

(XX)

And today I got your letter. Today is Tuesday, 12th March 1974 - my 8th wedding anniversary  
At which point Sally arrived home and seduced me, and I've forgotten what I was about to say, which is probably just as well. Every man should have a Sally.

Ah yes.. If I have been married - no, that's wrong - If I was married exactly eight years ago today, that means I have been in fandom for ten years and published my first fanzine 7½ years ago. (It means other things, too, but the hell with that.) So I am just a little bit staggered to realize that you - yes, you: stand up there, John D. Berry: - you, sir, are the first person in all those years to OFFER to write me a column. Goddam. I accept.

Seriously, I can't think of anyone I'd rather have writing a column in PG than you, Walt, er Redd, er Bob, er (bl\*st!) John. Seriously. I decided some time last year that ScythropformerlyASFR wasn't what I wanted to go on publishing, and neither was Philosophical Gas exactly. Years ago Lee Harding accused me of being the Guardian Of SF, and I've long since given that up. But what I've been publishing mostly for the two years I've been in Canberra is me - pure, unadulterated me, straight onto stencil and devil take the hindmost - and I've become pretty tired of that, too. So Philosophical Gas goes on, with an increasingly more illustrious supercargo. Kurt Vonnegut, Ursula Le Guin, Leigh Edmonds (who?) - they were just warm-ups. Now George Turner and Bert Chandler have drunkenly committed themselves to writing for me each issue, and Ron Graham has promised he will too. You've never heard of Ron Graham? I don't blame you. He's a nice bloke in his sixties who has the largest sf collection in the southern hemiglobe and more money than you and I together are likely to earn in our lifetimes. We've hated each other's guts for years, especially since he appointed me Assistant Editor (or something) of Vision of Tomorrow and sacked me before the first issue appeared. That's DNQ, however true. Anyway, in the last few weeks we've settled our differences, which I am bloody delighted about, and he has said he will write for me. The man can write; no doubt about that; but I suspect that for forty years or so he has wanted to be a Science Fiction Writer - and he's hopeless at it. Get him going on how he went out gold prospecting at age 18, or something like that, and he's fantastic! Not only that, but he writes exactly the kind of personal, vaguely sf-orientated stuff that I

enjoy publishing. So Ron's on the payroll, hopefully as of no.27.

So here I am, with three first-class columnists. What more could a fanzine publisher want? He could want someone like John Berry, that's what. I think George Turner is the youngest of the three - and he's past his mid-50s. Get the picture? Exactly. I don't feel like publishing the official journal of First Fandom. (Not even if I get LoCs from Sam Moskowitz, no.)

Now there is the other question: whether or not you should join ANZAPA. Frankly, I think you should have a go at it. The requirements aren't too onerous - six pages in six months - and I think the treasury still allows airmail bundles for overseas members. More important, I think ANZAPA is about to enter one of its good phases. John Foyster seems set to become OBE (should I explain that? In some drunken moment years ago I supported a motion to have the OE's title changed to Official Bloody Editor, and the motion was passed...), Gillespie is back in town, and everything looks auspicious indeed. John's leadership alone should guarantee a lively twelve months. Give it a bash, John. I'll pay your dues first time round (no arguments: I can afford it easily, and I want you in), and I'll be happy to run off stencils for you - providing you don't write 200 pages every mailing. Any old stencils will do, but if you can get them I would prefer three-slot Roneo. (I've run off some pretty odd stencils in my time, so I don't think you could surprise me. I use Roneo R430X stencils, which measure - Oh bugger that: I'll enclose one and you can see exactly what they're like. I'll just remove the backing sheet and the carbon.) :

I feel guilty because I haven't published anything from your letters and haven't commented on your things in FAPA. I know that you know the feeling - but that doesn't lessen my feeling. I love reading about what people have been doing, whether it's travelling round the British Isles (e.g. Frank Denton) or ruminating at length over Julie Andrews (who?), but I find it most difficult to comment on these things, and if they are contained in letters to me I find it impossible to re-type and publish them. Bruce Gillespie types four stencils per hour, easily. I've seen him do it. But I can spend a whole night on one or two stencils, so I have to be incredibly enthusiastic to publish a letter that goes for more than one of my pages. The reason is simple: After nearly eight years of re-typing other people's stuff I am utterly sick of it. You wouldn't believe the effort it took to stencil the articles in recent PGs by Vonnegut, Le Guin and Willis. You wouldn't believe how difficult I find it to stencil the excellent things I have on hand from George and Bert. I think I'm just old and tired. It isn't only that. I don't get to the typer these days anywhere near as often as I did in 1986, or even last year, because (a) Sally is more important to me than fandom ever was, and (b) I tend to drink a lot while I'm typing, which upsets Sally and makes the next day at work hell.

This typer doesn't help much, since it fits so much in. Example? The first two lines from your letter:

I believe I'll designate this 'Commonwealth Letter-Writing Day'  
and, after completing this, perhaps go on to the long-neglected and

I remember the day in 1988 when I first typed a stencil on the 14-spaces-per-inch Optima portable. It took me nearly half an hour. This IBM averages around 17 or 18 characters per inch, and the lines are closer than on most machines. Last December I deliberately bought an electric portable which has a type-space exactly between pica and elite - 11 characters per inch - because I felt I was spending too much time answering letters, and that the much larger typeface would lend itself to shorter letters. I was wrong, of course. I've hardly used the thing. And it's a complete dead loss as far as fanzines are concerned, since the cost of paper and postage has shot up like a rocket. As you know.

Speaking of which... I note that your letter to me cost you 52c. From memory I think it would have cost you 42c before the postage increase, right? Our rates are rather different. We've Gone Metric, you understand. So it costs me 25c per 10 grams for an airmail letter. Ten grams is 0.353 oz. Let's say your letter to me weighs a bit under an ounce. It costs you 52c. If I send it back to you, it weighs a bit under 30 g (with luck), and therefore costs me 75c. But my dollar is worth half as much again as yours, so my 75c is in fact US\$1.13. This works all the way through our postage schedule, so if you don't hear a lot from Australia you now know why: it's costing us more than twice as much as your new rates, and most of us earn about half the average American's salary. Example: I am probably the best-paid fan in Australia, apart from Ron Graham, John Foyster, Robin Johnson and ~~maybe~~ Peter Darling. In American currency I earn around \$15,000 per year; I pay \$61.50 per week for a small three-bedroom house; I drive a Renault 16TS, which probably uses about as much gas as your VW van, and I live only about 3 or 4 km away from work (most Australians live much farther away: at Ferntree Gully I was about 40 km from Melbourne), but super-grade petrol (gas) costs me about US\$0.88 per imperial gallon (=2.273 litres = about 0.85 American gallon). So make that about US\$1.00 per US gallon.

The message is that if you have an income of about \$10,000-15,000 from America you will probably exist very happily in Australia. Under \$10,000 (=A\$6,666) you'll be struggling. But (so far) you won't have to queue up for petrol, at least.

(Wednesday:) Another thing I do when I'm sloshed is write long, careful, boring paragraphs like the above. I'm not even sure what I had in mind up there. Sorry.

Today is Canberra Day. I don't know the significance of 12th March in Canberra's history, but the Wednesday closest to it is a holiday. I slept until midday, when the noise of every bloody motor-mower in Red Hill at last penetrated my sodden skull. I have no plans for the rest of the day, except not to do much, but first I think I should start answering your letter.

Well, you know now where Gillespie is. ::: Your feeling about writing to authors whose work you admire, before they die, is a feeling familiar to me. Not that I ever do anything about it, but I know the feeling. I'm glad I screwed up courage to meet Alec Hope, my favourite Australian poet. I'm glad I called on George Turner back in 1967: it would be hard to imagine my life, or the shape of Australian fandom, without him. I'm glad I wrote to Kenneth Slessor and Walter Murdoch to tell them I enjoyed their work; both have since died. ::: The general Australian image of America is that it's a bloody dangerous place, and for me this is reinforced by the many accounts I have had from fans of being robbed, mugged and so on. One fan whose name you would know, though I don't think he's very active these days, told me some years ago that a close relative had been robbed of a very small amount of money and then murdered. There are times when I feel I don't want to budge from Canberra.

It's interesting to read your note on not knowing whether there are two issues of Foolscap in FAPA, since four days after you wrote that I read those two issues. The Pacific isn't all that wide when you can afford airmail - but I don't think I can go on paying \$8.55 (and obviously far more when FAPA is bigger) for the privilege of seeing mailings apparently before you do. Next mailing you will see Scythrop 28 and PG 26. They cost me A\$7.50 to post. My enthusiasm is waning a little.

I've never been able to keep up with correspondence - mainly, I suppose, because I tend to write awfully long letters. Like this one they often take a couple of days to write, and on the second day I start repeating myself. For example, I've already told you about writing long letters. (\*blush\*)

I'm glad you mentioned that Kaiser Stuhl J426, because real soon now I'd better put labels on the remaining four bottles. Reserved for John Berry. Reserved for Ed Cagle, Bill Rotsler, Ursula. Otherwise I might drink them, and there just ain't any more to be had. Not quite true: I was offered two bottles the other night for \$8 each. I don't pay that kind of money for any kind of booze!

I'm sorry you lost HERE'S LUCK. As soon as I find another copy I'll send it to you. But I am intrigued by your comment that you 'recognized at once Lower's affinity with (my) kind of humor'. I know I'll never make any kind of literary critic because I just can't pick things like this. My friend Carolyn, whom you have met in PG and maybe elsewhere, started recommending Lower to me not long after we met (ten years ago! - Jeez, I'd better write to her), but I didn't get round to reading him until late 1971. Maybe you can tell me whether he influenced me; I can't. Certainly I love that book (see page 93, Torcon handbook), and I like the stuff he wrote for newspapers, but my favourite writers include some odd people and I don't really think I could have been influenced by them all. Or could I? Someone said not long ago (I think it was Jack Wodhams in Kwalhioqua) that my writing is a mishmash of Thurber, Leacock, Beachcomber, Lower and Peacock - or something like that. He didn't include Hazlitt, Thackeray, Sterne, Meredith, John James, Michael Innes, Elliott Paul, Mencken, Pamela Branch, Tom Keneally, Peter de Vries and a couple of dozen more I could mention, presumably because I haven't raved about them in fanzines. I think I've probably been influenced as much by John Foyster, Terry Carr, Charles Burbee and Calvin Demmon as by these lesser-known writers. And Liebling: I've only ever seen one of his books - THE JOLLITY BUILDING (?) - but I'm damn sure his style influenced mine. And the Goon Shows: I've been listening to them for (Gott in Himmel!) eighteen years. I prefer the way you put it. Affinity is one thing; influence is altogether another.

One of these days I must write something about Lennie Lower, so I'll write a bit here for practice. You mention his limitations of viewpoint, the datedness of the book, and cultural differences. Good, good. He was a hack journalist, first. He wrote during the Depression and the War, second. He lived in Sydney, third. These three facts distance him from me almost as much as they do you. I don't remember much about the War: I was about six when it finished. All I know about the Depression is what I've read and what I've heard from my parents, and their experience was different from, say, Lower's. They were church-going folk, not much interested in politics, quite cut off from the boozy what-the-hell kind of world that Lower knew. As far as I know my father never touched alcohol or smoked a cigarette in his life. (And I've never dropped acid, and pot gives me a headache - so I'm not much different from him.)

I bought a copy of HERE'S LUCK in Sydney in November 1971, on my way to the annual conference of the National Association of Retail Grocers of Australia (for which organization I had the dubious honour of working at the time). At the conference I met Norman Kessel, an elderly bloke about to retire as editor of Retail World, the weekly trade paper part-owned by NARGA. We talked a bit, but nowhere near as much as I now wish I had. His first love is theatre, and I notice that he still writes crits for The Bulletin. Somehow Lower came into our conversation, and he recalled working with him. The story he told me, roughly, was that at the time he was a sub-editor and Lower a journo committed to writing something funny every day. He recalled that Lower had one day been writing steadily all morning, and chucking everything he wrote into his wastepaper bin. About lunchtime Lower went out to get pissed as usual, and didn't come back to the office for hours. Meantime everyone was panicking about this. Norm went through Lower's wpb, smoothing out the crumpled sheets, and from them constructed one of the funniest things ever to appear under Lower's byline. Lower was annoyed as hell about this. Moral 1: Writers don't always know whether their work is good or not. Moral 2: Sub-editors have a useful place in the scheme of things.

The only person I have ever encountered who writes almost exactly in the Lower tradition is a bloke whose name I have forgotten who worked for NARGA. Every week he wrote a piece about life in the grocery business, and most weeks it was hilariously funny. He wrote these things for Retail World, of which Norm Kessel was then editor. I can't recall whether I talked about this with Norm, but I'm sure he must have recognized the... affinity?

This letter is getting out of hand!

Re your first experience of Australian paperbacks: What you saw in HERE'S LUCK was probably a declaration to the effect that the book had been registered for transmission by post as an Australian book. Until recently Australian books could be sent through the mail at a reduced rate, provided they were registered as such. That's finished now, to the vast annoyance of Australian publishers. Our postal system is rather different from yours. Basically we have letter rate and 'other articles' rate. Books are 'other articles'. Both categories cut out at 500 g: anything heavier is a parcel. Within Australia there are five parcel categories, based on distance. For example, a parcel weighing under 1 kg costs 45c (within 50 km), 60c (within State but beyond 50 km), 85c (between adjoining States), \$1 (between distant States, eg NSW and Tasmania), \$1.10 (between 'far distant' States, eg NSW and WA). Complicated, especially for ANZAPA OBEs. Overseas rates, for airmail letters, other articles and parcels, are also in five categories. Surface mail has two categories. I won't go into further detail because it will probably all change again on 1st April.

I think you could happily go through life knowing only Sibelius's 2nd. The other symphonies and the shorter works are all beautiful, but you need a fair bit of patience to absorb them. All I have now is the 5th on record (and not a particularly good performance at that, but cheap) and the 2nd on tape. Oh, and the Violin Concerto on record, too; I suspect that it is the most easily approached work of Sibelius, along with the Karelia Suite and the 2nd Symphony.

Claptrap, you say! Listen, young Berry, I won't have anyone call Janacek's 2nd String Quartet claptrap! You weren't referring to that? Sorry. Sure, a Beethoven piano concerto will do fine. Which was it? My favourites are, like everyone else's, the 4th and 5th - preferably played by Emil Gilels.

Tea: I mean, tea - not the other stuff. Just to extend the coincidence, the other tea I like is Twining's English Breakfast. I don't have any on hand, but I like it now and then (but not with honey!).

Your response to my question about mailing comments is the best I've had yet, so it will be in PG 27.

And I think I've just about answered your letter.

To conclude, the next sheet is the cover I finally decided on for PG 27. There are a few more around than I need, so here's a preview. For my next trick, I shall attempt to post this letter at other-articles rate. Wish me luck. Maybe I'll get away with it if I enclose PG 26 as well. I'll do that. Hope I haven't sent you a copy already...

Is all.

Cheers,

