

# TRAP DOOR

**Trap  
Door**

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**ART & GRAPHICS:** ATom (2), William Rotsler (6, 15, 33), Dan Steffan (7, 19-23, 26, 32) and Steve Stiles (cover, 2, 16, 24, 34).

A couple of issues ago I wrote about my longtime connection with Paul Williams, and mentioned in passing that he gave me my first real-world job after I left the Farm. This led some readers to wonder "Why did you go to the Farm in the first place?" and "Why did you leave the Farm?"

### Part I: Why did I go?

Well, first of all, it was not a dark and stormy night and there was no Farm to go to when I pulled up stakes in San Francisco and moved to Tennessee. I stumbled on the seeds of its beginning almost by accident, through a fannish connection. Andy Main, who was also living in San Francisco, mentioned that a guy named Stephen Gaskin was about to move his Monday night open meetings on Life, the Universe and Everything Else to an old movie house on Haight Street. Andy had been going to the meetings for several months, waxed lyrical about Stephen and his ideas, and had even begun audiotaping the talks.

Not too many Monday evenings later, in early 1969, Trina Robbins was visiting from Los Angeles. A rumor had circulated over the weekend that the Jefferson Airplane and



the Grateful Dead would be playing a free concert at Winterland that Monday night. It sounded good to us, so we went to check it out and indeed it *was* only a rumor. All dressed up and nowhere to go, I remembered Andy's enthusiasm about the Monday night meetings. We arrived just in time for the beginning. I was impressed with Stephen's straight talk even though it was liberally laced with the kind of

hippie jargon I wasn't—even then—a fan of. At that time my personal life (newly unemployed and getting by on savings and a little freelancing) and the state of the world around me (the dreary aftermath of the Summer of Love, the election of Nixon, the Vietnam War, and the dwindling hope that things would get better) made me more receptive than I might otherwise have been. Stephen's words suggested that a better life could be achieved by pooling resources and living communally, but at the same time avoiding the questionable "freedom" of free love that was so in vogue. Intrigued by all this I kept coming back and making new friends as time and Monday nights passed.

By the time I'd been attending the meetings for a year or so, there was a growing consensus that Stephen should carry his message around the country, and before long he was booked for a string of speaking engagements—most of them on or near college campuses. In order to afford the tour, Stephen and his family moved out of their city apartment and into a large school bus they had converted into living quarters. A bunch of his more avid followers made similar changes, and the concept of a bus caravan (which was soon generically and then specifically dubbed “the Caravan”) took shape and grew. By the time the Caravan actually hit the road, it was sixty vehicles strong.

At this point I had no particular interest in joining them, but that began to change after I hooked up with Denise, whom I met at one of the meetings. Once the Caravan took off and we had been together for a while, we started to miss our Monday night friends—so many of them had gone off to follow Stephen.

When the Caravan returned to San Francisco after three months on the road, it had transformed itself into a tight community. Returning to ordinary life in San Francisco at this point seemed out of the question to them. Tennessee had been the friendliest state they had visited, so that was where they decided to buy land and settle down to live communally. It was hard for us to resist; we would go back with them and at least check it out. The Caravan, of course, didn't wait for us to get it together. We would have to catch up with it. Over the next couple of months we bought a converted mail truck, sold off or gave away a big chunk of our “material plane” (including—so dumb in retrospect—my fanzine collection), put some other worldly goods in storage, gave up our little house, sold my car, and finally took to the road.

When we arrived in Nashville about a week later, we parked downtown near the Grand Old Opry and decided to take a walk. Within minutes we ran into two couples from the Caravan who were on their way to pick up some guitar strings. Happy to see some of our friends for the first time in months, we tagged along, and thus found ourselves un-

wittingly at a moment in Farm history. Because of the extensive local newspaper coverage, Amy Martin, the woman behind the counter at the music store, knew about the Caravan and its search for land. She said her father had about 700 acres fifty miles from Nashville, and she would ask him if the Caravan could park there while it continued its search. He said yes, and so we did.

Our previous notion of “checking it out” had morphed into a decision to stay. That Denise was eight months pregnant was clearly no minor factor, nor was our reluctance to part with our friends yet again. We got married one Sunday morning after Stephen's services. Two days later my wife gave birth to our first son (and the second baby born on the land), delivered by Stephen's wife with help from Stephen himself. Not many months after that, the first 1,000-acre communal land purchase was made—just down the road and around the corner from the “Martin Farm,” making moving easy.

So that's how I “suddenly” decided to join up with a rural commune in Tennessee.

### ***Part II: Why did I leave?***

Fast forward nine sometimes happy, sometimes maddening years to the end of the marriage and my increasing discontent with the direction the community was taking—too big and yet unable to stop admitting new people, too little money to keep the collective body and soul together *and* pay down its huge debt. I found myself single and homeless, living out of a duffel bag, and basically camping in the temporarily vacated rooms of fellow Farmies. This was no way to live and so, when Paul Williams popped up out of the blue with a letter about his difficulties running his small publishing company, I was more than grateful to accept his eventual job offer. I loaded all my stuff into a drive-away car and took off for Chicago, where Paul met me at that year's American Booksellers Association convention. It was extremely hard to leave my four sons behind, but I knew Denise and I would work something out where I'd be with them as soon as I got settled. A few days later I was back in California.

This brings me full-circle to having left the Farm to work for Paul Williams (as I wrote in #26), but now that I'm warmed up I want give you a taste of what life was like for me...

Would you believe that in the early days of the Farm at least one person referred to me as “saintly” for being willing to go to town? At that time, in the aftermath of so many months on the road, no one was interested in going off the land, preferring to focus on building the community and enjoying nature. Although I counted my fellow communards as friends, I found it improved my disposition to go out into the local area and do things that I enjoyed from my previous life: shopping for things the community needed (the reason for going) coupled with bookstore browsing and mixing with a wider range of people. These sporadic escapes led to one of my earliest jobs on the Farm, running the community grocery store.

Actually, “grocery store” was something of a misnomer. In its earliest incarnation, the store consisted of displaying all its food under a shade tree for a few hours so that people could come get their share. (This worked well except when it rained.) At first, most of the groceries were bought through a catalogue. They were delivered only once a week by a huge truck that slogged its way down our often muddy road to be greeted like a liberating army.

But that method quickly proved too limited and too expensive. Luckily for me, I was asked to go out and establish relations with various other suppliers to get better prices by purchasing in bulk. From Columbia Mill & Elevator, about twenty miles away, I bought 100-pound bags of soybeans (until later, when we grew our own) and flour. It was an interesting place, located in a huge metal building on a railroad spur in an industrial part of Columbia. Soybeans and wheatberries were kept in huge piles on concrete floors, sometimes ten to twelve feet high. I would watch as an elderly black man shoveled our soybeans into large burlap sacks that were hooked onto a floor scale.

The flour was already bagged and waiting. I'd help him load at least five hundred pounds of each into my truck, because I could see he was struggling with the weight.

Early on, one of the managers there gave me a tour of the mill, and I learned that it also had a lucrative sideline in country hams. With obvious pride he took me into a large air-conditioned room packed with hams hanging on hooks. The rich ham smell did nothing for my appetite, but I wasn't such a narrow-minded vegetarian that I couldn't remember my former taste in food and appreciate it.

A little later the Farm found another, more natural source for our flour, an old water-driven mill in the little town of Readyville, about a hundred miles east. Getting there was a beautiful ride almost entirely on two-lane blacktop, past fields of corn and soybeans and through a number of small towns with clusters of good old boys sitting around on country store porches smoking corncob pipes and nursing green bottles of Sundrop Golden Cola (sic, really). The mill, originally built in 1812, had been brought back from serious decrepitude by a guy named Joe. He was grinding organically grown wheat, which we preferred, and charging about the same price as the regular stuff at Columbia Mill & Elevator. Each time I visited, Joe would show me some more of the mill's workings and ask me questions about the Farm. He was an interesting talker—quite proud, and justifiably so, of the work he'd done to bring the old mill back to life.

One of the trucks I used from time to time to pick up large loads was called the Cracker Truck, formerly used by a large baking company to deliver their snack foods to wholesalers. It was a medium-sized box truck, not the largest vehicle I used while living on the Farm but pretty big. One winter morning, about halfway to Readyville to pick up a two-ton load of flour, I noticed some unusual noises from up front—sometimes a grind, sometimes a deep throaty squeak. I wondered about it, but I didn't have a clue what it might mean. I crossed my fingers, said a little prayer, and kept on driving. On the way

back with my heavy load, I was around eighty miles from home as darkness began to fall and trouble finally struck. With a loud grind and squeak, the right front wheel came off. In the periphery of the headlights I watched it bouncing off into a field and then disappear. Trying hard to drown out images of death and disfigurement as the truck lurched scarily to one side, I improvised some fancy steering and managed to jockey it onto the shoulder.

And then I sat there, just breathing and figuring out what to do next as darkness continued to fall. I was about three miles away from a small town whose lights I could see across the flat cropland and realized I could walk there. Halfway to my goal I got a ride from a pipe-smoking farmer hauling a couple of very big and very alive pigs in the back an ancient pick-up. “That your truck back there?” were his only words.

He dropped me off at the town’s only grocery store and I used their pay phone to call the Farm. I was lucky to reach one of our main mechanics, who knew more than I would have guessed. When I told him what had happened, he remembered that someone had been working on the Cracker Truck the day before, repacking the front wheel bearings, and apparently had over-tightened the nuts. He said he was surprised that *both* wheels hadn’t come off, and much sooner in the trip. He promised to come get me that evening.

I hung out around the store’s huge wood stove until closing time, at which point an old gent who had overheard my call invited me to wait in his little cottage next door. He fed me canned barbeque beans and cold cornbread—delicious!—and offered to let me use the recliner in his living room until my ride came. It was very sweet and very appreciated. I was there a long time—my host had already excused himself and gone to bed when I heard a car door slam and a knock on the door.

It was well after midnight when I finally got home. At six the next morning I was sitting in another big truck on the way to towing back the Cracker Truck, its missing

tire (found at the back of an alfalfa field after a long search), and the big load of flour.

Things weren’t always so exciting. My usual stops were routine and closer to home. Several times a month I drove to a wholesale grocery in Nashville to pick up five-gallon cans of cooking oil, 50- and 100-pound bags of various beans, rice and other bulk food. I also made weekly visits to Norton & Steely in Columbia, another wholesale grocery warehouse, for a few food items but mainly for soap, toilet paper and the like. Usually I dealt with Mr. Steely, who looked uncannily like Phil Silvers in his Sgt. Bilko days (even to the frames of his glasses). “How ya doin’, buddy?” he’d say, and tell me which brands were having special promotions. Then we’d retire to the warehouse and pull the order together. Mr. Steely was interested in what our community was all about, and I was happy to fill him in. He also liked to test me to see how cool I was, at least from his point of view. Usually this involved making a racist remark or two that I would feel obliged to call him on, and we’d have a little “discussion.” He was pretty broad-minded about seeing my point of view, and in retrospect I suspect he was probably baiting me for his own amusement.

Once we moved onto our land, the outdoor market was traded in for a large Army surplus tent with a locking front door. I was given a certain amount of money each week, depending on the Farm’s overall finances, and had to figure out what we could afford to buy. If there was enough money, sometimes I would be able to deliver treats like ready-made pasta or fresh fruit. In tighter times I’d be forced to cut rations and everyone would have to make do.

Practically all our outside food was distributed so much per person per household per week. This applied to basic items like cooking oil, margarine, rice, and flour. Soybeans were always plentiful as our main source of protein—and thanks to our communal farming and home gardens there were seasonal vegetables like kale, peppers and tomatoes. One of the more popular staples—and one of the most expensive—was a particular variety

of nutritional yeast. As vegans, we’d gotten into that kind of yeast out of necessity because it supplied the Vitamin B-12 otherwise lacking in our diet. I’d been part of a committee that researched, sampled and selected the nutritional yeast we would adopt. “Red Star T6635 Large Flake” won based mainly, I think, because of its cheesy taste lent itself to sprinkled on popcorn, and over time creative Farm cooks figured out lots of other ways to use it.

I ran the Farm Grocery for a couple of years to generally good reviews. Then one day Stephen asked me to take on a new job as the Promo Guy for the Farm Band. It seemed like an interesting change from buying groceries, and he’d picked the right guy for the position since I had some experience doing record promotion. Back in 1969/70, I worked for Columbia Records in San Francisco, taking around the latest “product” that fit the format of the underground radio stations (Dylan, Blood Sweat and Tears, Chambers Brothers, Taj Mahal, Dan Hicks, Sly—that sort of music) and I enjoyed getting to know some of the DJs. One day I happened to mention this to one of the Farm Band members. His eyes bugged out and word quickly got to Stephen. I was given the use of a late-model Oldsmobile Cutlass with a big V8 engine that a recent arrival to the community had donated, and was sent off to get airplay for the Farm Band on various radio stations throughout the south.

The Farm Band, by the way, had been formed as a sort of warm-up act to accompany Stephen’s speaking tours. The Farm had purchased an old Greyhound Scenicruiser, which was repainted in psychedelic-patriotic red, white and blue, and outfitted to accommodate the band and its equipment. During one of its gigs in Nashville the band was “discovered” by someone running a small record company. A contract and their first album soon followed: a two-record set with a sound similar to what the Grateful Dead was, in retrospect, much better at. On the Farm’s Wikipedia page I recently found this amazing statement: “The debut album, a self-titled 2-LP set, is considered a classic

among independently released acid-rock albums of the 1970s.” That’s a bit laudatory in my opinion, but I did like it at the time—and it definitely attracted more people to hear Stephen’s message.

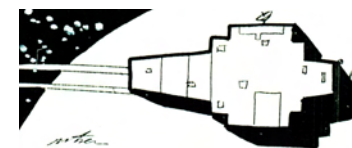
The record company did next to nothing to promote the album, and my own efforts didn’t translate into big sales. Although I gave it my all and I got some airplay here and there, what I mainly enjoyed was being on the road in a powerful muscle car. When the Farm Band moved on to their second album, there wasn’t much point in continuing that job. Turning in the keys to the Cutlass, I happily went back to being Store Man again.

*By the way, if you’re not familiar with the Farm or want to know more, check out the Wikipedia story, “The Farm (Tennessee).” You may also want to click the link at the bottom of the article to have a look at the Farm’s own Website, especially its history section.*

A few notes on the contents of this issue: Roy’s, Earl’s and Graham’s articles began their lives as postings on InTheBar, but have been expanded considerably. Dick Lupoff’s “At The Cosmic Saloon” sonnets originally appeared in *A Sea of Alone: Poems for Alfred Hitchcock*, edited by Chris Conlon and published by Dark Scribe Press. However, that version does not include Dan Steffan’s marvelous illustrations. Gordon’s story first appeared in the November 2010 issue of his FAPazine, *Sweet Jane*. Fred’s long-promised article is newly minted.

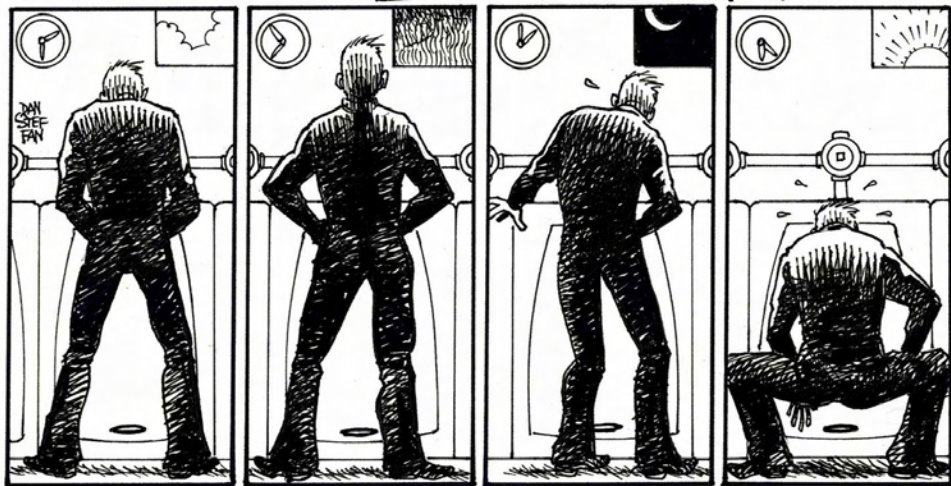
Thanks to those who generously voted for *Trap Door* and for me as letterhack in the 2010 FAAn awards. Your support is much appreciated.

—Robert Lichtman





# TO PEE OR NOT TO PEE BY ROY KETTLE



A few years ago, I became aware that I was peeing more slowly and more frequently than had once been the case. (And if that's too much information already, then perhaps we should part company here.) This condition isn't a sudden revelation as if one day the faucet's full on and the next it's nearly off. It's gradual – you're not aware for some time that it's taking a second or so longer each day. But the evidence mounts. The stumbling trips to the toilet in the night that eventually suggest you should set up a bed in the bathroom. You're beginning to wonder why you're still standing at the urinal when many other people have come and gone. The guy next to you sounds like a horse relieving itself while you're still struggling to focus on waterfalls or floods or even, God forbid, horses relieving themselves. If only someone would turn on a tap.

By then, of course, you've realized that something might not be quite right. But you hang on just in case it gets better. It might just be a temporary thing. A longer term temporary thing than most temporary things. The sort of temporary thing that's here to stay, you finally admit.

The first point of call for most ill people in the UK, as in most countries I guess, is their

doctor – called a General Practitioner under our National Health Service. Though if you've had an accident or some other emergency it's straight to the hospital, often for a long wait in a room full of people bleeding and being sick, none of them caring that you don't know what to do with your feet as the pools of blood and vomit get closer together.

You can go to your GP whenever you're ill, or think you are – it doesn't cost you anything, though there are prescription charges for many people. I'm not sure how GPs deal with hypochondriacs (though I've read of some who are surprisingly tolerant of them) but in my experience GPs are understanding and helpful even if you're just worrying about an interesting new spot or some vague ache or pain. My GP is very matter of fact. He doesn't try to do bedside manner but he generally deals with me pretty effectively and usually well within the ten-minute time slot that they like to allocate per patient. A GP can deal with most things fairly readily. After all, most things get better with a bit of time and simple advice from the internet, sometimes with some self-prescribed medication or rest, sometimes with the delusion that a little self-prescribed homeopathy has helped.

"Sounds like your prostate," said my GP putting on latex gloves and a resigned look. "Mmm, nice and smooth like a billiard ball."

I didn't think I'd actually accidentally sat on one without noticing so that must really have been my prostate. Rough isn't usually good and could be cancer. Apparently, smooth is what you hope for as it's likely that the prostate is simply enlarged.

The main purpose of the male prostate seems to be this: to get bigger with age and crush the urethra which it surrounds. An entirely secondary function – mostly useful for men younger than me anyway – is to produce a secretion that makes up about a quarter of the volume of semen. And what a clever secretion it is too as it gives the little spermy things better motility, longer survival and better protection of their DNA. But maybe a simple little gland would have worked just as well. A tiny grape-like thing, perhaps the size of a pearl attached to the urethra by a little tubelet, not something like a particularly stupid parasite that starts off the size of a kiwi fruit until it decides that causing problems for its host by growing huge is the way to get on.

Just to be as sure as he could be without a biopsy, the doctor took a blood sample to test for PSA (prostate-specific antigen) which can show higher levels if you have prostate cancer. Of course, like a lot of these tests, it's not really certain at all but my eventual low reading was another good sign. Smooth *and* low. Like an advert for a cigarette with less tar.

But in case it was something else, he sent me to the hospital for urodynamic testing. That's even less fun than it sounds. I thought it might just involve peeing into some sort of device to see what the flow rate was. And it did involve that. But it also involved sticking a different device up the urethra to check the pressure in the bladder. There are no pain-killers offered, presumably because the pain is very brief as the tube goes through the sphincter into the bladder. But it's still a pain. And an eye-watering one at that. A sympathetic smile from a pretty nurse is no substitute for drugs. In fact, I think it actually made things worse. I have no difficulty with

female nurses being present at these sorts of procedures, but psychologically I suspect I'd rather they weren't. Of course, it wasn't as bad as the time I agreed that a few student doctors could watch a hemorrhoid check, only to find a classroom full of women gazing less than adoringly at my bottom.

I went to see an NHS consultant. Consultants seem to be doctors who specialize, often very narrowly, though they don't actually have the title of doctor. Though they're too grand for that, they use inverted snobbery and call themselves merely Mr. or Mrs. Some, however, go on to become Professors. It's always more reassuring to have a Professor than a Mr. Unless it's the man delivering the milk, in which case you wonder if he's resentful enough to have poisoned it.

Apparently, the tests showed there was an "obstructive element" which might require bladder neck surgery. I had a faint hope that the plastic tube from the urodynamic testing might have cleared it, like a dyno-rod, but the problem hadn't gone away. The alternatives to surgery were coping strategies and medication.

The medication – Tamsulosin, branded under the evocative name of Flowmax – had no discernible effect. I don't like taking medication if I don't really need to (though preventing even the slightest pain is usually a good enough reason for me to be honest) but if the alternative is surgery then that's a different matter. I convinced myself it was doing some good. Why, only five people had been in and out of the toilet while I stood there – surely some sort of improvement.

The consultant and I agreed that I might as well drop the medication and just cope. I needed to learn to hang on and not give in too easily to urges. It sounded like the medical equivalent of delayed gratification, but somehow even more unpleasant. The letter also said I needed to cut down on tea and coffee etc. Etc? What could that possibly mean? I hoped it didn't mean alcohol – perhaps I had to avoid wine with coffee overtones or cut down on Long Island Iced Tea. I decided to ignore the reducing intake bit. The consultant had no idea

how much I had anyway, so I might already be drinking only what someone else would have cut down to. It sounded like a plan. Admittedly, not a very good one, but one that I felt fitted well with my intention to continue drinking beer and wine.

My other coping strategies were not so easy to adopt, but were unavoidable. I couldn't usually go for much longer than two hours without needing to pee. If I was careful about how much I drank beforehand, and when, I could see a Woody Allen movie without interruption but it was a real strain watching something as long as one of the Lord of the Rings films, say. Towards the end of the movie, my leg would be twitching up and down involuntarily as some sort of mechanism for taking my mind off peeing I guess. I'd seen it happen to a friend with the same problem and felt reasonably confident it wasn't the beginning of Parkinson's.

Long journeys in the car needed a bit more planning – and a good knowledge of the distance between motorway service stations – plus an empty bottle just in case, though fortunately it never came to that. Gerard Depardieu's recent failure to urinate accurately into a bottle when not allowed to use the toilet on a taxiing plane brought it all back. I dreaded toilet queues in crowded trains. I got to know which shops had toilets and where they were in central London art galleries and museums. I found I was following the advice that a lawyer friend of mine adopted because he couldn't readily leave court once there – never pass up an opportunity to use a loo.

I had a friend who was once a bit incontinent. He was staying at our house and decided on this occasion not to join Kathleen and me on a theater trip. But he did phone Kathleen when we reached Piccadilly Circus to ask her to get some incontinence pads. There was a branch of Boots there and Kathleen went to select some while I lurked in the aisle. She was having a reasonably loud discussion with the assistant, who seemed very keen to help her make a good decision by demanding to know what type of incontinence it was and then who it was for. As soon

as the assistant knew it was for a man, she (having seen through my ruse of appearing to be unrelated to Kathleen which consisted of standing nearby, listening carefully and occasionally making a witless remark to her), inevitably said even more loudly "What strength incontinence pads do you need, sir?" She seemed to be articulating the words slowly as if incontinence made people deaf or simple-minded, too, but it did give everyone in the shop a much better chance of hearing what she was saying.

All the people nearby looked at me as if I was about to flood the shop. Some backed away as if they might be hit by spray. Kathleen was laughing in the way that women do when the men they're with are embarrassed. I was reduced to denying I was incontinent – which had the result of prolonging matters and ensuring people shook their heads with sad disbelief – and Kathleen got lots of sympathetic looks. On top of it, I was the one with enough money to pay for the pads, which certainly made it clear who they were for.

In the theater, I found that the packets of pads were actually quite comfortable to put my feet on but it wasn't much compensation (particularly as I was convinced that everyone muttering around me had been in the queue and Kathleen wasn't helping by cheerfully reminding me about it beforehand and in the interval) though the play eventually took my mind of it. To cap it all, they were never used as my friend recovered quite quickly *and* he thought it was all very funny.

I didn't actually want to have to start using incontinence pads. I asked about surgery.

I was in the middle of a few months more of trying Tamsulosin, which again failed to help me. I even persuaded the GP to let me try a different drug recommended by Ted White but that was really no better – not everything works equally well for everyone. After a further round of urodynamic testing – again with the desperate hope that any bladder neck stricture might be sorted by a sharp-edged plastic tube – I elected for surgery. I was to have a Transurethral Resection of the Prostate – more commonly known as a TURP. It's done with a hot electric wire to

cut through the gland. I realized it was to be a wire TURP – I merely had to be brave, courageous and bold.

I got a lot of advice about the risks and benefits of the procedure. Initial symptoms included nausea, vomiting, disorientation, dizziness, headache and swelling of the abdomen. Just like a night out at the pub then. Longer term symptoms might include urinary tract infections, twitching, seizures, cyanosis, heart pain, coma or, for one in four hundred cases, death. That didn't sound so good. Reassuringly (for me at any rate) most of these deaths occur in men over eighty years old.

I asked the consultant what would happen if I didn't have the operation. The need for self-catheterization was one possible outcome. That didn't sound so good, either. Marginally better than dying, though. I asked him what would happen if I was stuck somewhere without a catheter. I had an unpleasant illusion that he would suggest I make one from a nearby reed or a hollow bone from a rabbit that I'd managed to catch. That would be bad enough. But he simply said, "you'd be buggered."

On balance, I opted for the surgery.

A date was set. I could eat and drink normally up until midnight before the operation, but after that only water, clear fruit juice or herbal tea until 6:30 a.m. The warning that was stressed most – with caps AND underlining – was not to chew gum on the day of the operation. Who knew where it might end up, causing a blockage in some internal tube?

On the day before, I set about following the other instructions as well. I had a shower. I didn't shave near where I was going to have surgery. (I never shave in the vicinity of a hospital anyway.) I made sure my nails were clear of nail varnish. I kept warm.

On the day, I thought it was important to bear in mind the final bit of advice: "If someone tries to shave the site of your operation before surgery, ask them why they are doing so and why they are not using clippers." Did I have to second-guess everything being done to me or was it simply that there'd been a spate of illicit shaving with cut throat razors in the

NHS. I never found out. No one tried it on, but probably only because I was so alert.

After I arrived at 7:00 a.m. as requested, I was told there might be a long wait but that, as I was first, I might be starting by 9:00 a.m. Two hours a time. There were four more patients after me. Would the last one have to wait until 3:00 p.m. to begin their procedure? I could see where the word "patient" came from.

I put my clothes and other things in a bag and changed into a hospital gown. I sat on a chair in a small space surrounded by a curtain on a rail. The idea is to give you some visual privacy – which it does – but there isn't any privacy from being overheard in hospitals I've been in. Mostly, you don't think about it – everyone else is in the same position or worse. They've got other things on their minds than listening eagerly to details about your condition.

One of the many good things about the NHS is that the closer you get to something major happening to you, the number of times you're seen – and the number of people who see you – increases. You certainly feel like you're being looked after. They make really really sure they're doing the right thing to the right person. Though, sometimes, this can seem like, for want of a better word, overkill and maybe there's scope for removing an occasional interaction.

A nurse arrived and gave me a bit of information about what was going to happen. Beforehand, though, she asked me my name, address, date of birth and whether or not I had one of a number of illnesses such as epilepsy or diabetes. I waited a bit longer. An anaesthetist arrived and gave me a bit more information about what was going to happen. She asked me my name, address, date of birth, and whether or not I had one of a number of illnesses such as epilepsy or diabetes. She was a bit more touchy/feely than the nurse – presumably getting me used to later when she would definitely be touching and feeling me. I waited a bit longer. Another nurse arrived and gave me a bit more information about what was going to happen. He asked me my name, address, date of birth, and whether or not I had one of a number of

illnesses such as epilepsy or diabetes. I guess it was best to be sure – I didn’t want to be mistaken for someone in there to have their head cut off.

The second nurse also asked me to sign a form saying that the NHS had no responsibility for my belongings. Then he took away my bag. How did that work then? Surely *someone* had to be responsible for my bag and I didn’t have it any more. Maybe the surgeon would be holding it with his free hand.

Then the five of us were lined up, given a pillow each and walked off to another room where we were allocated beds. Very comfortable and civilized. A nurse arrived and asked me my name, address, date of birth, and whether or not I had one of a number of illnesses such as epilepsy or diabetes. She put socks on me to help prevent deep vein thrombosis. The plastic bag that the sock came in was put on the foot first which allowed the tight sock to be pulled easily over it. The sock had a hole in the end for my toes to wiggle and for the bag to be pulled away. How neat was that?

Then I was wheeled to the anaesthetist. She asked me my name, address, date of birth, and whether or not I had one of a number of illnesses such as epilepsy or diabetes. I expected an epidural but was given a spinal anaesthetic. I thought this was the same thing but it seems that epidurals go around the nerves in your spine rather than between them (if I’ve read Wikipedia correctly) and spinals are usually higher dose. I also got a cannula in the back of my hand for antibiotics later if I needed them. I find the back of my hand to be the worst place for needles. I’m not sure why but I guess for one thing I can see it going in. It’s also not always *that* easy for someone to find a vein. And there’s not much flesh to cushion things.

I sat up and was first given an anaesthetic in the small of my back so I didn’t feel pain when the spinal was done. Then I got the full spinal. The last time something like this had happened to me, the anaesthetist stuck a pin in one leg to check whether I could feel anything. Advances in technology and a bigger budget now meant I was sprayed with some-

thing cold from an aerosol. At least, they said it was cold. The anaesthetic was working. I was not a free man, but I was number.

The consultant came in. He ran through what would be happening to me, but it was getting to be too much information by then and not all of it stayed put. At least he said enough to reassure me that he and I were on the same page concerning which bit of my body needed work. The likelihood of leaving without a brain was decreasing.

When I’d had an operation before, I’d passed out by this point, probably as much through a detailed description of their plans for me as the anaesthetic. So I saw the operating theater for the first time and, unsurprisingly, it was full of people and equipment. Obviously, the further you get through the system, the more people there are to deal with you – one nurse to several patients on a ward, several nurses per patient in the theater. Just like on TV, the cheerful nurses gently heaved me from the trolley onto an operating table. This seems to be something that doesn’t change with any innovation I’ve seen – brute force is the best way for a number of reasons, though I guess that keeping the nurses free from back pain might not be one of them.

I was given a heated blanket in case I got cold and a mask in case I needed sedation. Above me was a big monitor – a heavy bit of equipment that I was told would normally have allowed me to watch what was happening (should I care to do so) but a very recent improvement in the technology had meant there was now only one and, wisely, they had decided the surgeon’s needs were greater than mine so I just saw the back of it. The newness of the monitor meant they had to spend a few moments adjusting it to get the vertical position right. One of those moments led to it suddenly lurching a few inches downwards but luckily it stopped and a more thorough test of the effectiveness of the anaesthetic didn’t happen. I felt more apprehensive at that point than any other, and maybe sedation would have helped.

I lay there waiting for them to start. There was some discussion that I couldn’t quite make out, and some show of interest in me

and some more discussion and activity. I waited a bit longer. Best that they got it right before beginning, I thought.

Then it became apparent that they’d actually been working away inside me for several minutes much to my amazement. Presumably shoving tubes in – I gathered later that they needed tubes or cables for getting water in, getting water out, operating the hot wire *and* holding a camera. That seemed to be a lot of kit for what was actually only a narrow part of me. The less I thought about it, the better.

The insertions and camera work came to an end and a decision was taken on where to cut. In lieu of the monitor, I was shown photos of what they were seeing. They looked like moons of different colors. Maybe the obstruction was caused by these globes like enormous kidney stones but it didn’t quite fit in with what I’d been told. Eventually, it dawned on me that the circular shape was simply a result of the image being taken through a tube. D’oh!

I listened whether I wanted to or not. “No room to manoeuvre,” I heard. Unsurprising, given all those tubes but apparently it was because of one of the lobes on the prostate causing the main obstruction. “That was the first mistake [someone] ever made,” I also heard. My mistake or theirs or just a chat between them about the latest football match? Everything was done out of sight, as my legs were bent up, but at one point a hand in a bloody glove waved into view and I could have done without it. Photos of moons and a bit of banter were one thing but that glove made what was happening all a bit too real.

When they had finished, I was taken through how things had gone. The surgeon seemed pretty relaxed. He said a bunch of stuff – hospitals are great these days at telling you what they will do or what’s happened – but I don’t think I was as receptive as I might have been. I’d just come out of surgery after all. No doubt all would be revealed again later, and most of it was. Phrases like “possible problems later in life” seemed to suggest things I might worry about another day.

Wheeled to the recovery room, I dis-

covered it was 11:00 a.m. I was told I’d been in surgery for only twenty minutes, but it had seemed a lot longer. I couldn’t really tell where the time had gone since my being admitted at 7:00 a.m. It must have been the accumulation of a lot of little waits and discussions and treatments.

It felt really weird lying there being unable to move my legs. I could see them and send messages telling my toes to wiggle under the blanket or my knees to bend, but nothing happened. I could feel a huge frustrating pressure building up both mentally and physically – not out of fear of anything, but simply because I was trying hard, and pointlessly, to work things. Eventually I relaxed and waited for the gradual return of movement.

After half an hour, I was wheeled on a bed through the corridors – like a Super Mario video game dodging boxes, other trolleys and so on – until I reached the ward. The sort of open plan, four person to a room that I’d been in before on hospital visits in the last twenty years or so, and is probably common to most British hospitals – curtains again for some semblance of privacy, but you inevitably sacrifice real privacy when you go into hospital so it’s never bothered me much about how much or little there is.

(The first time I went into hospital for surgery, for an appendectomy when I was eighteen, I was in a long ward with men and women of all ages. Three people died while I was there. I was so relieved when I was moved to a smaller recovery ward – not least because it meant I was unlikely to die at that point, but also because the worst thing going on around me was the man in the next bed who showed me his urine bottles and compared their color to various wines he had obviously enjoyed a bit too much during his life. When he moved from a red burgundy to sauvignon blanc it was even more of a relief all round.)

I sleep lightly anyway, and had a bad night with the variety of beepy and clicky machines that come with being in hospital, as well as the regular checks on my blood pressure and temperature. The temperature was

taken by a thermometer that was put in my ear, and with every insertion a little tube was discarded and replaced, presumably for hygiene reasons. Heart rate and, I think, blood oxygen levels were checked with a clip put on the forefinger. That wasn't discarded between patients. I didn't like to think where other patients' fingers had been. I certainly knew where my own had been which gave me some cause for concern.

The next day, I felt fine, if a little tired. Then, as I lay there, I began feeling dizzy and slightly disconnected from my surroundings. Everything around me gradually became blurred – I managed to rub my eyes in case they simply weren't focussing but nothing improved and I felt I was drifting away somewhere. The sun through the window slowly became bigger and yellower as if I was getting closer to it. I fumbled for the call button and a nurse came pretty quickly. My blood pressure wasn't just low but very low. My heartbeat was *very* slow. I dimly recalled a visit from a very jolly anaesthetist when I had had major surgery a few years before and he told me that my heart had stopped for twenty to thirty seconds. If I was ever going to have a general anaesthetic again, he had said, I should tell someone to help prevent me dying. What a good tip. Hopefully that didn't apply to local anaesthetics. I felt as if I was floating. I was conscious that I should be worrying but I didn't care. Then I was mildly aware of nurses rushing around me and I was put onto a saline drip. Things returned to normal quite quickly. No bright light any more, not from an enlarged sun nor, thankfully, one getting closer from the end of a tunnel.

One of the people sharing the room with me was quiet and very reserved, even when he had a visitor, and I never found out anything about him. The other two were a guy who both looked and sounded miserable, as well he might have had reason to, and another, much more cheerful, with a display of disconcerting tattoos many of which would usually have been obscured outside of a hospital or orgy. They appeared to be headline writers for the *Daily Mail*. Too many

immigrants. Too many people claiming benefits. It was impossible for women to go out. England used to be a lovely green country. There was nothing any good in England any more – it had been better forty years ago. People always wanted something for nothing in this country these days.

I asked the miserable guy where he came from, though his accent was pretty clear. "Belfast," he said, as if I was mad. The other guy volunteered the information that he had emigrated to Thailand so he could live off his British state pension in comfort but had come back in order to get free treatment on the NHS as it cost too much there.

He was obviously in for an irony bypass. They both assumed that I agreed with them about everything, but I just switched off as best I could rather than argue. I'd tried arguing in hospital wards before but eventually you need somewhere to hide and something to kick. Mostly, in hospital, there is nowhere to hide and kicking things would probably be seen as a symptom of some mental illness requiring transfer to a secure facility.

As I learned a bit more about what they were in for, I was glad I hadn't argued about what were essentially very slight things. One was having to have his legs amputated because of a lifetime smoking, and the other had some horrible ulcerative skin condition with an uncertain prognosis. At least, it looked like I'd recover.

My experience of the food in the hospital before hadn't been too bad. They made an effort to provide a balanced diet with reasonable tasting dishes on the budget they had. There was a number of dishes I didn't want, of course, but as my meals that day were based on what my predecessor in the bed had chosen the day before, I seemed to get everything I wouldn't have picked myself. A disconcerting reliance on diced swede (rutabaga for those of a US persuasion) for the main course – no doubt healthy but a more specialized taste than a popular one I guessed. Maybe they got a discount from the local farmers. And something a bit rubbery and sweet for pudding. I ticked a few boxes on a meal request for the next day, carefully

choosing things I might actually like.

Later that day, I was moved reassuringly from what was a long-stay ward to a short-stay one. I was given a bed in exactly the same position but three floors down. The cases not being so bad, it wasn't so busy at night.

I was advised not to have the catheter removed yet because of risk of needing to self-catheter. As before, I wasn't told exactly what this would involve, and chose not to ask, although I assumed the words meant what they said. It sounded very unpleasant again and I didn't want to do it. I chose to have the catheter left in if that might prevent the need for me to have to – no, I still don't want to think about it too closely.

The next day was a Sunday and I got offered a range of possibilities to fulfil my religious needs. It wasn't intrusive nor was I pressured. Had I been feeling low, I might have been less friendly, but they were nice people providing some sort of service. I behaved well and didn't even ask if there was any representative from the Church of the Flying Spaghetti Monster. But, if I had, how we would have laughed.

The next day, the catheter was taken out. I'd wondered how it stayed in – I mean, if I was ever supposed to self-catheter, surely it was just me having to insert a simple but surprisingly wide tube without anaesthetic rather carefully, yet painfully, into my bladder and keep it there by strength of will or sphincter. I shuddered at the thought. I'd been very circumspect so far about how I moved in case it came out easily and had to be reinserted.

How naive. In fact, there seemed to be one tube that took urine away with another inside it. A nurse put a large syringe on the end of the inner tube and emptied about 10 cc of water. I asked her what she was doing. She said the catheter was held in place by a balloon of saline solution inside my bladder. As she spoke she gave the tube a tug. It was reasonably disconcerting but nothing happened. Hmm, she speculated, maybe it's a 20 cc balloon. She took another 10 cc out and tugged again. Yes, just as disconcerting. I

had visions of being pulled inside out. Perhaps it was a 40 cc capacity. I hoped no more. And, yes, it was. I was free – sore but free.

My meals in this new ward again turned out to be those chosen by the previous occupant of my bed. I'd asked if the meal I'd ordered in the previous ward might somehow find its way to me here, but with a withering look that suggested I might be better off in the Savoy rather than an NHS hospital, the woman giving out the food politely put me straight on the logistics of large institutions. As it happened, the choice was slightly better than before – roast beef as good as some I'd had in pubs and a decent "very cheesy" cauliflower that wasn't, in fact, *very* cheesy. I was certainly keener on it than on the rainbow-colored jelly for pudding – well, I didn't even try it, especially not with the custard that had been ordered too. But the cheese and biscuit was ok. I was tempted to tick a bizarre combination of choices for my successor but played fair and chose what I would have wanted myself. Doubtless not what they would want, but I could do no more.

My hospital stay came to an end with a wait for the consultant's assistant to give me the ok to leave and a pharmacist to give me a prescription for various drugs. Kathleen drove me home and I had an interesting few weeks of checking my urine for signs that I will neither bore nor disgust you with, and hoping that there would be an improvement in the flow and a decreased frequency. All this came together in time and, except for generalized worry and a disturbing, though easily treated, urinary tract infection (as the leaflet had warned me might happen), all was well.

The final thing was to apply the traditional test for post TURP treatment. Well, it's not actually traditional but I recalled reading about it in an issue of the London listing magazine *Time Out* in an article by convicted armed robber John McVicar. Why I recalled it after some thirty years I don't know. Long before I had any idea what prostate problems really were, McVicar had briefly described his own successful treatment and how,

afterwards, he had been able to pee so hard that he could push a matchbox along the floor. How stupid is that? Maybe that's why I remembered it. I'd decided in hospital that it was too daft to try. Though, in the event and the absence of a smooth floor I was prepared to pee on, I discovered that trying to push a matchbox in this way across a lawn was actually even more stupid.

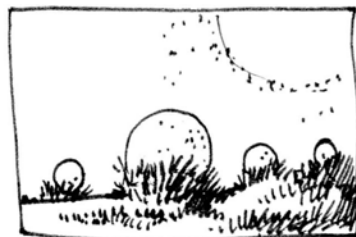
So more treatment by the NHS was over. Successful, as I eventually discovered, and a treatment I'd certainly recommend to anyone else in my position, though not without the usual surgical risks such as the possibility of finding out you're actually on an island with a doctor called Moreau. It was a pretty positive experience, but with some niggles. A lot cheaper, of course, than going to a private hospital and it left me without ideological guilt. Apart from anything else, I would have resented the money being spent on allowing a company to profit from my health, whether or not it was my money or came from an insurance company. It seems silly in a way, as I buy non-prescription drugs and so on from chemist shops owned by private companies and the NHS itself buys in goods and services from private companies. But there's a difference between my choosing to buy medicine for health reasons, and the NHS buying in some things, and what the NHS does as a national organization which is to provide free, efficient and effective medical help for anyone who *needs* it. I don't mind people using private hospitals, but I think it's important that we retain a good public health service for everyone else. The NHS is held in particularly high regard in this country and rightly so – the other public institution which has a broadly similar place in so many people's hearts is the BBC.

I guess a private hospital might have been quieter with a bit more, well, privacy as well as slightly improved food and less busy nurses, with fellow patients reading better quality newspapers from which to steal headlines and, if things went really wrong, very well-equipped NHS hospitals to fall back on. But it was a very well-equipped NHS hospital that I'd actually started in. As on most

other occasions, I couldn't *really* fault the treatment, or the openness, helpfulness and cheerfulness of the NHS staff, whether or not some minor things were less than perfect. I doubt that paid-for care is perfect either, but I really only have American TV shows to rely on for evidence. What I do know is that the admin costs of private insurance health care in the US (which only covers a proportion of the population anyway) are about 30% whereas those of the NHS are about 5% – among the lowest in the developed world – and it seems that one of the few health outcomes where the US clearly beats the UK is on the proportion of the population that is obese.

I should say that I am merely expressing a hope that the NHS doesn't go the way of the US in how we provide healthcare, rather than criticizing US healthcare as such. Whether NHS treatment will continue to be free, widely available, timely and as good value to the taxpayer as now, under and beyond the present Government's policies, I don't know. Apart from many other potential problems, the policies seem likely to lead to greater privatization of health care with money passed on to shareholders and company directors instead of being used for treatment. I'm certainly not anti-private sector – where would we be without good private companies generating money or providing many services? However, for anything as important to us all as health care, and given the record of the NHS, I remain distinctly prostate.

—Roy Kettle



# Revisiting Hef



One morning last summer, on *Sunday Morning* on TV, there was a major puff piece on Hugh Hefner and *Playboy*. Watching it brought back many delicious memories of a distant and unbelievably exciting bygone era.

In 1953 I thought I stood in the center of the universe and could see forever in every direction. I was little Mr. SF...totally unqualified...extremely reticent... suppressed ego, but nevertheless in charge. And right in the middle of the Fray.

(There was again, on that *Sunday Morning*, mention that the first issue of *Playboy* contained that delightful nude photo of Marilyn Monroe and...again...without mentioning that it was a rerun of a previously published photo and nothing that originated with *Playboy*.)

Lots of stuff going on subsurface, but

when was it not, especially between William Hamling and Hugh Hefner (Hamling turned 90 last June and Hef is 85), one-time friends and co-workers who, together, planned their ultimate men's magazine down to the layouts and page makeups...before a major breakup that separated the two forever. An unsolved mystery...the riddle of the ages? Both of them still deny this and neither will give an explanation for their breakup.

Their children used to play together while the adults planned that fantastic magazine, laying out the pages on the Hamling kitchen table in their Fowler Avenue residence in Evanston, Illinois, and while the adults have forgotten all that, their children haven't...nor have I.

And I was not/am not alone.

There was an invisible line in the sand



beyond which none of us dared to trespass for fear of jeopardizing our jobs and our publishing futures. But, as always, that didn't stop any of the ongoing activities from happening.

There were continuous, secret, clandestine movements from Hamling's Greenleaf complex to Hefner's *Playboy* enterprises and back again, at all levels from the newest-hire office boy to the executive suite and, as far as everyone knew, all this was kept secret from Hamling.

At one time, the Greenleaf staff was doing more work directed toward *Playboy* than they were doing on the job they were being paid to do. Most of this was in an effort to get rid of Ajay Budrys, who hated his job and desperately wanted to move up to "something legitimate" and his target was Playboy Press. The Greenleaf staff, at all levels, inundated the *Playboy* staff with *bon mots* about Budrys and hints at how much he could improve the *Playboy* operation if they could somehow successfully "steal" him from Greenleaf (legally known as Blake Pharmaceutical at that time). And we succeeded, they grabbed off Budrys, we celebrated, and began restructuring the company under new direction.

That new direction was me, only the title on the door said Bruce Elliott who, among other things, once was "The Shadow" writer part-time and a full-time drunk. But that didn't bother me, I was doing what I wanted to be doing, running the show....

And, at all times during those early '50s, I was plugged into *Playboy* solidly. Hef himself did the set-up, allegedly removing himself far away from me in order not to jeopardize my position at Greenleaf by pissing off Hamling. Hef set Spec (A.C. Spector) up as his and my personal connection. This involved secret phone calls to the office, fake code names...all the usual...and arranged meetings in convenient but unusual locations and times...exchanges of data and gossip....

And then there were the Playboy clubs. What a grand institution they were, for the '60s. I jumped onto that bandwagon very early on, perhaps even a charter member. It

was a private "key club" in those days, and you actually had a pretend key identifying you as a club member. It was very exciting too, being a member. You were treated like royalty and that did something very positive to your ego and self perception. Initially, when you checked into the #1 club in Chicago, a wooden plaque with your name on it was slid into a huge display indicating the names of the club members present at that moment; when you left that name plaque was removed and stored away until your next visit. It was exciting just seeing your name alphabetically inserted among the names of known Chicago and world-wide movers and shakers.

The real prize with being a member was the very cheap prices the club charged for cocktails, steak dinners, lush desserts, etc. If I remember correctly, it was \$1.50 each. Ideal for entertaining or for bringing visiting significant guests, writers, artists, etc. because you could do so without running up much of a tab.

And, soon after that, the clubs were popping up all over the place. I remember visiting Playboy clubs in L.A., Phoenix, NYC (Terry Carr—who sneaked out of the office so Donald Wollheim wouldn't know who he was meeting—was my lunch guest), the London club, and many others.

I visited the London Playboy club and casino shortly before they were busted for illegal gambling practices, shut down, and kicked out of the country.

(The new TV series about the Playboy Clubs looks very interesting and the advance hype makes it look like a sure winner. However, those same promos display Playboy Clubs, especially the #1 Chicago club, as being very, very different from their realities.)

I was a part-time resident in Jalisco, Mexico, when the *Playboy* corporation was busted big-time for slum landlord offenses. Their properties were confiscated and they were kicked out of Mexico. *Playboy* magazine was banned from Mexico, their trademark disallowed, and fraudulent Playboy clubs appeared all over Mexico.

(And, at that same time, the surest way to smuggle contraband past Mexican customs officials was to hide it beneath copies of *Playboy* magazine. Those magazines were sure to be confiscated, and contraband ignored, as the Federales, chortling, rushed away to read all those articles and, especially, lick the centerfold.)

Yet, now, on *Sunday Morning*, we learn that new Playboy clubs are operating not only in London but within Mexico itself. My how times have changed.

The TV article mentioned that Hef has always been a champion for gay rights, for sensible drug laws (far, far removed from US federal concepts), etc. And I agree with *Sunday Morning* in that regard. In fact, I'd take it a good but further than they did.

During the '50s I thought that *Playboy*, the magazine, was actually a gay publication. Many of the staff, many of the contributors were known gays. Some of the elaborate "playboy pads" were actually prominent gay residences. Before photo sessions would take place in them, they had to be de-gay-ed of artwork, penises, etc. and females brought inside the venues for the first time just to pose. But this is true in many areas. (Have you considered how much of the US federal staff is gay, and the ways in which they manipulate things?.)

In 1962, Hef and the whole *Playboy* group worked overtime to help make the Chicago Worldcon a huge success, including showing up at the con banquet with a couple of centerfolds, including much, much sub-surface writer/editor activity and one unbelievably invitation-only all-night SF blowout at Hef's bunny pad (1300 N. State Parkway). I wrote about this extensively as "1962 All Over Again"...Read it! (*Askance* #11, ed. John Purcell)

And then we go back, internally, and have another look at Hef the great *Playboy* stud. Another contemporary, Larry Flynt, who had publishing endeavors paralleling Hef's, was as different from Hefner as night is from day. Among other things, Flynt gathered around

himself many unique things of sexual-related significance...including a number of films that Hef had made of himself and various numbers of the young, buyable (would it be correct to call them "pre-whores"?), fuckable females. And, in every one of them, there is *no love, no eroticism, no emotion*...only pure analytical observations. Nothing positive for any of the participants, no joy, no sharing, no reinvigorating, just dull, boring statistics.

What a way to go!

As time took its toll and Hef grew older, he discovered Viagra and went out of his way to brag about Viagra's capabilities and pharmaceutical sexual staying power. Yet, the most damaging thing the most recent almost Mrs. Hefner said about Hef, immediately after she bolted and ran just before their scheduled wedding, was "he had no stamina...just lasted brief minutes." Maybe he gave up on Viagra. Time for Cialis.

I'm 82 now...three years behind Hef and I can positively guarantee you that there is nothing I can think of that I would like to do with any 25-year-old bought body, regardless of how eager or attractive she appears to be on the surface.

And, I need to admit that I, personally, owe Hef quite a bit. During my enforced federal vacation in Terminal Island, Hef assigned his staff the task of keeping me entertained and inundating me in printed matter. Every week I would receive a large parcel of magazines, books, calendars, note paper, pens...all labeled PLAYBOY...and letters from every department (especially the legal department.) almost every day. They wanted me well marked as one of theirs.

And, to this day, Hef still pretends to remember me and he calls me Earl. Keeps me warm on cold winter days....

—Earl Kemp

# AT THE COSMIC SALOON

## THE SCENE:

A drinking establishment located in a hauntingly familiar city somewhere in the Elysian Fields; four onetime co-workers -- perhaps one should say, "the ghostly shades of four onetime co-workers" -- have assembled to share a cheering libation. They reminisce.



● by Dick Lupoff ●

Screenplay By  
Joseph Stefan

## Robert Bloch Speaks:

I had a chance before you called. I like  
To think you called, of course, to buy a script  
Or lay before a man like me, a tyke,  
A big appeal, you see, but you had tipped  
Your hand. One knew the way they work out West  
To send a front, a fake, to buy a book  
For naught. You ought to be ashamed. At best  
A wink, a nod, a nudge, I think, a look.  
Too bad, I thought, old Lovecraft, sage so wise,  
Was gone by then, was dead and gone, but still  
I thought he'd smile at me, I'd won the prize  
He never did. He lay, at last, so ill,  
He died, unknown, but loved; in ichor green  
He would have loved, I'm sure, the silver screen.

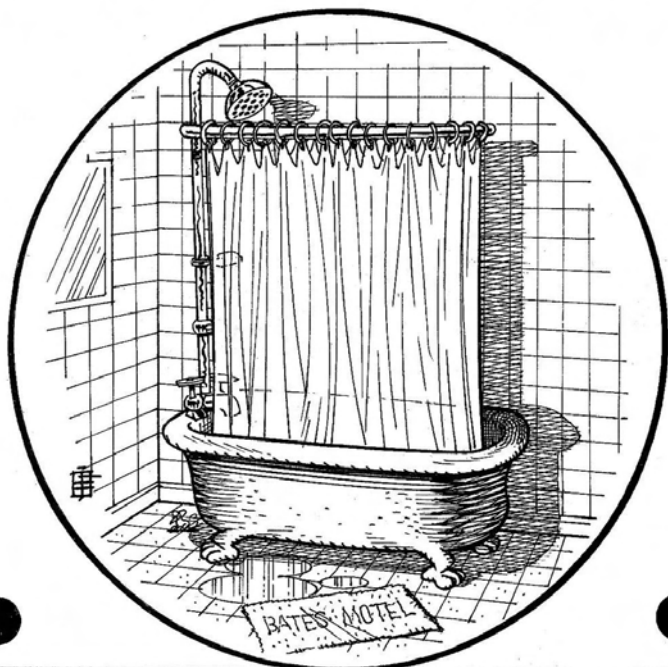






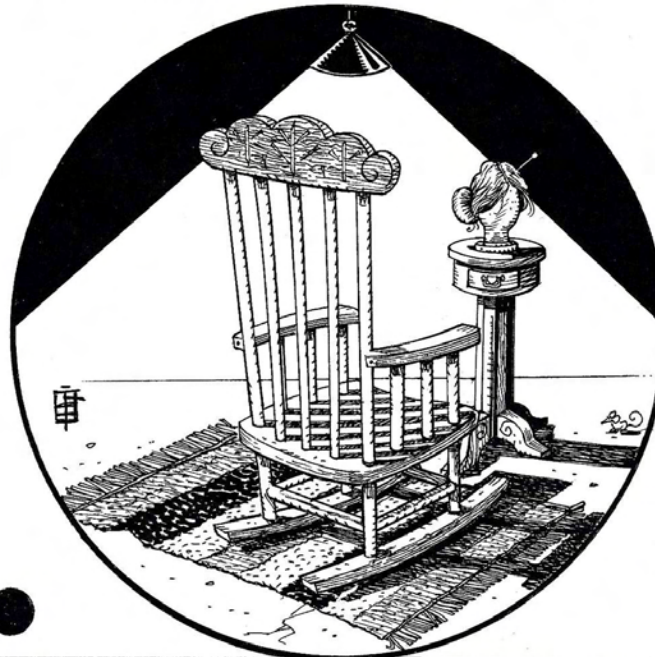
## Janet Leigh Speaks:

Oh no, I doubt you've ever seen me play  
Miss Lissy Anne McBean. Go take a peek  
At *The Romance of Rosy Ridge*. I'll say  
They paid me well for quite a spell; each week.  
My check -- and I will quote -- one half c-note.  
Of course I made far more than that to act  
In films and on the vid. I don't show-boat;  
I did my job with skill and charm and tact.  
My friend, you want to guess -- or count -- my flicks:  
Eight-three, I think, my mem'ry says, I think,  
I made in fifty years in towns and sticks  
And ev'ry one, I think, returned black ink.  
But looking back I growl, I frown, I glow'r  
At poor Miss Crane, Miss Crane in that damned show'r



## Anthony Perkins Speaks:

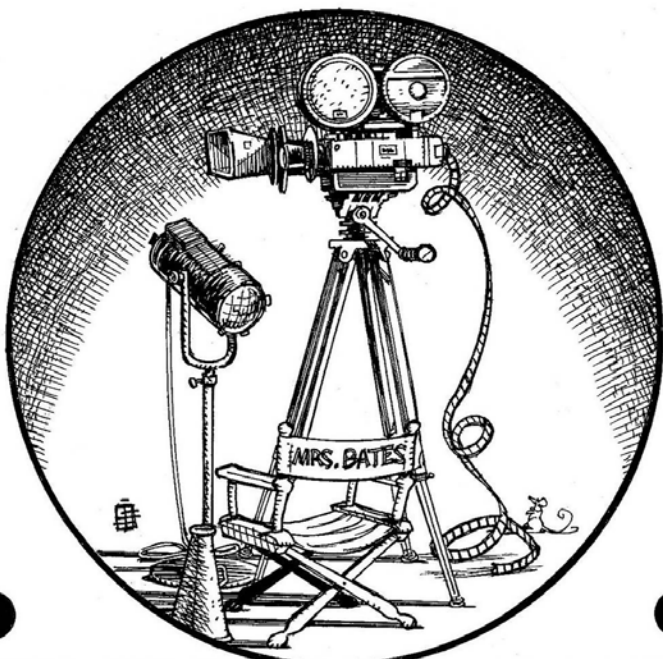
They liked me, yes, they really did, and yes  
I had a life, I loved my work, my wife,  
My kids, but when I played that twitch I guess  
They thought I was that guy, that creep. That knife  
I used was really me, ask Jung, as Freud.  
But first I played young Jim, that troubled lad,  
And fear struck out. You bet the Red Sox toyed  
With me, they did, but still I felt so bad  
To play young Jim, young Norm, Joe K, each freak  
Became a part of me. I guess the crime  
Demands as much, too much, each line we speak.  
So Marion, I wept, I did, each time  
I struck and then I had to find some air.  
I fled, I breathed and rocked in mother's chair.





## Alfred Hitchcock Speaks:

I feel your pain, I do. I feel it, Bob,  
It's true. All right, I bought your book too cheap,  
Like you I once performed the writing job,  
And had no food nor drink nor place to sleep.  
And you, my dear, my blonde du jour, Miss Leigh,  
No Princess Grace nor Tippi you and yet  
How many hearts still pound aloud for thee  
Of all my blondes you still remain my pet.  
And Tony boy, what can I say: you died  
Too young, you had to play in fields of mauve,  
When word of that arrived it's true, I cried,  
And yet you left behind for us a trove.  
My children, dears, come toast in booze or beers.  
Let's wrap this shoot and win the critics' cheers.



Conversation is a universal happenstance, something we all learn during our formative years. So how come some people are sadly inadequate at the art? Well, perhaps it's not an art after all, but a skill, something which improves with practice, and perhaps some of us don't practice enough.

In a fannish context, conversation mostly happens at cons. A happy confluence of syllables there. Sometimes con conversations are important and memorable, like the one I had with Iain Banks at Novacon about single-malt whiskies. Sometimes they are important but unremarkable, like when I asked Brian Aldiss why one of his characters was called Dave. This was before the age of Dave the TV Channel, and he didn't have an adequate answer so turned away to talk to the cat.

### *Talking to the Cat:*

Is something all conversationalists should learn to do.

As Oscar Wilde might have said: There are worse things than being talked at, such as not being talked at. Terry Pratchett springs to

mind as an example of both, when at one of Rob's parties, both Rob and Chris Evans did the "going to get another drink" thing, leaving me alone with him, when he promptly turned aside to talk to the cat. Neil Gaiman did the same to me when I asked him about his children, except there was no cat involved. Ken Campbell did the same with me when I accused him of being a dilettante, and also no cat. Is it just me, do you suppose?

This raises the issue of being talked at. There are lots of associated conversation disorders one comes upon with fandom, of course, and being talked at is just one of them. We have all been trapped in the plight of having the party bore—or Gerry Webb as he is known—talk at us, and feeling unable to extricate ourselves from the situation. What do you do? Stick around ogling his luscious Asian partner, whilst momentarily tuning in to his gabbling about how he handles PR for people who want to launch things into space. Never once did he ask me what I was doing.

The only thing worse is when you realize you are yourself talking at someone whose eyes are in the process of glazing over. I am,



in the air and disconnected. The true art of conversation must lay initially in recognizing that a conversation is going on, which lots of Asperger's sufferers don't. I remember with a sort of perverse affection one man who I encountered in my incarnation as a bookshop manager many years ago. He was a railway enthusiast. I think enthusiast is probably understating it. He bought multiple copies of photographic railway books to cut the photos out and file them according to his own arcane principles. I should say there was nothing threatening about this man. He held down a job as a civil servant and, I assume, was quite good at it. But it was quite impossible to end a conversation with him. He would stand there smiling at you over the longest longueur imaginable. I remember going out to lunch one time and coming back to find him still standing there waiting for a response. It was impossible to get rid of him without being rude, and of course with his social deficiencies he would not have realized I was being rude. This knowledge didn't stop me from feeling guilty whenever I did it.

*Lesson for all conversationalists:*

Try to remember you are talking to somebody, not a brick wall. Ask them a question occasionally even if it is only “How are you doing?” Actually, if you encounter someone who doesn’t recognize that being asked how they are doing is a simple pleasantry, the floodgates can be opened on how they are actually doing, and you may find yourself being talked at for some hours. But don’t worry, you have done the decent thing.

Conversations can be even more successful if even more forethought is given to structuring them. When I “interviewed” Chris Garcia at Orbital in 2008, I managed to mask it so successfully as a conversation that Max thought Chris and I were merely chatting with each, so sat down with us and interpolated remarks occasionally (these were cut out in the edit).

(continued after Gordon's story)



## Water Project.

Anyway, down in Seamount, the closest major fan population center to Mule Creek, Budd Champion was the first of us to receive a loc from Earl Foss. Budd and his wife Melanie were then still publishing their Hugo-winning zine *Howl of the Rocketeer* on a regular monthly basis. That initial letter from Earl Foss came in response to one of Budd's prozine review columns dissecting a Robert Randall novelette in one of the last issues of *Surprising Stories* before its controversial name change to *Serendipity Scientific Fact and Fiction*. "This," I remember Budd remarking at the next regular Rocketeers club meeting, "is the smartest goddamn letter we've gotten from a new fan since Tom Purdom started writing us. I don't know who the hell this kid is but he's going places."

This turned out not to be entirely accurate. The part about Earl Foss being a kid, that is. Back then—in the sixties—just about every new fan entering the microcosm was a young boy still in his teens—many like me in their relatively early teens—and the handful that weren't like Les Nirenberg

or Bob Leman or our own Tom Powers stood out like bats in a butterfly swarm. Earl Foss was definitely no boy. I don't know exactly how old he was since like everybody else I only met him the one time but would estimate from appearances he was somewhere in his middle to late thirties. He actually looked a good decade older but Earl was clearly the sort of person who would always look older. If you know what I mean.

After that first letter in *Howl*, Earl Foss's name soon started appearing in other fanzines as well. Not just locs but articles, reviews, funny little snapshots from life. My favorite remains the long piece in an early '62 *Howl* detailing Earl's daily life working as a lumberjack in a northwestern timber camp. He wrapped it up with an description of how his best friend had been killed the summer before in freak chainsaw accident and bled to death in his arms. I know I wasn't the only reader who ended up with tears running down his face. Even Hapgood Snails, the notorious ex-fan turned Hollywood pro, wrote in to say how deeply he'd been moved. "Like the kick of a bull moose coming off a week-long Benzedrine jag," is how he summed up his reaction.

"It may be the best damn thing we've ever published," Budd said.

"Better than Avram's thingy," Melanie concurred.

This was about the same time the first issue of *Potato Head* appeared. Unlike most neo-zines it looked and read magnificently right from the start. Then, as it attracted outside contributors—Willis, Bloch, and Greg Benford all in the fifth issue for example along with regular columns from Budd, Ted White, and newszine editor Walter Wunderly—it quickly came to rival not only the best contemporary zines from *Warhoon* to *Void* but many of the great fabled titles of the past as well. The artwork—ATom, Rotsler, Steve Stiles—was a joy to the eye, the layout as tasteful as a delicate vintage wine.

If *Potato Head* failed to receive a Hugo nomination during its only year of

publication it was only because of its tightly limited circulation. I doubt that more than fifty copies of any issue ever went out. "This is our the best new writer since Grennell, the best new publisher since Bogs," Harry Warner summed up.

Which brings us to the rainy season PuCon of November 1962. It was our own little Rocketeers con intended for West Coast fanzine fans and our local gang of hangers-on. We contracted out with a decent but by no means plush downtown hotel and deliberately limited publicity to the major zines and apas of the day. In our committee meetings we kept kicking around possible guests of honor—Yul Mellman nominated Darrell T. Langart and Tom Powers pumped for Philo Botts—but the trouble was it didn't matter who we wanted because we didn't have the funds to pay travel expenses and sf writers back then—excepting Heinlein and Arthur Clarke—weren't clearing enough from their writing to justify a trip to our far distant nook of the world. The general plan all along was that Dr. Alvin Dector, our only local writer, would end up stepping in but he turned out to be out of town that weekend at a chiropractic gathering.

"Why does it always have to be a goddamn pro?" said Tom Powers finally. "I thought this was supposed to be a fan's convention."

"Well, it always is," said Melanie. "A pro, I mean."

"But it doesn't have to be. It's not written down."

"Uh...no."

"Then I say we invite a fan as our guest of honor."

"Like...who? We still couldn't pay..."

"Somebody close-by. Somebody who could get here by Greyhound bus. Somebody like..."

And we all chimed in unison as if it were one of those spontaneous ideas like evolutionary theory that strike the enlightened few all at once: "Like Earl Foss," we sang out.

"Hell," Budd said, "Earl's a logger and

this is the off-season up there in the woods. I bet he could make it for sure."

We decided to call him with the good news.

And we tried—but the operator there in Mule Creek said that phone calls to the Foss residence were "not being put through, not out that way," not at this time, which made little sense—nor did her explanation that we needed to talk to the sheriff if we wanted to find out more. So we gave it up, fired off a telegram via Western Union instead.

We got a letter in return. Neatly typewritten and double-spaced like all of Earl's correspondence, like something from the office secretarial pool. It was succinct and to the point. "Hell yes," he wrote back. "I'll be there. I'll be there with spurs and boots on."

He added in a postscript that the part about the free hotel room for the weekend sounded like a darn square deal.

Tom Powers and I were delegated to meet Earl Foss at the downtown Greyhound terminal the Friday before the con officially kicked off. We hung around the outdoor lot scoping out passengers as they disembarked from the northern local but failed to spot anyone who looked likely. Finally with us standing there looking goofy as hell in our matching propeller beanies, a hunched-over, tobacco-chewing, yellow-skinned little man in a black leather jacket, filthy blue jeans, and scuffed engineer boots strolled up and thrust out a hand sorely in need of washing. "I'm Earl fucking Foss," he said. "You must be the guys from the science fiction crowd. Call me Pigg. Everybody does."

He was plainly drunk on his bony royal ass.

A pint bottle of white port wine jutted from the inside pocket of his leather jacket.

The plan was for Earl to spend the night at Budd and Melanie's place on Queen Jane's Hill and then the next afternoon go on over to the con hotel and check in while we set up the registration tables. As Tom drove to the Champions with all the windows rolled down due to Earl puffing one hand-rolled cigarette after

another—while simultaneously chewing a bulging fat wad of Red Man tobacco—his conversation in response to our blithe fannish chatter was limited to grunts, gurgles, burps and snorts. Without asking permission, halfway there he switched on the AM radio to full blast and sang along in shrill falsetto with a medley of hit Four Seasons songs the rest of the way.

We dropped him off in front of the Champion house and sped off. "Jesus Lord," said Tom, waving at the air to try and clear the dense smoke. "I think I need a drink myself."

"White port?" I said, with a smirk.

"Charlie, boy, I think you just made a joke," Tom said, rolling his eyes in feigned astonishment.

The following morning at the con hotel we ran into Budd Champion first thing looking bleary-eyed and shaken. "Where's Earl?" we asked.

"You mean Pigg?"

"Right, Pigg."

"Up in his room, I hope to God. Passed out cold and sleeping it off. We drove him over here at six a.m."

"He couldn't sleep?"

"That wasn't the problem. After you two bugged out, the son of a bitch started right in slurping up all the booze in the house. Then he turned on the goddamn TV and laid around on the couch watching 'Gilligan's Island' the rest of the night. Mel and I crapped out around ten. At three a.m. we got woke up again."

Budd and Melanie had two children, twin girls, innocent as lambs, who'd just turned twelve.

"We heard a noise like a goddamn gunny sack of bricks hitting the floor and then the girls started yelling their heads off," Budd explained. "When we got in there we found Earl passed out buck naked on the floor in between the two girls' beds. I can't prove it but I think he was trying to make up his mind which one to crawl in with when the goddamn ocean of booze he'd put away hit him like a hammer and he toppled over flat on his ugly face. We calmed the girls down,

got them back asleep—with their door locked—poured a gallon of coffee down Earl, got him dressed, and drove him the hell over here. He didn't say two words the whole time. Just grinned and winked and said he sure liked our free big city ways."

"Jesus God," said Tom.

"Jesus had nothing to do with it," Budd corrected.

That afternoon Earl himself appeared, looking absolutely none the worse for wear, as chipper as a squirrel at a peanut harvest. I noticed there was now another bottle of white port jutting out of his pocket the same as the day before. Spotting my glance he pulled it out, took a long swig, and offered it around to the rest of us. There were no takers. I hurried off in the direction of the art show which featured a selection of Rotsler's erotic etchings.

During the evening panel discussion on the state of contemporary fanzine fandom, Earl had to be physically restrained from going after fellow panelist Ed Pikestaff, who'd casually remarked that he thought the sercon fanzines of the forties and fifties were better than today's more fan oriented product. "Asshole's got no place talking that kind of shit at me," Earl said. Several witnesses insisted they'd seen a switchblade knife in Earl's fist when he first leaped to his feet. Afterward, no sign of the knife could be found, however.

At the big room party that night Earl started things off by stripping down to his frayed Fruit-of-the-Loon jockey shorts and trying to take a cold shower, the trouble being that the bathtub was full of beer and he slipped and nearly drowned before rather reluctantly being pulled out. Later on, still in his damp underwear, he chased two comely California femme fans costumed as slave girls of Barsoom around the room while loudly demanding they show off their bassoons and let us see exactly what they had to sell. Soon after one of his many discarded cigarette butts caught the window drapes on fire and he tried to quench the flames by spraying white port wine from the bottle in his pocket.

"I thought we were going to have to tie him up," Tom explained, when he came by to pick me up at home the following morning. "Lucky for everybody he passed out right after the fire and four of us carted him back to his room. And look what I took home with me." Tom held up a room key. "He ought to still be locked in there if things went right."

They hadn't. And he wasn't. When we got to the hotel one of the first two people we saw in the lobby was Earl Foss, who had longtime Los Angeles BNF Milton Arbogast caught in a vicious choke hold. Tom and I dashed over, managed somehow to pry Earl's hands loose, and let Milton escape. We never did find out what had caused the altercation. Milton left by cab immediately after. Word eventually drifted back from L.A. that he'd caught the first plane home while vowing never to come within a thousand miles of Seamount again. That was the end our proposed 1967 worldcon bid, by the way.

This was some hours before the incident involving the hotel maid found naked and locked in the closet in Earl's room with the committee having to come up with fifty dollars cash in order to convince the hotel detective not to file formal police charges.

The banquet that afternoon went off without a major hitch except for the fact that the Guest of Honor failed to appear to deliver his scheduled speech. Earl had last been seen an hour earlier headed up to his room in the company of two rather ravaged-looking women wearing thick make-up and unseasonably tiny skirts over black lace stockings. If you look closely at the final PuCon treasury report you'll note an entry of \$99.99 under the ambiguous sub-heading "miscellaneous committee entertainment." It struck me then—and now also—as more than worth the expense.

Looking only slightly worn from his recent activities, Earl showed up right on time—in boots if not spurs—for the concluding Sunday night dead dog party. Here everything reached its fated climax. Many who were there claim it came down to

the moment when Earl pulled the marijuana cigarette out of his boot top and lit up. (Remember this was 1962. Five years later nobody would have blinked. But this was still a time when simple pot possession could bring five-to-ten hard ones in the state pen.)

But in truth that only marked the final fat camel on the strawman's weak back, so to speak. I think the critical moment occurred shortly before when Earl, white port bottle in hand, launched into his personal summing up of his initial con-going experience. "I love you fucking science fiction flying saucer nuts," he announced to the room as a whole. "People say to me you're a bunch of crazy dumb assholes but shit I'm saying you're the salt of the goddamn earth. Free booze, free beer, free broads. What more could a guy want?"

He then went on to explain how with the long winter looming ahead he was going to invest in one of those \$99-for-99-day Greyhound bus tickets and tour the country, stopping at every town where more than a half-dozen fans lived. "Hell, they'll put me up, that much I know, and we'll have ourselves one son of a bitch of a rocking good old time! A fan in need is a fan indeed! I'll have it fucking made, by God!"

Those of us hearing this looked one another straight in the eye.

Then Earl lit up his joint.

I don't know who moved first. Frankly even at the time it was hard to tell. Call it a mass movement. I think there may have been as many as ten of us total.

Some of us hit him high, some hit him low.

It was November, yes, but with the dense smoke filling the room in those pre-air-conditioning days the windows were all open. Where Earl stood sucking on his pot, the window right behind him hung wide open to the night.

It was over in a matter of seconds.

When we hit him Earl immediately lost his balance, pedaled backward, hands flaying the air, and struck the lower window sash with the back of his knees.

And he toppled straight on back—and out.

Out the open window.

Eleven stories down.

The odd part, on the way he never uttered a sound. (My own explanation: he was holding the marijuana smoke in his lungs in order to achieve full blast.)

Of course that ended the con. At least it did as soon as the police let us go. But with all witnesses agreeing that it was nothing but a dreadful accident—too much to drink and the poor man slipped and fell—name was Earl Voss or something like that, from up north someplace. No, none of us knew him well. Warrants? No, we knew nothing about any felony warrants out for his arrest.

Tom Powers was the only one of us to attend the subsequent funeral in Mule Creek.

I'll give Tom that. He said it wasn't so much guilt as curiosity. There were only four other people there, he said. One was the sheriff, another the minister who delivered the eulogy, one the gravedigger leaning on his shovel, and the fourth was Earl's sister.

"I didn't know he had a sister," I said.

"Who did? Quite a bit older, I'd guess. Though with Earl that's hard to say. Big as a house, bad teeth, bad complexion, but clean, prim, neatly dressed and bright as a light bulb too, I'd figure. She was hauling a big burlap bag around with her the whole time. I drifted over and snuck a peek inside. It was full of books. Guess what kind? Heinlein, Asimov, Silverberg and Ellison, *Rogue Moon* and *Venus Plus X*. A couple issues of *Galaxy* and *Serendipity* too. And I saw some fanzines. *Yandro*, *Xero*, *Howl*."

"They were Earl's fanzines, you mean?"

"Depends on how you want to look at it, son."

"Oh," I said. "Then you think the sister was the one who—"

He cut me off. "Who can say? She wouldn't talk to me. Not one word. And I tried. I finally asked the sheriff and he said Miss Mildred Foss doesn't say two words to anybody unless she has to. A nice girl, a lady, but quiet, he said. Keeps to herself.



Unlike her goddamn crazy psycho brother Pigg.”

“But why would...?”

This time I was the one who broke off. Maybe because by then I’d more or less figured it out on my own.

“She would because she could,” Tom said. “Heck, in fandom, aren’t we all putting it on at least a bit? She just went the whole way and named it after her brother.”

Tom left it there.

And, no, we never heard a word from the sister again. Nobody did. Maybe she found another outlet. She became a coin fan, she

collected stamps, she joined a church or became a Rosicrucian. Who can say?

But one thing for sure. For a time in the early sixties a fan of great talent and accomplishment came and went among us in the quick flicker of an eye, a fan known by the name of Earl “Pigg” Foss.

For that one quick shimmering instant the greatest fan in the world.

*(With all due apologies to  
Mr. James Thurber)*

—Gordon Eklund

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### ***Graham Charnock continued:***

*The “What are you doing, these days?”  
Conjunction:*

Being asked what you are doing, as opposed to how you are doing, is almost as embarrassing, of course, as being talked at or not being talked at. Never do I have an adequate answer for it, although in future I may construct one along the lines of “Oh, I’m just helping those people out with their Large Hadron Collider.”

*Walking away:*

I think walking away from a conversation that has gone bad, for whatever reasons, is a basic human survival instinct that most of us pick up pretty quickly. In fact it’s...er... instinctive. I have on many occasions allowed myself to be talked at beyond the realms of acceptability because I mistakenly thought I was fulfilling a therapeutic role for the talker, but there always come a time when you have to walk away. It’s a bit like allowing yourself to be fallen asleep on at a party. No names, no pack drill, except it was Chris Atkinson. You may initially worry or feel guilt about being too obvious in this ploy, but no, the talker will never realize what is going on. The other positive side of the coin is that it

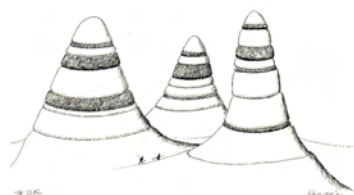
operates as an alarm when \*you\* are potentially in danger of becoming a talker, although normally its pretty easy to see the listener’s eyes glaze over.

With some people—like Dave Langford, for instance—this is all up in the air anyway. I can talk to him forever knowing he will never hear what I am saying, and I know he knows, so neither of us will feel guilty when either of us turns away and buys someone else a drink. When you see this process happening as a third party observer viewing two other people, which I sometimes do, it’s especially fulfilling and amusing because you have no participation in it.

*And finally:*

Of course if talking to people just suddenly become all too much for you, you can always go off and chat with Ted.

—Graham Charnock



The boy was a teenaged me and the song was “When Your Lover Has Gone.” Written and composed by Einar Aaron Swan, it first surfaced in 1931 in a Jimmy Cagney/Joan Blondell film titled “Blonde Crazy” (aka “Larceny Land”) and reappeared much later (science fictionally!) in “The Rocketeer” (1991). Swan was a professional dance band musician who died in 1940, only living long enough to write a handful of songs of which “When Your Lover Has Gone” is the best known. It has become a “standard,” favored by jazz musicians and singers alike and recorded (“covered” in mediaspeak) by over thirty people ranging from Gene Austin (1931) to Kevin Spacey (2004). Among the best versions are those by Frank Sinatra (1955) and Carmen McRae (also 1955), both of whom, unusually, sing the verse in addition to the chorus.

The American Forces Network (generally known as AFN) was a radio station established by the U.S. Armed Forces Radio Service which began broadcasting from London in July 1943 with five hours of recorded shows using studio facilities provided by the BBC and with signals sent via telephone lines to five regional trans-

mitters. It was intended, of course, to provide entertainment for the American forces, which were being built up in Britain for the invasion of Europe, but incidentally did the same for many British people. For the first time we were able to hear, for example, “The Jack Benny Show,” George Burns and Gracie Allen, “Duffy’s Tavern,” etc. And, of course, lots of jazz and big band music at a time when the Beeb (BBC) played a half-hour weekly of rather stilted British jazz and the “big bands” were such as Henry Hall, Ambrose, Harry Roy, etc. Worthy, but stodgy, especially for teenagers like me, who had discovered a passion for jazz in particular. And now, suddenly, we had the real thing, the genuine source with shows like “Jubilee,” which was all black and featured, usually, a big band: Ellington, Cab Calloway, Erskine Hawkins, a trio or small group: the King Cole Trio, the Loumel Morgan Trio, the Slim Gaillard Trio, etc. plus a couple of singers like Maxine Sullivan or Herb Jeffries and emceed by Ernie (Bubbles) Whitman. There were also disc jockeys (unheard of before!) who had a lunch-time spot, “Duffel Bag” (signature tune the intro to Tommy Dorsey’s “On The Sunny Side Of The



Street”) and a tea-time “G.I. Supper Club” (signature tune the beginning of the second part of Artie Shaw’s “Blues”). They played records, of course, either commercial or the special “V-Disc” made exclusively for the U.S. forces.

The “shows,” however, were pre-recorded on 16-inch metal and glass transcription discs and shipped over here to be played, I believe, at 33 1/3 rpm. Precursors of LPs, in fact. Apart from “Jubilee,” the other shows I listened to regularly were the weekly “Town Hall” concerts organized by Eddie Condon from 1942 on and featuring many of the mainstream jazz musicians of the day. Too many to list but including (among many others) Max Kaminsky, Pee Wee Russell, George Brunies, Gene Schroeder, Sid Weiss, George Wettling, Dave Tough, etc., etc. Also, every week there were one or two songs by the lovely Lee Wiley whose smoky, sexy voice really caught me by the throat. Hormones might not have been raging but they *were* agitated!

Then one night she came on and sang “When Your Lover Has Gone,” accompanied only by Jess Stacy on piano (another of my heroes). It was the first time I had heard this really very sad number, which somehow appealed to the Celtic gloominess that we Scots/Irish are noted for. Disappointingly, she never repeated it on any of the subsequent “Town Hall” broadcasts that I happened to catch. Then, with the Allies established in Europe, AFN transferred to Paris and we were no longer able to hear the broadcasts on our feeble radios anyway. At the end of ‘45 I was “called up” (drafted) into the RAF myself and played piano in various service bands but, alas, never came across that song.

Came the Fifties and, with the record industry expanding after the shortages of the war years and the LP and EP (remember that?) invented, an urge came over me to look for Lee Wiley, especially “When Your Lover Has Gone.” It would seem that she never recorded the song commercially but I did buy one LP, eventually, which was made up of two albums of Rodgers and Hart and Harold Arlen songs which she had recorded respec-

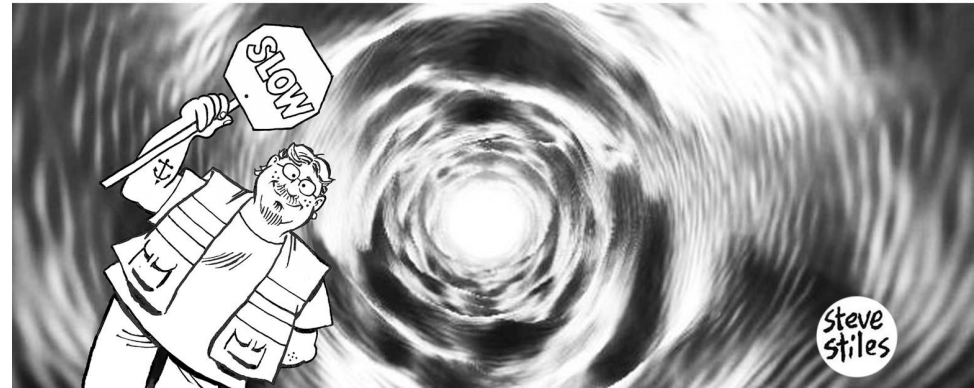
tively in 1940 and 1945, accompanied by different Eddie Condon groups. Incidentally, to digress, “albums” in 78 rpm days could be literally that, presented in book form (like photo albums) with the “pages” actually sleeves holding four or five records. They never appeared in this form in Britain to my knowledge, but I did once see, and hear, a Capitol King Cole Trio album of this type which my cousin Margaret had obtained from the States in ‘45. Anyway, Lee here had produced two “songbook” albums years before Ella Fitzgerald!

Although I hadn’t managed to track down a Wiley recording of “When Your Lover Has Gone,” I did acquire Maxine Sullivan’s 1942 version made, by the sound of it, with John Kirby’s small band and, a bit later, found it on discs by Keely Smith and Eydie Gorme. Both of these ladies, backed by big bands, overpowered the song to my mind with blasting, swinging performances, okay for some numbers but hardly for this one. A more acceptable interpretation, like Sullivan’s, was Doris Day’s, made, probably, in the Sixties.

Now come up to recent times and what do I find, accidentally, while trawling through YouTube, and over sixty years later, but the very Town Hall broadcast of the song by Lee Wiley that first gripped me back then! A small specialist company had somehow got hold of the Eddie Condon concert transcriptions and transferred them to LPs and had even gathered Lee’s vocals together separately. They are now available as CDs, Lee’s title being “Live On Stage, Town Hall, New York.” Unfortunately the transfer of “When Your Lover Has Gone” is rather scratchy, as if it had been taken from an acetate, but still sounds very good. Although, as with everything else, you can’t go back and relive those special experiences and there is always some disappointment if you try. In fact, as I said at the start, Carmen McRae’s is the best rendition of the song with Sinatra’s a close second. Lee Wiley died in 1975 at the age of 67.

—Fred Smith

# The Ether Still Vibrates



## MARK PLUMMER

I was flicking through a book the other day. It’s called *Buried in Books* and it’s one of those seasonal compendiums, a Christmas novelty item readily deployable as a gift, even for people who don’t read much. But it’s rather better than that implies. It is a collection of extracts from other titles, usually only a paragraph or two, about books and reading. Many of the source texts are familiar—Brian Aldiss’s *Brightfount Diaries*, Ian Sinclair’s *White Chapell*, *Scarlet Tracings*, various Orwell essays, Lucy Mangan’s columns from *The Guardian*, John Baxter’s wonderful *A Pound of Paper*—but there are also snippets from (to me) far more unusual sources, cropped out of their context and stitched together into a new testament to bibliophilia.

While Julie Rigg’s book is subtitled “A Reader’s Anthology” I think my favorite section is “The Good Practice of Buying a Book a Day.” This chapter, taking its title from an entry in Arnold Bennett’s diary, is obviously enough about the buying rather than the reading of books. The narrator of Sam Savage’s 2007 novel *Firmin*—a rat born in the basement of a Boston bookstore—understood that the customers “did not come in just to buy a book, plunk down some cash, and scam. They hung around. They called it browsing, but it was more like excavating or mining.... They dug for treasures with bare hands, up to their armpits sometimes, and when they hauled some literary nugget from a mound of dross, they were much happier than if they had just walked in and bought it.” R. T. Campbell, in

*Bodies in a Bookshop: A Detective Story* (1946) thinks that bookshops are like pubs: “You start with one and then you drift to another, and before you know where you are you are on some gigantic book-binge.” Octave Uzanne (*The Book Hunter in Paris*, 1893) even kits out his “academician” with a special costume for such expeditions: “He could stow away bundles of books in his pockets, which were numerous and as deep as sacks.”

Reading these extracts, and John Baxter’s article in the most recent *Trap Door*, I do find myself mourning for a lost world: a world of character. A few years ago a change of office location meant I was working a little closer to the west end of London. It really wasn’t that much of a change geographically, just enough to make an excursion to the Charing Cross Road area feasible within a conventional lunch-break. But that locale is not what it once was, something that I pretty much knew anyway, and so while I still make the occasional foray—you never know when you might find a complete file of *Sky Hook* in an “ephemera” box—it’s likely to be depressing rather than liberating. Once on visiting an unfamiliar town I’d check out the location of the second-hand bookshops in Drif’s guides; now I don’t bother and there probably aren’t any anyway. And yet I’m slightly of two minds about John’s conclusions. I’ve never been a serious book collector. I like the act of fossicking in second-hand bookshops as an end in itself, and the occasional joy of discovery of a long-sought item at a bargain price, but ultimately I am a reader and so there’s a balance. It’s a friend’s birthday in a

couple of days and we wanted to get him something. A particular book occurred to me as apposite, nothing especially scarce but it's been out of print for several years and so I'm not going to find it in even the bigger new book-stores. I suppose I might have turned up a copy by trawling the Charing Cross Road as it was twenty years ago, but there would be no guarantee and yet now a few seconds on ABE and I find multiple copies, and one of them is even now making its way to me. At least I hope so. Without that, who knows when I'd have unearthed a copy.

The downside of this, of course, is that bookshops like the Fantasy Centre are no more. I can't say that there's a direct causal link between its demise and the relatively free availability of second-hand books online—both the proprietors were at an age when they might have wanted to get out of the business anyway—but I'm sure it contributed. I always used to use Ron Goulart books to illustrate why I liked the Fantasy Centre. If I was ever seized by a desire to read Ron Goulart paperbacks, I would say—and I don't know why this name came to mind; it could just as easily have been, I don't know, Marion Zimmer Bradley or Ray Cummings—I could always go up to the Fantasy Centre and there they would be. But now the Fantasy Centre has gone, and I can still buy Ron Goulart paperbacks perfectly easily should the desire ever overwhelm me which I think increasingly unlikely, and I realize that that wasn't the shop's value at all. Rather it was that I could drop in and have a cigarette and a coffee with Erik, at least back in the days when I still smoked and the law still allowed smoking in public places. And maybe somebody else would drop in too, perhaps somebody I knew, perhaps not; perhaps one of those great figures of literature looking to sell review copies, and perhaps just some misguided soul who would spend ages perusing the shelves before asking if they had any books on quilting—provoking Ted to patiently intone for what was probably the 5,271,009th time, “No-because-we-are-science-fiction-specialists.” It was the place where I would have my annual conversation with occultist Gerald Suster about my favorite authors, each discussion conducted with no recall of the previous iteration and a background sense of imminent catastrophe as Gerald proved stunningly inept at lighting roll-ups while surrounded by piles of crumbling paper; and where I'd always check out the

non-fiction section just in case one of the books I'd half had an eye on for half a dozen years had just got cheaper, or whether some previously never seen and half suspected to be mythical volume had come into stock. And where Erik would occasionally thrust some fannish ephemera at me, something he'd acquired as part of consignment which he knew he couldn't sell but which he also knew I'd be able to find a home for. I'm reminded of a sign on the door of a closed branch of Borders, suggesting that anybody in search of a rest room should try Amazon. Online second-hand booksellers are incredibly convenient but they don't make you coffee.

We also lose the stories: not the ones that are printed on the page but those that surround the book's discovery and acquisition, the sort of stories John tells in ‘The Wendigo in the Woods’. Online it would just have been another issue of *Galaxy* Vol. 9 No. 2 from March 1955 (Simak, Knight, Sturgeon, de Ford, de Vet, Ley (science), Conklin (reviews), Hunter (cover)). In a bookshop in Hay on Wye it was that too, but I could see that it also came with a handwritten invoice from Ken Slater's Fantast (Medway) Limited dated 4 March 1955. He was sending that issue and the January *Astounding* (Miller, Oliver, Brunner, Gunn, Russell, Freas (cover)) to a P. W. Clarke, total cost 6/-. P W seemingly already owed Ken 4/- so that brought the debit up to 10/-. Who was P. W. Clarke? Did he pay his bill? Was he a known fan? I don't recognize the name and a quick check of *Then...* doesn't turn up anything although I may have missed something amongst the numerous reference to the other fannishly and professionally famous Clarkes.

The rise of ebooks is of course a further nail. In the past year or so ebook readers have advanced to the point where I can see myself getting one, because it seems to me they've transcended gimmickry. And yet I know that an ebook of Richard Powers's *Generosity* would not come, as our second-hand US paperback did, with an unexplained four-inch long brown feather tucked between its virtual pages. Presumably it was simply an unconventional bookmark, and at least an improvement on the possibly apocryphal rasher of uncooked bacon apparently similarly deployed in a returned library book in Worthing. I've told before, I know, the story of how, a decade or so after the event, I was reading an issue of John Jarrold's *Prevert* (#14 from January 1986)

with its reference to receiving an issue of *Trap Door* with a manuscript annotation from you, and then just a couple of months later acquiring a copy of *Trap Door* #5 with the manuscript annotation ‘I love *Prevert*!’. Jarrold's copy, presumably—unless you were in the habit of enthusing about *Prevert* to all and sundry at the time. I realize that to the wider world such a discovery hardly ranks alongside the chance acquisition of a signed first of *Ulysses* or even a copy of *The Blind Spot* by Austin Hall and Homer Eon Flint (1921) in which all the bad bits have been underlined in damon knight's own fair hand. But still an' all, one wonders at the prospect of some future fan being similarly charmed at acquiring a copy of the actual PDF that prompted your first letter to *Vegas Fandom Weekly*. {*Would “the actual PDF” be the one resident on my hard drive? Now there's a sfinal concept! Would a copy made from it onto a diskette or perhaps a flash drive be considered collectible, or would one have to somehow obtain the hard drive itself?*}

Thanks as always for *Trap Door*: it's all a delight, from Brad's cover to Dan's cover inclusive, even if I don't really mention much of it here. I only wish it were more than an annual, and perhaps that you'd find more space for yourself.

## MILT STEVENS

Your editorial started me wondering whether all fans dream about fandom at some time or other. I guess when fandom becomes a significant part of your experience it will wander into your dreams. I doubt having fandom in dreams is any odder than the things other people have in their dreams. We might ask a psychiatrist about the subject, but I don't think they are supposed to tell.

I think your dream was more complicated than most of the dreams I've had about fandom. My dreams are set at a convention or a LASFS meeting, but possibly a LASFS meeting at a place where LASFS has never met. I and a bunch of fans I know are milling around. Sometimes the fans were people I knew were dead, but that didn't bother me. Fannish ghosts seem to be friendly. While the fans and I weren't doing anything or even trying to do anything, I felt perfectly contented.

I once had a fannish nightmare. It was a couple weeks after the LosCon at the Sheraton Anaheim (which is sort of a castle-like hotel you can't help noticing from the freeway). I had been

hotel relations at the con. A couple of weeks after the convention, I woke in the middle of the night with the disturbing thought that I had forgotten to shut down the gaming room, and the gamers were still there. It took several minutes to convince myself that it wasn't a very sensible idea and hadn't really happened. Of course, it probably reflects my subconscious take on gamers. If you don't tell them to go home, they may not have the sense to go home.

Your dream was rather sercon for a fannish dream. The idea of scanning fanzines for posterity is a good one, and I'm all in favor of it. If there are more large collections of SF and SF-related material, the better the chances that the material will be scanned in a long-lasting form.

I sometimes do wonder who will ever have enough time to actually read all this material. We aren't the only folks who amass large amounts of written records. Just about everybody is doing it these days. On the plus side, fanzines record what a group of reasonably educated people in the 20th and 21st centuries were thinking when they weren't being paid to think anything at all. These days, grad students have to read medieval tax records all the time, and I think future grad students will find fanzines a lot more interesting than medieval tax records.

I hadn't known Gregg Calkins came from Utah originally. I didn't find his account of being forced to drink by an overbearing person to be pleasant. I possibly don't like bullying in general. I learned from Roy Kettle's article that he doesn't seem to like any of the three British political parties. I think I can understand that.

## FRED SMITH

Your editorial “dream” is not at all farfetched. Plenty of early fanzines are already online with more seeming to be added continuously. But one does miss that Twiltone which was so characteristic of US zines and it's interesting that it featured in your dream.

John Baxter's tale of book searching on the west coast of America is engaging as well as amusing. While not a collector as such, I've done enough book and magazine collecting to appreciate the joy that you can feel when discovering a rare and desirable item—especially at a bargain price! One small carp: according to Algernon Blackwood it was the Indian guide who cried “My burning, fiery feet” as he was carried off by the

Wendigo. Not that it really matters. Their experience with the Alamo rental girl rings a bell. When I went to pick up our “compact” in San Francisco, she persuaded me to upgrade “because we were going to be climbing through the Sierra Nevada mountains.”

Gordon Eklund’s revisiting of the two Willis trip reports is almost as fascinating as the reports themselves and certainly it’s true that *Twice Upon A Time*, while wonderful in itself, is not quite as good as *The Harp Stateside*. Gordon’s conjecture as to the reasons Walt didn’t finish his second report are confirmed in a letter I received from Walt himself in January 1997 (in reply to my comments on the very same subject): “I agree... about the difference between *THS* and *TUAT* but it’s hardly surprising. After all, you can’t bathe in the same river twice, as the saying goes. And I’m pleased you liked the ending of it. I’ve always felt guilty about not finishing off that travelogue properly, but what is left is so downbeat in character...the loss of our luggage, etc...that I preferred to leave it on the most upbeat ending open to me.”

Regarding Madeleine’s presence possibly inhibiting Walt’s capsule portraits of the fans they encountered, it’s a pity that her own account has never been reprinted and, naturally, Walt could hardly express the affection he had for Lee Hoffman, platonic though it no doubt was.

Incidentally, talking of Walt again, possibly you haven’t seen the TV ad concerning the Norwich Union insurance company’s change of name to Aviva in which they say that Bruce Willis would never have made it as the hero of *Die Hard* if his name had been Walter! Actually, of course his name is Walter Bruce Willis.

## DALE SPEIRS

John Baxter’s account of Martin Stone the book scout and how the Internet destroyed the thrill of hunting about in secondhand bookstores parallels my experience in Calgary. Until the late 1990s I used to make the weekly rounds of Calgary secondhand bookstores. In the first decade of this century, many of them dwindled away and the remainder had only stocks of cheap paperbacks, so I gave up and now buy via the Internet. The two good secondhand bookstores left in Cowtown price their stock according to the Internet, so there are no bargains left. No more 1940s SF prozines at \$1 each or obscure history

books on telegraph stamps or old-time radio shows. The Internet does serve to level the playing field. Searching for one SF novel, I found it at Abebooks and got it from a Florida dealer, something that was more difficult in the old days of paper catalogues.

I can always find new books that the local Chapters/Indigo/Coles/W.H. Smith/Classic Books store does not have in stock. There is only one chain bookstore in Canada, operating under the aforementioned names; all of them are owned by Heather Reismann. I normally buy new books online from Amazon.ca (not .com), as they have a better selection. I have been forced to obtain some books as PDF only, because they are specialized references that cannot be economically published on paper because of numerous color illustrations or lengthy tables or lists. They are too long to print out, and many of them use vertical format instead of easier to read horizontal format for the computer screen.

E-zines appear to have been replaced by blogs, notwithstanding sites such as efanazines.com. What annoys me about blogs is that most of them are not archived in fixed format, where you can be certain that a text is still viewed the same way as it was when first published. This matters for historians who like to cite their sources and be assured that readers can still find them instead of an URL that only returns a “404 Page Not Found.” Many e-zine editors publishing in PDF format don’t or won’t understand that if you do use vertical format PDF, then use single-column text only so the reader doesn’t have to scroll back and forth. And don’t flatter yourself that everyone is going to print out your e-zine; only a few do.

I’ll keep my zine *Opuntia* going as print-only as long as I can, being a stubborn denizen of the Papernet. I do recognize that the next generation does not feel that way, so I have scanned the 225+ back issues as PDF issues. They will eventually be posted online but not just yet. The Papernet has an advantage over the Internet because there is no search engine to allow your boss or the authorities to locate your material with a Google entry. Many people have lost their jobs or not gotten one because present or prospective employers are doing searches on employee names. It is also standard practice to search the boss’s name or the company name just to see who is saying what about them. I can foresee that

many would-be politicians of the future will have their candidacies destroyed because someone found stupid remarks or photos they made when they were teenagers or university students. In the Papernet, the bosses or police have to specifically know you are publishing and somehow obtain a copy, not an easy thing to do when your paper zine only circulates within a small group.

Gordon Eklund’s reminiscences about Irish fan Walt Willis mentions that he rarely wrote about his day job in the Ulster civil service. I had some letters from him in the few years just before his death, in which he mentioned that it was safer not to discuss his bureaucratic job during The Troubles. Not a few civil servants were targeted by the IRA or the UDA simply because they were government workers and therefore the enemy. Just visiting the wrong pub for a quiet drink could get a man killed, and guilt by association was good enough for either side to bomb someone or some place. We in North America complain about how hard our lives are and don’t realize how fortunate we are.

## TARAL WAYNE

It somehow doesn’t seem right to dream about fandom. We are told that our dreams are generated by deep, primal forces, like vast invisible tides in our psyche, whereas fandom is a mere bubble on the ripples in a shallow puddle. Shouldn’t you be dreaming of the Arch-Father dominating your child-like Ego, or of being swallowed by the Earth Goddess/Mother Figure’s Primal Sexuality...stuff that makes no difference because it’s so deeply meaningful that you don’t understand it anyway?

When you come down to it, it’s the stuff you *do* understand that matters, isn’t it? I mean, who cares if, in the deepest recesses of your soul, your Id entertains fantasies of murder, incest and credit default swaps? What’s that got to do with how you treat stray dogs, or whether you cheat at poker? Why the hell *not* dream about fandom if it’s part of the real world?

I not only preach, I’ve dreamed about fandom myself. Unfortunately, my dreams have a lot in common with those preoccupations of the Id I was talking about a moment ago.

Some of them have been mere anxiety dreams. I imagine that I’m at a large convention – a Worldcon perhaps. I don’t seem to be with anyone, and I have a room somewhere, but I can’t

remember where it is or where my room key went. I’ve just discovered the dealer’s room, but it’s already closing and I have no time to look at anything. There’s a book I want to buy that I saw just a minute ago, but now it doesn’t seem to be where I remember it. There are room parties already in swing, but when I go in they are noisy and uncomfortably crowded. I don’t know anyone. I have no reason to stay. Then I realize that I can’t find my way back to the lobby or main program area. On occasion, I’ve even dreamed that I left the hotel for some reason. Wandering a few blocks away, I can see the hotel in the distance, but somehow can’t make my way back. I walk six blocks and turn left, but the entrance isn’t where it should be. Now I can’t even see the hotel anywhere.

At that point, I’m so disgusted that there’s nothing left to do but wake up.

But that’s just a standard “labyrinth” dream. My fannish dreams gets darker than that. One, from years ago, stands out in my memory. To start with, I was *dead*. Death is always a good beginning. Not death in the same way that Pat Robertson is to the Intellect – more of a “First Class Spectral Non-Apparition in Ghostbusters” kind of dead. My spirit could drift invisibly along the halls of any convention, and listen to friends and people I had known as they bad-mouthed me ...when they remembered me at all. All I needed to finish the dream properly was for Egon or Ray to come around a corner and vacuum me up.

So what does that say about why I don’t go to conventions?

Actually, not much. The main reason I rarely attend cons is that I’d have to have a much larger disposable income just for the travel. But you understand now why I don’t *miss* cons as much as a lot of fans would.

When it comes to book scouts, the expression “been there, done that” comes to mind. I knew a few in my time. One I knew fairly well was a young lady of very diminutive stature named Anne Sherlock, who had a nervous giggle. She was also a mail-order dealer who never quite got her business off the ground. We had a mutual friend in a tall, cadaverous, dark-fantasy connoisseur named Bob Hadji. He was more of a collector, but also scouted books for Anne. As a mere fan, I fit into the arrangement as their driver.

Anne and Hadji would finance the trip – rental car, motel, meals and a few bucks in *my* pocket, if

it could be managed. There's more about those trips that I've forgotten than what I remember. The memories I've kept are like unlabeled snapshots in a shoebox – I don't know which trip they are from, or where we were at the time. Nevertheless, the memories are vivid. Who could forget the car we picked up from Rent-a-Wreck, that drove sideways? At sixty miles per hour, it was trying to crab left at ten. I had to insist we exchange the car for one that I was reasonably sure wouldn't kill us before we left the city.

I recall that, somewhere along one trip, Hadji pointed out John Crowley. The author was crossing the same street we were, in the other direction. "You mustn't seem to recognize him. He hates being recognized."

I didn't, so the writer went by without annoyance from me, at least.

I remember an old barn of a Gothic American frame house, every room stuffed with musty smelling, water-stained, worm-eaten books, and hardly a one of them worth a dollar.

I recall directions to a place in New England that were like the opening credits to the show "Newhart." We drove and drove into increasingly more rural corners of the state, along narrower and narrower lanes, until we finally came to the end of the road. Instead of an 18th century inn, there was a large, wood-frame, two-story building. It was an exclusive college – the sort you imagined Joshua Lawrence Chamberlain attended to earn his first degree. From the dirt parking space we had a magnificent view over a broad wilderness valley. There was not a chimney smoke or a steeple to be seen anywhere. If we had been idling the engine in the driveway of Miskatonic University, the location could not have been more isolated. No bookstore, though. We thought it best not to be there when darkness fell, so we left.

That wasn't the only place we went to that wasn't there, either. But, almost as though to make up for it, we found gas stops with small general stores attached, with boxes of old books under the counters. I found an original paperback travel book by Ian Fleming. Anne found a stash of some pulp magazines that looked like nothing to me, but she bought all of them.

On the whole, Anne and Hadji never found quite enough to make these trips pay. After three or four they gave it up – and I was out of a pleasant, if infrequent, job.

I don't see anything of Anne anymore, and

hear only rarely from Hadji (who changed his name to Robert Knowlton, in any case). But I was friends for a long while with another book scout named Ken. Ken had a good eye for books, and found them in Sally Anns and Goodwills on a regular basis. He'd buy them for a dollar or two, then sell them to a dealer for a hundred times that. Sometimes we'd hang out together while he scouted. I found that I had a fairly sharp eye as well – I found at least one book worth fifty bucks that he'd gone right past a moment before. Just a few weeks ago, I found a copy of *The Lodger*, a 1913 novel by Marie Adelaide Lowndes, née Belloc. Ken said later than he had been browsing through the same books the day before and overlooked it. *{I've never read the novel, but it was the basis for a wonderfully dark 1944 film of the same title starring the died-too-soon Laird Cregar in the title role.}*

But, if I had an eye for scouting, I didn't have the encyclopediac knowledge Ken had. He would give me tips like, "if you ever see a first edition of *Crimson Tide* by Tom Clancy, grab it. It's worth \$5,000." Try as I might, I never found it. The closest I came was the *second* printing, worth *nothing*. I knew of perhaps five books that were worth \$100 that I might ever be likely to find. I actually *did* find one worth \$500. Which I kept. Ken knew of *hundreds*, though...that was why *he* found them, and generally *I* never did. In the long run, I decided to stick to collecting books that I wanted for myself. I realized that I didn't want to own books merely because they were "valuable." I sought a different sort of wealth – a good read – so made the decision to leave finding collector's items to Ken.

Not to put too fine a point on it, I hate the taste of beer, whiskey, rye, bourbon, rum, gin *and* vodka. It's all weed-killer to me. I wonder if Gregg Calkins's drinking buddies from his Mineralogy Department days would be insulted if I asked for a Kahlua or Gran Marnier instead? They're just as alcoholic but taste a hell of a lot better, if you ask me.

Another article I don't intend to talk much about is Gary Hubbard's. I've contributed too many Fannish Bad Health Stories in the last year to add more. \*Shudder.\*

I'm tempted to mention that I too built that model of The Visible Man that Dan illustrated. Mine had two eyes. One of them must have fallen out of the box when Gary built his. In fact, I built

The Visible Man a second time, just a few years ago, and it's on a shelf in the kitchen next to the Visible Head and my fleet of Star Trek models. That's as much as you'll get out of me on the subject of health and medicine.

I read Walt Willis' "The Harp Stateside" more than thirty years ago. Think about that. When I read the original publication, it was at most only twenty-five years old! Isn't just old fanzines that get older. So do we.

Unlike the generation Willis belonged to, "The Harp" didn't make a deep impression on me. The writing was good, who disputes it? But I knew relatively little then about the fandom of the '50s. I know a great deal more, now, but one thing remains the same. I hadn't met any of the people mentioned by "The Harp" when I first read it, and now, more than thirty years later, I still haven't – possibly not even one. For me, the read lacked the verisimilitude that it must have had for Sixth Fandom readers. It might as well have been fiction. Eklund's article was a stroll down memory lane – to a place I've never been.

All the same, I found some of the titbits that Eklund quoted from Willis did illuminate hidden pearls in "The Harp" that I wouldn't have spotted in 1975. I might easily have missed them in 2012. Predicting that the Worldcon would gradually grow into a ritual-encrusted ceremonial activity, dictated by unbreakable tradition, was spot on. Watching a line of hierophants parade across a stage at a Worldcon and shower benedictions on each other before handling the sacred objects back and forth can hardly be distinguished from a Mass or a human sacrifice. Having not-so-long-ago participated in such a ceremony hasn't diminished that impression. In fact, Anticipation robbed the occasion of whatever illusion I once had that the Hugo ceremonies and similar events had any spontaneity left in them. I say this despite the fact that, most of the time, I had no idea what I was doing or was going to say there.

What *am* I doing with a copy of "The Harp Stateside," anyway? I actually don't remember with any certainty. I might have bought my copy from a dealer at a Worldcon who didn't know what it was. More likely, I bought it from Ethel Lindsay's collection. I could probably make good money by selling it again, but what's a few bucks compared to the bragging rights of owning an original copy? In the long run, I'll probably pass it on to the Merrill Collection when the Great

Bibliophile collects *me*...which is no bad thing.

I wonder if the key to Kettle's article is having some knowledge of who *Shambling* is? While the humor, free association, sarcasm and spoonerisms along the way were diverting entertainment, when I came to the end of piece it slowly dawned on me that I was not yet aware of Kettle's *point*. I had no reason to doubt he had made one, but I had somehow missed it. I skimmed through the article a second time, but I discovered nothing new. I tried scrambling the letters in Shambling's name. "Bhimsnagl?" "Gmiasbln?" Clearly that wasn't getting me anywhere. Next, I wrote down the first letter of every word, then the first letter of the first word of every paragraph. "Aidwimbitpwntolahs?" "Athbibbf?" What the hell could *they* mean? I began to suspect there really was no point, and no person by the unlikely name of Shambling, after all – that the only purpose of those uncounted thousands of words between pages 33 and 38 was to trick a chuckle or two from the reader. But, no, that would be uncharitable. Surely there *must* be a point. Even if I have wear out every pair of reading glasses I have in order to examine the Xerox toner for microdots, *I'm going to find that bloody point!*

Very high standard of fanart. What do you have on Dan Steffan and Steve Stiles that you can get them to spend that much time on your illustrations? Did Dan give evidence in court against Ted White? Was Steve the real author of those nasty anonymous letters to Sue Mason? I'm glad I spend such a *spotless* life, or I might be vulnerable to the same blackmail.

Or *not*... depending on one's taste in fanart.

## GREG PICKERSGILL

I thoroughly enjoyed, and will reread more than once, the pieces by John Baxter and Gordon Eklund in the latest issue. Baxter is an obvious winner in that he speaks to the collector in us all, and moreover illuminates area of the back scene that few are familiar with. Great stuff, and written with verve and obvious delight.

The Eklund piece was in many ways quite startling, a re-examination of the known that was truly thought-provoking. I absolutely intend to get out the original texts and reread them with his article to hand. That was clever and perceptive stuff, and I very much appreciate it.

I won't say much about the rest because I don't think I'm really the target audience any



more (I don't think I'm the target audience for \*any\* fanzine any more, really!), even for the letter column, although I do feel more than a little sympathy with Peter Weston's plaintive query about *TD* being something to do with sf fandom. How nice to know that it actually \*isn't\*, and that hasn't been just an unjustified suspicion of mine for a while now. {*Actually, if you have another look you'll see that Peter is wondering about any connection to sf fandom in Breiding's article about going on hikes with his friend Larry, not the fanzine as a whole.*}

Not that I ought to complain—I'm at a really low level of interest in fandom at the moment, I can't even summon up any enthusiasm for Rob's very laudable *Novae Terrae* project, which is quite bad as I have one of the few substantial runs of *NT* in the UK. I simply can't—at the moment anyway—convince myself that all the work is actually worth it, that there's any real audience for it.

Funnily enough, I was just interrupted by a phone call from Bryn Fortey, and in amongst it all we talked a bit about fandom, which Bryn has not been engaged with for nearly thirty years now (and that's incredible in itself for me, as he was a BNF when I started off!). I found myself describing the way fandom is these days, and we compared and contrasted what we remembered of our time in fandom together, and agreed we both preferred it then, when everything was done through fanzines and fans would meet up maybe three or four times a year (if they were lucky) and everything was a bit special. It's irresistible to say that fandom today, like sf, has become a commonplace (via the internet) and is actually the worse for it. There's too much of it, and the tempo is all wrong, at least for those of us who grew up in the '50s and '60s. It's peculiar, I said to Bryn (pointing out what we here already know) that fandom as we knew it is something that existed for around fifty years and is now almost completely gone, and will never again reappear, and that \*none\* of the people who came to fandom in the last 10-15 years will have ever experienced it. All quite obvious of course, but peculiarly distressing nevertheless.

## GREG BENFORD

Baxter of course is always fun, and these explorations of the book lust community is fascinating. I always wonder whether book desires resemble stamp collecting—i.e., inde-

pendent of the actual objects. This piece is full of great scenes.

Gordon Eklund's view of the second WAW trip reports brings it all back. He was, I agree, our very best writer—subtle, wry, always diffident. I got a great letter from him before he died about how he admired those who could write fiction. Odd, for I always admired the soft, amusing approach he used.

Paul Williams was hugely influential while still a teenage fan. This is a great tribute; thanks. Roy Kettle is one of our funniest writers. He takes our world and gives it a twist you don't expect. Thanks for another fine issue, the best fmz we have!

## PASCAL THOMAS

Here's the proper loc I've been meaning to send you for years. Well, of course, its shape has evolved in my minds with each issue, only to get buried in the sands of time, and the worries of day-to-day life.

Some of the things that get buried do eventually come to light some time. Such as *Trap Door* #26, which I was able to find beside my computer by digging a bit in the paper morass accumulated on my desk. Shows I was meaning to get to it some time, and I even do remember how my LoC (now sadly virtual) would have started. See, I've always been an avid reader of periodicals of various sorts, and for a long time I was starting to read each issue with the Letters to the Editor section, which invariably made me want to go back and read the items in the previous issue which I'd missed, or read and forgotten. Though I do usually read *Trap Door* cover-to-cover going by the order of the (seldom printed) page numbers, the lettercol there as ever puts new gloss and attractiveness on the items of the past issue, thus that eventful trip through Pakistan and beyond recounted in *TD* 25 looked like the occasion to reminisce about...

But we are running the risk of an infinite regress here. So let's just note that I enjoyed Gordon Eklund's historical research piece and David Langford's alphabetization campaign as much as the rest of your readership. And was moved deeply, once again as I reread it, by your not-quite-obituary about poor Paul Williams. It was not news to me, as I'd heard about his condition from the Wolfgang's Vault music website, but still it reminded me of my last (brief) meeting

with him, at a Readercon near Boston in the summer of 2000, and at the time I didn't notice anything wrong with him (nor did he yet at the time, I suppose).

Paul's piece in the current issue of *Trap Door* is much like the bonus tracks found in CD reissues of classic albums from rock'n'roll's past: the outtakes aren't usually as good as the better known recordings, but, whether they be unknown songs or different versions of known tunes, they offer a glimpse into the creative process, a useful addition to the aficionado's collection, and a chance to discover once again what we've liked for a long time. Likewise, reading "Fannish Footprints..." was, for me, emotionally charged and taught me a lot I didn't know.

At this point, I can't hide the fact that, as a dyed-in-the-wool rock fan (and occasional DJ on a local non-commercial radio—with the web, it's a chance at worldwide fame nowadays), I get more wowed by r'n'r name-dropping than by its stfnal variety. You got a letter by Greg Benford in *Trap Door* #27, that's fine and dandy, but no matter how much I admire the writer (and he's high in my personal pantheon of SF), I've met him and talked to him several times and I get the feeling that I know him; but a letter by Lenny Kaye, goshwowohboy, even if his major claim to fame is as linchpin of the Patti Smith Group. I'd forgotten that he was the producer of *Naked Movie Star*, that made me fish out the LP and play it as I'm writing this letter. I'd forgotten how good that record was—I guess I didn't give it a careful and repeated listen at the time, because I still was under the spell of Cindy Lee Berryhill's first album, *Who's Gonna Save The World*, more in tune with the (anti-)folk rock sound of her live act, which I'd been lucky enough to catch in a small club in LA in 1987 (or thereabouts). All right, upon further thinking, I seem to recall that the long track on *Naked Movie Star* that Lenny Kaye mentions, "Yipee", had reminded me of the long tracks on some of the Patti Smith albums.

There are other enjoyable LoCs in there, by Gregg Calkins, William Breiding, Gary Mattingly (although I feel he could write longer sentences sometimes—yeah, I know, it wouldn't hurt if I managed to come up with a few shorter ones myself), John Baxter (whose subject matter of course reinforced the Old Fandom atmosphere in *TD*, and made me think about why I, too, keep so many useless papers around me—perhaps

because that once I'll part with them, in a garbage pail rather a library I'm afraid, I'll be feeling that I'll have lived what they represent, that I'm no longer living it, and perhaps even that I'm no longer living. A neurosis, granted, but one that must be common in fandom).

Roy Kettle's chutzpah is boiling over into the lettercol. You have to watch this guy! (Really, I laughed all the way through his article, but have nothing much to say about it beyond this admittedly feeble pun. He asked for it with his litany of proverbs).

Gary Hubbard makes a valuable addition to the hospital literature that's, alas, so well represented in your pages. I shiver, and try to reassure myself with the thought that fowl fat contributes much more good than bad cholesterol to my bloodstream. And I live close to the heartland of *foie gras*, Gers, where ducks die by the thousand to satisfy our greed. And preserve our health (along with the obligatory glass of red wine a day, naturally).

But the high point of the issue for me was "The Wendigo in the Woods," with this larger-than-life character, Martin Stone. I couldn't help diving into the record shelf and checking—and sure enough, he's there, credited with guitar and mandolin on *Bongos over Balham*, by Chilli Willi and the Red Hot Peppers. But of course the article was a treat because of the way it evoked the pleasure of the hunt for books. I've spent many an hour blackening my fingers with dust in garage sales, swap meets and second-hand bookstores (and record stores), at first to save money, but eventually for the sheer pleasure of the surprises that might await me there. My friend Tatane, who runs a record store here in Toulouse, explained to me several years ago how the internet has helped collectors but also driven the prices up (but enlarging the potential market for each seller). I see that it now is killing store after store, even (and perhaps above all) in remote places and for books, items that at first would seem to cost too few dollars per pound to justify going over to online commerce. Oh well. Since most of the things I buy aren't collectors' item, I can still look forward to many happy years delving in piles of near-garbage at the collective yard sales known here as *vide-greniers* (empty your attic), which have undergone an astounding expansion.

OK, er, I see that once more "when I get started I go to town" (Ray Davies, in "I'm not like

everybody else”), I’d better stop now. And once again congratulations and heartfelt thanks for unleashing *Trap Door* once again on the (by now suspecting) world.

## JIM LINWOOD

The highlight of the issue was John Baxter’s memories of Martin Stone. The first time I heard about Martin was when I read about him in John’s wonderful book *A Pound of Paper* with such tales as when he snorted cocaine stuck in a traffic jam outside Holloway Road police station in London. As John notes in his book, Martin appears in fictionalized form as “Nicholas Lane” in Iain Sinclair’s first novel *White Chappell, Scarlet Tracings*.

I had a Paul Williams Moment in April 2010 when Marion and I took a trip to Coventry. We particularly wanted to explore the new modernist St. Michael’s Cathedral designed by Basil Spence which replaced the old one destroyed during the Luftwaffe blitz on Coventry in 1940. In the cathedral we found an exhibition called “Give Peace a Chance” comprised of Gerry Deiter’s rare photographs of John Lennon and Yoko Ono’s 1969 Bed-in for Peace in Montreal.

I was surprised to find amongst the photos a framed description by Paul entitled “Doing the Bed-In For Peace” which covered the event and also his encounter with Timothy Leary. Looking more closely at the photos, I was sure I spotted Paul amongst those in the Bed-In. When I got home I watched the “Give Peace A Chance” video on YouTube and, sure enough, there’s Paul with long hair and a brown shirt in the foreground. Among other interesting items in the exhibition was a copy of the Montreal hotel housekeeper’s notes on the cleanup operation after the bed-in complaining that the Bed-In room was “very dirty and littered with flower petals” and the staff’s refusal to clean Lennon’s filthy shoes. *{That live video of the original performance is at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AwNg4IHFi7I>—and Paul appears right at the outset, shot from the rear in long-sleeved brown shirt and long hair. It’s dark at first, but lightens up and at 0:44 the camera begins closing in on Paul (on its way to Lennon), who is rockin’ out from side to side, his face and glasses becoming ever clearer until he’s out of the shot just before the one-minute mark. He reappears at various points later in the video (1:48-1:57, 2:20-2:30, 4:75 for an instant,*

*and finally at 5:14-5:18 with Tim Leary in the frame next to him).}*

Peter Weston’s account of a chance meeting at Lake Powell with an old lady who may have been Paul Williams’ aunt reminded me of a similar incident that happened to Marion and me on holiday in Venice in the late ‘90s. In the hotel we sat next to a middle-aged couple from Ealing whom we vaguely recall were called Harris. In conversation we mentioned we read SF and the woman, who hailed from Ulster, said she knew Anne McCaffrey and had been to a convention in Belfast (Mecon?) where she dined with James White and Bob Shaw. I asked her if she knew Walt Willis but drew a blank. Her husband was later mugged for his wallet on the Rialto Bridge – luckily it was a non-violent Venetian mugger and he wasn’t hurt.

## JOHN NIELSEN HALL

John Baxter on his trip with Martin Stone was very entertaining. As John notes, Martin is a London pub-rock legend, and I particularly remember seeing him in the company of other Ratfans at the Kensington in West London in a line up of Chilli-Willi & The Red Hot Peppers. They were a band with a certain uniqueness, something between folksy and rockanroll. They released an album called “Kings Of the Robot Rhythm,” which among other idiosyncrasies of production and artwork substituted for the usual copyright notice on the label the legend “Unauthorised Public Performance and Broadcasting of this Record Forbidden. Otherwise we will be after you with a Big Stick!” (It’s funny the things that stick in your head.) More recently, and evidently when not pursuing his other career as described here, Martin has been touring in a revived line-up of Mighty Baby. I haven’t seen them, but I recall the original incarnation of that band being one of those ubiquitous names at benefit gigs and free festivals of the late sixties and early seventies, along with Fat Mattress and The Edgar Broughton Band—best avoided, but no doubt having a certain nostalgia value now.

But, all that aside, I wish I understood the craving to collect first editions. To me, the value of a book is what is in it, not its publication or its binding or any of that. Bookshops with stock in glass cases put me right off. I may collect a lot of books, but that is really quite inadvertent—my intention was and is to read them, not exhibit them

like works of art. Or is it me that’s screwy?

Once again, I am just bowled over by Dan Steffan’s artwork. Steve Stiles artwork for Roy’s article, however well executed, was baffling. But that’s probably just me. Or maybe it’s Roy. It’s almost certainly not Steve’s fault. Anyway, about Roy’s article—I laughed...well no, that’s not true, I giggled, well, maybe, but to be accurate, maybe I just smiled, or perhaps it was that I just crinkled my face up a little. I wondered if there was some deep and extremely subtle political satire going on. But then, I thought, there couldn’t be. If Roy had something to say about politics here in the UK, I’m sure he would come right out and say it. He usually does. No, that’s not right—he usually quotes long passages from the *Guardian* and agrees emphatically with the contents. My Dad used to do the same with the *Telegraph*. It must be something to do with age. Or perhaps with the price of newspapers and the perceived need to get value for money out of them. But you mustn’t think I am accusing Roy of any kind of plagiarism. That wouldn’t be right. Roy is an extremely original thinker. In a class of his own, he is. Certainly, I can’t think anywhere near as well as he can, as he often reminds me. Which might be why I enjoyed his article, but didn’t actually understand it. My brain hurts.

## JOHN PURCELL

The covers by Foster and Steffan are fantastic! Love the concept of trap door shooting, which Brad Foster executed so well on the front cover, and the back cover’s “Hall of Giants” is totally cool. I really like these covers. Very nice work by these gentlemen.

Gregg Calkins wrote about parts of Utah that I have actually been in. My family enjoys camping, and have actually done so twice in Utah, a truly beautiful state. Back in the mid ‘90s we camped on the shores of Lake Provo while visiting my mother and other relatives who lived in nearby American Fork. This was in 1994, I believe, and then we camped up in the mountains in the Wasatch Mountains State Park, Strawberry Reservoir, in 1998. That was so much fun, especially when the skunk family waddled through our campsite one night. We left them alone and they left us alone. They were off to their evening dinner hunt, so these critters were totally uninterested in us. It was definitely an experience camping out at an elevation of 6,700 feet above sea level that August. At night

the temperatures were in the upper 40s, then warmed up into the 80s by afternoon. Gorgeous weather and scenery. It was very neat to wake up and look at the mountains surrounding the park and spot mountain goats and deer scattered up on the slopes.

The other thing that Gregg reminded me was our drive home to Iowa through the Uinta Forest in northeastern Utah. It was very wooded, as Gregg noted, and the trout fishing was finicky. Beautiful, but no real success. We spent one day of our trip fishing the Green River and enjoyed it immensely. Valerie was the only one of us who pulled in a rainbow trout that day. It was only a baby, about seven inches long. But hey, it was still a trout! We released it back into the river, of course.

## MIKE MEARA

Many thanks for sending another great issue of *Trap Door*. Once a year isn’t often enough for a fanzine this good. That’s a really great cover. Even I could hit a barn door—or any damn door—at ten paces if I had a gun like that. And I would love to have a gun like that, even (even!) if it was a fake, just so I could stroll down the street with it casually slung over my shoulder. I bet I’d get all the girls. All the ones with weird weapon fetishes, anyway. I’m not picky. I keep voting for Brad in the FAAns, but it hasn’t worked yet.

I mentioned last time that I love book dealing tales, and the one you have here is even better: really lovely writing about a truly fascinating character. I don’t often reread stuff, fanzine pieces included, but I made an exception several times over for this little masterpiece.

Geology—hmmm, not my subject (though it is Pat’s, and I’ve recommended she read this). But once again this is great writing. I’m beginning to see your cunning yet simple plan here, Lichtman: you just get the best writers, probably using whatever underhanded and devious means it takes, and let them write about anything they like. And Gregg quotes from my two all-time favorite poems, so he’s probably a Good Guy.

It’s hard to believe that no one before Gordon thought of comparing Willis’s two trip reports, but perhaps it is indeed so. His chosen quotes of the great man are bright enough to be a searchlight on his own writing, which easily passes the Lichtman test as described above. But I admire the bravery.

Gary Hubbard's medical tale is also well-flavored with slice-of-life, but this time it's personal, as I went through something very similar a few years back. The difference is that I never thought "At least I can get a fanzine article out of it," and now it's too late, since I couldn't do it as well as Gary does. But does he mean "discretely," or does he mean "discreetly"? With gonads, it could make all the difference.

Perhaps it's fortunate that Roy had already accumulated enough gold stars to get my FAAn award vote, because this piece of his doesn't add to them. It's pretty good by most standards, but comes across as contrived. On a really good day, I might be able to put together something almost as good, but then I'm not Roy Kettle. Even the tone of it doesn't fit with the rest of the contents. This really sounds more negative than I intended, but he had some tough acts to follow.

Another great lettercol, full of the finest ingredients. But there's one that not even you will be able to include from now on. "Who knows how many sips I might still have?" Not enough, Mike, not enough, that's for sure.

## ROBERT SABELLA

My favorite article was Gregg Calkins's "Cheap Bourbon and Injun Talk" about his brief career in mineralogy. I am pretty sure I would not have enjoyed an entire career in such a field, but the chance to spend a summer doing so must have been both a great learning experience (that's the teacher in me talking) as well as a lot of fun. Not being a drinker even during my student days, I wonder how I would have handled the required social drinking aspect of the job though.

I assume I am not alone in nodding my head approvingly at Calkins's comment that "In a perfect world I'd still be going to college there, never graduating and always studying something new and interesting. There are a zillion things I'd like to learn more about." Definitely. If I do not take advantage of my still-new retirement and learn some of those things, then I will consider myself a failure in this latter aspect of my life. Great stuff, Gregg.

## MURRAY MOORE

Gregg Calkins's LoC prompts me to share my tale of downhill skiing, an incident from which I escaped unscathed. I was with our then-young sons on a steep but short slope. I can't recall the

sled's proper name. It was designed for one person; on its front were skis and a steering wheel. Near the bottom of the slope was a ramp of snow, built by kids: its purpose, to launch them into the air, briefly, before gravity returned them to the snow-covered ground. I, however, was an adult, with an adult's weight. When the sled left the ramp, the sled and myself did not continue parallel to the slope. Gravity on a Jupiter scale pulled us. The front of the sled dropped and it and I went head-over-heels in a tight circle, slamming to a hard landing, with me sitting upright, sliding, dazed, the few remaining feet to the slope's bottom.

## JOSEPH NICHOLAS

I think I got most out of the two contributions by Gregg Calkins and John Baxter—the Calkins for just being "different": an insight into a section of a life well outside my experience; and the Baxter for the obsessiveness, and to a certain extent the pointlessness, of the activity it chronicles. As he says in his letter later in the issue, the book collection he has built up will eventually be dispersed to other collectors; this of course means its dismemberment, in which case one might ask what point there was in building up such a collection in the first place. After all, the point about such a collection (any collection) is that it should be able to tell us something about the collector, and for those insights it should surely be retained as a whole after the collector's death. This is presumably one of the reasons why his papers were passed on to an archive in Canberra, rather than being dumped into the recycling bin: because it not merely chronicles his life and activities but because it provides an insight into his personality. That his book collection (especially if it is as rare and as valuable as he says) should not receive the same treatment rather baffles me. Unless, perhaps, he considers that all the real insights are contained in the memoir of book collecting to which he refers in his article, and he therefore thinks that the collection itself can offer nothing more.

## JIM CAUGHRAN

I like the Foster cover. I looked at it for two seconds, then rolled on the floor laughing, as they say on the internet.

The next scribble in your inadequate margins is in Eklund's article, and just says "No." But the

"no" is wrong, and I'm remembering the wrong confrontation. I remember walking along in Berkeley, thinking that I might see San Francisco suddenly turn into a fireball. Since I moved to Ann Arbor after the convention, I thought the crisis must have been before the convention. But it must have been the Bay of Pigs invasion. Damn, a mere fifty years throws my memory into chaos. What will it be like in a hundred years or a thousand?

I mentioned the Jim Webbert evisceration to Willis in 1962, since Webbert was also at that convention. Willis had assumed Webbert would disappear, as neofans often do. I think Willis was more cautious in his criticisms on this trip.

Lenny Kaye moves his fanzines from one place in the basement to another. Recently we felt crowded for space, and (gulp!) gave away ten years of fanzines, including some good stuff as well as accumulation. Maybe even (woe is me!) *Trap Doors*. The near-term fanzines don't have the nostalgia factor of the old ones; I would love to be reunited with *Hyphens* of long ago, but the Good Stuff of recent years is less beloved, though it should be appreciated as much. Giving fanzines away is tough, like giving away my lifelong hobby. Damn!

I confess to creating "far-oof exotic ..." in a one-shot at a party at the Busbys, c.1961. Buz thought more of it than I did, and publicized it.

Has Taral Wayne ever been out of his neighborhood? Toronto's ethnic areas have bilingual signs all over. Near us, it's Greek and English; other places there's Italian, Chinese, Portuguese, etc. Toronto is \*full\* of bilingual signs.

Breiding reminds us that locs are never too late. Still, my resolve to loc disappears when the following ish arrives. Nineteen years!

I finished this loc! And in less than nineteen years!

## MIKE DECKINGER

Gary Hubbard's column on his medical travails conjures up parallel memories of a procedure called an angiogram I underwent prior to open heart surgery a few years ago. A thin catheter was inserted in the groin region and then threaded up the arterial highway to the heart muscles. Once the destination was reached, a harmless dye was injected through the heart and its path tracked visually on a monitor. The objective was to determine the soundness of your

pumping system and if any other complications exist. Unlike Gary's torturous ordeal, I found the entire process to be painless and free of any undue stresses on my beleaguered system.

During the 45 minutes it took to perform the test, I followed the path of the invading pink cloud overhead, like the insidious progression of a video game, while chatting with the doctor about his brother, a local and well-regarded writer of fantasy and horror, often with some medical underpinning. If all medical testing was this uneventful, I'd have nothing to worry about.

I've only met Paul Williams a few times, but I'm very sorry to hear of his slow inevitable deterioration. The most recent occasion was perhaps fifteen years ago when he was autographing copies of a new book at a Haight Street bookstore. I bought a copy with his signature, chatted briefly, and then had to depart for other business. Inexcusably, I lost the book shortly after its purchase.

I've never crossed the teasingly named "John Cleland Drive" Chris Nelson cites, and I hope at least some of the residents took proper due diligence action in determining the origin of the name. But I have had the consolation of traveling Arthur Godfrey Road, in Miami, many years ago. At that time it was just another sunny Florida road, with too many cars and not enough beach-front parking. Lonely Planet reports it has the unique distinction of being the best place outside Manhattan to enjoy a good Reuben (and the only place outside Tel Aviv with kosher sushi houses.) Further quoting Lonely Planet: "And just as Jews have shaped Miami Beach, so has the beach shaped its Jews: you can eat *lox y arroz con moros* (salmon with rice and beans) and while the Orthodox men don yarmulkes and the women wear head scarves, they've all got nice tans and drive flashy SUVs."

But who remembers Arthur Godfrey? I always stayed up late to watch his variety shows, and only much later learned he was a vindictive prick to many who tirelessly worked for him. I am going to be one of the multitudes citing your reply to Taral Wayne: "Must be from before your time, or were you dosing during that particular fan history class?" Underlining mine. I can't decide if that's a typo or not. *{No, it's one of those errors not picked up by spellchecker or by me in what passes for the final copyediting. But it does conjure up some un-Taral-like behavior. And*

*you're the only one to notice, or at least comment.}*

## BRAD FOSTER

Hubbard's "The Cracked Eye" was funny in a "hee...hee" nervous laughter, looking over the shoulder kind of way. I'm in my mid-fifties and still moving along okay, but this just goes to show it doesn't take much to cause problems. After reading this the other day I had to climb on the roof to take down the Christmas lights, and realized I was taking a little more time than usual to make absolutely sure I was placing the feet of the ladder safely and securely on the ground. Next thing you know I'll even be looking both ways before I cross the street!

## YVONNE ROUSSEAU

Reading the letter column's responses to Dave Langford's ingenious "South Wales Alphabet," I was amused by Chris Nelson's comparison of the blindworms in 1960s Wales with the two pet pythons kept by Chris's nephew in 21st-century Darwin. These pythons are not allowed to eat disease-ridden running-about mice (whether domestic or of the field) but must be fed instead on "frozen mice from the pet shop." I was instantly reminded of the diet of "old Dan" in Garrison Keillor's song, "My Grandmother's Cat." To qualify for the warning "that your cat should be smaller than you," the grandmother had been routinely feeding her pet on such delicacies as "white rats in chocolate sauce," "guppy fries and goldfish pies; ragout of robin thighs," and "chihuahuas in cheddar cheese; chuck-roast of chickadees." A python could be simiilarly pampered.

I greatly enjoyed John Baxter's "The Wendigo in the Woods," about book hunting with Martin Stone from 1978 until their North American expedition of 2003 which showed them "the desolation inflicted by the internet." The former "world of retail bookselling had ceased to exist, leveled by the internet as completely as loggers cleared a forest."

Here in South Australia's Adelaide only a few treasured secondhand bookstores remain. Formerly reliable charity shops have also closed down or moved to less hospitable premises, reducing the number of their bookshelves and often banishing the hardbacks they used to offer under headings such as "Nostalgia." I have heard

charity-shop staff members tut-tutting over donations of books that they would not want and that therefore nobody else would: they're "old" and unglamorous.

Defining the change in the way we search for things now, John writes that the internet "turned on the lights, dispelled the shadows, blew out the dust, but in the process took away what most attracted me, the thrill of discovery, the hunt." This change in our searching applies not only to books but to the information inside them.

On 15 March 1993, I wrote to Dave Langford about my habit of "remembering where to find again a thing that I have read, and thus to retrieve the evidence underlying the Undetailed Impression which is all that my brain bothers to store for me: I simply know which book, which side of the page and how far down the page and approximately how far through the book the page is."

Dave responded on 20 March 1993 by disclosing the similar habit of Mr. Earbrass, the hero of Edward Gorey's *The Unstrung Harp: Or, Mr. Earbrass Writes a Novel* (1953) "who at one stage is shown desperately searching his library: 'Mr. Earbrass was virtually asleep when several lines of verse passed through his mind and left it hopelessly awake. Here was the perfect epigram for [his novel]: *'A horrid (?) monster has been [something] delay'd By your/their indiff'rence in the dank brown shade Below the garden...*' His mind's eye sees them quoted on the bottom third of a right-hand page in a (possibly) olive-bound book he read at least five years ago. When he does find them, it will be a great nuisance if no clue is given to their authorship."

On 30 March 1993, I wrote back to Dave, agreeing that these thought-processes were uncannily like mine.

These were air-mailed exchanges. Had they been emailed, it might become possible (as digitization advances) to locate them by googling for "Earbrass" or similarly searching the documents on my own computer (except that most of my emails have been lost in computer crashes). Instead, I engaged in an old-fashioned search through my paper files, discovering on the way, in Dave's letter of 12 November 1992, a comment on the circulation in the USA of "'ersatz recycled *Ansibles*' (in Robert Lichtman's graceful phrase)."

Another relevant quote comes from the beginning of my letter of 4 June 1992: "Greetings,

on the 922nd anniversary of the discovery of Roquefort cheese (which I imagine to have been a matter of Thurber-cartoon-types in topees tippy-toeing up to a curiously scented dingle...)."

Today the internet makes it so easy to find such anniversaries that it no longer seems worth while. It is the same kind of discouragement as John's: "I still have my collection and add to it, but not with the same enthusiasm. I was happier with the Wendigo in the dark."

Later, reading John's letter of comment, I was pleased to learn that the Baxter papers are being preserved by the National Film and Sound Archive in Canberra. Here, the internet made it easy to obtain a definition of the "foul matter" among these acquisitions. As Camille Minichino expresses it: "foul matter is material such as early draft manuscripts, galleys, or proofs that have been superseded by advanced galleys or by the bound book itself, and have been returned to the publisher by the printer."

Thus, in the 1940 novel by Michael Innes, *There Came Both Mist and Snow*, Lucy Chigwidden's galleys (draped around her as she presides at the tea table at Belrive Priory) are not yet foul matter, despite their increasingly insanitary condition as she inadvertently dips her fountain pen into the cream jug to correct them while "Periodical grabs had to be made to disengage them from the cream cakes." Their provision is "the result of her present absorption in chapterization. If one cannot quite bring oneself to decide where one's chapters leave off one need not expect paged-up proofs from one's publisher."

## WE ALSO HEARD FROM:

**JAMES BACON, JOHN BURBEE, JACK CALVERT** ("Roy Kettle did a great job of spinning cliches off into other dimensions, and puncturing the politically fatuous while he was at it. And produced a fine sequel to Graham Charnock's 'About Gout,' which I wouldn't have thought possible."), **MELISSA CONWAY** ("Again, many thanks for thinking of Eaton!" I hope other active fanzine publishers reading this will do the same.), **RICHARD DENGROVE** ("I'm wondering whether or not we should do like Paul did and publish our own stuff. We're unlikely to strike it rich like some of his publications did. We're unlikely to become famous. On the other hand, if you have to write, you have to write."), **GORDON EKLUND** ("Don't know if

I've mentioned it but I loved the Baxter book-hunting piece in the last *Trap Door*. Another piece that wouldn't seem out of place in the *New Yorker*. (I suspect they may pay more too.), **KEN FAIG** ("Gary Hubbard's piece on angioplasty (stents) sticks in my mind the best since I am getting to be an old guy with the attendant ailments. For ten years my diabetes was basically asymptomatic (once the sugar was under control), but now I am experiencing tingling in lower legs and hands. Such is life!"), **MARLIN FRENZEL, JOHN HERTZ, TIM MARION, LLOYD PENNEY** ("I guess every field has its king, and Martin Stone seems to be His Majesty. Great essay, Mr. Baxter! I certainly enjoy the hunt myself in any given used bookstore, and I know the insides of more than a few."), **DAVID REDD** ("Obscure reprints can be a win-win situation, and my favorite piece here was indeed gleaned from elsewhere: Gregg Calkins' geological memoirs. Wonderfully evocative and readable. As was John Baxter's irresistible book-hunting expedition. Incidentally, I was struck by the excellence of your three major artists on the intro art for these: Brad Foster's jest inviting us into the issue, then Steve Stiles beautifully in character for "The Book People," and best of all Dan Steffan's frontier snapshots for the Calkins—a terrific package."), **KAT TEMPLETON** and **BRUCE TOWNLEY**.