Issue No. 32, March 2016. Edited and published by Robert Lichtman, 11037 Broadway Terrace, Oakland, CA 94611-1948, USA. Please send trade fanzines and letters of comment to this address (or ***trapdoor@rocketmail.com***). Founding member and Past President[1991]: fwa. This fanzine is available by Editorial Whim for The Usual (letters, contributions both written and artistic, and accepted trades), or $5.00 per issue *(reviewers please note!)*. An "X" or "?" on your mailing label means this may be your last issue.

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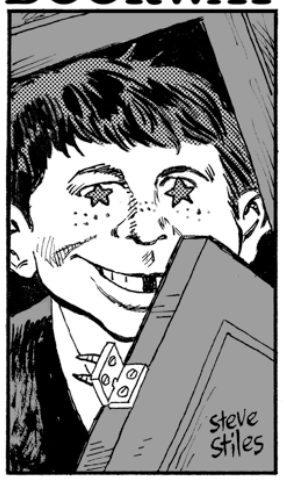
DOORWAY



Why This Issue Is Late

As long-time readers know, *Trap Door*'s schedule has been charitably described as "irregular" – with intervals between issues as little as six months and as long as two years. So I was pretty pleased with myself in January 2015, when I celebrated having published *Trap Door* on a reliable every-December schedule for six straight years. I had some material already on hand for this issue, more was promised, and I was in touch with other possible contributors. As the year progressed, these contributions were arriving more or less on schedule, and the issue filled up. What, then, could go wrong?

In a word, cancer.

This was not totally unforeseen, but it was a shock nevertheless. I'd been aware since 2004 that there was a remote chance it could happen. My then-doctor noticed something in the blood test results for my annual physical that raised a red flag for him. A bone marrow biopsy confirmed his suspicions. I had a relatively innocuous, slow-growing (or never-growing) condition called MGUS ("mug-us"), which stands for – sit down! – "monoclonal gammopathy of undetermined significance."

This meant there was an abnormal protein in my plasma cells, and it's unclear what caused it. They say that both genetic and environmental factors are possibilities, but they don't really know. However, growing up in Los Angeles smog (not to mention the fall-out from above-ground A-bomb tests in Nevada when the wind blew the wrong way) and then living for a decade on the Farm, near chemical processing plants, does raise some questions.

Usually, my doctor told me, this is something which is monitored by periodic blood tests. Most people experience no

symptoms, he said, but one percent per year go on to develop multiple myeloma. Those words were chilling, but I dwelled on the highly favorable odds. Over the next ten years I dutifully took my blood tests and watched as the number of bad cells slowly rose. It doubled in that time, though not in a straight line and not into scary territory. Every time a new set of test results arrived in the mail, Carol and I would hold our breath in anticipation of the latest reading.

In October 2014 the numbers suddenly jumped. They were still below the threshold for full-blown multiple myeloma, but my oncologist had a compelling reason to subject me to a series of tests – including (oh, joy!) a second bone marrow biopsy – to determine what was happening more specifically. And indeed, the tests turned up a lesion on one of my ribs where the aberrant cells had decided to eat away at the bone.

Treatment started in March 2015 with a combination of two drugs that reportedly worked well together. One was last summer's poster child for exorbitantly priced brand-name targeted cancer drugs ($100,000+ a year!), and although the co-payments are minuscule thanks to our excellent health plan, it unfortunately had one unacceptable side effect – a rash and then hives over large parts of my body that quickly became so severe (and one variant potentially life-threatening) that my doctor discontinued it. Otherwise, Mrs. Lincoln, it had been very effective in sending my bad numbers downhill.

After a break for my skin to recover from the rash attacks, I started a totally different drug. I tolerated it well, and went through four cycles of treatment with it. The bad numbers climbed back up again, but only to the level they had been before its October 2014 great leap forward, and they stayed that way through the rest of the year. The most debilitating side effects of that drug were some neuropathy in both feet and intermittent fatigue. I did not lose what's left of my hair, by the way, because the "targeted" chemo I've been getting doesn't affect my normal cells.

But 2015's health news hasn't been all about me. Over the July 4th weekend, Carol began to notice that she was making a lot of typing errors – but only with her left hand. When she next started having some weakness on her left side, she was pretty certain that she'd experienced a mild stroke.

It turned out not to be a stroke, but a brain abscess on her right frontal lobe. This diagnosis gave us a (ahem!) heady mixture of terror and relief. She was operated on almost immediately, and the abscess drained. She was then given steroids, antibiotics and an anti-convulsive medication "just in case." The cause of the abscess, like the cause of my cancer, remains mysterious. After less than a week in the hospital, she was transferred to an excellent rehab facility where she spent nearly a month working with some excellent physical therapists.

I was continuing my chemo appointments twice a week and also visiting her every day. It was really wonderful when she would greet me with yet another demonstration of progress. I especially remember when she regained the grip in her left hand and fingers, the ones with the typos. Her goal was to be able to walk the eighteen steps between our carport and front door. Once she achieved that (several times) on the staircase inside the hospital, she was released. Her many medications came home with her.

But after a couple of days she developed a fever and was ordered back to the hospital, where it was discovered that her white blood cells numbered an astonishing zero. After undergoing many tests to rule out some dire possible causes, her self-diagnosis – shared by her very smart friends – was found to be a side effect from one of her long-term, heavy-duty antibiotics. A few booster shots to her immune system and she was on her way home again at the end of August. Now, aside from using a cane and experiencing some fatigue ("The family that naps together…"), she's pretty much back to her normal self (smart, funny, easily angered and judgmental – she just added).

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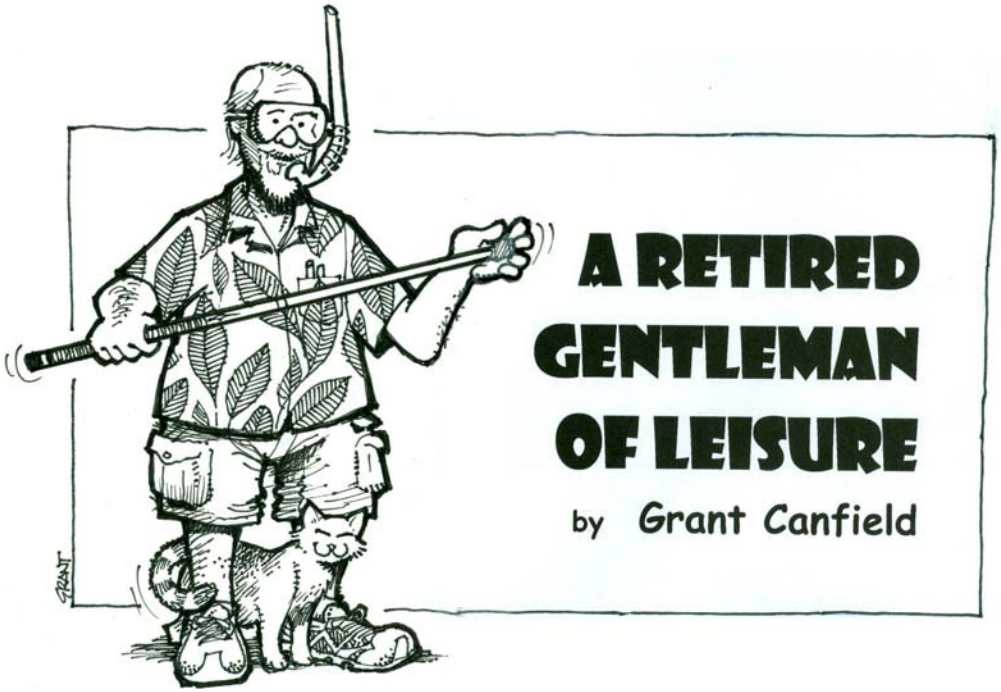


When asked what I do these days, I answer, "I am a Retired Gentleman of Leisure."

I achieved this enviable status through a protracted, painful process known as "retirement," during which I lost my job, my house, lots of money, my relationship with my sister, and a certain amount of self-esteem. It's a dramatic tale of adventure and intrigue, passion and pathos, slapstick and suspense. I'll probably be played by George Clooney when they make the movie.

I enjoyed my career as an architect and was proud of my professional accomplishments, but towards the end the old fire in the belly had burned down to cool embers and intestinal gas. I was ready to move on to the next stage of my life, the RGoL phase. That I was looking forward to it was no secret to my colleagues. As my last day of work drew near, my assistant Simon said to me, "You've been working for so many years. What will you do when you retire?"

I said, "Sleep late. Wear Hawaiian shirts and cargo shorts every day. Sell books on eBay. Play poker, shoot pool and go swimming." It's good to have a plan.

Simon said, "But you wear Hawaiian shirts every day now anyway, and you've been selling stuff on eBay for years."

"See?" I said. "I'm already easing into it."

1 – Last Man Standing in Cat Shit

In the last few years of my career, I wore Hawaiian shirts almost every day. My closet is full of them, some acquired in Hawaii itself. One of my favorites is embroidered across the front with the colorful state fish of Hawaii, giving me the opportunity when I wear it to tell people its name: *humuhumunukunukuapua'a*. That word is just so much fun, I can't even say it without smiling. Go ahead, try it.

As it happened, the last major project of my career was in Hawaii. I was subcontracted to the project architect in Honolulu as the laboratory planner for a new science building at a local community college. I got the gig by a random stroke of luck, and because I was the Last Man Standing.

The random stroke of luck was how the project team came together. The project criteria required that the lead architect must be located in Hawaii, but that some of the subcontracting consultants, from various identified categories, must be from out of state – that is, mainland USA. Among those identified categories were laboratory planners and IT specialists. This was a juicy project, so several Hawaiian architectural and engineering firms were vying for the contract. One such Honolulu architecture firm used a local civil engineering consultant whose office was a branch of one of the largest international design firms in the world …my employer. The civil engineer recommended the architect contact our Phoenix office for IT specialists and the San Francisco, Houston or Chicago offices for lab planners. They signed up an IT guy from Phoenix, and as for the lab planner, well, Last Man Standing…

When I came to this company in 2007, I was charged with building up and running an architectural department, a small studio within a specialized design-build division, that could successfully compete in the Bay Area for projects in the science and technology market sector – laboratories, biopharmaceutical facilities, clean rooms and such. A big reason I took the job was because the Chicago and Houston branches had architects with résumés similar to mine, so I was looking forward to collaborating with and learning from other professionals with heavy chops in labs and high-tech facilities. And I actually did get several opportunities to work with some of those people over the next few years.

Meanwhile, from 2007 to 2010, I built up the San Francisco architectural department. The first person I hired was Simon, thirty years my junior, one of the sharpest and fastest CAD drafters I ever worked with and an intelligent, talented architectural designer. He came to America after graduating in architecture from a Hong Kong university, and had worked for me at another firm. By 2010, my staff had grown to include three more CAD designer/drafters – two architectural graduates from UC Berkeley and one from a university in Argentina – and a documents control clerk. The engineering departments in our San Francisco office had also grown proportionally. By any standard, we had developed into a small but efficient and profitable studio. We were completing successful small projects, steadily improving our position in the market sector, and making money for the corporation.

The corporation. If Mitt Romney was correct – "Corporations are people, my friend" – then the corporation I worked for was a drooling, demented idiot pulling wings off bugs. Just sayin'.

This was a very big corporation, with branches all over the world. Its major growth strategy was to acquire existing successful design companies, buy them out, swallow them whole, and absorb them into its labyrinthine organizational structure like a gigantic virtual amoeba, then reshuffling and reorganizing over and over until the daily default mode for thousands of employees was cross-eyed confusion. Our little San Francisco studio was a small piece of one of those acquisitions, a tiny morsel. At some point, attitudes in upper management shifted regarding the pursuit of work in the laboratory and biotech market sector, which meant design operations in the Chicago, Houston and San Francisco offices all became vulnerable. Like characters in a Gary Larson cartoon, we began to notice targets painted on our backs. Other divisions in the corporation were designing and building airports, skyscrapers, docking facilities, power plants, infrastructures for entire cities, huge projects worldwide. Our lab and biotech group was performing well, but I guess it was chump change compared to those guys.

I have a theory. Within any sufficiently large corporation, I maintain, there must be a proportionally huge pool of sharks, weasels, douchebags, sociopaths and related vermin, mostly lurking in the upper management echelons from which they swoop and pounce like raptors on wounded bunnies. Their mission and their function is to annoy and irritate, frustrate and harass, driving out specific targeted human beings in order to shift the composition of the organization to favor their particular corporate overlords, and, by extension, themselves. The corporation itself, a heartless, soulless organism running on internal currents of pure, selfish greed – and bearing no earthly resemblance to people, dolphins, alien visitors, or sentient entities of any kind – needs a mechanism for disposing of unwanted resources, usually those pesky human beings, in order to maintain its vile homeostasis. I picture it something like the rippling excretory function of a giant slimy amoeba, *The Blob* writ large.

At any rate, heads flew. Or were excreted. The Chicago office was shut down shortly before Christmas, throwing dozens of architects, engineers, designers and drafters out in the snow. An architect in the Houston office, having been assured that he needn't worry, *his* job was absolutely secure, bought a new house. Less than a month after close of escrow, he was laid off with the whole Houston design group. Unrealistic marketing constraints and spurious employment practices were applied against us, but with our backlog of work, our little San Francisco studio managed to hang on for a while by our fingernails. I advised my staff to start looking for positions elsewhere, if they hadn't already, as signs were clear that the axe was about to fall for all of us. Eventually, one of them returned to graduate school, and the rest found other, better jobs.

One of those backlog projects that kept us hanging on – for a while I thought it might be the last significant project of my career – was fascinating in its own way. Our client, a giant chemical products corporation, was the manufacturer of a leading brand of kitty litter, quality control procedures for which required them to maintain a "cattery," a cat holding facility and laboratory in rural Contra Costa County. It accommodated three cat colony rooms, each housing up to twenty cats per colony, plus a small office, restroom, employee lockers and a utility area, all clustered around a central laboratory. Each colony room connected to an outdoor caged area of similar size. Cats living in a colony were confined to those two large spaces, the colony room and the outdoor cage, but they didn't have a bad life. They were well treated, well fed, and under the constant observation and care of trained veterinarians and animal care technicians. The colony rooms featured scratching poles, small ramps to climb on, random stacks of carpeted boxes forming individual sleeping cubes, multiple food dishes, and – most importantly – lots of litter boxes.

Every day, the laboratory employees would coax all the cats in each colony into the outdoor caged area, a process one could legitimately call "herding cats," then close the connecting door. They cleaned the walls and floor (because sometimes kitty's aim is a bit off), refilled food dishes, and – most importantly – removed the litter boxes and replaced them with fresh ones. The cats were herded back inside, and the process was repeated for each of the three colonies. Every day, as many as sixty cats dutifully deposited their fecal tributes in the litter boxes. The contents of each day's litter boxes were filtered, sorted, tested, catalogued and stored – a process called "harvesting." I didn't have to ask, "Harvesting what?" After testing and other lab procedures, the harvest material was packaged, sealed and shipped to a different facility, where it was processed into pellets used in QC testing of the kitty litter product itself. The client called the place a "feline holding facility and laboratory," usually shortened to "cat lab" when we discussed the project. Privately, I thought of it as the "cat shit project."

Our client had identified and was considering a potential new site for the cat lab, which is where I came in. My team's job was to study and report on the feasibility of converting a portion of an existing large horse barn and stables, *way* out in the country past Livermore, into a new cat lab facility, with the same functional requirements as the existing one. It turned out to be a fun project to work on, mostly because we all enjoyed getting out in the open country – to a horse ranch, no less. "Wear boots or solid shoes out there," I wisely advised my crew. "No open-toed sandals."

The horse rancher was a nice guy willing

to explore the possibilities, thinking he might get some rent money from a few empty, unused stalls. He didn't need it, though; he and his family were quite comfortable. His house, which he had built with his own hands, was gorgeous and impressive, like something from a classy country living magazine. The whole ranch, lovingly maintained, was populated by a flock of peafowl, several goats, and a small herd of miniature horses (*not* Shetland ponies), who lived in stables adjacent to the proposed cat lab site.

The project turned out to be unfeasible due to remoteness of the site, remodel costs, utility and infrastructure problems, access requirements and other factors, including that it was a bat-shit…uh, *cat*-shit crazy idea in the first place. But damn, while we were working on the project, it was *fun*. Telling my poker buddies about it, I said, "I'll be proud and honored if this is how my architectural design career ends – converting a horse shit generating plant into a cat shit processing facility."

Meanwhile, though, the Honolulu architectural firm had asked my giant international design firm to provide an architect with mad lab chops to serve as a laboratory planning consultant on the Hawaii project. By then, the Chicago office was gone. The Houston office was gone. All those architects who had similar lab portfolios to mine were gone. I was the only architect left in the company that fit the criteria. Now, I know my worth. I'm pretty good, I know my stuff, and I never had a dissatisfied client. But in this case, I was also lucky enough to be…the Last Man Standing.

I got the gig and our team won the contract, which was a big reason the San Francisco studio survived two years longer than it otherwise would have. So the last significant project of my career, instead of being the cat shit project, was the Hawaii project, for which I got to take five trips to Oahu from 2009 through 2011, on an expense account. One of my engineering colleagues noted, "After all those years in architecture, Grant, it looks like you finally got a sweet perk!" And just in time, I thought.

Each trip was for five days of work, but I made sure I was in Hawaii the weekends before and after as well, when I could just be a tourist. The expense account covered air fare, hotel, meals and car rental during the week, when I was working on the project, but my tourist time was on my own dime. I bought a lot of shirts and a few boardshorts. I learned to say *aloha* and *mahalo* without feeling overly self-conscious. I took guided tours and a helicopter flight, spent time at the beach, and ate in nice restaurants.

And every trip, I visited Pearl Harbor, including the U.S.S. *Arizona* Memorial, the battleship U.S.S. *Missouri*, and the Pacific Aviation Museum on Ford Island, housed in a group of buildings that used to be the hangars where my dad served as an aviation metalsmith in the Navy in World War II, working on the Grumman F4F Wildcats, Douglas SBD Dauntlesses, Vought F4U Corsairs and other fighters and dive bombers that flew from the carrier decks of the Pacific fleet, and the Consolidated PBY Catalina flying boats that flew rescue and reconnaissance missions. The Carrier Aircraft Services Unit (CASU) at Pearl Harbor NAS was his duty station from 1940 to 1945. And yes, he was there on December 7, 1941.

That's why Pearl Harbor holds a special place in my heart.

The first time I visited the *Arizona* Memorial, in late November 2009, a light morning mist sweetened the air and a bright double rainbow framed the scene as the visitor launch pulled up to the dock. I read every name on the wall of the memorial, then leaned on the railing, watching drops of oil weeping up slowly from the submerged sunken battleship, forming swirling iridescent streaks on the surface – the "black tears of the *Arizona*." If you or any American can visit that memorial, or others like it throughout the nation, without tears welling up in your eyes or a lump forming in your throat as you honor those who made the ultimate sacrifice for our country in times of war, I believe you may be a soulless flesh-eating zombie lizard. If you vote in Congress not to provide funding to care for the health and welfare of our nation's service veterans after they come home, you may be even worse.

In my contract and work plan for the Hawaii project, I required one assistant to accompany me on each trip after the first one, to take meeting notes and draw sketches on CAD while I talked everything through with the project stakeholders, as we all worked the project together. Simon went twice, once bringing his wife along, leaving the kids with their grandmother. My other top assistant, Jo-Wen, got to go the other two times, with her boyfriend joining her at the end of the work week. For his birthday, she treated him (and herself) to a plane ride over Oahu, ending with an exciting tandem parachute jump, each of them harnessed to a professional jumper. She wore a camera on her helmet, and they later shared the video online. All the way down, she can be heard shrieking in delight, "Oh my God! Oh my God! Oh my God!"

Jo-Wen and most of the rest of my staff moved on to greener pastures. Simon and I were the last architects left in our studio. Simon found a niche elsewhere within the same company, inheriting the Hawaii project as it went through various revisions and reissues in the next few years, as money and scope were trimmed from the program. I understand it's now going through yet another round of budget-driven revisions, with a chance that some version of it may be funded for construction in 2016, four years after we completed the original design and construction documents.

As for me, I was given my termination notice in June of 2012. July 31 was supposed to have been my last official day as an employee of the giant corporation with a heart of Ice-9, but a human being in the Personnel Department took it upon herself to add one more day, to August 1, so I would be covered for one additional full month under the company's health insurance plan. I believe there may actually have been many human beings laboring away within the giant corporation, in addition to the weasels, douchebags, etc. I wish them all well. They sail in treacherous waters.

Though I had planned to work only another year or so anyway, I wasn't happy being laid off for the first time in my career of 42+ years. It struck me as an ignominious way to go out. My professional pride was scratched up a bit. An engineer in the company who was about my age advised me to accept the inevitable. "When the weasel nips you in the butt," he said, "you know it's time to move on."

Simon, Jo-Wen and some other current and former colleagues threw a small retirement luncheon for me at a downtown restaurant on July 17, the last day when my body was actually in the office. I was quite touched. In the card Jo-Wen gave me, she wrote, "It's about time! You are honestly the fairest, nicest, smartest, and most organized boss any employee can ask for…not to mention most grammatically correct!"

Throughout my career, I enjoyed mentoring younger architects. One of my protégés once told me, "I learned more working for you for three years than I did in six years of college." I used to joke that mentoring was a mechanism by which an older guy got credit for getting someone younger to do his work for him. But I would bet I got at least as much out of those relationships as they did. I'll probably miss that aspect of the profession more than any other.

I had been steadily employed since moving to California in 1970, but when I got laid

off, I qualified for – and gratefully accepted – State Unemployment Compensation, which lasted for one year. Meanwhile, I kept looking for a job, but really, who wants to hire a 66-year-old guy who plans to retire within a year anyway? (Answer: Nobody.) I did manage to land a few short, temporary gigs as a laboratory planning consultant on specific projects, working as an independent contractor for a San Francisco architecture firm. After a year of that, in mid-2013 my Unemployment eligibility expired, so I decided the hell with this, I'm fucking retired.

Since then, my income has been Social Security benefits and distributions from my retirement accounts – IRAs, 401(k) and cash savings built up during my productive working years. Of course, I've also been on Medicare for several years.

So, in mid-2012 – a Presidential election year notable for vile, vicious right-wing rhetoric – I found myself out of work at age 66, on Unemployment Compensation, receiving Social Security benefits, and insured by Medicare with AARP supplemental coverage. To rabid conservatives in election year frenzy, that was an entitlement trifecta. Though I had worked hard for half a century, earning my own way through life and playing by all the rules of American law, society and culture, in their worldview I was now a loser, a lazy moocher, a bum, a taker, only interested in "free stuff," and someone unwilling to take responsibility for his own life! The earned benefit programs I now counted on for my very survival were vilified as "entitlements," a word always more snarled than spoken, with scorn dripping off it like grease from a fatburger. In mid-2012, that's exactly the brand of crap spewing from the orifices of bilious, self-righteous conservative politicians… every… damn… day.

2 – Selling Short and Trailer Trashing

By early 2012, I knew my job would soon be ending. Without that steady income, I wondered if I'd still be able to afford my condominium townhouse in Sausalito, my home since April 2001.

When I bought it, I was 55 years old. I made the down payment with money inherited from my dad, who had passed away the year before. My dad and I were very close. His death hit me hard. When I bought the townhouse, using the inheritance money, it was the first – and, as it happened, only – piece of real estate I ever owned, so my investment in the property was not just financial but also somewhat emotional. At any rate, without that inheritance, I'd probably have been a renter for the rest of my life. Despite being an architect, a "professional," I would never have been able to save enough for a down payment. The most intense and productive years of my career were the 1980s, '90s and 20-oughts, that period of American history when the game was being steadily rigged against working stiffs in favor of greedy, cynical plutocrats. That's how it appeared to me, anyway, whenever I pondered why I could never seem to get ahead.

Anyway, by 2012 it was time to sell out and move on. Though I still loved the townhouse itself – an ideal personal oasis tailored to my needs and comfort – the neighborhood was not so great. Raccoons, possums and skunks wandering in from the nearby woods. Loud, unruly teenagers arguing in the streets at odd hours. Unemployed drunks shouting and revving car engines at two in the morning. Break-ins, burglaries, physical assaults, the occasional gunshot in the night. If it wasn't the roughest neighborhood in Marin County, it was a contender. While serving on the Board of Directors of the Home Owners Association, I often witnessed embarrassing examples of the rancor, racial hatred, enmity and conflict that can fester among neighbors in a condominium community, until I just wanted to get the hell away from there. And did I mention the skunks?

I consulted with my pal Dave, a poker buddy for over twenty-five years and one of my closest friends. He had been my real estate agent when I bought the townhouse in 2001. At that time, attempting to dampen my first-time buyer's anxiety, he had said cheerfully, "Don't worry, Grant. Nobody ever went broke investing in Marin County real estate."

Eleven years later, uncertain as to how and where I'd be able to live in retirement, I asked him what I could get if I sold out. After checking market conditions, he got back to me. "I'm afraid you're under water," he said, his voice on the phone expressing such anguish that for a moment I was more concerned about his state of mind than my own predicament.

I had heard the phrase before, of course, but this was the first time I had heard it applied to *me* without reference to a swimming pool or some other large body of actual, you know, *water*. When I refinanced in 2009, the property had been appraised at much more than I originally paid, so I thought I had been building equity, a poster boy for responsible American homeowners who faithfully pay their mortgages, trust the system, and play by the rules. I had been counting on that equity for my retirement, but now, it turned out that not only had I *no* equity, I actually had *negative* equity. I owed more money than the place was now worth. My major asset had become my biggest liability. Under water. Glug, glug.

Bad timing. I was facing retirement just as home values were nose-diving in the wake of the subprime mortgage crisis. My monthly housing nut – mortgage payments, property taxes, HOA fees, insurance, utilities and maintenance – was greater than the total benefit amount I'd receive from Social Security. If I stayed in the townhouse, I'd immediately have to start drawing down on my retirement accounts for food, gas, cable TV, medicine, books and other basic life stuff.

The value of the townhouse would surely rise again, Dave advised, but how long it would take and how high it might go were matters of pure speculation. Maybe the bank would let me refinance at a lower rate, or possibly I could qualify for Federal HARP refinancing assistance. "So," I summarized, "it appears my fate is in the hands of magic real estate fairies, or I can just trust the government or a bank. Swell." A queasy spasm rumbled through my bowels.

Dave helped me to assess my assets, run some budgets, and explore various fiscal scenarios. I also consulted at length with the investment counselor who manages my retirement accounts. I had a lot to think about. I didn't know where I was going to live when I retired, but I had a pretty good idea of how much money I'd have and how long I could make it last. It was clear I wouldn't be getting a dime out of the house. I made the decision to sell it short, to get out from under the mortgage as soon as possible. I had never defaulted on a loan before in my life, so this decision rather bruised my self-esteem. And then "selling short," or the "short sale," turned out to be a humiliating, demeaning process designed by demons with the apparent intent of sucking away any last shreds of my dignity and self-respect.

Meanwhile, Dave was also the agent for our mutual friend Ed, who was selling his house in San Rafael. And Dave was dealing with tough personal issues of his own at the time. His way of dealing with stress was to

self-administer liberal dosages of Chardonnay and Vicodin. He was often stressed out to the point of inebriated incoherency. He took to calling me on the phone almost every night, fretting over and over about tiny details of my proposed short sale. He'd go over every aspect six or seven times in the call, despite me telling him repeatedly, "Dave, I get it. I got it the first time you told me, and I got it each of the five other times you've gone over it tonight. Let's move on. Please. I have to pee."

I felt guilty when I got irritated with him because I knew he was stressed, but really, a phone conversation that would last four to eight minutes with any other person on Earth would run at least forty, forty-five minutes with Dave, usually only terminating when I played the need-to-pee card. One night he snapped. "I can't do this anymore," he wailed. "This is too much pressure. I'm trying to handle Ed's sale, too, and it's all too much! I can't be your agent. I'm sorry to leave you stranded, but I just can't do it anymore."

I was taken aback, but strangely relieved. "Well, if you can't help me yourself," I asked, "can you refer me to someone who can?"

Luckily, he could. He put me in contact with Katie, an agent whose greater experience with short sales proved invaluable, and with Steve, a real estate lawyer who outlined the fiscal liability and tax implications. Would the bank come after me for the default amount of the loan? Could the government consider it as taxable income? Federal and State laws to protect homeowners from those perils in a short sale were due to expire on December 31, 2012. There was no guarantee they would be extended [they eventually were] so in order to avoid those potentially expensive pitfalls, the end of the year became my default deadline for completing the sale. Steve advised that in all likelihood the bank could not attack my protected accounts – IRAs and 401(k) – but my cash accounts might be in jeopardy. If I had been considering spending or otherwise disposing of those accounts, he suggested, now might be the time.

I wrote a somewhat depressed letter to my brother and sister – same letter sent to two addresses in Illinois – bringing them up to date on the status of my job (soon to end, as I rightly suspected), uncertainty about where I would live in retirement, the frustrations of trying to sell short, and a review of my financial status (shaky). Retirement is one of those life transitions where you look back on your life, reflect on your missteps, disappointments and failures, and then beat yourself up about it at every opportunity.

A few days later, I was enjoying dinner and an evening playing Mexican Train in Sausalito with my pal Art, his sharp and gracious wife Yvonne, and their friends Bernie and Mel, transplants from Illinois, as am I. Art is an electrical engineer a few years my senior. When we worked together, our daily conversations were more often about history, science, art, birds, boats, books, whatever – some arcane bit of information currently tickling his curiosity – than about the project at hand. We stayed friends after our professional paths diverged. Over dinner and dominoes, the subject of where I might live in retirement came up. I said I had looked at homes in retirement communities in Springfield and Decatur, Illinois, and had priced options for Reno, Nevada, and Portland, Oregon, all of which had their various appeals, but… "I've lived in the Bay Area for two-thirds of my life," I said. "I consider myself a Californian. What I'd really like to do is stay in Marin County for the rest of my life, in something approaching comfort and dignity, but I don't see how I could ever afford it."

Bernie and Mel exchanged a look. Then Bernie said, "Have you ever considered the advantages of mobile home living?"

"You mean like a trailer park?" I asked, visions of my grandmother's dismal penultimate residence flooding my memories.

"We call them 'mobile homes' or 'manufactured homes,'" Mel explained. "We never say 'trailers.'" She said two years ago they had faced a conundrum similar to mine – what to do and where to go in retirement. They had sold their house and bought a "double-wide" in a seniors-only mobile home park in Novato. Sympathetic to my plight, they invited me to visit them and see for myself. Bernie said, "I think you'll be surprised," and then, as usual, he mercilessly trounced all of us at Mexican Train.

When I visited Mel and Bernie's place a few days later, I was…surprised, as he had promised. I learned that a double-wide manufactured home is nominally 24 feet wide by up to 60 feet long – that's 1,440 square feet, more floor area than my townhouse. The dimensions are based on the largest size trailer allowed on public roads and highways, 12 feet by 60 feet. Individual modular housing units are manufactured in a factory, then hauled to the jobsite where two units are joined together along the "marriage line" to form a "double-wide," which is anchored in place. Porches and steps, carports and storage sheds, base skirting and earthquake bracing, decks, patios, landscaping and gardens are added at the owner's whim. Residents own the homes themselves, but pay monthly rent for the land they sit on, plus metered utilities. Bernie and Mel's place was tastefully finished and furnished, with a new kitchen, hardwood floors and carpeted areas. The ceiling was only eight feet high, but otherwise it was like being inside a nice regular house. And they had access to a park clubhouse with a swimming pool and a pool table. "Wow," I said. "I could live like this." I decided to look into this new option.

I sent a second letter to my brother and sister, telling them not to worry about me and apologizing for the whiney tone of my previous letter. I subsequently spoke on the phone with my brother and his wife. They told me that, no matter what else happened, even if I lost everything, I'd always be welcome to come back to Springfield and live with them. I was touched by their generosity and display of family love and loyalty, but I vowed never to embrace the "live in my brother's basement" retirement option.

I never heard from my sister. No response to either letter, or to phone calls. *[Sound of crickets.]* I didn't yet know it, but I had somehow landed on her shit list, in indelible ink.

As my career was drawing to an end, as the short sale process was flaying my nerves, as my retirement location was still indeterminate, the world at large scarcely gave a shit. It was an election year. The rhetoric of conservative political debate reached a level of hysterical bombast seldom achieved by rational human beings. Putting it another way, it seemed to me like the right wing had gone cat-shit crazy.

I participated in the national political process in the manner of many modern Americans, namely by sharing snarky political memes on Facebook. If it was anti-Republican, anti-conservative, pro-Democrat, liberal or progressive, unions vs. corporations, science vs. superstition, reality vs. idiocy – and funny – I probably posted it on my FB page. I also contributed, when I could, to Democratic Party candidates and campaigns. Yes, I am a liberal, and sometimes I can be a dick about it; bite me. My sister hasn't spoken to me, or even acknowledged my existence, for three years and counting, reportedly due to something I posted that was offensive to her and/or her husband. Ah, well. –*sigh*– Family…

By the way, at no time was "live in my *sister's* basement" ever a retirement option. Her husband's sociopolitical stance is about as far from mine as possible. The thought of hearing "liberals just want free stuff," and "your boy in the White House," and "I'm not a racist, but…" every day is, well, unthinkable. I'd pop like fifteen inches of bubble wrap.

Meanwhile, Katie and I were still trying to get the bank that held my mortgage to agree to a short sale. After a virtual obstacle course of procedural hoops, we eventually got permission, Katie having convinced them that something is better than nothing. But first I had to prove my financial distress to the bank's satisfaction, including several steps that amounted to documented groveling. Moreover, I was required to submit several years of federal and state tax returns, revealing more about my finances than Mitt Romney was willing to do to be President.

While we were awaiting the bank's decision and jumping through hoops, I faced another daunting task. "You have to get this place ready for showing," Katie said. "We have to stage it for agents and buyers."

Looking around my living room, I knew what she meant. Although I planned to continue living there during the sale period, I needed to move out as much of my personal stuff as possible. In my case, "personal stuff" mostly meant "books." Except for the bathrooms and kitchen, every wall of every room of my house – including the garage – was covered with floor-to-ceiling bookshelves. With all of those books and shelves out of there, every room would seem at least a foot or two wider in both directions.

I rented a 10' x 15' storage locker in Sausalito, about a mile from the townhouse, and started buying boxes, mostly the size of banker's boxes, from storage companies. When I wasn't at work or performing short sale documentation tasks Katie assigned me, I spent every spare moment buying boxes, folding boxes, filling boxes with books, loading boxes into my car, and hauling boxes to the storage locker. I could fit about thirteen book boxes per carload, or the equivalent volume in comic book boxes and empty bookshelves. Boxes were my life.

It took weeks to accomplish, but I loaded the storage locker with over four hundred boxes containing thousands of books, pulps, digests, magazines, fanzines and comics; hundreds of CDs, DVDs, action figures, plastic figurines and little toys; several saucy pirate girl statues; and dozens of empty wood bookshelves, many of which had been custom-built to fit particular spaces in my house. When I looked into the fully loaded storage locker, I flashed on that final gigantic warehouse scene in *Raiders of the Lost Ark*, stacked crates stretching seemingly into infinity.

I owned more than a thousand laserdiscs, too, shelved in the garage like a wall of LPs. Thanks to DVDs and Blu-Rays, laserdiscs had become an obsolete technology. Many of mine were from the collection of my friend Jerry, who died in 1986. I had that emotional attachment to them, as well as a collector's natural reluctance to get rid of anything, but it was time to give them up. I had no room for them. I tried to sell them; no takers. I tried to give them away. I contacted four different charities, offering them for free if they would just come and pick them up. Nobody was interested. In the end, running out of time, I set aside one boxful to keep for myself – the collector in me insisting – and hauled the rest of them to the Marin County Recycle Center. I paid $25 to throw the whole collection into a concrete pit, one by one, watching them get crushed and mangled and pushed into piles of rubbish by big front end loaders. (Somewhere, sometime, a laserdisc collector will read these words, make a little whimpering sound, and faint dead away.)

I sold off some of my furniture. All that was left in my house was the minimum I needed to live there – a bed and dresser, a few clothes in the closet; my desk and computer in the office; TV, couch, chair and dining room set; some pots and pans, a few dishes and glasses, minimum cookware; toothbrush, shampoo and towels in one bathroom. Everything else was out. After a thorough housecleaning, it was ready to show just as the bank authorized us to proceed with the short sale. Katie listed the property in late May 2012, and we scheduled an opening for agents. She added a few flowers and we put a hot pot of coffee on the counter. I looked around and said, "Damn. This place looks *good*." I kind of wanted to live there myself…but of course I'd have to add bookshelves.

The real estate agents liked it. Many potential buyers came by to see the place through the summer and fall. Katie or a buyer's agent would call me and schedule a time for a viewing, and most of the time I'd just leave and let the folks look around on their own. It was sort of like living in a motel, with the next customer waiting to get in while I'm still packing my suitcase.

There were interested buyers, but they all seemed to have problems with their own banks, or were disqualified for one reason or another. One potential buyer was a nice young woman with a good job, but this would be her first real estate purchase. The transaction went all the way to the end, with the bank finally rejecting her loan application on the very…last…day, having wasted the maximum time possible for all participants. I was extremely pissed at this bank, partly because it's also been my own bank since I came to California. I won't reveal their corporate name, but I remember muttering, "Fuck you, fuck your stagecoach, and fuck your whole fucking team of horses."

I hosted a couple of Tuesday Night Poker games during the period the house was for sale. I've been playing poker with the same gang for over a quarter of a century. We currently have eight regulars who play every week if they can, and three alternates who are generally available to sit in when a regular is out. Hosting duties rotate among the regulars, with the host providing dinner for the whole group. When I was working for a living, I could occasionally get away with ordering out for Chinese food, but generally the host is expected actually to cook the meal. Most of these folks have mad kitchen skills, so Tuesday night dinners have become legendary, easily the best meal most of us will eat the entire week. Every eight weeks or so, I know I'll have to cook dinner for eight ravenous fiends, each of them a character in his or her own right. I usually serve fresh fish – halibut, salmon, cod, swordfish, whatever looks good – baked *en papillote* with an array of steamed or sautéed vegetables. But I also make a mean meatloaf that's very popular.

After I had hauled all the books and bookshelves out, my turn to host TNP came up. Dave, my pal and former real estate agent, had been a regular in the past, but he was there that night as an alternate. He said, "This place looks great! I remember now why we bought it in the first place." Yeah, I thought, noticing the agent-speak "we," but *we* bought it with *my* money.

Peter, a wicked good blues musician and former graphic artist, said, "I don't know. This looks kind of creepy to me, not a bookshelf in sight. Are you really our pal Grant or is there an alien pod around here somewhere?"

"Without all that insulation from the books," Tim said, "have your energy costs gone up?"

Ed said, "This place is so much bigger without bookshelves, I think I hear an echo."

Meanwhile, I had been looking into the mobile home option. I contacted an agent in the same park where Bernie and Mel lived, and started visiting available units. They all had problems, but I was optimistic that I'd find something soon. I was in no hurry, because I was still living in the townhouse, hoping for a buyer. And frankly, because they are often the final residence of many elderly folks, there's a lot of turnover, as it were, in the mobile home market.

In the beginning, I was a bit concerned about the mobile home thing. As an architect who had spent his entire adult life immersed in the design and construction of hard, solid buildings on concrete foundations, I was apprehensive at the thought of living in a mobile home – which as a class has a certain reputation, deserved or not, for flimsiness. But I got over it as I came to realize that the mobile home concept may have made continuing to live in California both affordable and viable. Hot damn.

One Tuesday evening, over a dinner of chicken adobo at Gary's, I told the TNP group about the mobile home option. Over the past few weeks, there had been some anxiety in the game over the possibility of losing me to Oregon or Illinois. Not only would they lose my weekly generous contributions to the poker pot, but I was also the best chip stacker, counter and divider in the group, an admired talent that Ellen, for one, thought bordered on a super power. Chip Stacker Man. The Chipster. Doctor Chips. Or I could move to upstate New York and be The Buffalo Chip.

"It looks like I've found a way to stay in Marin County after all," I said. "I've been looking into buying a double-wide mobile home in a seniors-only retirement park in Novato."

Ed jerked back in his chair and said, "Sonofabitch! I'm doing the exact same thing." We compared notes as the rest of the poker group chimed in with helpful comments.

"Does this mean you guys will officially be trailer trash?" Peter asked. "Do you have to get a license for that?"

"Be sure to find out how many murders and meth labs there were in whatever trailer you buy," Mike advised. "They're probably more valuable the more murders they've had."

"But the fewer meth labs, the better," Ellen said. "They tend to make a trailer a bit stinky."

Larry said, "A dog with an infected ear makes an attractive mobile home accessory, I've heard."

Gary mused, "Those trailer park places are like giant magnets for lightning and tornadoes, aren't they?"

"Pretty much any natural disaster," Dee agreed.

Ed and I both wound up buying mobile homes in the same park, not Bernie and Mel's but another seniors-only retirement park in Novato. We both used the same agent, and we both had similar space requirements – we each needed a poker room, for instance – and we both found places suited to our individual needs. And as it happened, we both closed escrow on our places the very same day, June 22, 2012. That same week, I was given my termination notice at work.

Ed had sold his house in San Rafael, so he had to move into his new place quickly. Without a buyer for my short sale, I was still living in my Sausalito townhouse, so I had time to get my new place ready. It needed a lot of work. Over the next ten weeks, I had the following work done, dutifully dishing out dollars in depressing dosages:

Repaired a portion of the roof structure, taking a 6" sag out of the ceiling, then replacing the roofing and insulation; maximized the number of supports under the carriage, in the crawlspace where the trailer axles live, replacing all the pads, and adding seismic bracing, thermal protection and rodent proofing at the whole underside of the carriage; trimmed all the overgrown landscaping, cleaned and refinished the redwood deck, and replaced the deteriorated landscape irrigation system and controls; rebuilt the entry stairs, wide enough to accommodate delivery of new appliances, and replaced flimsy porch railings with sturdy new aluminum ones; added a new platform, stair and railing at the back door; replaced all existing corroded aluminum single-pane windows and a sliding glass door with new vinyl double-pane thermal insulated units; installed designer window shades throughout; added wood flooring in the entry hall and living/dining room; replaced the low, pink, ladylike water closet in each of the two bathrooms with a new manly quick-flush Toto, high and white, upon which it is a genuine pleasure to take a dump; removed virtually all existing light fixtures, replacing mainly with new track lights with low-wattage lamps; replaced the washer, dryer, refrigerator, oven, range exhaust fan and microwave, keeping only the existing dishwasher; inspected the electrical service, furnace and water heater, making proper adjustments to all strapping and connections; had all the ductwork cleaned, and replaced the dryer vent duct; and painted the entire interior of the place – all walls, ceilings and interior doors.

Whew. Steve the lawyer's advice – that now might be a good time to spend any cash reserves – had been heeded, and then some. After buying the double-wide and then doing all that work, having too much cash on hand would never again be a problem in my life. I was out on a limb, out of work, under water, a lazy taker wanting free stuff, unwilling to take responsibility for my own life, relying on *[sneer]* "entitlements," and more at risk than I'd been in years. I felt great. Losing my job, selling short and moving into my new place was turning out to be an exhilarating experience.

I wanted to do a few more projects in the new place – remodel the kitchen and bathrooms, replace the storage shed, add a workstation in the office – but it appeared I was running out of time. We had a serious buyer for the short sale, with everything proceeding smoothly. The transaction was almost complete, and an actual turnover date had been set, when the new owner would take possession: September 20. I allowed a week or so for slack. On September 10, the movers came, emptied out the Sausalito townhouse and moved everything up to my new Novato mobile home.

Remember that nice young lady I told you about earlier, who was buying her first home? And the bank pulled her loan approval on the very last day, wasting everyone's time the maximum possible amount? And I expressed a few thoughtful, sincere observations regarding their corporate stagecoach logo? Remember that? Well, insert that story here. And fuck those horses' asses again.

The townhouse was empty now, and I was living twenty miles north in Novato, but the short sale process continued. Another buyer, a couple, backed out when they discovered the neighborhood was racially mixed and culturally diverse. They wanted something a bit more…vanilla, I guess. A third buyer was disqualified by his own bank due to "irregularities" in his credit history. The fourth buyer backed out at the last minute for some goddamn reason, but by now I barely listened when Katie told me about these aborted transactions. Finally, fifth time was a charm. The fifth buyer was real. On December 10, I turned over my keys to Katie to pass on to the new owner. "Congratulations," she said as we hugged. "You are no longer the owner of [the townhouse address]." The relief I felt was immediate and immense, as if the burdens of Atlas had been lifted from my shoulders. I may have shrugged.

After moving to Novato, I still had to contend with that *Raiders of the Lost Ark* storage locker. It took several weeks to move, install and anchor my existing bookshelves. I designed new bookshelf units to infill various wall assemblies throughout the new place, and had them built and delivered by an unfinished furniture retailer in Berkeley who has made dozens of custom bookshelves for me since 1996, for my last three Bay Area residences. With bookshelves in place and properly anchored, I started moving the books, comics and magazines. Over four hundred boxes, thirteen boxes per carload, forty miles round trip per carload, and one large bottle of Bayer Back & Body later, the storage locker was empty. My last ties to Sausalito were gone. I still had many books to arrange on bookshelves, of course, but that's always been an ongoing theme of my life.

So, I now live in my mobile home in Novato, in a retirement community surrounded by other geezers, amongst whom I'm almost a kid. I am officially trailer trash. There were only the mandated minimum number of murders in my unit and no meth labs, possibly a few dogs with infected ears. And I now fret constantly about tornadoes, lightning, earthquakes, floods, firestorms, rampaging giant mutant lizards and all other natural disasters, for which I now certainly must be a magnet.

I sleep late. I wear Hawaiian shirts and cargo shorts almost every day. I sell books on eBay, play poker, shoot pool, and sometimes go swimming. That's what it's like to be a Retired Gentleman of Leisure, just following The Plan.

3 – The Eulogy

On a bright Sunday afternoon in September 2014, wearing my *humuhumunukunukuapua'a* shirt, I stood in front of over a hundred people gathered in the clubhouse ballroom at the mobile home retirement park where I live. I stepped up to the microphone and said, "Hello. Thank you for coming here today for this celebration of the life of David _____. I'm Grant Canfield. I've lived here in this park for two years, since I retired. Dave was my friend for over twenty-five years. We started as poker buddies and we later shot a lot of pool together. I enjoyed many dinners at his table, and he at mine. Over the years he became one of my closest friends.

"Dave was also my real estate agent when I bought my house in Sausalito in 2001. When I retired two years ago, he and his colleague Katie _____ helped me sell that place. At the same time, he was also helping our mutual friend Ed _____ sell his house in San Rafael. Dave hooked both Ed and me up with Fred _____, who helped both of us find and buy our places here in this park in the summer of 2012. Ed, Katie and Fred are all here today. *[Nodding to them.]*

"When Ed and I moved in here, it soon became obvious to Dave that we were enjoying our new lives as retired gentlemen of leisure here in this park. Whenever he visited me, we'd shoot pool in the billiard room downstairs from here *[pointing to the floor]*. Like everyone, he admired the gorgeous views *[pointing to the windows]* and beautiful landscaping. He could see I was relaxed and enjoying my retirement. He'd keep asking me, 'But really, are you happy there? Do you really like it?'

"I'd say, 'Dave, look around. What's not to like?' Over the last two years, he came to the realization that retiring to a place in this park was exactly what he wanted to do, too… and he almost made it. He had sold his home in San Anselmo and was in escrow for a place here in the park, just about a hundred yards from here, right over there *[pointing]*. He was just a few days short of closing, just a couple of weeks before he planned to start moving in, when he passed away, suddenly and unexpectedly, on Sunday, August 24.

"That previous Friday, we spoke on the phone for the last time. We made plans to go to Home Depot together on Monday, to pick out window coverings for his new place. 'Afterwards,' he said, 'I'm gonna kick your butt at pool.'

"I said, 'In your dreams.' And that was it. That was the last time we spoke together.

"But that's not what I came here to talk about. I want to tell you one of my favorite personal stories about Dave.

"A few years ago, when I was still working for a living, Dave noted that I was looking pretty tired and decided I needed some fun. Specifically, he decided what was required was a weekend road trip to Reno with him to play poker in casinos…which is exactly what we did. He drove the whole way, both directions. If any of you have ever been in a car with Dave for a few hours at a time, you may have some idea what it was like. Non-stop chatting, non-stop laughter, in the car, at rest stops, in restaurants, and everywhere else… except in the casino poker rooms. We'd been playing poker together for so long that we knew each other's tells and styles of play, so we made a pact that we'd play at different tables all weekend, so as not to queer each other's moves. Playing poker at casino stakes is a serious business, an order of magnitude more serious than playing poker in home games for quarters and dollars.

"Well, I had a great run of luck that weekend. It was amazing. I just couldn't lose. It seemed I was winning every hand I played in, no matter what table I sat down at. It was one of the best runs of my life. Meanwhile, Dave was consistently losing, no matter what table he played at. Now, as any poker player here today can tell you, the only thing better in life than winning at poker is winning at poker while your buddy is simultaneously losing at poker. It's just the best of all possible worlds. Imagine our lunches and dinners together that weekend, as we compared our poker experiences. I won't say gloating occurred, but I won't say it didn't, either.

"But here's the thing. Dave wasn't upset about losing at all. More than anything else, he was genuinely pleased that *I* was having a good time. To him, that was the purpose of the whole trip. In the casinos, in the restaurants, and on the whole drive home, he cheerfully accepted my teasing and boasting with grace and good humor. It was one of the most fun weekends of my life, all thanks to Dave.

"So that's how I want to remember him – as this big-hearted, loveable, cheerful, slightly goofy guy, more concerned that his buddy was having a good time than he was about his own misfortunes. It was impossible to know him without loving him. I know many of you have your own memories of Dave, revealing what a talented and amazing character he was, so again, I want to thank you all for coming together here today to share those memories and to celebrate his life."

Now, almost a year later, I do miss Dave. And I miss Jerry and my college friend John, my high school buddies Tom and Don, my ex-wife Catherine and my former girlfriend Allyn, Frank, Bill, Calvin, two Terrys, my parents and grandparents, and all the other people I admired or loved who have passed on. Missing loved ones, I find, is one of the constant, chronic aches of growing old.

Finally, I want to thank you all for reading these personal reminiscences of a retired gentleman of leisure. I treasure my life, my friends and my family, sharing a world of laughter, intellect and beauty. It's been a marvelous journey, seven decades and counting. I'm just damn glad to be here.

Mahalo and *aloha*.

—Grant Canfield

TYPO IN MUMBAI

John D. Berry

"I can't believe this is your first time," said the young Indian woman with whom I was sharing the auto-rickshaw.

"It is, though," I replied, calmly clutching a handhold as the three-wheeled vehicle careered through the traffic of northern Mumbai.

I hadn't even encountered yet the full roar of the city, but Indian traffic was proving to be everything I had expected it to be. Chaotic, crowded, incredibly varied, and resoundingly effective at getting everyone around, despite the lack of any perceivable patterns. Drivers seemed to navigate by echo-location, honking fairly constantly to let other drivers know that they were approaching; and they might approach from pretty much any direction, or any side. Private cars predominated, but alongside them you'd find gaily decorated trucks, lots of flitting motorbikes, pedestrians of all kinds, and of course swarms of auto-rickshaws, all punctuated with occasional feral dogs and meandering cattle.

Indian cattle do not bear much resemblance to the big beef or dairy cattle of North America, and I was pleased to discover that their shit, which of course appeared on the streets quite often, did not bear the same acrid stench. Phew!

I was in Mumbai for only a few days, invited as a keynote speaker at Typography Day 2015, an annual event that moves around among various Indian universities. This year it was being held at its original home, IIT Bombay, or the Indian Institute of Technology Bombay. The large, leafy campus lies on the northern fringe of Mumbai, abutting the shore of Powai Lake and at the southern tip of the vast hilly Sanjay Gandhi National Park. The university has about 8,000 students in a variety of faculties, clustered throughout the campus; many of the central buildings are aligned along a covered open-air walkway known as the Infinite Corridor. Although the campus feels considerably less crowded than the heart of Mumbai, and it suffers much less from the ever-present air pollution, proximity to the national park requires signs like one I spotted near the lake warning that a panther had been spotted in the vicinity. "Well," as one local put it to me, "we're encroaching on their territory, so why wouldn't they came into ours?"

Typo Day was put on by the Industrial Design Center, the design school at IIT, and the talks were presented in the IDC's large, modern auditorium. Outside the auditorium was a large common area where people could mingle during the breaks for the aptly named "tea and networking," and just outside the building, a display of typographic posters was hung in the open air and a sculptural assemblage of 3D letters climbed one of the twisting trees.

The displays, like the subjects of talks and workshops, were not only multilingual but multi-script. India is a land of many languages and many writing systems; Hindi is simply the largest, and the dominant one in northern India, but the only common language that educated Indians have throughout the country is English. Although most of the various Indian writing systems are somehow related to Devanagari, the complex script developed for ancient Sanskrit and used today for Hindi and several other North Indian languages, the relationship is tenuous enough that only scholars can really spot the similarities. As one Hindi-speaking designer from Mumbai put it, "If I go to Bangalore, I can only admire the writing there as shapes; I cannot read it." Several of the talks at Typo Day dealt with the fine points of Devanagari type designs and manuscript traditions; others dealt with different writing systems, including one talk by a woman from Sri Lanka about the lack of vocabulary to describe the letterforms of written Sinhala.

But it wasn't just fine points and details. There was exuberant creativity on display, and the other keynote speaker, Itu Chaudhuri, gave an inspiring and well-illustrated talk about how a love of letters "will enrich your life." He then proceeded to demonstrate how it had enriched his.

I was treated extremely well by the organizers of Typo Day, Prof. Ravi Poobaiah and his wife, Dr. Ajanta Sen. Not only did they fly me to Mumbai, have students meet me at the airport when my flight arrived in the middle of a hot March night, and put me up in the comfortable Guest House at IIT, but on the day after the end of the conference they arranged a car and driver for me to explore Mumbai (and its traffic), and the next night they had me staying at the Royal Bombay Yacht Club, which is every bit as luxurious as it sounds. We had met there for dinner the night before, but, as Ravi explained, there wasn't a room available that night, so they drove me back to IIT, with Ajanta giving me a running commentary on the history of the heart of the city and which buildings she had grown up in.

At the conference, I found myself being naturally adopted into the circle of gray-haired elders of Indian design, though I also met quite a few younger designers and students. Although I often missed the jokes, sometimes from lack of context, sometimes from not catching the accents, I enjoyed the company of these men and women with their shared history of typography and graphic design in India. (Accents varied. There was one brilliant, impassioned speaker that I had a very hard time understanding; when I mentioned this to someone else, he said, "Oh, yes, he has a strong Marathi accent. He sounds the same when he speaks Hindi." What he was saying was so forceful that I regretted missing some of it through my own incomprehension.) I felt as though I had only scratched the surface of the typographic culture of the country.

I barely scratched the surface of Mumbai, too. I spent one afternoon walking around the streets near the Gateway of India, the monumental stone arch that once welcomed incoming ships of the British Empire during the Raj. (The Yacht Club was right across the street from the public park in front of the Gateway.) Although I clearly stood out as a foreigner, the only hassles I had on the streets were the expected attempts to sell me something; most of the time, people just ignored me and went about their way, as they ignored most of the teeming crowds around them. I visited a couple of museums, of which the oddest and thus most fascinating was the Mumbai City Museum, with its collections of objects and artifacts and models and dioramas depicting the city's history. In one room was a current exhibit about the cultural and economic connections through history of the two sides of the Arabian Sea.

I also dropped in to the vast Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj Vastu Sangrahalaya, formerly known as the Prince of Wales

Museum, to see the relatively small permanent exhibit on "Pre and Proto History," the pre-Hindu Indus Valley civilization of Harappa and Mohenjo-daro. Most of the objects, however, were reproductions; the originals were in Delhi.

Impressions of Mumbai:

Very, very hot. No surprise there! I adopted a slow amble as I walked through the streets, in accord with the way most people seemed to be moving, just sort of easing through the humidity with a minimum of effort and disturbance.

Huge contrasts of affluence and poverty. Also no surprise, frankly; I knew I would encounter this, and I was neither shocked nor numbed by the inescapable poverty. I saw some of the upper levels of Indian society, but the top and the bottom mingle on the same streets. I did not try venturing into any slums, such as Dharavi, where *Slumdog Millionaire* was filmed; nor did I go to see colorful fisherfolk on the quay at Sassoon Dock. For that matter, I did not go see a Bollywood movie while I was in the town that makes them. I just looked and listened wherever I was, and experienced the city that I was presented with, in all its ordinary glory.

Traffic. But you already know about that. It was wild and wooly, yet I never saw an accident of any kind.

Urban texture. It seemed as though everything I saw in Mumbai was either crumbling away or in the midst of being built. When I mentioned this to Ajanta Sen, she said yes, that's exactly the way it is. Many big cities give this impression, but Mumbai had it in spades.

Military bands. This wasn't something I expected, but while I was staying at the Royal Bombay Yacht Club, the park across the street was closed off, with a police cordon all around the Gateway of India. It turned out that there was a huge celebration going on there during those couple of days: a big stage in front of the arch, with performances by military bands and orchestras from around the country. The music was loud; and it was eclectic, a blend of Bollywood show tunes and folk performances and military band music, accompanied by light shows. I never did quite figure out what the point was. One effect that it had was purely personal: I had hoped to catch the boat to Elephanta Island on my next-to-last day in Mumbai, to see the Hindu temple and its famous carvings, but because the quay was temporarily blocked off, the boats weren't running.

One of the typographers I saw at the conference was Aurobind Patel, a type designer and graphic designer whom I had met before. He made my last day in India memorable by inviting me to his weekend house, in a fishing village north of Mumbai, to spend a relaxing day out of the city; his driver would then drive me to the airport for my flight to Amsterdam, which didn't leave until 2:45 a.m. So I got to see a little bit of what lies outside the city, and how the city is encroaching on the countryside year by year; and I got to walk on the beach by the shore and watch the sunset over the Arabian Sea. Aurobind's house, which was newly built to replace a crumbling older house inherited by his wife, was in the process of being repainted and having the pool's foundation reinforced. During the painting, the wall-size sliding-glass doors on the seaward side were covered by huge segments of Bollywood movie posters, their painted sides turned in; this gave the interiors a bizarre and dramatic look. But while I was there, that very afternoon, the workmen finished the painting of the exterior, and as I was taking a much-needed nap they removed the posters from the windows. So when I awoke I could look out through the glass directly to the sea. That was quite some transformation.

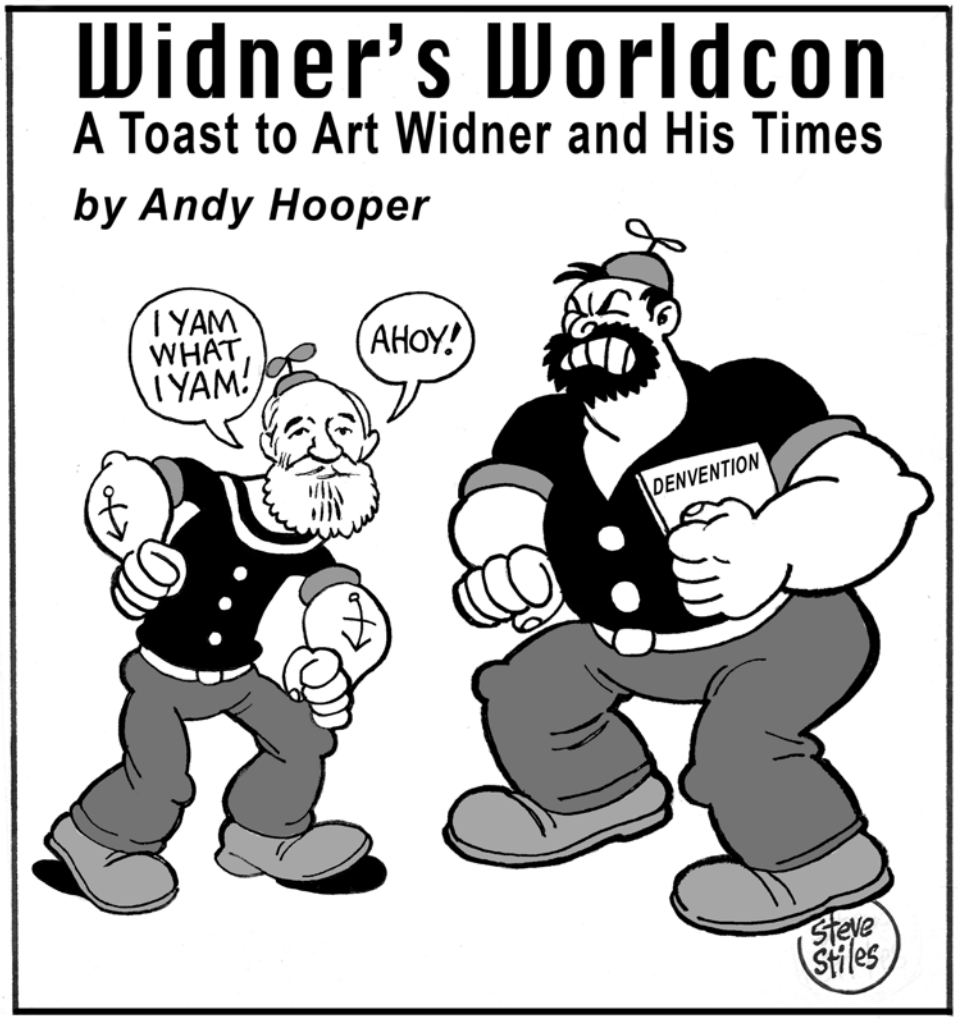
I have now seen a very tiny piece of India, and met a wonderful and eclectic range of Indian designers and typographers. Perhaps this will be just the first of many visits to the subcontinent.

—John D. Berry

Widner's Worldcon

A Toast to Art Widner and His Times

by Andy Hooper



We sensed some attenuation in the venerable Art Widner (1917-2015) when he visited us in the summer of 2013, as part of his pilgrimage to Seattle for the annual Art car blowout. He had some trouble finding his way on a very familiar route, and also had some misadventure with his false teeth that provided some challenges in feeding him. He appeared at the Portland home of Dan and Lynn Steffan two days early, and didn't seem to understand the discrepancy. Despite his increasing need for assistance, and in practical terms, supervision, he continued to travel as often as he could, seemingly hungrier than ever for fannish company.

My last meeting with him was in early May of 2014, at Corflu, the annual gathering of fanzine-loving fans. Corflu 31 was held in the suburbs of Richmond, Virginia, a site chosen for its general location on the eastern third of the United States. No one present had any real connection to the city; the weekend was spent in an anonymous mid-price hotel, thronged with local weddings and the site of a Saturday night high school prom, which drowned out the Corflu's evening program. Art had speculatively extended his visit out to Tuesday in the hope that some local or

traveling fans would remain to share his company, but of course everyone had to immediately return to the jobs and families they had abandoned on a spring weekend, and he was left alone in a smaller motel near the airport for two days.

Art inflicted these little tragedies on himself more regularly as he blew past 90 and began to approach the age of 100. Art always had a pretty breezy attitude toward his reliance on the hospitality of others, and in earlier decades, had been very comfortable existing under rough conditions, sleeping out of his car and worse. But his nonagenarian body could no longer endure such privations, and receiving a visit from Art evolved into a full-time responsibility, one that often lingered after it was over as a host waited nervously to hear that he had made it safely home. People understandably became reluctant to take on this charge, and the number of destinations where he might appear unbidden began to dwindle. He had outlived all four of his children, and while emotionally close to his grandkids, they had dispersed to points as distant as Australia. One of his grandsons took possession of the large octagonal house that Art and his son Greg had restored, while Art retreated to a smaller set of rooms closer to the town center of Gualala, California.

The Quincy Strongboy

When he was young, Art was known as one of the most physically powerful men in fandom. Bob Madle and others called him "Popeye" because of the bulging muscles in his arms. Madle credited Art with saving him from a beating by the larger and drunker Cyril Kornbluth at the 1941 convention in Denver by offering to fight Kornbluth instead, an offer which was declined. He remained remarkably strong and active into his eighties; I personally saw him pitch in a softball game in 1991 in El Paso, Texas, in which Madison, Wisconsin fan and game writer Bill Bodden bounced a hard line drive right off Art's knee. Widner had to come out of the game about a half-inning later, but bore it with excellent humor and was ambulatory enough to go home just a day or two later.

When we gathered in Richmond, I had already let Art know that I wanted to interview him in regard to his memories of the first "World Science Fiction Convention," held in New York at the beginning of July 1939. Among his many fannish achievements, Art was lately renowned as one of five living members of that event, along with Erle Korshak, Dave Kyle, Madle, and Jack Robins. Although he had been reading and writing letters to the promags and pulps for five years, the experience of attending the New York convention had clearly had a galvanic effect on Art. He had attended the following four Worldcons, in Chicago (1940), Denver (1941), Los Angeles (1946) and Philadelphia (1947). In the case of both Chicago and Denver, Art had made prodigious cross-country drives to reach them, providing rides for several other fans. In 1940, he drove a huge 1928 Dodge touring car that he dubbed "The Skylark of Woo-Woo." The following year, he purchased a handsome Ford V8 in red and black, which he dubbed "The FooFoo Special," and used it to carry himself, Milton Rothman, Julius Unger, Bob Madle, and Boston fringefan John Bell on a marathon trek to Denver, despite the vehicle's complete lack of trunk space.

All of Art's famous achievements in fan activity – his editorship of the fanzine *Fanfare* and his FAPAzine *YHOS*, his relentless gathering of data on fandom's tastes through his many polls, the co-foundation of the National Fantasy Fan Federation, the invention of the science fiction board game with his 1940's design "Interplanetary"…all of these things took place after that fateful weekend gathering in New York. The first meeting of The Stranger Club, Boston's famous pioneering fan group, took place in February of 1940; Art's prior efforts to make contact with local fans had been thwarted by differences in reading tastes and one potential contact's epic halitosis. But after the New York gathering, he knew what he was looking for, and found it in a circle of friends including Robert Swisher, Earl Singleton, Chan Davis, and perhaps most importantly, Louis Russell Chauvenet, who was soon to give us the word "fanzine."

I expected, therefore, that even 75 years after the event, Art would recall some catalytic moment or meeting at the 1939 convention, which he would connect to the eight to ten years of concentrated fan activity that followed. But his impressions were frustratingly vague. He recalled Moskowitz, certainly, and shared the sense that his "New Fandom" was something of a scam meant to woo the attention of professional editors. He had been aware of the two feuding New York clubs in attendance, and had listened intently at the edges of conversations between some of the Futurians, but claimed he was too shy to join in. He had not attended the Futurians' rump summit at which the future existence of the Worldcon was determined. He had gone to a baseball game during the trip to New York, but did not believe it was part of a double-header, and did not recall Lou Gehrig's famous speech, so we can assume he was not there on July 4th.

He had no recollection of Ray Bradbury, except as one of a group of "kids" who followed in the wake of Forry Ackerman during the convention. Ackerman had left a memorable picture with the Doc Smith-inspired costume which Myrtle Douglas had tailored for him to wear during the event, and Art was clearly inspired. At the Chicago convention in 1940, he had used a pillow he borrowed from Trudy Kuslan, a hat belonging to "Pogo" Gray and a wine bottle to portray Giles Habibula from Jack Williamson's *The Legion of Space*. In Denver, he dressed up as "Old Granny" from A.E. Van Vogt's *Slan*.

Presented with selections from a list of attendees, Art's strongest memories were all of fans that had appeared at the second and third World Conventions as well. He knew he had met with several fans previously known only from correspondence, while the subject and substance of those conversations were long forgotten. But they had continued to talk well into the morning hours on two or three consecutive nights, ending only when diners and tap rooms near the convention closed.

Art had loved the entire enterprise, but at the time, he had been preoccupied with family issues, and felt terribly self-conscious staying in a New York hotel for the first time. By far the largest part of the 75 minutes we spent in conversation was concerned with the work that Art had been doing for two years prior to the convention, serving in the Civilian Conservation Corps.

Digging to the Top

The CCC, as it was universally known, was one of the most popular public relief programs instituted as part of President Franklin Roosevelt's New Deal. Roosevelt had run a smaller, but similar program as Governor of New York, seeking to build on his famous cousin Theodore's legacy of conservation, and the practical benefits were remarkable: The CCC would plant more than three billion trees during the nine years of its existence, and reversed a small part of the deforestation which had swept the continent since the 17th century. In human terms, the CCC provided a period of employment for more than 3,000,000 Americans, until their energies were judged essential for "real" military service in 1942.

The CCC was generally open to unemployed, unmarried men between the ages of 18 and 25. The Corps was segregated by race, as was the U.S. Army and most federal services. Most "enrollees" were white, but there were also a number of units reserved for African and Native American enrollees. Special units were also formed for veterans of service in the Great War. At first, enrollees wore surplus Army fatigues, but later acquired a uniform of their own. They were led by Reserve Army officers, and were put through a four-week conditioning course at the beginning of their service, but they did not learn military skills beyond marching in unison and saluting the national flag. Their daily duties might include anything from clearing and building roads to building dams, bridges and a hundred other types of structure. Many U.S. National parks contain buildings and trails built by the CCC from 1933 to 1942.

The program was not meant to be a permanent source of employment. Enrollees committed to six months of service in each

enrollment contract, and were at first limited to three and later to four terms of enrollment, for a total of two years of service. The CCC enrollees were paid a dollar a day, a reasonably good wage for the 1930s, 25 dollars of which was sent home to their families every month. For many enrollees, it was also the first access to three daily meals which they had ever enjoyed.

Art Widner's family had never experienced poverty on that level, but his father was chronically out of work. Art wrote that even after he had begun a paper delivery route, hoping to purchase SF and adventure pulps, his parents typically "borrowed" his two-dollar weekly salary to pay for rent or groceries or carfare so that his father could look for a job. Art was eighteen years old in 1935, and little hope of continuing any studies beyond public high school. Employment beyond the $2 per week level was challenging to find, so the 19-year-old Art made his first attempt to enroll in "The C's" in 1936.

He had a miserable time. Many of his fellow enrollees were essentially hoodlums from South Boston, and they were far more interested in fomenting one or more types of trouble than in any conceivable form of work. With his cosmic consciousness and star-begotten mind, Art was their natural prey. Late-night reading had already revealed limits to his vision, and eyeglasses were a sure sign of effeminacy in the world of the pre-war lunkhead, and Art had to endure daily aspersions on his sexuality, masculinity and general fitness for service. He wasn't afraid to fight, but couldn't face it every day. He opted out of his enrollment about two months in, and went back to his parent's home in Quincy.

He didn't elaborate, but I got the feeling that Art received relatively little sympathy, particularly from his father, who wasn't happy that he was responsible for feeding and housing his son again. He didn't cite the dynamic tension of Charles Atlas, but over a period of about ten months, Art started to fill out what had been an underweight frame, and simply growing a year older did a lot for his confidence. With no other attractive employment prospects, he returned to the CCC in the spring of 1937, and was accepted for enrollment in a company that was assigned to a dam-building project outside Waterbury, Vermont.

Things were better, but still not exactly perfect. The Corps had learned to discourage goldbrickers and delinquents during the recruiting process, and learned to wash out more during the "Conditioning Course." The discipline and practical skills which CCC enrollees learned were also particularly valuable, particularly in the context of the coming World War. When the draft was commenced after Pearl Harbor, draftees who had seen at least one full term of service in the CCC were almost all made corporals, and most became sergeants. His experience with the CCC was almost certainly one reason why Art was able to secure duty as a test subject in an army research lab during World War II. But had his eyes been better, he would have been an ideal candidate for service as a combat infantryman, after the CCC had put the muscles on him.

His intelligence and love of reading still made him the object of hazing by company bullies. One loud-mouthed, red-headed Irishman named Bryant was particularly merciless, and had Art at the breaking point with his daily accusations of homosexuality. Art always hastened to point out that he had never been repelled by gay comrades or acquaintances like many fans of his generation, but neither had he ever felt any inclination in that direction. But it was then an accusation which no man was able to absorb without shame, and most who made it did so in anticipation of a fight.

After weeks refusing to make any physical response, Art finally confronted his tormentor. Accused again of being gay, Art replied, "There are only two queers in this outfit, and both of them are you." It wasn't the most brilliant of ripostes, but it had the intended effect. Art let Bryant throw one punch, which stung, but did not slow him, then uncoiled his right arm right into the side of Bryant's head, dropping him to the ground insensate. When he came to, Bryant ran directly to his locker in the camp barracks, packed his belongings, and left without talking to anyone. Art had certainly made his point, and months of working with heavy construction and hand tools had made him into the "human gorilla" that fandom would soon know. Before long, company bullies became acutely aware of his presence, and he became the man who would save Bob Madle from C. M. Kornbluth.

On the Town

His third consecutive term in the "C's" came to end sometime in the first quarter of 1939. Art probably could have easily have convinced his superiors to ignore his first aborted term of enrollment. Or he might easily have found some way to continue to work on CCC projects in New England as one of what were known as LEMs or "Local Experienced Men," who did much of the more challenging fabrication and construction work, and were paid an hourly wage. But enrollees were universally encouraged to move on to another potential career after their service in the Corps was contractually complete. If they wanted to remain in national service, the Army and the U.S. Forest Service were both logical options. And it was clear that Art had greater ambitions, in addition to being quite ready to leave the all-male society of the Corps behind.

Art didn't say why, but it was clear that relations with his father were possibly even worse after he mustered out of the CCC. I think one possible reason why is the one specific point of contention Art was willing to acknowledge, which was money. When he returned home, Art was probably due at least some percentage of the money which the CCC had sent back to the family over the course of the enrollment – $150, assuming Art's monthly expenses didn't exceed the five dollars he was allowed. This was not an inconsiderable amount, particularly if Art's mom and dad had been spending it as it arrived, and now were supposed to produce some large portion of the total amount on demand. To make things even more emotional, Arthur Senior's own father, Art's grandfather, died at the end of June in 1939. In addition to the funeral, Art's dad had to meet with attorneys about the estate, and there would be significant social responsibilities as well. So Art agreed to accompany his father to New York, with the pretext of paying respects to his older relatives. He did not apparently inform his dad that there would be a gathering of fans and pros in the city at the same time.

This may explain, I think, why Art seemed to be preoccupied for part of the weekend of June 29th to July 1st, 1939, and why he embraced his newfound fan community with such remarkable intensity in the months that followed. I don't know if he actually abandoned his father to family obligations without preamble, but he clearly chose to spend time at the convention when he had been expected to be with them. Within a year, Art was publishing a fanzine, planning national organizations and meetings, and setting off on cross-county marathons to see those familiar faces from Caravan Hall once more. His enthusiasm had the quality of something that had been restrained for a long time being suddenly released. Art always embraced the idea of fandom as a second family, and I don't think he ever really relinquished that, even during the thirty long years that he was away raising – for a time – four kids of his own.

In fact, Art never completely broke off contact with the friends he had made in fandom, particularly Louis Russell Chauvenet (1920-2003). Russ continued to write letters to Art across the entire length of his gafiation, and Art followed the success that Russ found as a computing engineer for the Department of Defense, a champion chess player and Windmill-class sailor. Chauvenet accomplished these things with apparently little interference from the fact that he became totally deaf after contracting meningitis at age ten. Art particularly valued the friends which he had made in the months after the 1939 convention and before the U.S. entered World War II, and was eager to defend them. In "Rewind," his editorial from the first issue of his long-running FAPAzine *YHOS* after his return to fan activity in 1979,

Art revealed again how deeply bullies annoyed him:

"An old fan's memory plays strange tricks. After my earlier remarks on senility, I'm beginning to wonder. I just spent some time browsing through my old *Fanfare* file, reading the minutes of The Stranger Club to see if I was slighting anyone from that estimable outfit. I had planned to at least mention Singleton, Chan Davis, Harry Stubbs, and Tom Gardner, but I was astonished at the crowd of people I had completely forgotten – and I had written most of those minutes – but even worse, there were several who when I saw the name on the printed (kaff – poorly mimeo'd) page, didn't even conjure up an 'Oh yes, he was the one who…' Complete blank, as if I'd never seen the name before.

"But to continue – then there was Chauvenet. And I remember a more or less trivial incident with him as if it were yesterday, I suppose because it was relatively laden with emotion. We were both riding the street car into Neponset station from Boston, after a rather late SC meeting as I recall. Neponset was a big transfer point, where I had to catch a car for Quincy, and Russell for somewhere else, so we were in rather animated conversation, trying to pack in a lot in the last few minutes before parting. Russ was trying to get something across that seemed important, and I was rather more obtuse than usual, so, as deaf people will do when excited, he began to vary his voice volume all over the lot, accompanied by exaggerated gestures. Unfortunately neither of us used sign at the time, and I gradually became aware in the nearly empty car, that a group of toughs at the other end were looking in our direction, making remarks about LRC's masculinity, mocking his strange delivery, and rather clearly intimating that he was either a swish or a spaz.

"My ears grew hot and I could feel the old adrenaline gurgling through the tubes. I looked back at Russ, but he was blissfully unaware of the whole scene. I was sorely tempted to take them down a peg by at least letting them know how far off they were. But then I thought of all the Southie ignoramuses I had known in the CCC, and how futile words would be, so I sort of stooped in the middle of the car and waited for Russ to make his point, while the morons got off and duh-huhuh'd their way and the conductor glared at us in annoyance.

"I don't know if I ever told you about this, Russ, but that's how you came within an inch of being involved in a glorious donnybrook. I still think we could have cleaned their clocks. After all, there were only three of them, and there were two of us."

The Century of Tomorrow

I think it is telling that Art made these friendships when he was himself was already in his mid-20s, and his first fannish career feels as if it was prematurely truncated by the sudden onset of adult responsibilities. In memoirs of the 1940s, Art repeatedly refers to himself as a pimply-faced adolescent, yet he was as old as most college graduates, and had done eighteen months of very adult labor in the CCC. In many early fans, one senses a desire to recapture a childhood interrupted by various catastrophes, including the Depression, the War and eventually, the Bomb. No wonder fandom developed such a passion for the gentle absurdities of Walt Kelly's *Pogo*, and other mythical companions like Roscoe and Carl Brandon. The enduring affection for childhood characters like Buck Rogers or Mickey Mouse was a shared characteristic of many fans, and even now most of us understand the familiar comforts they provide.

But Art had a unique opportunity to see many of his most outlandish fantasies realized. Atomic energy, television, bucket seats, freeze-dried noodles – he saw them all go from theory to practice. He told me that the real reason he had been dead set on making it to New York that summer was that he wanted to attend the 1939 World's Fair. He confirmed that he had a reasonable store of cash retained from his CCC wages, and used some of it to spend an entire day at the fair. His recollections of that event were as intense as the day they were made, as was his elated, proprietary joy in the exhibits, which echoed technocratic inculcation he had already received from Campbell and other futurists. He felt, as did so many fans, that the 1939 fair was an endorsement of his wilder dreams, and some evidence that they were not so crazy after all.

I can't resist including another anecdote recorded by Art in the superb history of The Stranger Club which he wrote for the first Progress Report for Noreascon III in 1987:

"The next red letter day in Stranger Club history came on April 27th, when John W. Campbell showed up for a visit with the Swishers. I had recently acquired a snappy red and black '35 Ford V8 in anticipation of assembling a carload of fen for the forbidding trek to Denver and the third Worldcon, so I stopped in Whitman to pick up fringe fan Jack Bell to show off my new wheels. At the time I was living in Bryantville, a tiny hamlet not far from Plymouth. The Stranger Club was indeed 'strange' in that (after Paro left) 'the Boston group' hadn't a single member residing in Boston, and the director didn't even live in the Metropolitan area!

"Not too many showed up, probably because Swisher was rather quiet about it, knowing that if it were widely known that Campbell was there, Mrs. Swisher wouldn't be doing much but baking tons of her famous pecan buns for a horde of voracious teenagers.

"So it was that besides the Swishers there were only Art Gnaedinger (son of Mary Gnaedinger, editor of *Famous Fantastic Mysteries*), Chan Davis, his cousin Allen, Bell, and myself to wallow in an afternoon and evening with the Great Man. And wallow we did, for twelve hours, as it turned out. I had a bad case of hero-worship, and Jack didn't succeed in dragging me away until 2:30 a.m., with everybody else propping their eyelids up with toothpicks.

"Campbell played us like delicate instruments and we loved it; at least I did. He predicted that the war (which we weren't even in yet) would be decided by (gasp) atomic power. Four years later I remember quite vividly walking along the streets of Lawrence, Mass., with some army buddies from the Climatic Research Lab and passing a newsstand where the headlines screamed:

ATOMIC BOMB USED ON JAPAN!
ONE BOMB DESTROYS
ENTIRE CITY!

"I remembered Campbell's prediction and the awed discussion that followed, and started babbling excitedly to my fellow-GIs. 'It's the end of the war! It's not just the end of the war – it's the beginning of a whole new age! It's yabba dabba gibble gabble! Hoo-hah!'

"My friends looked at me disgustedly as I stood there gibbering and pointing to the newspaper. 'C'mon, Art,' they said. 'You've been reading too much of that crazy Buck Rogers stuff again. It's just another big bomb – no big deal.'

"'But – but – ' I sputtered. 'A whole city! Read it yourself! Look!' It was like Galileo telling the Church Fathers to look through the telescope. They physically took hold of me.

"'Art!' said one, waving his fingers close to my eyes. 'Pay attention! We're going to play pool – remember? Pool, Art. You know how you like to play pool. We''l just shoot a little pool and it'll clear your head.' To the others: 'Just bring him along; once he gets the cue in his hand he'll be all right.' And they dragged me around the corner to the pool room, still feebly protesting."

The Restoration Angels

As it happened, I had recently been doing research into the role the CCC had played in the reconstruction and restoration of the land that became the University of Wisconsin Arboretum in Madison, a frequent woodland and prairie destination of my youth. When the arboretum was pieced together from played-out farms and a failed housing development in the 1930s, the first workers on the site were contracted by the Wisconsin Emergency Relief Administration, or WERA, which lacked the heavy equipment needed to do real reclamation work. The University jumped at the chance to turn the operation over to the more capable CCC in 1935.

The first members of the 2670th Company of the CCC arrived in Madison from Camp Honey Creek in West Allis, Wisconsin on August 16th, 1935. More would arrive from Racine and Milwaukee in the following

week, and some came directly from their four-week Conditioning Course at Fort Sheridan, Illinois. There were 180 enrollees in the Company, and twenty officers and non-commissioned officers from the Army Reserve who would supervise them.

With the resources of the Park Service, they steadily improved the conditions in what became known as Camp Madison, and often added inventive touches of their own. For example, the camp had wide concrete sinks for doing laundry by hand, but two enterprising enrollees found and salvaged a washing machine, which they then rented out to other camp residents.

There was a half-hearted effort to make university courses available to CCC enrollees, but only a few took advantage of them. Some were able to complete high school while simultaneously working for the Corps at Camp Madison. A weekend bus ride to downtown from Mills Street cost a nickel; Madison movie houses were a favorite destination. Sports were the most popular pastimes in camp. The CCC had a very competitive baseball league, and Camp Madison won the 1939 District Championship in basketball. But most of the time, they lived like soldiers, obeying most of the regulations observed by any regular Army garrison. Their first uniforms were Army surplus left over from World War I; reveille was at 0600, and they marched in formation to the mess hall, converted from a barn on the former Charles Nelson family farm. At 7:30, they reported for outside work details, and from that point until 4 p.m., they were technically under National Park Service supervision, and not required to salute their foremen. Then it was back to formation inside Camp Madison, with lights out coming at 10 p.m.

Their presence continued for five years beyond the originally two-year commitment, so they were definitely still working when Art and his CCC crew finished the Waterbury Dam at the end of 1938. The total number of CCC personnel to pass through Camp Madison was probably close to 1,000. It was the only CCC Camp in the country located on a university campus, and one of few still in operation at the end of the program. The Camp officially closed on June 30th, 1942; by that time, the U.S. Congress had defunded the CCC, in the assumption that unemployed young men were needed for active military service.

But I Know What I Like

I shared at least a few of these details with Art, and observed how completely ubiquitous the work of the CCC had been when I was growing up. I tried to find some graceful way of saying that I was grateful to him and his fellow enrollees in the Corps, for all the things they had done and built that we can still enjoy today, but I wasn't very coherent, and I think the impression was more that I was thanking him for still being with us, a sentiment he was happy to endorse, at least at that moment. He told me he had been ceaselessly harassed by the demands of his own bladder, which now seemed to have roughly the capacity of an acorn cap. He couldn't imagine how he could survive a transatlantic flight to reach Tynecon II, so he thought that Corflu 31 was likely to be his last, and that sadly turned out to be true.

By the time he allowed a doctor to diagnose his obviously recurring prostate cancer, the disease had metastasized into his skeleton, and there was really no option available other than palliative care. He died on April 17th, with family and close friends nearby. He would have been 98 years old in October of 2015.

The content of that conversation in Virginia made me feel a particularly strong sense of loss when I learned that he had died. Art was a living doorway to human experiences and memories that stretched back into the 1920s, and his death meant that door was now closed. I suddenly regretted every night at a convention that I had chosen to eat with a different party of fans. Or left him searching for companions, and settling for the hotel coffee shop because of its easy access. He was always openly petulant about these seeming snubs, and he was never someone who preferred suffering in silence. He was already several years into a long second childhood when I met him, and exhibited an indefatigable sense of play that could leave genuine six-year-olds gasping in the dirt. I don't think I've really done any kind of job communicating just how much fun he was to be with – he was always glad to see you, and inspired the same reaction.

And I realize belatedly that whatever his age, our friendship was one of the most enduring in my life. I had to have met him no later than Corflu 5 in Seattle in 1988, but I know he attended a Wiscon around the same time. And I had heard the story of his return from gafia several years before, an event that took place within about eighteen months of my own first contact with fandom. In his second incarnation as a fan, he and I were actually close contemporaries; by all appearances, both of us had only been on the scene for a few months. And in the end, we had at least 27 years of friendship, more years than I was allotted with many fans significantly less than half his age. Many nights we persisted in our conversation to a beery, bleary dawn; many others I surrendered well before he did, and observed his subsequent day-long slumbers with some envy. He was as genuine and honest as anyone I have ever met; his abilities as a story teller the equal of any decorated pro, although he made just on professional sale, the story "The Perfect Incinerator," published pseudonymously as "Arthur Lambert" in Robert Lowndes' *Science Fiction Quarterly* in 1942.

In fact, I realize that Art spent a significant chunk of those 27 years telling me what the first World Science Fiction Convention was like, along with insights into the epic suffering of the Boston Braves and their fans, the true nature of misunderstood friends like Francis Towner Laney, and his mystification at the latter-day notoriety of Claude Degler, whom Art considered a creep and a thief who deserved to remain in obscurity. He was especially delighted to find that gatherings like the Worldcon had expanded and proliferated, and tried to be at as many of them as possible. If there is any sort of afterlife, a concept which Art himself generally eschewed, I hope that it is something like a convention, at which Art is now being hallooed and thumped on the back and proffered many drams of fine single malt whiskey by the many, many dear friends who have preceded him in death, some of them by so many years. One hopes that they are ready for a long night, because Art will never leave again, as long as one fan remains there to converse with him.

— Andy Hooper

MEDIA STORMS

Every rain is a rainstorm,
And a fire, lit by a couch
    swallowing the house,
    then spit out to a sizzle,
Is a firestorm.

When somebody dies,
    passerbys, with a catch in the voice
    but dry eyes,
    mourn like the pros on their afternoon shows,
And warn of a terrorstorm.

Carol Carr

When bebop appeared in the Forties. many would-be jazz musicians found that its complexities and difficulties were too hard to understand, let alone execute, unless you were up there, or even near there, with Bird (Parker) or Dizzy (Gillespie). So a groundswell started among average (or less than average!) but still enthusiastic jazz-loving amateur and semi-pro musicians to return to the "roots" – the "traditional" stuff, as it were. Thus, inspired by the likes of the American Lu Watters Yerba Buena Band and the Muggsy Spanier Ragtimers and by the British George Webb Dixielanders (with Humphrey Lyttelton), the so-called "Trad" movement was born. With the examples of the three "B"s – Kenny Ball, Chris Barber and Acker Bilk (who had some hit records),"Trad" spread like wildfire (or a plague!) in the U.K. – rivaling even the onset of rock 'n' roll. Bands sprang up in every city, including Glasgow, which had at least five at one time.

Among these was the band I was invited to join. Alec was a trumpeter of some small talent, who had big ambitions to be a "name" bandleader and a rival to the best of the rest. A big fan of Louis Armstrong's, he even called his band the "All-Stars," a six-piece combo like Louis's. The only trouble was he didn't have men like Trummy Young, Ed Hall or Billy Kyle, so had to make do with the local talent – such as me. So I became an "All-Star" in spite of leaning more towards bebop and tending to sneer at the "moldy figs" (i.e., the "Trad" groups). Actually, Alec wasn't as bad as the purists, who regarded anything later than 1920 as "modern." He included some Ellington in the repertoire and even insisted that we rehearse weekly!

The band included trombone (not bad!), clarinet (dodgy!), bass (basic!), drums (okay!), plus Alec and me. Occasionally a guitar (anathema to "Trads") doubling on banjo (wonderful!) was added just to give an authentic flavor, and this sometimes gave us a slogging primitive beat, energizing the dancers. So we continued on our merry way for several years with two regular weekly gigs plus other odd dates. Then one day Alec surprised us all by deciding that he wasn't going to become a "name" or make his fortune by carrying on with this semi-pro outfit so he upped sticks and set off for London, where he joined Terry Lightfoot, a real "trad" clarinetist who also had his own band.

Not really downhearted by the loss of Alec, the rest of us found another trumpeter and carried on as before in our two regular gigs until the manager of one of these (a dyed-in-the-wool purist) decided we had become too "modern" (we were playing '30s tunes) and fired us. The bassist, Ian, and I joined Jim Galloway (clarinet and saxes) who left and formed his "Jazzmakers," also a six-piece. For a time this had some success; we did three radio broadcasts, one TV spot, a few concerts and some assorted gigs, but "Trad" jazz as a mass commercial proposition was dying. Jim then decided to break up the band and took himself off to Canada where he took up soprano sax, playing with, of all people, Jay McShann (who had given Charlie Parker his first record date), and then became organizer of the Toronto Jazz Festival.

Taking Ian with me, I put together a piano/bass/drums trio plus girl singer and found regular gigs in two hotel lounge bars. The style was light jazz, mostly the Great American Songbook with the occasional current pop number. Although the "Trad" boom had ended, several pros and a couple of our local semi-pro bands carried on in a modified form. Guitars and saxes were no longer taboo and, in fact, the whole jazz scene had settled down into a comfortable "mainstream" and/or Dixieland style. Then, suddenly, into this milieu reappeared Alec, back from his adventures in London and eager to re-form his "All-Stars." He had acquired an agent, who in turn had secured for him a regular weekly gig at Gleneagles Hotel, certainly the most prestigious hotel in Scotland. So Ian and I joined up again on the strength of that and found that we were the only original members of the band, the others (trombone, clarinet and drums) tending to vary during the subsequent three or four years that we lasted in this job. They were not always better than adequate as musicians.

The engagement at Gleneagles meant playing for a "jazz brunch" every Sunday and, since we were playing for diners, we had to be very quiet – horns muted all the time with Alec continually worrying that we were too loud. As a leader he tended to the martinet style and could be completely obnoxious at times. During the three hours we played we were allowed hardly any time between numbers and no interval breaks in the music. When the band did get a break, I would play solo piano till their return when I would then get a theoretical ten minutes off for a pee and a smoke – too long for Alec, who would agitate till I came back and become bitter and twisted if I took anywhere near that time. Apart from these tensions, however, it was an easy job. I would pick up Ian (with his bass) from his home in Bearsden and drive us the sixty miles to the hotel. On the return trip we fell into the routine of stopping for a couple of drinks at a pub in Blackford, a village just down the road from Gleneagles – best part of the gig, as it happened, improved by the presence of an attractive barmaid!

While I felt that we were largely ignored by the diners, Alec regarded them as his audience and behaved accordingly like a big "name" band leader. However, it turned out there was at least one couple who evidently liked us (God knows why!) and paid attention to what we played. This was a middle-aged millionaire wine merchant from London together with his classy, good-looking (although aging) wife. They drank nothing

but champagne, seemed to have many free weekends to lunch at Gleneagles, and liked jazz, chatting with us at the end of each session. In the course of conversation, this gentleman revealed that he was Chieftain of the nearby Highland Games and had a country house at Lochearnhead (where he and his family seemed to spend most of the summers). At the end of the Games, it was his intention to throw a party at the house and, to our surprise, proposed that the band play at his party. Alec was elated, of course, so after settling on a suitable fee and arranging rooms for us at a nearby small hotel, it was agreed that we would entertain (hopefully!) the family and guests.

The plan was to play for the evening indoors if it was raining, but out on the lawn, near the shore of the Loch, if the weather was dry. All well and good and, in the end, we were engaged to perform at the house parties for three successive years following the Games! Knowing that we were in danger of playing out of doors, I took the precaution of packing a tube of insecticide ointment as protection against the dreaded midge! This biting, bloodsucking creature is the bane of the Scottish Highlands, particularly in the West. The scenery is great but no joy if you're fighting off the attentions of this Thing (which is not mentioned in tourist guides!). Now, the midge doesn't like sunlight or wind or dry ground, but loves still twilight and damp grass, preferably near water. Although a small fly, only about one millimeter long, don't think that it can't be as bad as I make out. In the right conditions it will attack in swarms like black clouds, and without protection of some kind the only recourse is to run!

As it happened, the first year's party was in the house so no problem, but when we turned up the second year there was an upright piano sitting in lonely fashion near the edge of the Loch and well away from the house. We also noted that a tent (or some kind of canopy) had been set up as a bar about two hundred yards from the piano – presumably so that the drinkers wouldn't be disturbed by the music! Before we could start, however, our host's son appeared with a bottle of whisky and glasses so those of us who were drinkers (i.e., all except Alec) poured a shot while getting ready. Anyway, we started playing in our usual way – no time between numbers – till Bill, the clarinetist, called out, "Alec, give us a minute till I recharge my glass."

"Recharge mine while you're at it," I added.

Alec went berserk and his face contorted, "You're not here to *drink*. You're here to *work*!"

Suitably chastened, if not mortified, we carried on playing till it became apparent that dusk was descending, the air was still, and the midges were starting to appear. Not in swarms (so far) because Lochearnhead is not the worst place in the country for the beasties, but I felt it was time for the insecticide before conditions deteriorated. So I turned to our esteemed leader, "Give me a minute till I get my anti-midge stuff from the car."

This time, in jocular mood, Alec then had to announce to the audience (the couple of dozen people in the "drink tent"), "There will now be a short break while our pianist goes for his midge ointment. Haw-haw." Of course nobody took a blind bit of notice while I smeared the stuff on my face and hands. In turn I offered it to Ian who recoiled, "Oh! No! No!" as if it was cocaine. It seemed he would rather be bitten than take the time to apply the ointment and risk upsetting Alec again! As an indifferent bassist, Ian might have been afraid that he would lose his place in the band, but he was always very helpful to everybody and supportive of Alec. The irony was that some years later Ian died the same day as Alec, almost as if he was still following him off this mortal coil!

The three "Highland Games" gigs that we did for our millionaire jazz fan were not the end. He also hired us to play for his two children's 21st Birthday parties, the first in Goodwood House and the second on board the "Silver Barracuda," a pleasure cruiser on the Thames, both venues hired by him for the occasions. That's another story but shows that we did get around in some quite rich circles in the Eighties!

—Fred Smith

TRAVELING JIANT

By Bob Silverberg

I've been an assiduous traveler most of my life. Travel was impossible during my boyhood, which coincided with World War II – war-time travel restrictions made it very difficult to get far from home except for some really good reason, and so my travels were restricted mainly to the subway ride from my Brooklyn home to the museums of Manhattan, forty minutes or so away. In the summer my family trekked all the way up to the summer resorts of the Catskill Mountains, which I recall as a three-hour drive from Brooklyn (and three hours when you're nine years old seems an eternity, so I thought of the Catskill trips as Serious Travel). But at the same time I was a regular reader of the *National Geographic*, to which a friend of my father's had bestowed a subscription on me in 1944, and in its vividly illustrated pages I read about places like Jaipur and Shanghai and Tahiti and Patagonia, and knew that some day, when the war was over and I was grown up and could make decisions for myself, I was going to get out there into the world of the *National Geographic* and see all those places with my own eyes. (As it

happens, though I've done a fair bit of traveling in the past sixty-some years, I've never been to Jaipur, Shanghai, Tahiti, or Patagonia, and I don't seriously expect to get to them in the handful of years that lie ahead. Nevertheless, I've done a pretty good job of gobbling up the globe, one or two big trips a year, sometimes three, for decade after decade.)

I began my career as a world traveler in 1950, when I was in my early teens. With a well-known New York fan of the day, Morton Paley, I set out on an expedition from Manhattan to attend a one-day science-fiction convention in far-off Philadelphia, 90 miles away, traveling by bus. I had never seen another actual city before. As we entered Philadelphia I was struck by how old everything looked. New York, then, still had plenty of buildings dating from the nineteenth century, but Philadelphia seemed much older than that, block after block of little brick buildings, dusty streets, an almost total absence of the high-rise structures that I associated with Manhattan. I half expected to see Benjamin Franklin strolling down the street. The other big thing I remember about my arrival in the City of Brotherly Love was that the lampposts were of a design utterly different from those I had grown up with in New York. It had never occurred to me that different cities had lampposts of different design. The beginning of my education as a world traveler!

The convention, so far as I can recall it 65 years later, was held in a drab little meeting room (the Knights of Columbus Hall?) in some drab little corner of the city, but for me it was a wildly exciting event. L. Sprague de Camp was there, and, perhaps, Theodore Sturgeon and Lester del Rey, and, I'm pretty sure, John W. Campbell, Jr., and other luminaries of the era. I had never seen live, famous science-fiction writers before. My first convention, but very much not my last, because I found myself returning to nearby Philadelphia again and again (usually by train, not by bus) and when the Worldcon took place there in 1953 I was, you betcha, there the whole weekend, sharing a suite at the Bellevue-Stratford Hotel with a young Ohio fan named Harlan Ellison. (That may have been my first experience of staying in a hotel room. It certainly was my first experience of Harlan Ellison.)

It seemed to me necessary to attend the Worldcon every year thereafter, and so I have, a streak now extending over more than sixty years, with the solitary exception of 1954 (when the con was in San Francisco, and I, as an impecunious college boy in New York, had no way of making what was then an expensive and difficult transcontinental trip.) But I was at the Cleveland con in 1955 – more alien lampposts – and that trip provided another new travel experience: before the con I flew from New York to Milwaukee, my first air journey, and made my way somehow up to Fond du Lac, Wisconsin, to visit my close fannish friend, Dean A. Grennell. (Instead of flying back, I returned to New York as a passenger in a bedraggled car owned, I think, by the fan Ian T. Macauley. Among the other passengers were such fans of the era as John Magnus, Harlan Ellison, my future first wife Barbara, and Karl Olsen, all of us jammed together for the 13-hour freeway drive. I didn't yet know how to drive, so I spent the long trip in the back seat; Karl Olsen didn't know how to drive, either, but that didn't stop him from taking a turn at the wheel, which nearly deposited us upside-down on the freeway median. We did get home, though.)

The Worldcon in 1956 was in New York, easy enough for me, but when 1957 brought the first overseas con, to be held in London, I began my real career as a world traveler. I was out of college then, and married, and earning a nice living as a fledgling s-f writer. So we organized a three-week trip for ourselves that included not only the con (at a shabby old hotel in Bayswater, with one toilet per floor, at the end of the hall) but a bus tour of the U.K. that took us to Oxford, York, Edinburgh, the Lake Country, and a lot of other places, and even a three-day side trip to Paris, a truly mind-croggling event. (They don't speak English here! They've published two of my stories in their magazine! And look at those lampposts!)

And so it was launched, my career as a world traveler. The 1958 Worldcon was in Los Angeles, technically a part of the United States, but I had never been out west before, and it all looked plenty alien to me. Our ambitious journey took us to Phoenix and some of the New Mexico pueblos, then to San Francisco (then a tiny, low-rise town, and I had no inkling whatever that within another fifteen years I would be living across the bay from it) and down the California coast by bus, goggle-eyed, to wonderfully bizarre Los Angeles, where, as a long-time student of botany, I reveled in the subtropical vegetation even as I did anthropological research among the very peculiar natives. The 1959 con, in Detroit, led me across the border into Canada; but now it was time to get serious about exploring Europe, and in the spring of 1960 my wife and I set off on a vast driving trip (the longest trip I have ever taken, and I could drive, now, too) through most of Italy – Florence, Venice, Rome, Naples, Capri, Pompeii, then turning west along the Ligurian coast through places like Portofino and San Remo and ending up across the border in Monaco and then Nice, a staggering journey that still blazes in my memory after 55 years.

After that one, it was easy to extend the conquests. Pick a destination, put up with the uncomfortable air travel of that pre-jet era, and go somewhere. Jamaica! Puerto Rico! Surinam! Guyana! The Netherlands! Belgium! Scandinavia! Kenya, Tanzania (as it was then), and Zanzibar! Turkey! Israel! Australia! Morocco! Tunisia! And so it has gone ever since. Since my second marriage in 1987 Karen and I have usually taken two overseas trips a year, filling in the blanks – Greece, Spain, Russia (St. Petersburg, anyway), Japan, Finland, the Galapagos, Switzerland, Catalonia, Croatia, Hungary, Germany both East and West, Egypt, the Czech Republic, Austria, almost every corner of France (Burgundy, Bordeaux and the Dordogne, Alsace, Provence, the Loire, etc.) and many repeat visits to London and Paris, and on and on and on, just about everywhere with the conspicuous exceptions of China and India, where the geographical extent and the size of the populations made even a seasoned traveler like me hesitate.

One thing about spending so many years traveling is that it takes a long time to spend a lot of years, and one major thing that happens when you spend a lot of years is that you get old. Which brings me to my most recent travel experience, now less than a month in the past.

I have always been a pretty healthy man, and I have generally been spared serious medical difficulties while overseas. A big exception was the heart attack that hit me in London in October 2013, but even that was relatively mild as heart attacks go, and the British National Health Service had me patched up and on my feet within a couple of days, and there have been no long-term consequences. So we did our regular spring trip in 2014 (Brussels, Zurich, Vienna) and went back to England that fall for yet another British worldcon. (I have been to all seven of those, which makes me a member of a very small, select club.) In the spring of 2015, I decided, after reading how Matisse had discovered the use of color under the dazzling light of the French Mediterranean coast in 1905, to visit the town of Collioure, where he had lived, close to the Spanish border, and drive up the coast to such adjacent places as Montpellier and Narbonne, a part of France I had never seen. In the Internet age I serve as my own travel agent. I booked a flight (San Francisco to London to Toulouse, and a rented car the rest of the way), picked out hotels (here in my old age I see no reason to continue saving for my old age, since I am smack in the middle of it, and I go for the best and most comfortable ones), chose some fine French restaurants. If my 90-year-old self complains that I was too free with our money when I was in my 80s, well, I'll find some way of apologizing. But if I don't happen to make it to my 90s there's not a lot of sense in hoarding the money these days.

The trip was under a dark star from the beginning, though. We were due to leave on May 1, arriving in London the next day and

continuing right on to Toulouse with a layover of a couple of hours. That would get us to Toulouse by about 5 p.m. local time on May 2, making it easy enough for us to check into our hotel, unwind a little, and get ourselves ready for the first of what I expected to be a long series of splendid French dinners. But a few weeks before our departure the French air controllers' union, citing all sorts of grievances, announced that it was going to stage a series of three-day strikes, the third of which would be concluded on May 2, the very day of our arrival. The first of the strikes occurred a couple of days later; with French air space shut down, flights were canceled all over Europe (including, of course, our British Airways hop from London to Toulouse) and chaos resulted.

Which plunged me into deep anxiety. The whole trip, which I had spent close to a year planning, seemed to be in jeopardy. The ingenious Karen did come up with a desperate workaround: since we were flying into London, we could try to take the Eurostar under the Channel from London to Paris and proceed from Paris to Toulouse by high-speed train. The problem was that we would be landing in London around 11 a.m. London time, after what would be an all-night flight from San Francisco; we would then have to collect our luggage, grab a cab from Heathrow to the Eurostar terminal in central London (getting there in time for a Eurostar departure around 2 p.m.), then race across Paris from the Eurostar terminal at the Gare du Nord to the train station in Montparnasse, on the opposite side of the city, in time to catch the afternoon train to Toulouse. That would get us to our hotel around midnight of the second day of the trip, having had only such sleep as we could catch aboard our plane and on all those trains.

Nightmaresville. The 80-year-old body is not built to withstand such stress in the course of a trip, especially at the outset, under the impact of jet lag. But we saw no choice, and I bought two (refundable) Eurostar tickets, and we awaited, gloomily, the uncertain beginning of our journey. If we missed our Heathrow-to-Eurostar connection we would be stranded in London on our second day. If we got to Paris on time but missed our Paris-to-Toulouse connection we would be stranded in Paris. Hotels would need to be found (during the madness of an air strike.) The whole equilibrium of the trip would be upset at the outset.

Then the May 2 strike was canceled.

The air controllers had proved their point with the disruption caused by the first strike, and so the second and third ones (designed to upset French travel during the Easter holiday) were called off, though I spent the next ten days checking travel news daily via the Internet to make sure that the volatile Frenchies hadn't decided, nyaah nyaah, to have their May 2 strike anyway. They didn't. I got a refund on our Eurostar tickets and we boarded our plane on Friday, May 1, snuggled into our comfortable sleeper seats (I fly first class these days, and if my 90-year-old self doesn't like it, he can finance his senility with Kickstarter), and duly arrived in London on time the next day, transferred to our Toulouse flight the next day, reached our pleasant hotel in central Toulouse by 5 p.m. or so, and enjoyed a top-notch dinner at the much-heralded restaurant of the hotel. So far, so good.

We spent the weekend wandering around Toulouse, a mid-sized French city with some interesting architecture and a couple of medium-grade art museums, and on Tuesday, emerging from jet lag and feeling pretty good about things (though I still couldn't quite believe we had escaped the disaster of the air strike) we set out in our rented car for Collioure, Matisse's pretty fishing village on the Mediterranean coast, a two-hour drive away.

And now I get a chance to tell how I was Really Wrong about something, and how I apologized for it. These are both fairly rare events in my life. I don't have any problem with apologizing when I'm wrong, but I am a pretty shrewd guy and I have been around a long time, and that combination of shrewdness and experience has allowed me to avoid a lot of life's most serious mistakes. But I'm not infallible.

The story involves Karen's iPhone. I don't have one. I have what amounts to an irrational dislike for smartphones. I rarely leave the house during the day, and since there are computers and telephones all over the house, I don't have any need to clutch a smartphone in my paw as I move through my daily routines, and in the evening, when Karen and I usually go out to dinner, we have depended (on those rare occasions when we needed a phone) on the dumb little phone-only fliptop cell phone that she has carried in recent years. One time when I was driving alone, coming back from the dentist, my car broke down and I needed to call Karen to come rescue me, but I knew that everybody in the street would have a phone in his pocket, and it was no problem to stop someone and have him call her. And at Worldcons I will ask friends to put through calls for me when I'm trying to reach someone in the confusions of the con. But a smartphone of my own? Never! Irrationally or not, I have taken an intense dislike to the whole nose-in-the-screen culture I see about me, the couples sitting at the restaurant table ignoring each other while poking at their screens, the dreamy teenager wandering across the street against the red light as I come driving up, etc., etc.

For this trip Karen insisted that we had to buy a smartphone. She was afraid that we would get lost driving around on the French coast, that the burden of figuring out our route would fall on her, and that we needed not just a GPS but the full assistance of Google's travel facilities to guide us.

I scoffed. I pointed out that our whole trip involved about two hundred miles, that French road signs are rationally distributed and clearly intelligible, that I had a good road map, that I have been wandering around Europe since 1960 by car without ever getting seriously lost, even in places like Greece that don't use the Roman alphabet, and that I am, goddammit, not quite senile yet. We would not get lost, I said. And if by some mischance we did, I would take it upon myself to figure out how to deal with the problem.

Well, no dice. She wanted a smartphone anyway – she and I were practically the only people in the world without one, she pointed out, and that felt peculiar – and so she went out and bought one. I am not the sort of husband who issues dictatorial decrees, and she is not the sort of wife, anyway, who would let me get away with that. So she had an iPhone 6 in her purse when we embarked for Europe.

And when we drove down from Toulouse to Collioure we got ourselves hopelessly lost, and needed the smartphone to bail us out.

Most of the drive was an easy one – a smooth, straight French freeway, better, indeed, than our California equivalents. We picked up the car at the Toulouse railway station and I drove us out of town, and after about ninety minutes on the road we stopped and I turned the wheel over to her for the final leg into Collioure. And then the fun began. Our nice straight roadway devolved into a series of roundabouts conducting us to ever more secondary secondary roads, and, though I had brought along a printout of Michelin highway instructions for this leg of the journey, suddenly the signs on the road did not match the instructions on the printout, and Karen, not knowing what to do next, made a right turn off the road into a quiet residential neighborhood so we could figure out a route that would take us the remaining ten or fifteen miles into Collioure.

Big mistake. The residential neighborhood, at noon, was very quiet. There was not a human being in sight. And each of its streets terminated in a dead end. We drove around in circles, trying to find some way out that would lead us back to the road we had been on, since that at least went somewhere and these streets went nowhere, one cul-de-sac after another. Trapped! And then Karen pulled out the smartphone that I had so vehemently objected to buying and began poking at things on its screen.

Suddenly a voice out of the phone said, American accent, "Turn left on Rue Olivier." I looked up, and, by damn, there was a street crossing ours just ahead, and a street sign plainly said, "Rue Olivier." I was flabber-

gasted. How did the telephone even know where we were, let alone what the street at the corner was named? "Turn left again into Place Charles de Gaulle." "Turn right on Rue de la Republique." And so on and so on, step by step, until it had led us out of that series of cul-de-sacs and back to the highway where we had become lost in the first place. "Take the next roundabout to the D8 and go four miles," the telephone instructed. We did so. Meanwhile I unfolded my old-fashioned roadmap, saw where we were, plotted a route that would take us from there to Collioure, and, behold, so it happened. Between the phone and my map we found our way with ease and joyfully parked the car at our hillside hotel.

And I apologized most handsomely and extensively for having scorned the smartphone, because I knew that without it we would still be banging around helplessly in that neighborhood of dead-end streets.

Collioure turned out to look pretty much the way it had in Matisse's time, except that all the fishermen have gone elsewhere and their picturesque little houses have been transformed into restaurants or boutiques for the sale of tourist-oriented stuff (sandals, scarves, ceramic knickknacks, etc.) But the medieval castle and the church and the watchtower are all still there, and the three pebbly little beaches, and the sunrises and sunsets, and all the other pleasant features that Matisse, Derain, and their colleagues in the group of painters known then as Fauves – "wild beasts" – painted with such gaudy abandon. To underscore the point, reproductions of some of their paintings were posted here and there around town in the precise places where they had set up their easels long ago.

We stayed there for four days, doing not very much except watching the scenery. (There is a tiny museum, with paintings by locally celebrated artists, and we did visit that.) But little problems were cropping up. Mysterious pains were radiating from my right big toe, as though I had an infection of some sort along the nail. Every step sent me an unpleasant message, and even at night, in bed, the contact of my toe against the bedsheet hurt. Then, too, as we walked back and forth along Collioure's little waterfront, something seized up in my left hip after about ten minutes of activity, making it necessary for me to stop and rest until things unseized again.

This frightened me considerably. I am still making use of all of my original bones, having had no knees or hips or clavicles replaced along the way, and the thought that something in my leg had worn out and I was going to have to go through the painful and complicated process of a hip replacement once I finished limping through this trip was horrifying to contemplate. Then, too, we were eating quite lavishly, as is the point when you come to France, and by the third night I was awakening about two A.M. each night with distinctly bothersome intestinal distress.

Poor old Bob, I thought. He's had a long and lively life, but here he is a mere 80 years old and one of his hips is starting to go and he can't get through a fancy French dinner without having his stomach rebel and even one of his goddamn toenails is acting up! Geezerdom has arrived! Codgerdom! It is going to become impossible for me to travel any more, I ruminated bleakly, if I can't walk for long and can't even enjoy my dinner. So in a mood of great gloom we left Collioure on Saturday morning and drove a hundred miles up the coast to Montepellier, said to be a large and vigorous town where we were due to stay at a classy hotel that boasted a Michelin two-star restaurant. We got there about half past twelve, dropped our luggage at the hotel, and went to the town center, a ten-minute walk away, to find a place for lunch. (Our hotel, two-star restaurant or no, didn't bother to serve lunch.)

The first thing I discovered was that my hip ailment had gone away, as mysteriously as it had come, during the drive up the coast. I had no difficulty walking, nor did I for the rest of the trip, and all thoughts of hip surgery vanished. The second thing I discovered was that Montpellier was having a heat wave, and the temperature was close to 100, whereas Collioure, right on the Mediterranean, had been pleasantly cool. The third thing I discovered was that on Saturday afternoon Montpellier, which is only about a 90-minute drive from the Spanish border, observes the Spanish custom of the siesta. Just about everything was shut, and hardly anyone was outdoors in the debilitating heat.

We did find a little place that was open for lunch, and ate outdoors, salad and steak tartare for me. And the next thing I discovered was that I was really, really sick.

I did manage to eat my lunch. We did manage to find and visit the Montepellier cathedral, a few blocks away, which was beautiful, and blissfully cool inside. And when we came out into that heat a vast wave of queasiness overtook me and I knew we had to get back to the hotel pronto, and that I didn't have the strength to manage even the ten-minute walk back. We looked for a taxi. No chance. The streets were deserted and even though this was downtown Montpellier there was no reason for a taxi to be out and about.

What we did find was the Montpellier botanic garden, across the street from us – open, and with an office at the gate where we were able to ask in our lame French if the two officials on duty could find a cab for us. I assumed that there'd be one within easy reach that could be summoned by telephone. Ah, mais non. The two officials pulled telephone directories down from a shelf and began phoning around, and after twenty minutes the best they could say, in their own mixture of French and English, that a cab would be here "in two minutes." Ten minutes later, no cab. They could see that I was ill, and they kept offering reassurances; and eventually a cab did show up. I was groggy from the heat and fever by then. What had been a ten-minute walk from the hotel for us turned out to be about a fifteen-minute taxi ride back, Toulouse being a maze of one-way streets; but eventually the cab deposited us in front of our hotel, I crawled into bed, and Karen ate her two-star dinner alone that night.

I stayed in bed all the next day – Sunday – eating nothing, dozing lightly, feeling awful – but the hotel was able to find a doctor who would make a house call, and he arrived around two that afternoon, diagnosed my malady as a mere intestinal upset, prescribed an antibiotic, gave me some sort of ointment that soothed the troublesome toenail, and departed leaving me with the feeling that I probably would survive. Sunday in Montepellier is double siesta – the stillness of the grave, nothing budging – but Karen set out on a journey to the one pharmacy that was actually open, bought my pills, and even returned with a pizza, which I was unable to eat. By morning, though, I was aware that the fever had broken. I felt well enough to go out and do a bit of sightseeing, thereby determining that there was nothing much to see in Montepellier (except one highly regarded museum, which was closed that day) and in the evening, though I still felt pretty wobbly, I did fake my way through an elaborate dinner at our hotel.

My recovery continued and onward we went on Tuesday to nearby Narbonne, which has a fine medieval castle (I surprised myself by being able to climb to the top story), a half-cathedral (after they started building it they realized that they would have to knock a hole in the city wall in order to extend the building to its proper dimensions, and knocking holes in the city wall was a bad idea in the fifteenth century, so they quit halfway) and some pleasing Roman ruins. Next stop, the famous fortified town of Carcassone, pretty much Disneyized but its ancient battlements still there, and back to Toulouse for a final night before setting out for home. And I was, let me tell you, glad to be heading home, after all the ailments great and small that had beset me on that trip.

What conclusions did I take away from this, the umpteenth of my overseas trips?

One was that that region of France was not as interesting as I had hoped it would be. Well, okay, it happens: everything can't be Paris. But the more important discovery was that I had better go easy on myself in future years, because the octogenarian body is not as resilient as a 40-year-old's or even a 60-year-old's, and I am prone now to unex-

pected aches and pains (that mysterious affliction of the hip) and not as resistant to invading bacteria as I used to be (did too many steak tartares lead me to that digestive upset in Montepellier?) And I can't march around a museum or a famous ruin for hour after hour without getting very weary. So we will go easier on the high-end dining, and easier on the stress of travel, too, not as many changes of hotel during a trip (twelve-day trips instead of seventeen), not as much driving done by us (with or without the benefit of Google's GPS), and shorter museum visits, probably nipping into them for several short visits instead of trying to see them all at once on the same day.

What I won't do, at least not yet, is give up traveling altogether, however more convenient it would be never to go past my own front door. The next trip, not a big one, is up to Spokane for the worldcon. A couple of months later, off to Europe for stops in Copenhagen and Amsterdam, and down to Nantes for a French s-f festival where I am one of the guests of honor. Next year, I hope, a trip to Tuscany, conducted under the new rules, just two hotels and hired drivers taking us around. After that? One does not want to get too cocksure about one's own survival. If I'm still here next year, as I hope and expect to be, I'll find someplace interesting to go in 2017.

—Bob Silverberg

(continued from page 3:)

My last round of chemo ended in early October, and almost immediately I was scheduled to undergo radiation to deal with that lesion on my rib, which was starting to give me a little pain. Compared to the relatively leisurely pace of drug infusion, this meant going to the hospital every weekday afternoon for two weeks to get my daily dose. In preparation for this, I was placed on my back on a very hard surface while they adjusted my body and their equipment. I complained about the discomfort and asked for some cushioning, but they said any changes would mess up their calculations. Two days later, I started having severe lower back pain and weakness in my right leg that made walking and driving difficult. More tests determined that this was caused by a flare-up of disk degeneration in the lower back that was now pressing on my sciatic nerve. Did that hard surface aggravate what was already happening, or was it a coincidence? – yet another mystery. Later I had a couple of steroid shots to deal with the pain, and it's helped some.

But instead of the robust, energetic person you know and love, moving quickly – according to Carol, much too quickly – through the universe, I'm now slowed down and walk more like those people I used to call "old." As you might expect, I'm not happy about this state of affairs, but glad that medical science continues to come up with new ways to keep me alive.

Now for the fun parts of this issue. Grant Canfield returns – his last appearance here was in 2007 – and has decorated his engaging article with his first new artwork for at least a quarter century.

Continuing a long-time *Trap Door* tradition to give worthy material a wider audience, some of this issue's contents first appeared elsewhere and in somewhat different form: John D. Berry's in his blog, Andy Hooper's in the 2015 WOOF distribution, Bob Silverberg's in his FAPAzine, and Greg Benford's in the *New York Review of Science Fiction*.

My contributors and I would, as always, appreciate your comments and reactions. And before you ask – yes, there will be another issue one of these days. Whether sooner or later depends on your response – and yes, my health.

—Robert Lichtman

ESCORTING THE ODD

By Greg Benford

For decades, starting in the 1970s, the University of California at Irvine asked me to be the default escort for visitors and speakers a bit out of the ordinary. This usually meant science fiction writers with a large audience, though not always. I was an sf writer too, though with real world credentials as a professor of physics, which some thought qualified me to mediate between the real and the imaginary.

Thus I introduced Ray Bradbury several times to enormous crowds of thousands. He gave the same talk, essentially, mixed in with whatever was currently in the swirl: the promise of Mars, lustful vampires, nostalgia for books and libraries. He was always affable and signed for hours. He asked me to contribute a story to an anthology playing on his themes, and I did, with a story "Centigrade 233" – the same temperature as F451. In it I had a comic line, that in that distant anti-book future, the true Bradbury collectibles were those unsigned. He liked that.

Michael Crichton taught a screenwriting class at UCI in the 1970s when his career was in a stall after *The Andromeda Strain* and lesser movies, before the dinosaur revival movies. I had drinks with him before his night class and introduced him at public talks. He told me how he had worked his way through medical school by writing suspense novels. He said scripts were easier to write, but novels helped you sell the idea. He got his ideas from sf stories, much as George Lucas did.

Guests Good and Bad

The first person I brought to UCI was Avram Davidson. I had noticed in my first year there that a position of visiting faculty had opened. Avram was destitute in the Bay Area (where I'd met him), so I applied for him – and he got it. He was a good writing teacher and we enjoyed dinners together. He parlayed that into a series of visiting writer positions that got him

through the last, impoverished years of his life. He spoke well in public, having had decades of training in panels at sf conventions. I liked him a lot. The English Department faculty ignored him completely.

In the 1980s I became the referee for public debates, starting with G. Gordon Liddy of Watergate fame vs. Tim Leary. We had dinner beforehand, Leary in his tennis shoes and jeans and clearly stoned, with Liddy orderly, relaxed, affable. They had done this gig before and got along, all topics between them exhausted by now, so mostly they asked me about being a professor and writer. I wanted to know about the Nixon White House and Liddy complied; I deduced that it was worse than it seemed, and Nixon a clear paranoid. Again, I was amazed that such an unbalanced personality had made it through the political circus.

Liddy demolished Leary in the debate and impressed me with his clear, precise logic from premises I doubted: that Nixon knew the country's enemies and Liddy's job was to carry out orders without question. Leary mostly told old dope jokes and spoke of the sloppy, ineffable mysteries of life. Leary had lost the audience by the end of it and Liddy got cheers. I steered clear of the wreck of Leary and had drinks after with Liddy. Theirs was a traveling road show and both knew it.

In 1993 my friend, biologist Michael Rose, and I assembled a public debate between him and the leading anti-evolutionist in America, Phillip Johnson, a professor of law at UC Berkeley and author of *Darwin on Trial* in 1992. Michael and I were both astonished by the rise of anti-science in our culture, and sought a way to take on "intelligent design," an attempt to put a patina of secularity on top of what is a fundamentally religious belief.

I opened the debate by saying I had no strong religious beliefs because I was an Episcopalian. That got the expected laugh, because the crowd was quite fundamentalist. Unlike previous biologists who debated Johnson, Rose used offense, not defense, taking Johnson to task for what he thought a theory of life's development should be. This revealed that the alternatives to evolution were laughable.

Rose wore a small, calm smile. At the half-hour point Johnson's face began to twitch, eyes narrowed, ears reddened. I watched the audience, having little to do. They resembled a slow-motion crowd at a tennis match, attention swaying lazily, but now watching Johnson as Rose spoke. Rose scored points and Johnson's face clouded, vexed.

At the end Johnson, blocked from his favorite arguments by having to fend off Rose's reasoned points, was visibly angry. Rose walked across the platform and shook Johnson's hand, but Johnson refused to shake mine. I felt grand, since I made him do it in full view of the crowd. A bit more than 1,500 paid $10 each to get in, with 300 UCI students getting in free. So UCI made $15,000 out of fundamentalist Christians and Johnson got blunted. Plus, it was fun.

Some debates I turned down, such as an Israeli-Palestinian one. I'm pretty much a hard-line Zionist, though not Jewish, and didn't think I could be fair.

Passing Through

I got a call from the English department's Masters of Fine Arts program, the writing mavens. The well known novelist Robert Stone had agreed to come teach for a while, with one firm demand – UCI had to get him a rental home in Laguna Beach, where I lived. Did I know of any? The market was tight.

By pure chance a friend who taught math at the high school was going on a half year sabbatical. (Since she didn't do actual mathematical research, I wondered what a sabbatical would help with – never found out.) She liked the idea, but: "This Stone guy has a reputation for boozing and being rude. I'll rent to him only if Benford checks on the house every week."

I laughed at this and the deal went through. So each week I knocked on Stone's door and we had a drink. The house seemed fine. About a month in, Stone waved a hand at a thin fellow who was staying with him for a while – Tom. We shared a bottle of wine and I gathered from the wandering talk that Tom wrote, too. It came up that I had lived three years in occupied Germany, where my father commanded some artillery units. Tom was fascinated by The War and wanted to know especially about the Nazi policies on weapons, physics, V-2, the lot. I told him some about von Braun's subscription to *Astounding*, how issues had come to him through the German embassy in Stockholm, then by diplomatic pouch to him. So von Braun told others about Heinlein's 1940 story on radioactive dust as a weapon, and the Cleve Cartmill story about how to build a nuclear bomb. Tom ate all this up.

Slowly as the weeks wore on I saw that Tom had read a lot of history, science fiction, knew vast amounts – a vacuum cleaner writer, eager for details. I too am a magpie writer, storing shiny bits away for later. Then dimly I sensed who he was.

I never brought up his identity. Stone finished his teaching and I saw Tom no more, for years. But occasionally I do see him in Laguna, so maybe he has a home there. Only now do I regret that I didn't ask him about the writing of *Gravity's Rainbow*.

In the spring of 2001 the campus speaker administrator called me to introduce Douglas Adams, just hours before he was to appear in a poorly announced talk. I met him beforehand with his wife, Jane Belson, and gave a quick introduction to the audience of maybe twenty people. Adams was unbothered by the small crowd and gave it his all, funny and deft, drawing on his Hitchhiker mythos. After, we had drinks with his assistants, and he told me he was moving to the Santa Barbara area to write a movie version of the Hitchhiker tale, maybe the start of a series. He wanted to "go Californian" as he put it, away from England. Maybe he could get some exercise, spend time out of doors, get to know Hollywood. That might speed up his writing; after all, he quoted himself, "I love deadlines. I love the whooshing noise they make as they go by."

I told him how I had tuned into the first, radio version of Hitchhiker when I was a visiting fellow at Cambridge, in the Institute of Astronomy, in the late 1970s. It was unexpected, hilarious, a deliciously ironic view of sf ideas. From that he grew the whole, vastly amusing landscape. He nodded, saying, "You guys bring the ideas, we bring the irony." A few months later he was exercising in a gym, had chest pains, shook off help, went home to rest – and collapsed with a major heart attack, dying at age 49.

The Sirens of Slaughterhouse

When in 1972-1973 I taught a night class in modern sf with David Samuelson, a Long Beach State professor with sf credentials, we had a fine bevy of writers come to speak: Spinrad, Poul Anderson, Zelazny, Sheila Finch, Tim Powers. Still, the most striking writer I hosted, for a day in the early 1990s, was Kurt Vonnegut.

The university asked me to walk him around the campus, have dinner with him, and host his public talk in our largest center, where he drew over a thousand. With his curly hair askew, deep red pouches under his eyes and rumpled clothes, he looked like a part-time philosophy professor, typically chain smoking, coughs and wheezes dotting his speech.

To my surprise, he knew who I was. "Sure, I've read – " and he rattled off six of my titles, starting with *Timescape* and through my Galactic Center series, then incomplete. I didn't mention my review of his *Galápagos* in 1985, which found the book weak, and he didn't either, probably because, he said, he seldom bothered with reviews. He was affable, interested in the campus, and wanted to talk about sf. "I live in Manhattan and go to the literary parties but I don't read their books. I read just enough reviews to know what to say, then look enigmatic."

Vonnegut reminisced that his mother, Edith, had the greatest influence on him. "She thought she might make a new fortune by writing for the slick magazines. She took short-story courses at night. She studied magazines the way gamblers study racing forms. All to little avail. I think she envied me, later."

He said his favorite writer was Orwell, tried to emulate him. "I like his concern for the poor, I like his socialism, I like his

simplicity." Orwell's *1984* and Huxley's *Brave New World* heavily influenced his debut novel, *Player Piano*, in 1952. He defended the sf genre, and deplored a perceived sentiment that "no one can simultaneously be a respectable writer and understand how a refrigerator works."

He had grown up reading and then writing sf, but shed the label of science-fiction writer with *Slaughterhouse-Five* in 1969. Its subtitle, *The Children's Crusade: A Duty-Dance with Death* told its intent, refracted through an sf lens. After the book appeared, Vonnegut told me, he went into a severe depression and vowed never to write another novel. Suicide was always a temptation. In 1984, he tried to take his life with sleeping pills and alcohol, and failed. Smoking seemed to be a half-measure in that direction, I thought, watching him light one from the butt of the previous. Yet he was a man of mirth – perhaps the other side of the same coin?

His novels since *Slaughterhouse-Five* had been an ironic stew of plot summaries and autobiographical notes. Often, Kilgore Trout was a character, plainly a stand-in for Ted Sturgeon; I asked him about this and he nodded. "If I'd wasted my time creating new characters, I would never have gotten around to calling attention to things that really matter."

He remarked that he could easily have become a crank, and I said that was because he was too smart. From his soft, ironic comments I gathered he could have become a cynic, but there was something tender in his nature that he could never quite suppress. To me, he could have become a bore, but even at his most despairing he had an endless willingness to entertain his readers: with drawings, jokes, sex, bizarre plot twists, science fiction – whatever it took.

Before I introduced him that evening, he insisted on smoking two cigarettes outside the big, smoking-free UCI center where a thousand people waited. Then I did a thirty-second introduction and he spoke for an hour. Before questions, he had to take a break – for another cigarette outside. After half an hour of questions it was over and he delayed the small reception for him to have another. Then we went in to meet the Chancellor and others of the elite. Vonnegut accepted a glass of Chardonnay and while talking, took out a cigarette and smoked for the rest of the evening. Nobody remarked on this; it was Vonnegut, after all.

In his remarks that day and evening I felt a very deep, dark despair. I mentioned that when Kilgore Trout found the question "What is the purpose of life?" written on a bathroom wall, his response is, "To be the eyes and ears and conscience of the Creator of the Universe, you fool." Trout's remark, I said, was curious, seeing that Vonnegut was an atheist, so there is no Creator to report back to. In *The Sirens of Titan*, there is a Church of God the Utterly Indifferent; that seemed to be his true position.

That night he said, "The two real political parties in America are the Winners and the Losers. The people don't acknowledge this. They claim membership in two imaginary parties, the Republicans and the Democrats." In the end, he said, he believed that, "We are here to help each other get through this thing, whatever it is."

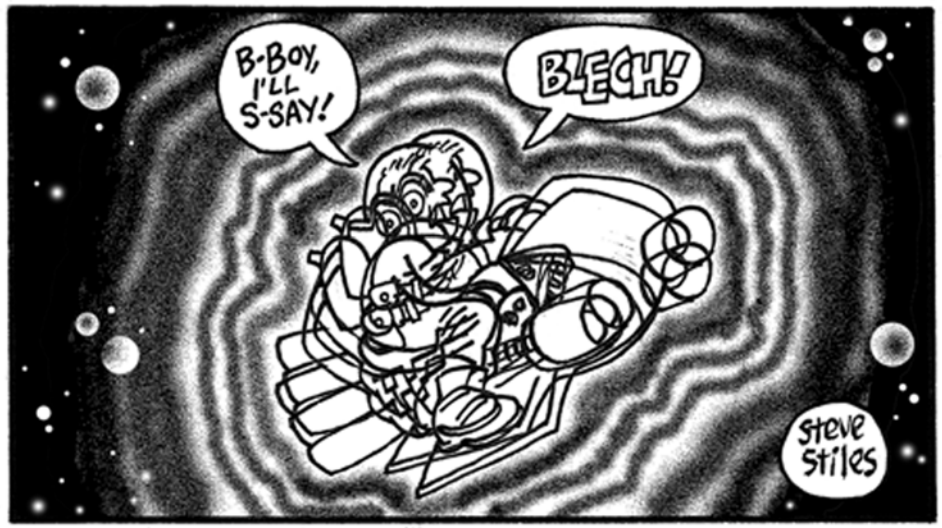
Some years later he nearly died in a fire started because he fell asleep smoking. In 2007 he died, age 84, of brain injuries incurred several weeks prior from a fall.

As usual, he had a great exit line. In 2006 he sardonically said in a *Rolling Stone* interview that he would sue the makers of the Pall Mall cigarettes he had been smoking since he was twelve years old, for false advertising. "And do you know why?" he said. "Because I'm 83 years old. The lying bastards! On the package Brown & Williamson promised to kill me."

Of all the odd people I escorted, Vonnegut seemed the most in touch with the world he struggled to describe. It gave his remarks an immediacy I relished. The last thing he said to me was that anything that persuaded people that they were not leading meaningless lives in a meaningless universe, was good. "So keep writing."

—Greg Benford

THE ETHER STILL VIBRATES



LEIGH EDMONDS

About the only light reading I seem to do these days is when I'm on public transport, and these days that is mainly on the train down to Melbourne and back. So when fanzines arrive I put them in my backpack for later reading. You might have received this a few weeks earlier had it not been that Bruce Gillespie's *SFC* arrived in the mail the day before *Trap Door*. It was a little like the old days when there seemed to be a fanzine or two in my letter box every other day. But that was all the fanzines I have so far received this year.

I had to go down to Melbourne yesterday for a book launch, one of my own efforts in fact. So I had *Trap Door* and I had this book that I'd written and I thought I'd best have a look at the book first so I had some idea of what I might say when I was asked to make a speech. I didn't think that it was too bad but it could have done with a bit of editing to smooth out some of the rougher edges. In fact, I'm not sure that it is a good idea to reread one's own work, particularly when it is set in print, because then it is too late to make revisions.

Since I only had to be in Melbourne in the evening, I decided to make a day of it and spend the day in the State Library doing some research. The project I'm working on at the moment – civil aviation in Australia in the 20th Century – had led me to some interesting side issues that I needed to clear up. One was what had happened to all the coastal passenger ships that once were the main form of transport between capital cities (remembering, as you no doubt do, that Australia is an island continent and that all the capitals except Canberra are on the coast). The other one was about the links between civil aviation and tourism. So I spent the day finding what there was in the library on these topics and copying it.

In the old days, when I was doing my PhD, I did this by taking a writing pad and several pencils to make notes. This was hard and time consuming work. Later on, when I started writing to commission, I made endless photocopies, and later again I'd drag along my laptop and scanner and make copies that way. These days I simply take along my digital camera and photograph what I want to copy. Even that has changed in the past few years. When I wrote the tax office history, I photographed endless government files, but the photographs had to be in black and white to keep the file size down because of storage issues. These days storage is so cheap and easy to use that color images of pages of books is quite okay.

So I did that most of the day. Just when that was starting to become too boring to continue, who should wander past but Lucy Sussex, whom I hadn't seen since the most recent Aussiecon. We chatted for a while and made arrangements to get

together for lunch somewhere down the track. Then it was time to get to the book launch.

This little book was the history of the cadet unit at Haileybury College, one of Melbourne's leading public (or private depending on your perspective) schools. Come to think of it, they use the word "independent" these days. Its oldest campus is in the leafy suburbs of Brighton, which is not too far from Melbourne by suburban train. Getting off the train at Brighton Beach – which, as its name suggests, has the sea on one side and suburbs on the other – I headed up South Street. Strolling up to the school took me more than half an hour because I dawdled and took in the sights that I had not seen for quite a few years. It's now an expensive part of Melbourne to live in and there are some magnificent older mansions, mostly built before the 1893 crash, lots of modest bungalows, and an intrusion of rather hideous boxes made more recently. Perhaps those boxes will take on a certain charm with the passage of time, but the architectural contrast between the old and the new is, I suspect, a little too severe to ever become acceptable.

When I arrived at the school I found hordes of children hurtling around because it was an open day. Weaving my way through the throng, I found the hall where the launch was to be and sat down to make a few notes about what I might say for my little speech. But I didn't get past the first line when somebody recognized me, dragged me inside and thrust a glass of more than acceptable Chardonay into my hand – and everything became a bit of a blur after that. I'd written the school's history a few years back and had met most of the people then, so it was more a matter of catching up with them rather than making polite chat. I found myself chatting to the Chairman of the School Board about his time in the cadet unit and talked to the man who is credited with doing the proofreading. (It turned out that his daughter had actually done the work because she is a professional in the field. She was visiting some friends in London and ran out of money so he sent her the manuscript and the money he was being paid to proof it to get her out of that hole.) There were some speeches, including mine which people seemed to like, and then with a second, or was it a third, glass of plonque in my hand I found myself chatting to a past Chairman of the School and the current Principal about coming back and doing some more work for them in a few years. This might be interesting because they now have a campus of the school in Beijing.

Soon after that I was popped into a car and dropped back to the railway station to catch the suburban train back into the city to catch the train back to Ballarat. As it turned out, the Ballarat train left almost half an hour later than the timetable I had said, so I had plenty of time to spare. I found myself somewhere more of less comfortable to sit and wait, rummaged around in my backpack and found this ish of *Trap Door*, admired the cover and then turned the page and started reading. (Somewhere in this the train came in, I got on board and found a seat and continued reading.)

I enjoyed everything in the issue, all well written, engaging and entertaining, even amusing. It also struck me that a lot of it was people rummaging around in their past experiences and telling stories about them. For example, I don't know how many times I've read you mentioning your time on the Farm, but this is the first time I think I've read a story about what it was like to be there and what you did. It sounded like a very organized kind of commune but I suppose they have to be. Valma and I were interested in one through a friend on the edge of fandom in the mid '70s and may even have visited it, but Valma went to university instead and I kept my job in the Department of Civil Aviation, so our lives took a different path that led us to Canberra and then Perth and now here to Ballarat.

Having read your editorial (or is it an article) I wonder if I would have been suited to life on the Farm. It sounds like too much physical work to me, and being a shy and retiring fellow, being out on the road selling books wouldn't have been my cup of tea either. I also got the feeling from some of the things you said that the leadership of the group (I assume there was one) could be a bit fascist at times, which would not have been fun either unless I was one of the group.

Next came Roy Kettle's long, involved and interesting piece. Like him, I've occasionally dabbled in artistic pursuits and David Grigg and I wrote a play in the early 1970s which was performed in Brisbane, so we never saw it. The reviews of it were damming so perhaps that is just as well. As for self publishing, I've given it some thought but it does seem like a lot of hard work. I've written two or three histories to commissions that have not been published for one reason or another (not the quality, of course) and I've occasionally given some thought to getting the rights to them and publishing them myself. But thank you, Leroy, you've cured me of any such thoughts in the future.

Then there was Lenny Kaye's article about his involvement in fandom and his fanzine collection. Being a bit of a filing clerk by nature, my fanzines were all carefully filed by editor and I built myself a big bookshelf to store them in. By the time we got to Canberra the collection was occupying a few more book cases, all still carefully sorted and filed. It gradually occurred to me that they were taking up a lot of room and that I never looked at them and wondered what to do with them. As it turned out, work send me on a flying visit to some of the branches around Australia and so I spent a very pleasant evening with Grant and Sheryl Stone in Perth. Grant is probably too eclectic to be just a fan, his interest are far wider, and he fed these interests by being the Special Collections Librarian at Murdoch University. As he was driving me in to where I had a meeting the following morning, the conversation turned to my fanzine collection and it turned out that the Collections Librarian wouldn't mind taking it off my hands. In return I'd get a bit of cash and a spare set of the Historical Records of Australia that happened to be languishing in the library's loft. A few weeks later a moving van turned up and took all the fanzines away, which was just as well because there was a book warehouse in Canberra called Academic Remainders and, what with that and the annual book fair, the shelves were soon filled again. The fanzines are still at Murdoch, along with, so I understand, John Bangsund's and Don Tuck's collections, and I hope to get into them one of these days for that history of Australian fandom I've foolishly said I'd write.

I skipped over the poem – poetry doesn't do it for me. Sorry. *{Try reading it as prose.}*

Next, Greg Benford's piece. I always enjoy his writing which is so nicely worded and structured. This time I was laughing out loud (not something you really want to do on a train full of passengers) at some of the predicaments he went through to get to the airport on time. And it reminded me of an experience that Valma and I had on a visit to Europe, if you will indulge me.

Early in 1993 I got an invitation to give a paper at a history conference in Switzerland so we planned to go. My thesis had been passed and the PhD wasn't going to be awarded for another six months or so, but the University Council held a special meeting to approve my award so I'd go to the conference representing them as Dr. Edmonds. So we headed off on our first overseas trip since DUFF in '74 and stayed first for a week with John Baxter and his wife in Paris and then a week with Judith and Joseph in London and then off to a week long history of technology conference in Sweden and then back to Luzern for the week long conference there. After that we planned to spend a few days seeing a bit of Europe by train and then end up at Dave and Hazel's in Reading. As it turned out, there was a train strike in Italy so we found ourselves in Paris again and lying on the grass near Les Halles (that John had shown us a few weeks earlier) and realizing we were absolutely buggered (that's the Australian use of the term, I could have said "exhausted" but that would not have quite the right emphasis) and needed just to lie down and rest for a few days. So I rang Dave who said "What!" and then that it would be okay to come a few days earlier. And this is where the story starts.

We got out our map of the Paris Metro and saw that to get from where we were to where we had to be to catch the train to the ferry we had to make a series of connections through the Metro system. What happened next is the stuff of nightmares with none of the entertainment of Greg's story. We were laden down with luggage (before the days when they invented cases with wheels) and, oh my goodness, I could go on at length but it's not very entertaining. Suffice it to say, an hour or two later we were finally on the train to the coast. At that stage I pulled out our map of Paris and saw that the station we'd started at and the one we ended up at were less than ten minutes apart by taxi and it would have been quicker and easier to have walked the distance. When we got to the coast we found that the weather had been so rough that no ferry had sailed for a day or two, so we crammed aboard with thousands of people and endured a very rough crossing. I quite enjoyed it, but that's a different story.

Next John Baxter. What an amazing and entertaining piece. How does he come up with phrases like "…as if Napoleon's grand armee had returned, but costumed by Josephine" or "By far the most convincing performance was given by the tanks, of which there was an enormous number." Do you think they come to him spontane-

ously or he carefully crafts them? I like to think the former but it's probably the latter. There were lots of "laugh out loud" moments here but fortunately for me the passengers had settled down to play with their smart phones or had earplugs in listening to their music, or both. I could almost hear him reading it because the piece is so well written. Although John has been long gone from our shores, we occasionally hear him on the radio. Most recently a young and brash presenter tried to talk to him about the situation in France after the recent unpleasantness. Out of the speaker came John's urbane and laconic voice speaking of civilized France and the other voice was from someone who had just spent a year in Alice Springs and sounded like it, and knew so little about the world that he must have spent his time there studying nothing but the form guide. It was enough to confirm John's decision to head overseas to get away from such people.

That aside, John certainly has had some adventures. Going to film festivals sounds a lot like going to history conferences or even sf conventions. The difference is that at film festivals one occasionally watches films, when one goes to history conferences one goes to the odd panel session, which is also an optional extra at conventions. The life around these events is quite another thing indeed and John seems to have found more than enough characters and entertainments, which he recounts with great relish to our general delight. More, more, we cry.

While reading John's experiences of his trip to Yugoslavia I was reminded of the conference that Valma and I went to Hungary in '96. It was memorable for many things but one that sticks in my mind is the Soviet era hotel we stayed in. The shower was of particular note if for no other reason than that most showers are designed so that the lowest point of the floor into which the water flows is also the place where the plug hole is. But not so in this case so the shower filled up and overflowed before the water got to the plug hole. (I thought that it takes a special kind of ability to be able to achieve that level of incompetence.) There was also the lunches and dinners in the dining room. After the first day the staff decided that it was not good for us to go off and sit at any table we liked with anyone we liked and started herding us to the tables they wanted us to sit at. Most of the attendees were amused by this and went along with it but those of us from what had been East Germany only a few years earlier refused to be pushed around and defiantly went and sat where they pleased just to make a point. Then there was a dinner at a kind of folk restaurant on the final night when, as far as we could tell, all the Americans and Britishers had gone home. So Valma and I had a delightful evening talking about them behind their backs in a variety of various European languages. Not that I have more than a smattering of French and my German and Italian has all been learned from operas.

And then Steve Stiles' article about serving in a book shop. This is precisely the reason why I have avoided dealing with the general public. True, I did spend eight years of my life writing replies to letters that members of the public had written to the Minister of Transport about airports. They wanted them here, they wanted them there, they didn't want them here or there, they wanted them better, they wanted better service, they had ideas for better airports or how to save money. One of the bright ideas that an amazing number of people had over the years was that, instead of having international airports around the country for the capital cities, there should be one huge international airport in the center of the country and then everyone would fly from there to their final destinations. Some bright ones even thought that it would be better to have very fast trains running from there to the cities around the coast. And I was supposed to write serious replies to all these letters. On occasions I would draft replies that actually told the letter writer what I thought. These responses were written only for my amusement and to let off some steam, but one got into the system and caused a bit of a fuss.

Sorry for having waffled on so much, but the reminiscences in this ish spurred my own memories and so I've burdened you with them now.

GORDON EKLUND

Your editorial this time adds yet another spell-binding chapter (with some overlap?) to the ongoing epic saga of your life and times with the Farm, spurring me again to wonder how come you just don't just write a book, unless maybe that's exactly what you are doing, except in installments, which is probably as good a way as any, whatever works. Especially since – and it's entirely likely I've missed some titles, suggestions definitely welcomed – the worthy books written about Those Ancient Hippie Days are a slim scattered few countable on the fingers of Mordecai "Three Finger" Brown's pitching hand with a digit or two left over for head scratching. There's Tom Wolfe's *Electric Kool-Aid* opus, a slightly musty by now and purposively limited view from the outside looking in, and maybe Robert Stone's equally Kesey-centric memoir, a copy of which lies buried somewhere among my to-be-read piles, so I'm going on faith alone (and a few good reviews) when I cite it. Other than that – um, what? A few dull by-the-journalism-school-numbers-and-then-another-Grateful-Dead-keyboard-player-kicked-the-bucket tomes from out-of-work former *Rolling Stone* assistant editors – and what else? A few novels – none of them terribly good. Hey, it was a time worth the remembering, hard as it seems to be to write well about it, and if the visionary futurists among us have it correct it's likely never to come round again because as Dr. Asimov long ago noted robots don't get off by getting high. (Rupert Fike's poem in here also a fine dose of memory writing and as you say reading along the apparent obscurities soon shine clear.) *{Other Farmies have written at various lengths about their experience. Perhaps the most ambitious – and surely the longest – would be Melvyn Stiriss's* Voluntary Peasants - Labor of Love. *As of this writing it's available only as a Kindle book (and the best choice among the numerous versions listed would be the "5 Book Series," which incorporates them all) but will eventually also be in print edition(s). I knew Melvyn back in San Francisco, when he went by Mordecai and was a frequent visitor, so in reading him I experience a certain between-the-lines effect not available to you. Another Farmie, Douglas Stevenson, has a couple books out, also available from Amazon, which are of some interest but very dry compared to Mel's. A third would be Patricia Lapidus's* Sweet Potato Suppers, *available both in electronic and print editions from Amazon.}*

Oh, and a question I seem never to have got around to asking aloud before: what was the size of the Farm population? I imagine it varied considerably but what was the average, the highs if not the lows? Curious am I. *{The original population was around 250, climbing to a high of around 1,600 in the early '80s – and after decommunalization in '83 it sank (quickly at first, then more gradually) to around where it started and perhaps even a little lower. An average would be hard to calculate, lacking year-by-year figures.}*

Speaking of which (the so-called future that seems poised to descend upon us before we've had time to appreciate the present let alone the past) Roy Kettle's long piece certainly told me way more about the state of contemporary publishing than I may have wanted to know and led me to the inexorable conclusion that if I were me forty-five years ago and the time was now not then I would never have published a word. I mean, the writing part alone is tough enough for me but all the other, um, stuff he writes about here, the publishing, the selling, the publicity and, oh yes, the hustle, I mean, please, where's the kicks in any of that? (What would Kafka do?) And when there's so much material now out there fighting simply to be recognized…who gets to decide what's worthy and what is not? To quote my writer friend Sophie K. Blue of Venusian Moons tetralogy fame: "If you don't know how it feels to be kneed in the groin by a pack of mad dog critics frothing at the mouth, then you've never had a book of yours reviewed."

Lenny Kaye stirs within me a long suppressed memory of my having once written him a letter as a member of the National Fantasy Fan Federation Welcommittee welcoming him to science fiction fandom. Let's call it 1960. In addition I do believe I not long ago came across some issues of Lenny's fanzine *Obelisk* tucked away under a pile of yellowed *Yandro*s among storage boxes dating back to the same geological epoch.

I cannot allow anything with John Baxter's name on it to pass without giving a loud shout out to his seminal (in the best, less gooey sense of the term) *Science Fiction in the Cinema*, a dog-eared copy of which accompanied me along with Robin Wood's books on Hitchcock and Hawks, Carlos Clarens's *Illustrated History of the Horror Film* and Andrew Sarris's *The American Cinema* as I traipsed from one Berkeley/San Francisco repertory cinema to another (yes, there were indeed several such back then plus the Pacific Film Archive which changed its program daily) punctuated by hours enduring awful late night TV commercials while trying to see as much of what was written about in those books as I could. Only many years later with the invention of home video did I finally see a few of the rarer gems. And of course his piece here is right up my groove.

Greg Benford evokes fond memories of classic Happy Benford Chatter, though causing me to

wonder whatever happened to this guy Toomey – the name like so many others ringing a distant bell in my head. A look at the on-line SF data base reveals a number of seventies short stories along with a book from Ballantine and then silence. *{He's still around, but his primary activity these days seems to be as an eBay seller ["bobtoomey"] selling off his collection – over 500 listings!}*

Like Steve Stiles I too once labored in the customer service industry (U.S. Postal Service version) and also have my store of tales I could tell whenever things grow dull around the campfires by night. I'll skip the one about the guy in line with Tourette's syndrome or the plump lady who sat on the recycling bin and crushed it like a cigarette butt and mention only the irate customer who to express his displeasure when nobody could find the check he insisted was in the back someplace stripped off his clothes, hurled them at guy who was trying to help (no, not me – I was observing from afar), and ran off into the chilly autumn day. The police when called soon appeared holding a guy they'd just nabbed peeing in the flower bed out front as they drove up but who turned out to be wrong man. The naked guy was eventually apprehended strolling naked through the Wallingford Food Giant parking lot. Never did find his check.

Loved Dan Steffan's back cover. He does fictional fans in a way that reminds me of some of my own similar rifts except that he's funnier. (The illustrations alone do that.) In the letter column Mark Plummer muses on the term "sci-fi". As a product of the era when the term was held in general disdain I still can't bring myself to write or speak it aloud and whenever I hear or see it from others it's like somebody poked me in the eye with a pointed stick. Funny though that while "sci-fi" marches blithely on the original "hi-fi" has been rendered long since archaic along with the once futuristic audio equipment that gave it its name.

Great Stiles cover, too – almost justifies Lovecraft.

DAVID REDD

I like these drip-feed random splatters of your autobiography, so thanks to that and Rupert's poem I sought out *Voices from the Farm* on Amazon. An interesting collection, one to keep along with, say, *The Sign of the Fool* as a picture of the times. I note the sheer effort needed to maintain a civilized life when severed from the parent culture's accumulated wealth and wisdom. Also, one telling factor in the decline of the original system: "…no one could begrudge our techies for wanting to make good money with their talents instead of performing guerrilla repair duty seven days a week."

This made me dig out my one copy of *Communes* magazine (October 1969) and look up its brief reports on visits to some USA communes pre-Farm. One was the Twin Oaks Community, Virginia, "based on literally following B. F. Skinner's book *Walden Two*, even though Skinner himself said that his book was not intended to be followed." This commune used work credits rather than money, sold their products outside and ate bought-in food, and were ruled by a "self-perpetuating" Board of Planners. "Twin Oaks is not a happy place to live, at least, from this visitor's point of view." Strict ideology seemed the main problem. Andrew Singer seemed more taken with the "alive and organic" "free atmosphere" of the Heathcote Community in Maryland, which grew vegetables and corn and earned the few dollars they needed for small expenses by "working at odd jobs outside the community for 3 to 4 days per month."

Voices from the Farm was interesting both for the thoroughness of the Farm experiment and for comparison with the '60s UK commune attempts. (That issue of *Communes*, incidentally, contained Tony Fowler's "brief manifesto for tribal living within present society," which for me was certainly a contrast to the standard utopian proposals I'd been finding in science fiction.)

So to the opening blockbuster, Roy Kettle's "About A Book." Enjoyed greatly, as usual with Roy's episodes, very entertaining and informative, and the piece forms yet more evidence that all human life is in fanzines, and there is more documentation of our present civilization from the inside to be found in *Trap Door* and the like than in most sociology texts.

A parallel story: my friend Val achieved paid print publication a decade ago (albeit few sales as the publishers quickly went bankrupt) and, now widowed, has after a long layoff turned to Amazon and CreateSpace. Despite many of the obstacles Roy and Chris encountered, she found that if you don't aim for perfection you can get into print quite easily. Her sagas such as *A String of Pearls*, *American Odyssey* and *Stranger in Paradise* (as by Val Baker Addicott) make use of standard templates, stock covers, and minimal proofreading, but get her in print. She buys the books at author's-discount prices and sells some to local booksellers and some to friends and neighbors at book parties. Her readership is the local older generation. Without expensive publicity the mass market isn't interested. A signing session in the library of her former home town attracted only a few friends. The library itself had well-stocked shelves seemingly untroubled by actual readers, the main users being unemployed males playing horror-adventure video games. The future wasn't meant to be like this. The public for her kind of reading is diminishing with age, and as with many sectors of society there's effectively no new generation continuing things. (I fear for many other activities – our volunteer-run steam railways, say – after another decade of bringing up youngsters as pure de-skilled consumers.)

Having seen the marketing/readership problems of 2014 with Val's books, I can appreciate and admire the efforts by Roy and Chris with *Future Perfect*, although as with most of Val's work the length is far too much for my eyes to attempt, sorry.

More great articles – and art. Steve Stiles (with appropriate Taral art) gives us a nice memoir, and reminds me to recommend Jen Campbell's book *Weird Things Customers Say in Bookshops*; about a third of its quotes are from a bookshop I've dealt with, "Ripping Yarns", so I have to assume that every word is true…as with Steve's offering, of course.

Favorite article against strong competition is John Baxter's (not least for the spectacle of so many different worlds colliding), with the roses incident a standout. Forget bribes, a well-chosen gift wins every time – that's how Armand Hammer did such good business with Soviet Russia. I recall one construction sub-contractor who started demolishing a lady's roof in error; he took her a box of chocolates and she thought he was wonderful. (Repairing the roof itself took rather longer.) Even better stories abound in John Baxter's letter, a perfect illustration of Bester's Formula: second-best paragraph first, the best last. Brilliant.

Favorite art: Steve Stiles for Lenny Kaye. (And the article was pretty interesting too, making me wish I'd been there to hear Moskowitz on *Astounding* 1934 and to see that great *Obelisk* art at full size.)

As for Mark Plummer's personalzine disguised as a letter, glad to see a fan still inspired by staples. I will also point out that Wales' favorite on-wall slogan ("Cofiwch tryweryn" south of Aberystwyth) is somewhat classier than "Big Dave's Gusset." A must for visitors to be dragged to.

GARY HUBBARD

Regarding the Farm, I recently cataloged an electronic book (all I do is ebooks these days. How stfnal is that?) for the library where I work, called *The Farm Then and Now* by Douglas Stevenson. Personally, I could never get with that Back to the Land stuff, having spent a bit of time on my grandparent's farm in Tennessee. Life was boring, the pigs were scary, and TV reception was poor. My attitude was perhaps influenced by my Mom. She grew up on the farm, but lit out for the big city as soon as she could, and never regretted leaving the country behind. She never liked animals, you see, although she raised five boys, which could not have been much different from raising pigs. However, she is fond of relating stories from her youth, full of a lot of Tobacco Road atmosphere. Since she's ninety years old, I'm encouraging her to tell all the stories she has while there's still time. As you might expect, my ancestors indulged in a fair amount of feuding (with their neighbors and each other) and adultery and a little bit of inbreeding. That was on account of an ancestor of mine who sat out the Civil War by hiding in a cave. I'm immensely proud of him for that, but it did Have repercussions. You see, the local girls used to smuggle food up to him and, since all the other boys were away at the War, Nature took its course. But that made it kind of tough for his descendants anyone to marry they weren't already related to.

I just finished reading Roy Kettle's "About a Book." I used to think that getting a book published was a pretty straightforward business. You wrote a book, bundled it up, and sent it to a publisher – or a hundred publishers – until it got accepted, but I guess it doesn't work that way. Roy's thought about setting up a web site got me wondering if I might do that. I have a friend who has one, and he could help. But I did wonder if by some chance the domain name Cracked Eye was already taken, and, sure as shootin', it is. There's some kind of digital literary magazine on line using that title. I wonder if I went ahead and wrote another Cracked Eye story and it got published online would they sue me? I remember something

like that happening to Richard Geis when he was publishing a fanzine called *Alien Critic* and was sued by someone who was publishing a magazine called *The Critic*. Seemed a little goofy when I first heard about it, since there was little chance anyone was going to mistake his little fanzine for the other. Happened another time, too. When Oprah Winfrey started her own magazine "O," there was already a magazine by that title being published in Germany that was geared toward the SM and rubber crowd. So she sued the German "O" lest people confused the two. I don't know how it turned out.

WILLIAM BREIDING

Way back, when #31 first arrived, I emailed you that I had probable comment hooks relating to your further Farm musings. Rupert Fike's broken lines (what my brother Sutton calls "poems" that aren't really poems) fed into this hook: That hippies have far too many rules – hell, some sects of hippiedom were damned near puritanical; this was particularly the case with many communes, both urban and rural, where you were made to feel guilty for feeling basic human impulses like wanting a spot of sugar (candy bars) or things by which to read and write, or see (flashlight batteries, fer cryin' out loud). And most horrid of all, penalized for being a single male (no longer acceptable to represent).

Rupert Fike's "Soda Run" was enjoyable – I particularly liked the unflinching honesty in facing conflicting desires, and by proxy, the under\lying bogus nature of "collective" living when mandated by one man or a government. Of course you all were there by your own free will… but you get my drift.

And of course John, the fourteen year old who was abandoned at the Farm, knew that he had been. Fourteen year olds are always wise and smart and know far more than you do…at least that's how I was, nested in the hands of hippiedom. Too frequently (even in San Francisco) I smelled of wood smoke (the Victorian we lived in had only a fireplace for heat), sour compost (in a corner of the back yard where we took up the cement), Dr. Bronner's (the soap of choice by all true communards), and ripe sweat (truly I should have bathed more often, dirty hippie that I was). At fourteen I was the poster boy for hippiedom. *The Good Times*, an alternative weekly newspaper, run by Steve and Harry Driggs, placed me on the back cover of an issue, explaining where each article of clothing was obtained – for free – it was almost accurate, but not quite; I had paid full price for the collapsible satin top-hat.

Were you aware of, or part of, the collective of communes in San Francisco, in the late sixties and early seventies, that were connected by a weekly hand-crafted, and hand-delivered, "newspaper" called *Kaliflower*, the brain-child of Irving Rosenthal? (Author of *Sheeper*.) This collective of communes also started the original Food Conspiracy co-op, weekly as well, housed in the lower flat of a building at Lyon and Haight. *{I was aware of most of this – the main omission being I didn't know (or have forgotten) Rosenthal was behind that paper.}*

Everything else in the issue was a highlight. Roy Kettle's epic about writing and publishing *Future Perfect* with Chris Evans was fascinating, beautifully detailed, and certainly confirms Michael Dobson's assertion that CreateSpace is the way to go for any kind of major fan publishing endeavor. Maybe you should consider CreateSpace for *Trap Door*, Robert! *{Not major enough.}*

My personal favorite was Steve Stiles' lighthearted piece on his last few jobs before retirement. I have been ordering books from Daedalus for, probably, decades. It was nice to find out that Daedalus is one of the good guys. If I'd known Steve had been working at their brick and mortar store in suburban Maryland, I would have certainly dropped by; every time I passed it on my way to the East Shore of Maryland (my God, is it pretty over there) I would consider stopping, but never did, thinking, "I already have too many books!".

Lenny Kaye – a great fannish reminisce, and wise donation choice for his fanzine collection. You do realize that this issue of *Trap Door* will carry an over-inflated price on eBay because of Lenny's article, right?

Greg Benford remains the consummate pro – even in fan publishing. "The Complete Toomey Experience" was yet another fine, vivid meeting with a remarkable man, and it certainly deserved this reprint.

Another fine piece from John Baxter—the superlatives just keep on coming; I told you the whole issue was a highlight – boating up from Australia to attend European film fests – a wild time had by all!

And, of course, Dan's "explanation" of his cover for your 30th annish was all very haw, haw, haw. Could have been an excerpt from Gordon Eklund's recent work.

JIM LINWOOD

Roy Kettle's piece on the writing and publishing of *Future Perfect* was fascinating and one of the longest articles I've ever read in a fanzine. At LonCon I eagerly approached Roy and Chris at the signing table for an autographed copy not realizing that they weren't selling the novel, just signing it. Roy told me that some of the booksellers in the auditorium were sure to have copies but my search got nowhere. I returned sadly to the table and Roy led me to the bookstall opposite and pointed to a copy that I had overlooked. It is a real page turner with an added benefit: I usually read lying on my back in bed holding a book aloft and at over 500 pages and weighing two pounds reading it provided my daily exercise for two weeks.

Reading *Future Perfect* I was reminded of Jake Arnott's *The House of Rumour* which was written about the same time and published in 2012. Arnott is best known as the author of *The Long Firm*, which featured East End gangster Harry Starks, an amalgam of the Kray twins. In *The House of Rumour* SF writer, Larry Zagorski (clearly based on P. K. Dick), looks back at his writing past which started at a '40s meeting of the Mañana Literary Society:

"There was an impressive group of writers at the Heinlein's house in Laurel Canyon on that fateful night when Mary-Lou and I attended. Jack Williamson, my great idol, shy and diffident in person; Leigh Brackett, one of the few women writing SF back then and a great inspiration for Mary-Lou; Cleve Cartmill, a newspaperman crippled with polio who had just started writing for Astounding; Anthony Boucher, who was more of a mystery writer; and L. Ron Hubbard, a prodigious all-rounder of the pulps who, it was said, could write two thousand words an hour without revisions. Looking back, I'm liable to put aside the sense of how star-struck I was in the presence of all this talent. I even tend conveniently to forget the miserable way (for me at least) the evening eventually concluded. Now I'm inclined to remember it as the first time I ever met Nemesio Carvajal."

Sub-plots in the novel feature Ian Fleming, Katherine Burdekin, Jack Parsons, Aleister Crowley (who also featured in Arnott's previous novel *The Devil's Paintbrush*) and Rudolph Hess's flight to Britain. In his progress through the SF world Zagorski mentions Anthony Boucher, Donald Wollheim and Terry Carr.

Brian Aldiss was a guest at the book launch party and I assume that he was a "technical consultant" on the SF world. Despite its content I'm surprised that the novel is little known in fandom and hasn't been nominated for any awards. I think I put it forward as a possible nominee for a BSFA award but nothing happened.

MICHAEL DOBSON

Wonderful cover by Steve. The Witnesses don't visit our house, fortunately, but they have shown up at previous residences. I, too, know the Random House warehouse in Westminster, Maryland. When I worked at TSR, Random House was our distributor to the book trade, so all returns of our products ended up there. It was quite fascinating. The whole place was about four acres, and they had at one time an operating cable car system that ran through the complex. You'd pull product onto a wheeled cart, then drag it over to the trench carrying the cable and drop the handle so it would pinch the cable and take the cart on its leisurely journey. What I thought was really cool about it was how the carts knew when they'd reached their destination. On the front of the cart, there were num\bered and lettered holes. If you were sending your cart to, say, B-6, you dropped a metal pin in the "B" hole and one in the "6" hole. Each stop had Braille-like bumps in appropriate positions, so when the cart reached its destination, the bumps caused the pins to lift up, disengaging the handle from the cable, and the car would roll quietly to a stop by the side of the track.

I also remember the furnace room, which contained pallets of hardcovers – turned out that books were the cheapest fuel they had.

I very much enjoyed Roy's piece; I wrestle with many of the same issues with my own imprint.

I first discovered the wonderful world of print-on-demand publishing a few years ago. I had this idea of writing a series of books on what happened on each day of the year, and sell them as sort of upscale birthday cards that people would never throw away, an idea that would have been impossibly impractical using conventional publishing and distribution (the return situation would have been a nightmare). With POD and ebooks and online sales, however, what would have been absurd suddenly looks plausible. And with a 70% royalty rate, the level at which you actually start making money is

surprisingly low. So far, I've published about forty volumes. I couldn't believe the per-book production costs, and as I started working on *Random Jottings* #8 (the Watergate Issue), I suddenly realized that it would cost me more to run them off at Kinkos than to use CreateSpace. I published the fanzine, and for good measure, converted the content to a book and ebook.

More through happenstance than planning, I found myself with a history imprint (Timespinner Press). The story-of-a-day books are clearly history; I did a book version of the Watergate issue; and I published an 800-page tome on WW2 Pacific battles (down to the individual ship level) and a 200,000 word history of the Raj and formation of Pakistan from the perspective of the Nawabs of Bengal and their descendants. The next *Random Jottings* is a collection of history essays; it'll have a book version as well. How well are they selling? Thanks for asking; they're doing great – one of them has nearly broken the three-figure mark!

I'm writing the day books because I actually think I can make some money eventually (it's going to take me years to write them all), but I don't particularly care if the other books never earn a cent. It didn't cost me anything except time to publish them in the first place. Having an imprint wasn't exactly a bucket list item, but it was something I'd fantasized about. I love the possibilities in this new technology. It's possible, I suppose, to earn millions at this, but I'm fine as long as I'm not hemorrhaging money.

I experimented with Calibre and some other ebook conversion tools, but it turns out that plain old Microsoft Word will do the trick. Kindle and Smashwords (I use both) take MSWord, and Smashwords creates epub and Sony and all the other weird formats, and puts your book on Nook, iBooks, etc., at a surprisingly modest cut. Given that it's nearly impossible to do much in the way of formatting of an ebook, I can't see much to be gained by doing it any other way – but I could well be missing something.

My website is a work in progress. As it turns out, my neighbor down the street creates websites for National Geographic and the Discovery Channel. He's more than I need, but he did give me the friends and family discount, so the cost is merely "ouch" instead of "tilt." It should be done before spring of this year. Overall, promotion has always been the sticking point. Before I'd ever written a book, I thought writing a book was very hard. After I wrote a book, I discovered that selling a book was really hard. When the book came out, I discovered that promoting a book was *really* hard, and I don't think I've mastered that one yet by any means.

The question of self-publishing versus mainstream publishing is becoming increasingly interesting. It's been a long time since publishers were printers; when I got into the business, publishers offered financing, editorial and packaging services, warehousing and distribution, and marketing and promotion (limited). It was possible to self-finance; editorial and packaging could be bought a la carte; marketing and promotion tended to be primarily the author's responsibility anyway; but you need economy of scale to do warehousing and distribution. Print on demand obviates the need warehousing. Online distribution doesn't get you everywhere, but it's good enough for a lot of titles. Plus, it's so much cheaper so the need for financing is dramatically reduced. Sometimes, a major house delivers enough added value to earn their 85% of cover price – but not always.

Bill Plott mentions DeepSouthCon50 in Huntsville, Alabama, which makes me feel particularly old. My first con was also a DeepSouthCon in Huntsville: DSC IV, in 1966; I was a month away from turning fourteen. I think the total attendance was under thirty, but included Lee Jacobs, Wally Weber, Hank Reinhardt, Lon Atkins, Dave Hulan, and others I forget. Naturally, I had no idea who any of them were, and had limited time to get acquainted; after all, I had to be home no later than ten.

PAUL SKELTON

That's an excellent cover by Steve Stiles. I suspect most people would have seen it the other way to my viewpoint. They'd have looked at the character and thought, "Oh, oh! Got it Wrong!," whereas I thought, "How did he know?" It was indeed superb work by Steve to capture the true essence of a Jehovah's Witness, rather than to simply show us the outward semblance of humanity which they normally project. What's more, I can be certain my interpretation is correct because we all know that, in the choice between opening your door to be confronted by either a monster from H. P. Saucecraft, or a Jehovah's Witness, in precisely which eventuality **true** horror lies…and before anybody points out that they can't see any copies of *Watchtower*, they'd obviously be being held at the front, where we can't see them. In fact I think I can safely say that in any egoboo poll that was about *Trap Door* 31, Steve's cover would come in an easy joint-second.

Note there that by going from saying something is "excellent" to saying it's "joint-second" (not even on the podium on its own in silver) seems to be suddenly damning instead with faint praise. Such are perceptions. When you get to an Olympic Final (and I think you *can* compare *Trap Door* to an Olympic final, even if it happens every year rather than being quadrennial) everything is going to be good. It's an excellent cover. Leroy Kettle's "About a Book" is an excellent article, with a fabulous Dan Steffan heading illustration.

I have to say that, in my own (admittedly ignorant) mind I've previously always equated "self-publishing" with "vanity-publishing," so right away I've learned something new. Oddly I have never equated fanzines and fanwriting in this same way even if there may be an element of vanity in the assumption that one has something to say worth someone else's time in the reading of it. Whilst I am never likely to find myself in Leroy's position with this sort of thing, I must admit that the idea of self-publishing has actually crossed my mind. One thing I have always promised myself is that if I ever win a multi-week mega-rollover on the Euromillions lottery I will republish a deluxe edition of my 1990 USA trip report *Alyson Wonderland* as a single volume coffee-table edition with full color photos and illustrations. I'm not sure that "print-on-demand" would be able to cope with such a small edition, especially as I would require gold-leaf page edging and binding in hand-tooled gold-blocked Andalusian calf-skin (sort of "Books of Spanish Leather," as Bob Dylan almost [but never quite] phrased it).

I am genuinely puzzled why anybody who can truly write can have difficulty getting stuff published when some really ropey junk keeps appearing on the bookshop bookshelves. I picked up a used paperback of Colin Forbes' *The Vorpal Blade* and just could not get beyond the first couple of chapters (both of which felt like I was swimming against the literary tide). I bought it as part of a "three for a pound" deal, and felt ripped off. I passed it on to Pat Meara with the words "I think this is simply bad writing, but form your own opinion." She and Mike wholeheartedly agreed. But the thing is, shite as I thought it was, it got published. I guess the guy must be a big-name writer who can get away with this sort of thing (not exactly great detective work, as there were a lot of books listed on the "also by" page).

Anyway, fascinating as all the detail was, and as well written as everything always is by Leroy, this was still in a dead-heat for second place.

Leroy mentioned that he was also aware of Lulu for Print on Demand, as Graham Charnock uses that platform. I'm not familiar with any of Graham's work on that platform, but the name rang a faint bell. It turns out this is also the platform Phillip Turner used when he published *Now & Then Revisited*, his tribute to the fanzine *Now & Then*, published in the early-to-mid fifties, by his father Harry Turner and his father's long-time friend Eric Needham. The paperback does include some extra articles and indexes, but is mainly a facsimile reproduction of the original fanzines. These of course featured over seventy of the early Widower's Wonderfuls, including many by outside contributors. Without sitting down and going exhaustively through them it seems to me that those produced "in house" were invariably rhymed A, B, cc, B over the four lines, matching Sandra Bond's second. Her first offering, however, was not entirely unprecedented as there was an example in *N&TR* by Archie Mercer rhymed aa, B, cc, B. They did reprint one from Richard Eney that was simply A, B, C, B so maybe they felt the thought was what counted. Anyway, whilst I appreciated both her pyjamas and her medium I did prefer the extra rhymes so, on the basis that imitation is the sincerest form of flattery, here's...

Seek not your inspiration in some bottled distillation,
that's not what a fine fannish mind chooses.
You'll capture the gist, like a true perfectionist,
with WIDOWER'S WONDERFUL MUSES.

I discussed this double-rhyming in the first line with Mike Meara when he was visiting last weekend and he too was of the opinion that it improves the result. He pointed out that these things evolve and that the original limericks always finished with a last line that either duplicated, or almost duplicated, the first...which was a load of rubbish and a complete waste of time. So it doesn't really matter if they are true to the original conception or more variational.

That's the thing about the Widower's Wonderfuls, they're just such fun delicious doggerel

even when poorly written. If you're of the opinion that rhyming makes it poetry, then yes, it is poetry, but it is everyday poetry. It's like having a poetry sandpit to play in, or a poetry shallow-end where we can all just splash about and have fun. And no, I admit I don't think that simply rhyming makes stuff poetry, nor that poetry absolutely needs to rhyme. I would, though, assert that **I** believe the Widower's verses to be poetry because, in giving enjoyment, they appeal to the mind and make the heart sing, and in a way that practically defines a couple of the things that poetry is supposed to do.

I don't hold with the view that, if it's fun, then it isn't poetry. That means you can only represent half of Life's drama, in effect the mask with the scowling face. There's a superb clerihew in Graham Charnock's *Vibrator 2.0.12*, which will never make it into any *Oxford Treasury of Poetry*, but which, with its simplicity and brevity (to say nothing of its superb bawdy humor), would knock many longer, po-faced pieces which would, into a cocked hat. I note in this context that Edward Lear's nonsense pieces are described as "rhymes," "verses," and even "songs," far more often than they are admitted to be "poems."

Anyway, when it comes to poetry, whilst I've enjoyed some poetry that doesn't rhyme, my own personal preference is for stuff that does. Color me "Fuddy-Duddy."

This sort of leads me in a way to Rupert Fike's "Soda Run" (again superbly illustrated by Dan Steffan). Now you make mention, in your "Doorway" piece, that Rupert is a poet, and he himself mentions that he does "poetry slams," but there is no claim anywhere that either of you consider this particular piece to be poetry. I certainly don't. It seems obviously, despite its eclectic layout (perhaps a stand against the rigid inflexibility of word-processing programs in general and Word in particular), to be simply a prose vignette. A sort of example of the "spoken word on the local circuit" that he writes he also does. It's quite effective as such and puts me in mind of the book I'm currently reading (Dennis Lehane's short story collection *Coronado*) in that I can see the quality of the observations but don't really see the point of them, but then I guess that's the problem with such vignettes. They are simply accurate observations with, as another song once definitely did have it, "No particular place to go."

For me the stand-out item in issue 31 was Mark Plummer's letters in "The Ether Still Vibrates." Obviously I must admit here to some degree of bias. As someone whose current involvement in fanzines is defined entirely through the medium of my LoCs, then obviously I will attach more importance to LoCs than might others. Not, of course, that you would necessarily be included with those "others," given that your current presence in fanzines is arguably more through the medium of your LoCs to other fanzines than through your editorship of (an apparently annual) *Trap Door*. It's certainly true that I only bump into you once-a-year in your fanzine whereas, with your letters and articles, you're pretty much omnipresent elsewhere.

Obviously his first letter was of the type Claire Brialey defines as being not so much a LoC as instead a "Letter of Engaged Response." I can't of course speak as to his state of mind when he wrote it but it recalled to me the way I'd often feel responding to Bruce Gillespie's *The Metaphysical Review*, the title of whose LoCcol was "I Must Be Talking to My Friends," which is precisely how I used to feel when responding to his fanzine and how it seemed Mark must have felt when responding to yours. Sort of like, "Hey, here's all this interesting stuff that occurred to me upon reading something in your fanzine."

His second letter, into which he segued so superbly (either via his own abilities or your editorial acumen) anchored his response in the detail of your previous issue, and in various other previous issues, one element of which had me itching to drag all the junk out of the cupboard under the stairs (that's the bedroom cupboard under the stairs leading up to the loft suite), until I got down to the level of the boxes of fanzines stacked against the wall, then dig out the box containing *Trap Door* 8, and find out just what the heck I had written in my LoC therein.

Nowadays of course all of my LoCs are preserved on computer file but back in those days they simply went into an envelope and were mailed. So it's no wonder that, on reading Mark's letter, I wondered just what sort of pratt I made of myself back then. Gotta get the spare bedroom/library finished and get all those fanzines accessible again.

FRANK LUNNEY

Hey Robert, *Trap Door* arrived in today's mail.

After seeing how many people had already received their copy, whether in the US or in Europe, I figured my copy would be in my mailbox on Monday…but there was absolutely no mail at all, which is very unusual.

I don't even know who my mail person is any more, since the woman I knew who had been delivering it for decades (she always brought oversized packages and envelopes which wouldn't fit into the mailbox down my driveway to my front door, to avoid any water damage) abruptly retired.

I knew it was someone new when I got a "Notice of Violation" because my mailbox didn't have a red arrow (which gets raised to alert the mail person that there's outgoing mail in my mailbox).

Fact is, when I replaced my mailbox many, many years ago I didn't install the red flag because I had decided I would *never* be putting mail in my mailbox to be picked up…I'm too paranoid that someone would come by, see that mail was there for the taking and take my outgoing letters, perhaps looking for a credit card payment accompanying a credit card bill (with the card number on the bill).

My immediate neighbors had to lodge a complaint because their mail was being stolen. They also had their house broken into by, they suspect, young teens on ATVs who occasionally bomb thru the neighborhood.

Well, finally I got another notice to tell me that if I didn't install a red flag on my mailbox they'd stop delivering mail to me. I put up the red flag (cost $6 at the Dries Do-It Center) and my mail continues to be delivered.

But after not getting any mail at all yesterday, I suspect the person who delivers my mail took it home with her/him to read and that they delivered it to me today.

The reason I believe that is that there's a small patch of tape sealing the envelope shut.

I hope whoever had my copy overnight enjoyed the issue.

But just from skimming thru the contents, I'm sure they did. Great lineup. A 15-page article from Roy Kettle? Lenny Kaye? Greg Benford with a Bob Toomey story?

As unlikely as it may be, I think I may have met Bob Toomey before Greg Benford did.

When I was in high school I worked in a pizza stand, and Alexei Panshin would shop at the Quakertown Farmers Market every weekend (which he still does, 45 years later), so he'd usually stop by for a slice or two.

My brother worked with me, and his joke was that every time Alexei was there, he'd ask, "Are you Alexei Panshin, the famous science fiction writer? I want to shake your hand!" and he'd make a big deal out of shaking hands in front of the pizza stand customers.

Alexei & Cory Panshin were living in a carriage house on a larger estate in the countryside of Bucks County, so he'd get occasional weekend visitors, who would then accompany Alexei to the market. I think I met Robert Silverberg for the first time at that pizza stand.

But there was one weekend when Alexei didn't come by the stand, and I think it was the weekend when Bob Toomey visited with Lee Hoffman, for they were a couple at that time.

Looking for "an experience," they all took some acid that Toomey had…but Alexei was affected by it more than everyone else, so he left the carriage house and went for "a walk"…thru the adjoining neighbors' properties.

Someone called the cops, and when Alexei didn't respond to their calls, they had to tackle him... so they could take him to jail because he was so high he was incoherent.

When he came down enough to explain who he was and explain that he was living in the neighborhood he was walking thru, he had to call Toomey, Hoffman and Cory to come and get him.... tho they were still tripping.

Oh wait…or was it Silverberg who had to get him out of the cooler.

Ack…too long ago…it *does not* seem like yesterday...

Oh…very, very amusing bacover follow-up to the last cover Dan did for *Trap Door*. Flipping through the issue to check on the response of others to Dan's cover, Joseph Stalin was a popular guess as to who's in the center. Lenny Bailes doesn't think I could be the character wearing the "George Scithers jacket" with short pants (yes, I have hairy knees), but it might be Don Wollheim…except Don Wollheim doesn't like pudding? (News to me.)

I'm glad Dan had a chance to straighten out the controversy, explaining it's the long forgotten minor league '60s fans, Feesence, Spoils and Phedd. The details Dan provides about these fans who only managed to produce one fanzine each is what makes fanhistory so fascinating.

*[Frank sent a copy of his letter to **TED WHITE**, who weighed in…]*

Wow! You apparently conflated a bunch of separate events and got the main one Wrong.

It was Robin and I who tripped with Cory and Alexei, and it was me driving us in my VW Bug through night-dark Pennsylvania back roads to a hospital I'd never been to before. Alexei did not call. A sheriff did. They didn't have him at a jail. I found him, a couple sheriff's deputies and the hospital maintenance man in the workshop in the hospital's basement, where they were trying, with little success, to cut handcuffs off Alexei. The key no longer worked. I looked at the key and told them it would be easiest to pick the handcuff's lock. A 10-year-old could have done it. But they ignored me and wasted another half hour cutting the handcuffs off (a bolt-cutter ultimately succeeded after they'd broken a half-dozen hacksaw blades and bloodied Alexei's wrist).

The steering wheel still felt like a rubbery, writhing snake in my hands when I drove us back. Alexei was sent a bill for a pair of new handcuffs. I don't think he paid it.

No Toomey, no Hoffman, no Silverberg.

*[And **Frank** replied…]*

Yes, much too long ago to remember correctly.

Tho Alexei has referred to it recently, without actually mentioning you and Robin.

He never brought you to the pizza stand?

I know I got the pizza stand part of it right.

*[**Ted** wrapped things up…]*

I have a vague memory of the pizza stand, but it might be based on your descriptions of it, back in the '70s. Or you might have taken me there on one of my earlier visits, also in the '70s. But I don't think Alexei ever took me there, and certainly he didn't on that memorable weekend.

I should have added that the drug the four of us took was not acid – at least not unadulterated.

It was the "shake" of many dozens of pink pills, represented as "mescalin." A plastic bag with a lot of pink powder in the bottom, with fragments of the pills buried in the powder. It was given to me by my buddy Alan Shaw, who may have gotten it from a hash dealer we both knew. I knew it wasn't real mescalin, because I knew that was expensive to synthesize and a dose *cost* around $20 to make and would have to sell for much more.

I had empty capsules (in those days you could buy them in drugstores; I had gotten them for peyote) and I capped up some of the pink powder. Alexei took double the dose the rest of us did, convinced that since I didn't know how much a dose should be, that was his wisest course. He was, of course, wrong.

Both in that pleasant field, and on several subsequent trips with Dan Steffan and Richard Snead a few years later, I observed that the trips on that pink powder were uniquely different from any acid trips I ever had, nor any on peyote. There was a unique visual distortion, the same on each trip, which changed the proportions of objects and people.

The dose that Robin, Cory and I took provided a solid trip. The dose Alexei took gave him both hallucinations and delusions. When the sheriff's men caught up with him he was trying to walk through a barbed wire fence in a field, convinced it wasn't there. He was on a quest that involved walking in straight lines no matter what he encountered. While in the sheriffs' care, Alexei vomited a lot of pink. We were asked about it and said it was pink ice cream. No one realized we three were tripping and they thought Alexei had food poisoning. (Before we left their carriage house for the hospital, I looked at myself in the mirror, straightened my clothes and hair and told myself, "When this is over you will have done everything necessary and all will end well." Thus assured of my coming success, I went out and did it, bringing Alexei back to his home.)

So what *was* that pink powder? My guess is LSD plus Something Else. Maybe – but maybe not – PCP. Whatever it was, I've never had anything like it since then.

WE ALSO HEARD FROM:

JAMES BACON, **GREG BENFORD** ("Lenny Kaye, always amusing – and a great rocker, too 'My way of life is a godblessed hobby" – great line!") **ALAN BRIGNULL** ("As usual the articles were all good, some more recognizable than others. The most surprising discovery was a six-page letter largely about Wivenhoe, inspired not by my previous letter but by the mere mention of my address. Mark and I have been in touch now to exchange notes and printed items."), **RICHARD DENGROVE**. **KEN FAIG**. **BRAD FOSTER** ("Nifty cover from Steve this issue, going for the other side of that door from the cover of issue 28. Very clever idea!"), **SOCORRO FRANCO-BURBEE**, **MARLIN FRENZEL**, **JOHN HERTZ**, **STEVE JEFFERY**, **JERRY KAUFMAN** ("I was fan-tasted to read Lenny Kaye's piece about his fannish days. I met Lenny on several evenings back in the 1970s, after Patti Smith Group concerts, and he attended a party, in late 1976 or 1977, at the apartment Stu Shiffman and I shared in Upper Upper Manhattan. But the covers you included of *Obelisk* are my first sightings of those zines. Thanks for publishing this."), **JAY KINNEY**, **JERRY KNIGHT** ("Reading Roy Kettle's piece in *Trap Door* #31, I was moved to purchase a copy of *Future Perfect*. I just finished the book, which took quite a while (541 pages!), and I enjoyed it."), **HOPE LEIBOWITZ** ("Great poem by Rupert Fike. It reads really smoothly and fast. Wow. A bit disappointing that it didn't quite happen like that, but I'll get over it."), **ERIC MAYER** ("Wonderful cover by Steve Stiles. If that guy's expecting a Jehovah's Witness he's sure going be surprised when he notices his caller isn't carrying a copy of *The Watchtower*. I love that the articles are individually illustrated. That's a challenge for both editor and artists. The quality is so good, that by the time I got reading John Baxter's piece I had to remind myself I was reading a fanzine. Then I wondered why John didn't have his article published in the large commercial magazine of his choice.") **MURRAY MOORE** ("I am a hard sell for poetry. That said, I read all of 'Soda Run' and I enjoyed it. I must wonder, however, about 'nipple twists' and 'deep tongue action' as methods for jump-starting a birth. I am an expert. I have watched every episode of seasons one, two, three, and four of 'Call the Midwife"' without seeing either of these methods used by the nurses or the wise and resourceful nuns."), **JOHN NIELSEN-HALL** ("I really enjoyed Steve Stiles bookstore article. I used to work in bookshops long ago, when clad in slender youth. Once you knew your way around the mechanics of book selling, you could get jobs pretty easily. I worked in Dartford, London, and Manchester. But of course, it didn't pay much. Nothing to do with books does, does it?"), **RAY NELSON**, **LLOYD PENNEY**, **JOHN PURCELL** ("Roy Kettle's lengthy article was fascinating reading. This is probably the most informative article I have yet read about self-publishing (well, in a fanzine at least), and serves as a reminder why I never should do this."), **JEFF SCHALLES**, **FRED SMITH** ("Lenny Kaye's piece on his early fanning days is okay but raises a couple of questions. He mentions early fanzines like *Yandro* and knowing fans such as Sam Moskowitz and the Lupoffs, so how come I've never heard of him?" Easy – he wasn't active for very long.), **MILT STEVENS** ("In spite of Steve Stiles' article, I still think favorably about the idea of working in a bookstore. As some people know, Robert Lichtman and I went to different high schools in the L.A. area.. However, we both prowled the used bookstores in Hollywood during our teen years. I was totally fascinated by used bookstores. I would have been delighted to work in a used bookstore. I'd have been even happier if they had offered to pay me."), **PHILIP TURNER** and **HOWARD WALDROP** ("I was at Suncon and didn't see *any* of the guys – Mal Feezence, Victor Spoils *or* Stillwell Fedd – there, though there were the usual reported Claude Degler sightings, etc. Steffan's piece was dead on perfect for memoir writing.").

Thanks to all who responded! And apologies for a larger than usual we-also-heard-from. Articles kept coming in and I didn't want to hold any of them over to the next issue. Turns out I did, anyway: Boyd Raeburn's article, "The *À Bas* Story" – which he wrote in 1964 for my fanzine *Frap* – will appear in #33. The full story of how this piece languished for over fifty years will be told.