolas, for a meal and seemed to hit it off. Some Egyptian friends of mine, Fifi and Nabil were having a party, so we ended up at that. On the Sunday we went to watch a soccer match with John's workmates. I went to Sydney the following weekend with a good friend of Denis's and had my one and only ride on a roller coaster at Luna Park, but never again! John told me much later that he had tried to contact me without success. I visited him later in the week.

At the time this seemed a fairly unorthodox way to meet someone, and in some ways it still does. I suppose I was lucky that I didn't get a whole lot of nutters replying to the advert and I certainly wouldn't recommend it as a way of meeting people these days. It's a bit like hitchhiking these days. It would be one hell of a risk to take. However, if I hadn't gone ahead with the ad, I probably would never have met John or discovered the existence of fandom, which I would

regret very much. Although John and I had lived in the same hostel, Lawley, at the same time, we had never run into each other. I didn't know that there was such a thing as fandom. I had read some science fiction and particularly enjoyed the more traditional style of authors like John Wyndham. The one thing we never did, even to this day, was tell the older family members how we really met, as they would not have understood or approved. However, my brother and John's sisters accepted the situation quite readily.

As to my first introduction to fandom, when I first went to John's place at Kingston, George Turner was staying with him. I recall walking into the kitchen and meeting George, just as he was trying to grill some tomatoes on an upturned frying pan, as the grill was missing a few bits and pieces. I had no idea who George was and ended up having a very lively discussion with him about some films we had both seen recently. George didn't seem to mind the fact that I had read very little science fiction!

1973: My first experience of fandom

Because I didn't keep a diary during the 1970s and didn't do so until the early 80s, I was having a great deal of difficulty remembering the detail and sequence of particular events, while forgetting some altogether. Then suddenly I had an idea. What if I went digging in the various boxes in the garage and had a look at John's older fanzines? This took me further than I had intended, as I realise now that the best way of approaching this would be to relate events as I remember them, then to reprint articles on the same thing from John's fanzines, or vice versa. I've discussed this with him and he agrees with the idea. I was on holidays when I decided to do this, which is why I have the time to go delving into all the boxes in the garage. There were about eighteen boxes or so, some of them enormous boxes, which had a mixture of what seemed to be Anzapa, Applesauce and FAPA mailings going back to the late 70s, and a number of other fanzines. I pulled out all of John and Bruce Gillespie's fanzines, plus an Anzapa index by Marc Ortlieb and lots of other memorabilia. I hadn't meant to spend quite a few days of my leave in August engrossed in other people's fanzines, but I found it an enjoyable experience. You will discover that in some cases I haven't commented or said very much about events which John has been writing about. The reason for this is because I either can't remember much about the particular time, which is mostly the case, or that I have

not got very much to add to what John has said.

Just before I met John in May 1973, he missed out on going to Melbourne for the tenth Melbourne Science Fiction Convention in Easter 1973 because he had the flu amongst other things. He published a one-page *Philosophical Gas* which was devoted to his 'Orstrilian national anthem'. The new Labor government was running a competition for a new national anthem, so John wrote one, but didn't enter it in the competition. Instead he sent it to the *Canberra Times*, and this PG version was sung at the convention.

ORSTRILIA

A Fair-Dinkum Orstrilian National Anthem

(Tune: 'The Red Flag' or 'O Tannenbaum')
(allegro assai, ma non troppo)

ALL:

Orstrilia! Orstrilia!
Ya know we'll never filia!
We'll fight fer ya and die fer ya
Whene'er yer foes assilia!
Our sunburnt land is green in spots;
There's gold in sand and we've got lots.
We're big on Truth and Liberty!
Orstrilia is the place for we!

SOLO:

The East is Red, the South is not:
This is The Land That Time Forgot.
But Time has caught up with us now
And we're all reading Chairman Mao.

ALL:

Yes, Time has caught up with us now
And we're all reading Chairman Mao,
But Chairman Mao is rather bleak
So now and then we read Newsweek.

SOLO:

With E. G. Whitlam at our head
We'll soon be either Red or dead.
Whichever it turns out to be,
It is our Modest Destiny.

ALL:

Whichever it turns out to be,
It is our Modest Destiny.
But destinies are born, not made,
So ours will likely be mistaid.

SOLO:

We all have homes and cars and jobs:
We're all right Jack but we're not snobs.
If everyone was like we are
This world would be Utopia;

ALL:

If everyone was like we are
This world would be Utopia;
There'd be a lot less strife and fuss
If everyone was just like us!

ALL:
Orstrilia! Orstrilia!
Ya know we'll never filia!
We'll fight fer ya and die fer ya
Whene'er yer foes assilia!
SOLO:
Our blokes are beaut, our sheilas grouse
And we have got an Opera House!
ALL:
AND PIES WITH SAUCE, AND BHP!
ORSTRILIA IS THE PLACE FOR WE!

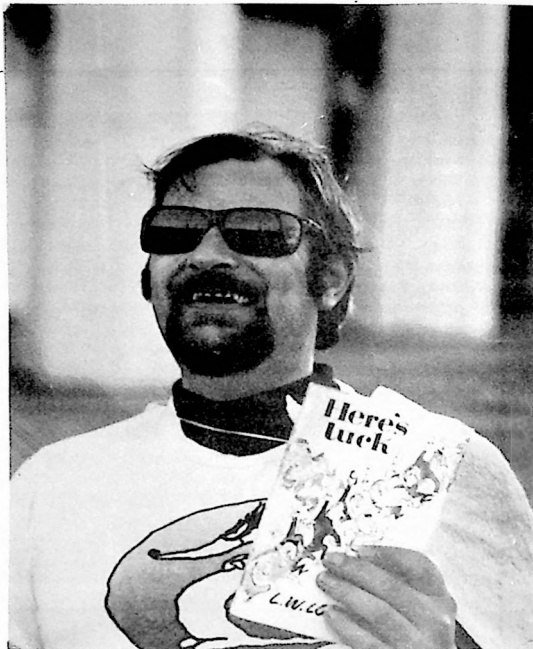
— (*Philosophical Gas* 23, Easter 1973)

When I first met John, his favourite restaurant in Canberra was Lucky's Chinese restaurant in Kingston and the Golden Star in Queanbeyan, which specialised in tiny Yugoslav skinless sausages called *cevapcici* which I still like and they are delicious. I'm reprinting the following piece particularly for Bruce who will no doubt be as amazed at the prices of wine in 1973 as I was when I reread this. Seaview Cabernet Sauvignon is one of my favourite reasonably priced reliable wines, at least it was until the Budget a few weeks ago. I had been paying on special the price of \$6.95 which was pretty good, but after the Budget it went up to \$9.29 which is getting a bit too expensive at the local Safeway.

My favourite restaurant (the one with the tv set) has, as I mentioned, run out of Orlando Barossa Cabernet. But all is not lost. The chef has started making all kinds of delicious European dishes, including *cevapcici* (which I love very much), and the proprietor has bought in some really magnificent wines in the last few weeks. Last night I had a '66 Seaview Cabernet Sauvignon (their price \$2.30, Private Cellar price \$1.94, which is rather incredible: the usual pricing formula in licensed restaurants is twice retail plus a bit for luck) and a great mound of them beautiful little Yugoslavian-type sausage things with French salad. Total outlay: \$3.70. And the chef gave me a large sample of something else he's trying out, a kind of cheese and pastry thing, the name of which eludes me — tarouk? — something like that. Beautiful, anyway.

— (*Bundalohn Quarterly* 4, October 1972)

The cheese and pastry thing which John describes sounds rather similar to *burek*, which is sold at most Hot Bread shops in Melbourne, although this has the addition of spinach. It's a flat round pie-like thing, which is cut into pieces when sold. When I first met John, I recall being a little amazed at his cooking techniques. It was nothing to see him open a tin of something like sweet and sour pork, and not cut the lid right off, but use a pair of pliers to put it on the stove and then when it was heated, lift it off the stove with the same pair of pliers! His washing clothes technique also amazed me. Put all your washing in the bath, have a shower over the bath, stomp on the clothes a few times, then rinse them! No wonder he kept asking me to marry him!



John Bangsund — mid-1970s.

When I met George in John's kitchen in May 1973 I had only known John for a few days, in fact four days! George had come to stay for a few days and John wrote the following about George's stay.

On Thursday, 10th May, George Turner came to Canberra. I don't think Canberra was quite ready for him, but it seems to have survived. He stayed with me until the following Tuesday, and this was a mind-bending experience. On his very first day here he presented himself at the bar of the Hotel Civic, announced that he was a stranger in the place, and within twenty minutes knew more about where the action is in Canberra than I suspected existed. . . . While George was here I received (a) an enormous telegram, measuring about two feet by three, from most of my best friends in Melbourne, wishing me a speedy recovery from my illness, and (b) half a dozen cassettes from Robin Johnson, containing not much less than nine hours of stuff from the Melbourne Eastercon. . . .

(28th May) I think it was the day George went home when I received a letter and a telegram, the first advising me that my mother was coming to stay for a while, the second that John Julian planned to call in one day. John promised not to bring his 'forty footy mates', but on the following Saturday he arrived and with him were two of his friends from Melbourne, John and David. We talked for a while and they went off to see Canberra. I think I mentioned that this could be accomplished in twelve minutes by sticking to the main roads, but might easily take a fortnight if they got off them. Sally called in, John's lot came back, and about 6 four of us (David had an invitation to dine and sleep elsewhere) set out for dinner. Sally had mentioned her need to visit a friend at Gundaroo, so we went there first.

Now I have to confess that although I had heard of Gundaroo I had never actually been there, and frankly wasn't even sure where the place is. I can report that it is a lo-n-g way from

Canberra when you are hungry. In my usual accommodating fashion I enjoyed the drive and the company, but John and John soon began expressing their consternation at our expedition to Back o' Burke in a quite amusing but heartfelt manner. My patience and their innocence were rewarded when we found the place; apart from Sally's friend's house, a few ruined churches, a petrol pump and a couple of dogs, Gundaroo has, of all things, a wine bar. And we stood in that bar, talking to the locals, drinking port and generally enjoying ourselves no end for more than a few moments. The proprietor showed us his bottles of pre-war 'Coronation' brand sparkling sweet sherry, which I still refuse to believe in. Then we started feeling hungry again and drove to that Chinese restaurant in Kingston. . . . Then we listened to a swag of Mahler and talked deep stuff about the interrelationship of the arts and so on.

(4th June) Robin Johnson arrived on Saturday morning and didn't lose a thing in Canberra, which even if it detracts from his image a little is nevertheless pleasant to report. Monica and John Lichen, more or less secretly married about a fortnight ago, arrived on Sunday, and I feel very honoured that they chose to spend a day of their three-day delayed honeymoon at my place. With Sally, Helen and Leigh Hyde, we did some weird, fannish and altogether delightful things such as a short film sequence at the National Library. Readers of *Nation Review* will perhaps be pleased to know that when the short colour film for Australia in '75 is shown in Toronto this September I may be observed wearing a ferret T-shirt (or is it D-shirt?).

The milkbar at Manuka which sells papers on Sunday happened to have this week's *National Times*. The proprietor was a little bemused when Robin and I bought five copies each, and Sally and John at least one each. If he had seen Robin a few moments later dumping the *Times* in a litter bin and keeping only the colour supplement he would have been convinced we were quite insane. But that issue has a passable article about sf and fandom by Tony Maiden, with interesting photos of Robin, Mervyn, Paul, Bert Chandler and George Turner. Oh, and Bauman, yes. Robin and his *Nostalgian News* were also mentioned in Saturday's *Melbourne Age*, but I didn't discover that until tonight. Since Lee Harding was guest speaker at the last Fellowship of Australian Writers meeting in Melbourne, and George Turner is writing an article and a story for *Meanjin* (most illustrious of Australian literary journals), one cannot help feeling that sf and fandom are getting some very useful publicity these days.

— (*Philosophical Gas* 22, May 1973)

In June 1973 we went to visit John's sister Ruth and her husband Barry at their place near Milltown in south-western Victoria, where they had been living for several years. I was looking forward to going there. Milltown is near Heywood, in the Grampians country in the south-west corner of Victoria. I am particularly fond of the beautiful countryside around this area. We drove down through Albury, Echuca, where we drank flagon red from coffee mugs in an unlicensed restaurant, St Arnaud and Hamilton. The views of the Grampians, particularly at a tiny town called Dunkeld, are really quite magnificent. Ruth was about seven months pregnant at the time with Amanda who is now nineteen. They were living in a small house on a farm, with lots of animals, and had bought a block of land nearby with only a dunny on it. I think it was at this stage that we

all started talking about the possibility of all of us living together on a farm. It was awfully cold on that visit, so it must have been the next time, in early 1974, that I went swimming in the dam on a nearby property and felt my feet squelch in the mud at the bottom of the dam and had my toes nibbled at by yabbies. These were the days of hippies and communes and the idea of not having to live in a big city and opting out appealed to all of us very much. John had always got on well with Ruth and Barry and had the funny situation where at one stage Barry was his brother-in-law twice over, as John had been married to Barry's sister, Diane, the first time around. However, after a few years of us all discussing living together in the country somewhere in south-western Victoria, Ruth and Barry discovered religion in 1976, more or less told us we were in league with the devil or some such thing and wanted nothing to do with us. They alienated themselves from all the family and went their own way. We heard nothing from them for about ten years, although John's mother had a postcard or two from them.

I had forgotten one particular humorous incident until I read something about it in a oneshot which was produced at 46a Wentworth Avenue Kingston on 21 July 1973. John mentions Robyn Price who I mentioned last issue. Robyn absolutely loved horses and although she wasn't supposed to on medical orders because of the fractured vertebrae, still loved riding when she could do it without her doctor finding out. We were at Gundaroo for lunch one Sunday. Lunch started at 1.30pm and went for a very pleasant eight hours as enjoyable lunches often do. The highlight of the day was Robyn riding Baghdad into the dining-room, which was quite an achievement as the room was very small and he was a very large horse!

The oneshot which I mentioned a few lines ago was completed on 21 July. Leigh and Valma were staying with John at the time. Marea and Ken Ozanne and Eric Lindsay were visiting and everyone contributed. John mentions that 'Last night saw possibly the best and certainly the biggest mid-month (i.e. informal) meeting of the Canberra SF Society at Leigh and Helen Hyde's place. Sixteen people, I think, not counting children. Very little in the way of drinking, oddly, but lotsa talk . . .' (21 July 1973 at 46a Wentworth Avenue, Kingston ACT 2604)

John mentions that we were moving that weekend into a house at 20 Investigator Street, Red Hill. We had this crazy idea which I mentioned last mailing that two could live cheaper than one and instead of me paying rent for my flat at Queanbeyan and him doing the same thing at Kingston, why not share a house together. Did we save money? No. But it was a lot more fun!

However, in the process of moving house, I spent very little time at my flat. One day when John and Ross and I went to pack up my things, I walked in the front door and had this eerie feeling that someone had been in there in my absence. I say eerie — it's hard to describe the feeling when you suddenly realise that your place has been broken into. The window in the bathroom was smashed, which was presumably where the burglar had got in, or was where the burglar wanted us to think he/she had got in. There were signs of things being ransacked, but what made me feel distinctly uncomfortable at the time was the fact that the only thing which was missing was my electric blanket. This was when we realised that it must have been someone who knew me and was trying to make an unpleasant point. One of my female friends had a key to the place, which probably made it worse in a way, as I didn't like to think of the possibility that it might have been her but yet at the same time couldn't dismiss that possibility.

A few days after we moved into the house at Red Hill, I had to go into hospital for a small operation and was supposed to rest for a few days after that. Instead, Leigh and Helen Hyde decided to throw a surprise house-warming party which was quite a surprise to the two of us!

John commented: 'Since May Sally has met (and I am given to understand, liked, bless her) George Turner, John Julian, Robin Johnson, Monica and John Litchen, Carolyn and Sandy, Leigh Edmonds and Valma, Eric Lindsay, Marea and Ken Ozanne, Joan Dick and Tony Thomas. And my mother and nephew and sister and brother-in-law. And the local fannish fraternity, of course.' (*Revoltin' Tales of Sex and Super-Science 4*)

I remember very clearly meeting John's mother and her grandson Mark for the first time. Mark was an adorable blond blue-eyed little boy of five who was easy to instantly like and persisted in cheating at cards at this early age. John's mother seemed very sensible, but I was surprised when we were washing-up and she said that she had no objection to young people (not so young) living together! I had only known her a couple of days when she said this and was most impressed with her forthright manner and also wondered whether she was being a little premature as John and I had only known each other for about three weeks at this stage! Joy and Vern and their children Mark and Kelsey stayed with us a number of times during 1973 and 1974 in between their overseas trips.

I've decided to reprint most of an article which John wrote about our first Christmas together in 1973. I've left a couple of paragraphs out, but otherwise it's reprinted almost in its entirety as I think it's John writing at his absolute best.

Sally and I left Canberra on 22nd December. I had spent quite a few hours loading the Renault. With the twelve flagons of red and the stack of *Scythrop* 28s and *PG* 26s (which I had planned to collate, staple and mail in Melbourne) on board the car had two inches clearance at the back. So I took all that stuff out and put cases in instead. We were still a bit overloaded.

The first night we stayed at Benalla, about 250 miles down the road, and enjoyed the first night of our holiday watching tv and eating honeyed prawns in the motel. Next day we headed east into the mountains and drove the long (rough) way round Lake Eildon. It was almost worth it. Every few miles along that unsurfaced, winding, up-and-down road we caught a glimpse of the lake, made enthusiastic noises and stopped to take a photo or three. Then on through the fern forests, over the Black Spur, and late in the afternoon, into the outer suburbs of Melbourne. I felt like turning round and going back. I had forgotten how big and ugly and nasty Melbourne is. (The feeling faded after a week or so, but I was glad to get away. Residents of New York, London and other great metropolises will find the place rather like a compact village when they come here next year, but two years of Canberra makes a city of two million or so a bit too much for the spirit, if not the mind.)

We spent about a fortnight meeting and re-meeting friends and fans. It seems invidious to name some names and not others, but it would be churlish not to mention the wonderful times we had with Leigh Edmonds, Irene and Lee Harding, Bill Wright, George Turner, Bert Chandler, John and Elizabeth Foyster, Paul Stevens and — in some ways best of all — my mother and Carolyn and Sandy. But by New Year's Eve we'd had enough of people. We went to the drive-in by ourselves, watched *Cabaret* and were thoroughly miserable, and came home and watched a Christopher Lee horror movie on television.

Perhaps the most memorable occasion during that time was the night George, Bert, Lee and Irene came for dinner. (We had my sister's house: Joy was in Europe, Vern in New Zealand.) George and Bert argued the night away magnificently — and thirstily. Lee bowed out sometime before midnight (Irene had already collapsed), but the other two were still enthusiastically resolving all the world's problems, political, moral and literary, when we poured them into a taxi in the small hours. Later that morning, when Lee and Irene emerged, we learnt that things had Gone Bump in the Night — for them anyway. A storm had blown up. Lee had opened the windows — something my sister and brother-in-law apparently are not in the habit of doing — and when the storm came it brought down about fifteen feet of pelmet and heavy curtain. Lee and Irene struggled in the dark to put the rotten things back, but gave up, and for the rest of the night endured the brilliance of the flashing neon signs just down the street on the Burwood Highway. Lee told me all this over breakfast. He also told me that when the curtains came down there was suddenly a gentle sound of music: to be exact, the sound of that well-loved old tune 'Beautiful Dreamer'. I didn't believe him: the man's a writer after all, and this is exactly the kind of thing a writer would invent to touch up an otherwise merely passable dramatic story. A day or so later we found Joy's jewel-case, which when opened, or even merely touched, plays... 'Beautiful Dreamer'.

Robin Johnson remarked one night at the Degrafs Tavern that whenever I am within two hundred miles of Melbourne there is a thoughtless, blissful feeling of goodwill and content descends over fandom. This, he said, is how he knew I had gone to visit my sister Ruth and her husband Barry at their farm in Western Victoria last June — or at least hadn't been surprised to find later that I had done that. This also, he said, is why Melbourne fandom spends most of the year thinking ill thoughts and saying hard things about me, but clamours to buy me carafes of Henry's rough red when I'm in town. Robin didn't buy me any red, rough or otherwise, while I was in

Melbourne, so I don't believe the rest of his story either.

The papers had warned us that the airlines had instituted thorough checks of passengers and their baggage. Ansett ignored entirely my rather bulky portable electric typewriter (which might have been a suitcase full of explosives and hand weapons, for all they knew) and radio/cassette recorder (ditto on a smaller scale). We had a bumpy and rather lengthy ride to Hobart, where we were met by Sally's parents.

(We were in Tasmania for about ten days. By 15th January, when we flew again, the security had really tightened up. My typewriter was inspected; my all-purpose bottle and can-opener, which contains a knife-blade, was confiscated for a few minutes (did they really think that I would attempt to hijack a plane with a bottle opener? — it would be a compliment to drinkers everywhere if they did); and I had to empty my pockets until they were satisfied that the silver foil in a cigarette pack was setting off the metal detector. We were the last to board the plane.)

Sally's brother has a newsagency in Sandy Bay, a rather exclusive and comfortable suburb of Hobart on the lower slopes of Mount Nelson. It is a suburb full of steep, meandering, narrow little streets and cul-de-sacs. Most of the houses look out over the Derwent, and the majestic bulk of Mount Wellington looms a few miles to the west. Closer is the Wrest Point Casino, which also looms but is not majestic. The shopping centre in Lower Sandy Bay can only be described as groggy. There is a good pub, a service station (scheduled for demolition by the local council), a post office and a handful of uninteresting shops. One of the shops was a moribund newsagency run by two elderly women, and this is the business which Graeme and his wife Helen bought last year. Already they have transformed it into a lively and, it would seem, potentially very profitable concern, supported enthusiastically by the locals. This would not have been achieved without the considerable assistance of someone like Sally's father.

I have met people like Mr Yeoland before, but not many. He is the kind of good, gentle man who gets things done quietly, thoroughly and without fuss. In a time when speed is more valued than thoroughness, that virtue is sometimes held against him, but I know which I prefer. He is the kind of man who does more than is required of him, not to impress, but because of his nature. My father, a man very like him, called this 'going the second mile'. Mr Yeoland doesn't quote scripture.

About 2 a.m. on Monday I was sitting by myself reading when Mr Yeoland got up to go to work. We talked as he had his breakfast of tea and toast. I said I was almost inclined to go with him, but ... and I indicated the almost empty claret bottle, and he laughed. He looked tired. Very much later the same day, after dinner, I said I would like to accompany him in the morning to see what goes on behind the scenes in a newsagency. And I did.

I went to bed a little after 10. About 1.45 I was meditating irritably over my coffee, pondering yet again my essential stupidity, when Mr Yeoland came out. He suggested good-humouredly that he hadn't expected me to go through with it. I suggested we were both insane. Again he looked tired. I don't know how I looked, but I felt dead tired. However I felt, I was determined to prove to myself that I could keep pace with a man of sixty-two. This challenge kept me going for the next twenty-two hours.

About 2.30 we set off for Sandy Bay, about 38 kilometres away. (I'm trying to Think Metric; if you aren't, make that about 24 miles.) An almost full moon gleamed on Frederick Henry Bay and the lagoons by the road. We didn't talk much. Sandford, Lauderdale, sleepy little villages, sped past, then the lights of Rokeby, Howrah and Bellerive, and across the silver Derwent the street lights of Hobart, dominated by the orange-golden tower of the casino. Over the Tasman Bridge, through the city and onto Sandy Bay Road, past the motel I stayed at when I was

last in Hobart (1967: half a lifetime ago it seems) and on past the casino, where the gambling tables had just five minutes earlier ceased business for the day, to Lower Sandy Bay and the newsagency. The place was quiet; I could hear the river tide breaking gently on the beach; and it was freezing. Waiting for us was a young bloke named Bill, starting on the job that morning. He was wearing shorts and a parka. I shivered and lit my seventh cigarette for the day.

Under the shop was a store-room containing mounds of newspapers, magazines, comics and junk — and the Machine. The function of the Machine is to ingest whole newspapers and spew them out rolled and firmly wrapped in greaseproof paper. It was designed, I decided, by Heath Robinson and subsequently improved by Rube Goldberg. If you think that operating a duplicator is fraught with hazard and frustration, you should try a newspaper-rolling machine. I didn't. I just watched. Theoretically it should get through a thousand newspapers easily in an hour; theoretically every last one of those papers will be rolled and encased in its protective cover with just exactly the right amount of paste to hold it together but not to seep through and glue the pages together. I guess if you tried hard enough and long enough it would do just that, maybe, but it was certainly in a temperamental mood that morning. Also it was about as quiet in operation as a pneumatic drill. I think I made a good impression by volunteering to wheel the barrowloads of rolled papers up the steep slope from the store-room to the street, but in fact I was escaping from the noise. Each trip took me about five minutes — less than a minute to take the barrow up and down, the rest to stand in the street smoking and savouring the quietness. I don't think I have actually heard a river before, but I heard it then — the gentle surf of the Derwent breaking on the pure golden-white sand two blocks away mocking with its absolute timelessness the thunk-thunk-thunk of the Machine.

Right then and there I had an idea for a science fiction story, the kind of story that Lee Harding is good at writing, but I've forgotten what it was. It had something to do with Nature and Progress, and the realisation that one was better than the other, but I just forget which was which, and it doesn't matter anyway.

About 5 Graeme turned up, and we loaded his Valiant and Bill's Falcon with the papers. Mr Yeoland went off with Bill to teach him the round, and I went with Graeme, sitting in the back with hundreds of papers which kept on falling every time we changed direction, which was often. I had the round-book, and my job was to yell out the street numbers — not that I was really required: Graeme normally does the run by himself, and I was just along for the ride.

Graeme had the radio on ('Expected top temperature for today is 19. Temperature in the city at this moment is 7. The time is ten past five and we listen to the big sound of ...') and he smoked almost non-stop. We set off up Sandy Bay Road and I settled back to enjoy the ride — for about half a minute. Graeme nonchalantly threw a few papers over fences while talking and smoking, then suddenly swerved onto the wrong side of the road. He's a maniac! I thought, but I didn't say so, and it was just as well, because for the next hour or so we drove on the wrong side, went the wrong way down one-way streets, reversed at hair-raising speeds down steep driveways I didn't think he'd get up in the first place, missed parked cars by inches and generally breached every article in the traffic code. I asked him how he got on with the police, since I had seen a patrol car or two. He said they had stopped him once (no seat-belt, on the wrong side of the road), he had explained what he was doing and they just told him to be careful and disappeared.

It was a nightmare, but I have been driven by Leigh Edmonds and lived, so I accepted my situation fatalistically — and even found myself enjoying it in a macabre kind of way.

About three-quarters of the way round we encountered a milk truck. It was reversing rapidly towards us, out of a dead-end

street. Graeme said 'Do you think he's seen us?' I shouted 'No!' and Graeme threw the Valiant into reverse and roared off backwards into another street. The driver of the milk truck waved to us when he eventually saw us, and we waved back and went on into the street he had been in. We reversed out as he had done, and from then on every house we passed had milk bottles outside. In the next street there was a house with a little brick pillar at the entrance to its driveway, and on top of the pillar a bottle of milk. I said to Graeme 'The trick is not to hit the bottle.' He laughed, flung a paper and hit the bottle. It fell over — and slipped into a cavity in the pillar unbroken. I said 'That was 44, wasn't it?', Graeme said yes, I said 'They don't get a paper!' — and we roared laughing. 'They deserve one,' he said. And on we went.

It was easily the most dangerous and hilarious car ride I have ever experienced, with Graeme commenting on the magnificent views, driving one-handed while picking up papers from the floor, and throwing them in every direction, out of, over, and possibly even under the car, reversing at speed down steep inclines onto the main road, and all the time smoking, listening to the radio and keeping up a laconic commentary on his customers — while I hung on, yelled out numbers and wondered if the next corner would be our last.

Somehow we made it back to the shop. In the daylight I looked at Graeme's reasonable collection of sf — Asimov, Herbert, Spinrad, Boyd, Aldiss, and others more expected — and shortly afterwards set off with Mr Yeoland to deliver some accounts and do the banking. Mr Yeoland prefers to bank at the casino, so we went there. After paying in what seemed a vast amount of money we went down to the gambling room. Outside the sun was shining, the water clear and the sand clean and pleasant underfoot. Inside the casino it was dark and gloomy and oppressive. There were a dozen or so gamblers at the tables. The girls looked bored. We watched for a minute or so, and then a very nicely dressed, ever so polite young man sidled up to us and murmured that ties and jackets were required in this room — and since we had neither, we retired without regret.

Mr Yeoland and I went back to the shop, did a few chores necessary, and retired to the pub. Sally found us there, by telephone, and we drove into town to have lunch with her. We lunched on an excellent meat dish, with a superb red wine which would have cost three or four times as much in Canberra, and went home. We had about an hour's sleep before the women woke us, and then drove back into Hobart and dined with Graeme and Helen. It was a great meal and a great evening. We got back to Cremorne about midnight, and I slept for twelve hours. (Mr Yeoland got up about 2, as usual, and spent roughly the same kind of day that I have tried to describe. I don't know how he does it but I kept up with him for one day at least.) ...

Back on the Mainland (as Tasmanians, with just a hint of a sneer, call the big island to their north) we saw a few friends in Melbourne again, then set off for Ruth and Barry's place in the Western District. Here we spent several idle days, their delight spoilt (for me) only by Barry's playing me with excellent wine and superb music and then thrashing me at chess.

On then to Adelaide. All of Australia's state capitals hold some attraction for me, and good memories. Of the six I tend to think of Adelaide as my favourite, yet on this visit I was seeing the city for the first time. Perhaps it was because I had no special reason for going there; in the past I have always had a reason — business, special events (the Festival, and many years ago church conferences) or people I wanted to see. Perhaps it was simply for the first time I had my own transport there. I deliberately did not seek out friends and fans: I wanted to discover Adelaide, itself, the place, just with Sally. We decided we could live in Adelaide very happily, and if the opportunity arises we might do just that.

— (*Philosophical Gas* 27, Autumn 1974)

My brother and his wife had moved back to Hobart from Canberra in April 1973 and had bought the newsagency almost straight away as Graeme had resigned from the public service in Canberra and didn't have a job. They had been living in Canberra since 1966 and Helen was homesick for Hobart and her family who all lived in Hobart. They hung onto the newsagency until 1976 when Graeme joined the State public service. He said recently that their time in the newsagency was the hardest they had ever worked in their lives and he really appreciated getting back into a 9-to-5 job.

My father continued to work as a motor mechanic in his business in Sandy Bay until the late 70s and then 'retired', but not in the real sense. He always had several cars at home which he had bought cheaply, often in Melbourne, and he would then do lots of hard work restoring them and selling them. Also, living in a small seaside town and being the only motor mechanic available meant that he was in constant demand until his death in 1985 at the age of 75. My parents decided in 1958 that they were tired of city life and at that stage my mother had lived all her life in New Town and my father at Middleton where he was born. Sandy Bay and New Town, Middleton is a little town on the banks of the Derwent about 40 miles or so south of Hobart. It is separated from the main part of the river by a large island and the stretch of water inbetween the shore and the island is known as the Channel. It is right in the heart of apple-growing country and most of the towns around this area have orchards of one sort or another. My father lived at Middleton until his twenties and interspersed with this, went to Clemes College, a boys' school in Hobart, and then became an apprentice motor mechanic at the age of 14. He was the oldest child, and when his father died unexpectedly when my father was 13, he was expected to go out and earn a living. The family house was called Taronga, and his parents had an apple orchard and spent a lot of their days fishing in the Channel. When my father met my mother in the late 1920s, she was a TB nurse at the Sanatorium, one of those hospitals with lots of chalets typical of the 1920s, and nursed my father's youngest brother who had TB. It was not uncommon for my father to row his boat up the Channel from Middleton to the city to meet her. I'm sure this influenced them both in 1958 to move from the city from a lovely Federation style house in New Town, which had been my maternal grandmother's house, to Cremorne which is about a 20 minute drive from Hobart. They had visited there on a number of occasions, because my swimming teacher lived there and although a lot of her lessons were conducted at the Wrest Point swimming pool, long before the days of the present Casino, I often had to go to

Cremorne for lessons. They fell in love with Cremorne, which is not hard to do and decided to buy the swimming teacher's house when she decided to sell it. It was on a double block, right on the beach front. Cremorne overlooks Frederick Henry Bay which becomes part of the Tasman Sea. It is a beautiful bay about ten miles or so across and at that stage, very few people lived there and commuted with the city. There were mostly holiday houses and a few retired people who had lived there for most of their lives. We moved there in 1959 and I enjoyed ten years or so of living by the sea, which was a wonderful environment to grow up in. I spent most of the warmer months swimming, going for long walks along the rocks and cliffs and riding my bicycle to other beaches. The weekends were usually taken up by visits from my numerous aunts, uncles and their families, as it was a popular place to visit. My father had a large heavy dinghy, and on many occasions I went out fishing with him in the Bay. I'm quite sure that the healthy life by the sea helped prolong his life as he had been suffering from very high blood pressure since the early 1960s and with the outdated blood pressure treatment available then, his blood pressure didn't really get under control until the late 70s.

1974: Donovan, Dylan and Darwin

18th April — Sally and I were married at 6.30pm on Friday 29th March. The ceremony was conducted by Mr Roger Thomson of the Attorney-General's Department, and witnessed by Miss Rosemarie Bell (Immigration) and Mr Robert Lehane (CSIRO). The ceremony seemed to consist of filling in forms in quintuplicate. The bride wore a purplish-bluish-greenish caftan of her own making, the groom an elderly but serviceable dark grey suit. Both later reported feeling radiant, and a little nervous.

Leigh Edmonds, devious swine and all-round jolly good fellow that he is, has quoted me as saying that the wedding went without a hitch. I did say those words — but I was quoting from Sue Clarke's account of her wedding, dammit!

On Saturday we drove Sally's ancient Falcon station wagon to Melbourne, and on Sunday were feted splendidly by close relatives, most of our friends in Melbourne fandom and a few friends who were not fans. On Monday afternoon I flew back to Canberra, leaving Sally to take the Falcon on to Hobart. We had a joyful reunion on Wednesday night, but we still think it was a pretty daft sort of honeymoon.

— (*Philosophical Gas* 27, Autumn 1974)

In the months before we eventually got married I can remember John asking me about once a week whether I would marry him and I kept saying no quite regularly. I still can't explain why I eventually said yes. It was the Friday before 29 March when I did say yes, which put John into a state

of shock. The following Monday we went into Births Deaths and Marriages and filled out the necessary forms. The time for lodging a notice of intended marriage was supposed to be a month before the actual date. However, the time could be abridged if there were special circumstances, such as interstate travel. I had already arranged to take the Falcon down to Hobart the following weekend, so this was acceptable to Roger and we made arrangements for the ceremony the following Friday evening. I had never ever wanted the traditional sort of wedding, the idea of which horrified me and a quiet private ceremony without any fuss seemed very appealing. This suited both of us, because I didn't attend Church on a regular basis at that stage and felt that it would be hypocritical to get married in a Church. Also, there would have been another complication, as the Anglican Church at that stage still took a very narrow view of a divorcee wishing to marry and would not have allowed us to have a normal service, but only a Church blessing. We finally told our relatives a couple of days before and I'm sure my parents were disappointed that we didn't want all the family to attend, but they handled it very well at the time. John's sister Joy wanted to fly up for the ceremony and we threatened to call it off if she did! It was a pleasant ceremony, with one of my best friends (who is a cat lover!) and Bob Lehané who was a good friend of John's as witnesses. Afterwards we all adjourned to the Bacchus Tavern (where I had celebrated my twenty-first birthday several years before) and had a very pleasant meal of steak, claret, oysters and riesling (but not in that order). John recalls us having a bombe Alaska but I have to admit that my memory got rather vague as the evening progressed.

When we got to Melbourne late in the afternoon the following day to stay with John's sister Joy, we found that she had excelled herself by organising a party of relatives and friends. These included George Turner, Leigh and Valma, Lee and Irene, Bill Wright, Bruce Gillespie, Robin Johnson, John and Elizabeth Foyster, Peter Darling, and some relatives. It was a very pleasant afternoon meeting all the fans I had previously met the previous Christmas and on a previous visit during 1973 at the Degrafs.

The Degrafs Tavern was downstairs in Degrafs Street, just off Flinders Lane. When John was working at the Railways Institute in the 1960s he often used to have lunch there. Sometime in 1967 or 1968 fans started eating there once a week in the evening, because it was the sort of place where a number of people could gather and also have a speaker if they wanted to, and in fact one of the early Nova Mob meetings was held there. I'm fairly sure that this was where I first met a number of fans like Leigh and Valma,

Lee and Irene and lots of others in 1973. John wrote the following about Henry, the proprietor, early in 1973:

On Wednesday, 20th December, I drove into town from Burwood (the Renault handles very nicely on the freeway at 90) and walked into the Degraives Tavern, traditional meeting-place of Melbourne fandom for some years. (Formerly Jenny's Cellar. See *ASFR* 5, p. 41.) My arrival surprised everyone except Diane, who knew I would be there, and Henry, the proprietor, who is surprised at nothing. Even as I reached the bottom step (assorted fans recoiling at their rediscovery of a sense of wonder) Henry was calmly pouring me a complimentary glass of house red, which he presented to me at the bar with the words 'So you're back' — or something polite like that. 'Yes, sir,' I said. 'I've been to Canberra and changed the government, and have returned for further instructions. Sir.' 'I still think you're a bloody spy,' said Henry. 'Merry Xmas.' 'And a Merry Xmas to you,' I said, raising my glass in salute. He refilled it. 'Your friends are over there. You have noticed already. Good. Your wife looks very attractive tonight. I do not know what she sees in you, and I am not interested.' Ah, it was good talking to Henry again.

— (*Philosophical Gas* 18, February 1973)

Back to 1974 . . .

4 July — Last weekend Sally and I went to Sydney for a friend's birthday party, and we thought that, having driven something like 300 km (actually about 190 miles, but as of 1 July distance in Australia is officially measured in kilometres, and if I have to get used to it, you might as well, too), we might as well see some other friends while we were about it. We had a late lunch with Shayne McCormack, at a place called Harpoon Harry's. The restaurant wasn't much to look at, but the food was awful. And the wine. Shayne showed us lots of photos of herself with Isaac Asimov, with Bob Bloch, with Bob Silverberg, with . . . Fortunately Sally hadn't heard of any of these people, except the three mentioned (because she has read Asimov and heard me talk of the two Bobs), otherwise we might have both turned green with envy and thrown bits of underdone shazlik at her in uncontrollable pique and envy. (I wonder how 'shazlik' is really spelt: I can't find the word in any of my dictionaries.)

Then we went to see Bert Chandler. He looked older than I've ever seen him — that stands to reason, I suppose. We talked of this and that, and he autographed three of his books for Sally. (If I don't watch her, Sally will have read more of Bert than I have soon.) He had just received his copy of *John W. Campbell: an Australian Tribute* — which rather surprised me because I posted it early in May — and I asked him what he thought of it. Naturally, his comments were kind. I have never heard Bert make an unkind comment about anyone, except Colonel Khadaffi (I feel I need some new dictionaries). But he did say that, after reading Redd Boggs' article in the book, he felt I should ask Redd to write a column for *Philosophical Gas* entitled 'Port Watch'.

The birthday party was just great, but not quite what our friend had expected. Four of us had a delightful dinner at a French restaurant at Tahmoor, about 100 km from Sydney. On Sunday Sally and I drove back to Picton, across the mountains to Wollongong, and back to Canberra via the Princes Highway. It was a good weekend.

— (*Philosophical Gas* 28, Winter 1974)

What John doesn't say about the birthday party is that it was Sandy's birthday. We met at Tahmoor and proceeded to polish off entrées of

Coquilles St Jacques which we all enjoyed so much that we asked the waiter to repeat the experience, wonderful steaks and numerous bottles of alcohol. The motel was only about 1 km from the restaurant and all of us were extremely pickled by the end of the evening. I'm not sure how I managed to drive us to the motel, as we were all well over .05% . I can remember walking into our room at the motel and finding an enormous ginger cat on the bed. The next day we all nursed our sore heads and went to the nearest cafe in Tahmoor to have some coffee. When John went to pay for the coffee Carolyn offered to pay, but John said that's OK, you paid for last night.

John's mother became an instant celebrity about this time by sitting in a rocking-chair and rocking away for 61 hours. She set the world record for 61-year-old widows rocking nonstop in rocking-chairs. For her efforts she received a Jason rocker which she proudly showed off to us when we next visited Melbourne.

Apart from getting married in 1974 the other significant thing that happened was getting Dylan and Donovan in September 1974. Our next door neighbours in 1974 were Cathy and Robert at Hartley Street in Turner. We moved there in May 1974 after the owner had decided to sell the place at Red Hill. Turner was a very convenient suburb to live in. It is very close to Canberra's city centre, about 2 km, and is one of the older suburbs. Having said that, I'm trying to work out how old the house we were living in would be. I think it would have been 1930s as were most of the houses around the area and for Canberra that's old. The house at Turner was very pleasant — double-brick, with three bedrooms, separate diningroom and a veranda out the back which was ideal for a table tennis table. The garden was one of those older English gardens with lots of shrubs around. Cathy and Robert were about the same age as me and had a lovely German short-haired pointer called Kruger, who was only a couple of years old and a very dark brown. They also had a cat called Pox who was also a couple of years old.

Pox and Minx, a pretty silky tabby from over the back of their place, got together and had four kittens. When Minx was pregnant, I asked Cathy if I could have one of the kittens and she agreed. I saw Dylan when he was 10 days old and he looked like a little wombat with his eyes just opening. I decided that this black-and-white little thing was the one I wanted. I saw him at various times until he was old enough to take away from his mother at about six weeks. It wasn't until he was much bigger that I realised he was the spitting image of his father Pox. Both had exactly the same markings, black except for a white tummy and white paws, and a white fleck through the black fur. Donovan, a ginger tabby, came from a

farm at Bungendore a week later. A friend at work asked me if I would like another kitten, which I immediately agreed to, and Donovan arrived. He and Dylan were about the same age, although Donovan was much smaller and didn't have any whiskers when we got him. Apparently he'd been in a fight with one of the farm dogs and was much too tiny to defend himself. When we first got the two of them we discussed various names and had initially decided to name Dylan after Dylan Thomas. But when Donovan came along it seemed appropriate to name him Donovan as these were two of my favourite singers at the time.

John describes Turner in a mailing comment to Rosemary Hickey:

When you wrote about driving to work in 'six or seven minutes' I was probably still living in Red Hill. Last May Sally and I moved to Turner, which is the second suburb north-west of Canberra City. From Turner to Civic takes about 15 minutes, walking. Two minutes driving. I work on the south side of Lake Burley Griffin, so these days I find that it takes all of twelve minutes to get from my driveway to the car-park at work. But then, Canberra is a small city (I rely now entirely on memory: less than half the size of Dallas). In Melbourne I'll bet Leigh Edmonds takes nearly an hour to cover the same distance I do each morning. Canberra is designed for cars, you see.

— (Philosophical Gax 28, Winter 1974)

Not long after getting the two kittens I got trigeminal neuralgia, which is a virus in the trigeminal nerve in the face and was bombed out on painkillers for a few weeks before I eventually got rid of it. At this stage my parents visited us for the first time. My father used to always drive Falcon station wagons, which was an advantage when they came to visit, as they came over on the *Princess of Tasmania* with the car, which was usually loaded up with furniture and other items for us. I think at this stage my parents brought over a grandparent's dressing-table and my grandmother's very ornate treadle sewing-machine, which I was very pleased to have. We acquired a table-tennis table about this time and it was always enjoyable to have a game of table tennis with visiting fans, of which there were many, especially John Foyster, Robin Johnson, John and Monica Litchen, and lots of others. Ken Ford visited us late in 1974 and I still have a photo of him holding the two kittens, one in each hand.

We spent Christmas 1974 in Melbourne with John's sister Joy and brother-in-law, Vern. The most memorable thing about Christmas 74 was Christmas Day in Darwin.

Darwin was not the place to be on Christmas Day. Cyclone Tracy achieved what the Japanese failed to do in 1942 by virtually wiping out the city. Reports are still confused, but it seems that something like 90% of Darwin's buildings have been partly or wholly destroyed, 44 people killed and hundreds injured, and 25,000 people (out of a population of 40,000) homeless. One



Sally, with Dylan (left) and Donovan.

news broadcast this afternoon had it that 25,000 people are to be evacuated to Sydney. The cyclone is reported to be following roughly a circular route, which means it could strike what is left of the city again. Seven RAN ships are on their way, and are expected to arrive on 1 January. If Tracy decides to strike again next week we'll be short of one (1) Navy.

This morning's story in the *Canberra Times*, taking up two-thirds of the front page, is about the worst piece of journalism I have seen in years. Maybe there was only one cadet reporter on duty yesterday. 'The death toll is expected to rise even higher as the rescue teams move in.' Why? Are they awfully clumsy? 'The few meagre reports received in the more populated southern States . . .'. Relevance? Is the writer attempting to give a crash course in Australian geography? Darwin is the capital city of the Northern Territory, which is not a state. Queensland extends further north than the Northern Territory. The great bulk of Australia's population lives south of the 30th parallel, certainly, but half of Western Australia and most of Queensland occupy the same latitude as the Territory. So what is the writer trying to say?

The bit that I don't understand is that the cyclone was known to be heading for Darwin on 22 December. I'm not sure exactly what I would do if I knew that a cyclone was three days away from Canberra, but I would expect to know about it, and I think I might have been better prepared for it than the people of Darwin seem to have been.

— (First Draft 1, January 1975)

I think that at this stage the reason Cyclone Tracy came as such a shock to us all was that we'd always thought of Australian cities as being pretty safe and impenetrable and the thought of a city being wiped out by a cyclone was pretty dramatic. The following Christmas was made even more memorable for me by the crashing of the *Lake Illawarra* into the Tasman Bridge and putting the Bridge out of action in Hobart for several years.

1975: From Worldcon and Coup to Adelaide

There were more people at Canberra airport than I've ever seen there. The lounge was crowded with ambulant, perspiring bodies waiting for delayed flights and inert, somnolent bodies hoping for cancellations. (It was the same at Melbourne and Hobart airports.) After checking in I went outside for a cigarette or five and a breath of fresh air, and watched people. I like watching people. There was a well-dressed lady vomiting decorously into the shrubbery opposite the TAA entrance. There was a Fiat-full of well-bred public servants and dogs. There were many white government Fairlanes containing bored drivers, waiting for visiting important persons. (Who on earth would come to Canberra for Easter? I wondered.) The air was crisp. I was tired. I had a long way to travel.

Last time I travelled by air the plane was held up while officials decided whether my combination bottle-opener/corkscrew/pocket-knife was a lethal hijacking implement under the Terms of the Act. There was no inspection at Canberra. I could have held up the DC9 with my bottle-opener and demanded to be flown to Kuwait or West Footscray — and it would have been entirely their fault.

A smooth flight to Melbourne. I had three hours to kill, so I grabbed a taxi and headed for the Vineyard restaurant in St Kilda, where I had arranged to have dinner with my good friends Sandy and Carolyn. The taxi-driver said he was having an incredibly quiet night and suggested he call back for me about 11. I thought that was a great idea, because I really wanted to be on that midnight flight to Hobart, drunk, sober or otherwise. The driver's name was John. I enjoyed talking to him as he weaved his almost worn-out Falcon through the Melbourne traffic. He promised he would call back for me unless he got a fare to Ballarat ('Please, God!' he said, taking his hands off the wheel to raise them in mock prayer — and immediately replacing them to avoid a giddy VW fastback).

It was great seeing and talking to the girls again, even if I had a touch of jet-lag or whatever and wasn't exactly making scintillating conversation. The Vineyard's cevapcici, I decided again, is superior to the Golden Star's at Queenbeyan. I'm not a connoisseur of Yugoslavian food, but I certainly like cevapcici. The girls presented me with two beautiful books (about Cervantes and Aubrey Beardsley) to remind me that Sally and I had been married for a year. 'Dunno what she sees in you,' Carolyn said. A little before 11 John came into the restaurant, and we invited him over for a drink. He seemed a little surprised. Then it was goodbyes all round and I got into John's Falcon, and Carolyn rushed out as we were about to drive off and pointed to her new Corolla across the street (*Chloe II* — an impressive-looking beast) and I grinned and said 'See you soon', and we were off. I got talking to John about humour. He wanted to know Carolyn's address and phone number, but I diverted him and we talked about humour. I asked him what he thought about Benny Hill. I don't like Benny Hill. John pulled up in Sydney Road, leapt out, opened the boot of his cab and got back in with a cassette player. He drove on, one hand on the wheel, the other fumbling with the machine. Eventually he found his favourite Benny Hill track — 'The Fastest Milkman in the West' or something. I made complimentary noises, hoping like mad he wouldn't run into anything. He said he'd only ever once been invited to have a drink with a fare before, and that was with Kevin Dennis (the fastest used-car dealer in the South). He seemed a little moved, and happy. I liked him, I decided, even if he damn-near killed us both at least five times on the

way back to Tullamarine.

About 2.30 a.m. the plane arrived at Hobart, and Sally and her father were waiting for me. About 3 we got to Cremorne. Mrs Yeoland fussed over me, insisting I should have coffee and cakes and things, but all I wanted to do was go to bed. I think I was not as civil to my in-laws as I should be, but it really had been a long day.

My Easter in Hobart was a rather dreamy and confused time. The Yeolands' house is right on the beach at Frederick Henry Bay. I spent hours looking at the water: it changes colour with the weather and the light. (What an incredibly true thing to say! But there is nothing trite about Frederick Henry Bay, and Canberra is a long way from the sea.) One night I went out and took some inept photos of the full moon — enormous and bright golden-orange it was — rising across the bay. All the time I was there I was conscious of the waves crashing or gently lapping on the beach, only a few metres from the house, an unaccustomed and vaguely disturbing but satisfying sound. One day, I promised myself again, one day I shall live in a house like this in a place like this.

In January the *Lake Illawarra*, carrying stuff for the Electrolytic Zinc works (where Don Tuck spends the time he can't devote to science fiction bibliography), ran into the Tasman Bridge, with disastrous consequences. Bert Chandler may say what he will but I cursed the master of that ship when we set out for dinner in Hobart Town on Easter Saturday. We had to drive something like seventy kilometres from Cremorne to the city. We had a gorgeous meal with the Yeolands, senior and junior, at a French restaurant in Battery Point. Then we had to drive back. I admit, enthusiastically even, that the company and the food made that drive worth while, but I wouldn't want to do it every weekend. Some people do it every day.

Mr Yeoland remarked at some time during this visit that I don't say much. This is half true. When I haven't anything to say, I don't say much. When I've had a bit to drink, I say a lot. Sally, and my friends in fandom, will confirm this. But if I didn't say much at Cremorne it was probably partly because of the book I was reading there. Martin Boyd's autobiography, *Day of my Delight*, is a strangely disturbing book, and I still haven't quite come to terms with it. I'll say a bit about it before I'm finished, but not right now — except that it brought on me an attack of High Resolves and things, now, I am pleased to say, more than half forgotten. (High Resolves are no good for everyday living, after all.)

Quite apart from anything else, I went to Hobart thinking about some Australian writers for whom I have a great fondness. John Hepworth, who writes the 'Outsight' column in *Nation Review*, I have always associated with Tasmania. He and Sally have mutual friends. On the Friday before Easter John had a curiously ambiguous piece in his column about the suicide (or perhaps-suicide: I wasn't sure what he meant, to be honest) of Owen Webster, a local writer of whom I had heard a lot, never met, and frankly, did not admire a great deal. On Maundy Thursday there was a letter in *Nation Review*, signed by Phillip Adams, Stephen Murray-Smith, Barry Watts and other people for whom I have a great respect, taking Hepworth to task for his 'frivolous' obituary. John can be obscure at times — I'm sure he would be the first to admit it — and I didn't know until I read that letter that Owen really had taken his own life. I went to Hobart wondering exactly what happened, and concerned about John.

On the same Thursday I had a letter from Phillip Adams. Phil gave me advice on how to become a professional writer, and it was good advice. Establish a power base, he said; get a regular column in *Nation Review* or somewhere. And I read Phil's letter, and I thought about Owen, who had established such a power base and got no joy from it (his final column in *NR* made that very clear), and I knew that if I am ever to become what the world calls a writer I should be a writer like Owen

Webster, whom I did not admire, rather than a writer like Phillip Adams, whom I admire immensely, and here was Phil advising me to follow the kind of career that led to Owen's suicide. And on the same day there was Phil's signature on a letter in *NR* reproving John Hepworth for what John had said about Owen's death.

Do you wonder that I went to Hobart confused?

With the utmost respect to Phil and John, and to those who admired Owen, I do not wish to follow in their footsteps, even if I were capable of doing so, which I doubt. Not at all. My own footsteps are erratic enough, god knows, and outside fandom hardly anyone knows I exist, but I really prefer to muddle along in my own way. I confess that I would like the Big World to acknowledge my existence, but I don't lose much sleep worrying about it.

Anyway, there I am at Cremorne, watching the moon rise over Frederick Henry Bay, and reading Martin Boyd.

— (*Philosophical Gas* 31, July 1975)

Carolyn and Sandy were two good friends of John's who used to live in the same block of flats at Bundalohn Court, St Kilda in the late 60s, and Carolyn became a special friend during a couple of periods of John's life.

The good thing about fanzines is that they are a very good substitute for diaries. We still have the photos that John took, looking out of the window of my parents' house at Cremorne. The view was spectacular, especially at night with the moon shining across the water.

The crashing of the *Lake Illawarra* into the Tasman Bridge had a tremendous effect on the 50,000 people living on the eastern shore (about one-third of Hobart's population). Without the bridge they had to drive north about forty miles or so to the next bridge, which was at Bridgewater, about thirty miles or so from Hobart, and then drive down to Hobart. From my parents' place, which was about 17 miles from the city, it was usually only a twenty-minute drive. My father was still working at Sandy Bay at that stage, and had to drive this extra distance twice a day to get to and from work, if he wanted to take his car to work. An emergency 24-hour ferry service was set up the moment the disaster occurred, from Bellerive, just opposite Hobart on the eastern shore, to the wharves at Hobart. The government was criticised at the time for the lack of a government hospital on the eastern shore and for not providing better river transport facilities. Later still, a Bailey bridge was built from Risdon (site of the first settlement in Hobart by John Bowen in 1803) to Goodwood, a couple of suburbs north of Hobart, which improved conditions for people on the eastern shore considerably. For those of you who might not know what a Bailey bridge is, it's the type the army use, presumably in wartime and on manoeuvres. It is fairly quickly assembled and reasonably stable, although one has to drive across it in a single lane and fairly slowly and carefully. I'm old enough, dare I say it, to remem-

ber a punt service which existed from Risdon to the same point at Goodwood during the 1950s. I can also actually remember the bridge which existed over the Derwent from Hobart to the eastern shore before the Tasman Bridge. It opened up the possibility of development on the eastern shore, which previously had not existed, as there was no bridge prior to this, except the one at Bridgewater. The Tasman Bridge was opened in 1965. The previous bridge was a floating arch bridge made of two very large pontoons, built during the Second World War and opened in 1943. It moved with the wind and the water, which meant that on a stormy day you could be driving across and have waves breaking over the sides of the bridge and feel the bridge moving! There was a small section near the Hobart side which could be raised, so that ships could go up or down the Derwent.

It took about two or three years for the Tasman Bridge to be repaired, by which time people had generally got used to the inconvenience. After the disaster, the government decided to install a series of safety lights, which would warn motorists of any problems on the bridge before they crossed it. The bridge was quite high, and when the *Lake Illawarra* collided with it, hitting one of the concrete pylons and dislodging several others, this caused a segment of the bridge to collapse into the water. This part of the story still makes me feel slightly uneasy travelling across that bridge even now. When the pylons collapsed, there were still cars travelling across the bridge. Several cars actually went into the water, with subsequent loss of life. However, there were a couple of cars hanging off the edge of the collapsed part and thankfully these people survived, the type of thing you often see in movies, but this was the real thing! After the disaster a number of residents moved from the eastern shore to the Hobart side of the river, and of course it was rather difficult for these people to get reasonable prices for their homes at the time. Apart from the current high rate of unemployment and the green issue of dams for hydro-electricity, this is one of the most significant things to affect Hobart during my lifetime.

There were a lot of things about the bridge disaster that I couldn't remember very clearly, so I went to the State Library and had a look at microfiches of newspapers from 1943, 1965 and 1975, all of which were very interesting. Because of the war, presumably, there wasn't an official opening of the Hobart Bridge in 1943. A couple of days after it was opened, early in December 1943, there was a tremendous storm which snapped a couple of bolts on the bridge, causing it to be closed for repairs until Christmas Day. In March 1965 the Tasman Bridge was opened by the Duke and Duchess of Gloucester with much pomp and

ceremony. I found it surprisingly upsetting looking at photos of the Tasman Bridge after the disaster on 6 January 1975. I say surprising, because I didn't expect it to have any effect almost twenty years later. The bridge actually took three years to repair, and I remember going over it for the first time afterwards and realising I would never feel safe on it again, which probably sounds ridiculous, but I know a lot of other Hobart people felt the same way.

The origins of the World Science Fiction Convention in Melbourne may be traced back to Hugo Gernsback, Jules Verne, Mary Shelley — indeed, should you be so inclined, to Lucian of Samosata or the Book of Job. But let's be reasonable about it and say that it's basically John Foyster's fault.

Ten years ago John decided that what Australian fandom needed was another convention. There had been at least six national conventions before then, but the most recent had been the 1958 convention in Melbourne. 'It's time!' John cried, or something to that effect. So in 1966 a motley bunch of dedicated fans braved the horrors of the Melbourne SF Club's primitive clubrooms — an ancient warehouse in Somerset Place, serviced by a hydraulic lift (the second-last in Melbourne) and infested by rats, Mervyn Binns and old movie posters — and proceeded to enjoy themselves hugely and make fannish history.

Out of that convention came a fanzine called *Australian Science Fiction Review*, and out of *ASFR* came more conventions, more clubs, more fanzines. . . . And here we are.

The first issue of *ASFR*, published in June 1966, two months after the convention, featured Brian Aldiss, Michael Moorcock, Langdon Jones, John Foyster, John Baxter, Lee Harding, Mervyn Binns, Stephen Murray-Smith, Burt Kaufman, Jim Ellis, Bob Sessions — even Bernard O'Dowd. Not a bad line-up for a first issue. Since then I've published so many fanzines I've lost count. *ASFR* became *Scythrop* in 1970. In 1968 Leigh Edmonds started ANZAPA and I discovered the joys of publishing apazines. My first apazine was *The New Millennial Harbinger*, which begat *Crog!*, which begat *Philosophical Gas*. Along the line there were *The Cosmic Dustbug*, *Revolving Tales of Sex and Super-Science*, *Bundalooh Quarterly*, *Lodbrug*, *Stunned Mullet* and others I've perhaps mercifully forgotten.

In 1966 there was need for a good critical fanzine devoted to sf. Pete Weston's *Zenith* (later *Speculation*) was about the only fanzine around in this field. In *ASFR* 14 (February 1968) Samuel R. Delany wrote: 'The Review — a number of people around here have started referring to it simply as The Review (indicating that there is no other, perhaps?) — has become one of the more intriguing voices in the dialogue of current sf.' And so it was.

One of *ASFR*'s early subscribers, a young schoolteacher named Bruce Gillespie, decided that he wanted to publish a fanzine something like *ASFR*, and as he was thinking about this I was thinking how much I would like to publish something not so closely bound to sf. Bruce's *SF Commentary* therefore picked up the loose ends of the conversation that *ASFR* was about to drop, and instantly became every bit as intriguing a voice in the sf dialogue as *ASFR* had ever been. Happily, Bruce's work continues, and *SFC* is a great fanzine.

Bruce and I have won a Dünar award each, and each been nominated three times for a Hugo. Both of us (for once I think I can speak on Bruce's behalf as well as my own) know that we owe what we have achieved, and we have achieved a lot, primarily to those friends of ours in fandom who have supported us by writing articles for us, sending us artwork (which we sometimes use: Australian fanzines are not renowned for their artwork, and given half a chance at this convention we'll tell you

why), buying subscriptions from us, and altogether making us feel that we really are as good as you tell us we are.

Philosophical Gas, despite my occasional outbursts to the contrary, continues to be very largely concerned with science fiction. I've tried to interest my morose readers in a better class of literature, such as the works of Thomas Love Peacock, Brian O'Nolan and Lennie Lower, but sf keeps on rearing its ugly head and I guess I just have to live with that if I want to go on publishing (and I do: I don't know why, but I do!) so *PG* must be regarded as a science fiction fanzine.

It is also, as John Clark up there in Queensland remarked a few issues back, my private diary. It isn't as intimate a diary as, say, Dick Geis's, but it's a diary and I like to think I am among friends when I sit down in front of a blank stencil and begin to recount the momentous and other events in my life.

Also, *Philosophical Gas* is about the only place where I write. I mean, write. Other people write on paper and get many cents per word for what they do. Between 8.30 a.m. and 4.51 p.m. I probably earn more than they do by correcting what other people have written on paper. But my writing is very much confined to what I put on stencil. Most of it, like it or not, goes straight onto that stencil without forethought, and that's what you read — unless I think better of it the next day. I also write letters. Robin Johnson will deny that, but it's true. Only last week I wrote three letters. (This week I'm having a rest.)

— (*Philosophical Gas* 32, August 1975)

Charles Race Thorson Mathews, foundation member of the Melbourne Science Fiction Club and Member of Parliament (let's get our priorities straight), introduced the 'notables' in the first official session of the 33rd World Science Fiction Convention. He omitted to mention that most of Melbourne's first fandom bought books and magazines from a shop that was part of the old building pulled down to make way for the Southern Cross Hotel, where he was speaking. He also omitted to mention me, but that's life. After the official opening all of the notables came down from the platform, except Mike Glicksohn and Rusty Hevelin. I went up to join them for a panel none of us looked forward to, on 'How to really enjoy yourself at this convention'. I met Bob Tucker on his way down from the platform. He looked awful serious. He said 'God, that's a cold audience!' Cheered me up no end.

Well, Mike and Rusty and I looked out on that cold audience, and we were worried. I could feel it. So did Mike and Rusty: listen to the tape and it shows in what they said. It wasn't so much the floodlights that blinded us and made it hard to see the people out there: it was mainly that we could see some of them and sense the rest and from what we saw and sensed we knew that here were five hundred or so alert, concerned, serious-constructive science fiction enthusiasts, along with a few score fans, and we were expected to tell them how to enjoy themselves! Good grief! — all that these people wanted, bless their eager young souls, was in-depth talk about Sexism in the Novels of Samuel R. Delany or Heinlein's Concept of the Cultural Elite or the Function of the Third Aorist Pluperfect in the Writing of A. E. Van Vogt — and we were not prepared for anything like that. We talked away about fandom and stuff, and everyone seemed awfully polite but bored. Then I started talking about Norman Gunston — and I got the first feedback anyone experienced at that convention. It was incredible. They came alive. They cheered and clapped. After all the foreign talk about 'fandom' and such, here was someone who spoke their language, even if it wasn't about science fiction. It was an incredible breakthrough. They relaxed. If Aussiecon was a success I claim some credit, for establishing a comfortable cultural atmosphere within an hour of the convention's beginning.

Ben Indick . . . asked me to write a great report on the 33rd



John Bangsund starring, and John Litchen directing, in the Canberra segment of the second Aussiecon promotion film.

World Science Fiction Convention — not just for him, of course, but for all seventeen of those wonderful people who read and enjoy my stuff. Well, let me tell you that the moment I arrived home from Melbourne I started writing my report. I wrote eight pages about the trip back from Melbourne. They're around somewhere. I never quite got to writing about what happened during the five or six days before that. I recall, however, that it was a most pleasant and hectic experience. Oh, and far too many people, too — I should mention that — over six hundred at times, so I'm told. 'It's an anomaly,' John Berry told me, that last night at the tomato sauce tasting, and he should know. Actually he could have told me anything and I would have burst into sobs as I did then, on hearing my favourite tomato sauce or favourite worldcon — I'm not sure which he meant, and it doesn't matter — described as an anomaly. That night, less than half an hour before I lurched into Leigh Edmonds' wretched pie-and-sauce party, I had taken my leave of Ursula, and that's when the convention ended. 'Come again,' I said to her. She said 'I'd love to,' that's all, and the lights changed, there on the corner of Bourke and Exhibition Streets, and I walked away from her to the Southern Cross mausoleum, to Edmonds' pie night, and John Berry sitting there talking about this anomaly, the last of the small worldcons.

About 10.30 p.m. on Thursday 21 August I dreamt a crazy dream about forty-seven American fans ringing our doorbell. Sally nudged me ever so gently and said 'There are forty-seven American fans at the door!' I woke up sufficiently to put on my VIP dressing-gown before going to the door and switching on a few lights. Blinking at the assembled throng, I remarked in my most hospitable manner 'Don't stand out there in the cold. Go home!' Ignoring this polite imperative, Susan Wood, John

Berry and Carey Handfield (heavily disguised in a Nebraska accent) slipped in before I could slam the door. I still don't know who the other forty-four were. Either I imagined them or they went home.

We sat around and talked and had a few drinks for a few hours, then went to bed. It was 11.30 p.m. and we'd all had enough. I slept fitfully. I kept on having nightmares about Susan Wood and John Berry being in our house, and forty-two faceless fans milling about our front garden, sullenly cheering the efforts of Jack Chalker and Bob Tucker to slip down our chimney simultaneously.

On Friday morning I swept all the bottles, food scraps, fanzines, cats etc. into a neat pile in the lounge room where Sally would find them without any trouble when she came home from work, and noticed while doing this a figure resembling Carey Handfield asleep in the room. I poured myself a stiff coffee. The figure roused itself. It now looked like Carey Handfield in pajamas, which further alarmed me. Fans don't wear pajamas. I poured myself another stiff coffee, and Carey came back into the room and asked if he could have some. 'Handfield,' I said, 'is it true that you are here in my lounge room in pajamas?' 'It is,' he said. 'Is it possible that Susan Wood and John Berry are somewhere in this house?' I asked politely. 'They are,' he said. I opened a bottle.

I forget exactly what we all did that day, apart from talking a lot and walking all over town looking for string, post offices and toy koalas and having lunch about 3 and driving up Mount Ainslie to look at Canberra. Ah, it's coming back to me now. We found this bloke up Mount Ainslie who'd locked his keys in his car, and I said I'd ring the NRMA when we got back down. I did. They asked me for his membership number, and I said he's locked his card in the car; they asked me for the car's registration number, and I said I'd forgotten to note it. The NRMA bloke sort of sighed and said he would send a service van up the mountain real soon. I suspect he didn't really believe me. If you're ever up Mount Ainslie and you see this bloke looking hungry and confused outside a brownish Ford Escort, would you mind telling him I rang the NRMA for him? Ta. About 5 we sent Carey out to the airport to pick up Mike Glicksohn and Sheryl Birkhead. I didn't believe he would come back with them, especially since I'd given him a map of Waukegan, Illinois, instead of Canberra, ACT, but he did. I keep on forgetting that Burley Griffin came from Illinois. Suddenly we had a house full of fans, and I felt a strange sense of *déjà vu*. (That's Latin for 'When does this convention end!')

About 9 we were all miles away in the depths of sinful New South Wales, eating unpronounceable Yugoslavian food at one of my favourite little restaurants in Queanbeyan. Ask John Berry what the stuff was called: he made a note of it. It wasn't *cevapcici*, alas, but at least John achieved one of his other ambitions: we had a 1966 Kaiser Stuhl J426 (and a few other distinguished Australian reds that just happened to be lying about the place). When we rolled home we found a note under the door that confirmed my fond imaginings of the previous evening. I quote: 'Ve was here but you was not, so it goes. We are at the Lytham Flag Inn. Ned Brooks, Chalker, Stu Tait, Joan Serrano, Jake Waldman.' We consulted maps of Canberra (and Waukegan, Toronto, Vancouver and Gaithersburg) and could find no place called Lytham Flag, or even Lytham, so we decided it was all a hoax and got down to some more serious talking and drinking.

Saturday morning: a bright, sunny, unseasonable Canberra day. Beside me on the back steps is John Berry. We are drinking Guinness and there is between us a profound sense of communion, of mutual fondness and respect, of wonder, of well-being and hangover. We do not speak. Behind us, on the porch, Carey and Mike are playing table tennis. Occasionally one of them steps in the cats' food and there is a polite, gentlemanly oath muttered. Sheryl, Susan and Sally are on the lawn before us,



Aussiecon I: a great convention!

(From left to right) Leigh Edmonds, Lee Harding, Sally Yeoland, John Bangsund.

playing with the cats and talking lady talk. If fandom did not exist I think to myself, it would need to be invented, if only for idyllic moments like this.

During the afternoon we all sat around listening to an incredible record sent me by Rune Forsgren, a Swedish fan. If you see this, Rune, we would like you to know that we loved Lundsten's *Nordisk Natursynfoni nr. 1*. Thank you for sending it to me, and I promise to write real soon now.

Then some of us went off and invaded the Private Cellar Club (the only liquor business ever to have its stock list in FAPA?), where I picked up a few dozen bottles to replenish my dwindling post-convention stores, and Mike failed to convince the cellar-master of the virtues of Canadian wines. Susan was back at 4 Hartley Street, writing her con report for *Locus*, and Sally was there too, wondering whether she was cooking enough beef stroganoff and kitsch lorraine (in France it's called quiche lorraine, I know, but we only have the Australian stuff) to feed seven. Mike, John, Sheryl and Carey agreed with me that we should drive up to Red Hill to look at Canberra from the back end, but the Renault (which has a mind of its own) developed a flat tyre, so we didn't.

We were just about to settle down to dinner when Robin Johnson, Fred Patten and Don Fitch arrived. Sally panicked, of course, but I knew we could rely on her lovely heavy hand. Most of the ten of us had second helpings. About 8 we were joined by Bobby Saxby and Rosemarie Bell. (Ms Saxby stood unsuccessfully for the local Assembly election some months ago, and

I'm sorry I didn't vote for her; the musty corridors of power could do with some fans of her capacity. Rosemarie is one of my trusty unsung collators; she learnt the art two years ago by helping Sally put the Campbell book together. While I supervised, yes.) Twelve isn't a large number for a party, but even so we split into at least three sub-parties before long, with sercon fandom in the living room, fannish fandom in the diningroom and dish-washing fandom in the kitchen. I dimly recall talking until all hours with Bobby and Rosemarie in my junk-room (or study, as I sometimes call it) long after the others had departed or gone to bed.

Sunday was sad. We didn't want all these wonderful people to go. There were hugs, kisses and wild promises all round ('See you in Kansas City!' for example), and Don Fitch appeared in the far distance just in time for all of us to wave to him. (He had stayed at the Canberra Youth Hostel. A man of great fortitude, is Don.) Then Carey, John and Susan set off for Sydney. Robin, Fred and Don for a quick tour of the Snowy Mountains, and Sheryl, Mike, Sally and I for the airport. I hate leave-takings, and shall gloss over our feelings at this time. Fred and Robin stayed with us that night, and we learnt a lot about all kinds of things we never knew we were interested in.

On Monday, confident that the last North Americans had dribbled out of Canberra, we found ourselves dead tired and attempting to play host to Grace and Don Lundry. A delightful couple they are, too, and we enjoyed their company. I forgive them readily if they did not enjoy ours: we were not exactly at

our sparkling best by then.

On Wednesday I came down again with the dreaded Canberra lurgi with galloping irritis. On Thursday Sally conducted her first marriage ceremony. It is now Sunday 31 August and the 33rd World Science Fiction Convention seems a long way in the past. If only I could get over the lingering suspicion that Don Fitch is still out there at the hostel, and that forty-seven American fans who missed the flight are going to ring our doorbell tonight.

— (*Stunned Mullet* 3, November 1975)

I suppose the thing I remember the most about the Worldcon was just before it, when Ursula Le Guin arrived in Australia. I remember being terribly nervous because she was coming to stay for a night on 1 August, after spending a day or so in Sydney with Nancy Keesing, and I had no idea what I was going to say to a famous author, let alone one I hadn't even read! She turned out to be an absolutely charming and delightful person. She gave us a book of her poetry entitled *Wild Angels*, inscribed 'For Sally and John most affectionately from the Instant Collapsing Guest'. Ursula was very tired when John picked her up from the airport, and at our place all she wanted to do was sleep, which she did all afternoon. What we didn't know at the time was how nervous she was about coming to the Worldcon.

John came down to Melbourne several days before the Worldcon and I flew down on Thursday, 14 August. We both stayed at the Southern Cross, probably the only time we have actually stayed at the same hotel a convention was being held at. I recall the introduction to the Worldcon on 14 August, with the music by Bruce Smeaton, which was quite spectacular. I found Ursula's guest of honour speech on Thursday night extremely impressive. It was typical of her that she thanked Robin and the con-committee 'and most of all John Bangsund, for thinking of this whole silly idea in the first place'. She talked about the walls being down in respect of people reading and accepting science fiction. However, she also cautioned that there were still lots of walls 'to be reduced to rubble'. She also discussed the scarcity of women in sf 'in the literature, among the fans, and most of all among the writers'. I have some recollection, but only just, of John being toastmaster at the Banquet and David Grigg being the awards committee. I have very vague memories of panels etc, but found it all very interesting meeting the large number of overseas fans at the Worldcon and afterwards.

The reason for my hazy memory is probably because at the beginning of August I had just changed jobs from the Immigration Department to Births, Deaths and Marriages and part of my job was to marry people. My new boss had married John and me in March 1974. It was the first time they had a female doing the job and I wanted to prove that I could do the job as well as any male.

This was also the first time I had actually experienced sexism in the public service. When I first started in April 1970, I was treated exactly the same as the males and promoted at exactly the same rate, so it came as a bit of a shock. The Registrar-General, who was a fellow in his early sixties, didn't want me to use the office car. Now this was rather ridiculous, as at least 50 per cent of the marriages were performed at locations away from the office, so of course I needed to use the car. The office cars were parked in the basement of the National Mutual building, and like most office basements there were pillars that one had to try to avoid. At that stage I'd had a licence for nearly eight years and had driven to Melbourne and Sydney quite frequently, so I wasn't inexperienced. However, he would only agree if I got one of the guys to go downstairs with me and let him guide me out of the carpark! Imagine getting away with something like that now! My male colleagues thought this was pretty ridiculous, and pretended to the Registrar-General that that's what they would do, but never did.

The job itself turned out to be the most interesting that I'd had up to that stage. Usually there were at least 6-10 marriages on Fridays and Saturdays, and the occasional one on a Sunday. As it got towards the warmer months of the year, people favoured the Botanical Gardens and various other garden sites and spots on the edge of Lake Burley Griffin. In those days you had to fill out a notice of intended marriage and lodge it at least a month before the date. Then the couple had to come into the office for a pre-marriage counselling session before the marriage took place. This was a fairly simple interview, with the idea of establishing that the intendeds were two consenting adults! I enjoyed the job at the time, not because I thought people should get married, but because I liked the contact with the public, instead of doing a desk job, as I had previously been doing. The only occasion I had a problem with this was when a fellow turned up for his wedding ceremony with a black eye and his relatives were concerned that the person who'd given him the black eye was going to turn up at the ceremony, which didn't happen.

On another occasion, two people from Immigration came in to be interviewed and were a bit alarmed to see me, as they were trying to keep their intended marriage a secret from their workmates and thought I might pass on the information. One of my ex-boyfriends turned up one day with his intended and got a surprise to see me. Another time, one of John's exes turned up with her intended to get married.

One of the more unusual marriage ceremonies I carried out was on board a ferry which used to go around the Lake for tourists. That was a very pleasant occasion, and as I didn't have any more

marriages to perform that evening, I joined in the celebrations. That was a very pleasant side of the job. Carrying out marriage ceremonies must be a bit like delivering babies. The people involved feel very happy and usually treat you like part of the family, so there were many occasions when I was asked to stay on and celebrate with them, which I usually did on a Friday night or at the weekend, if I didn't have any more ceremonies to carry out that day.

People weren't quite as innovative with their locations as they probably are now, but one day I had a call from someone wanting to know if I'd perform a ceremony on a hang-glider! We even got to the stage of naming a time and date, before the person on the other end of the phone took it a bit too far and I realised they'd been put up to it. I am not very keen about heights and am not sure whether I'd ever feel comfortable about flying in a small plane or a helicopter, let alone hang-gliding! A good friend of mine was quite aware of this and decided to test me out.

Registering births, deaths and marriages was relatively straightforward and so was producing certified copies of the registers except on the odd occasion when we all had great difficulty deciphering handwritten entries in some of the older registers. I can recall an older well-spoken lady ringing up and complaining to me at one stage because we'd got her occupation wrong. I can recall checking with a couple of colleagues before the copy of her marriage certificate went out. We all agreed that 'trained horse' must mean 'horse trainer', a rather odd occupation for a woman, but nevertheless these were liberated times. She was very indignant and didn't agree with us, because she was a trained nurse, a much more worthy occupation in her eyes! We also had the classic situation of the wrong body in the wrong place for a funeral. Nothing too drastic as far as we were concerned, with one body at Albury instead of Canberra and vice versa, and not our fault but the undertakers'. However, the relatives of both parties weren't too impressed about the whole thing, which I can quite understand.

When we moved to Adelaide, several of our friends were keen to have me marry them, but I realised that I didn't really want to apply to become a marriage celebrant again, as I would have had to do, as the celebrant bit stayed with the public service position. It was a novelty while I was doing it in Canberra, but not something that I wanted to continue doing.

Terry Hughes, over there in Arlington, Virginia, where it's all happening, wrote to me nearly eleven months ago and asked 'What's happening in Australia?' I think I am just about ready to answer his question now.

Until the first day of the present century 'Australia' was a geographical name only. Politically it meant nothing, for until 1 January 1901 there were six separate self-governing colonies

of Great Britain: New South Wales, Tasmania, South Australia, Victoria, Queensland and Western Australia (what we now call the Northern Territory was then part of South Australia). The Old Queen graciously consented to the federation of the six colonies as 'the Commonwealth of Australia'; the tariffs and customs duties between the colonies were abolished; the colonies became the states; and Australia, the very first new nation of the twentieth century, got its very first Governor-General. There was a Constitution, too, and two Federal Houses of Parliament. Her Majesty's powers in this new country, vested in the office of her representative, the Governor-General, were more or less understood, but to a large extent not exactly defined in the Constitution. Our Founding Fathers had rather more important things to think about at the time, so they didn't even bother to say things in the Constitution about the powers and functions of the Prime Minister and his Cabinet, for example; in fact, they weren't even mentioned.

On the other hand, the rights of the new states were pretty well provided for. The 'upper house', the new Australian Senate (modelled loosely on the British House of Lords), was to be 'the states' house'. Each state, regardless of population, size or anything else, was to have the same number of senators. In many ways this was quite an admirable idea: it would stop the big states of New South Wales and Victoria from imposing their will on poor little Tasmania and poor enormous Western Australia, for example. But it didn't work out that way. The Senate was also to be a 'house of review', where older and wiser heads could consider the latest nonsense sent up from the House of Representatives, especially in the light of the various states' interests and concerns, and send it back for amendment if it were unseemly. It didn't work out that way either. The Senate rapidly became a political House, where questions were decided not on how they might affect the states, but on simple party lines. And so the Senate became either a rubber stamp (if its party majority reflected the majority in the Reps) or an obstruction and a pain in the arse (if it didn't).

Enter the Australian Labor Party — and I'm not about to give you a history of the labour movement and the trade union movement in this country. If you are interested you can look it up. By 1949, that is just forty-nine years after Australia started, Labor had enjoyed sixteen years in office. During the late 1940s the Senate was absolutely dominated by Labor: only one senator was not a Labor representative. This was patently unfair, so (mainly due to the efforts of Arthur Calwell, Gough Whitlam's immediate predecessor as leader of the Parliamentary Labor Party) the proportional voting system was introduced for the Senate, resulting thereafter in a Senate that more nearly reflected in its composition the party preferences of the Australian electorate. . . .

Australian senators normally remain in office for six years. Every three years, usually when elections are held for the House of Representatives, half of the senators complete their term of office and must stand for re-election. At present there are 62 senators — ten each from the states and two (courtesy of the ALP, as of December 1975) from the Australian Capital Territory.

The Senate cannot initiate any money bills. It can return any bill to the House of Reps with requested amendments, but the Reps need not accept the amendments. It can reject bills. Since a bill must be agreed to by the Reps, the Senate and the Crown to become an Act, it becomes obvious that the passing of a bill by the Reps is just the first step. However, if the Senate rejects any bill twice within a stipulated time, the Prime Minister may ask the Crown (that is, the Governor-General) for a dissolution of both houses and a general election. If the new Senate still rejects that bill, the Prime Minister may call for a joint sitting of both houses.

In December 1972 a Labor government was elected, the first time since 1949. The first Whitlam Ministry consisted of Gough

Whitlam and Lance Barnard: between them they controlled every government department. People have written about President Kennedy's 'first hundred days', but in Australia we still remember, some of us, Gough Whitlam's first hundred hours. Among other things, many other things, in those first hundred hours Whitlam withdrew Australian troops from Vietnam, abolished conscription and granted recognition to Mao's China (a government that had been in power for 23 years, just like the Liberals in Australia). Those were heady days, especially for a Labor voter of long standing employed by the Parliamentary Reporting Service in Canberra, which is what I was then.

Sir Harold Wilson (or Mr Wilson, as I prefer to think of him) has recently published a book in which he comments on some peculiar aspects of Australian government. One of them is that the Labor members of Parliament — the Caucus — conduct a long and exhaustive ballot to decide which of them shall be Ministers. The Prime Minister then has to accept these members, like it or not, whether they have the ability or not, and make a Ministry out of them. (The Liberals and their friends just elect the man they want as PM and let him choose his own Ministers from members and senators.) I mention this to explain the reference to 'the first Whitlam Ministry'. Whitlam acted immediately, before Caucus could choose his Ministers for him, in those first few days, and there are probably some who still haven't forgiven him for that. Between 1972 and 1975 many Australians found things they could not forgive Gough Whitlam for, and the reason for this (I believe) is fairly simple. Australians generally do not have enough knowledge or experience to judge rightly whether an exceptional man is exceptionally good or exceptionally bad, so to be on the safe side they reject any exceptional man. Gough Whitlam is an exceptional man. Even those who admire him most wonder at times whether he knows what he is doing.

The Whitlam government had a good majority in the House of Representatives, but did not control the Senate, mainly because half of the senators still had three years to go, and were therefore not subject to the election. So, right from the start, the Whitlam government had a hostile Senate. In less than eighteen months the Opposition in the Senate had knocked back about half of Labor's bills. Billy Snedden, Leader of the Opposition in the Reps, was tempted to 'block supply' — that is, to have the Senate reject the government's Budget for 1974-75. Whitlam asked for a double dissolution, on this and other grounds, to which he was entitled, and the Governor-General (Sir John Kerr, an old-time Labor man, appointed by Whitlam) granted it.

So there was an election in May 1974. Again Labor won, but with a smaller majority, and still without control of the Senate (even though Labor received about 200,000 more votes than all the other parties combined in the Senate election). For the first time in Australia's history there was a joint sitting of the Senate and the House of Representatives. We saw it all on television (another first). Since Labor had more members overall than the Opposition, it won all the divisions and passed some important legislation.

Then it was back to normal. Billy Snedden was axed by his party, and Malcolm Fraser became the Liberal-Country Party coalition's sixth leader in seven years, and the Senate settled back to block as much of Whitlam's legislation as it could.

The new Senate in 1974 consisted of 29 Labor senators and 31 anti-Labor. Two of the anti-Labor senators were officially listed as 'independent', and one of them (Steele Hall, a former premier of South Australia and something of an idealist) often actually did act independently, which gave Labor something close, but not close enough, to an evenly divided Senate. Later, both of the 'independents' rejoined the Liberal Party. (If you wonder why I chose the expression 'anti-Labor', rather than go into the names and numbers of the other parties, that little note may serve as an explanation.)

Then a very eminent Labor senator, Lionel Murphy, was appointed to the High Court of Australia. And that's when things started going wrong.

When a senator resigns or dies, it is normal for the Premier of the state he represents to appoint someone of the same political party to fill his place. Tom Lewis, the Liberal Premier of New South Wales, appointed an 'independent' to fill Murphy's place. Now, let's give credit where credit's due: Cleaver Bunton, the man appointed by Lewis, proved to be quite independent. I think he was generally regarded around Parliament House as a man of great integrity, dignity, honour and a lot of other qualities, including courage and wisdom perhaps. But Lewis went against all convention in appointing him.

Then a Labor senator died — dear old Bertie Milliner. Not a great intellect, perhaps, but a good man, and a man highly regarded around Parliament House, with many friends. The Premier of Queensland, Johannes Bjelke-Petersen, with much glee appointed in his place a man named Albert ('call me Pat') Field. Albert Field presented himself as a half-wit and a dupe. You watched him on television, talking about his landlady, his favourite reading matter (westerns), his reception by Labor senators ('I dunno, I just followed the bloke with the mace. I didn't notice really'), his outspoken remarks about pornography, permissiveness and homosexuality (nothing in particular: he was just against them), and you thought he was an idiot. He wasn't. The man was at least twice as smart as he appeared to be on television, which made him about as smart as most members of Parliament. And he brought down the Whitlam government.

You ask me, Terry, what's happening in Australia. I can't answer that. But right now I can say that the Labor government, elected in May 1974, was brought down in 1975 by two men: Senator Albert Field, a small-time former union official with a big-time hate for the Australian Labor Party, and Premier Bjelke-Petersen of Queensland, a man who governs the second-biggest state of Australia on behalf of less than 30 per cent of his state's voters.

You will excuse me, perhaps, if I sound a little emotional about the whole business now and then. What I am writing about is the closest parallel in Australia's history to the assassination of John Kennedy, or of Salvador Allende.

(The only Australian politician I know of who has been nearly assassinated was Arthur Calwell. A great man, old Arthur, an outstanding minister in the Chifley government, leader of the ALP (for just a little too long) in his later years. When I met him in 1966 he was a foot taller than I expected, and he was grey. I can't quite describe it, but he looked as though he had theatrical makeup on, as though his face were made of ash. Not long after I met him, someone fired on him in Canberra. In his latter days he appeared in parliament on crutches.)

After Albert Field's appointment the numbers in the Senate were: Labor, 27; anti-Labor, 29; Independent, 4. Even allowing for the semi-independence of two of the independents, Labor was short of a majority in the Upper House.

The Budget was presented in 1975, in August, as usual. Unemployment was high, and the inflation rate was higher. Gough Whitlam can spout figures until the cows come home (he has a fabulous memory), and he was certainly concerned with inflation, but his first priority, his overriding concern, was with what people call 'quality of life' and the right of all Australians to enjoy it. This mid-term Budget was aimed at a delicate balance between the way the economy works and what Australians need and want and deserve. Short of a revolution, this is what a Labor Prime Minister must aim for, after all.

The 1975 Budget was not rejected by the Senate, but 'deferred'. For eight weeks or so the Senate kept on deferring consideration of the Budget, and gradually government departments started running out of money. That's why we public servants were getting a bit worried about this time last year.

Early on Remembrance Day, 11 November, Whitlam advised the leaders of the opposition parties that he would call a half-Senate election unless the Budget was passed. After a conference with his senior colleagues, Fraser told Whitlam that the Senate would not pass the bills. At 10 a.m. Whitlam made an appointment to see the Governor-General. The House of Representatives sat from 11.45 to 1 p.m. At 12.45 Fraser left the House and, unknown to Whitlam, who left five minutes later, went to Government House. When Whitlam arrived there was no sign of Fraser: even his car had been parked somewhere out of sight. At 1.15 Sir John Kerr handed Whitlam a letter in which he dismissed him and his government, and attached to the letter was a statement of his reasons for taking this action. Whitlam had no prior intimation of Kerr's intention. At 1.30 Kerr swore Fraser in as Prime Minister.

A few minutes later I came back from lunch and my boss said 'Whitlam's been sacked!' I didn't believe him, but someone had a radio, and we all listened to it, and it was all true. At 2.30 we heard Fraser announce the news officially to the House. There was a certain amount of debate on the subject, most of it sounding like the kind of debate you can hear any night in any good rowdy pub. Fraser moved that the House adjourn, and his motion was defeated, naturally. It was announced that the Senate had passed the Budget and adjourned. Whitlam moved that the House had no confidence in the caretaker government of the honourable member for Wannon (Fraser) and that the member for Werriwa (Whitlam) be called upon to form a government. The motion was passed. I said to my boss, almost beside myself at the brilliance, the sheer audacity of the thing, 'Did you hear that! The cunning bastard! It's incredible: the Budget is passed and Gough Whitlam is Prime Minister again!' My enthusiasm and sheer logic convinced him. I rang Sally and told her.

And I was absolutely wrong.

At 3.16 the Speaker of the House of Representatives asked for an appointment with Kerr, to advise him of the House's decision. He was told he could not see Kerr until 4.45. At 4.50, on my way home from work, I heard on the car radio the proclamation by the Governor-General's secretary from the steps of Parliament House that Parliament had been prorogued, and that Fraser had been appointed Prime Minister until elections could be held.

I still don't believe it. The government had not run out of money on 11 November. After the Budget was passed, the House called on the Governor-General to reinstate Whitlam as Prime Minister, and the House was ignored. The fact that I vote Labor, the fact that the most powerful interests in the country wanted Whitlam out and had convinced the public that he should go, the fact that Fraser won the election in December easily — these things ultimately are peripheral to me. So is the fact that with 53 per cent of the vote at the election, the anti-Labor coalition won 91 of the 127 seats in the House of Representatives. So is the fact that while Australia was distracted and virtually helpless to do anything about it, Indonesia invaded and annexed East Timor. All these things are worth discussing, and relevant, but not central to my concern here.

What happened on 11 November last year is pretty clear: the spirit of seventy-five years of political development in this country was set aside for the letter of the Constitution. Sir John Kerr was perfectly entitled to sack the elected government of Australia, just as the Senate was perfectly entitled to block supply and Bjelke-Peterson to appoint Albert Field. They did not break the rules — they merely used them, to break a government. Now that it has been done, it can be done again, and probably will be done again.

Sir John Kerr has said in recent weeks that he is not in favour of Australia becoming a republic (which is about as newsworthy as the Pope's opinion that the Vatican should remain Catholic), and that Australia will still be a monarchy a hundred years from now.

Does that surprise you at all? Do you really think of Australia as a monarchy? I will confess to you that until recently I had never thought of Australia as being a monarchy; I had thought of my country as a 'commonwealth' — which I considered to be for all practical purposes a republic, but with ceremonial royal trimmings. I had not read the Australian Constitution. The opening words of the Constitution are 'The legislative power of the Commonwealth shall be vested in a Federal Parliament, which shall consist of the Queen, a Senate and a House of Representatives'; the next few sentences have to do with the Governor-General or such person as the Queen may appoint to administer the Government of the Commonwealth; and clause 5 says quite clearly, without qualification, that 'The Governor-General may appoint such times for holding the sessions of Parliament as he thinks fit, and may also from time to time, by Proclamation or otherwise, prorogue the Parliament, and may in like manner dissolve the House of Representatives.'

What's happening in Australia, Terry, is that a lot of people are going back to read the rules, and thinking it's time some of them were changed. I don't care much whether Australia ever formally becomes a republic or not. I don't care much whether the ceremonial head of state is called Queen, Governor-General, Chairman, President or Grand Cham. But the executive head of state should be the person elected as such by the people.

When I published some remarks last December about the election, a few people disputed my use of the expression 'death of democracy', and I now retract that expression. Until we start electing our Governor-General, or until he is stripped of his executive powers, I will maintain that officially democracy never existed in Australia.

Some of us may live to thank Sir John Kerr for effectively beginning the overthrow of the Australian monarchy. But even if I live that long, I will never forgive him for dismissing one of the truly great leaders Australia has had, nor, by so doing, for wrecking the greatest program for social reform this country has ever embarked upon.

— (*Philosophical Gas* 35, November 1976)

I suppose what surprised me when rereading John's piece about 11 November 1975 is how much I had forgotten, particularly the time sequence of the day. I thought that Kerr's secretary read out the proclamation at lunchtime that day, but that was when the media first knew that Whitlam had been sacked. I'd forgotten just how much John and I were affected by all this at the time and how close we were to the whole thing.

I realise that nothing has been changed in the Constitution to stop it from happening again. I tend to agree with what John says and that is if we have to continue being a monarchy and having a Governor-General, then it should be someone who is elected by the public and not appointed by the Prime Minister.

AUSTRALIAN ELECTIONS 1975: KRUGER SWEEPS THE BOARD!

Kruger? Kruger is a young German short-haired pointer who lives with our friends Cathy and Robert up the road. He comes to our place to see his little friends Dylan and Donovan, and Dylan and Donovan go to his place to see him, and they lick each other all over and claw each other a bit, and it's all rather

touching actually, if a little obscene at times. I don't think cats and dogs were meant to be friends like that, but they're young yet, all of them.

On election night, about 9, Kruger and Cathy and Robert came to our place to watch the death of democracy, live, on television. Cathy had made a pavlova, and I had found an interesting sauternes to go with it, but basically we didn't feel much like eating, so it was a bit of a waste.

The first figures to go up on the board were from Casey, the outer-suburban Melbourne seat held by Race Mathews, and Robert and I looked at those figures and groaned. Early figures invariably favour Labor, and Race was way behind. We opened another bottle or three. By 9.30 it was pretty obvious that Labor was in real trouble, and Robert and I were groaning so much that Kruger started whining in sympathy. Sally and Cathy got sick of us and politics, and started playing scrabble. They set up the board on the floor, and got down there and flung four-letter words at each other and talked lady talk and so on, while we kept watching the board at the tally room and groaning and opening more bottles. At about 10.30 when Robert and I had decided to emigrate to South Africa (since they don't even pretend to fair elections there), Kruger became restless and wagged his tail a bit and yawned. His tail neatly wiped all the pieces from the scrabble board.

Shall I set up another game? said Cathy, without enthusiasm. No, said Sally. After a few more drinks we all parted company, Kruger still yawning and scratching his private appendages. I stayed up to the bitter end, watching Australia's finest hour expire, live, on television.

The last elected Liberal Prime Minister, John Gorton, was interviewed. The 'overwhelming response of the public' was mentioned. Said John Grey Gorton, independent candidate for the Senate: 'The overwhelming response of the public was wrong!' Jim Cairns, former Deputy Prime Minister, was interviewed. 'No government can remain in office that displeases the media,' he said. And 'We must be more radical.'

Noel Norton, one of the ABC's political experts engaged for the occasion, laid the wreath on International Women's Year. 'It is a sad thing,' he said, 'that women were contesting marginal seats.' And it is. There will be even fewer women in the next Australian Parliament than the last. Four, out of 189 members and senators. Now there are two, I think, maybe three — Labor lost two and gained one, so maybe it's three.

On the latest figures for the House of Representatives, the Liberal Party has 69 seats, the Labor Party has 33 seats, and the National Country Party 22 seats. Three seats are still undecided, but likely to go to the Liberals. An overwhelming victory for the Liberal/NCP coalition, yes. No doubt of that. Probably 94 seats to Labor's 33: an undisputed victory. And yet... Labor got 43 per cent of the votes, the Liberals got 42 per cent, the NCP 11 per cent. You do the arithmetic, and when you've done it, please tell me why Australia is called a democratic country, and why the election result is called a landslide victory for the coalition. Remember, please, that in Australia voting is compulsory.

When all is said, the important thing to remember about this election is that it was unnecessary. Any Australian government is most unpopular halfway through its three years in office; this is a fact of political life. Labor's loss was inevitable. Australia's loss is in-calculate. However contrived, the sacking of a Prime Minister by a Governor-General in this country has set us back 75 years. We are still a colony, after all this time. That might suit the media proprietors, but to me the whole business is tragic.

— (Stunned Mullet 4, January 1976)

Cathy and Robert were the best neighbours we've ever had. They were both from Adelaide and had spent some time living in South Africa, with

Robert and two other friends working as park rangers. They moved to Canberra in the early seventies, and we lived next door to them when we moved to Hartley Street, Turner in 1974. We had two Christmases with them. They invited us in for a crayfish and champagne breakfast in 1974 and then again in 1975, when John's mother was staying with us. The 1975 one was probably the best and I have to admit that I don't remember very much of the day after breakfast. I recall going back to our place to put a turkey in the oven, but I think John's mother supervised most of its cooking, as I was pretty inebriated by lunchtime. It was great fun, joined in by Kruger, Poxo (the father of Dylan) and our two cats. We knew at this stage that John had got a job with Rigby's and that we'd be moving sometime in January to Adelaide. Cathy and Robert stayed with us on one of their visits to Adelaide, and brought an injured wedge-tailed eagle, which they had found lying on the side of the road. They both had a great love of animals which they demonstrated in all sorts of practical ways.

23 February 1976... Some time about early November last year I wrote to Rigby Ltd, publishers, of Adelaide, applying for the position of paperback editor (as advertised in the local morning newspaper). Someone's lines got twisted. Before I knew quite what I'd done, or was doing, I was being interviewed by Mike Page, Rigby's publishing manager, for a position as his assistant and eventual successor. When he rang me at the Australian Government Publishing Service (Publishing Standards and Design Section), I thought for a few moments that he must be a salesman from Rigby's who happened to be passing through Canberra. Then his name rang a bell somewhere, I looked up back issues of the *Australian Bookseller* we had in the library, and I realized that he was the Michael F. Page, author of novels, award-winning editor of other books, and publishing manager at Rigby's. I forget how we arranged it, but somehow Sally got a clean suit and tie to me, and about lunchtime I met Mike on the steps of the National Library. He immediately discounted the idea that he should be interviewing me for the job of paperback editor; obviously, he said, whatever I had applied for, the firm must have felt I was worth interviewing for the job as his assistant (the advertisement for which I hadn't seen). We talked for an hour, and he said he'd let me know. A few days later he rang me at work and said that Rigby really needed someone with more experience than I have for that job, but that he could offer me a position as general editor. Before he could even name the miserable salary (by public service standards) I had accepted. And here I am. Editing Frank McManus, wondering what I'm doing here.

I hesitate to say this, knowing my audience, but... I like my job. Truly. It doesn't stop me wondering why I'm here, when I could be back in Canberra, unemployed because of Malcolm Fraser's policy of sacking public servants who aren't quite public servants (as I was), and some who are (as Sally was until last Friday). Maybe something deep down warned me that I would be one of the first victims of the so-called Liberal government (apart from Robert Heinlein, our new Prime Minister is the only person in a position of power I know of who has admitted to being a disciple of Ayn Rand; not that it mattered — he could have mentioned Ben Bova, A. J. Liebling or Thomas Love Peacock, for all the great Australian public cared) and prompted me to talk my way into a job in Adelaide, where it doesn't cost as much to be poor as it does in Canberra. I leave

such premonitional-adventitious-psychic speculation to my younger or more impressionable readers. If you reckon it was my stars did it, I don't believe you. I have no time for astrology. Nor does any other Tauran I know.

On Tuesday 6 January, a little after midday, I found myself in the little speck on the map of New South Wales called Grong Grong. This was fortunate, since I'd driven some miles out of my way to look at the place. Whatever Grong Grong may have been in the past or may become, it is enshrined in the memory of those aspiring writers who took part in Ursula Le Guin's writers' workshop before the 1975 World Science Fiction Convention in Melbourne, and I have no doubt, in Ursula's. I wasn't at the workshop, worse luck, but enough had been said about Grong Grong during the Worldcon to make me plan a round-about route to Adelaide that would allow me to make this pilgrimage.

It was worth it. Grong Grong is the quintessential no-account Australian country town. In its total lack of importance to anyone who lives anywhere else, Grong Grong stands as the symbol and archetype of science fiction fans and writers everywhere.

Because I'd gone some miles out of my way, and because the Falcon we'd foolishly bought kept on flooding its stupid carburettor, I spent the first night at Hay, instead of Tooleybuc. This was unfortunate. I'd drafted an article before I left Canberra called 'I stayed the night at Tooleybuc', and in all honesty I can't write it now. 'I stayed the night at Hay': no, it'll never sell. Damn that Ford!

About 4 p.m. on Wednesday 7 January I drove into Adelaide, and went straight to the Afion Private Hotel on South Terrace. I had driven 400-odd miles, and foolishly let my right arm hang out of the window most of that distance, so I was sunburnt from wrist to earlobe. I wish I could report that the cheerful atmosphere and old-world comfort of the Afion soon made me forget my agony; alas, the atmosphere was that of a home for wayward children, and the old-world comfort so old that only a Spartan would recognize it as comfort. I had a bed in my room, and a rickety table, and a hard chair, and a small wardrobe with a door that wouldn't stay shut (I believe these are specially manufactured for the poorer sort of hotels and lodging houses, certainly throughout Australia, possibly throughout the world, and are part of an evil conspiracy the nature of which even Dick Geis dares not guess at). To boil my electric jug I had to put it on a box on the chair under the light switch, where the only power point was. To fill the jug I had to walk down a flight of stairs, into the bathroom, and back, hoping no-one was looking, since there was probably a rule against it. There were rules against most things.

Marc Ortlieb, brave soul, visited me in my room; ask him what it was like. When he came I had to open the door leading to the balcony, because he doesn't smoke, and I do, and the only ventilation in that room was provided by a few slots in the wall, about ten feet up.

Before I saw my room the manager rattled off the Seventeen Basic Rules, took my rent-in-advance (vide Rule 2a ii et seq.) and handed me a letter from Robin Johnson. I read the letter, swore all over again that in future I would be kind and considerate to Robin, because he is one of the most kind and considerate men I have ever met, and right there, in that grotty private hotel, I felt a surge of love for him and for fandom in general that I have not felt for some time. Robin, I said aloud to those dismal blank walls, is a Good Fellow! Then a vague memory of a midsummer night's dream wafted into my head, and I giggled. Friar Puck! I said, tears of pain and merriment stinging my eyes. I was becoming delirious, what with the sunburn, the elation of being in Adelaide, the despondency of being in that hotel, the joy of being a fan, and the awareness that I hadn't had a drink all day.

I drove to Norwood post office, where I stood around for half an hour and eventually got a postal address. I came out, my arm throbbing in the 35-degree heat, and I saw a chemist's shop opposite me on one corner, and the Norwood pub on the other. I bought some ludicrous sunburn lotion at the former, and wearing it, spent an hour or so in the latter.

My first love in Adelaide, chronologically, this time round, is the Norwood pub. I walked in there with my arm (up to my earlobe) bathed in that white gunk, ordered a gin and tonic, and sat down, and no-one in the place gave any sign of giving a damn. I drank a silent toast to Adelaide, to Robin Johnson, and to Australians everywhere who don't give a damn what you look like in a pub.

By Friday I had leased a house in the hills (or Mount Lofty Ranges, if you want to be pedantic about it), something they said couldn't be done, but a small thing really, of little account, to we Sons of Analog and Coming Rulers of the Sevagram. The house I chose is a modest little place with three bedrooms, two bathrooms, a passable lounge and diningroom, and a 'family' room (ideal for one's sf collection). It's OK. Overpriced, of course, but it's OK. It's just about big enough for Sally and me, and the cats, and our books and things, and our few sticks of furniture. When we arranged our stuff about the place there was one wall left absolutely blank and wasted, except for the picture window in it, so we bought a piano to go there. Now it's just like home.

My main reason for wanting to get out of Canberra was that politics was corrupting me. I was so close to it, first at Hansard, then at AGPS, and apart from the public service and money, politics seems the main topic of conversation in Canberra anyway. Sally and I were becoming quite morbid about it, allowing it, despite ourselves, to take over our feeling and thinking. The sad thing is that idealism plays little part in politics, and even plain old common sense is a liability in the diabolical machine that is politics today. You can't trust the politicians, because they have suppressed their idealism and common sense to survive in the machine. You can't trust the newspapers, because their owners want to run the machine, and their employees prefer to sacrifice their feelings and principles rather than their pay-packets. (Can you blame them? I can't, because to some degree this is what I have done since I became a journalist. And I understand perfectly, now, why alcoholism is the journalist's major occupational hazard.)

— (*Philosophical Gas* 33, February 1976)

Both John and I had had enough of living in Canberra, because we'd become too closely and emotionally involved in politics, but also I wanted to live in a real city again, one with more character of being old and also near the sea. I was also sick of running into public servants, especially at parties, and all of us having very little else to talk about. So the Rigby job offered us a means of leaving Canberra. I wrote a number of letters to various organisations and the South Australian public service during December and early January. John left Canberra on 6 January, but I didn't leave until the last week of January. I can remember it all fairly clearly, because some clairvoyant had decided that Adelaide was going to be totally wiped out by a tidal wave on 19 January. It all sounds ridiculous now, and although we're not superstitious, we both wondered what we would do if there was a grain of truth in it. I can remember Don Dunstan, then South Australian

Premier, reassuring everyone and in fact going to Glenelg Beach on the fateful day, and everyone breathing a sigh of relief when Adelaide survived for another day, without any tidal wave!

John's mother came back to stay with me for a couple of days before I finally packed everything up in Canberra. Dylan and Donovan were sent off to a cattery for the last day, and Rosemarie had instructions from the vet to give them a tranquilliser before she put them on the plane to Adelaide. Most of our stuff was being sent by road transport interstate, but a few important items, like our wine cellar, were packed into the Renault 16. Now the only trouble with Renault 16s is that it doesn't take a great deal for them to sit rather low at the back. This is exactly what happened, and Mum and I left Canberra rather anxiously and slowly. I called into a service station just out of Canberra for some reason, and the bloke there thought that we were dangerously overloaded. I was faced with a dilemma — what to do with some of the cargo? I drove to Yass railway station, the closest station to Canberra, and decided that some of the wine and spirits were to be sent to John's sister Ruth and Barry at Heywood, a little country town in south-western Victoria. This seemed a sensible decision, as Mum and I were headed in their direction anyway. We got to Heywood late that night, some 400 miles, and told Ruth and Barry what we had done. Barry was delighted and said he would look after the boxes very carefully. I should have been suspicious then, but wasn't, and it was only on our next visit a few months later that we discovered that our wine and spirits had been keeping him going quite nicely thank you for the past few months!

The next day we started out for Adelaide, but only got as far as the local service station and had the tyres checked. Barry discovered the back driver's side wheel was very hot to touch. We could only suppose that the brake was staying on for some reason, causing the back wheel to overheat. We couldn't discover the reason for this, and in fact thought it had been fixed and set off. We got halfway to Mount Gambier, when I got out and checked the wheel and found it to be very hot indeed. I flagged down a passing motorist, who promised to contact the RAASA when he got to Mount Gambier and get them to send a towtruck out to us, which he did. Mum and I rode in the towtruck, while the poor Renault was towed to Mount Gambier. We spent a fair bit of the day waiting for the car to be fixed, still hoping to make it to Adelaide that night. They reassured us it had been fixed, so we took off again, this time getting as far as Penola, and discovering yet again that the wheel was still overheating. I was getting rather desperate by this stage, and called in to see the local RAASA fellow, who was a chap in his late sixties. He had never worked on a Renault before,

but did the same thing my father would have done, and that was to take the wheel apart and work out logically and painstakingly what the problem was. So much for the repairer at Mount Gambier, who obviously hadn't found out what the problem was. He pressed the brake drum and squirted me with water. 'That's what the problem is,' he said. It had poured with rain overnight and for some reason some water had got into the brake drum, causing the brake to stay on. Mum and I were very relieved by this stage and waved goodbye to the old chap, insisting he take \$5 for fixing it, which he didn't want to do.

We got into Adelaide extremely late that night, with no more unforeseen problems. John had sent a map of the Adelaide Hills to me, warning me not to make a right-hand turn into the steep driveway at Bridgewater, as we might get killed, and of course I did make a right-hand turn, much to his horror. I loved the house at Bridgewater, as it was surrounded by lots of bushland, rather like Ferntree Gully. We collected the cats the next day from the airport, and they took several hours to recover from their trip and the tranquillisers. They spent the next few days exploring their new environment and loving it, although I realise now that it's not a good thing to live with cats in an area with lots of wildlife. Something has to suffer, and it's usually the wildlife. They were only eighteen months old at that stage and very lively. It was at this stage that we started insisting they sleep inside at night, partly to protect them, but also to stop them inflicting damage on other cats and wildlife.

The thing that I hadn't foreseen was the effect that the fire alarms would have on me. I didn't think I'd been affected too much by the bushfires in Hobart in 1967, but obviously I had, because I had quite a fear of being caught in bushfires. Bridgewater was an idyllic place to live except for this. There had been some major fires in the area, and in fact in 1983, a few years later, a lot of that area was wiped out by bushfires.

I managed to get a temporary job with the State Public Service almost immediately. I'd given up hope of a Commonwealth position, because Fraser had frozen all public service positions in December. The job with the State Public Service involved shift work from 4.00 p.m. until 10.30 p.m., checking old land titles against computer printouts. All of the old Torrens titles were being transferred onto computer. I quite enjoyed the hours, as it meant I had most of the day to do other things. I also found out that I could probably get onto the day shift, which I did after I'd been there for a couple of months.

By May of that year, we discovered another hazard of living in the Adelaide Hills. Often when we were driving home from work, or had been out somewhere and were going home later in the

evening, we would discover, by the time we got to Eagle-on-the-Hill, about halfway up into the Hills, the whole area would be completely covered in a very dense fog. It was dense enough only to be able to see the tail lights of the car in front. Neither of us had had much experience in driving in heavy fog and found that we were rather unnerved by it. Also, running two cars was becoming too expensive and we knew we would have to sell the Falcon 500, which John had bought just before leaving Canberra.

We thought the best thing would be to look for a house close to the city and go from one extreme to the other. I'm not quite sure how we came to be looking at a house in Mile End, literally a mile west of the city centre. I think we were working towards that area, after we'd looked at a house in Thebarton, the next suburb, and decided that we couldn't live with very bright colours in every room. Most of the houses in Hughes Street, Mile End, were lovely old bluestone, very solid and cool during summer. The house we moved into had three bedrooms, a dining room, a lounge room and a kitchen. It had very high ceilings, and as we discovered later, rising damp in one of the rooms. The blocks were a decent size and there was a very large almond tree in the back garden. I can remember climbing up the almond tree at some stage during 1977, to pick almonds with Vonda McIntyre. Dylan and Donovan adjusted very quickly and discovered the joys of living in the inner city, as did I. I walked around the corner to Henley Beach Road and got a bus to work in Grenfell Street, all of five minutes, so I should really have walked, but I was not health conscious in those days and was several stone lighter.

At that stage I was working for the licensing area of Consumer Affairs, a very enjoyable job. We saw a lot of Gary Mason, who I think also worked for Consumer Affairs in those days. John went freelance with Rigby in July 1976. Our time in Adelaide was a very pleasant one. We had excellent neighbours on both sides, but on one side in particular, where there were three elderly sisters. The youngest, Flo, was 78. She looked after her two older sisters, one of whom was deaf and the other blind. She became absolutely devoted to Dylan and Donovan, would do anything for them and called them her 'boys'. When she did her shopping at the local corner shop she would always buy a packet of crisps for the cats, who loved them in those days. I discovered fairly early in their lives that any sort of crisp, Twisties or whatever, they would expect to be shared with them. Donovan was even known to help himself to an open packet.

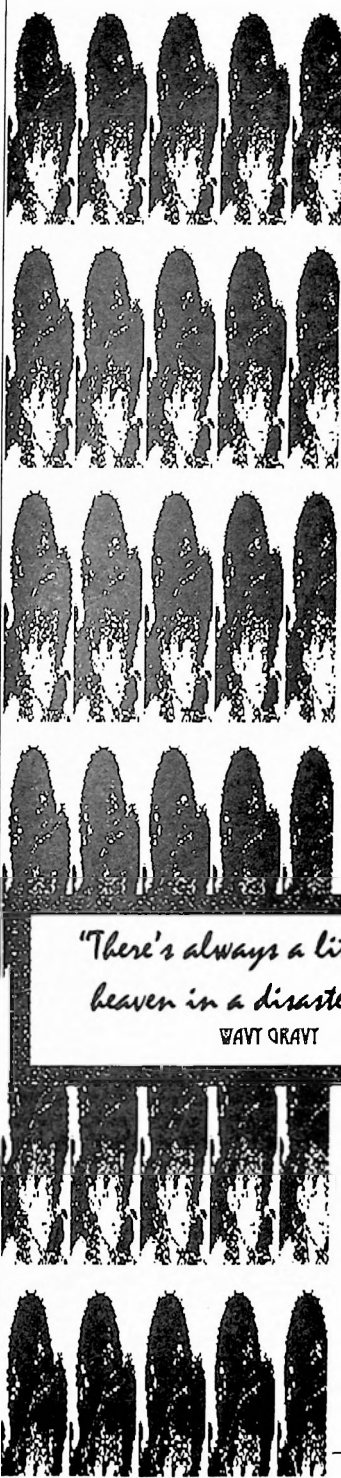
Just around the corner in Henley Beach Road was an op shop run by an Anglican priest and his wife. Their church was a block or two away from where we lived. Peter and his wife Barbara became good friends of ours after John ran into Peter in the op shop one day and got talking to him. We saw them on lots of occasions and I recall Peter quite happily playing poker with John's mother on one of her visits. I found out in later years that Peter and David Farrer, my priest at Christ Church for many years, but now at St Peter's, Eastern Hill, had gone through theological college together in Adelaide. This didn't surprise me, as they had rather similar ideas about things.

30 December 1976 . . . One night a few weeks ago we let Dylan watch an elderly television program called *Daktari*. You've probably seen it. This particular episode concerned a man-eating leopard called The Phantom. It was OK. The man-eating leopard didn't actually kill anyone during the program, but it was OK. About an hour after it ended, Dylan leapt from the sideboard onto my lap, more or less. The thing was that, sitting sort of sideways, as I was, with my naked legs clad in nothing but their native skin and hair (it's the heat you understand), I didn't have much lap to speak of, and Dylan skidded down my left leg, leaving claw marks most of the way. This was a little painful, yes, but I managed to hobble to the typewriter next day (thank you for asking). A few nights later Dylan attacked Sally's legs, from a similar position. It may be entirely coincidence, I know, but lately I've been keeping a wary eye on that black cat, because I'm almost convinced he thinks he's a man-eating leopard. If you think I'm exaggerating, ask anyone who has met him. He's an odd cat. If he were human, I'm sure he'd be organizing a World SF Convention. He's mad enough for anything.

The psychology of cats, as Marc Ortlieb will tell you (along with any other self-respecting cat-lover in our midst — and who can be truly human who has never been a cat-lover?), is, to say the least, of some passing interest. If you haven't had children, you could almost say they're like children. Take Donovan, for example. He's the ginger one, yes. Now Donovan is very different from Dylan. Dylan pretends to be affectionate, and he pretends to be a killer. Fair enough: he's both, up to a point. But Donovan doesn't pretend. Donovan is the one who hates visitors. He hides. This is because of his early upbringing, before we met him. He just hates people. Before we met him, someone had cut his whiskers — a terrible thing to do to a cat — and this meant that he was scared of people generally, and that he had no sense of balance. He kept on falling off things. But we noticed fairly early that Donovan was the one that went racing up trees after birds twice his size, and caught them. These days, of course, he's twice the size of the Canberra currawong, and we don't get birds like that at Mile End, but he's still a killer. Donovan is the one that goes after anything that moves here, not Dylan. And he's affectionate. If you can manage to tickle Donovan, he'll fall off whatever he was on, in sheer ecstasy. I wouldn't like to admit that Dylan is entirely Sally's cat, but if he is, then Donovan is mine.

— (*Philosophical Gas* 36, December 1976)

— Sally Yeoland, 1993–94, and John Bangsund, 1973–76



TERRY FROST at CONSTANTINOPE, Melbourne, Easter 1994

FOUR DAYS IN ANOTHER CON

(Reprinted from *The Great Animal Soup of Time*.)

The party's over, the analyses have begun — started perhaps by Nick Stathopoulos's heartfelt and uncomfortably honest award acceptance speech at Constantinople (Easter 1994) in which he vivisected that smug beast we all know as the Diltmar-As-Popularity-Award. William Gibson has returned to a strange and alien place called the world of entertainment, the other attendees have suffered the annual post-con diaspora and I have finally achieved the nirvana of eight hours' sleep in a row. Looking back, Constantinople doesn't seem quite real. People I thought didn't particularly like me acted in a benign and compassionate way, others acted in a manner confusing and pointless, several benighted souls expressed envy in my direction. It was — and there is no other way to say this — byzantine. The whole magilla was a space-time node of weirdness, ego-threatening plot twists, acts of awesome kindness, abruptly experienced wonder and reality shifts worthy of a Phil Dick novel. It brought out the best in some of us and for others it did the favour of pointing out the fact that they've been frigging around childishly with their skills, talents, time and insights far too long.

Ditmars

It's no secret that I was the punter's favourite to win the Best Fan Writer Award.

If the TAB had permitted, some people would've laid money on me in an odds-on Trifecta with Nick Stathopoulos and Leanne Frahm. (Personally, I would've backed me for the win with an insurance bet on Bruce Gillespie, who was something like a 5-to-1 second favourite at the time.)

On Awards Night, rather than hanging around in the heady, stud-starred world of lit fandom, Michelle Hallett and I had dinner with a bunch of media fen and a young BBS sysop with attitude at the Nyonya. The sysop opined that Gibson was a phoney because he knew diddly about computers and wrote *Neuromancer* on a typewriter. That was cool because fifteen years ago I used to say

dumb, defensive, ego-driven things like that. I argued that Gibson was a synthesist who Bamixed together pop culture, a cutting-edge sense of technological entropy and a beatnik ear for the euphony of the language into prose that somehow managed to cut through everyone's bullshit filter and mesmerise the reader. (I wasn't really that eloquent, but the gist is true to the conversation.)

It was during dinner that abdominal muscles directly south of my sternum began vibrating to a rapidly staccato beat and I found myself breathing off the top of my lungs. To combat this, I took deep shuddering breaths now and then and expelled them explosively to clear the miasma from my alveoli. The only time I had ever felt anything similar was at Syncon 83 when I rolled up at the con after living for six months in Dubbo NSW, went bugfuck-maniac for four

*"There's always a little bit of
heaven in a disaster area."*

WAVY GRAYT



"I know that cream floats, but
so does polystyrene."



days to escape the grim knowledge that when the gavel banged at the closing ceremony I'd have to go back to a reality where I was both broke and homeless. Strangely enough, I was nominated for two awards that year, too. Life sometimes dimly echoes itself — or maybe our perceptions just link random events in that way to help us understand them.

I took a seat at the award ceremony somewhere up near the back because that way people would applaud longer as I made my way to the podium. (It's an old Oscars trick that never fails. Tommy Lee Jones did it this time.) Michelle Hallett sat on my left, Leanne Frahm on my right and John Foyster behind me with Yvonne Rousseau, Julian Warner and Lucy Susse.

The lights dropped and without an overture Ian Gunn gave out a bunch of self-referential joke award teaspoons before the real stuff happened. Maybe nerves made me impatient of the same kind of facile New Wave Fan Boy belly laughs we've been getting since the eighties. Ian should get serious and simply Do the Next Thing. Maybe the spoons should have been given out after the real awards, as happened with the Gold Plated Caterpillars in a bygone age.

I never expected to get an ASFMA fan writer award, but injustice and inanity abound in awards, which is why I mocked the media equivalent of the Ditmars in my *Thyme* column. Awards are, in theory at least, a way of saying thanks and of encouraging excellence — so I reckoned that it should go to someone who (a) wanted it and (b) it would encourage to excellence. That's the name of the game. For me to win one would have been embarrassing and just wrong.

Came the Real Ditmars. By this time I had burned enough nervous energy to put me at the top of an emotional parabola. (Picture a Pegasus booster launching an American spy-sat.) I was in free fall and lost track of my feelings. It felt like shock and fear, but no real loathing.

I whispered one-liners to Leanne and Michelle *sotto voce* to somehow jump-start myself emotionally. It didn't work. I was hyper-aware of my surroundings but empty inside. Nick Stathopoulos won the Most Liked Pro Artist (sic) and gave his difficult but honest speech on how biased, manipu-

lable, parochial and plain dumb the Ditmars have become.

(Nick, thanks for your honesty and courage. Telling the truth to a crowd can get you into immense amounts of shit but you sleep better when you do. I'm ashamed to say that I'm part of that problem — I voted for you.)

Leanne won the award for Best Short Fiction and turned into a gibbering, blubbering, gasping and incredibly lovable heap. That helped thaw my emotions and I was proud to be sitting next to her.

Fan Writer. Marc Ortlieb, who was MCing, announced that Irwin Hirsh had voted for me because he wanted his Most Unsuccessful Ditmar Nominee crown back. (Irwin had told me this — several times — and I wished him luck in his efforts.) Michelle and Leanne clutched my upper arms and held me for one of two reasons: either to give me a physical manifestation of their moral support or to stop me from throttling Bruce if he won.

Two heartbeats before they announced the winner. I had a sudden knowledge that Bruce was going to get it. I was pretty spacey by this time and I felt like I could feel the time-lines calving and the alternative universe where I won went spinning off into a place that only Stephen Hawking could imagine or quantify.

Inevitably, Bruce's name was uttered and something clapped me on the shoulder. It was John Foyster's hand as he screamed 'Champion!' in my ear. Regardless of his intentions, I wanted to find out what he'd had for dinner the hard way. It was a sudden, second-long fury and Michelle, who'd been recently pumping iron, restrained me until it passed. After that I decided that I'd have a little dignity for the rest of the evening and eviscerating BNFs was for lesser creatures than I.

Bruce stepped up with visible reluctance and told everyone that he'd voted for me. His kindness floored me. People like Bruce and Leanne who have a seemingly innate sense of honour leave me pole-axed with admiration. Any sense of morality I have I acquired as an adult. To have it integral to one's

nature qualifies as a paranormal ability, on par with telepathy or having an eidetic memory or winning every time you play poker machines.

Marc asked the nominees to go up to collect their plaques and I did, somewhat surprised that my body was functioning enough to let me walk. My brain had me convinced I was invalid. Halfway to the stage Jan MacNally appeared at my side and took my hand. (She too was nominated.) That was another act of unexpected kindness that stunned me. We walked up there together and received the plaques.

Michelle and Leanne decided that we all needed a drink. In my experience, female intuition is particularly acute when it comes to the aptness of alcohol consumption. They have an instinctive knowledge about medicinal ethanol. But I decided that I'd congratulate both Bruce and George Turner (who did a terrific George Burns turn when receiving the Best Long Fiction for *The Destiny Makers*). I also wanted to tell Nick that I believed he did the right thing in his speech.

Before and after this spasm of handshaking and back-patting, I was hugged and kissed by ten or so attractive women, all of whom knew I responded well to that kind of stimulus. shook hands with male friends and hugged a few of them, too. Finally, after a length of time I couldn't really measure I collared Leanne and Michelle and said, 'Fuck this, let's get a drink.'

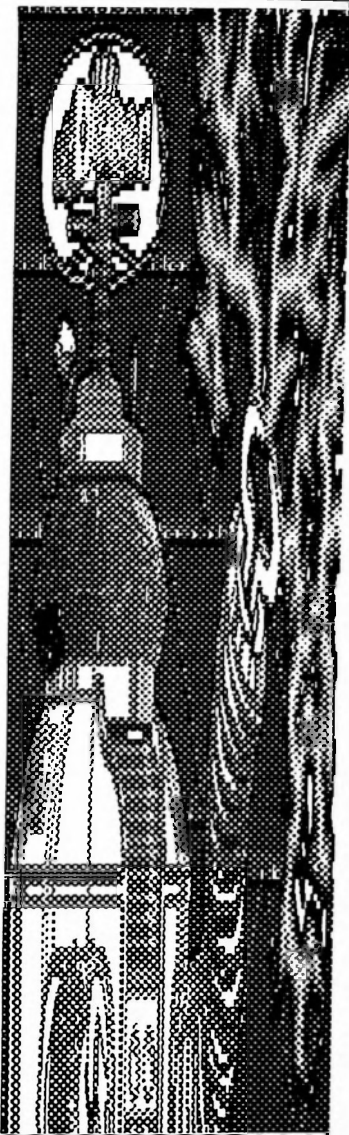
Leanne had been upstairs phoning her husband Kerry and both of them were crying about her win, thousands of kays apart. We went downstairs to the bar, saw a panorama of the kind of unlikely characters who frequent such places at 11 p.m. on a Sunday night and decided to commandeer a nest of couches in the lobby. Somewhere I had acquired a cyalume stick from Apollo Zammit. It glowed a kind of cherenkov radiation blue, so I took a slug of my gin & t and dropped the cylinder of chemical light into the drink. It reminded me of nights in the Manhattan nightclub in Canberra with Kate Burgess just after I left Karen. I'd dress in black, order a gin and tonic and sit under one of the UV lights so that the quinine in the tonic water would fluoresce a ghostly blue. But the icy gin suppressed the chemistry of the lightstick and it dimmed.

Songs began to run through my head. Isabella Rossellini singing 'Blue Velvet' very badly. Sondheim's 'I'm Still Here'. I told Leanne and Michelle and Lucy Zinkiewicz, who had joined us, that I was suddenly living in the movies. Puckish deities were channel-switching my life during the commercial breaks. From an Oscar ceremony on some Hollywood drama, I had zip-panned to a hotel lobby scene.

This whimsy fitted with my food like the dovetails in Japanese joinery. There's a point in *Two Weeks in Another Town* where the Kirk Douglas character has all his fears and nightmares come to life. He falls off the wagon, the friend who's giving him a second chance at a career has been poisoned against him by a scheming wife, he does the right thing by the Italian starlet he's attracted to and lets her go, his own nymphomaniacal ex-wife (played by Cyd Charisse) tries to seduce him with the sure knowledge that it'll drive him to suicide this time. None of that was happening to me, but the emotional context was scarily similar.

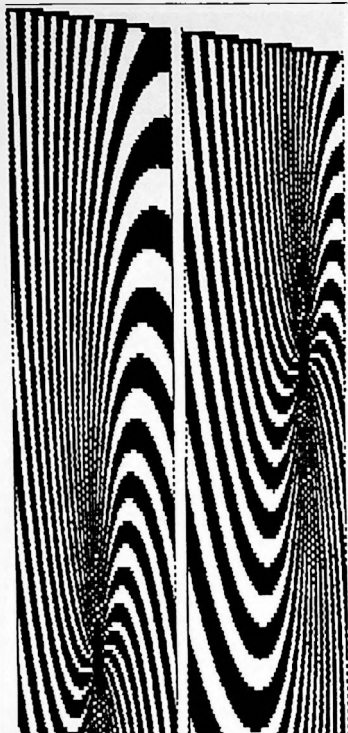
From that moment on at the con I was living inside movies. With every mood shift or unexpected happening the Halliwell data base behind my brow would chug and tell me what film I was in. Call it a temporarily altered state of consciousness brought on by tension, fatigue toxins, disappointment and dieting if you like, but I went with the flow, and it's a harmless fancy that helped me function for the rest of the con.

As we sat there and the second drink kicked in, I looked around the lobby and thought *Wild Palms*. James Belushi, Robert Loggia, Angie Dickinson and Nick Mancuso in the world's first cyberpunk miniseries. The hotel reminded me of the LA hotel where Bill Gibson did his cameo appearance in *Wild Palms*. All right! I grokked that for awhile and shared the insight with my companions. None of them had seen *WP*, of course, but they were kind. We shot



THEORY NUMBER ONE ON WHY CONSTANTINOPE WAS WAY WEIRD.

The convention was a near total reality breakdown. If reality is a consensual hallucination then the physical proximity of so many fans existing on so little sleep had changed the nature of what we see and seem in a radical manner.



THEORY NUMBER TWO ON WHY CONSTANTINOPLE WAS WAY WEIRD.

William Gibson's Guest of Honour speech. There was something about the lean, black garbed, question-mark shaped cyberculture icon-god with a William S. Burroughs drawl, painting word-images of life in show bis and the magic of making movies in Toronto that broke down the Mega-Meme of Reality, making its cell-membrane permeable to other, smaller memes. It took a while for the reality to change, hence the fact that the true weirdness kicked in on Sunday afternoon.

the breeze and I began to formulate my master plan for improving the Dilmars, upping the Intelligent Interest Quotient of con panels, restructuring the mindset of media fandom and working out ways of explaining to *Dr Who* fans how lame that series really was.

We chatted about people and places and changes in both. I explained that this convention was different for me. Somehow I was a role model for younger and greener fans. I had even (shock! horror! merdel) become something of a fannish celebrity. Clive James or someone like him once said that celebrity is when more people know you than you know. That's exactly what happened. I signed photographs, had paparazzi flashing at me unexpectedly (and not just the usual Richard Hryckiewicz sequence of click! flash! grin!) and somehow ended up talking about the con and Australian sf in general on 'Einstein Au Go Go' on 3RRR community radio. My interview went to air immediately after William Gibson and a dapper old guy called Robert Jewell who used to operate a Dalek for the BBC. Jenny Ackroyd heard it on her car radio and somehow managed not to prang. She said that it sounded good, and hubris enables me to believe that.

Through all this I was walking on unfamiliar ground. I know what happens to celebrities. They get really bad inflammation of the ego and demand that their bald spots be retouched out of every frame of the movie. But I wasn't at that stage yet. It was more the *what the fuck is happening here?* stage, which leads to something that felt very like low-level panic, which by the time of the awards had manifested as a full-blown anxiety crisis and reality rearrangement. I didn't know whether to laugh, cry, shit or spontaneously combust. Never before in my life had I experienced anywhere near this level of peer approval, and the paradigm shift was tearing me up. The notes on my Amstrad Notepad say *This is like riding a boogie board into a black hole*. I also found a note on the Amstrad from Michelle and Leanne, who said encouraging things that are now lost because the fuckin' machine dumped its memory a little while after I read it. (I've since acquired an additional memory card for the machine, which means that it won't be able to capriciously erase my hard-typed work or beautiful compliments from friends.)

Waitret, Please Waitret

Was it Sunday or Monday lunch time that Bruce, Elaine, Phil and I ate lunch at the Sun Po? Doesn't matter. As Captain Cloud said in *Get Crazy*: 'Time's a trip, man.'

The scene is this: a hole-in-the-wall Chinese chop shop in Russell Street. Napalm ducks in the window, one of these really big Chinese Calendars on the walls, formica tables for around 20 patrons, and a slight scent of joss-sticks coming from the back room. Melbourne's full of such places. You can't throw a one-liner near Little Bourke Street without someone in one of these places laughing at it.

We saunter into the Sun Po and I think to myself, Oh, yeah, there's Kinky Friedman. No big shock, no surprise. It fits with the flow of events that weekend. For half the con I've been telling people that my two current role models are Kramer from *Seinfeld* and Kinky Friedman, songwriter, singer, crime novelist and former leader of the Texas Jewboys. The guy who wrote 'Asshole from El Paso', 'They Ain't Makin' Jews Like Jesus Any More' and 'Get The Biscuits from the Oven and Your Buns in the Bed'. The only man in the world with brontosaurus-foreskin cowboy boots.

So we stroll past the moustached guy with the smashed budgie on the side of his stetson and sit down. I don't know if Bruce knows that the Kinkster's there, but I'm not going to be so uncool as to drool, go wow! or even talk loudly enough to let Bruce and Elaine know that I'm totally blown away by sitting a metre away from one of my great idols of the moment. I try to figure out if there's a bookshop that has the *Kinky Friedman Omnibus* near by, decide there isn't, and take that disappointment philosophically.

I order a seafood combination soup (which was good) and halfway through lunch, Elaine says quietly, 'Is that Kinky Friedman?' Bruce stays cooler than I did and tells her it is. Soon after (but not before Elaine broke the code of silence) the Kinkster leaves. Phil smiles and nods a lot, grokking the vibes in a bright-eyed Phil kinda way. I decide that the whole Constantinople thing is a strange and wondrous computer game scenario that someone's running on

me and the Sun Po instantly becomes an important Melbourne landmark for me. Rather like the uppermost level of the fire stairs at the Victoria Hotel where I once schutuppied someone comely after slipping out of the Friday night cocktail party at a convention.

— Terry Frost, May 1994

TERRY FROST at THYLAACON, Hobart, 10–12 June 1995



(From *Minezine Flashback*, No. 3, September 1995.)

In olden days when it was still considered politically correct to bugger cabin boys on long sea cruises, Tasmania was thought to be the home of headless anthropophagi. In other words, cannibals with mouths in their stomachs. I didn't happen to see any of them while I was in Van Diemen's Land, more's the pity. I was also on the lookout for that other renowned attribute of Apple Islanders: serious long-term inbreeding. With the exception of a singularly gene-kinked stall-holder at Salamanca Market, everyone I saw in Tasmania looked like they came from a diverse gene pool — even when they didn't act like it.

There were cannibals in Tasmania, however. Escaped convicts trying in vain to find civilisation down there had the disturbing habit of turning each other into Lean Cuisine when possums became scarce or elusive. Happily, the food situation there has been improved.

I was supposed to take notes on the trip to Thylacon. It was my first visit to Tasmania and I fully intended to document the experience with a clarity that won't otherwise be seen until Virtual Reality really gets its shit together. I took along my faithful Boswell, the little Amstrad Notepad computer. I even wrote a page of people-observation notes on it at Tullamarine Airport before leaving. But I think I saw the Notepad twice in Tasmania, once while hunting for Panadol's one morning and the second time while packing books into the backpack.

I was having too good a time to take notes. As a result of this, the con report is going to be a tad post-modernist, in that it's made up of vague memories and snippets (or — as Kate Langbroek and Fiona Scott-Norman say on 3RRR's 'F&K Show' — schnippets).

My Quote of the Con

Cary Lenehan, one of the co-chairs of the convention, has a 'No Republic' sticker on his car, and he warned us 'mainlanders' not to mention the 'R word' in Hobart. This kind of censorship could not go unchallenged, so by wryly crossing monarchism with Tasmania's anti-gay legislation, I cornered him by the registration desk and declaimed with puckish sincerity, 'Listen, Lenehan, Tasmania can't have it both ways. You're either for Queens or against them.'

He had the grace to smile reluctantly but was miffed when I showed him a local newspaper headline the next day that read 'Tasmania to Lead the Way on the Republic'. This banner put a lot of locals into paroxysms of anguish. It's hard to find an inhabited place that's geographically further away from England than Tasmania,





nor one spiritually closer to some long-lost turn-of-the-century dream of a green and pleasant land.

Stan and the Hadley's Hotel Bar

Kim Stanley 'Stan' Robinson was among the most approachable, cool and intelligent Guests of Honour we've had here. His presence highlighted the difference between the lit-fan and media-fan approach to GsoH.

He was more like a guy who writes than a celebrity. He and most of the rest of the con spent comfortable blocks of time sitting in the bar shooting the breeze about all manner of things. I got into a good conversation on movies with him (the five-minute terraformation of Mars in *Total Recall* amused us both) and we were there at one or two a.m. when small hordes of drunken Apple Islers tapped on the bar windows from outside and gestured incomprehensibly at us. Nick Stathopoulos walked up to the window and pretended to unzip his fly and flash his Kennett at them. There are times when, living in Melbourne, I miss that kind of Sydneyside sophistication.

Treating windows like the bars of a zoo is a weird Taswegian phenomenon, but not as weird as the couple who at three that morning did the dirty boogie on the church steps across the street for the delectation of late-night con-goers. It ain't the coolest behaviour known, but I have a sly admiration for their *sans souci* attitude to organised religion.

Hobart — the town

Salamanca Markets have got to be the best al fresco street-level capitalist phenomenon in Australia. Six hundred metres long with two aisles for most of the way and hundreds of refreshingly varied stalls selling records, edible fruit, leather, clothing, rubber stamps, fresh produce, hot doughnuts, fridge magnets, jewellery, software, ice cream, vegetarian pies, candles, yak socks, bookshelves, honey, lucky dips (don't try it — I did and got an old Ninja Turtle toy) and a million other things.

We covered the waterfront — Constitution Dock, where the Sydney-Hobart Yacht Race ends every year. Now I've seen both ends of it. The floating fish and chip shops, pale yellow starfish that are like an underwater rabbit plague in the area, old decrepit sailing ships and ramshackle lobster boats piled high with wicker pots. The *South Head*, an old Sydney-to-Manly ferry, sits there like a manifestation of a childhood memory. It looked just as large and exciting as it had when I rode it across the Sydney Heads in a rough sea thirty years ago. It's nice to know that it's still around. Too many significant artefacts of our childhoods vanish from reality.

I like Hobart. I'm not sure I could live there. They have only four tv stations, though Galaxy Cable is about to throw up a transmission tower on Mount Wellington any day now, the parochialism would make my brain itch after a while, and the cold weather would eventually become too depressing.

The Award

They changed the Ditmar Awards ceremony on me a lot. At first I thought the banquets and awards were on Saturday night, then found out they were on Sunday. The awards were going to be after the meal, then at the last minute they decided to have them first.

Before it all, I felt numb but not as numb as last year. Phil Włodarczyk and Frances Papworth looked after me as we sat at the back of the audience. This positioning was a none-too-subtle ploy to maximise the duration of applause if I happened to win. It worked admirably.

Wynne Whiteford got the Chandler Award, which was great. He's been writing since an age when Hitler was *Time's* Man of the Year and he's still doing it. He's been at a typewriter for most of the twentieth century, and yet on Monday night he spent the evening hunting the elusive fish-and-chip shop with a rowdy bunch of merry drunks many decades younger than himself. And he was one of us.

Alan Stewart got the Best Fanzine award for *Thyme*, then the Best Fan Writer nominations were announced. Phil and Frances supplied moral support on either



side of me. I sat there trying to sory the immediate future — to suss the way that the winds of probability were blowing. Came up with zip, unlike last year when I sensed Bruce's success a moment before the name was spoken. Then the amplified voice of Grant Stone mentioned my name and I felt a tumour in my psyche dissolve in an instant. A long-clenched muscle complex somewhere in my gizzards relaxed.

Amazingly, I could still walk, and did so up to the stage where Grant gave me the Lewis-Morley-designed art deco award on a base of Tasmanian blackwood. I used my one prepared line on the audience. 'I'm glad I got this before all my hair has turned grey, all my teeth have fallen out and before I need to shop for a penile implant', and it went over well. I thanked supportive friends including, without getting either metaphysical or maudlin, Roger Weddall, and then got the fuck outta Dodge. One humour-challenged wit suggested that I should still go for the penile implant and I bravely avoided scrutinising his hairline and suggesting a different kind of prosthetic procedure. Such was my bonhomie.

I didn't really feel relieved or exuberant. I felt a wide, all-encompassing rightness. By never telling people to vote for me, by using the award nominations as a talisman with which I worked to improve what I was doing, I felt that I'd put a little credibility back in the Ditmars after they'd been so sorely used in the 1980s. I felt a part of the history of Australian fandom, and belonging to it comforted me greatly.

The photo opportunity was an ordeal for some reason. I think I smiled for the cameras and camcorder. Mostly I felt a strange, not-at-all-unpleasant stunned sensation. We proceeded to the banquet hall and got stuck into the seafood chowder, the venison, cold cuts and other exotic victuals of surpassing quality. Après grub, when the Fan Fund Auctioning started, I slipped out to call Susan. She congratulated me and sounded immensely pleased to be over the post-Ditmar Award bouts of depression I'd suffered ever since she'd known me. Florence Nightingale she ain't. Then I called Leanne Frahm. She head the STD beeps on the phone and shrieked 'Tell me! Tell me! Tell me!'

'Sorry Leanne,' said I. 'You didn't win the Best Short Fiction. Greg Egan did.'

'Bugger that,' La Frahm retorted. 'Did you get one?'

'Well, yeah,' I admitted, then held the phone away from my ear as a telephonic shriek of delight beamed from the deep north to the dark south of the continent. We chatted until my pocket change ran out and I got back to the banquet as they finished selling stuff to the captive audience.

People have been extremely cool and kind about the win. Much as they've been knocked by some, the Ditmars are a great encouragement to us all. They aren't an end in themselves but they're more like that first cup of coffee in the morning that sharpens the perceptions, squirts a dose of optimism into the veins and, if only for a moment, makes us feel that anything's possible.

After the Awards, someone asked me if this meant that I was going to give up writing fanzines now that I'd eaten the carrot from the stick. I gave him my best Errol-Flynn-playing Robin-Hood mocking laugh and said no. Unlike professional pugilists who throw in the towel at the top, I'm going to keep going. I'm passionate about writing, even though I've only ever made \$37.50 out of it (plus \$1NZ) and if I don't let my fingers dance creatively over a keyboard at regular intervals or so I get morose, moody and cranky. Yep, words are the monkeys on my back but hey, how many addictions do you know that can get you awards?

One of my other fond and mellow memories of the convention was lounging around the large, comfortable hotel room one afternoon with Frances, vegging out and watching, of all things, *Endless Summer II* on the in-house video. There was something extremely zen and meditative about watching guys slide down the glassy jade slopes of Indonesian water, beach-bash with Nat Young in Queensland and skim the fast, bright surfaces of coral reefs in Fiji. Pure magic. It re-energised us for the rest of the convention.

Taswegian plug

I encourage all of you to get to a Tasmanian convention even if you have to start dog-paddling now. Hobart's as photogenic a town as we have in this brown, unpleasant land. The croissants are cheap and crusty there and you can even get a decent cup of coffee if you take reasonable precautions. There's a new crop of Tasmanian fans who want, need and deserve our encouragement, so build a few bridges. None of us have anything to lose by this.

— Terry Frost, September 1995

TWO GREAT FALLS

The falling

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I broke my leg on 14 October 1994. Many rumours have circulated among my students about my accident. Barry Oakley's piece in *The Australian Magazine* was not accurate. Add to that the general ignorance among the populace as to the time needed to recover from my sort of accident, and you have a situation that cries out to be set aright.

Before last October, I had never been a patient in a hospital. The only surgery I had ever undergone was my circumcision as a baby (unless I was born without a foreskin) and two small operations for the removal of cysts from my scalp in 1955 and 1990. Neither of these required a stay in hospital. Before last October, I could say that I had never broken or dislocated any bone in my body. As of last October, I had more than ten months of accumulated sick leave, so seldom had I been ill. When I left the Education Department in 1973, I had likewise a huge amount of unused sick leave. So, I was someone who needed to be reminded that he was not made of imperishable stuff; who needed to be brought low — literally as well as figuratively.

Catherine insists that my accident was the result of my working too hard. She is partly right. I had worked without a break for nearly a year on the night of my fall. I had worked by day and by night all through the previous summer, with only a few hours off for Xmas and New Year, doing the dreadful task of the Selection Officer for my course at Deakin by day and trying to finish the book *Emerald Blue* by night and at weekends. In October, I had just come through the hardest part of my year as a teacher of fiction writing — sitting over my students' assignments for thirty hours a week as well as taking sixteen hours of classes each week and doing my share of the never-ending administration at Toorak — but I hadn't unwound. I know now that I was overwound.

But that was only one contributing cause. The big event of our year in 1994, if I hadn't broken my leg, would have been the twins' leaving home for good. All year, they had been looking at houses to buy or rent but

postponing a decision. The crowdedness of our small house was becoming unbearable, not to mention the strain of finding dirty dishes on the sink at all hours and the feeling that we were being used up. I say this without meaning to speak against my twin sons. However, a time comes when the parents of any animal turn away from it. I used to watch with interest many a mother cat boxing its half-grown kitten over the ears when it was time for the young one to stop trying to suckle and to get out and catch its own mice. Catherine and I were tired of subsidising our sons and shopping for their food etc. etc. Well, the boys left in October 1994 — on the 11th, to be precise. They went to a rented house in Clifton Hill where they remain, happy and well satisfied and wondering why they didn't leave home sooner. Catherine and I were in a mood to celebrate. Here were these two empty rooms given back to us after we had lived like Japanese for so long, with our belongings piled up in cupboards . . .

I couldn't wait to take over one of the rooms and to move things into both. But I had to wait for a few days, so busy was I at work. The first time that I had for my takeover was Friday evening, the 14th of October. Ah, fateful evening!

I opened a six-pack of Coopers Sparkling Ale and got to work. I moved filing cabinets and their contents. I carried boxes of books and filing cabinets and their contents. I carried boxes of books and papers. I was unstoppable, it seemed. At about eleven-thirty, I was standing on a chair and pushing a row of books along a shelf near the ceiling of what had been for so long my son Martin's room and out of bounds to me but was now my new playground. Some of the books began to fall. Instinctively, I reached out to save the fuckers.

I do not know how I fell. I recall lying on the floor and knowing, as one knows things in dreams, that something was wrong with me. I recall hearing the last of a stubby of beer pouring onto the carpet from the ironing board near by. As I had fallen, I must have clipped the corner of the ironing board and caused the stubby to fall onto its side and to pour out its contents. I recall reaching up and standing upright the now empty stubby. I recall lying where I lay for a minute or two, knowing, as I just said, that this had been no ordinary fall. I recall using the chair to drag myself to my foot. I wrote *foot* because I had not as yet put any weight on my

left leg which, so I divined, was not quite right.

I recall standing up with my hands on the chair and putting weight on my left leg. I recall — and I'll never forget — my left leg buckling under me as though the bone from the knee to the ankle was a strap of licorice. I recall — let's be frank — hopping out to the toilet with the chair as a walking-frame and emptying my bowels from fear of what I done to myself. I recall hopping up to Catherine's and my bedroom and waking her up to tell her that I had injured my leg. I do not recall any pain. God is merciful. Injuries such as mine seem to be painless. You can say I was in shock, if you like.

I can't tell you all the details, or this letter would be ten pages long. Catherine phoned the Austin Hospital. The woman who answered the phone said (surprise! surprise!) that the casualty ward was very busy that night but that I had better come along and have my leg looked at. In the meanwhile, the woman said, we could do worse than call an ambulance. Ambulance drivers, so the woman said, were very good at estimating the severity of injuries. An ambulance driver could tell whether or not I had broken my leg.

I lay on the bed and pressed ice packs against my leg, which was swelling as if there was no tomorrow. (There wasn't!) After a while two friendly ambulance men came in and asked me to try to wriggle the toes of my fucked leg. I wriggled the little fellers OK, whereupon the ambulance men told me that I could not have broken my leg. I must have damaged my ligaments in some way. (Thanks, fellers!) But the men were considerate enough to tell us that if we weren't members of the Ambulance Scheme (and we weren't), a trip to the Austin Hospital (about three miles) would cost us more than \$400. So the men went away and my son Giles drove me in my car to the Austin. (Giles still lives with us. It was just as well that he didn't move out when the twins moved.)

When Giles and I arrived at the Austin, he had to park forty yards from the door of Casualty. I tried to hop from the car to the ward but soon tired myself. I sent him inside to ask for a wheelchair. He then wheeled me in to the front desk of Casualty where, in response to the perfunctory question from the woman at the desk, I uttered one of my best-ever lines. 'I've done a bit of damage to the ligaments of my left knee,' I said. (Thanks again, fellers!)

There were about half a dozen persons in the Casualty waiting room, and none of us was attended to until about four in the morning. (I had arrived soon after midnight.) Until I sent Giles home, he and I sat and watched a film called, I think, *The Creature from 50,000 Fathoms*. Two doctors were in attendance that night, but they were fully occupied with the people who kept arriving by ambulance. We in the waiting room, with our damaged ligaments and whatever, were left to watch old black-and-white movies.

I was sent for an X-ray at exactly six on the Saturday morning. This account of my troubles is not meant to suggest that the Austin Hospital is in any way remiss. As soon as the young doctor in Casualty saw the film of my X-ray, I was treated differently. No more *Creature from 50,000 Fathoms* for me! I had a cast put on my leg, which by then was about three times its normal size and generally blue-green in colour. I signed forms. I was looked

at by the Orthopaedic Registrar. I was admitted, for the first time in my life, to a hospital.

Here follow the chief events of the next few months.

On Tuesday 18 October, I was operated on. I was cut open in two places. My left leg, as you might expect, was slashed open, and my right hip was exposed. Bone was scraped from my hip and used to replace the top corner of my left tibia, which I had neatly removed from its rightful position when I fell from the chair in the room that was formerly Martin's. The grafted bone was held in place by a screw, whose threaded part went into the surviving part of my upper tibia. A metal plate was placed vertically against the upper part of my tibia, and the screw just mentioned went through the upper part of the plate. Three other screws went through the lower part of the plate. At the time, I had no idea of the position or the purpose of all these screws and thingummies, but I have studied my X-rays on many occasions since, and I now know exactly what was done to me.

On Friday 21 October, when I should have been preparing to go home, I was discovered to have a clot in my fucked leg. I was then put onto a course of anti-coagulant medicine which I am still on.

On Sunday 30 October, I was discharged from hospital with my leg in a plaster from thigh to ankle. I was under strict instructions not to jolt the leg and not, for Christ's sake, to put any weight on it by pressing the foot to the floor. I had a pair of crutches for hopping around the house but I spent most of the next month lying in bed and watching the wattle-birds in the front garden. Well-meaning but ignorant persons had by now begun sending me cards. They were as ignorant about broken limbs as I had been before my fall. One of them urged me to write, write, write, while I was laid up. I couldn't even bring myself to read, read, read. I felt as though I was a different person. I felt as though I had to go far, far back to some earlier point in my life and start all over again. Oh, how strange and helpless and useless I felt! I even had a special chair for sitting in when I sat on the toilet. (In the hospital, in my worst days, the nurses had to lift me on and off the toilet seat!)

On 1 December, my plaster was removed and my leg was X-rayed. My surgeon said he was delighted with the X-ray but that I was to go home and not even touch my left foot to the ground until further notice.

My surgeon next saw me on 22 December. By then, I had begun physiotherapy. I should have mentioned just above that I had been expecting to be allowed to start walking as soon as my plaster had been removed on 1 December. Well, when they took the plaster off, I couldn't even bend my knee. When Giles drove me home that day, I couldn't even get my leg into the front seat of the car — I had to sit across the back seat as I had while my plaster was on. That's where the physiotherapist comes into the story. I began to see her as from when my plaster came off, and her exercises helped me to get the leg working again. Nobody knows what happens to a limb that has been out of use for two months unless it happens to them. Please God, forgive me for my careless disregard of my son Giles's troubles when he broke his arm in 1983. Now I know why he couldn't bend the bastard normally for weeks after he had his

plaster taken off — and I thought he was being a sook!

My surgeon, as I say, saw me on 22 December. Again, I was expecting him to allow me to resume a normal life, but all he did was to warn me and the physio that I was not to put any weight on the leg until mid-January. He believes that my sort of injury must be given three months and no less to heal. At the time, I was impatient with him, but now I bless him.

On Thursday 12 January, almost three calendar months after my fall, I began to put my foot to the ground while I used my crutches. At first, I was terrified of putting any weight on the leg that had four screws in it. Gradually I regained a little confidence.

On 13 January, with the encouragement of the physio, I began to walk on one crutch, putting about half my weight on the bad leg at each step. On the same day, I began to drive the car again — a strange feeling after having been a passenger for three months with Giles or Catherine at the wheel.

Today, the physio made me walk with one crutch held as though it's a walking stick — not under the shoulder but with the hand gripping the middle part. Next week I'm going to buy a stick for support. Then I'll throw away the crutches.

Next week also, I have an X-ray and visit my surgeon. He will either say he doesn't want to see me for months to come or tell me that I have to go back to hospital. I think the odds are much in favour of the former. The physio believes I'll be leading my old life in a few months. It seems too good to be true.

I'm due back at work in the first week of February, but I've still got five or six months of sick leave unused, and I feel as though I deserve a holiday after all that has happened to me.

I'm not a great admirer of doctors; I've resented the treatment that Catherine and our kids have received from many doctors in the past. I hate the airs that so many doctors give themselves. Having said that, I hope my tribute to my surgeon seems all the more fulsome. He introduced himself to me in hospital as Rick Cunningham. He is the only specialist I've ever heard of who charges the scheduled fee for consultations in his rooms. He has no airs about himself whatever, and yet I heard some of his colleagues gasping with admiration when they saw the X-ray of my leg at seven weeks. Roderick Cunningham, I salute you. Every day for the rest of my life, I'll remember you with gratitude.

(20 January 1995)

Through a false ceiling

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'Curiouser and curiouser' quoth the sainted Rev. Dodgson as he rolled a reefer. *The Metaphysical Review and Phonebook 19/20/21* landed with a foundation-jarring thud on the doormat the other day and in it was a letter from me. In that letter I was reporting that the reason I had time to write was that I was recovering from a back injury. In this letter I am reporting that the reason I have time to write this letter is that I am recovering from a back injury. It would seem that your SmoFish influence extends even into the Twilight Zone. I cannot over-emphasise that taking such steps is not necessary! I just haven't got round to replying to No. 18, and now that it's too late, rest assured that *it will not happen again!*

So here I am up for the first time hurriedly replying before the sky falls on my head. I am listening to Brian Eno and Harold Budd *Taking Tiger Mountain* and learning Windows, Word and a new keyboard. You can probably hear the swearing from Collingwood.

* Even the normally unflappable Elaine was heard to utter the odd cuss word when learning Word. The trouble is that it seems to be the most logical and easily learned of all the word-processing/desktop-publishing programs, and it ain't.

Taking the contents of this issue as a whole, you

could say that being acquainted with BRG is a health hazard. *

I am only allowed to sit up for brief periods, and even when I get a back brace fitted it will probably be a while before I get this finished. How did the indomitable Donald end up in such a parlous state?

Has the Fairy Shop phenomenon entered your purview? They are retail establishments that celebrate all those aspects of the Simples perception of Faerie condemned by J. R. R. Tolkien in his essay 'On Fairy Stories'. They originate in that home of schlock and the fast buck, the US of A, and are springing up all over town like fly agarics under a pine tree. Last year I made a thirty-foot dragon for a hippy shop in Daylesford, and the word has got around that if you want That Sort of Thing in your shop, nursery or boudoir, I'm your person. I was installing a Mermaids' Cavern story-telling room at the rear of one of these places, and ended up feet first through a false ceiling into a loading dock onto a parked car. Eight metres and a very dented car later I was lying on a cold concrete floor. I contrived to get myself into the recovery position, waiting for a Good Samurai.

(Stand by for a brief period of temporal adjustment . . . beep beep twerp hummmmmmmmm. It is now nine weeks later: 13 October 1994, 2:47:34 p.m.)

One turned up eventually, and was quite surprised to

find me huddled in a corner being plaintive. He called an ambulance that, on arrival, immediately called another one: the intensive-care unit. Before my fall I had been spraying underwater scenes on the walls of the room, and as a result my skin was covered with blue and green overspray. This led the ambulance wallahs to believe I was about to stop breathing any minute.

After they had put me on oxygen laced with something narcotic they assembled a complicated frame around me and heighed me off to hospital. Max had arrived by this stage, having been alerted by Samaritans Inc., and was fussing over me in a very satisfactory fashion en route.

When we arrived at Casualty I was surrounded by a hoard of medicos who cut off all my clothes and proceeded to try out all their medical devices on me. I was plumbed with poppy juice and saline, covered with lots of sticky dots and plugged into more gauges, lights and screens than on the bridge of *Millennial Falcon*. After they had established that my deathly pallor was scenic paint, everything calmed down a bit. They disconnected lots of stuff and wheeled me into a cavernous room in which loomed what appeared to be a huge gleaming continuous conveyor-type pizza oven. This device, they informed me, would take pictures of thin slices of my spine to see if they could find any cats. I thought they would have had more luck looking on the bed at home, but they left me slowly being conveyed through the gizzards of this blot on the national balance of payments. While I was there they X-rayed me (and presumably any resident cats). I found myself in the care of a bevy of nurses when I emerged, and was spirited upstairs to the wards. There was a hiatus while the nurses waited for the doctors to decide What Was To Be Done.

By now the media had somehow found out, and I was having my fifteen minutes of fame. Typically, the news-rodents had got the wrong end of the stick, and had gotten the idea that I had fallen twenty metres into a concrete bear pit and thought they had found An Amazing Thing to spice up the nightly bland fare of genocide, exploitation, devastation, pollution, famine and hamburger ads. The hospital told them to bugger off, and they did so.

During all this, the pain was gradually succumbing to the pharmaceuticals, and the realisation was sinking in that I was probably not going to get up in a few days and get on with my life. Max, pregnancy and all, was being a bump of strength, but I could see that she was Very Worried. If there was one thing I have learned over the theatrical years, it is that the inevitable is after all inevitable, otherwise it would have been called something else.

Even adrift as I was in a field of poppies, I did not need the continuous admonition of the nurses 'not to move' to know that I was in serious trouble. Gangs of doctors kept coming around and asking me if I could move my legs or wriggle my toes, and seemed surprised that I could. The nurses hovered and, in between dabbing at the paint (they called me The Jolly Green Giant) refused to let me move.

Many visitors came, one of them a specialist who kept saying reassuring things like 'I really must look at your CAT scans' over his shoulder as he wandered past,

discussing his golf handicap. The nurses were magnificent, understaffed and harried by Kennett's morons. They actually did the doctoring, made most of the decisions, and were advocates for the patients on the odd moments when the doctors showed up.

(More temporal adjustment . . . twerple beep beep . . . Wednesday, 4 January 1995)

An enterprising pathologist found some blood in my urine, so I had to Keep Still except when I had to fill up little plastic jars. Filling those jars was about the most exciting thing that happened for a few days. I couldn't read, there was no radio, and I had suffered enough without forcing myself to watch television. Paul Voermans showed up with a Walkperson, and I was able to listen to my collection of *Coon Show* tapes which, allied to my pharmaceutically enhanced condition, helped enormously. Visitors came in droves, even my brother and sister-in-law. It's remarkable the speed of the various grapevines when misfortune strikes, and how quickly friends respond. I don't think I was very communicative — faces swam and that first few days blurred.

Slowly the nurses reduced the quantity of morphine in the drip and we were all quite surprised at how quickly the pain had subsided. Now it only hurt if I laughed or tried to do the long jump. The massive doses of drugs had an unfortunate effect on my bowels, and while we waited for the blood to remove itself from my urine, the nurses tried out all their battery of laxatives. Eventually the earth moved: almost as painful an event as the accident, and it seemed I was Going Home.

The specialist had finally got around to looking at my CAT scans and X-rays and had agreed with me that they looked a mess, and that time wounds all heels, and I had to keep still in bed for a long time, and I may as well do it at home as they needed the bed. (This was after he had told me I had two compressed fractures of the vertebrae, four simple fractures and several smashed ribs.) So the heroic Carey Handfield showed up in his posh car. Everyone agreed that a decrepit long-wheel-base Nissan Van was not a suitable ambulance. I was transported home with a collection of medical-looking furniture and admonitions from the nurses to Take It Easy.

In the first months of my convalescence I clocked up the Movieland record for hiring the greatest number of videos. I quickly got to hate Radio National. When you have to listen to it all day and night the welter of the unconsidered prattling of politically correct, flavour-of-the-month, insubstantial, banal poseurs slowly suffocates you with despair.

I am not a good patient and hate inactivity, as you know. It took every inch of my self control to buckle down and take the long view of my eventual recovery against the daily grind of inactivity. What saved my sanity was my wife Max who, despite her bump, was always supportive and cheerful, if less than enthusiastic about cooking, and my friends Paul and Carey. They went to the library, got me videos, bought me pizzas, played cards, chatted, fussed and worried. Thank you all.

(Continued on Page 83)

LIFE AND TIMES

**SHAYNE McCORMACK
HENRY GASKO
DAVE PIPER
JOHN BROSNAN
ROBERT DAY
MARK LAWSON
JEANNE MEALY
CASEY JUNE WOLF**

Life after Galaxy

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After I left Galaxy Book Shop I did a sort of reverse trip, fan activity wise. When I started I was a media fan (though I didn't call it that then, of course) who eventually mutated into a general fan who ended up making a living selling the stuff. After I left Galaxy I slipped away from general fandom (not that there was much activity in Sydney to slip away from) back into media fandom, which is much more active. But even that became dull. Media fandom has developed the much-discussed 'couch potato' syndrome, where all that is done at club meetings is to sit on a seat and have episodes shown to you while you pay for the privilege. Gradually I found myself not having much to do with any kind of fandom at all.

But I guess you can take the woman out of fandom, but it's harder to ignore the old fannish urges . . . they just lie there, sort of dormant. During my time at Galaxy I had made a number of good friends who didn't fit into neat fannish pigeonholes — they aren't active fans, but they have a lot of the characteristics of fans, in that they read and enjoy science fiction or fantasy and often watch sf on tv or in films. And we found we had a lot of other interests in common as well.

After a couple of years away from Galaxy I wanted to let some of them know I was still alive, and to see how they were, so I sent out the first issue of *So You Say*.

Without realising it, I was creating the old-style classic form of letterzine; they wrote back to me with comments on my letter; then they started commenting on each other's letters; and so it went. Some of them now write direct to each other, though they've never met. I didn't think of *SYS* as a zine in the beginning, but now I realise it is, and that it's the kind of zine I always wanted to produce. When I started out in Aus fandom I tried producing the kind of thing I thought other people would want to see (I suppose most younger fans want to impress other fans with their cleverness, as well as earn ego points) but they never really pleased me. Now I try for a happy compromise — I do what I like and I try to do what my correspondents like as well. If it ever gets tedious or stops attracting responses, I'll quit. And right now it's just the size I can afford — I send out only about 25 copies.

* I feel privileged to have received *So You Say*. It sounds much like what *TMR* has turned into: letters surrounded by new material to spark off further letters of comment. The trouble with *SYS* is that I cannot discuss most the topics that interest the other correspondents. (I don't watch sf tv series, for instance.) Still, you sent me the latest issue. Shayne, and I'll try to find time to reply properly. *

As to what I've been doing otherwise — not much. After twelve very tiring years at Galaxy I allowed myself a couple of years of doing bugger all. I do temporary and casual works of various types to earn myself some income, but most of the time I laze around. I've been trying to write, but most of my writing has been directed towards media fanzines. If I ever do get published professionally, I don't think anybody will be more surprised than me.

I really didn't think you'd be interested in getting *So You Say*. My memories of you were of a very literary, erudite young man more interested in discussing the works of Philip K. Dick than chatting about the latest film or computer problems or the other sorts of stuff I talk about.

(28 February 1994)

* Surely I was never like that! These days I'm a jaded middle-aged man, content to grab the time to get back to any fannish or creative activity at all. *

Life in the country

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The pseudo-country lifestyle on our twenty acres goes on fairly happily. We have a big wooden house that sits on top of a hill overlooking the Upper Plenty Valley. A friend once described it as 'living in a ski chalet'. That was both its good and bad points, of course. Not that we get much snow, and the views are fantastic. However, we also get phenomenal winds from the north. The first week here, the roof of our water tank blew off; we were out there at 2 a.m. with Judy spread-eagled on the top to keep the corrugated iron down, while I threw rocks up from down below. Fortunately George from next door came over to lend a hand.

We now have two cows, three horses, fifteen chickens, and about 100 fruit trees scattered around the paddock. We also have an in-house menagerie of one dog, one cat, thirteen fish and four guinea pigs. On the good days, it's magnificent being outside with the sun shining and the countryside all around. On other days, there's the hour-long drive to and from the city, feeding the animals in the rain and generally trying to find time to combine about three lifestyles into one.

Judy has been having an up-and-down year. She finally left Prahran after driving down there twice a week for the past five years. She eventually started an after-school maths tuition program called Kumon (it's Japanese), as well as working one and a half days at the Shire of Diamond Valley, and working two half-days a week as an Infant Welfare Sister at a chemist's in Mill Park.

The kids are both fine. Emily is now ten and Anne is nearly eight. They both go to the local primary school, which is a two-room school that escaped the recent cuts — its numbers are actually increasing because a lot of parents bring their kids from the nearby big town of Wallan. They both have very busy schedules; Emily is into riding, taekwon do and dancing. Anne does taekwon do, takes guitar lessons and is in the Australian Girls Choir. Mum and Dad do a lot of driving.

That's about all that's new. We are both concentrating on surviving the next few years, and then getting back out into the world a bit more when the girls are older. At the moment, the most exciting parts of our social life are the odd Disney film and dinner at Pizza Hut.

And reading, of course. I have an hour each Wednesday in Rosanna while Anne goes to choir practice, and have been going to the local library, much as I used to do as a kid while my mother did the grocery shopping. I have been trying to catch up on the science fiction and horror scene that has passed by me in the last ten years. But there seems to be very little that's worth reading. The stacks seem to consist of the multi-volume tales of

magic in pseudo-medieval lands. Ho hum. Word processors have a lot to answer for. The books I've enjoyed most, in fact, have been Emily's juveniles, by people such as Robert Westall, Nicholas Fisk, John Rowe Townsend, and a host of others. They are a sensible length and tend to get on with the story rather than laying on the padding in order to stretch an idea into a trilogy (or worse).

The horror scene is a little more promising, but blood and gore are too often substituted for true horror. Dan Simmons is very good (although his sf, especially *Hyperion*, is crap), and there is a lot of good short horror fiction about.

(3 September 1994)

* We've actually visited your place twice, and thought it would make a good sort of home if only it did not demand that the inhabitants drive a car. I'm not sure how both of you have eventually fared under The Cuts: the routinely idiotic policies brought in by the current government to drive capable and intelligent people out of good jobs. *

This year has been busy. Judy tore a ligament in her knee while doing taekwon do. She is off training for two months now.

The following week, Emily broke her arm. This is the third break she has had in about four years. The doctors said there was nothing wrong with her bones. She's just clumsy. Luckily it was the day after her dance exam and the last Pony Club meeting of the year. That has meant a couple of days at home after the break, and several trips to the hospital to get the plaster checked. In fact, she is onto her third plaster. The first one was too loose after the swelling went down, and then this week they decided to put on a short one. (The first one was fingers to upper arm; this one stops below her elbow.)

The cast should come off in the first week of January, so we'll have most of the holidays for activities. Last year, you might not have heard that she broke a bone in her upper arm just below the shoulder only a week before Christmas, and had to have it in a sling most of the holidays in Newcastle. (By the end of the holidays, she was swimming with her sling.)

Otherwise we are all fine. Anne has just finished a year with the Australian Girls Choir. The last bit was a concert in front of about 3000 people at the Melbourne Concert Hall. She loves to sing, and spends most of the time listening to Golden Oldies from the sixties. She knows them almost as well as I do, and I was raised with them. She is also studying guitar with one of the teachers at her school, who insists on teaching them all the old Creedence Clearwater Revival songs. Very strange, considering she is in her mid-twenties.

You may have heard that the Austin Hospital (where I am still working three days a week) and the Repatriation Hospital are going to be merged. That is the big news around here these days, and everyone is wondering how it will affect them. The last word was that the Repat site had been chosen as the site of the combined hospital. The two hospitals are supposed to merge officially on 1 July 1995. But it will be many years after that before we all move together onto one campus, especially if they have to rebuild all the Austin facilities over there.

Judy is also just going through an amalgamation, this time with local governments. Since she left Prahran early in 1974 she has been working 1.5 days a week at Diamond Valley as a coordinator of Infant Welfare there, as well as two half-days as an Infant Welfare sister at a chemist's in Mill park (having a little bit each way). Diamond Valley has just been split, half going to Heidelberg and half to Eltham. The official announcement was just made last week, and now comes the part where they start choosing which set of staff they want in each new council. Effectively they will have three sets of staff to choose from for two new councils. We can only wait to see what will happen.

Other than that, we are pretty well. It is very dry here, as everywhere. Our last rain was over a month ago. But we are busily pumping water up from the dam for our garden and fruit trees and they are all going well. Our main concern is to buy enough hay to feed our two horses and two cows next winter. There is very little hay around here, and prices are very high. But fortunately we don't need a lot. Many of the local farmers are talking about whether they will survive, which is quite surprising. Most people think the drought is just affecting the interior, but it is affecting everyone around here.

(19 December 1994)

* I'll leave you there, because I haven't heard how much your lives have eventually been disrupted by assorted Kennetisms. Presumably, you enjoyed the breaking of the drought during this year, and are well prepared if it settles in again this summer. *

Cheap at twice the price!

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Jeec!! I never thought I'd say it . . . but I'm having trouble typing this on me trusty Brother De Luxe portable manual after spending the last couple years bashing away at a piss'-oling computer. All day I work a program and I find it bloody boring, but I have to admit that the keyboard and this newfangled bloody thing called 'electricity' certainly make typing a lot easier than giving yourself a hernia bashing away at *this*. But I, and you'll must suffer for our art. Er.

An' I haven't even poured out me first Friday glass yet . . . 'ang about, I shall return . . . right . . . Camel over there, Jacob's Creek 1992 over there and (Doug Barbour would appreciate this) Count Basie and Zoot Sims flowing in like honey in my ears (copyright Eddie Condon circa sometime) from Over There.

Before I forget . . . Very relieved you've at last moved out of that PO box. Always worried me at how cramped

you both must have felt. . . bit like wearing very tight Y-fronts; does you no good! Something to do with your virility or somesuch. Course, never bothered me as I reckon I lost mine at age eight, when me eyes starting getting bad and I developed an incipient twitch in me right hand.

Say you break something, y'know? and it hurts. Some bright spark will always say something like 'Well, Fred down the road did the same thing and he's managing.' / say 'I don't bloody care; it's no damn condolence to me. It still hurts.' But, *but*, I had this mental picture of a shaggy dark-haired Wild Colonial Boy . . . and you've gone grey. Weee . . . great. I'd send you a picture of me but I realise that Elaine would only pine and dream of What Never Can Be!

Cath and the half-century of daughters (still at home) are fine. In ten days we celebrate 30 years of wedded bliss. I only did one bright thing in me life and that was conning Cath into marriage . . . but, only whisper it, she hasn't tumbled it yet!

Ah Nostalgia was rampant upon reading Phil's (it's Ben Webster and Art Tatum thrilling me now) lists. I'm with Gerald Murnane on the early fifties stuff . . . I love the stuff. I'm not too sure of the intrinsic worth of it. It may well be just nostalgia for a simpler time when I was young, but I do have very fond memories of the people he mentions. In fact, for a few years now I've been buying compilation tapes of early fifties records. The 78s I had have long gone. F'instance, when I'm in . . . er . . . me cups (to put it delicately) I always maintain that the greatest record ever was 'Hold My Hand' by Don Cornell that I play non-stop when I'm doing the washing up. Even when I'm sober I like it. Ah, Johnny Ray . . . I had a great record by him and the Four Lads called 'I'm Gonna Walk and Talk With My Lord' that was just . . . just . . . words fail me.

Anyway, you have some blanks in these lists, and although I am very far from sure, I do have a few suggestions. 1950's No. 1, I think, was probably by Billy Cotton and his band with Alan Breeze on vocal. No. 4 was by Frankie Laine. No, it wasn't. I'm mixing it up, I think. I'll have another glass of this trifflie Aussie wine. 1951's No. 5 was, I think, by Debbie Reynolds and Donald O'Connor.

(You know, if you ever see it, you *must* get yourself a copy of this Webster/Tatum record . . . it's wonderful. Pablo label, *The Tatum Group Masterpieces*, PBL 213. I unreservedly recommend it.

1954's No. 5: I'm far from certain, but I don't think the Four Lads recorded 'Heart of My Heart'. I reckon it was the Four Aces, one of my very favourite groups. They had a double-sided 78 of 'Garden in the Rain' and 'Tell Me Why', which was almost as good as the First Moon Landing. There were three versions of 'The High and the Mighty' in the US charts at the time of the film. They all included the whistling bit, and I think the biggest hit was by . . . um . . . a 'Leroy' something, but I just can't remember the surname. Colour me old and senile.

Now *listen*, I'm telling you, you *must* get this Tatum record. I've had it for years and every time I play it I'm transported. Honest, honest, it's great.

Mind you, so is this Aussie Shiraz Cabernet from

South-east Australia . . . only £4.35 a bottle. Cheap at twice the price!

(16 September 1994)

* One of the best things to happen this year was to be dragged out of bed at 8.30 one recent Saturday morning to hear on the phone the sylvan tones of Dave Piper from Ruislip. That voice I heard last sometime in January 1974. Dave had been getting stuck into the Jacob's Creek late at night, and began to wonder whatever happened to the next issue of *The Metaphysical Review*. I made my usual excuses, and vowed that if Dave Piper needed the next issue I would still have to produce it.

It's still very difficult to find information about music from the pre-rock 'n' roll 1950s. The jazz scene from that period is well documented, but not pop music. The hit parades had begun, but often they were only weekly Top Tens. There are no big glossy books about that period. Magic, a local AM radio station, attempts to fill in the gaps, but it only plays a random selection of records from the forties, fifties and early sixties. If only it would broadcast people talking about the late forties and early fifties! *

HAK novels and Ortygia tales

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I was very intrigued by your piece 'The Reunion'. Seeing as we're of the same generation, I could identify with the experience, though I'm not sure I'd like to encounter my own class of 1958 primary school colleagues, and I'm sure the experience would be equally unsettling for them to encounter me. I was surprised that your reunion went off so well with such a high turnout, and not only once but twice. I was under the impression that when people tried to arrange such reunions they invariably went terribly wrong. And as hard as I try, I can only remember a few faces and names from my class of 1958, which would have been at the Rosemary Primary School in Shenton Park, Perth. I clearly remember my two best friends of the time, the oddly named Richard Bone and Ross Albones (hard to forget names like that!), but I long ago lost touch with them. I still have occasional contact from a friend I knew from an earlier school, and we exchange letters maybe once every two or three years.

* Wal Robinson, main organiser of the reunion (and now a TMR contributor), learned a lot from going to a

badly organised reunion, that of Oakleigh High School some years ago — nobody wore name tags, and because the reunion attempted to cover the whole range of former students, few people recognised each other. At our Grade 6 Reunion, we could all be suitably astonished when we read each others' name tags.

The Reunion taught me that most people, even those who were ghastly when they were kids, improve with age. Childhood is an unfortunate event from which we can recover, sort of. *

It may appear that I produce books at an indecent rate, but it's an illusion. I'm the laziest writer I know. *Bedlam*, the last HAK novel, came out in 1992, and *The Opoponax Invasion* was published in November 1993. (A paperback version of the latter has just come out and a reviewer pointed out that I had spelt 'Opoponax' wrong, and he's right!) I'm just finishing a novel for Legend, Random House, called *Damned and Fancy*. It's a lightweight comic fantasy, the first of three. I've finished with Gollancz. Since they were taken over by Cassell they've been in an even bigger mess than before. Main problem is an inability, through lack of sales staff, to get their paperbacks into the bookshops. They keep saying things will change for the better but they never do. And recently Richard Evans, in charge of the sf list, was rushed to hospital a few weeks ago with a chest infection and suspected cirrhosis of the liver. . .

Beyond Bedlam came out to almost unanimous critical condemnation. It got a lot of publicity when it came out, mainly because its brief theatrical release coincided with the latest bout of moral panic whipped up by the tabloids and various MPs over horror videos, with the result that the censors withdrew its 18 video certificate. But despite all the publicity it only lasted a couple of weeks in the few cinemas it had been released in. One of the main problems with it is that there is no explanation at any point as to what is actually going on. I did point this out to the producer, Paul Brooks, when I first saw the movie, but he disagreed, and still does. But the critics, and no doubt the audiences, were left mystified — some critics presumed it was all supposed to be a series of dream sequences (only people who had read the book would be able to figure out what was supposed to be going on, but such people are in an extremely small minority).

Ironically, at the time of the film's release the leading lady, Elizabeth Hurley, was practically unknown, but shortly afterwards she leapt to fame as a result of the success of another film — *Four Weddings and a Funeral*. No, she wasn't in it but had the good fortune to be the girlfriend of its star, Hugh Grant. At that film's premier she arrived wearing — almost — a little black shredded dress held together — just — by large safety pins. This was splashed over every tabloid paper the next day and she hasn't been out of the papers ever since. We're hoping that she's still as famous when *Bedlam* comes out on video early next year (after some cuts were made the 18 rating was restored). I suggested that the publicity catchline be: 'Your chance to see Elizabeth Hurley fully dressed.'

Against my better judgement I'm involved with Paul Brooks on another film project. It's based on the first

HAK novel, *Slimer*, but has been changed to *Proteus* for obvious reasons. I've done three versions of the screenplay for Brooks, none of which I've received any money for so far. The deal is I get paid when and if the film starts shooting. Brooks says that shooting will begin in January next year, but is still not sure whether it will be shot here or in Canada. And as far as I know only one member of the cast has been decided upon — the lumbering Craig Fairbrass from *Beyond Bedlam* (as with *Bedlam*, *Proteus* is supposed to be another 'vehicle' for him, but in reality the perfect vehicle for Craig would be a forklift truck).

The latest stumbling block is a batch of suggestions for script changes that Brooks has just received from an American video company, Trimark, which is supposedly putting up \$500,000 of the budget. Therefore, says Brooks, we have to take these suggestions seriously, even though he agrees with me that most of them are both absurd and insane. Even though I'm going to be pissed off at not getting any money for all my work I'm betting that this film is not going to happen. I hope I'm wrong but...

As you can see, I'm still in Ortygia House. This flat, like its occupier, is rapidly disintegrating. The large curtains in the front room are particularly embarrassing — you can sit here by the computer and actually watch bits fall off them. I need more space, the furniture needs to be replaced, the kitchen is tiny, there is no central heating, no more space for bookshelves and no space for a washing machine (not that I could afford one). From your comment about the place in a previous letter of yours I see that you have this flat mixed up with the basement one in which Chris Priest, and later Lisa Tuttle, lived. Mine's on the ground floor above it and much smaller. Colin Greenland, who also lives on the same floor as me, lucked out when he arrived — his flat is twice the size of mine but he pays the same rent. Still, compared to the average rent for a self-contained flat in London mine is still ridiculously cheap and therefore I can't afford to move. I shouldn't moan (but I will).

(16 October 1994)

* I hope David Pringle doesn't get upset if I say the most interesting material I've read in *Interzone* were the fannish articles a year or so ago about the writers who've lived at Ortygia House and the incredibly ancient landlady who welcomed them. I've read since that the landlady died at the age of 100, but that the building is still standing and offering accommodation. The Barton Finks of Harrow are still living there. *



Train spotting in Austria

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This year, no Christmas Card of Comment, but a real, honest-to-God letter to bring you up to date with matters *chez* Day (not too many of those) and perhaps a few comments on your last few fanzines.

1994 was an interesting year. I was headhunted (within Ofwat, the water industry economic regulator I work for) to a new Quality Assurance Branch. The name is a bit of a misnomer, because it actually deals with data quality provided by water companies to Ofwat, rather than dealing with questions of quality assurance within the organisation itself. (That will come later — perhaps in the second half of 1995.) Data that Ofwat gets from companies is 'certified' by independent Reporters, normally attached to big engineering consultancy firms.

Our big project for 1994 was re-setting price limits (the originals having been set at the time the industry was privatised in near acrimony during direct negotiations between the companies and the government). It involved a lot of information from the companies over their business plans for the next ten years, and a lot of number-crunching from us. The end result was 31 new price limits announced on 28 July and an office full of exhausted people, who promptly scattered to all four corners of the globe on holiday. I waited a full three weeks before escaping for ten days to Austria.

My travel agent had secured me a ten-day rail pass that gave unlimited travel on the State railways for the sum of £180. This represented extremely good value for money. Austria has a reputation for being expensive, and I suppose the tourist traps can be. I chose to avoid most of them. I was having a railway enthusiast's holiday after all. In Hanover I did pull in the odd Imperial Palace, quaint town, Baroque church or cable-car ride. These tended to be the expensive bits. Travel in Vienna was cheap — 24-hour public transport pass for 25 schillings (about £2) and efficient. Food was excellent, and could be had inexpensively if you were careful. Beer was plentiful. Austrian television was a revelation: 1950s/early 1960s values, with a lot of UK and US material dubbed into German.

I spent a few days around Vienna, then moved to Innsbruck (where some unpleasant weather set in), and finally moved to the south — a town called Villach in Carinthia — for the last couple of days. Carinthia is near the Slovenian border; indeed, at one point I found myself marooned because of an unusual efficiency failure of the State railways, and occupied myself in killing a couple of hours by taking a walk in the general direction of the Slovenian border. I turned back with

this seemed to be getting a bit like something out of *The Ipersess File*.

The countryside was delightful, the people reasonably friendly, and the hotels comfortable. Perhaps the most gratifying thing was the way I kept on getting mistaken for a local (tourists kept on asking me directions). I am about six feet tall, quite heavily built, have a reddish beard, glasses and thinning hair in the fair-to-blond category. Also I did not carry a backpack or obvious camera bag (though I did take the photographic gear around in a large hold-all). I dislike the idea of going anywhere where my appearance might shout 'tourist', and it seems that I avoided that quite well. Speaking what turned out to be passable German helped, as well as the ability to pick up local recent variants fairly quickly.

I hope to go again, though not in 1995: Worldcon and all that. 1995 will also, doubtless, see me do another year as secretary to a local modelling club. I was landed with this job by two different people. They independently cornered me at last year's AGM and said 'You'd make a good secretary'. So I gave in to the inevitable. This has tied up a number of weekends taking the club's exhibition stand up and down the country.

I also anticipated doing another year as trade union representative for Ofwat. If I'm not very careful, this will probably also mean that I get wheedled into one of the Union magazines' Editorial Boards. All my years in fandom tend to give me an edge when it comes to setting out page layouts or producing a guest editorial or something similar. I'm sure Joe Nicholas has kept you up to speed on the progress-so-called of the government of John Major, currently running at 15 per cent in the popularity polls and falling. In a desperate attempt to dredge up money from somewhere to bribe the electorate with tax cuts before the next election, the government is selling off everything it can, including huge chunks of the Civil Service. There is the fascinating prospect of Inland Revenue personal tax records being held by a private company, for example. Now *there's* a risk to confidentiality if ever I heard one, but the government persists nonetheless. The private sector is assumed to be more efficient than the public sector, so despite all the evidence to the contrary, the government persists in trying to sell the one to the other, even being prepared to load the balance against the public sector when necessary to make sure that their friends win all the bids.

This runs so very close to corruption — public services being sold to companies that support the Conservative Party — that the whole thing cannot be long in blowing up in the government's face. It cannot be soon enough for me, as well as for many others. Of course, the government has divisions within its ranks over the question of greater European unity, and these divisions are being exploited by the Labor Party to try to bring down the government. We are not due for another general election until May 1997 at the latest. But it may not last that long. Let us hope . . .

* You could be in for a shock. Our 'Labor' government has since 1982 put into effect many of

the more Thatcherite policies that the previous Liberal (i.e. conservative) government had refrained from implementing. Under this 'Labor' government the income differences between the richest and poorest sections of the community have become very much greater than they were in the seventies. Pushed to the right, the conservative opposition will only be much worse when it achieves power, following the lead of the fascist policies of the current Victorian and Western Australian governments. Don't assume that the arrival of a Labor government in Britain will improve the situation. *

[Re TMR 19/20/21:] British fandom went through a film-making stage. A fan called John Collick (since vanished) produced a slide show illustrating one of Dave Langford's space opera pastiches *Sex Pirates of the Blood Asteroid* (about 1979-80). Later he was the force behind a Clint Eastwood spaghetti western pastiche at Mexican 2, coupled with a stop-frame horror short about a homicidal shirt filmed by John and Eve Harvey. The two films on one reel won a prize in a Leeds Film Festival when it was entered in passing. (The Harveys were driving back to London and giving Simon Ounsley a lift; they stopped on the way in Leeds, entered the film, and were as-tounded to be given an award.)

British fandom's film-making came to an end when Collick and Ounsley's next mega-production, *L'invasion des bollards énormes*, was stolen, together with the video record that contained the master tape. It was never recovered, and British fandom gave up in disgust (the way it does with all sorts of other things).

Have now fitted the battery to the car. And succeeded in getting it started. For a supposedly weatherproof Swedish product, my car seems very prone to under-bonnet condensation and damp. Despite the liberal use of moisture-repellant sprays, under particular conditions of dampness and temperature the thing will take three or four goes to wheeze into life, then stagger off on two or three cylinders until the engine gets warm enough to dry out, whereupon the rest of the engine cuts in with a punch . . . ah, the glories of an English winter! (Perhaps the Swedes only get cold *dry* winters, which could explain much.) I have this theory that Britain only gained an Empire because it was the only way to guarantee the hope of somewhere warm and dry to live. Of course, we had to overdo it.

I worry a lot about Barry Humphries. I agree with you, Bruce, that he is one of Australia's funniest men: certainly, in his earlier cartoon work; and I have never recovered from an early Dame Edna comment in Stratford-on-Avon, on seeing a Morris Traveller: 'Look, viewers — a half-timbered *car*.' Increasingly I worry that the Dame Edna persona is taking over Barry Humphries. Sir Les Patterson, the disgustingly funny Australian cultural attaché, has disappeared (I always thought that was far too much over the top until I saw the party the Australian High Commissioner threw, in all senses of the word, at Australia House in London when you won the America's Cup), and all we see now is a whining grotesque in ever more unbelievable situations. I have seen demonic possession and its name is Edna Everage.

I see from your response to Mae Strelkov that you haven't given up the idea of travel altogether. Glad to

hear it! I'm certain that the UK leg of the Gillespie/Cochrane World Tour could be made interesting. I cannot offer accommodation for the Midlands (though I'm sure I could find some) but I have a lot of practice at being Native Guide/Chauffeur.

In the days when I was more active in UK fandom than I am now, the only thing more worrying than being told 'Joe Nicholas hated your fanzine' was being told 'Joe Nicholas loved your fanzine'. I find it interesting that Joe has given up a lot of political activism to allow him time for other things. My experience in the trade union movement suggests that there are two sorts of trade unionists: those for whom activism is their hobby (it has much in common with that other hobby, fandom — a lot of people in it look the same as fans, for example), and those who didn't run fast enough when jobs were being handed out. I fall into the second category, though the UK political situation and polite demands from other people within my union keep threatening to drag me into the first.

I do get a little worried, though, that Joe considers the world his entertainment. I don't want to be entertained by the world. There are things and places I want to see so that I can learn about them, and I suppose learning is a form of entertainment for those who seek it voluntarily. What I cannot stomach, and which I suspect Joe couldn't if he stopped to think for a second, is wandering around flaunting, by my very presence, my status as a fortunate member of a technologically advanced western society.

By extension, I suppose I therefore enjoy sf as a speculation on the abilities and pitfalls that such a society might display and run into. I don't want sf to look back into the present; I want it to look ahead and throw up some markers as to what might be coming up, so that I am less likely to be surprised.

So when Arnold Schwarzenegger becomes World President, I'll be ready.

(1 January 1995)

* I don't have the stamina for a World Tour. Elaine, however, has, so you might yet see her in your area. People believe that I'm a Nice Person until they meet me, so I stay this side of the computer. *

* Elaine and I, both working at home, hold a permanent non-cleaning-up contest. I usually lose. My eyesight is very much better than hers at seeing dirt and dust. *

[Re. TMR 19/20/21:] It's quite all right to dream of me as a train robber. I'm flattered that anyone should dream of me at all, even in such a role. Others confess to nightmares about me or, worse, forgetting all about me.

You asked about my career. I recently qualified for long service leave at the *Financial Review* — 10 weeks for 10 years, and no, I haven't taken the leave. I'm J8 plus margin these days. Although the pay is comfortable, moving into a house, buying a second car to shuttle between station and home, and preparing for a baby — yes, one is due in five weeks — have pushed me into taking an immense amount of freelance work in order to pay for everything and maintain lifestyle. Like you, I have problems with my Visa Card.

The freelance work varies from interesting — I am correspondent for the London science magazine *Nature* and do a little work for Jane's Information Group — to tedious. In the next two weeks I have to write an 1800-word roundup of the management consulting industry in Australia. Sigh!

At the *Financial Review* itself, I'm on a section called 'surveys', which are those special multi-page reports you see occasionally in other papers. Again the work varies from interesting (shipping, sports marketing) to dull (quality management, leasing) and it's not the place any reporter who wants to further his career would go. It's a comedown from the time I wrote editorials, but I don't mind, as it gives me the flexibility to do freelance work, and my byline still appears quite frequently in the news section, mainly because the editors keep asking me if I have any stories to fill space.

I guess all the above means that my career is going well, at least to the extent that we are drifting forwards financially, rather than going rapidly backwards, although we will have to tighten our controls on Visa. But I will not make it to major editor level, in part because I don't want to get there. I have vague plans to build up my overseas contacts into something more substantial if and when I get tired of the *Review*. However, it's still just a vague idea. For the moment I'm staying put.

As for the real news, the state of play in fiction writing, I'm still in there trying, but progress is very slow, as a lot of my spare time is occupied with freelance. I've only just finished the second draft of my sf book 'The Dream Shops', and what with freelance and the other odds and ends I do — I'm supposed to be writing a major article on armament manufacturers in the nineteenth century for a military history magazine — not to mention the real time-waster, computer games, the final draft will take some time. I'll get there, but don't hold your breath.

I trust both you and the cats are well. Most of your news I know from *The Metaphysical Review*. I enjoyed the last edition, incidentally, especially as I got a mention. Actually, now that I think about it, I got two. At one point you mentioned a fan who got so drunk at a MUSFA end-of-year dinner in a restaurant in Carlton that he had

Waiting for the final draft

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This might be a non-correspondence contest, just like the non-cleaning-up contest I used to have with Peter Burns when I boarded with him. (Despite my considerable talents at ignoring household dirt and disorder, he always won.)

to be carried out. I confess: it was me. (It was 1975.) One of the few, but fortunately only a few, truly sleazy moments in my life, like the time, a few years later, when I was almost sick in the train on the way home from my first office Christmas party. I rarely drink anything stronger than light beer these days so, rest assured, Sydney's trains and restaurants are safe.

(19 January 1995)

Fortunes rising and falling

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USA

My fortunes have risen and fallen over the last few years. I'm back doing temp work and trying to figure out what sort of a job I want to look for. John, my SO, and I moved with our two cats across the river to St Paul last fall after on-and-off attempts over the years to find another place to rent or buy in Minneapolis. So far it's been fine. One plus is that we're closer to stores, which is handy for this non-driver. John's car needs a new transmission and there's no money for it, nor is anyone sure that the car is worth fixing. Getting to Minicon, going to rummage sales, taking the cats to the vet — all these things and more have necessitated imposing on friends for rides. We have to rely on feet or the bus if we want to do anything else. The loss of freedom and spontaneity is hard, as is swallowing our pride and asking friends for help. John's financial situation has been shaky for years, most recently because he's been trying to pay off his parents' estate bills. (It's a long, horrible story.)

* People are genuinely astonished that we exist without a car. For most of the time we've been together, we haven't been able to afford one. These days we'd resent spending money on something we don't really want. Friends are generous to a fault in giving us lifts, especially in getting home from late-night events. But we do live in the inner suburbs of a city with, by American standards, a good public transport system, despite various governments' efforts to run it down. We can get anywhere to anywhere before midnight. We used to have no trouble catching taxis home, but recently they've begun to disappear on Friday and Saturday nights. We've walked from West Brunswick to Collingwood, although that's about our limit. Out in the wilds of Burwood, the Pender-Gunns and Ortliebs are just about off the edge of our planet, but not quite. *

I'm happy because we're renting a house all to ourselves after nine or ten years at the 'temporary' place in Minneapolis. It's a two-storey, three-bedroom house not far from downtown St Paul. No more duplex noise! Also,

no more noise from being on the flight path and a very busy street. The neighbours are fairly quiet, and I feel pretty safe. There are also a number of neat features that really please me. The old place had no doorbell; this one has two. We have an enclosed front porch; I have plans to set up a hammock, maybe some chairs, out there. (The porch swing may have to wait until next summer.) The living room and dining room are more spacious, and have some nice woodwork, such as the built-in buffet and book cases.

The first night there, I turned off the bedroom light and laughed. We'd joked that we were looking for the sun, the moon and the stars in a new place. Someone had put glow-in-the-dark astronomy stickers on the ceiling, so I found myself looking at the sun, the moon and the stars!

Fanac consists of membership of five apas, regular attempts to LoC fanzines and attending a few conventions every year (the worldcon or NASFIC and some regional cons). I suppose I could count e-mail contact too — the illegitimate offspring of the correspondence world. I've been eagerly following news about the Australia in '99 bid, though I really expected to be back much sooner than this after the '85 worldcon.

(15 June 1995)

* The trouble is that a lot of people remember the mental and spiritual damage that organising the Aussiecon II caused. Some of the people involved are still not talking to each other or to fandom. Americans seem more anxious to give Australia the '99 worldcon than we are to take it. In practical terms, we are worried about finding the forty or fifty utterly reliable fans who would be needed to manage a five-day event for (we expect) 3000 or more people. If the '99 event happens, probably it will go well because we will over-organise in order to avoid the problems of Aussiecon II. *

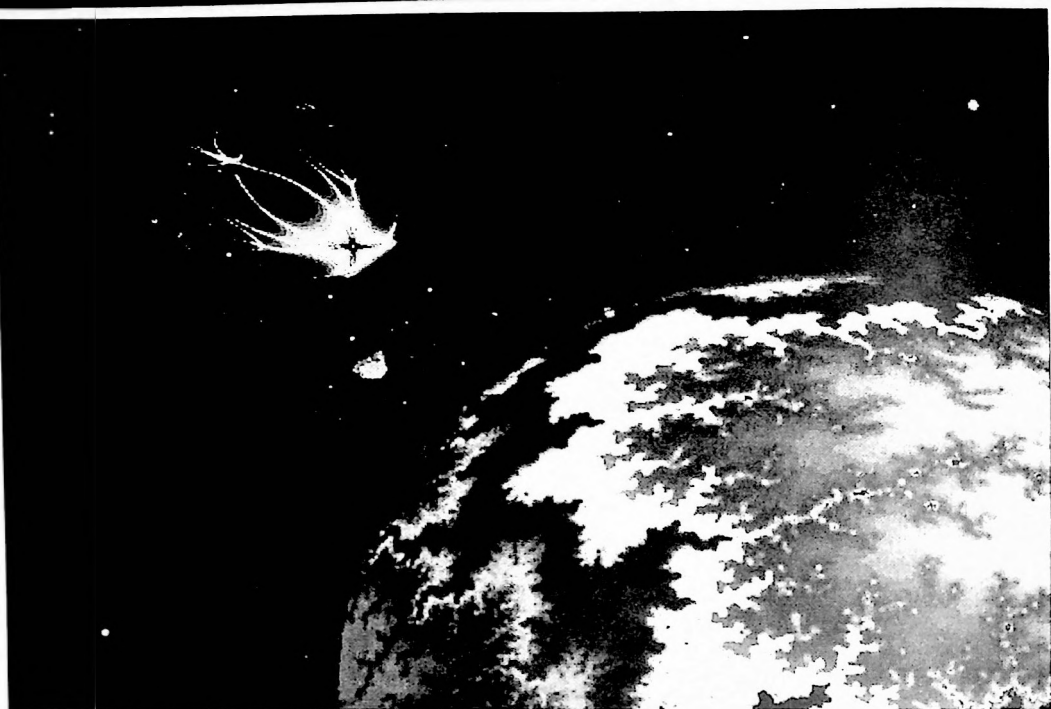
New naming

CASEY JUNE WOLF
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* This is only the second time this has happened to me in my role as fanzine editor: a correspondent has changed surname between issues, just like that. You've probably read Casey's notes and letters in my fanzines under her previous name.

I saw Casey last when she was in Australia at the time of the World Convention in 1985. If she'd had the money and time to get here, I'm sure she would have enjoyed the reunion convention, Arcon, held in late September.

I asked Casey why she changed her name. I'm not sure I understand the answer. *



22 August 1994:

I don't know if I told you I was changing my name, but I'm glad it's done. Gradually I'm getting used to it. It felt weird at first, but I knew that if I didn't do it I'd never lay the thought to rest. Now instead of a vague sense of conflict, whenever I say my name I have strong and welcome images, and it's helping me feel much better about myself.

You asked for the story behind the name change. I come from a very troubled family, and wanted to stop thinking of them every time I said my name. Also I sing and do poetry readings around town, and have a sister who is also a poet. For various reasons I don't want people to automatically associate me with her. I'm not ashamed of being her sister. I just want to emerge gradually in my own image. I don't want assumptions made about my life based on her view of the world. For instance, she identifies as native, whereas I look utterly white and get a lot of nonsense thrown at me whenever the subject of mixed heritage comes up. We are that, it seems, but it's all unremembered and undocumented and not proven, and I can't drag darker-skinned Joanne around to point to all the time, and people are very weird about the whole topic these days.

More than that, it's her writing about our home life that I want to distance myself from. I haven't even come to terms with it myself. I don't know if I remember the same family she does, the same type of events. In fact, I don't remember much, though I have the feelings, the body memory and somatised pain, the general drift of what happened, and a few important details that have come out over time. Still, it's my recovery, my past, and I'd like a little privacy around it, to be allowed to tell or

not tell in my own time.

But the driving factor had nothing to do with her. Since I was twelve years old, at least, I have toyed with changing my name. I think now it's part of changing my life and becoming who I am, who I love, instead of wearing forever who I was forced to be, with me buried underneath.

I've always been called Casey, but I was baptised Catherine. No one ever called me that, but it was on all of my i.d.s: Catherine is 'pure', Casey is 'courage'. The first name is controlled, remote, elegant, while the second is blunt, playful, ambiguous all at once. My dad, for all he played havoc with my soul, was my fondest friend when I was very young. He stepped down hard on my very existence on the one side, and on the other he taught me to laugh, sing, be wild at heart. (So, in other ways, did my mom.) He gave me the name Casey and it means a lot to me. For one thing, it's a sound that I like. It's very lucky that he picked a sound that would appeal to me. It feels like it means he cared. (Irrational, but what the hell.)

Dad and I haven't been in contact for six years now. He just suffered a stroke and forbade the people around him to tell me about it (or to tell various other members of the family who've bucked his version of the truth). I have lots of churning feelings around this man, and I am not certain how I will eventually resolve it. I may never see him again, whether I want to or not. In a funny way, when I changed my name, rejecting his family name but keeping the name he gave me, I realise I was sending away what was destructive about our family inheritance and keeping what was sweet. I was allowing myself full choice, not just kicking back.

(Update, 28 January 1995: In early December I wrote him a short note, something like, 'Let's end the silence. We mean too much to each other. Even if we can't resolve certain things, I love you and want you in my life.' I believed he wouldn't answer and it hurt like hell, but I needed to open the door. He hasn't answered, but a burden has lifted, anyway.)

'Wolf' came next. I was trying to find a name that would blend in. Preferably it would have a meaning I would like, but primarily I didn't want to attract attention to myself. Johnson would've have been okay. Marie's-Granddaughter or Feather-in-Flight were out. So was Bear, Sowthistle, Wolf...

One day I noticed that I felt annoyed whenever I saw the name Wolf(e). Why should so-and-so be allowed that name when — it clicked. I was rejecting the name I really wanted because I didn't want to stand out. I have always loved wolves. In fact, I love all wild nature, even when it scares me, but when I was very young wolves held a particular intensity for me. I could feel myself streaming away with them over the frozen tundra. Away. Away. My pack, wild and heavenly and rugged, with only the harshness of winter and starvation to contend with, and the awesome beauty of black spruce in fluttering snow and frozen air... so I started playing with it, sending poems out under the name Casey Wolf. I didn't like the way it scanned, but I started having dreams. I was a wolf, running, my chest narrow and deep instead of broad and flat, so that air passed into me easily and sustained me. For the first time in my life I felt safe enough, strong enough, able to really breathe. I gave in. I felt like a dweeb for the longest time (*people will know I changed my name!*) but I grow into the name more every day. My new birthday (I have two a year now) is December 23. I'll be one this year. I'll also be thirty-eight, on 25 June, which is where I got my middle name. It took ages to find a third name I could be happy with, and I got it when I read about an African custom of naming children after the month they were born in. (Lucky I wasn't a Scorpio.) When I said it out, it contained a secret pun I rather liked. Casey June Wolf. Most wolves are born in May. I tell myself I'm a June wolf — someone who got off to a late start on life. I have to spend most of my energy, I finally recognised, into putting me back together again after the way I came into this world. It's been a real handicap, but I'm coming along. I'm finding my wolf-legs, learning how to live, and slowly gathering my pack.

11 November, early afternoon:

As I sat on my bed this grey morning reading the last bits of *TMR* I heard, so faintly that I wasn't even sure if they were real, the strains of a familiar song played on a bagpipe. I called my mother and sang her the tune, and she gave me these words: 'The minstrel boy he has gone to war, In the ranks of death you'll find him. His father's sword he has girded on, and his great harp slung behind him.' (I've paraphrased. I wonder if it's an Irish tune. I'd have thought a Scot would have carried war pipes.) It was a quiet, old-feeling moment, where I wasn't here anymore but back over thirty years in Winnipeg in a world defined by my parents' feelings and opinions and information about the world, where my own were still very much in question. I felt the sadness

I almost never connect to around war and brave boys and all that and I was glad to feel it. Long ago when I fought off the life-destroying aspects of my parents' world, I lost touch with a lot that was real as well. To get the strangling hands from around my neck I had to stop feeling sympathy for the strangler. To stop feeling sympathy for the strangler I had to stop being entirely myself, because I did have tenderness and it was real and I couldn't risk it.

The leap here is that I had to stop feeling much for the men and women who threw themselves into the war effort because the meaning of that world was so twisted, it seemed to me, in the eyes of the people around me, and because it was important to them, and I had to get them out of me. The same people who thought those men were brave called me a liar when I said that I and others around me were being abused, either physically or sexually or simply in the way we were seen or spoken to, and how our lives were forced to be. It's hard to follow and then relate the chaotic links all these things formed in my mind: the conclusions I formed about my world, what I was ordered to believe instead, how it looked, how it tasted, how it felt...

I hope you don't mind a long and winding letter. I'm feeling melancholy today, the kind of day when I notice the raindrop hit the yard light and the spray of steam rise off it, then curl away in the breeze, the kind of day when I am glad and sad all at once that I forced myself to stay in and stop running around trying to catch up on life. Glad because I need it, and I need to feel my insides. Sad because my insides are filled with that.

I've always dreamt of houses. Old houses patterned on the great old brick house we rented from the nuns when I was six, and in which I lost what little remained of my childhood. When I wander through these houses I am always searching for something, trying to find all the old rooms and look into them or trying to move in, take possession somehow. Because when I was violated I had to leave these rooms empty. I had to lose the key and lose the address and wander without family or past. When I think of this looking at my childhood shame and torture, I see beyond that dying curtain an ancient pane of glass. There is so much dirt and cobweb on it I still can't see, except vague outlines and colours. Most importantly there is light. The parts of me that survived to adulthood have seen light and colour, have walked freely in beautiful places from Cape Breton Island to Kakadu, NT, but the prisoners behind those walls, the occupants of those apparently empty rooms, have never seen light, have never felt hope, have never believed they would be remembered and freed by the rest of me. Even as I've struggled years to come out of this painful place I've tried to control who would emerge and what would be true and what our agreed reality would be, just as it was controlled for me as a child by the adults around me.

When you forget betrayal, overwhelming pain, uncontrollable terror, you forget freedom of movement, innocent joy, the sense of belonging in this world. I forgot how to dance. I could move my body but it couldn't just whirl safely on its own. My head had to say, okay, now try this. Then my body would try to do it. Often I'd lose my balance because my balance wasn't

there. It was far away. Back in the closet where I sat with eyes closed and breath held and tried to believe it all away.

I forgot how to trust, even myself, how to feel all of me, how to forget fear for a moment and fly. But I didn't lose everything. I knew the sense of flying from my dreams — at rare moments — singing or writing or doing something brave or letting my feelings pour out. I could recognise the ability to fly in others and it pierced my soul. I could see the colours of the sky and be in awe of them. I could make straw dolls out of sentences and follow the interconnections of supposedly unrelated thoughts. I could form thoughts new to me. I could step back from fear enough to feel how huge love is, and I never — despite all my despair and the demon-thoughts telling me to turn back, despite the almost complete lack of understanding in even those who cared and tried to help and often stepped on me in the process — I never completely gave up. Part of me always hoped, through massive self-blame and misunderstanding, through a belief that I had to hide who I really was (which, sadly, in many ways was true), through early efforts to obliterate myself in order to end the pain. Just like the nightmares where I could not kill the evil thing. I could stop it, flatten it, crush it, but there it would still be, tiny and living, indestructible. And a malicious hand would reach across and tear the skin back from my face to reveal to my horror . . . open sky. The thing that wouldn't die was me. My will to live. The huge welcoming of self and nature that Mae Strelkov expresses in her letters to you. When I take the iron foot off the tortured, furious self, it begins not only to show me agony, and where it comes from, and who betrayed me and why. It shows me where we went right, where they loved me, where I am burgeoning, and real, where I did well and felt wonder and the joy of being alive in spite of everything.

Even the prisoners stretch toward the filtered light. Even the mangled and seemingly dead begin to drag themselves off the floor and go to the window for a peek. Life. Life. It's all that matters. Now I am just driven by mitochondrial DNA. Maybe it's all just a chemical plot to keep those helixes spinning into eternity. But damn it's powerful, to keep dragging me back to life, impossible as it seemed. To follow that tiny flame through an eternity of darkness on the hunch — the little hunch, so small I wasn't sure it was real — that it could really burn.

Yesterday I left the therapist's office and I went for a coffee and had my teeth polished and cleaned and read 'What To Say to a Naked Man' in a woman's magazine. ('Wow! This is my lucky day!' was one of the recommendations. They omitted, 'Get out of here now or I'm calling the police.') Then I hopped on Artemis (my bike) and spun home. On the way I passed a park with the trees lit from the side by the descending sun. Something barked inside me as I caught sight of one particular mossy elm. Following that self I am learning not to ignore, I made myself turn back and look at it. (This is the thing I kept thinking to tell you.) When I stood there looking at this non-native tree — a big, mossy, gnarly elm unlike anything you normally see around here — I was filled with pleasure from another time. I realised I

was looking up from a carriage, and the world was stunning in its autumn shades, in its late afternoon glamour, and I thought, 'She took me for walks.' It came as a revelation, much like the revelations of abuse. But unlike them, and like the one early memory of being held by my dad, it was as though some sweet, huge, unexpected hand had stretched toward me cupping life, and poured some on me. 'Here', it said, 'this is good. There was good in your life. You can remember that, too.'

I could have knelt right down and . . . those childhood images are weaving in and out all over the place. I see a saint, or Mary perhaps, kneeling in medieval robes with streams of light flowing out from her eyes toward the ground, wide, curling streams that fan out and bring her tears up to the heavens. Or are they tears entirely? Streams of some dazzling power she has connected with in herself, in response to witnessing a miracle. They are emotion; joy may be the best word, because in my experience it encompasses pain and the release of pain, the knowledge that even if pain is not over, it is small, small in comparison to the miracle at hand. I could probably beat this idea to the ground for readers, especially those who don't know what I am talking about, but there was something that the Catholics recognised, though they mislabelled it, in my opinion, that we are overlooking to our peril in this world. There is a miracle in action here, and it isn't just the tempered awe of science (which is one of my greatest highs). It is our direct involvement in that flood of living, of *being*, because life itself is not the central issue, and I certainly am no less overwhelmed by my relationship to the rock and the process that shaped it than to the eel and the hickory. I am *in* this miracle, and it is sweeping me. The greatest gift I ever receive is when I *feel* that connection again, when I remember and *know* every element of my life, when I *know* that they hurt me and how they hurt me, that my experience of it is all valid and all worthy of expression, that there is much more to it than how it was for me, that their lives and the lives around them and rippling back through living history all had their story and it is all real and valid and . . . I'm not expressing this very well, damn it.

One thing doesn't cancel out the other. I am angry and I'm not. I do love them and I don't. I am part of them and I am myself, unrelated. I am this human and I am that rock. How can I explain? Even in beginning I lose my train of thought. It's like too many trains whizzing in and out of the station all at once, which tells me I am jumping away from a thought that scared me, and throwing myself off the track.

That's okay. I don't have to have it all sorted out to be allowed to communicate this little with you. I hope you don't perceive it as a waste of your time. Maybe I should just keep it to myself.

I enjoyed a lot that I read in this issue. The writing about Roger, whom of course I didn't know. Dave Langford's column, especially the hilarious bits about crime fiction. 'Yes, I Want to be a Paperback Writer' (good go, Lyn). And, obviously, 'In Cahoots with the Creator', which I found puzzling, inspiring, and wonderful. Thanks again for bringing them to me.

(11 November 1994)

All that's yet unsung:

Farewells

BRUCE GILLESPIE

farewells

Dinny O'Hearn

Jim Hamilton

Marie Maclean

Esta Handfield

Philip Hodgins

It seems typical Gillespie to say it, but the 'highlights' of the last two years — the events particularly remembered — are the deaths of people who mean a lot to me.

Dinny O'Hearn: Close friend to thousands

DINNY O'HEARN took a year to extinguish. Many of his friends must have wondered that he took so short a time. We heard that he was ill with leukaemia about the time that we learned that Roger Weddall was seriously ill. Dinny survived Roger by seven months.

It was said of Dinny when he died that he was one of those people whose close friends could be numbered in their thousands. I was never a close friend, but he remembered me as one of his former students when I met him in early 1978 at an Australia Day booze-up in the Dandenong Ranges. (It was the coldest January day on record, and it was only luck that got Gerald Murnane and me back to Collingwood that night.) Even at my loosest, I was much too sober for Dinny.

I first met Dinny in 1966. He was my tutor for English II. I seemed to be the only student who talked back to him. Dinny and I spent the whole year in a conversation for two during those tutorials.

Our backgrounds were dissimilar. The rumour around the university had it that Dinny was a 'failed priest', although I could never understand why he attempted to become one. By the time I met him, Dinny described himself as a 'married man from the suburbs'. Dinny had Irish cheerful-

ness and a voluminous knowledge of literature, especially Australian and Irish. I was a gawky, timid student who would like to have read everything, but had only just started. Dinny appreciated people who loved books.

Dinny became 'Subdean of Arts', a position that was (according to rumour) created to keep him out of the way. I've never found out why he had to be kept out of the way, or why he was contented with his peculiar position in the university. The position of 'Subdean' disappeared when he became administrator of the Australia Centre during his last years before retiring. Being Subdean gave him a great ability to help students, and plenty of free time for boozing with the literary folk of Carlton. Dinny's gatherings at various Carlton pubs became famous. People who knew him only by reputation must have wondered what else he did.

Dinny O'Hearn wrote superbly about literature, but there is still no collection of his reviews and articles. Dinny always said that he would write a 'real book' when he retired. He took early retirement, and a few months later was diagnosed with leukaemia. He was already co-host of *The Book Show* on SBS Television, and continued in that position until a week before he died.

Memorials to Dinny are scattered around Melbourne. They are people like me who owe him a great deal: not only for his conversations about books in 1966, but the great help he gave Norstrilia Press. He was chuffed that one of his former students was a partner in an Australian publishing house, no matter how small it might be. Too bad that Dinny didn't like science fiction, but he liked George Turner's *In the Heart or in the Head*. He wrote a letter of appreciation that enabled Norstrilia Press to gain one of the few non-fiction Australia Council publishing grants awarded in 1984. Dinny had vague plans of reviving George's reputation inside Australia. These plans came to nothing, but George has showed an ability to extend his own reputation outside Australia.

I was never invited to one of Dinny's famous St Patrick's Day at-homes. As I say, I was never considered boozy enough. But he was a person who lit up a certain part of my life, and I feel it's unfair that he did not have those years of retirement to write the book he should have written. The only written memorial for him is *Books, Death and Taxes* (Penguin 0-14-024636-3; 1995; A\$14.95), a thin book of Australian stories that he selected before he died. Most of the very short

stories are uninteresting, but in it Andrea Stretton, his co-host on *The Book Show*, writes a wonderful obituary that summarises all the exasperation, as well as delight, that he gave to his closest friends:

'It is more than two years since then, and the good thing about time passing is that the memory of that frail, suffering, courageous person is now eclipsed by the vision of the delightful, pugnacious, full-blooded man Dinny really was. Dinny in the bloom of health, red-faced and sweating, scooting along with his rugged terrier walk (faster if he was heading to Percy's), blue shirt gaping over a bulging stomach, the unlikely silver neck chain and copper bracelet, spectacles held together with safety pins, threadbare tweed cap from Donegal, blue eyes blazing, drink on the bar, fag in the mouth, the inevitable bag of books. Dinny spreading warmth, making crude, incorrect jokes, dishing out opinions, sparring affectionately with Kim [his partner]. Holding court in the Kingdom of Carlton.' (p. 12)

**Jim Hamilton
and his wonderful Newsletter**

I had the usual short, pleasant note from **JIM HAMILTON** shortly before he died in 1993. As the person who ran the Victorian Fellowship of Australian Writers for many years, he gave me and my enterprises a remarkable amount of help, although he had no interest in science fiction. He would do anything to help small publishers. An advertisement in tiny type in his *FAW Newsletter* would bring more response than a mention anywhere else.

Jim didn't radiate personal warmth, except, I imagine, to people he had known a long time. He was a bookish man, like me, and we were equally shy in the other's company. I might have got to know him if I had attended meetings of the Fellowship of Australian Writers, but I didn't.

No doubt Jim had achieved much before he became the secretary of the Victorian Fellowship of Australian Writers, but that became his particular achievement. Each issue of the *Newsletter* was packed with vast amounts of information useful to writers. Jim never bothered with luxuries like layout; he didn't need to. Any advertisement I ever placed in it met with response, sometimes quite a lot. Most of the people who attended the 1975 Writers' Workshop, now known as the Le Guin Workshop, wrote to me because of the advertisements in Jim's *Newsletter*. Over the years, quite a few *SFC* subscriptions were also the result of them.

Vale Jim. I didn't know you, really, but you lit up a part of my life.

**Marie Maclean:
'Joys as things close in on me'**

I didn't know **MARIE MACLEAN** well at all. I met her only two or three times, at Nova Mob meetings in the early 1980s at the home of John Foyster and Jenny Bryce. I knew she was an academic at Monash University, but did not realise until recently that she was a member of the Department of French. She wrote articles about science fiction, and confessed at a Nova Mob that she had to convert an article from the English language to academese in order to have it published in *Science-Fiction Studies*.

I suppose she was only in her early fifties when she died, but she had a cheerfulness and gift for living that rather escapes me. In late 1993 she wrote to me: *

MARIE MACLEAN
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The reason you haven't heard from me is that I've been fighting cancer for nearly two years. Things are not going well, and I think very regretfully I'll have to give up *SF Commentary*. Thank you for all the pleasure and instruction you've given me and please accept the enclosed as a small contribution to neglected dues.

With good wishes to all friends in *SF*.

Yours ever, Marie Maclean.

(8 November 1993)

* Marie's last letter, sent a few months before she died, appears on the opposite page. *

**Esta Handfield:
All I know about a packed life**

I would never have met **ESTA HANDFIELD** if I had not known Carey Handfield for 26 years, but that does not reduce the real sense of loss I felt when she died suddenly in late June this year.

When I met Esta and John, Carey's parents, they were already winding up the public relations firm that occupied their time during the 1960s and early 1970s. She and John 'retired' to an existence that was still hectic: managing the Chinese Noodle Shop in South Melbourne and other enterprises, and taking part in writing and theatre projects.

What I didn't know was that Esta had been involved in such activities all her life. In the early 1950s she was associated with the people who set up the artists' colony at Monsalvat in Eltham; she was always interested in art and writing. It seems that she and John had moved to Eltham because of their connections with Monsalvat.

I never heard much of this from Carey. During

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Dear Bruce,

Thank you with all my heart for your letter, its warmth and commonsense. I didn't reply then as I was just going in for a fourth operation. It seemed to have succeeded, but after a couple of months, the damn thing was back, this time in the lungs and inoperable. I've only got a few months now, but I want to tell you how important your advice to talk and share is. Thank you too, for the Roger memorial issue, it really helps to read people's fond memories.

Unlike Roger, I've discussed it all openly with friends and family, and, this may seem crazy, after all we all say we want a quick end, but my three years' dying has given me a chance to hear and tell things to friends and family which we might otherwise have put off till it was too late. I don't mind if you publish this because it may help other friends dying of cancer and AIDS, and god knows there are enough of them.

In that time I've finished and published a new book, called *The Name of the Mother: Writing Illegitimacy*, which also became a sort of testament. To my great joy, among appreciations coming in, was a two page letter of praise from Derrida himself. I just can't resist telling you, because it gave me such a boost. I've also kept up my supervisions, and I think I'll have five theses to mark my last five months - one of them on Philip. K. Dick, so you see the old loyalties are still there. Add to that a new grandson and two new honorary grandsons!

One of my great joys as things close in on me and I can't get out much is the internet. I belong to a half a dozen bulletin boards, and it's wonderful out there. I'm not young or old, sick or well, pretty or plain, I'm just me, or rather a different me on each list. It's a whole new existence, where I can say anything I like and make terrific new friends. Again, if anyone who reads this is going through the same thing, look for these openings.

On the net I met Andy Butler, who suggested I send any Australian material to Andy Sawyer for his SF archives. So I sent him all my Metaphysical Reviews, only to realise, when I opened this one, that it was coals to Newcastle!

Must stop now, greetings to old friends out there and especially to you both for saying just the things I needed to hear.

Yours ever
Maurice

the heyday of Norstrilia Press, Elaine and I visited the Handfields' house in Eltham, and enjoyed their company greatly. She became impatient with Norstrilia Press's flatfooted attempts to publicise our books, and organised a wonderful book launching for *Dreamworks*. Staged at the Planetarium, it included a theatrical presentation of several of the stories from the book.

Esta's plans to become a writer during her retirement met with only partial success. Several of her plays have been staged by amateur groups, and therefore might eventually be discovered by larger companies. She tried several times to place plays with ABC Radio. To judge from the testimonials given during the celebration of her life at Monsalvat Great Hall on 3 July, her main contribution to writing has been her encouragement of other writers.

The last time I saw Esta was at the wedding of Carey and Jo in the late eighties. It seems only a few months ago that Carey and Jo had told us that Esta was feeling ill. A few weeks later she was diagnosed as having inoperable cancer. And only a week or two later Carey rang to say that his mother had died. According to John, Esta was still organising things on her last day. She was one of those people who represent the relentless creativity of life itself — she knew you have to go, but she packed her life until its last minute.

Philip Hodgins: The poet who gave me Poetry

During late 1984, soon after I began to work at the Macmillan office in South Melbourne, Alex Skovron and I were talking about books. The author I knew as Thomas M. Disch the science fiction writer was the same author that Alex knew as Tom Disch the poet. It turned out that Alex also wrote poetry (and has since had published two highly praised volumes of poetry). 'By the way,' said Alex, 'did you know that there's another poet in the building? I must introduce you to Philip Hodgins.'

Alex did introduce us, but **PHILIP HODGINS** and I had little to say to each other. Philip was a charming, polite young man with whom I might have conversed if I had known anything about him, or he anything about me.

Later Alex told me Philip's story. In 1983, at the age of twenty-four, Philip was diagnosed as having chronic myeloid leukaemia. He was given six months to live. He had been a travelling salesman for Macmillan, but moved to a desk job. A few months later, he left that job. He had always been interested in poetry, but had not enough time to write it seriously. Faced by death, he wrote a set of major poems that were collected as *Blood and Bone*. Most of us expected that to be his only collection.

Reading *Blood and Bone* is one of my most

important experiences of the last 20 years. Here was poetry that was completely accessible, yet serious and complex. The poems about facing death were those I read first. In 'The Passenger', death is born:

I feel it
in my marrow —
lurching and kicking . . .
Its birth will bring me to a corpse
and for a week or so
my hair will grow
and fingernails will still slide out.

At that stage, Philip's only fear was: 'My bad luck is to write the same poem every time.'

But even in *Blood and Bone* there were signs of another Philip Hodgins. His poems about living in the Victorian countryside had a thickness and immediacy of detail that showed that he was in love with life, not death. Not that his view of life was in any way sentimental. Of 'The Dam':

In summer it's popular with the herd
who muck it up by floating green cow pats
and come out caked, with leeches on their
teats.

In winter it's the spot for shooting birds.
Two ibises stand on the rim like taps.

That last line was the best in the book. If only the man could stay alive to write some more poetry!

Philip did. A few years later I met him in an Abbotsford street. He was going for his daily walk. A new collection was about to appear. It was *Down the Lake with Half a Chook*. More than few people consider this the best title of an Australian poetry collection.

Philip's poetry was important not only for its own sake but because it propelled me into reading poetry in general. I had grown up with the usual Australian prejudice against poetry: most poems were incomprehensible and most poets were up themselves. Philip Hodgins was not only comprehensible, but he had no time for the pretensions of 'being a poet'. In both respects he resembled Philip Larkin, the English poet whom I discovered at the same time. Soon I found plenty of other congenial poets, including Australia's Andrew Taylor and Alex Skovron.

During the late eighties and early nineties Philip's condition was in remission, and he made the best of it. He returned to Maryborough, where he had grown up. Death faded in his poems. The bitter variety of the Australian countryside became his main subject. In Philip's hands, the subject seemed to be captured for the first time. Of 'Dirt Roads':

The good thing about dirt roads is the way
they change . . .
unlike the indifference of bitumen

dirt roads keep a transitory record
for the interest of anyone on foot
i.e. the fluent script where a snake flowed
across
or the continuous tangled lines
of a pushbike going home.
A sealed road might be more consistent
but a dirt one is more eventful.

Philip's life became more and more eventful. He married Janet Shaw, and they had two children. He kept winning prizes and gaining Australia Council grants. Two more books of poetry appeared, *Animal Warmth* and *Up On All Fours*.

When I saw Philip at the Melbourne Writers Festival in 1993, he looked very well. *Up On All Fours* received the highest praise of any of his books. It contained only a few poems about death.

In 'The New Floor' he writes his credo. If I could write like this, it would be mine as well:

... the pleasure of knowing how things work
and a reminder of the ordinary details
involved.

For instance, the simplicity of your tools: ...
No amount of big technology could make
the finished floor more level than these can.
It's as good as that other thing, poetry.
With love the lines fit into logics of their own:
the first of redgum stumps, then tin caps,
bearers.

joists, and finally the bare pine boards.
They lie there at the end of low-tech work,
tongue in groove and side by side as tight
as lines from Dante's faithfully measured
book:

an understanding to keep the years together.

'Bare pine boards ... an understanding to keep the years together.' What better description of fine writing could one find?

I reviewed *Up On All Fours* for *The Melburnian* and later for *The Metaphysical Review*, and exchanged a few letters with Philip:

PHILIP HODGINS

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Thanks very much indeed for the *MR*. I was interested to read your list of reading highlights for the last year, and found myself agreeing with your comments about these two poets: JW and AT.

Apart from journals and things like that I've read very little of late as my health is all over the place at present. The last book I read was a couple of months ago: *The Aspern Papers*. I quite enjoyed its evocation of Venice but I do harbour some reservations about old Henry James. His style is a bit too embellished for my taste. I tend to like plain prose styles although I do make an exception for Gibbon and some others. Some friends of mine have

formed a Henry James Appreciation Society — I have not been invited!
(late September 1994)

I failed to answer this letter. Alex told me late last year that Philip had serious renewed health problems. A bone marrow replacement operation had failed to arrest the spread of the leukaemia. Even so, it was a shock to read in *The Age*, 15 July 1995 that 'Two months ago, poet Philip Hodgins was given a month to live'. After twelve extra years, now he had a month to live! I sent him a card, a farewell card, saying how much his work had meant to me.

Imagine my feelings when I actually received a reply. It seemed like a greeting from the grave:

Thanks very much indeed for your card, which arrived today with all its kind comments — don't really know what to say except Thank You.

Your enthusiasm for Larkin is one I share. By coincidence I have just had a binge of him, re-reading his *Collected Poems* plus several of his published interviews, which are hilarious in their own dour way but also full of much insight and common sense. He is a great poet — so clear, honest, skilful and distinctive. But of course you know all this already.

(21 July 1995)

Philip lasted another four weeks. After he died, Peter Goldsworthy wrote in *The Age*, 26 August 1995:

'I visited him for the last time in late May, at his home near Maryborough. At that time he had been given a month to live. He had decided to discontinue chemotherapy because he wanted his last weeks to be free of suffering, unclouded by the constant nausea induced by chemotherapeutic drugs. Outwardly he showed his usual stoicism and not an ounce of self-pity. Very few of us can face death without personal hope — but Philip's hopes were for his wife and daughters.

'He read this obituary during his last weeks. His comment, "an obituary to die for", is surely one of the great lines of gallows humour and another measure of the stoicism of the man.

'His poetry is full of such lines. His consciousness will live on, in small measure, wherever that poetry is read. We, his friends, and those who loved him can talk with him again, or at least listen to his voice, whenever we wish in those lines.'



Farewell, mother

JOHN BROSNAN

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19 August 1991:

Your timing is impeccable: *Metaphysical Review* 15/16/17, seemingly chocablock with people reminiscing about the deaths of their fathers, arrives when I am still reeling from the emotional 'shock' of my mother's sudden death just over a month ago.

One of the most distressing aspects of the whole thing was the way I got the news. My mother rang me only a few days before she died to tell me that she had been diagnosed by her doctor as suffering from a duodenal ulcer after suffering from chest pains. She'd been under the impression she was having a heart attack but no, according to her doctor, it was an ulcer. And she did say that the pains had gone once she'd started taking the tablets he'd prescribed. She was due to have an x-ray that Friday, and I told her I'd call her on the following Monday to find out how she was. I phoned her flat on the Monday morning — no answer. Same thing on Tuesday. I got worried. I presumed that her ulcer condition has worsened and she was in hospital, but as I didn't have an emergency phone number for her there was no one in Sydney that I could call (all the relatives live in Western Australia) to find out.

The only thing I could do was phone where she worked, which was at Reader's Digest. But as I remarked to a friend at my drinking club on the Wednesday evening I was dreading ringing the Digest and be told by the receptionist that my mother had died. The friend told me not to be such a pessimist. So I went home, taking the precaution of taking a bottle of wine from the club, waited until after midnight and then rang the Digest, figuring it must be after either 9 a.m. or 10 a.m. in Sydney. After several tries a receptionist finally did answer and I told her I was trying to get in touch with Mrs Joan Brosnan. There was a pause and then she said, 'I'm afraid we have some sad news about Joan — she died during the weekend.' I said 'Thank you' and hung up the phone. Then I rapidly drank the rest of the wine and passed out.

Of course, it didn't really hit me until the following morning and I was in a pretty bad state during both Thursday and Friday (and *really* excessive drinking didn't help). I hadn't seen my mother in person since 1974 (remember I stayed at your place before heading onto Sydney to visit her?) but we kept in close touch by letter and regular phone calls. On the Thursday I received the one and, so far, only phone call from a relative on my mother's side of the family. It was my cousin Valerie's husband. All I know about him is that he's Chinese and a physicist. I don't even know his name. He asked me if I was John Orton (Orton is my

mother's maiden name), which gives you some idea of how he was equally unclued-up about me. It was like talking to a Dalek. A totally unemotional voice. No offer of sympathy or anything like that. He wanted to know my mother's funeral plans — did she want to be buried or cremated, etc. I said I had no idea, as the subject had never come up between us. My mother and I were very similar in personality, and worrying about our funeral arrangements didn't figure highly with either of us. I may worry about *dying*, as I'm sure my mother did, but I couldn't give a toss about what happens to my remains after I'm dead (though I do carry, sometimes, a kidney donor card). I suggested that maybe she had expressed her wishes about this matter in her will, if she'd made one (I haven't) and the Dalek told me that his sister, who lives in Sydney, was trying to gain access to my mother's flat but there was some difficulty in doing that. And that was that. I never heard again from him. The following day I received a letter from my 79-year-old father (who'd been separated from my mother for over 40 years). He'd been informed of my mother's death and told me she had died of a heart attack in St Vincent's Hospital on the Sunday afternoon.

22 October 1991:

Time has passed since I wrote the above. I didn't really have the heart to continue, and I don't really have the heart now, but I suppose I must put it down in words.

3 May 1993:

But, as you can see, I never did. I was clearly in a very depressed state, not to mention a state of shock, which lasted well into 1992. Which explains why you haven't heard from me for some time. I just didn't want to complete the above account, and I won't, except to say that my relatives on my mother's side, under the influence of her odious brother, Ray, behaved in a pretty disgusting manner. I never heard another word from them after the above phone call. They never even sent me details of the funeral so I was unrepresented at the event — I couldn't even send flowers. I only learnt the full story much later from relatives on my father's side of the family, who behaved extremely well, which is rather ironic for reasons too depressing to go into. Then, horrified that my mother had died in debt and sans will, my odious uncle began bothering my ailing 79-year-old father for half of the funeral costs. There's a lot more — all of it nasty — but I'll leave it at that.

(3 May 1995)

* This is so much worse a situation than any I can imagine myself going through that I'm left with little to say. I suppose it's fortunate that you were able to keep in contact with your mother in years since 1974... but it must be hard to know that she was given a wrong diagnosis and nothing done to help the situation while you were on the other side of the world. Thanks very much for sharing this story. John. *

It's a grey and miserable Sunday afternoon, I'm hung over, I've got a cold, I should be writing a letter to my slowly dying father but I really can't face that little task, so I'm answering your letter of 7 July instead, and also

thanking you for *The Metaphysical Review* 19/20/21. The appreciation of Roger Weddall, who I never met, seems to be part of a depressing trend in fanzines these days — some time after receiving your magazine I received a copy of Ted White and Dan Steffan's *Blatt*, which contained a couple of moving pieces, one by her ex-husband, Grant Canfield, about another recently deceased fan, Catherine Jackson, again someone I'd never personally encountered, though after reading both magazines I felt I'd received a strong impression of both people.

But Canfield's piece about his ex-wife was particularly depressing, being not only a description of the young Catherine but of the break-up of their marriage and the fact that despite all the years since then he'd never really got over it. Even sadder, after seeing Canfield's idealised sketches of the young Catherine, was to encounter a photograph of her taken at a con last year and to see a dumpty, white-haired woman. The two images did not equate at all. Getting old, as my late mother used to constantly tell me, is no fun at all.

And on the same theme: I endured my forty-seventh birthday a short time ago and am bracing myself for the big 50, if I last that long. Earlier this year I was diagnosed as having high blood pressure and high cholesterol: a walking disaster area waiting to happen. Medication has brought the blood pressure down, but I doubt if the cholesterol level has changed. I've cut down on dairy products, but seeing as I continue to drink gallons of red wine I don't think it makes much difference.

(16 October 1994)

* I'm getting so ancient that I rarely drink red wine these days. I have a bit when I'm eating out at some decent restaurant, such as *Abla's*, and on the rare occasions when we have people to dinner. But otherwise, these days drinking wine is a drag-me-down, not a pick-me-up. I had normal blood pressure and cholesterol levels when last they were measured, and I've lost quite a few kilograms since then. *

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I was reminded of Australia recently by someone coming up to me at a conference and telling that Marie Maclean, who had been regularly sending me parcels of fanzines, had recently died. However, I never got around to writing, and then just after Christmas (on 2 January) my mother died, which meant that anything but essential work was out for a while.

Fortunately, my father and one of my sisters were with her at the time; it was sudden (a heart attack), and we had been there the week before for our annual post-Christmas visit. My other sister had been up for my dad's birthday the week before Christmas, and had spoken to her on the phone just the night before. I was meant to be having the week off anyway, so I spent most

of it in Wisbech with Dad and my sisters and returned the week after for the funeral, when I stayed on for a few more days. It was the first time this particular combination of family members had been in the same place together for years.

The worst part — but in some ways the best part as it helped me to grieve properly — was sorting out personal belongings. Mum was a hoarder, but there was stuff (including stuff of mine) which I never knew she'd kept. Pride of place at the moment is my first (and, let's be honest, only completed) novel — all four pages of it, written I'd guess shortly after listening to *Journey Into Space*, which would make the age of eight or nine. Naturally, it's sf...

(30 January 1995)

JEANE MEALY
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[In *SFC* 15/16/17] Lee Hoffman's description of her father's gradual decline and the tending she gave him was powerful and heartbreaking. I'll be interested to see if anyone in the medical field comments on the professional care he got. 'Despite all my calls and attempts to get help, no one had recognised what was happening.' We saw a lot of this at the VA Hospital with Lee Pelton, who died of AIDS complications last December. It was maddening. A lot of fans will be facing the facts of assisting ageing parents. Are we ready? I'm not. John, my SO (significant other) and I had to deal with this in 1992 when his elderly mother was diagnosed with pancreatic cancer. While John took the main responsibility, I did visit. The worst part came when she went into a health-care facility but didn't understand she wasn't going to leave. (There is no cure, though younger people can sometimes hold out for awhile.) Keeping a death watch is pretty grim whether the person is conscious or not. Many times we stood near by and told her and Lee, last year, they were loved and would be remembered and were free to go when they wanted. They both hung on tenaciously, spending time with visitors as they could, sleeping when they needed to, trying to tolerate care given by the staff (it was hard to bear the moans of pain). I can't imagine working in a place like that.

I can understand why it took John Bangsund time to write about his father's death, too. I'm glad the undertaker set John's fears at rest about whether he should have tried mouth-to-mouth respiration. Guilt is such a heavy, damaging emotion. The dream about his father being disappointed with heaven sounds like he was still feeling guilty. It takes awhile to work things out fully. I hope he's had a better dream by now.

(15 June 1995)

Memories of my father

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I read *TMR* 15/16/17, with its feature letter from Lee Hoffman and the weird dream recounted by John Bangsund, with interest at the time, then later I was able to contrast it with my own experience.

My father died on 2 January 1992. It was a very distressing time for my mother, as they were close, and his gradual failing with cancer — caused by his smoking for many years up to his retirement — and mental failings made him a difficult patient to live with.

My father was diagnosed with cancer and was treated with a course of tablets and other things. This put it into remission for a time, but affected him drastically in other ways.

After a spell in hospital to fix a blood clot in his leg he went steadily downhill. He was not in pain, but his attitude towards taking his many pills was not the best. Mum rang me regularly for stress relief. While this was going on I was steadily reminded of all the things that I knew I would regret not doing if I were too late. We have all head of people who missed the chance to say the important things to their parents. I am immensely grateful for the way in which I was able to say farewell.

As soon as Michael, our son, was mobile, he made sure that he gained the absolute maximum attention from his grandfather, who by then was at his most withdrawn. Michael would run straight past, dodge around or otherwise totally ignore my mother on his way to my father.

New Year's Day 1992 was a crisis time. That night things were not at all good. In the morning Mum rang while I was having breakfast. She was very upset. Dad had had a stroke that morning and was having difficulty moving. The ambulance was coming to take him to Casualty at Flinders Medical Centre.

I made a red light drive down there. At first I took the normal route to my parents' home, but changed my mind, and at the last minute went the alternate way up Shepherd Hill Road. I passed an ambulance. I figured that it was for my father, and followed it to Flinders.

Once there, I walked into Casualty. Dad seemed to recognise me, but he was having difficulty speaking. The doctor on duty took Mum and I to a side room and told us that he was likely to be paralysed, and would have great difficulty in speaking, if at all. When we returned to Dad, he appeared to have another stroke, and attempted to sit up. I helped him sit, and then he died.

All through that day I was conscious of someone else with me bringing a strong sense of peace and love. Before I left home I had rung a friend in the church to be praying for me during the morning. It was most obvious to me that they were indeed praying. I con-

firmed these times later. As far as a time like that goes, it was a blessed event. The funeral was conducted by a friend who had taken up a pastorate at Tea Tree Gully a year or so earlier. Mum took it very well, with our support. She has continued on at home, with her circle of friends.

(Christmas 1993)

* I stayed with Paul and his parents during two of my visits to Adelaide — 1972 and 1976 — and therefore I share something of Paul's loss. His parents resembled mine in quite a few ways, and were valued hosts. My parents grew older, and so did Paul's; my father died in 1989, and Paul's in 1992; the inevitability of the process doesn't make it easier to understand or come to terms with. Thanks for the letter. Paul. *

More memories of Roger Weddall

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What an extraordinary evocation of past days in fandom's domain. More than slightly sad and poignant. At this great distance, I've been very very fond of Roger Weddall (and his wry humour in zines; and, besides, he always sent me most the most tasteful Christmas cards). I liked thinking of Australian fandom that contained so many great people, and since the early days of John Alderson's *Chao*, I'd felt like Australia was a second home (speaking spiritually).

Here we all were, stranded alike under the Southern Cross, which pre-Columbian natives used to view as a Rhea ostrich-like bird. It kind of pleased me, this little-known fact, for drivelly nonsense about 'living under the Southern Cross' that one sometimes encounters, annoys me.

As I read through Yvonne Rousseau's 'The Garden Party', I'd at first failed to note that it occurred in 1992. Somehow, I fancied it had happened this very year, and it was a shock to find Roger appearing so frequently in the story. ('Are they not letting him be gone? Calling him back in this way so that like a ghost he's present there amid all his friends, still?')

But then I checked and realised I was wrong about the year. Perhaps you, Bruce, are to blame for my having been deceived as to 'time'. You wrote in *The Last Magician* about friends that 'disappear from sight' and you find yourself catching your breath with hope and dread each time you glimpse someone 'who might be your long-lost friend'.

Reading the Garden Party story I had the bewitching sensation: 'Roger's still alive — they've kept his memory

so real that he still walks in their midst, as humorous and wry as ever in his quiet way'.

* See my section about my Uncle Ian in 'I Must Be Talking to My Friends'. *

MARK LONEY

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Talking a little about Roger Weddall: I'm not sure from 'The Lark Ascended' (*TMR* 19/20/21) whether you suspect that there was 'some event during his 1985 overseas trip' or whether you know that that was the case.

Anyway, something did happen while Roger was travelling in 1985, and we talked about it at length one night in 1991. As Roger explained it to me, there were two aspects to what happened. The first was Roger's discovery that, while travelling, the people that he met and interacted with on a day-to-day basis had no expectations of how he would behave. He talked about how, in ordinary life, a person's behaviour is subtly but strongly influenced by the expectations of friends, family and work colleagues.

During the time he was overseas and, in particular, during his long recuperation in Egypt from the car accident, Roger realised that the expectations of people in Melbourne had, to a certain extent, determined the sort of person that he had been. (Roger and I talked about this at length and ended up agreeing with each other a lot — I have been fascinated for years with the way families interact and the undeniable fact that a lot of people have mental images of their siblings or parents that are several years old and take no account of growth or change that has occurred since they took their last mental snapshot.) The fact that Roger found himself completely immersed in the Egyptian culture for so long, where he and Australia were foreigners, has obvious significance.

Eventually Roger was well enough to continue on his planned journey to Europe. And, once he got there, some interesting things happened. First, some of the people he was meeting (the fans, obviously) had expectations about him — not quite as constricting as the expectations that people in Melbourne had, but expectations nonetheless. And second, one night in the hostel that he was staying at in Amsterdam, Roger was propositioned by another man.

From what Roger said to me in 1991, that proposition came as a terrible shock to him. Even after months in Egypt discovering that he wasn't quite the person that he and a lot of other people in Melbourne had thought he was, Roger was still shocked to discover that his response to the idea of a homosexual encounter wasn't 'no thanks, I'm not interested'. Instead, he felt desire, fear and longing. Most importantly, Roger felt confused and threatened — not by the proposition but by his response to it.

So, literally, Roger caught the next train out of town. As I recall, he ended up in Scandinavia (Finland, I think, but I could be wrong) without any luggage and not

much money. Roger had left Amsterdam in such a state that everything he wasn't carrying at the time he was propositioned was left behind.

After several days of travelling alone (and, at this stage, Roger's internal travels were far more important to him than where the train took him), Roger was calm enough to return to Amsterdam and pick up his luggage from the hostel (whose owner/manager was the person who had propositioned him).

I don't know the particulars of what happened after that in Amsterdam, whether Roger said yes or no or if the issue came up at all at that stage, but by the time he arrived back in Melbourne he was definitely thinking about his sexual orientation.

And, of course, back in Melbourne, Roger was once again surrounded by friends and family who had expectations of how he would behave and what sort of person he was. So, in some ways, he found it much more difficult to deal with in Melbourne than in Amsterdam — everyone else in Melbourne already knew that he wasn't gay.

1986, of course, was when Michelle and I moved to Melbourne and Roger moved into 2 Rogers Street, Richmond, with us. Thinking now about some of the things that he said about his 1985 trip at that time, I suspect that he came back from Europe shortly after his experience in Amsterdam. Perhaps he wanted to be somewhere where someone, even if it wasn't him, knew who he was.

But, quietly and privately, Roger did start to explore his homosexuality. We didn't see much of Roger at Rogers Street. He was absent for days at a time and kept the odd hours that are described so well throughout *Lhyfe Thyme*, but we assumed at the time that most of it was due to the work schedule at his first home (not Bridge House; it was out in the Eastern Suburbs somewhere).

Then in 1987, around Christmas if my memory is at all accurate, letters from 'Mike' started arriving at Rogers Street as well as elsewhere in fandom. The handwriting was atrocious and the grammar was that of a poorly educated twelve-year-old, but the message was clear — Roger was a homosexual and had AIDS.

The letters were vicious and cruel but, made by a self-proclaimed homosexual lover of Roger (who seemed, confusingly, to be strongly homophobic), they had an awful ring of truth to them. Roger's response to them was to ignore the accusation of AIDS and admit that, yes, he had had a relationship with 'Mike' and that it was ending badly. He implied but never said that the AIDS accusation came from the bitterness of the breakup.

Speaking personally, the realisation that Roger was a homosexual was the missing piece to much of his behaviour during the time he was in Rogers Street. Speaking for Melbourne fandom, I know that a lot of people were completely astonished (if not horrified) by the news — you could almost hear the collective jaw hitting the ground. Speaking personally again, I was astonished by the number of people who came to me, most of whom had been at university with Roger or known him from around that time, to confirm the shocking news. 'How could Roger be a homosexual?' one asked me. 'I was at University with him.'

Thus making the point that Roger and I agreed on in 1991, sadly, that those we have known the longest are often those we know the least well. We may know the person from several years ago (Roger wasn't a homosexual at university) but that may not be the person we know now.

(12 June 1994)

* The news that Roger had come to a decision about his sexual orientation came as a complete surprise and was somehow unsurprising. The news confirmed certain observations that I had made over the years, but which I had chosen not to think about. In particular, I could only observe that a number of women over the years had been attracted, in a moon-eyed desperate way, to Roger, someone who seemed unaware of his own attractions. Roger was a good friend to many women, showing the kind of friendship that most Australian men are incapable of, but one always sensed the safe distance he placed between himself and the women who were closest to him. I always had the sense of Roger as a relaxed, hovering bird, never having decided where to land. When he landed, the trapper-snapper nabbed him. *

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Thanks for *The Metaphysical Review* 19/20/21, which has inspired me to write my first-ever letter of comment.

The tributes to Roger Weddall brought back some memories of my MUSFA days in the earlyish 1970s. One common thread in *TMR* 19/20/21 was how amazingly persuasive Roger was. He was notoriously good at Diplomacy and other wheeling-and-dealing games.

My favourite memory of Roger relates to another game, Dungeons and Dragons. At Unicon II (Easter 1976), Jon Noble introduced some MUSFA people to the original version of D&D. To continue playing, we needed someone to design a dungeon and act as dungeon master. No one had time to do this by himself, so Roger and I designed the Twin Tyrant's dungeon together. (This may well have been the first D&D campaign in Victoria.) One of Roger's contributions was a moderately nasty maze. After mapping their way to the centre of the maze, the party found a room covered with signs in dozens of languages. Roger explained that all the signs they could translate had the same meaning: Get Lost. While I struggled to keep a straight face, Roger asked for a look at the players' map, scanned it briefly, then said 'Hmmm. Very good' in such a casual way that (to my amazement) none of them suspected a thing until he crumpled the map up and threw it away. The look on their faces was wonderful.

(15 July 1994)

BEN INDICK
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Roger Weddall is one of many wonderful and gifted young people we have lost to AIDS and/or its complications. Hardly a day passes when the *New York Times* obituary page fails to list a gifted young person in the creative arts. The losses in the arts community are beyond measuring, but, worse, all those fine young people, destroyed by this terrible disease.

I have written in my fanzines of my son, who is now 39, is gay, and is preparing for the premiere at Houston Grand Opera, Texas in January 1995 and then in April at New York City Opera, Lincoln Centre, New York, of his opera (as librettist) *Harvey Milk*. He has already had reasons for me to boast of him in the arts, but this is of course his *chef d'oeuvre*, his biggest piece. And such venues! In 1996 it will appear in Germany and in San Francisco.

Last year Michael contracted some form of pneumonia; it lingered and he had much treatment, and my fear was of its being the form common to AIDS. It seemed unlikely, since he and his companion are both solid and dedicated to each other, with no promiscuity. Such he has told me, and I accept. (My rueful joke is that they would both have made wonderful husbands and fathers!) Happily, his problem was not that pneumonia, and finally it was entirely cleared up with no aftermath. We heard Michael talk about his opera at the Centre for Gay and Lesbian Affairs on 13th Street a while ago, and his plot line sounds very good indeed. I hope the music is great, but I promise nothing. The Centre bought a block of 350 tickets to use (the subject, Harvey Milk, was of course a prominent gay politician in charge of gay affairs in San Francisco). Michael pointed out that his 'dad is a writer and his mom an artist, which influenced him, and they are here tonight'. For which we received a hand, which was poignant, and referred to the many parents who reject their children because of their sexual preferences.

I have been whiling away my retirement and regretably declining years in writing a screenplay. I am delighted to tell you that I sold a short story! Yes, an actual sale. I have plenty of essays in print, semi-pro, and have had a few books of commentary on sf writers, most of which for small if any bucks. But to receive an editor's letter for a fiction commencing 'I am pleased etc. etc.'! It had to be less than 3000 words, for a Barnes and Noble book, one of a series of 100s, this being *100 Vicious Vampire Stories*. However, it is not vicious, is hopefully touching, and barely vampirical. Indeed, it has no horror at all. It will be out this year. The book will be a hardcover with jacket, yet the series is priced at just \$7.95 each.

Love to Elaine — did you two get married? Kids? Why the devil not?

(16 August 1994)

* I like the way LoCers lob in comment bombs as they leave the room.

To us it doesn't seem long since Elaine and I got married (March 1979), but of course it was before I started trading fanzines with Ben. I even published a little fanzine (*SF Commentary* 55½) subtitled 'The Wedding'. If I can find a copy, I'll send it to you, Ben.

In all my time in fandom, no one has ever commented on or even (as far as I know) worried

about the fact that Elaine and I don't have children. Quite a few couples in Australian fandom don't have children, presumably for the same reason we offer: that we don't want any. Luckily for the marriage, we agree completely on that opinion. We are reading-and-writing people. We like peace and quiet. We can't stand the sound of crying babies. The world doesn't need any more children. Etcetera.

In the end, having children and spending the next twenty years bringing them up is something you do if you really want to do it. To have a child for any other reason does a terrible disservice to the child.

To return to the beginning of your letter:

For reasons which I won't go into, I did not say anywhere in TMR 19/20/21 that Roger Weddall suffered from AIDS. This was the assumption that many people made from what I said, and that was confirmed by the advertisement for *Lhufe Thyme* on page 3.

Roger had been infected by the HIV virus for perhaps as long as seven years. He never developed any of the usual symptoms of AIDS (except the occasional very severe respiratory infection), but he was struck down by lymphoma. Whether this disease would have affected him anyway, we will never know. When the lymphoma was finally diagnosed in May 1992 the HIV virus had already reduced his T-cell count greatly, and therefore the people treating him for lymphoma could not hit him with the full barrage of treatments. And because they could not do that, the lymphoma won.

Because I did not feel free to mention this part of the story in No. 19/20/21, I also did not feel free to write about one of the most moving nights of my life: the ceremony in May 1993 at the Exhibition Building, Melbourne, when Roger's quilt was unrolled, along with those of about fifty other Victorians who had died from AIDS-related diseases in the previous year. The fully unrolled quilt itself was overwhelming (Jane Tisell and other Melbourne fans had prepared it during the previous months), but in the same day Elaine and I and quite a few others joined the AIDS Vigil in the City Square, marched with them to the Exhibition Building, and had the extraordinary experience of entering with them through the little-used front entrance into the mightiest building in Melbourne. Built in the 1880s, the Exhibition Building's floodlit exterior seemed like some Bunyanesque Celestial City into which we marched from the Carlton Gardens. The ceremony of unrolling the quilts is the sort of farewell that any person should receive, rather than the glum rituals of conventional funerals. *

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My mother died in June 1994. It wasn't as hard to take as it might have been. She had led a good, long life, and she had been talking for some time of taking her leave, quietly she hoped, without falling into a lingering illness in which she would have felt embarrassed, held back. Although her last week must have been hard, she died fairly quickly, and was, I believe, glad to go rather than

regain 'health', only to be forced into the indignity of a nursing home, a fate she feared and loathed. All in all, I feel happy for her. And, as was not the case with my father, I think we had achieved a relationship we agreed on and in; there weren't any undone connections. I will probably be working out the problems of my relationship with my father for a long time yet; not so with my mother.

The memorials for Roger Weddall gave a wonderful sense of the man and his presence in many people's lives. I am reminded of bpNichol, the wonderful Canadian poet who died far too young in 1988, and who was beloved by all his friends across the country. Intriguingly, this summer I am reading widely in post-1945 poetry in Britain and the US (for a course I have to teach this fall for the first time), and so was reading about Frank O'Hara. There was a delightful collection of memoirs by various friends, which provided a sense of loss and love that reminded me of how 'we' all reacted to bp's death. Clearly, in his world, that of New York art and poetry in the fifties and early sixties, O'Hara had connected with people in a way very like bp had in Canada from the sixties to the eighties. The tone of the memoirs, like the tone of the many tributes to bp, now remind me of the tone of your and Yvonne's, Lucy's and Eric's memoirs in this issue. It doesn't matter what 'world' such a person lives in, she or he will touch many others so fully they will carry happy memories of these people to their own deaths. That is perhaps the greatest tribute they could have.

(14 August 1994)

HENRY GASKO
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We only knew Roger for brief and widely separated intervals during the late 1970s and 1980s. He always seemed to be going off to some distant place and we'd lose touch for a year or more. But when he came back, he would welcome us like long-lost family members.

Our strongest memories are of Roger in the mid-80s. We would receive long, interesting and not always coherent letters from various parts of Europe. He also sent a beautiful stone sphinx from Egypt that I still have on my shelf (I had mentioned how much I liked the basic sphinx shape and legend before he'd left). There is also the memory of the only Botanical Gardens party we managed to attend, with almost everything focused around Roger. In fact, there was almost a hush around that part of the lake until Roger arrived, and then it was as though someone had said, 'Let the party begin.'

He was one of the only men that Judy would trust to mind Emily, and he was fantastic with her. He was also the best cat and house sitter we have ever known. It was just after his return from Egypt (I think) in 1985 that we moved into a new place in Elwood, and then had to go away for a week the very next day. What to do with our two cats, one of whom was named Timmy because his only discernible personality trait was his timidity. (For the first week after we got Timmy, he lived exclusively

under the fridge; after two days, we started to slide bowls of food and water in to him so that he wouldn't starve.) Roger to the rescue, taking brilliant care of the house (the boxes stacked everywhere were transformed into a livable environment) and having Timmy actually eating out of his hand.

There were other sides of Roger as well, though we only knew about them vaguely through stories we heard around the sf community: his relationships; his handling of the Unicon IV convention (even though I was an outsider and not privy to all that was going on, it was the best local convention I attended until the next Worldcon).

The last time I met him was sometime in the late 80s on a bus going up Hoddle Street. We spent 15 minutes talking, mostly about his job as a social worker; it took a bit of mental gymnastics to think of Roger with a steady job. We traded addresses and promised to get together sometime, but by then we had moved up the country and our links with the city had becoming more and more tenuous. We never did see him again, and it wasn't until a few weeks after his funeral that we learned the news from Elaine.

(3 September 1994)

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(From *Colloquy*, ANZAPA 161, December 1994):

I've been reading some of the things written about Roger Weddall, and feeling a bit sorry and a bit guilty that I never managed to contribute. The truth was that every time I tried I stumbled over the very nature of our relationship.

You see, it didn't seem to me as a series of stories. Rather there were images, remembered scenes, bits of dialogue, faces and places.

I could, for example, never remember when I first met Roger. I do remember going to where he was living in Rathdowne Street in the middle of 1982. Terry was with me, I think, and we were delivering FFANZ flyers to be included in *Thyme*. He wasn't home.

That was often the case. He was always doing something, going somewhere. After he moved to Bell Street in Fitzroy I began to drop in fairly regularly. The others in the house, mostly not fans, were neat to talk to even if he wasn't there. He seemed to create his own environment.

Thinking of Bell Street helps bring the stories in. Having water pistol fights with him at parties. Shane and I turning his wardrobe upside down. These things used to show me he was a madcap, zany sort of person. Only now in retrospect do I realise that often it was me being zany. He was sometimes pissed off!

This is how it seems with all the pocket bios. They reveal the writer, not the written about.

Roger could be casual and unreliable, and loved the truly innovative jape (as when we played Catfish on the bottom of the pool at Swancon 8), but was also a remark-

ably serious-minded person. As many of us fully understood only afterward.

For some time *Thyme* was produced on a computer I had connected to a typewriter and so I saw even more of him, and Peter Burns, as they put issues together. This was how Jan met him at my little house in Thornbury. I remember being pleased to have him as a friend. Or perhaps proud would be the word. Maybe even then I realised he was more mature than I about the things that really mattered.

His mysterious absence during 'the Egyptian Adventure' was perhaps my first hint of his hidden mystery. It was a great puzzle. Peter knew some of what was happening, and yet I felt Roger had become suddenly a myth and would only be real again if he returned.

Even before this Roger was a mythic figure. People visiting Melbourne would want to be taken to see him (and I have a memory of him standing in the doorway at Bell Street, in T-shirt and towel, waving farewell to me and a carload of visitors).

He was always a puzzle, too. The folk I knew in common with him were always trying to figure him out. But it never really mattered, because he just went on being, as Alan said, excellent to everyone.

The further in I look, the more I see of me. I was older, yet he helped me release the child in myself. Pompous self-involvement had no place around Roger.

The time I saw a lot of Roger was in the period from 1982 to 1986 (I guess). It was a time of transition for me, slowly getting to know some of the fans in Melbourne. I was born in Melbourne, but met fandom in Sydney, and never really got it together down south.

I was really a bit of a refugee, and I think Roger realised that. He was always drawing people in, and making them feel welcome.

He had such confidence in the face of people. He gave people a chance and yet forced us to confront ourselves. To shape up.

And so it's clear to me now. Roger was the last friend of my childhood. With him I could be silly, or downright stupid. He would reproach me, but be as bad himself later on. We could be serious, but not weighed down by it. I'll never be as free again.

While speaking at the funeral service his sister Deb paused to smile. With a shock I saw it was his smile, and my head dropped heavily into my hands with a sob. It was the last time I saw him.

(10 December 1994)

Dark odyssey

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I'm glad you had a fine Garden Party (*TMR* 18). I wish I were social like that and had lots of friends, but I'm

not and I haven't. I have always been very introverted; and far from being in a panic about losing someone, I think I have tended to discard people from my life — not through any hostility. I'm just a *leaver*. I have had groups of friends in various places where I have lived round the globe, but when I have moved on, I have lost track of them. When I leave this university department, I will leave most of *that lot* behind, without regrets. Actually, that isn't entirely my fault. Some of the people I liked best in my Department are now dead, and the ones who have entered recently are not in the least bit social. In fact, the Department doesn't function as a social unit at all, except on the most formal occasions.

There are just two or three people I really interact with; I have nearly as many ties with the Classics Department, and those will continue once I have retired. I belong to their Greek reading circle, which meets once a week. We have nearly finished the *Odyssey* — well, we are getting to the bloody bit, and after that I hope we'll do the *Iliad*. The *Iliad* is a terrible poem, but great, and it never dates. Because human lust and violence don't date. Troy, Bosnia — it's all the same.

(4 May 1993)

I feel rather bad about the news of Roger Weddall's death, because I survived a lymphoma ten years ago — and he didn't. Luckily mine (a lump against the stomach wall) was correctly diagnosed almost as soon as it began to advertise its existence. I had one week of great fear, when the thing was thought to be a stomach carcinoma (five-year survival rate: 5 per cent) — then they whipped it out, and knew what it was. I needed no other therapy, and now as a ten-year survivor I'm off their books, and I suppose my risk of dying of cancer is no higher than anybody else's. I really expect to die of a heart attack, because I have the right type of personality profile for that — manic compulsive perfectionist, once called the Class A personality.

I have made a very successful adjustment to retirement — because I have not in fact retired. They don't pay me a salary, but I am up to my neck in 'research' — i.e. editing Wells — and I also have a post-grad student to supervise, simply because I can't shake her off — though in fact I don't want to teach *anyone anything again*. In my own mind I am no longer a teacher. I am throwing a lot of my energy (quite considerable for sixty-five) into a new (unpaid) career, as a nurses' helper, and perhaps ultimately a paramedic.

I've just read a terrific (pun intended) book called *How We Die* by Sherwin B. Nuland (1993: Chatto, 1994). He says everyone should be trained in CPR (cardio-pulmonary resuscitation). It's what you should try if someone has a heart attack in front of you. It seldom succeeds, but you ought to *try* — it's no good merely ringing the ambulance, because if the heart stops, it's brain death in four minutes (maximum). Nuland, an American medical doctor, is the chap to read, if you want to be scared into your wits.

I feel very militant about this, because although the universe as a whole is pretty crazy and doomed anyway, the meaning of Life and Everything is that you've got to keep fighting (even though you're bound to lose in the long run). As the anonymous author of *The Battle of*

Maldon put it (991 CE, modernised by me):

Thought shall be harder heart the keener
Courage the greater as our strength lessens.

In this poem this is spoken by an old warrior on the lost battlefield, close to the corpse of his leader Earl Byrtnoth. The old man goes on:

I am ripe-aged I will not hence (etc.) . . .
May he ever mourn
Who from this battle-play thinks to flee.

But the word I translate as 'ripe-aged' is actually *frod* (cf. Frodo) — both 'wise' and 'old'. That line in the original reads:

Ic eom frod feores fram ic ne wille

You see why you have to read poetry in the original. We in our Greek circle have just read the most tragic passage in *The Iliad* — perhaps in all literature — Hector's speech to his wife, 6.440–465, with the terrible lines:

For well this thing do I know in my deepest mind
and my heart:
There will be a day on a time when fallen is Ilios
holy . . .

Literature, especially poetry (or prose so intense that it reaches the level of poetry and you memorise it unawares) is the language of passion, including moral passion, and I am using literature now to express my own passionate commitment to life. It's all a battlefield, in which we will certainly be killed — but the point is to 'go ballsy', as Punch says in *Riddle Walker*. (Incidentally, I wonder how Hoban is. The last time I saw him in London, he was in very bad shape — had prostate cancer, among other things. As Nuland points out, the old are usually dying of several diseases at once.)

Actually, as a warrior in this battle, I am scared stiff. I have never been close to anyone's death, and I am deeply afraid that I will prove a coward when some day I am confronted with it. Your own death is not so difficult — especially if it's quick.

My wife has Parkinson's disease, and it's getting worse, which is normal. It got abruptly worse at the beginning of 1994, and she was in hospital twice — the second time for a broken arm. That was before I retired. I came home from the uni and found her lying on the bedroom floor, between the bed and the wall, unable to move. She had been there about half an hour, of course unable to reach a phone. She had a fracture, as it turned out, in the upper right arm. I managed to get her up, into our car, and to hospital. She has recovered, more or less, from that fracture now. Since then she has had many other falls, in one of which she broke her pelvis in two places. That's mended now, too — but for many weeks, or months, I was afraid she would one day break her neck. You don't die directly of Parkinson's, but you can die indirectly three ways: (1) from a fall; (2) from choking to death, if the disease gets a bad hold on your throat; (3) euthanasia, usually surreptitious.

Marguerite and I don't belong to the life-at-any-cost party. In fact, I don't think that people over, say, eighty-five, should have any unconditional right to life. They ought not to cost society millions of dollars (and their loved ones millions of seconds of horror). They ought to be put quietly out of their misery. Moreover, I think that as the populations of the developed countries age drastically over the next thirty to forty years, euthanasia will become legal everywhere, and may go on from being legal to being, in some places, mandatory. The old and decaying ought to make room for the next generation, which they can only do by dying. I am not opting for something like *Logan's Run*; if the hundred-year-old is healthy and has most of 's marbles, why, let 'em live.

Enough of that. But do read Nuland.

I have had no fits of depression this year — for one thing, I haven't had the time. Apart from caring for my wife, I also go visiting old 'clients', as our Blue Nurses call them. (Shades of Gene Wolfe! But I don't take a sword or black cloak with me on these visits.) The Blue Nurses are a Christian-sponsored voluntary home-visiting association. There's a laugh for you! Me working for Christians! I have even stood by, in their Day Respite Centre, while one of the nurses has said Grace. I quite liked the last Grace I heard, because the nurse who said it took time to remind God about old so-and-so who was now in hospital and therefore couldn't be with us. Of course, you have to accept God mythologically, as a word-symbol for the people, the group, us, the poor bloody humans. But I refuse to bow my head when this prayer is said. I look straight at God — namely, the people in the room.

Some of my paramedic work is very interesting, because my 'clients' are interesting people. One, especially, who was born a Romanian national, but of French parentage and Sorbonne-educated, and had a mysterious career during World War II dodging the Gestapo through Alsace, Vienna and Poland. I told him he ought to write his memoirs before it's too late. And now, alas, it may be too late, because when I went to visit him today, I didn't find him; a neighbour told me he was in hospital with pneumonia.

Pneumonia. The 'old man's friend' — because it kills quickly without too much pain. Of course Jack (not his real name) had heart trouble as well — but as I said (and Nuland says) the old have several diseases at once. Hell, I selfishly hope Jack survives this, because I want to hear more about Poland and the forest where the Germans never went (because if they did they didn't come out again; the Poles killed them). And the wild boar, and the Deutsche-Arbeits-Front, and, and . . . Jack is/was very deaf, so it took my a long time to extract these stories. Of course, I don't know if they were even true, or which side he really was on in the War, but when he did produce these yarns they were very good ones.

That's one annoying thing about death — it deprives the human race of interesting information. I have begun to think of my death in this way, too. My life has not been externally adventurous, but if I wrote a truthful memoir of the internal torments of my adolescence it would probably interest psychologists. Actually, I *have* written such a memoir, and I keep it in my Death folder

— prominently marked on the outside with instructions.

(15 August 1994)

[4.30 a.m.:] Being sleepless, I have now read *TMR* 19/20/21 a bit more. Roger Weddall puts me to shame. There was a man who *did* the things I only talk about doing. As his sister put it so well. No saint (?), but unique. (How do you define 'saint'? Roger strikes me as someone of 'heroic virtue', which is the category used by the Catholic Church for canonisation. I'm sure there must be some gay saints — gay in both senses.)

(16 August 1994)

* My favourite story about Roger was told to me by Peter Burns after I had written 'The Lark Ascended'. Peter, Roger and several other people travelled to one of the Perth conventions by car over the Nullarbor Plain. There is a section there where the road comes close to the cliff that lines the Great Australian Bight. Nobody climbs down the cliffs, which just go on for hundreds of miles, overarching the water, which bites in under them. Peter says that every time they stopped for a break near the cliff, Roger would insist on standing on the edge of the cliff, with his toes over the side. *

This is an addendum to my letter of 15 August, telling you what happened last night (16 August). Good grief, if I go on like this I'll be landed in a project like Tristram Shandy — you can't record your whole life on paper, because it's winding on while you write.

I am now at least partly in the revulsion stage I foresaw in my last letter. Over the past few days I have been too consciously wearing a halo or a warrior's helmet. I repent of that. The serious problems of life and death are best solved *not* by striking a heroic attitude, but by using your intellect. Enlightenment, not moral passion. The Buddhists are right and the Christians are wrong (to pervert one line from the Christian heroic poem *Le Chanson de Roland*). 'Be not righteous overmuch . . . why shouldst thou destroy thyself?' (Ecclesiastes, that nihilist mole that somehow burrowed into the Bible). '*Pas trop de zèle*' (Talleyrand). Hector was wrong, after all, and his wife was right — he should have taken more care to preserve his own life. That way, just possibly, Troy might not have fallen, literature might have been deprived of its greatest tragedy . . . but tragic attitudes are not the best approach to life. The Spartans should have retreated from Thermopylae, and lived to fight another day.

(Here, of course, I am kicking half of my personality in the teeth. I will probably repent of my repentance.)

My heroics about my Class A personality received a dramatic confirmation last night, little more than twenty-four hours after I wrote that first paragraph. Confirmation, or retribution? I am sure I psyched myself into it. 'It' was something that felt like a mild heart attack (actually, atrial fibrillation).

I've had goes of this before, when the heart seems to flutter in the chest. But previous bouts lasted seconds, or in the worst case about five minutes. Last night's bout lasted seventy minutes, from 9.50 to 11 p.m., and only stopped when a doctor called. Then it stopped

promptly, as soon as he made his diagnosis. (Therefore psych induced, no?)

Yes, I was in slight danger of death — I mean, more than usual, since we are all in danger of death every second. My pulse rate, for over an hour, was up from 60+ to 80, an increase of some 30 per cent, and worse still, the heartbeat was irregular. And an hour is a long time to keep waiting for the damn thing to stop altogether, especially lying on the bedroom floor with your wife looking on helplessly.

I have told her since (this morning) that if I do die of a heart attack some day before her eyes, it will be much worse for her than for me. I read an account in Nuland of a heart attack from the inside. This was a guy who *was* resuscitated in those crucial four minutes. he said that after the initial blow, he felt his consciousness simply fade peacefully away, like a light going out in slow motion. There is no horror at all — the horrors are reserved for those who watch. (Nuland describes these in graphic detail, for he experienced them as a young intern. He failed to save his patient. Afterwards, he was in shock and weeping. His friend put his arm round him and said, 'Now you know what it's like to be a doctor.')

During that long hour-plus, I was reasonably calm. We were facing a bad dilemma: was this a life-threatening crisis or not? I've had it before . . . but the minutes stretched on, and the thing didn't go away. Then I told Marguerite to ring our GP's locum. She got his secretary, who promptly asked whether she wanted the ambulance or (in another half hour or so) the locum.

I told her to opt for the locum after half an hour, very conscious that I might be making the wrong decision. Luckily it turned out to be the right decision.

At a pulse rate of 80, the thing is not usually dangerous. But if it goes much above that, it may be. The worst danger is that the rapid irregular beating will shake free a flake of blood clot which coats one of the vessels, and that can zoom up to the brain and cause a stroke. Fibrillation is a common phenomenon in the elderly; it is best warded off with half an aspirin a day.

(16 August 1995)

I wonder what difference my revulsion from heroism will make to my actual conduct of life. Not much overtly, I guess. Bit I intend to be a more cautious Volunteer, remembering that charity should begin at home, and rashness is no part of my duty. I had better shut up now, or I will utter more heroics. Damn it, those things are almost inescapable, and even if you don't write them, you think them ('Yes, I did rather well in that scene, after all, showed grace under pressure, like a Hemingway man'). Horrible, isn't it? But human egoism is endless. The real saints, I think, never write, and probably don't even think they're saints. But I don't suppose anyone is really perfectly selfless — evolution makes that impossible.

I flounder between different value systems. I was brought up a Christian on a diet of almost pure heroics. I wish now I had been brought up a sensible Buddhist or a worldly-wise humanist. But I wasn't: I got the education that reinforced all the extreme tendencies of my genes.

(17 August 1995)

Thank you for your information about heart fibrillation. It is precisely a stroke I'm afraid of — I'd rather be dead outright than half paralysed. I've had another go of the thing, about two weeks ago. This time I said 'To hell with it!' and just went on working, and after an hour it stopped.

(27 September 1995)

* I'll go into more detail in *SF Commentary*, but I'll mention here the definitive edition of Wells' *First Men in the Moon* that David has edited. The bad joke at the end of the process is that it is available only from American Oxford University Press. David is currently preparing a companion definitive edition of *The Invisible Man*. *

I've done a lot of reading in the past months, especially in philosophy of various sorts. One brilliant book was David Hume's *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion* (1779). In spite of its date, it's beautiful and easy prose. Hume impressed me with the *irrelevance* of the idea of God. If there is a Creator, so what? He/she obviously isn't 'good' in our sense of the word, and it is therefore pointless to worship him/her, or base morality there. (I intuited that long ago, in my short story 'Creator'.) People like Paul Davies and Fred Hoyle who find a creative hand in the 'design' of physical laws that make life possible should read Hume, and see how little this proves. It makes quite good sense to say, Yes, there is a God, but he is heartless or evil.

You can reach the same conclusion another way. Plato raised the point in his *Euthyphra*: are good actions good because the gods command them, or do the gods command them because they *are* good, period? If the first option is right, the gods/God might have commanded murder, rape, adultery, theft . . . and then these things would be 'good'. Plato comes down hard against this view, and I suppose most of us would, too. Good is what we intuit as good, without reference to God. Therefore God is perfectly irrelevant to goodness. Goodness does not spring from religion; rather, it's the other way about. Morality is primary; religion is an emotional pat on the back or reinforcing of morality. . . .

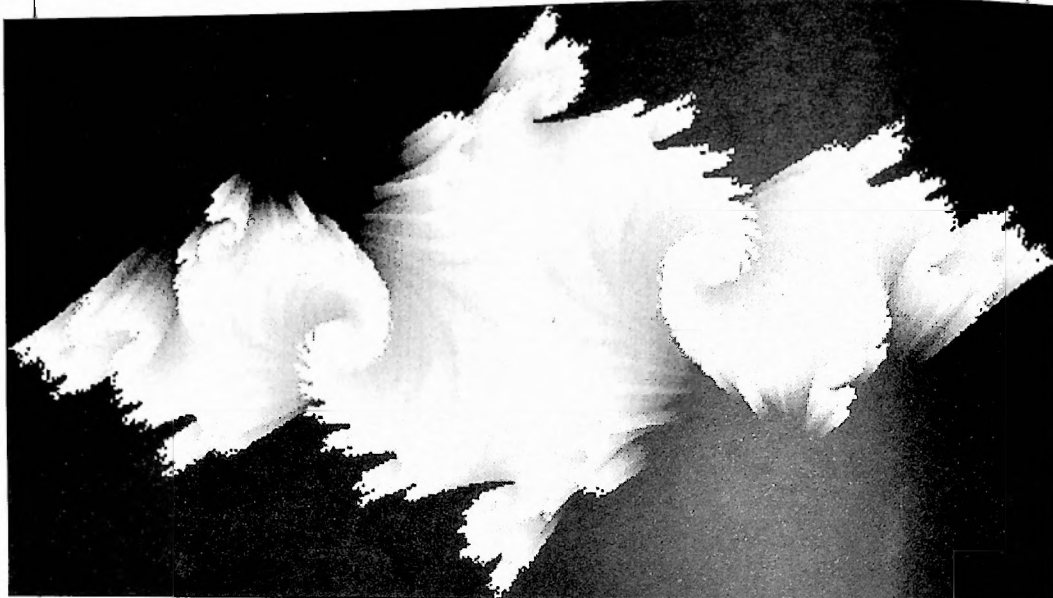
I'd like to be born again, with a different character. (Not Born Again in a religious sense!) I am far too introvert for real happiness. I am certainly not an ideal Tribesman. When I look at other people, especially people suffering from age and other severe handicaps, I marvel at their lust for life. I sometimes think I belong to a different species. And *they* are the ones I approve of, not myself. They are Darwinian winners — they are extrovert, they get pleasure from life even though they are blind, deaf and dumb, 90 years old, or whatever. Whereas I think death would be preferable to so much.

I seem to be quite healthy again. There is nothing organically wrong with me. All my stomach trouble was because of stress — at Marguerite's illness. *That* still gives me stress, all right. Every week I try to see some improvement, and instead, see signs of deterioration. The books say Parkinson's is not a mental illness. Well, the books seem to be wrong in her case. She definitely isn't as bright as she was. One proof is reading. She used to be a faster reader than I. Now she is painfully slow.

And there's the matter of her financial dealings. She simply doesn't know what she's got. There is no list. I have tried to make one, but in many cases there are no records of the last two years. And then, there is her walking. She is now on a very high dose of the basic drug,

yet she still falls apart every three hours. If she gets much worse, and I know what that can be like, she has told me she will want to die . . .

(27 June 1995)



(From Page 55)

I am now up and about, and though by no means fully recovered am sufficiently far on the way to be able to see the end. I have decreed that I will take my first job in April and be fully recovered by June. One year is enough!!!

Of course, while all this was going on we were pregnant. It has stopped being a pregnancy and has become a Patric: as all who came to the Naming know. He is a bouncing big bairn and the apple of our eyes. I am philosophically opposed to children in general, but you cannot argue with a biological clock (a fact that largely contributes to the current state of the planet), and now we have a Patric Pendragon Ellis Ashby. Maybe his generation will solve the problems we have created, if we leave them anything with which to work. Good Luck Patric Mate!

Max had Patric at the Women's Hospital in the Birthing Unit. I was present, but confined to a chair and wearing my then new back brace. The birth was fast and fierce. I hope never again to see a body in so much pain as Max experienced. For the pain he caused and for his own sweet self Patric is doubly dear. He is doing all those baby things that mostly seem to involve runny bodily functions punctuated with noises of various emotional colours and energetic horizontal go go dancing.

twurple werple glutz meeeep 17 January 1995 12:05:23 p.m.

Patric has been much travelled. At six weeks we went on one of our East Gippsland odysseys. He visited Sale to meet with Darren McCubbin, the National Town Crier Champion and loudest man on earth. With Darren we went to a Who Dunnit Murder Night for the Nambrok Tennis Club at the Nambrok Hall. Darren organises these little social events throughout Gippsland. This one seemed to have the entire population of Nambrok, all in character. We sat on the sidelines and watched in awe as Darren controlled an improvisation containing about a hundred participants towards the goal of finding out Who Dunnit. It was, predictably, the Local Policeman. On the way home we were treated to the most powerful thunderstorm with which I have ever been surrounded. The land around Nambrok is flat and dedicated to growing cows and cabbages. All around lightning flashed down to the ground at such a frequency that often it seemed brighter than daylight.

From Sale, we went on to Mallacoota. Max and I spent a lot of time there. It is one of our homes away from home. We have been involved in their arts festival for nearly ten years, and over that time we have almost become part of the community. I have conducted puppetry workshops, taught silt walking and mask making at the school for so long that almost every child in the town and a good number of the younger adults know me.

(17 January 1995)

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