

Outworlds 67

the
3rd
Five Yearly
All Cincinnati
(more-or-less)
Issue

Irene "opened" **OUTWORLDS 64** -- albeit under a different name. Somehow it only seems appropriate to have her lead-off this incarnation....

For Bill on His Big 2-0

Where you came from,
I don't know.
Does it matter?
Where you're going
I cannot know.
Can I?

You're here.
Now.
That matters.
That I know.

— Irene Perrin

This particular contribution may have the most convoluted means of entry into the data base. Roger's and Chris' contributions came on disk, and (despite some "problems" with the one from Chris) that "worked". But, despite his having saved it in three different formats – nothing Dave Locke could do (even with his impressive number of toys) would "read" Frank's disk. In the end, Dave suggested the "solution": Frank e-mailed the following to Dave, Dave downloaded it to my disk, I brought it home – and here we are.

Normally I wouldn't go to all of this trouble but, as Frank repeatedly points out to me – he was the only one to actually beat the deadline for this issue!

The Seven Year Itch (Minus Two)

Frank Johnson

Let's get right to it: let's talk about Bill Bowers.

He's a man of obsessions, ones that seem to come and go with time. This may, or may not, be easily evident to you by now. For instance, he was for a while taking note of his destination whenever his car odometer reached significant marks, like the passing of a multiple of 10 thousand miles, or a repetition reading of the same digit. I think I cured him of that one on the drive back from the Atlanta Worldcon in 1986. While on Interstate 75, in some southern state, my still relatively new 1986 Tercel was about to reach a total mileage of 8888 miles. That was the perfect excuse to exceed the posted speed limit to that of 88 miles an hour. Fortunately I didn't have the flux capacitor turned on, so eventually we wound up back home in Cincinnati rather than 30 years in the present or future as in the movies.

The publication who hold in your hands right now represents a pair of his other obsessions: publishing and anniversaries. For as long as I've known Bill, he has always been heavily into fan publishing. Even before that long ago move from NE to SW Ohio, he was quite well known for fan pubbing, one of the geniuses behind **Double:Bill**. For many fanzine editors, myself included, Bowers showed a graphic sense that made the simple look elegant, something that a lot of us copied. Since then there have been various issues of **Outworlds** and zines that start with X long before Chris Carter made that letter so very popular.

And through some very trying times, Bill has almost always put out. The old saying goes: "Publish or Perish". Bill continues the former and has changed the latter to persevere.

The anniversary thing has caused this particular work. It was fifty years ago today (do the math) that Sergeant Pepper taught the band to play. Twenty years after that the Beatles did an album about it and ten years after that Bill Bowers arrived at Midwestcon. Similar anthologies (can I be bold enough to actually call it that?) marked numbers 10 and 15 and here we are with number 20. What a Long Strange Trip It's Been.

■ To further show how this has become a matter of habit for Bill, more than tradition, he used "as usual" when defining the non-boundaries of what we contributors could write. Every five years doesn't fall into the normal ideas of "as usual". But then again we are speaking of Bill Bowers.

■ I have no idea where Bill has placed my pages within the finished product. If I'm in front and you're reading this early on, skip around to a couple of other sections then come back here. I heartily recommend Steve Leigh's piece. He's a Real Author. He's got novels out there, his very own Web site on the Internet (where he's actually used a quote from me), had some of his work nominated for a Hugo award, and (this is the big one) adapted into a Marvel comic book.

Steve is also lucky enough to be married to Denise Parsley Leigh who should also be in these pages. It's been a while (like maybe five years for Bill's last one) since her writing's been out there and whatever excuse it takes to get her on the printed page again is cause for celebration.

You should also read Joel Zakem's contribution. He's a lawyer, you know, and is the best source I know for jokes of his beleaguered profession. Joel has been a fan guest of honor here and there and was very close to winning the DUFF voting earlier this year. He and I go Way Back and are celebrating our 30th consecutive MidWest-Con. (This is not to one up, or even ten up, Bill. It's just that Joel and I started out young and stuck it out. I can't speak for him -- Joel or Bill for that matter -- but I'm proud to be an Old Fart.) Chances are if you're getting this from Bill you're probably invited to our big party at this year's con.

■ When we got together like this ten years ago, I was about to make my first big move westward to Avon, Colorado. Five years later, I sent my contribution from North Carolina. This time around I'm back in Cincinnati. The profession of radio can take you to far places if you don't watch out.

I do radio for a living, supplying on-air chitchat between music selections. That first trip in 87 took me to my first Program Director gig. Between then and now, there's been two more PD positions and production and on-air work in Raleigh, NC; Champaign, IL; and Lexington, KY within the formats of Adult Contemporary (Mariah Carey, Fleetwood Mac), Adult Alternative Album (Fleetwood Mac, Van Morrison), Rock (Pearl Jam, Led Zeppelin) and Classical

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Bacover Credit: Photo by Geri Sullivan □ Corflu 13, Nashville, March 1996

Note: I still have the POBox, but rarely visit it; please change your Mailing Lists to reflect the above....

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This is My Publication #195 ■ 26 Pages ■ Print Run: 175 ■ Dated: 06/22/97

(James Galway, Wynton Marsalis). It pays to be versatile.

I'm currently doing morning drive airwork and production at WVAE, Cincinnati in the Smooth Jazz format. Artists for this one include Kenny G and George Benson as well as Michael Bolton and Toni Braxton. This is not to be confused with Real Jazz, by the way, of which three of the four have never played and the fourth hasn't touched in over twenty years. The big difference between the two is the total lack of syncopation that makes Real Jazz the art form it is. That also makes Smooth Jazz a commercial viability and that's why so many stations are doing it across the country.

Ever since the format first appeared here in the fall of 1995 the audience reaction has been very positive, almost fanatically so. For a format that can be accurately described as Easy Listening for the 1990's, I'm amazed by the reaction from listeners. They say they've been waiting for this for years, it's the greatest thing since sliced bread, and so on. It's hard for me to see it through their eyes (or hear it through their ears) as I'm the guy doing it. I look at it as a business, something I do on an almost daily basis. And that means hearing the same pieces of music on an almost daily basis. Getting jaded about it is an unavoidable hazard of the job.

I manage to keep my sanity by keeping away from it when I'm not in the studio and on the air. People are surprised when I tell them that I don't listen to my own station when I'm not on it. They're also surprised to hear that I listen only to public radio, mostly the local classical outlet. It's really simple to explain.

Listening to commercial radio is work. Rather than paying attention to just the music that's being played, I end up paying more attention to what music selection is played, how the announcer is presenting it, listening to the commercials and station promotions that come in between the songs. Simply because of what I do for a living, I wind up evaluating what I hear rather than just enjoying it.

So why public radio? It serves my needs in the same ways as commercial stations do for you "civilians", minus the ads: I look to radio for entertainment and information. First off, it meets my expectations of entertainment. I enjoy classical music and, unlike highly formatted pop music stations, there's a much wider number of selections from which to choose. I have noticed that the Cincinnati classical station has recently implemented a smaller rotation of pieces that get on the air, but this doesn't match the policy of most stations of playing songs five and six times a day, everyday. I personally don't need such repetition and look for fresh, new things to hear.

And just like everybody else out there, I use radio as a source of information. National Public Radio is the tops in that department, nothing on the commercial airwaves even comes close. Luckily, Cincinnati has three stations that carry NPR newscasts and overlap each other on most days.

■ Over the past few years, I've been getting this question: Do you think OJ did it? I'll answer that question in a minute, but first....

The way that whole trial took over the country was the most amazing thing I've ever seen and it sure as hell brought out the worst in a lot of people. The Helms-Gantt Senate race in 1990 was a more concentrated affair but, with its effect confined to just a single state, slips into second place. The mass media grabbed onto that and never let it go; even now there's always something about it that makes the news.

I missed out on the Bronco chase because I was pre-recording an airshift that would run the Sunday morning of MidwestCon a couple of weeks later.

The station I was working for at the time (in Lexington, KY) got involved in the Kato Kaelin marketing blitz. The World's Most Famous Houseguest™ was flown in to attend a very upscale Kentucky Derby party and appeared on the station's morning show (not

mine, I assure you). My only comment on the affair, several weeks after his appearance, was to question whether he would have been twice as famous if four people had been killed.

Because I was working the overnight shift, my bedtime on most days was noon with wakeup at 8PM. This means I can claim to be one of the few people on face of the planet (certainly this hemisphere) who slept through the verdict of the first trial.

Sure it pulled in the ratings, but this was the worst lawyer series in the history of television.

And when the civil trial ended, I was also in bed. I did however watch the beginning of the networks' coverage of this one. Everywhere you turned, television cameras were trained on the outside of the court building where people were milling around waiting for something to happen. People Hanging Out was what we got to see instead of regularly scheduled programming.

Now here's my answer to the earlier question, and you may not like it:

I don't know if he did it. Nothing was shown to me to sway me one way or the other. The prosecution certainly didn't do their job in proving its case beyond a reasonable doubt. And the defense, in its er, um defense, did all it was supposed to do — supply that doubt. They didn't have to prove innocence, nor did they. I really wish they had, though, if in fact Simpson was innocent. It would have left this country in a much better shape.

■ Five years ago I wrote about how Cincinnati was getting a bad (but accurate) national rap because of the Mapplethorpe exhibit. Things haven't improved really. The furor over snapshots of penises has been replaced Marge Schott, a repeat offender, and the grandmother who got arrested for putting money in parking meters. Next up, my prediction before the May first deadline, will be a rematch of publisher Larry Flynt and Hamilton County. Milos Foreman made a movie about it and got a couple of Oscar nominations, you might recall. Flynt plans to return his *Hustler* magazine to local newsstands next month goading the county prosecutors to another court rumble. I can't think of a better promotion for the video release of the film.

■ Speaking of movies, I'm sure your attention was grabbed by the massive amount of column inches given over to the release of a film from the 1970's. Every time I opened up a paper or magazine this spring, all the critics were talking about the unexpected re-release of a movie that left an indelible impression on everyone who saw it the first time around. With cleaned up sound and images, the film was ready to affect a new generation of filmgoers. Of course, I'm talking about the legendary *Pink Flamingos*. It was really fun reading the creative ways writers used to describe that all too real final scene with Divine.

■ I was in Burger King last month when I spotted Elvis standing in line right in front of me. After paying for the food, he took the tray over to a table in the corner of the restaurant where he was having lunch with Colonel Parker.

■ Also in the last five years I've become a part of the computer connected world. Last time around I was using an Amstrad, which was basically a glorified word processor. No complaints about it, it served me very well without fail for more than seven years. I'm now typing this onto a three year old Mac that I love to death. What, you say and/or sneer, a Mac? Sure -- it's a breeze to use and I wasn't about to pay that kind of money for the privilege of looking at a damn C prompt.

It has made me very much more organized in many of life's endeavors and I'm much more productive in a lot of ways. And yes, I

do enjoy using it. I also like the fact that I can mess around and solve nearly the problems that come up. I can't explain it and I won't even try. But I will tell that I'm still on the good side of Nerd though, in the interest of good mental health and full disclosure, I do come close at times.

The time is soon at hand when computer know-how will be a real necessity in the everyday world. I'm waiting for the day when fanzines will get handed to me on a floppy disc.

■ While Michael Jackson is no longer for me a source of entertainment, he still has the ability to surprise. His marriage to Elvis' daughter was kinky enough, but for him to father a child! I didn't expect that the baby would be a boy; that would have been my third guess.

■ The internet is both a marvelous and evil thing.

It's marvelous that I can zip messages back and forth all over the world faster than any postal service. The wealth of information available out there is truly staggering from the very useful (on a

daily basis I peruse the Associated Press and online versions of the *New York Times*, the *Washington Post*, the *London Times*), the entertaining (lots of magazines like *Rolling Stone*, *Jazz Times*, *Q*, and *Fanfare* are just the start) – to the downright absurd (I found a Web site that purports to tell the truth about urban legends, including the one of Harlan Ellison and a taller woman – ask me later). It's evil in that so much time is sucked away via the World Wide Web in a most addictive manner. No matter where you go there's always an underlined bit a text that seductively beckons onto yet another time consuming journey.

I'm waiting for the day when fanzines will no longer get handed to me on a floppy disc. Why print the zine when it can be posted on the Web, in full color with moving graphics and sound? Think how lively and immediate the lettercol could be. In five years, you can check out the 25th anniversary spectacular at <http://www.outworlds.com>. You do have that domain registered, don't you, Bill?

— Frank Johnson

...as I've mentioned before, My Cat met Denise at that 1977 MidWestCon; I met her a week later. For twenty years, now – she has been one of the Special People in my life.

Hopefully we'll make another twenty...

For Bill Bowers, 20th Anniversary...

Denise Parsley Leigh

I have a hard time imagining that it has been twenty years since our first convention. It seems like I was a different person... sometimes I have trouble remembering what I was like back then: an eager, avid fan and Bowers worshiper (don't tell him). No children yet, not even a mortgage...no money, either.

I can't really say that things were better then, just different. One thing...I seemed to have more time for the things I enjoy doing. I even started publishing a fanzine and I'm not even sure when the last issue of *Graymalkin* was published (though I'm sure someone out there can tell me). Bill impressed me so much with *Outworlds* that I wanted to be a part of that elite group of good fanzine editors, thus *Graymalkin* was born. Granted, it was rather rough around the edges sometimes (okay, maybe often), but it was fun and Bill was my inspiration. Maybe someday he'll inspire me to revive it....he keeps trying to convince me. Something about a sexual fantasy issue.

At any rate, I promised Bill I would write something for this issue and he said he didn't care what I wrote.

I keep going back to that first MidWestCon. Steve and I have both written about it so I won't recap it here, but it DID seem like a different world then, even for fandom. It was before AIDS, so people were fairly free and, of course, it was before many of us (I mean Michael & Salma, Michelle & John, Drew & Carol, and I know there are lots of fannish friends out there whose names I'm blocking on right now) had kids, and before many of our friends, like Mike and Susan & Guy and Becca, and Tanya and Fe, got married. We just had cats and houseplants, for the most part. Some of us were taller then, too (right, Bill?) and I know I was thinner and Steve had a bit more hair. I haven't stayed up for all night fandom for years.

Now I have kids who are the gamers that we used to abhor at conventions. Sometimes they even run around in costume, and they are definitely into media. But both of them love to read and even write (and it always seems to turn out to be science fiction) and I am very proud of both of them.

Once in a while I get nostalgic for those times, but recently I went to a MikeCon where there were lots of fannish people that I really care a lot about, and really, none of us seem that different. We all still love to party, and stay up late talking, and go out to eat at ethnic restaurants, and drink good beer and wine, and go shopping and buy books, and cuddle and generally do the things that good friends are supposed to do together.

I guess it's always good to look back to the past to see where we've come from, but I, for one, am starting to really look forward to where we're all going. See you in the 40th Anniversary issue of Bill's move to Cincinnati!

— Denise Parsley Leigh
May 7 and May 30th, 1997

...If Joel makes it to as many CFG functions as I do – in the past few years Dave Rowe has shown up for considerably more such events despite living two hours away. So it only seems "appropriate" to invite Dave to join The Mix, this time around....

To Kill Kersh -- Twice

Dave Rowe

Following Gerald Kersh's second death in early November, 1968, *Publisher's Weekly* printed a perfunctory obit simply noting his 'passing' (with no mention of his first demise) and listed the only three of his books that were still available. Which was far too perfunctory for a man who was a Coldstream Guard, a spy, a Chief Features writer, as well as a scriptwriter for M.G.M., considered one of the best of the war-time and post-war writers, who wrote over 5000 articles, 3000 short stories and 30 books including several best sellers despite a literary career that started with a novel selling only 80 copies, who could bend dimes in his mouth and died twice.

Born, half-Russian in Teddington-on-Thames, Britain, in 1911, he lived his final "quiet" years in the Shawangunk mountain town of Cragmoor, New York state; with Florence, his second wife, a transplanted Philadelphian.

A stateside sojourn from 1950 to 1952 probably "laid the soil" for Kersh's own North American transplantation in the mid-fifties. Upon becoming a U.S. citizen he said of Britain, "The Welfare State and confiscatory taxation make it impossible to work over there, if you're a writer."

His other abodes had been in Barbados, France, Italy and some unspecified part or parts of South America.

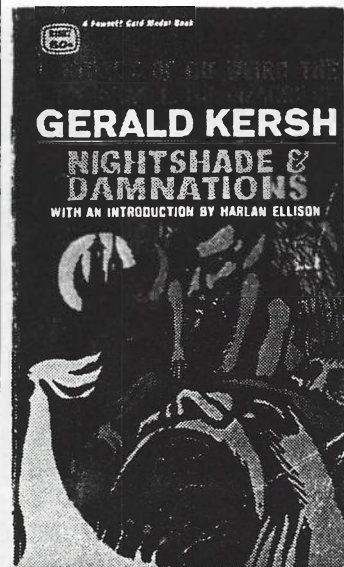
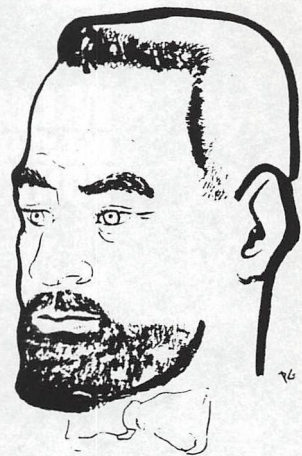
Kersh himself was described as "villainous-looking", "a huge burly Man" and "heavy set". He had "piercing black eyes" as well as a fierce goatee beard and a strong black mustache which framed a straight clenched-teeth smile. His voice was a "roaring deep bass."

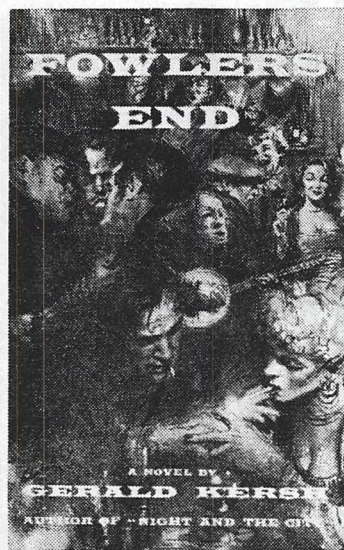
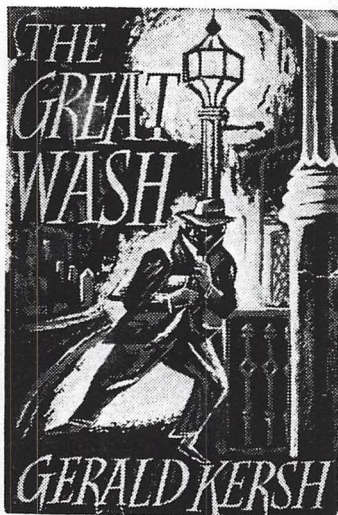
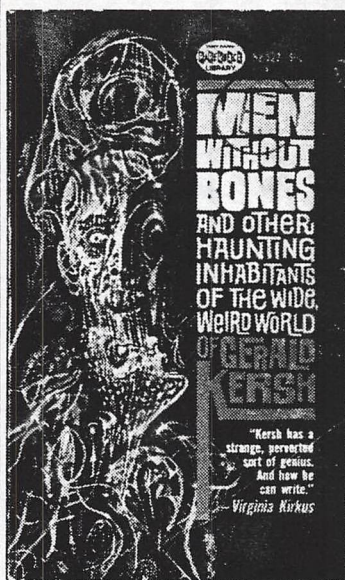
He was known not only to tear telephone directories in half and uncap beer bottles with his teeth but also to bend dimes and sixpences in two with his teeth. He would then give away the coin as a souvenir or good luck charm, admitting that "I started the dimebending thing in a New York bar to outdo some other muscular showoffs".

Always the individualist, he would refer to himself by his surname alone. He detested the ordinary, one anonymous friend recalled: "It wasn't surprising, having breakfast with Kersh, to hear him order something like anchovies and figs doused in brandy."

He was also infamous for his 'Kersh's Right Hand', a drink he would hoist onto many an unfortunate friend. This 'delightful' concoction included amongst other ingredients: brandy, champagne, gin, orange curacao, orange juice and picon.

During his years in Britain's capital he was often to be found wandering aimlessly around town, smartly dressed in a waistcoat and fedora, swinging a gnarled walking cane. These constitutionals were interrupted by many a visit to the pubs along the way where he would immediately ensnare one or more of the regulars in





conversation. Upon recounting these events he would make the regulars and their tales sound very much like some of his very own characters from his London novels.

At the time of his second death Kersh was best known with stateside paperback readers for his off-beat and bizarre short stories in the horror and SF genres. There had been two recent collections, resplendent with 'artistically' macabre covers and he had appeared more than once in Judith Merrill's annual best anthologies, but it has to be noted that his regular contributions to *Collier's*, *Esquire*, *Playboy* and *Saturday Evening Post* had certainly added more to his coffers.

Alternatively, amongst literary circles and British readers he was better known as a writer of popular novels which although also off-beat and bizarre were so because they were often based in the real world of London's bohemians, criminals and working class.

To explain the 'shift' it should be noted that some of the best novels were never printed stateside and his 'masterpiece' *FOWLER'S END* only received one printing.

However, these writings earned Kersh the praise of such critics as Orville Prescott of *The New York Times* who found Kersh "one of the most richly gifted of all the younger English writers", while *The Herald Tribune's* Lewis Gannett declared he wrote "with a terrifying sense of reality". Joseph Taggart of London's *The Star* wrote "As a surgeon exposing the inner malaise of some of our citizens, Kersh wields the keenest scalpel since Huxley & Waugh were at work in the 'twenties", and *The Evening News* critic Frank O'Connor considered Kersh "the real successor of Kipling, not a successor by imitation, but a successor by temperament."

But among such laurels there was a caveat presented by *The New York Times*; "Kersh is not a writer to be recommended to everyone without reservations." In 1943 Kersh wrote a fictionalized account of the Nazi's sadistic slaughter of the entire village of Lidice in Czechoslovakia, *THE DEAD LOOK ON*. Despite the fact that death and mutilation were then a daily part of life in blitzed Britain, the novel's horrific descriptions had some critics openly conceding "that they had to force themselves to finish reading the book" and in 1957 *FOWLER'S END* had a number of critics bemoaning that it contained "the most disgusting characters" and "some of the foulest language... they had ever come across."

"I am... supposed to be a fiction writer," wrote Kersh in 1947, "...but the novels I have written... haven't really been fiction at all. They have contained an irreducible minimum of made-up stuff. Like Aloysius Horn, I have found that fiction, without factual background is dust and ashes."

Kersh had found plenty of factual background during the war. In 1940 he had joined the elite Coldstream Guards....

"I was a ranker, serial number 2,663,141... dour, bitter-eyed, mustached. An officious sergeant complicated my writing by sending me a terse message explaining that writing wasn't part of the curriculum of the Guards. So I did rough drafts in longhand when the lights were out."

The result of these night-time scribbles were *THEY DIE WITH THEIR BOOTS CLEAN* & *THE NINE LIVES OF BILL NELSON* (combined in the U.S. as *SERGEANT NELSON OF THE GUARDS*). In fact he authored a total of seven books during the war years and despite paper shortages four were best sellers at the same time.

He also wrote the famous poem "*A Soldier: His Prayer*" which much to his chagrin appears in *BARTLETT'S QUOTATIONS* credited to Anonymous.

His stint in the Guards, which included action in the Libyan campaign, came to an abrupt end when he was on leave in London and an air-raid left him with both legs broken. He was promptly transferred for "special war duties" and to cover his espionage activities he also became a scriptwriter for the Army Film Unit as well as Chief Features writer for the popular Sunday newspaper *The People*, using the pseudonym Piers England; this latter position he held till the end of the war. His 'film career' saw him promoted to the Special Film Division of the Ministry of Information, and later still he worked for M.G.M. Kersh even found time to marry Claire Alyne Pacaud, from Quebec, Canada; the marriage later terminated in di-

voice. In 1944 he was accredited to the Supreme H.Q. Allied Expeditionary Force and a tour of duty that saw him buried alive three times by various explosions, all of which he survived "without ill effect".

One war-time tale of Kersh was told by William B. Dickinson (later Managing Editor of *The Philadelphia Bulletin*)... They had been amongst a group of correspondents, drinking wine all night long and playing poker till the sun rose: "When we parted, Kersh said he'd meet me for a drink at El Vino's, in Fleet Street, at noon. Sure enough, he was waiting on the steps six hours later and informed me he had had time to bathe, nap and write a short story. I don't doubt it, for he was a terrifically prolific writer."

Kersh's popularity as a writer started two years before the war, with his third novel *NIGHT AND THE CITY* (1937), of which the *New York Times* critic noted "Its characters are a repellent crew, but each in his own moral decay and intellectual vacuum is brilliantly portrayed."

As prolific and as popular as Kersh became, his first published novel remains an extreme rarity. *JEWS WITHOUT JEHOVAH* (1935) was withdrawn after the sale of only 80 copies, because one or more of those precious copies were read by three uncles and one cousin who promptly sued for libel.

Kersh had written two novels before that, but tore up both of them. Meantime he sustained himself with work as a banker's clerk, debt collector, baker, freelance journalist, bouncer in a cheap Soho nightclub then proprietor of same, traveling salesman movie manager, bodyguard, prize boxer, professional wrestler, and fish and chip cook -- this after being an "unwilling student" at Regent Street Polytechnic, a secondary school in London, which he quit "to learn to write."

In his childhood and youth he had an extraordinary capacity for consuming vast amounts of food; he recalled he once "ate raw butter-beans and pickles in a grocer's shop, topping off that repast with half a pot of greengage jam, and got away with it."

He also recalls "sticking a coloured transfer on a uncle's bald head as he slept after dinner!"

It is not recorded if this was an uncle who later sued Kersh.

For all that, Kersh claimed he was "a morose and tearful child."

His very first story "*Tom & Tilly Tadpole*" was written just after World War I when he was eight. The limited edition of one copy was bound in one of his father's old waistcoats, whether this was with or without he father's consent is also not recorded.

"At the age of three," wrote Kersh, "I died of congestion of the lungs following a most extraordinary attack of measles. I have a death certificate to prove it. My mother, however, who regarded me as the apple of her eye, kept a fire burning in my bedroom and rubbed my little tummy. I must have looked like a little saint. Everyone wept, coffins were prepared, and my parents went to sleep for the first time in fourteen days."

For her labours, his mother was awakened by the screams of the former corpse. (One version of this tale actually has him sitting up in his coffin.)

So re-invigorated was he that "from the age of three to twenty I ate five solid meals a day."

"It takes more than one congestion to kill Kersh."

— Dave Rowe

Pedants Corner:

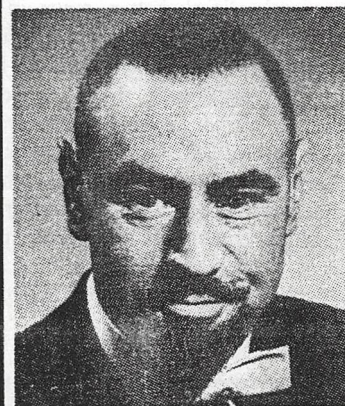
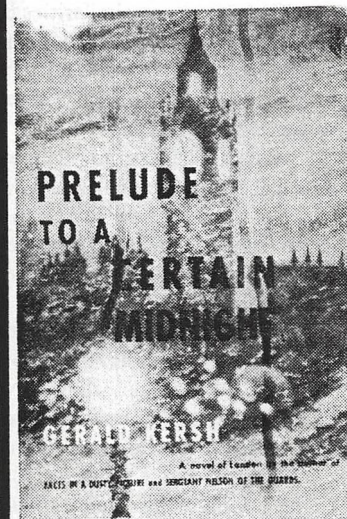
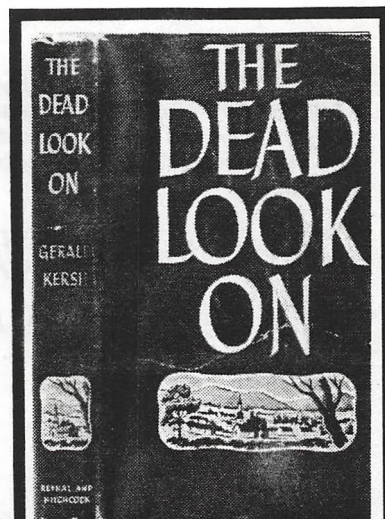
Sketch of Kersh (Circa 1947) by Paul Galdone

Cover for *PRELUDE TO A CERTAIN MIDNIGHT* (U.S.; 1947) by Robins

Cover for *THE DEAD LOOK ON* (U.S.; 1943) by Robert Haberstock

All others are uncredited.

(An earlier version of this article appeared as the *Fourth HOWEVER* -- in *FLAP* 60; 1989)



...way back when, in June of 1977, Joel showed up — All the Way From Kentucky — to help Bill Cavin, Rick Bergman and myself move my Worldly Kipple from the U-Haul-It truck into 2468 Harrison Avenue. Since then he has moved a bit further away, but still manages to attend as many (if not more) CFG functions as I. He has contributed to the two previous incarnations of this series — indeed, he is one of the reasons for the “(more-or-less)” exception to the “All-Cincinnati” template — and I’m pleased he’s back for the third go-around....

All the Way From (hic!) Kentucky (And Not From Australia)

Joel D. Zakem

Please forgive me if this is even more incoherent than usual (not that anyone would notice incoherency in a Bowers fanzine), but I started writing this after attending the first Kentucky Brewers Festival.

This event featured 16 different beers from six of Kentucky’s microbreweries and/or brew pubs. My favorite was a Wallonian-style Belgian Ale from Louisville’s Bluegrass Brewing Company. While I would not classify any of the other nine beers that I sampled (4 ounces each) as being outstanding, there were favorable IPA’s from Covington’s Brew Works and the Lexington City Brewery, solid stouts from City Brewery and Louisville’s Silo, and a fine ESB from BBC. The only disappointments came from the somewhat ordinary brews of Lexington’s Limestone Brewing Company and the fact that Oldenberg sent some of their standards rather than featuring more interesting stuff. All in all, however, I had fun.

There are many similarities between the way I think of beer and the way I think of fandom. I am a firm believer that beer, as well as fandom, should be fun. Those who have seen me at various SF cons over the past several years might have noticed that I have become a willing foot soldier in the U.S. microbrewery revolution. Even though I was a relatively late convert to beer drinking, not starting until I attended college too many years ago, I have become a major fan (and consumer) of the brewer’s art. I love discovering new beers, and sharing my favorites with friends.

General laziness, however, as well as lack of space has kept me from attempting to brew my own beer. Probably the same type of laziness that lets me leave fanpublishing to people like Bowers.

Not that I consider myself to be any type of beer expert, as my lack of input on the ConFusion beer panel showed. Still, it was interesting to listen to the dialogue between Joss Gross and Jim Kobrinetz, who actually knew what they were talking about. I was, however, the only participant who brought beer to the panel.

“Beer snob” is another term I tend to avoid. I have even been known to drink beers with names like “Bud” and “Miller” (almost anything that does not wave a name that contains the words “light” or “Coors”) at concerts, sporting events, ConCaves, and other places where the selection of malt beverages is a bit pedestrian. If I would have to define my relationship with beer, I would probably use the term “aficionado”, if I was feeling somewhat classy, or simply “fan”.

I have to admit, however, that beer drinking at conventions does sometimes get me into trouble. After several beers, I tend to come up with some fairly wild ideas and, even after almost 30 years in fandom, some people take these wild ideas seriously.

At least, that is the excuse that I use when people ask me why RiverCon sometimes has this strange program item called “The Oldywed Game”. It might also help explain why I ran for DUFF. It is very easy to blame everything on the beer.

As most of you already know, the 1997 DUFF race was won by Janice Murray. I came in second and, for once, am glad that the Australian ballot was used. It is a lot less traumatic to have lost by 23 votes after two rounds than it would have been to lose by one vote after one round.

Not that I really expected to win. When people first suggested that I run for DUFF, I was very flattered, but I initially said no. After all, I am not exactly a household name in fandom, especially among the fanzine fans who, traditionally, have provided DUFF with a lot of its support. While the 1997 MidWestCon, where this issue will hopefully debut, will mark the beginning of my thirtieth year in semi-active fandom (if you are reading this at MidWestCon, come to the party), I have spent a large portion of that time huddled in the background. In fact, even though this is being written for the all Cincinnati, more or less, issue of *Outworlds*, I have probably become slightly more active, and subsequently slightly better known, in fandom since moving to Louisville in 1983.

The more I thought about running, however, the better it began to sound. At the time of the 1996 (real) Octocon, where I changed my mind and decided to run, Janice Murray was the only announced candidate, and a search was on for someone else so there could be an actual race. Furthermore, this being a convention Saturday night, I had drunk several beers, and my resistance was low.

This does not mean that I treated my candidacy as anything less than serious (even though I did refer to myself as the stealth candidate on several occasions). Unfortunately, several grandiose plans were put on hold when, in early December, the Kentucky Legislature met in special session and eliminated the agency for which I work from all future claims. While there have been no major changes so far, no one seems to know how much longer my current position will last. Current estimates are that I’ll be in my present job until June 1998 but, with no guarantee, I did not feel like putting on a real active campaign.

That makes it even more gratifying to me that I did so well, and I would like to thank all of those who supported DUFF, especially those who voted for me. Maybe one of these days I’ll be able to see how much trouble I can get into while drinking real, fresh, Australian beer.

— Joel D. Zakem

...I sometimes have trouble remembering when Art "moved in"—but I think I may have a reference point now: I note that he wasn't represented in the previous Five-Yearly "Special" Edition of this fanzine, published in June, 1992. ...but I do know that he was here by the time that Ditto/Octocon rolled around that October, because he toted home The Ditto...after I tore up my back Sunday afternoon.

When Tanya first "suggested" Art's moving in, I was semi-reluctant: I was still busy licking my wounds from The Traumas and had a strong privacy thing going. But things have worked out well, at least from my viewpoint: He doesn't mind piles of books and he likes cats. He, too, has had his share of "set-backs" (health & wealth) over the past five years, but has survived, despite his being considerably more reticent to publicly vent than I.

I owe him a lot, not the least for "transportation", discounted books, and general all around patience.

I do promise, if he can be persuaded to come the Fifth Anniversary of the last Cinti-Ditto this October—he won't have to carry anything...!

Sacrifices

Art Metzger

A tear ran down Miriam's face as she went back up the steps and into the house for a paper bag. A paper bag—it didn't seem right, didn't seem good enough. But it was all she had. As she walked into the tiny kitchen she realized she was tracking mud. It couldn't be helped, though. It wasn't important now.

Stuck in the slim space between the sink and the refrigerator were dozens of empty grocery bags. She reached for one, felt pain shoot through her arthritic fingers as she closed her hand on it. When she pulled it out several more bags came with it, scattering over the floor. Something else to take care of later.

She started back outside, then remembered the twins. She'd better check on them. She had given them a bath and put them down in her bed an hour ago, and had sung them to sleep with "Jesus Loves Me" and similar songs that she was certain they never heard at home. She tiptoed into the bedroom, and, by the light of her reading lamp, saw that her grand-children were still safely asleep.

The body was exactly where she had left it. Please, oh Lord, let this all be a bad dream, let me wake up and find that this isn't happening. But the dead cat was still there, stretched out on the walk leading up to her back porch. How could this happen to my Mittens, she thought, how could someone do this, Lord?

On the ground next to the body was a rock. It had mats of fur on it, patches of blood. It was easy to see that it had been used to kill the cat. What was the world coming to? Why would someone do this to her poor cat? Why would someone do this to her? She kicked weakly at the rock, sending it rolling a few inches into the grass. It occurred to her that maybe she should call the police, report what had happened. What good would it do, now? It wouldn't bring Mittens back to her.

Miriam knelt down, bones cracking as her knees met the cold bricks of the walk, not protected at all by her thin house-dress. She opened the paper bag, reaching in and pushing out the sides so it wouldn't collapse again. Then she set it on the ground next to the cat.

She was unsure what to do next—whether to pick up the body and try to lower it into the bag, or just pick the body up partway and try to slide the bag around it. After a few moments she decided on the latter.

She slid her hand under the cat's rear haunches and slid the bag

partway under it. She stopped for a moment to pull off a clump of dead leaves and dirt that had stuck to the cat's underside.

She heard her mother's voice. "How many times do I have to tell you?" the voice said. She was a little girl kneeling in the snow, reaching out for the body of a dead baby sparrow. "Don't touch dead things. Don't ever touch dead things." Her mother was dragging her up, shaking her. She grabbed her by the coat, pulled her up to the porch, and forced her down on her knees on the cold concrete. "Don't you dare move," her mother screamed. She went into the house and returned in a moment with a pot of steaming water. "Hold out your hands," and when she did her mother poured scalding hot water over them, then went back inside to fetch another pot, and another, over and over again. The little girl felt the water begin to freeze around her, tiny rivulets on her legs, a pool of ice around her knees. "Pray to the Lord and ask Him to forgive you. Pray to Him and beg Him to make you clean again."

Miriam shuddered as the voice she hadn't heard in over fifty years faded away. She felt the cold again, the pain. But she knew that her mother had been right—she had been disobedient, and her disobedience had left her unclean.

Please understand this time, Lord. Please understand that I have to do this. I can't leave Mittens out here. I don't know why You allowed him to be taken away from me, Lord, but please forgive me for doing this. He was my only friend.

When she finished sliding the paper bag up around the cat's body she lifted it gently and carried it into the house. She set it down on the kitchen floor for a moment while she closed and locked the door behind her, then carried it up the stairs and into the bathroom.

There was still a towel spread on the floor left over from the bath she gave the twins after letting them play outside for awhile in her small backyard. They had found the garden and, apparently, her rose bushes—both of them had been covered with dirt and scratches. She lowered herself down on to it, slid the bag from around the cat's body and began to wash it.

When she was finished, after she had washed off all the dirt and crumpled leaves and blood and combed out all the matted hair, she dried it with one of her best towels and carried it, in its funerary bag, back to the kitchen. It was time, she thought, to face the problem of what she was going to do with it until tomorrow. She planned to bury it, of course. A proper burial near one of her flower beds. But she wasn't up to it anymore that night, it would have to wait until morning. She couldn't leave it here, her daughter would see it when she came to pick up the twins. Miriam knew what her daughter would say. Why fuss over it? It's dead, put it in the trash. How can you have brought it into the house where the kids can see it? Who knows how many germs that damn cat was carrying?

She heard a noise, a small bumping sound. It came from the bedroom. Not now, she thought. Don't let them wake up now. Too much to do. Please, Lord, not now.

Miriam was halfway down the hall to the bedroom when her foot met something lying on the floor. It rolled with her weight and sent her sprawling down onto the carpet. She landed flat on her back on the carpet and lay still. She waited, sure that pain would inevitably shoot through her body. When it didn't, she moved her arms tentatively, then her legs. They were stiff, they ached, but no more than usual. And there was a cut on her left leg, bleeding slightly. It was nothing serious. "Thank you, Lord," she said aloud as she raised herself to a sitting position.

A toy truck—that was what had sent her flying. One of the twins' toys. She didn't remember seeing it there earlier when she checked on them, but she had been in a hurry then and might have

missed it. Better just to be thankful that she hadn't seriously hurt herself. She picked up the metal truck and went into the bedroom.

Both of the twins were still asleep, thumbs in mouths and blankets kicked and tangled. She put the truck down with the other toys her daughter had let the twins bring with them, then covered the children back up. She started to tiptoe back out of the bedroom. Then she stopped, went back. She stood over the bed, looking down at them in the dim light.

Is this why You've punished me, Lord? She formed the words in her mind and mouthed them silently. Is it because I bore and raised a child who left You, a child who bore two of her own who are being raised up heathen? Is that why You've taken Mittens away from me?

Tears filled her eyes.

Never again would she turn to find the cat following her, wake in the night to find it curled at her feet. She wanted to turn back the clock, just long enough to catch whoever did such a terrible thing to her Mittens. Catch them and stop them. Somehow. She wanted her cat alive again. "What can I do, Lord?" she said.

It seemed strange to have the twins asleep here, in her bedroom—her daughter asked her to babysit for them so seldom. Miriam wished she could have more of a hand in their upbringing. She knew her daughter never took them to church. Why would she, since she never went herself? I wish I could give them to You, Lord, so they could be brought up in Your Light. She watched the light on their tiny, upturned faces and thought of Isaac, of his innocence as Abraham led him toward the altar.

Miriam took a last look at the twins where they slept; then, though she had no real sense of turning or leaving the bedroom, she found herself back in the kitchen, staring down at Mittens.

Poor kitty. She tried to imagine what tomorrow morning was going to be like—going out early in the morning, carrying her small garden spade. Digging, her arthritis shrieking protest. Then bending over to lay the bag in the bottom of the hole, listening to it pop every time a clump of dirt hit. Maybe she should find a box instead.

On impulse, Miriam took the small crucifix her mother had given her years ago from around her neck and put it on Mittens. It was far too big, it had to be looped around twice, but once it was in

place, and she saw the tiny cross resting against the cat's fur, Miriam was pleased with the way it looked. Mittens was so beautiful, all clean and combed and wearing her mother's cross.

Don't do this to me, Lord, Miriam thought. I can't bear the thought of Mittens being gone. Please, Lord, I'll do anything if You'll just give him back to me. I've given you my whole life, Lord, I've sacrificed so much. Please don't take that which is closest to me.

Sacrificed so much. A fleeting picture of Isaac again passed through Miriam's mind. The Lord hadn't taken Isaac, not really. It had just been a test for him, a test of his faith. Perhaps the Lord was testing her.

On the counter by the sink a rack of butcher knives gleamed.

Perhaps, Miriam thought, she could show the Lord that her faith was as great as Abraham's had been.

She thought of the twins, asleep in the bedroom.

Miriam walked carefully this time, cautious after her earlier fall. She kept her eyes on the floor, making sure there was nothing in her way.

She was all the way into the bedroom before she realized that the bed was empty. She bent over the side and picked up the blankets that lay scrambled there, peering under them absurdly as if the twins might have shrunk and hidden in one of the folds. They had to be there. She had left them sleeping there. Her mind couldn't accept anything else.

Not even when they started toward her, moving awkwardly across the floor. They're going to show me their toys, Miriam thought—each twin clutched one of their metal trucks. They want to show me they can get out of bed to get their toys.

They came toward her, trucks raised over their heads. Each of them grabbed one of her legs, wobbled, and pulled until, finally, she flailed her arms and fell.

"Kitty first," one of them said, reciting.

"Then Granny," said the other, as they each swung their trucks down.

At the last moment, Miriam instinctively reached up to her neck for her crucifix. But it was gone.

— Art Metzger

... in the last All-Cinti Issue I ran two articles by Roger: One, a reprint of his *Very First Submission to a fanzine* — from 1951; the Second, an article written in 1976, but previously unpublished. I ended the introduction to that tandem with the following:

I now have a new G*OA*L in Life:

... to publish something by Roger written in the 90s!

Here we have it. Although it certainly isn't about the 90s!

(And, by the time you finish, you will have more than a passing acquaintanceship with what we refer to — fondly — as a "Rogerism" Or two.)

Hal Shapiro Takes Me to Canada

Roger Sims

Having begun life on this planet in the year 5302 or in the normal calendar, 1930, I obtained the age of 19, June 8, 1949. About five months later or about 30 days after I had been discharged from the active Navy I found the Detroit Science-Fantasy League (DSFL). A number of months pass. Months in which I find fulfillment beyond my wildest dreams. I bloomed and blossomed under the tutelage of Howard DeVore, George Young and Martin Alger. It was great fun. Maybe as much fun as my visit to pre-Castro Havana, Cuba!

Now there were others in the group for sure. And this story concerns two of them. One Benjamin Singer played only a minor role. Ben is currently professor (or he may be retired by now!) of Social Psychology at University of Western Ontario at London, Ontario, Canada. Ben's literary claim to fame is two fold, first he was one of the three editors of the very first issue of *Fantasy-Scope*; and second he has two quotes from his unpublished doctoral dissertation included in Alan Tolfer's *FUTURE SHOCK*.

But on with the story. As we turn back the hands of time, Hal Shapiro is making a phone call.

The year is 1951, the month is June. Late June. This means that I am now 21 and I can now legally drink adult beverages.

It is early afternoon on a Saturday somewhere in greater Detroit. I am home reading science-fiction and watching a dumb science-

fiction TV show. The phone rings. I say as I am sometimes wont to say, "Joe's Bar, how many carry outs do you want?"

Knowing the drill Hal replies, "None, this is Hal. Ben and I were going to take two girls over to Windsor, Canada to the Metropole. But Ben can't make it. Do you want to take his place?" "Why not," I replied.

It is now 7:30 p.m. I am dressed in the dress of the day which is white shirt, tie and dark suit! You have to have been there to understand it. A car pulls up to the curb. In the front seat are Hal and one "lady"; in the back my "lady." I stand up, walk to the front door, open it, walk out the door, turn and lock the door. I then continue on down the front steps and down the walk to the curb where the car is waiting to take us to a wonderful night of fun and profit. As I approach the car, the first view of the "ladies" reaches my brain. The picture was freighting in the extreme. So much so that I almost turned on my heels and headed back to the sanctuary of my house. But I did not! No, the "ladies" were quite presentable and dressed to the nines. Hal was in his Air Force Uniform, he was some sort of Tech Sergeant. He obviously was old enough for what we were about to do as he was and still is my age. But the "ladies" were a different matter. So as I continued walking toward the car I slowed my pace and began a debate with myself. Now as most of you already know I am a practicing Gemini. Which really means that I am two different persons housed in the same body. A good one and an evil one. As I reached the car the evil one won and we climbed into the car. To this day I do not know how old they were and I still do not. Believe me when I say that I still get chills up and down my spine when I think about what their age might have been. For, dear reader, they looked to me to be under 16! And we were headed for the border and a night club in a foreign country. My life almost flashed before my face as I climb into the back seat and Hal introduced me to the two "ladies." I do not know what the age limit for alcohol beverages in Canada then or now. But I do know that at the time that this story is taking place all alcoholic drinks came with food. If you ate the food there was one charge; if you did not eat the food the charge was less! Need I say that only the foolish ate the food more than once?

It was a short drive to Canadian customs. Now between 1942 and 1990 I traveled more times to and from Canada than there have been fanzine titles. Normally and in fact at every other time, the custom person asks three basic questions: 1) What country are you a citizen of?; 2) Why do you want to enter Canada?; 3) What goods do you plan on leaving? On occasion other questions are asked which concern adult beverages and fire arms. Then having received the acceptable answer the car and its contents are waved on. Before continuing, I must tell the reader that the one thing than no one, not even policemen, are allowed to bring into Canada, is a fire arm! This statement is most significant as the reader will soon learn!

Some place in Montana, Idaho or North Dakota there is a US-Canadian custom house with only one bathroom. The location of the bathroom is such that the American custom person must cross into Canada and back into the USA in order to use its facilities. The American custom person removes his gun from his holster every time s/he visits the bathroom!

This time after the custom person asked the three questions and received the proper answers he walked around to the passenger side of the car; reached into the car through the open window; opened the glove compartment and placed his hand inside it. After several seconds he removed a very large knife. "Why is this knife in the glove

compartment?"

Hal, never a loss for words, says, "It's to cut slices off the salami that is on the back ledge for sandwiches!"

The custom person makes no reply. But as the knife is in his right hand and he is not through with his search of the glove compartment, he transferred it from his right hand to his left hand presumably because he doesn't want to cut his hand as he continues the search. Several minutes pass. I have sunk back in my seat for I know that I am in deep deep doodoo! There is no doubt in my mind that I was correct in my earlier evaluation and that we were soon to be retained, the very young ladies' parents called to pick up their wayward girls and then Hal and I would wind up Ghod knows where! I also begin to think about what I will say to the judge and then what I will say to my parents. I also begin thinking about where I will go to live after my parents kick me out of their house! After what seemed like an eternity but was only a few seconds, the custom person removed his right hand from the glove compartment. This is followed in quick order by the removal of both hands and arms as he waves us into Canada!

At this point I heaved a sigh of relief and Hal, I think, does the same. He then eased the car into first gear (This was a very long time ago!). The car slowly pulls ahead. We drive in silence for two or three blocks during which he made two right hand turns. After parking along the curb, Hal opened the glove compartment and removed a loaded 38 revolver. After he unloaded the gun he placed the shells in his pocket and the gun under the seat! No one said a single word. Why he bothered to do this is still to this day unknown to me.

Less than a half hour later we arrived at the night club. Hal parked the car and we entered the club. I think we had dinner. We may or may not have been served adult beverages. I do not remember. The headliner was an old white-headed guy who may have had a long show business career. But I had never heard of him. I don't remember what he sang or if I enjoyed it. I only remember that it was not offensive. Since I enjoy dancing, I do believe that I danced with my "date". But my impression is that we did not talk!

Some time after the show we leave. We drive to the border and enter Michigan without incident. Hal drives to the home of the girls. I think that it was an apartment house. We walk up the stairs and enter a hallway. At this point Hal said to me that his date was having a heart attack and that he was going to take her (I don't remember where) and administer to her heart attack. I must say here that his "date" looked in remarkable good health!

But after examining all of the events that had transpired already I thought that this sounded normal.

I am not sure what My "date" expected of me but whatever it was, all that I was prepared to do was talk. And that is what we did until Hal returned about two hours later. I think that is it significant that not a word was said about the "blood pump attack" or the condition of Hal's "date".

After a brief good-by Hal and I found ourselves in his car driving to my house. We must have talked about something, or maybe Hal talked and I listened. But the plain fact is that we did not discuss the evening's occurrences. And to this day we have not. Nor do I plan on doing so in the near or greater future.

Oh, if any reader feels the need to discuss this with Hal and as a result gains additional information, please do not discuss same with me for I do not ever want to know how close I came to disaster.

— Roger Sims

and the space race. Several times I was caught faking an illness so I could stay at home and watch NBC's Frank McGee or CBS's Walter Cronkite pontificate on a Gemini launch or watch a weather satellite go up. Eventually, my school, St. Francis de Sales, gave up and let all the children watch rocket launches during school. My attendance record went up accordingly.

I had plans. I was going to be an astronaut. My schoolmates were skeptical. I knew so much about the space program that they started calling me the astronaut.

Those plans came to an abrupt end on a spring morning, right before school. My older sister Gwen and I were approaching the schoolyard; I was overcome by the sight of my schoolmates playing. So much so, I was heedless of my sister's shouts to stop as I ran... straight into the path of a station wagon owned by a local brewery. I remember bouncing several times.

I was taken back to Jewish Hospital, where my distraught parents were told that a refund was out of the question.

Apparently the driver of the station wagon was going the posted limit of 25mph. I suffered some cuts, bruises and an injury to my left eye. I recovered but my eyes did not. Within three years I was wearing thick glasses due to severe myopia.

I knew that was the end of my dreams of being an astronaut. So I buried myself even further into books. And television.

Back in the sixties, the coolest thing to have was a UHF converter. Channels beyond the number 13. It boggled the young minds of the Barkley household. But there was only one channel available then, one of the first public television stations, Ch.48. My father mounted the converter box on top of my grandmother's old Philco set. The picture of Mr. Rogers was fuzzy, but watchable. In 1967, my parents decided to declare their entry into middle class. A COLOR TV! We were thrilled.

Of course, fights over the tv escalated to new heights of idiocy. And if you think about it; it was the beginning of the cultural erosion of American youth. Having color television shows was not just better television; it became our damn birthright! Nothing else except color tv would do for our favorite viewing. And how fast did this happen?

Right after the first commercial break of full colorcasting.

I sucked up a lot of tube in the sixties. When I was nine, I began to notice that some shows appealed to me more than others, on some sort of primitive, intellectual level.

The Twilight Zone was better than **One Step Beyond**. The first year of **Voyage to the Bottom of the Sea** was better than the second (or third, fourth and fifth for that matter). **Get Smart** over **My Mother, the Car**. Anything was better than **Lost in Space**.

You could not avoid the Vietnam war if you were watching tv in the sixties. I did not understand the issues being fought over. All I knew was that thousands of men on both sides were killed each week. Some network newscasts ran casualty totals on their Friday telecasts. I remember being appalled at the totals, especially of the NVA and Viet-Cong. They were ALWAYS higher than the US or Allied totals. Some days, I just wanted to cry. All that death and destruction...

Then came the summer afternoon that I wandered in from playing and just turned on the set. A western was on. A darned good one. It had shooting, intelligent chit-chat, chases, two brothers in conflict and a little kid being held hostage. I came in towards the middle but I was riveted by the story. When it was over, I took time out, for the first time, to find out what movie I was watching.

It was **Night Passage** (1957) with James Stewart, Audie Murphy, Dan Duryea and Brandon de Wilde as the kid. So I started looking for more movies with these cool guys in them. The same for tv shows. I discovered that people wrote, directed and produced them. I became more discriminating in my viewing habits. I started memo-

rizing the tv and movie schedules. Even my mom started asking me when things came on.

As for first run theater shows, the first one I remember being taken to was **Mary Poppins**. It came on the local independent station a few weeks ago; I actually got a little teary eyed remembering the first time I saw it. Up to that time, **SUPERCALIFRAGILISTICEXPIALADOSIOUS** was the coolest song that I had ever heard. I even tried to spell it for extra credit on the next spelling test I took.

The family mainly went to the drive-ins for big screen entertainment. If we were REALLY good children, we got permission to watch from the car roof.

My favorite drive-in of all time was the TWIN of Norwood; so called because it featured a double sided screen. If you didn't like what was on one side, you drove around to see what was on the other side. And in front of both screens were playgrounds with swings, slides and other well known child killing devices. Those were truly fabulous summer evenings.

At this point, I should say a few words about my parents.

They had their trials and tribulations with the six of us and I must say in retrospect that they did the best they could under trying circumstances. Until I turned 11, we lived with my grandmother (we called her Mama). My father was an aerospace mechanic for General Electric, my mother was first a secretary for GE, then subsequently went back to school (before it was fashionable) for a teaching degree, which she subsequently got in the mid-seventies. Dad retired from GE in 1984, my mother is retiring (for the second time!) from teaching in the Cincinnati Public schools at the end of this week (6 June 97).

The six of us could be awful at times.

I look back, simply amazed that they survived the experience. If any of us ever questioned the number of children she had, she would look us squarely in the eye and ask which of the children should she not have had. As intense as we were towards each other, I never heard ANY of us deny any of the others the right to exist.

They also gave us a sense of right and wrong. We were rewarded when we were good and Given a helacious spanking or licking with a belt to make a point. This in retrospect, in my opinion, was a good thing.

Being perceived as an intellectual of a sort, I got beaten up and taken advantage of on a regular basis. I, on the other hand, never beat up or victimized another kid for their ball or lunch money. Even as a callow youth, there were some lines that I would not cross. I'm rather proud of that.

Another thing that I realize is that in the integrated Catholic school, I was taught to respect others, no matter what they looked like. I was never subjected to any sort of racial slur or comments until I was nearly an adult. This too, was a good thing; it made the behavior of the racist people I have encountered even more shocking. If anything, this is the one thing that I have taken great pains to teach my daughter; judge individuals by their character, not their looks.

My parents, bless them, gave me good advice but left the final decisions to me. Any mistakes that I have made in my life are solely my own. I blame no one except myself for this.

As it should be.

One last remembrance before we move on; the music.

The station to listen to for rock n' roll in the sixties was WSAI-AM. If you have ever heard the soundtracks of **The Big Chill** and **American Graffiti**, you heard what I heard originally. Add Ray Charles, the British Invasion, American Bandstand on ABC, the Monkees, the Stones, surf music, Elvis, Hendrix, the Doors and Joplin, Johnny Rivers...musically speaking, there was nothing like it. Hey, you young turks! Remember when you heard Nirvana or the Smashing Pumpkins for the first time? Remember the rush, the ex-

Well kids, you just multiply that feeling by 1001. That is what music in the sixties was like. The only musical explosion that would be comparable would be the evolution of punk and alternative music between 1975-78. Nuff Said.

SOUL COUGHING
"Super Bon Bon"
From *IRRESISTIBLE BLISS*

CRISIS BETWEEN EARTH-ONE AND EARTH-TWO

On top of the page is the JLA logo and the credits; written by Gardner Fox, art by Mike Sekowsky and Sid Greene.

Never mind that I had never heard of any of these guys from Earth-Two, the story was just too exciting to wonder about details like that.

The story begins with the high flying Hawkman of Earth-One in pursuit of some truck hijackers at night on Moro Mountain. A sudden fog bank rolls in, obscuring the truck. The mists thin...and the crooks begin firing at him. But hey, wait a minute... the guys shooting at him are now in an armored car! Whipping the fog in front of the armored car, Hawkman succeeds in stopping it. He swoops down and subdues the crooks, wondering just what the hell happened to the original set of crooks.

Those crooks, it turns out, materialized on the same mountain on the extra dimensional world Earth-Two and were apprehended by the Golden Age Sandman.

Similar mishaps befall Dr. Midnight, sending him into the arms of the Flash on Earth-One and Batman finds himself accidentally placed on Earth-Two.

Brief vignettes show people from both dimensions being shuffled between the two dissimilar worlds. The Green Lantern of Earth-One rescues Black Canary of Earth-Two, who was chasing burglars on a rooftop on her own planet but suddenly ended up in a swamp.

In the meantime, the supernatural hero, the Spectre, is on a mission to prevent some asteroids from falling towards Earth (Two), acting on a tip from another hero, Starman (who is, in his secret identity Ted Knight [no kidding], an astronomer). As he moves to perform this task, his spectral essence is drawn away into interdimensional space by cosmic forces he himself cannot understand. And while this is happening, Solomon Grundy, imprisoned in space, in a globe of the magical energies fashioned by Dr. Fate and the Green Lantern of Earth-Two in *Showcase #55* ("*Solomon Grundy Goes on a Rampage*", co-starring another JSA member, Hourman), crosses the dimensional barrier, too...breaking free and headed for Earth-One!

Well, so much for Part One!

Part Two begins with Flash, Hawkman and Dr. Midnight meeting Black Canary and Green Lantern at the JLA headquarters. GL tried sending Canary back with his Power Ring and the Flash tried super speed vibrations with The Good Dr. Strangely enough, they did not succeed. Seeing that they cannot return immediately, Dr. Midnight offers their services in place of members who have been displaced by the present phenomenon. The Flash accepts. Then a call comes in over the international radio...Solomon Grundy has landed and is wreaking havoc all over the place. He wants only one thing...to destroy Green Lantern!

But wait, the Blockbuster, under study at Gotham City's Alfred Pennyworth Memorial Foundation, disappears from a lab where he is being studied and ends up in a remote area on Earth-Two. (At this point, editor Julius Schwartz urges the reader "to beg, borrow or buy" a copy of *Showcase #55*, so you can find out first hand what a son of a bitch monster Solomon Grundy is and why our heroes are going to have a tough time ahead of them.)

While all of this is going on, physicist Ray Palmer, who is secretly the six inch superhero the Atom, has felt his JLA emergency alarm go off but he can't operate his size and weight controls concealed in the palms of his hands to become his alter ego. At the moment, he is helping his lovely Italian science exchange assistant, Enrichetta Negrini, with an important experiment. He is stuck in the lab at Ivy Town, like it or not.

Then the mini JLA-JSA team confronts Grundy in a remote

mountain area. Having absorbed the combined energies of Dr. Fate and Earth-Two's GL, he proves more than a match for our gang, turning aside all of their assaults on him. In a final, desperate move, Hawkman flies in and grabs Grundy BY THE HAIR(!) and with the aid of his wings and gravity belt, lifts him in the air. While he is momentarily dazed, the heroes subject him to several thousand sucker punches. Grundy goes out like a light. GL then opens up a large mountain nearby with his ring and Grundy is tossed into a deep crevasse, which GL then seals up.

I know what you're wondering; what happened to the Spectre? So glad you asked. In the inter-dimensional space between the worlds, the Disembodied Detective comes face to face with the Anti-Matter Man. He (it?) is giving off a glow that weakens his spectral powers. Spectre deduces that if he were to come into contact with any matter in either of our universes, INSTANT DESTRUCTION! Since the Anti-Matter Man shows no interest in going back from where he came from, the Spectre decides to duke it out with him, entity to entity, right there. Part Two ends with the Spectre giving the A-MM a right to the jaw.

Part Three opens with the Spectre getting the shock of his...wait a minute...he not alive...lets just say he's just shocked, ok? Shocked to see his right fist SHRINK! Retaliating, A-MM gives him a left cross...and his head begins to swell up. Apparently the energies from the entity affect his spirit powers in perverse ways. Before he can suspend time itself and stop him, the A-MM hits the Spectre so hard, his legs are DRIVEN UP INTO HIS BODY! Weakened the Spectre steps aside and the alien resumes his course. His spirit senses alert him that the A-AM's destination is Earth! Either Earth! Racing ahead of the alien the Spectre discovers a more immediate threat; both Earth-One and Earth-Two have entered the dimension between the world and are on a collision course.

Gathering together all his supernatural strength, the Spectre resumes his shape and large size and places himself between the planets. But how long can he maintain this position?

On Earth-Two, Dr. Fate tries in vain to send Batman back to Earth-One from the JSA headquarters as Wildcat and Sandman observe. Then they get a call about a primitive caveman running amok on a road in Pinetree City. As they arrive on the scene, Batman recognizes the Blockbuster, who as a normal youth, Bruce Wayne had saved from drowning in a quicksand bog. By pulling off his mask, the face and voice of Bruce Wayne stops the Blockbuster from further violence. The threat has ended, but how long will Bruce Wayne have to baby sit the Blockbuster, without his mask?

Will Solomon Grundy break out of the mountain on Earth-One?

And don't forget about the Anti-Matter Man...the Spectre is the only one in existence who knows he's coming. And speaking of which...

The last two panels show the Spectre shrinking in size...the overwhelming cosmic forces at work are driving the two planets together and in his weakened condition, he can't hold off the cataclysmic collision much longer. The last caption panel reads:

**YOU DARE NOT MISS THE CONCLUDING CHAPTERS TO THIS
TALE OF TERRIFIC FORCES WHICH PIT SUPER-HEROES
AGAINST THE GRIM GIANTS OF EARTH-ONE AND EARTH-TWO--
AGAINST THE DREAD DANGER OF THE ANTI-MATTER MAN--
AGAINST THE COMING CRASH OF THE TWO WORLDS WHICH
WILL MEAN THE UTTER DESTRUCTION OF MANKIND!**

IS THERE ANYTHING THE JUSTICE LEAGUE AND JUSTICE SOCIETY MEMBERS CAN DO TO PREVENT THE ABSOLUTE END OF EVERYTHING? AMAZING ANSWERS NEXT ISSUE!

So I turned to my cousin and asked where the next issue was. He said, "I don't know."

III

THE ROAD TO FANDOM

I'm an adult now,
I'm an adult now,
I've got the problems
Of an adult on my
Head and my shoulders,
I'm an adult now...

THE PURSUIT OF HAPPINESS

"I'm An Adult Now".

Self titled album, 1987

Needless to say, I was plenty ticked at Michael.

Looking back now, I can only speculate why he gave me JLA #46. I suspect that he bought it himself and the story did not appeal to him. Or he forgot to pick up the conclusion. In any event, the story so disinterested him, he didn't even want to know how the story turned out. Today I realize, THAT was the biggest disappointment of all.

I, on the other hand, had a feverish, burning and fanatical desire to know what happened next. For the rest of the visit I was fixated on getting JLA #47. We went to the corner store but it wasn't there. I dreamed about it that night. The next day, I checked out the neighborhood pharmacy, Becker's, which carried new comics. No luck. I went to several corner stores that had used comics with stripped covers. No sightings.

Next I tried friends and acquaintances. Friends of friends. My siblings friends. Enemies of all stripes. I even talked to girls about it. Zip city.

School began and I checked with anyone who even had a remote interest in comics. Nada, but...someone had a copy of *Challengers of the Unknown* (which was about four non-superpowered, but extremely smart guys taking on super villains and threats. It was ok) that had a small coming attractions ad with the cover of JLA #47. TO TOUCH THE ANTI-MATTER MAN WAS TO RISK INSTANT DESTRUCTION!, screamed the ad. On the tiny reproduction of the cover, I was aghast to see a giant sized Batman delivering a left to the A-MM's chin (Remember kids, Batman was big on tv that year, so naturally he hogged most of the JLA covers during that period). Below, Hawkman, Dr. Fate and the Flash struggled in the GRASP(!) of the otherworldly villain. My young mind raced with excitement, read and wonder; how were they going to fight something they couldn't touch. Aw hell, they WERE touching him! How could this be!

As much as I tried, I got nowhere. I had to put my quest on hold while I tackled more important stuff, like school.

Starting in the fall of '66, we were visited at school by the Bookmobile of the Hamilton County Public Library system. It was a huge, thirty foot long green van, its sides filled with kid and young adult books. One by one, classes would trot down and ransack the shelves. Up til then, I was not a voracious reader of what I referred to as big books.

On the first or second visit, one book, *DANNY DUNN AND THE ANTI-GRAVITY PAINT*, by Jay Williams and Raymond Abrashkin (first published in 1956, coincidentally) caught my eye. It was the story of a somewhat headstrong, but bright young man who wanted to become a scientist. He and his widowed mother lived with a renowned scientist, Professor Bullfinch. Frequently, young Danny would start some ill advised experiment or start fooling around with one of the Professor's projects and trouble would soon follow.

Following Danny was his best friend, a would be poet named Joe and later in the series, Irene, a science scholar. There was also a bully named Snitcher, who acted a whole lot like the bully in my

class, Wayne Stenson.

In this particular story, Bullfinch and a grumpy colleague, Dr. Grimes, accidentally (with Danny's help) invent a substance that defies gravity. The feds step in and a prototype spaceship is built. Danny and Joe sneak aboard one day, just to look around, mind you, activate and launch the ship with the Professor and Grimes aboard.

I was totally hooked. In rapid succession, I got other books in the series; *THE FOSSIL CAVE* and *ON THE OCEAN FLOOR*. I expanded my interests as well, reading books and other series put out by Scholastic books. Among them were *THE FABULOUS TRIP TO THE MUSHROOM PLANET*, *ENCYCLOPEDIA BROWN*, the *ALVIN FERNALD*, *BOY INVENTOR* series, *HOMER PRICE* and general history books. Those were days that I will never forget as I learned more and more about the world through reading.

At one point, I almost picked up a Heinlein title, *TIME FOR THE STARS*. It was an Ace paperback with the awful Steele Savage covers; this one depicted a multi-headed monster threatening some astronauts. Had I read it, I'm sure I would have liked it and become even more advanced in my sf reading habits. But I rejected the book because of the cover, which of course I now regret. I did not read Heinlein until I was in high school. Pity. I judged a book by its cover and came up a loser because of it.

I did not forget about comics. I started searching in our local library branch for more knowledge about the older heroes. A tip from a classmate led me to *THE GREAT COMIC BOOK HEROES*, a fairly new book by some guy named Jules Feiffer. I tried to read the scholarly first section but I gave up after a few minutes and got to what I really wanted...ancient (by my standards) comic stories: *Superman*, *Batman*, *Flash*, *Hawkman*, *Captain America*, *Human Torch* and *Submariner*, all from the Golden Age. There was also a one page glimpse of a character that I had heard about but had never seen before, Captain Marvel, a charming looking fellow who kinda looked like Fred MacMurray on steroids. But my favorite was the last story, *The Spirit*, by Will Eisner. In a pre-WWII story, the masked crime fighter comes to a desert city to persuade a scientist to give him a cure for a plague back in America. I was amazed that so much story was packed into eight pages. Wowed, from then on I was always on the lookout for more books with compilations or histories of comics.

In the spring of 1967, our family moved into our own house, a block and a half south on Fairfield Ave. from Mama's house. Given more room, I started to collect comics, which alarmed my parents. They had nothing against reading, but "funny books" as they called them, were not a serious endeavor for study in their eyes. Between then and about my sophomore year in high school, they banned comic books from the household.

I paid absolutely no attention at all to them.

No matter how many times they threatened, sanctioned or beat me physically, I dug in my heels and collected, damnit!

I hid them. Yessir, that's what I did. In the attic crawlspaces. Under the mattress. Under loosened floor boards in my bedroom. In my schoolbag and in the garage. They would not relent; I would not give up. Finally, they gave up when my grades improved to the point where I could honestly say reading comics had no effect on my school work.

Oh God, the things that were thrown away or burned makes me wince...*Tales of Suspense* with Captain America and Iron Man, *JLA*, *Action Comics*, *Adventure Comics* with the Legion of Super Heroes, Marvel's *Captain Marvel*, *Our Army at War* with Sgt. Rock, *Strange Tales* with Dr. Strange and Col. Nick Fury of S.H.I.E.L.D....I could go on and on.

All gone. (sigh).

I don't hold any grudges against my parents over this. They were doing the best they could. I couldn't hate them, even if they were

dead wrong on this issue.

While the embargo was still on, I found my Grail.

It was in the spring of '68. My contacts on the street had come across a kid who actually saved comics like me. And he wanted to meet me!

I forget the boy's name but I remember the house he lived in on Fairfax Ave., just a couple of doors away from Owl's Nest, an urban city owned park. It's still there today. When I drive by every now and then, I smile at the sweetness of the memory.

We met on a Friday, right after school. It was a sunny day. I remember him being a little darker, slightly sized and he wore glasses like me. I got right to the point: did he have JLA #47?

He said yes.

I tried to control my excitement as I asked what he wanted for it. He looked thoughtful and asked me what I wanted to offer.

I offered cash.

How much, he asked?

I thought REAL HARD. I didn't want to haggle, I wanted it, I wanted it RIGHT NOW(!) and I wanted to make the right offer the first time around.

I sucked in a breath and made an offer of 50 cents.

He looked at me for five seconds...and accepted.

I swear I must have held my breath from the time he went into the house to fetch it until he came back out with IT.

I gave him two quarters and he extended IT to me.

IT was in pristine condition.

IT was the most lovely thing I had ever possessed in my young life. I opened it. The conclusion was titled, "**THE BRIDGE BETWEEN EARTHS!**". I think I swooned in the light, spring breeze that hit me right then.

When I saw **Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade** twenty one years later, I saw the look on Indy's face when he finally got his hands on the Cross of Coranado again after losing it when he was a kid. The look on my face on that fine spring day in 1968 MUST have been identical.

I sat down on the porch steps and read it.

Twice.

For almost two years, there wasn't a day that went by that I didn't think about having JLA #47 in my sweaty hands. Late at night I would try to make up my own pulse pounding conclusion to Gardner Fox's story myself.

Those are the origins of my becoming a writer. Right there. Trying to connect the dots in my mind, the long quest, the dreaming, the completion of one journey and the beginning of the next. Somehow, I knew I would follow in Fox's footsteps one day. These longings and imaginings, I owe them all to him.

As for what happened in JLA #47...get your own copy!

And now back to our regularly scheduled program...

Unfortunately, my joy of finding my Grail was short lived.

Indiana Jones had Rene Belloq in **Raiders of the Lost Ark** for a nemesis.

Mine in fifth grade was Roderick Dula.

I had read and re-read my copy a dozen times. I couldn't bear to part with it for a moment and it was not safe at home. My siblings, ever alert, squealed on me when ever they got pissed with me. I lost several good stashes of comics that way.

Ok, how about keeping in my desk at school. It would be beyond their reach, if I was careful.

But being a prideful hunter, I boasted about my find to some of my classmates and showed them my prize. This attracted the attention of another school bully, the aforementioned Mr. Dula, a tall, thin menacing figure. He asked if he could read it at recess time. I let him, but only with me keeping a careful eye on him. He thought it was amusing and asked if he could have it. Naturally, I said noth-

ing doing. I went through a lot to get that comic and I was keeping it.

Dula narrowed his little beady eyes at me and said nothing else. I put the comic back my desk. I thought that was the end of it.

Later, after lunch, I opened my desk to check on it.

It was gone!

I turned to Dula and he had this strange smile on his face. I knew he took it but I never had a chance to accuse him; I was embarrassed that this could happen to me.

If time travel were possible, I would not go back and prevent Kennedy's assassination or witness the Crucifixion of Jesus.... I would go and beat the living hell out of Roderick Dula and take back the comic book he stole from my desk.

What happened next was really pathetic. I offered him other comics in my collection as ransom. I offered him some primo stuff like the first appearance of the new **Captain Marvel** and the latest **Spiderman**. I wrote three or four notes (passed at great risk, while class was in session (!), which was a hanging offense in some Catholic schools) begging him to give it back.

The bastard wouldn't even look at me. He took the **Captain Marvel** and never acknowledged me. I never spoke to him again.

The one good thing that came from this bittersweet experience was that it made me just a little tougher and a lot wiser than I had been before.

Another two years down the road, I ordered it from a store in Passaic, New Jersey where it was the cornerstone of my collection until I was forced to sell it in 1978 to pay bills I accrued in college. I finally got another copy of #46 and #47 at Rivercon last year. Cost me over \$30. Worth every penny. I keep 'em in a fireproof safe now.

An enterprising collector like myself needed two things; a good and plentiful source of comics and regular income.

For some reason the local pharmacy, Becker's, was supplied with only Marvel Comics. Since I like DC as well, I began to search out a place that carried both. In the summer of '68, I either walked or biked extensively all over the surrounding area to find the best place.

I finally found a drug store just inside the Norwood city limits, that carried a majority of what I wanted. The shipment usually hit Monday afternoons, right after school.

There were two problems. Norwood, a municipality surrounded by the city of Cincinnati, had a reputation of being hostile to blacks. Needless to say, I had to be on my guard if I was going there on a regular basis. It was also about a two mile walk.

On this point I gritted my teeth and just did it. Week after week. Rain, shine, sleet or snow. After a while walking any distance was not a burden to me. Occasionally, I had a working bike but usually, I walked it.

Thank God there was a garbage strike in 1969. I would never had gotten money to accommodate my growing collection and I never would have met one of my BEST friends and major influences in my life.

My allowance had grown from a quarter to 50 cents a week. Comics had just had a price jump from 12 to 15 cents. One of the conditions of the strike settlement was that from then on, the sanitation workers would not have to haul the trash from the point of origin; homeowners would have to haul it out to the curb themselves.

This is where I, the enterprising youth, stepped in. For a quarter, I hauled neighbors trash out, no matter what the quantity. For a several years, I had between 10-15 clients along Fairfield Ave.

One of the clients I met through the strike was a retired Army Sergeant named Mary Hahn. She lived on the second floor of an apartment house and most of the time walked with a cane. She needed someone to take her large trash can out every week. I liked her so much, I would have done it for free. When she needed help

with other things, I was there for her. I also remembered that she had a plentiful supply of Hershey bars (the BIG bars, which usually went for an astronomical 79 or 89 cents back then).

Mary was divorced and had two daughters; Erica, the eldest, who lived in California and Michael (pronounced mike-kay-la) who went to Bard College in New York. I usually called her Mike.

I met her briefly when she came home from school in '69 and '70 and I was just getting out of grade school. I would describe her as being about 5'4", a droll, snappy, fast talking, cosmopolitan young woman with short brunette hair, a kinda cross between Suzanne Plechette and Barbra Streisand. She still does.

We saw a lot more of each other when she graduated and came to live with her mother in '72.

More on this in a moment; now, a few words about high school. I went to a prestigious local Catholic school, Purcell, an all boy's facility (then) which was (and still is) located right next door to my grade school, St. Francis de Sales. Those years, from 1970-74, were very hard on me. If anything, any positive self esteem I had in grade school was obliterated. I was considered a geek even by other geeks. I had few friends and a lot of enemies, including Rod Dula. Again, I can't be bitter at my parents for sending me to the best school available. I wanted to go to the local public high school, Walnut Hills. They had girls.

Puberty was difficult because at first, I had no idea what was happening to me. Luckily, I read a health book that explained everything. But I was feeling...frisky. I never had a girlfriend while I was at Purcell. I didn't understand how boys met girls or how to act around them, much less conduct myself with newer, higher levels of testosterone poisoning the deal.

So I became a loner at Purcell. I think I went to only one or two dances, that's all. I shunned the Senior Prom. I was on the bowling team. Bowling I could handle. I went out for the baseball and football teams once, for my father's sake. I gave up; my heart wasn't in it.

The only women I hung out on a regular basis with were Mary and Mike.

If my parents had any objections to my hanging out with them I never heard about it. I'm sure they had their concerns but for the most part, I fended for myself when it came to issues of the heart and sex education. I did not listen to locker room chit chat, I trusted the library...and an occasional copy of *Playboy*.

Mike and I were never romantically involved. From the start, she viewed me as the little brother her mother never provided. If I deviated from this role, she usually let me know in NO UNCERTAIN terms that THAT was NOT going to happen.

The thing that solidified science fiction's role in my life (and her's, too I suppose) came in a series of incidents over a four year period, '72-76.

In '72, Mike took me to see **2001: A Space Odyssey** in its first re-release. I was very impressed. In return, I loaned her some of my comics; among them the groundbreaking Denny O'Neil/Neal Adams issues of *Green Lantern/Green Arrow*. She hadn't read anything comic related since she was kid. She in turn was very shocked by the storyline of Speedy (Green Arrow's sidekick), being hooked on smack. Shocked, but impressed by the comic and my good taste.

Mike in turn, loaned me a paperback copy of Ace's **THE BEST SCIENCE FICTION STORIES** of 1969, edited by Donald Wollheim and Terry Carr. She told me to read a story called "*A Boy and His Dog*", first. The first Harlan Ellison story I ever read was so good, I read it three times straight, savoring how good it actually was. And the sexual interludes weren't bad either. VA VA VA VOOM!

In my sophomore year, my English teacher, Mr. Higgins (who was rumored to be an ex-linebacker for the Miami Dolphins), decided to liven up the curriculum by assigning some sf. We read

CHILDHOOD'S END, THE MARTIAN CHRONICLES, OUT OF THE SILENT PLANET and **THE TWO TOWERS**. And just the **THE TWO TOWERS**. Needless to say, the whole class had no idea what the hell was going on. It's more than probable that Mr. Higgins was misinformed and thought that it was a single novel. When the class found out we had only the middle part of Tolkien's **LORD OF THE RINGS**, the ex-linebacker rumor didn't sound so far fetched...

In February 1975, Mike and I went on a road trip to New York City; she to visit some college friends, me to check out a **Star Trek** convention in Manhattan. As a college freshman, I wangled my way on the staff of the campus newspaper, *The News Record*. It helped that I was also taking a journalism course and was required to write a couple of stories for publication. With a valid press pass, I was able to get into a hotel suite and meet George Takei, Robert Lansing (Gary Seven on the episode "Assignment Earth"), Majel Barrett and Gene Roddenberry. The one question I asked him was "If **Star Trek** returned to television, would it be on NBC"? Roddenberry gave a little grin and said "No Comment."

During the three day affair, I stayed with my mother's other sister, Cassie and her husband Sonny in their Brooklyn high rise. I commuted on the subway, toured Times Square and saw a few movies. I was catching a travel bug I do believe. I never wrote a story about the convention.

Another ritual that Mike and I had was reading *Analog* every month. I think Mary obtained a gift subscription or she got it herself. She would read it first and then toss it to me.

On Wednesday afternoon, 23 June 1976, I was spending yet another lazy day with Mike and her mother. I was paging through the May *Analog* while she was preoccupied with some mystery novel.

After reading the letters in Brass Tacks, I started paging through the last few pages to find out what was coming up in the next issue. The two columns of the calendar of upcoming events caught my eye.

"Hey Mike, says here that there's going to be a science fiction convention here."

"Here," she said in a slightly incredulous voice?

"Yeah, at the Quality Inn in Norwood. I think we ought to check it out."

Michaela rolled her eyes. "You're crazy," she said. "Those things are for science fiction writers only. They'll toss us out." She went back to reading her book.

It might have ended right there if I hadn't said, "Well, we like science fiction don't we? I'd like to go down and meet a couple of writers myself."

Basically, I had to cajole and badger her into going, as Archie Goodwin would harass Nero Wolfe. Even after she agreed to meet me there Friday, I still wasn't sure she would show up.

That Friday afternoon, I hopped a bus and rode deep into the heart of Norwood. The Quality Inn was located directly across the street from GM's Camaro assembly plant (it was closed in the early eighties). The city still had a rep for being racist so I did not linger on the street.

I found the registration table on the lower level near the pool. A nice middle aged woman named Bea Mahaffey took my five dollars, gave me my badge and welcomed me officially into sf fandom. My first question to her was, "Is Fritz Leiber's name pronounced Lee-ber or Lye-ber?"

She looked at me for a second. "Lee-ber," she intoned.

I thanked her and went on my way.

I had to introduce myself to the other members of the Cincinnati Fantasy Group as I met them; Lou Tabakow, Mike Lalor, Bill Bowers and a host of others.

I wandered outside to see who was in the pool and met a dripping wet Joe Haldeman, the guy who just won a Nebula for **THE FOREVER WAR**. I introduced myself, half shocked that I was meeting

Post-it Notes From Across the Span of Years...

Bill Bowers

06/17/97

As I was saying ... before I was so rudely interrupted by reality:

The reason for, the rationale behind this particular issue, is simple — and known to many of you.

Briefly: June of 1977 — the week before MidWestCon -- I moved to Cincinnati from northern Ohio. It was, at the time, the single biggest "gamble" in my life: emotionally and fiscally. In retrospect, it still is.

In June of 1987, to mark the 10th Anniversary of that Significant Event, I published a special issue of *Outworlds* [#51]. ...with a slight blurring of the line, everyone contributing was a "Cincinnati" fan. That was so much fun that, five years later, I did it again. *Outworlds* 64 [June 1992] contained many repeat offenders.

So soon, yet again. These past five years have passed with blinding speed, and yet there were stretches where my life, if not the clock, was seemingly full tilt in reverse. But I *have* survived (with more than a little help from my friends) and here we are once more:

There are some *strange* things in the issue at hand, but one commonality binds it together: all of the contributors have more than a tenuous association with Cincinnati Fandom and the Cincinnati Fantasy Group. My Thanks to all of them for Coming Through ... and my particular thanks to Frank—for actually beating the *deadline*!

It's been an *interesting* twenty years. Regrets? Yes, a few. But that initial "move" is not one of them.

Cincinnati is my Home, now. And likely to be so for the foreseeable future....

■ Now then:

The last time a majority of you *heard* from me directly was with the arrival of *Outworlds* 66. That issue was dated May...1993. (You can do the math.)

I used to wonder how someone could just simply stop publishing. After all, for more than thirty years...thru traumas (real and imagined) and marriages (real and ...) ... I managed to publish SOMETHING every year. Hell, I was even credited with co-editing/publishing an issue of Double: Bill during the eighteen months I spent in the P.I. No doubt to it: I was thoroughly convinced that no matter what travails Life threw at me, thru the Good Times & the Bad...I would somehow manage to Pub My Ish.

The last issue of Outworlds was dated 5/18/93. Half of the run remains uncollated, and the number of copies mailed out is less than that. Later that (same) year I managed a (two)page Xenolith 37 for FLAP 8(4).

(...) *It's been a while.*

— flaf • NINE; 5/11/96 (for FLAP 100)

Relax. I'm not going to render a blow-by-blow of the last four years. Local friends have endured along with me; a minority of the mailing list have endured through a couple of apazines ... and I'm not at all certain that either my psyche nor atrophied typing skills are up to the task in any event.

Still, I'm not at all certain that it is totally fair to so many of you to have simply dropped-out without a word and then re-emerge four

years later, as if nothing had happened. Enough has. And not only to me.

Therefore: as briefly and dispassionately as I know how:

■ The "Editorial" in *OW66* depicted my continuing "back" troubles and the wonderful episode of the exploding perforated duodenal ulcer. I ended the issue with a note to the effect that I had just been "laid-off". Two weeks before the Madison Conflu.

Unmentioned in that note, which was written on the Sunday following the Friday lay-off, was the fact that as I was preparing for that last day of work, I coughed and felt/heard something 'pop' as I was shaving. I didn't think to much about it but, by the time I made it to work, the pain in my side was—to put it mildly—acute. I somehow made it through the morning until, taking off my last half day of work, I went to have x-rays taken. Monday...they called with the results: I'd fractured two ribs. Coughing. ...only me.

Somehow I managed the drive to that Conflu and, despite the constant pain, I'm glad I did. The drive back was, however, the *longest* trip of my life.

The highlights of the remainder of '93 were there, but were few. The lack of work tore me down and eventually the doctor put me on an anxiety-reliever and then a full-blown anti-depressant. They must of worked; I got up in the morning. Occasionally my friends would drag me out, or I would drag myself out to see my friends. But I became increasingly self-isolated, progressing well on the path to becoming a total hermit. I was not a happy camper.

1993 ended/1994 started with the usual round of Floating New Year's Parties (one of my few lasting legacies to Cincinnati fandom). My life revolved around bi-weekly unemployment checks, doctor's visits—and ever more frequent vet's visits. In May, with the unemployment benefits coming to an end, I visited the County Human Services department, and applied for welfare. Not my proudest moment.

I was "approved". On Friday, June 3rd, 1994, I received my final unemployment check. I was not looking forward with anticipation to the future.

But. The following Monday I received a call from the agency that had secured most of my temp jobs. Would I be "interested" in going back to the Toy Company where I'd worked from '81 until the Big Lay-off in December '87? Silly question.

A call back: I was to start that very Wednesday, the 8th.

I then made the most difficult phone call of my life, setting up an appointment.

Tuesday.

I made a final trip to the vet.

I went cross-town to pick up my \$112.00 in food stamps.

I came home to prepare myself, not only for the physical effort of going back to work after thirteen months—but for the much more difficult task of simply living with myself.

... even though the surrounding wordage will be post-dated -- today happens to be the 6th of June, 1997. Therefore, it seems to me apropos to reprint the following, verbatim:

In June of 1977 I packed my Hopes, Dreams & Kipple in to a U-Haul-It truck and, towing the Mustang II containing my Responsibility, I moved to Cincinnati.

I've been thinking about, dreading this "section" ever since deciding to do this issue. This will be the hardest thing I've attempted to put into words since X:7.

... it will be the most difficult tale I've ever told ... while stone sober.

Whatever comes out will, I know, be totally inadequate. But I have to try.

Late December, 1976. In the Far North

Leah was visiting. She'd made "threats"; I didn't think she was serious. I came home from work one day, opened the front door and, looking into the kitchen, spotted a bowl on the floor. And a small ball of fluff.

"Oh, shit!" was my reaction. Without quasi-quotes.

"It's name is Bill Bowers' Responsibility," she said. "The intent is to keep you home, so that you can publish fanzines. ... rather than going to all these conventions."

Nice try, Leah.

Less than a week later, I took the kitten to Cincinnati, to the precursor of the Floating New Year's Parties.

Less than a month after the gifting, I took her to ConFusion. ... and, a little later, to a Kublacon. (I still have "her"

namebadges from both.)

I found that having a kitten at a convention was a great way of (*picking up women*) getting attention.

A little while later she made The Move with me. As if she had a choice.

When I first took her to a vet, I said that her name was "X"; I really didn't want to "explain".

But she rapidly became simply 'Sponse. To me and to everyone who was a part of my life. (Though she did have a habit of actively disdaining women who were more than superficial visitors. Strange.)

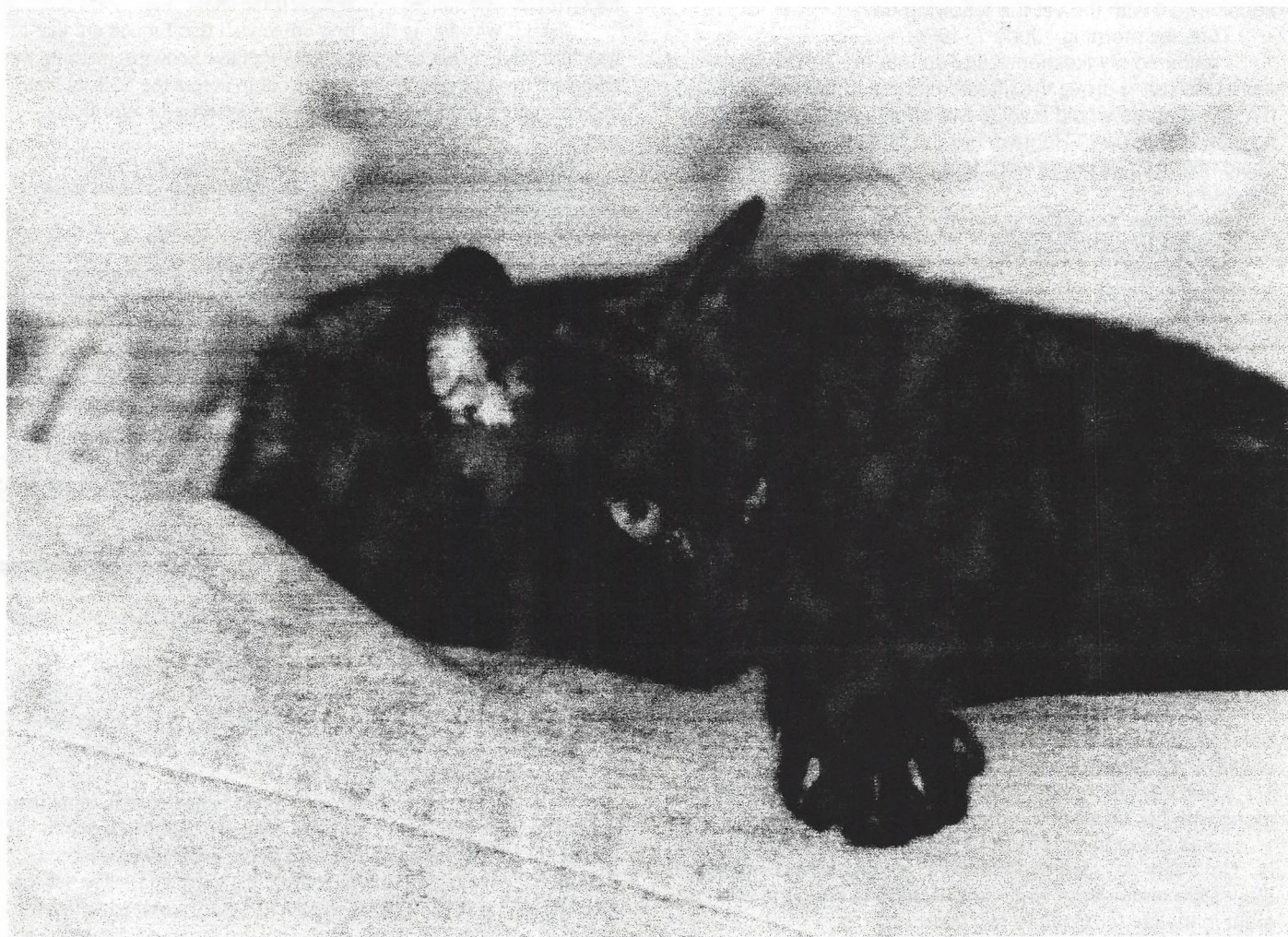
I went to an epic number of conventions. Without her. But she was always there when I returned. She was there. Through everything.

And when, in the mid-'80s I moved to Sunset and an apartment that didn't permit "pets", I arranged to board her out. I even paid Cat Support.

That situation was a factor a couple of years later when I moved into *this* house with the woman who was boarding her. It certainly wasn't 'Sponse's fault.

And when I gained re-entry to the house, after having been locked-up/out for a month, I found that 'Sponse was still here. Starved, but still here. We commiserated together and I used her as the lead-in to my first fanzine after The Traumas.

'SPONSE ■ December, 1976 ■ North Canton, Ohio



Forward to 1993. The Year of My Depression. Toward the end of the year 'Sponse began to get sick with increasing frequency. She threw-up and refused to eat anything but soft foods. Finally, in November, I took her to the vet. ... where she was, by then, known well as 'Sponse -- the cat the nurse had to put on the padded gloves to handle.

The diagnosis was kidney failure.

He gave her a fluid-shot, recommended a special food, and basically tried to communicate to me that there was no hope. I didn't want to hear that.

'93 faded into '94 and the deterioration accelerated. The frequency of the vet visits accelerated as well. She seemed to "rally" after each injection. But for increasing lesser periods of time.

Becca offered support, both over the phone and by making the long trip over here more than once.

Denise commiserated; she had gone through the same thing with the Parsleigh's cat.

DaveL understood; he'd had to put "his" cat to sleep.

Spring faded into early Summer.

It came to a point where I had to carry her up and down the stairs. She couldn't even make it "up" to the bed in which I slept; I sleep on a box spring & mattress on the floor.

The vet advised.... But I refused to even consider....

I was being selfish. I was putting my feelings ahead of her physical condition. I knew it but I couldn't do otherwise.

Taking care of 'Sponse was my "job", I joked.

That June Monday. When I was "offered" the job. When the call-back confirmed it -- I made The Call. And scheduled an appointment with the vet the following day.

Tuesday morning. June 7, 1994.

I gathered My Responsibility up into my arms and carried her to the car. I drove the fifteen minutes to the vet. He said that the process would involve two shots and there would be no pain on her part. He gave her the first shot, and said that I could hold her while she went to sleep. He and the nurse left the room.

She started convulsing. In my arms.

I died a thousand deaths.

I screamed....

They came back.

This *never* happened. I was assured. It didn't matter. It had happened.

He placed 'Sponse on the table and gave her the second shot. She stopped convulsing.

A fighter to the end.

They left me alone with her. Again.

I didn't hold her, but I petted her and said my Good-byes. I cried.

I left and went to pick up my food stamp allotment.

I didn't see as if I had a choice. I couldn't pass up the job. But I couldn't leave her home while I worked. I didn't allow myself time to think. I made the decision and carried it out. You do what you gotta do.

I had another choice to make.

I live in a rented house. I have no plans to move soon, but I couldn't see just burying her in the back yard. I certainly couldn't let the vet "dispose" of her.

I had her cremated. The little urn sits on the mantle, along with her collar and a handful of sympathy cards.

I was going to say it's not a shrine but, damnit, I guess it is. Not every day, but every once in a while I glance over at the visible reminder of what was, if nothing else, the one constant in my life for close to two decades.

I do miss My Responsibility. Still.

Some say that I should get another kitten. I refuse to even consider it. Not at least, until I can assure some degree of certitude for my own future.

Art got a kitten last fall. It's not The Same. But it does help.

Leah. Thanks for the Gift of a lifetime.

And that's about all I feel like writing. Today.

— *Xenolith* 38 : 7/28/96

Going back to work after thirteen months off was a trip. ...an endurance test, physically and emotionally. I was sent in under an 89-day "contract"...so that I wouldn't have to take the mandatory drug test. They decided to "extend" me. I took the test; passed. How boring!

Healthwise, I maintained. The allergies/asthma flared...and subsided.

The osteoporosis was another matter. Leaning over a drafting board is not conducive to a pain-free back. Finally, in October of '94 I was "referred" to one of the leading bone specialists in Cincinnati. She prodded and poked, took x-rays and put me on a year-long series of shots. She apologized because all the research on osteoporosis has been concentrated on women. For a couple of weeks I went in daily, after work, to have the shot administered. Eventually I worked up enough nerve to accept sample vials and a prescription for syringes--and started giving myself the shots. Fun. Real fun.

...and it was during that first office visit that I found out that I had "lost" five inches of height. I *should* have known something was going on: I was having to use a footstool to access the bookshelves and changing a light bulb had become an exercise in total frustration.

I still think of myself as being six foot two. But I'm not.

I am indeed making humble penance for all the "short jokes" I perpetrated over the years.

■ Inevitably 1994 blended into 1995 which in turn blended more-or-less seamlessly into 1996. Maintaining might not be the most exciting lifestyle, but it has its own set of *rewards*.

After a year of the shot, the doctor--to my vast relief--put me on a pill instead--Fosamax. Again one that's only been tested on post-menopausal women who are over sixty. In early '96 I had a second bone-scan and the bone mass in my spine seemed to have stabilized. As long as I'm careful in what I do [I'm under strict orders not to lift anything exceeding ten pounds; paranoia is the operative course of action here] I rarely have pain.

There were continuing mini-crises at work, and a total lack of any sense of security--but I kept on going in, and they kept on paying me.

I read a lot. I watched even more TV. Plus endless movies-on-tape.

Via the Sims' Express, I attended the Nashville Corflu. Dave Locke and I made a one-day trip to Louisville/Rivercon to visit the Tacketts. Other than that, it was (as usual) MidWestCon & Octocon, the occasional CFG meeting, and bi-weekly trips cross-town to the Causgrove-Locke Video Central.

...and in September, I did something I hadn't done in more than twenty years: I went back to night school. To take two terms in AutoCAD 13, one of the industry standards in computer-assisted drafting. It's something I should have done long ago.... The school *experience* was an, well, an *experience*, but I survived with a 4.0

for the first term and a 3.5 for the second. Six weeks ago they finally gave me a computer at work—loaded with AutoCAD 12—which means I can't do half of what I was taught.... Nevertheless, I now spend my days tunnel-visioned with eye-strain, but at least I don't have a back-ache from bending over a drafting board.

I may inch my way into the latter days of the 20th Century yet.

■ Enter 1997.

In March I journeyed out to the Bay Area Corflu. It was a fiscal indulgence, but I hadn't been out to Northern California since Corflu 2. In 1985. That's far too long an absence.

Despite the fact that I increasingly travel "less well" these days, I enjoyed myself thoroughly.

Thanks, Jeanne.

...and Patty & Gary.

Everyone.

■ Two days after returning from Corflu, I had an appointment with a Brand New Doctor [to add to my collection]. For nearly an year my eyes had been watering to such an extent that they literally splattered the inside of my glasses. This was not only irritating, but potentially dangerous while driving. So I went to an optomologist.

The diagnosis: My lower eyelids had "pulled away" to such an extent that the tear drainage system could no longer function. And, while I was there, she noticed that the *upper* lids were drooping. I was shrouded in a hood and instructed to press the "trigger" whenever I saw a dot on the screen; it turned out that nearly a third of my vision was being obscured. I was given a choice: I could have the lower lids operated on, and wait to deal with the uppers until later. Nonsense, I said, with total fake bravado: Let's go for The Works, all at once.

The operation was scheduled for May.

(Looking at my little list of medications taken, the Doctor opined that the conditions were probably the result of extensive use of Predinoline. You know. The same wonderful pill that tore up my back!)

A week later, I had an appointment with the bone doctor, to go over the results of the bone-scan I'd had just before Corflu.

Ooph.

Whereas the scan after the year on the shots had shown some slight gain in bone density, the results after a year on the pills were less positive. In fact, the results were downright negative, showing a marked degradation. So now, while I'm still on the pills, a nasal (newly on the market) spray has been added to the mix.

Have Drugs. Will Travel. Carefully.

May 8th. A Thursday.

Art took me to the Hospital. Roger picked me up. I stayed overnight at Dave & Jackie's.

...in between: The Doctor is four foot eleven; I'd joked that she'd need a catwalk on which to operate from. I won't joke anymore: the "three-hour" operation took four. And, since it was classified "out-patient"...I wasn't.... I was heavily sedated, but I remember more than I wish.

Having the operation done on a Thursday, I was supposed to be able to return to work the following Monday. That was the Theory, and a major scheduling factor under the No-Go-To-Work, No-Get-Paid dictum. It didn't work out quite that way. I missed the entire following week. [That would have paid for this issue, and quite possibly the next....]

I had major swelling, but the major setback was continual blurring. In fact, it hasn't been until this past week, five weeks later, that I've been able to read with any degree of comfort. Given my total addiction to things visually accessible, and considering what happened to my Mother when she had the stroke five years ago — it

was all a bit scary. And depressing.

I had a check-up visit with the Doctor this morning [6/18]. Things are going well enough that I scheduled an appointment for an eye-exam for new glasses in three weeks. She also mentioned, in passing, that I have the beginning of cataracts, but it's too soon to do anything about *them*. *sigh*

So. The next time you see me, you may notice that I'm shorter. But you'll also note that I'm considerably brighter-eyed than I've been in years. For whatever that's worth!

■ I mentioned I've been reading a lot (for me) these past few years. I've also mentioned, elsewhere, that, whenever possible, I like to assemble as much of an author's canon as possible, or at least all of a "series" before starting in....

I started reading **THE MOVING TARGET**, the first in Ross Macdonald's Lew Archer series, on the flight out to Corflu—March 13th.

I chugged along.

I started **THE BLUE HAMMER**, the nineteenth (and final) book in the series, just before the operation, the seventh of May. Thanks to the blurry vision, I haven't been able to finish it. Although I probably could now. If it weren't for trying to crunch this issue out for MidWestCon....

Don't be surprised if you see me at the convention — with a book in my hand.

■ Ten days ago I "celebrated" the beginning of the fourth year on my 90-day job.

This week there was a major lay-off/restructuring. As far as I know, I'm still there. One of the engineers pointed out that we contract workers were beneath the radar screen; i.e., not on any organizational chart. Maybe, these days, I am more "secure" than I would be if I had a Real Job. Wouldn't that be ironic?

And that, Dear Reader, is the rest of the story ... since last time.

■ Perhaps it's the beginning of Yet Another Tradition, but in the *last* All-Cincinnati Issue, I urged your attendance at Ditto V, the following October.

Well... Roger & Pat Sims, I, Bill Cavin and the CFG would like to invite you to attend Ditto X. Once again, it will be combined with Octocon (the local relaxacon), and held in Cincinnati the week-end of October 24-26. The venue is a Best Western (also the home of MidWestCon, this year), room rates are \$63. for one to four per room, and phone reservations may be made thru (513)793-4500. Early registration for the con is \$20. until 9/10; \$25. thereafter and at the door. Supporting memberships in Ditto are \$5. [Make all checks payable to Pat Sims.]

If you haven't received a flyer and need more information, contact myself or the Sims': Roger & Pat Sims, 34 Creekwood Square, Glendale, OH 45246-3811; (513) 771-7587; 73473.2247@compuserve.com.

Please consider it. What with Corflu being in England next year, and my pronounced reluctance to travel to anything other *than* Corflu & Dittos ... if you want to see me, this may be your best bet.

Then again, come in spite of that!

06/21/97

■ Frank, Joel, Steve, and Denise were all present in the two preceding editions of this "series", and I really appreciate that.

But there are two names *not listed* with the "contributors" at the end of this section — without whose "contributions" this issue would not have been possible.

Jackie Causgrove. Dave Locke.

Those with long memories will recall that *OW66* was produced on a Kaypro 10 and printed-out on a dot-matrix printer. Eventually

the printer, which was a "loaner", Went Away. I used that as an excuse (one of many) for not Pubbing My Ish. ...until just over a year ago when, in a burst of enthusiasm following Dave's "persuading" me to sit down at Jackie's computer [to crank out a one-pager for FLAP's 100th Mailing] – I bought an H-P DeskJet 600. I linked it to the Kaypro and, with considerable fiddling by Don Carter, managed to get it to "print". But I was less than thrilled – the output was erratic, to put it mildly – and although I managed to get out two apazines (and endless Lists), I literally dreaded the prospect of trying to produce *this* issue on that combo....

If fact, if I'd had a *working* typewriter....

Jackie got a new computer in December, 1995. Since then, other than FLAP duties, the *old* system has basically sat.

Two weeks ago tonight, after a crash course in defragging and other esoteric arts from Dave, I toted home the old system (along with a 24-pin dot-matrix printer – not yet hooked-up – and a **ton** of continuous-form paper).

All on Permanent Loan. From Jackie.

As per usual, Don Carter has been invaluable in helping me set-up.

So now you know who to blame.

■ For this, and for ever so much more in the way of Friendship since the early '70s, This Issue is For Jackie....

■ *This* is an IBM clone, a 486-33; and that's about all I know about *that*. I'm on an accelerated Learning Curve, both here and at work, and it's fun. But draining. I'm "working" in Word in a version of Works for Windows [3.11; I think]. And yesterday I skimmed the "Publisher" manual: As I said on the phone, to Dave – if Roger can master this shit, so can I!

A day of virtually non-stop fiddling later, everything you see surrounding this "dated" entry has been formatted. Already there are aspects that don't appeal – but considering that this issue has been in essence created in less than two weeks [and that I've promised to Have It Out for MidWestCon, this upcoming weekend] – well, not too shabby. Is it?

I'm actually looking forward to seeing what I can Do. Given time.

■ I know better than to promise, but I really hope to have another issue out by year's end. We'll see, but in the meantime I can accept material (in appropriate formats) on disk; either 3 1/2" or 5 1/4". And, possibly, in yet another format.

I've been cheerfully ignoring some of the broader aspects of the Information Superhighway, but Dave has called my bluff: He has come up with a *free* e-mail service that doesn't require a separate phone line. Once I've recovered from this, I'll probably take advantage of it.

...so, when you send along your hard copy LoC on this, you might include your e-mail address, against that day.

Chris will be amused.

■ The future...?

Inevitably "economics" (i.e., continued employment) looms as a large counter-weight against my Continuing Dreams. Those thirteen months out of work traumatized me. I still owe money to friends and relatives from that period; I'm not forgetting that. I still have seven car payments left; I can't ignore that. ...and so forth.

And yet, I *want* to get back to some sort of regularity in publishing *Outworlds*.

At one point Rusty was making noises about starting a "fund" to help me publish *OW*; at the time I was a bit aghast at the idea. Now? I probably wouldn't be insulted.

I really appreciate those who've kept me on their Mailing Lists over the past four years, with absolutely no response from me.

My own Mailing List is hopelessly jumbled -- I'm still not sure I sent out all of the *OW66*'s "owed". The print run this time is guesstimated, based more on what I can afford, than anything else. It will probably be smaller, next time.

■ Enough of all that. Despite the fact I'm so wasted I'm seeing double at the moment...*this* has been fun!

Let me know if you agree.

■ My undying appreciation and thanks to those who put up with me, and to those who have helped me put up with myself. It can't be easy, sometimes....

— **Bill Bowers**; 11:30pm; 06/21/97

...Apologies to Chris Barkley for running out of room at the end of his piece – before including the fact that it was:

DEDICATED TO THE MEMORY OF MARY HAHN and GARDNER FOX

Thank You both for pointing me in the right direction.

ALSO A SPECIAL NOTE OF THANKS TO RIC AND DAVE OF THE BREAKFAST CLUB OF 97X/WOXY-FM, FOR THEIR HELP IN DECIPHERING THE LYRICS TO SOUL COUGHING'S "Super Bon Bon".

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[Please note COA for the Parsleigh's – effective 7/22/97]

*I met Steve shortly after I met Denise – very shortly after I moved to Cincinnati. Though I don't see nearly as much of them as I once did – primarily, I suspect, my fault – they are **still** (together and individually) two of the major reasons I have for having no regrets about having made The Move.*

...Attached to the following was this note from Steve:

I'd hoped to have something to you on time. I didn't. I'd hoped to put together a light article about life and perhaps fandom, ending it with a truly lousy pun. I didn't.

Instead, what I have is a poem. Last week, my great aunt died, and I went over to the nursing home on the night she got really bad, and found all of her family there, waiting for her to die.

This is what came out of that.

Death Watch

Stephen Leigh

...and a breath... a breath... a breath...
panting
skin moving over the hollow of cheeks
mouth wide in a gasp or perhaps frozen surprise
while her daughter holds the withered hand she has held for hours
lifting tired eyes to watch for a moment
with weary sadness

...and a breath... a breath... a breath...
eyes closed
ears closed
voices drift over her blanketed form
unheard
she is inward
drifting
already farther away than a word or a touch
already in the grasp of her eternity

...and a breath... a breath... a breath...
we tell stories over her
about her
whispers of a past
blurred by time
embellished with regret
a laugh turns to sob
and then silence
broken only by a breath...

...and a breath...
...and a breath...
...and

--- May 1997
— *Stephen Leigh*

