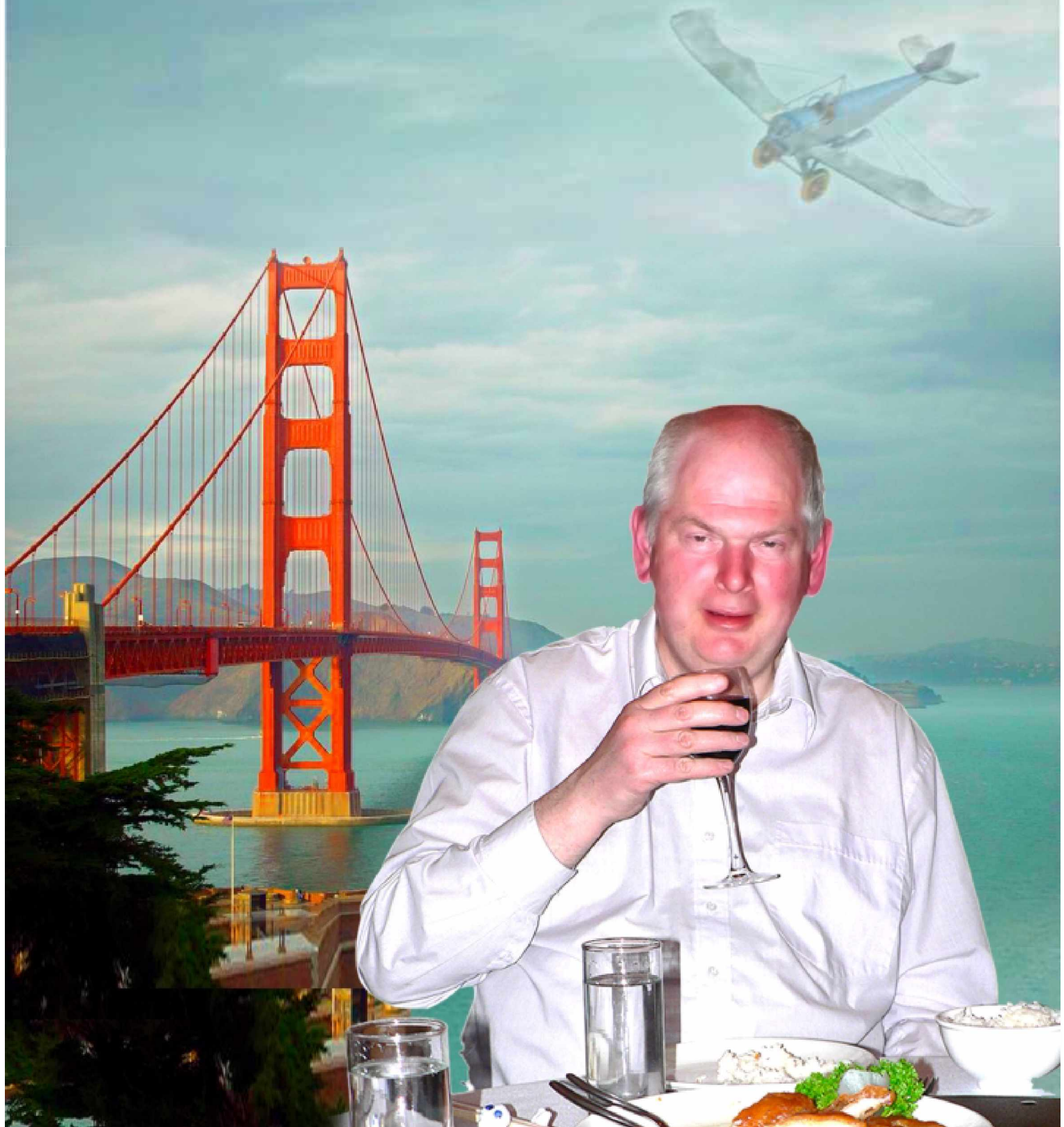


# ***AMERICAN KINDNESS***

## ***THE BRING BRUCE BAYSIDE FUND TRIP REPORT***

***17 February–13 March 2005***



# AMERICAN KINDNESS

## THE BRING BRUCE BAYSIDE FUND TRIP REPORT

17 February–13 March 2005

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for the

### **BRING BRUCE BAYSIDE (BBB) FUND:**

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First edition available free to the One Per Centers, other contributors to the Bring Bruce Bayside (BBB) Fund, and to other people who made the trip possible.

Copies also for sale: \$A10, \$US10 or £5 from the administrators.

The BBB Fund, and this edition of the Report, have been made possible by the generous financial donations — small, large, and very large — as well as the provision of accommodation and hard work of many individuals and organisations, to whom this Report is dedicated. Many of them are listed in column 2 of page 3 and column 1 of page 4, and the others are listed throughout the Report. If I have unwittingly failed to mention your name, I apologise unreservedly.

**Special thanks to Arnie and Joyce, Bill W. and Bill B. and Billy P., Robert, Claire and Mark, Irwin, Dick, Chaz and Hazel, Janice and Alan, Art, Marci, Peter, Charles, Earl, Marty, Bruce, Terry and Barbara, Lee and Barry, the Corflu and Potlatch committees, Victorian Science Fiction Conventions, Conflux 2005, and those amazing financial donors who know who you are. Thanks above all to Elaine, without whom none of this would have been possible.**

# AMERICAN KINDNESS

## The Bring Bruce Bayside Fund Trip Report: 17 February–13 March 2005

Bruce Gillespie (brg) interviews BRUCE GILLESPIE (BRG)

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### WHY ME?

**brg**

**So you've been to America and back?**

**BRG**

Yes. The trip was neither expected nor planned for. It just seemed to happen.

At Corflu in 2004, Eric Lindsay and Jean Weber again bid to hold Corflu in Australia, in their home town of Airlie Beach, Queensland. On the Trufen email listserv, Marty Cantor wrote on 30 March 2004: 'The problem for Bruce is, with Eric and Jean winning their Corflu bid, it will probably still be too expensive for Bruce to get to Airlie Beach for a Corflu there. Now, winning DUFF could get Bruce to the US; however, he would be expected to go to the Worldcon . . . , half a year away in time from when Corflu is usually held. What is needed for Bruce to get to Corflu — aside from Bruce suddenly coming into a windfall — is for a one-off fund to get him to the con. This would need many dedicated fans raising funds for this purpose.'

That was the message. I had one minute to accept or reject the offer. I accepted.

Arnie Katz from Las Vegas wrote: 'If you're a fanzine fan, then there's a place for you at Corflu. I see it as the Fanzine Worldcon and, therefore, believe that it should be inclusive rather than exclusive. You can also count me among those who think the idea of a Special Fund to bring Bruce Gillespie to Corflu is a damn fine idea.'

Robert Lichtman from California chipped in. I don't know how he did it, but he was able to dob in Arnie and Joyce Katz to run the American end of the fund. They accepted the challenge, and called it the Bring Bruce Bayside Fund. Ted White made the first donation. Within a week, donations were pouring in and the whole idea was a goer. Now I really faced the possibility of an overseas trip.

**brg**

**Why you? I thought you were never going overseas again?**

**BRG**

I don't know why they picked me. I'm neither a party animal nor a Travelling Jiant. I can't tell jokes at parties, and have never been known as a Fabulous Wit. A couple of years before he died, Buck Coulson assured me that I had been a social disaster during my 1973 trip to America, so I was reluctant to repeat the disaster.

The main reason for not going overseas again (or even travelling interstate) is that I've rarely had any money since 1974. Since 1997 I've made less money every year.

As Marty wrote, I couldn't even afford to travel to an Australian Corflu at Airlie Beach, let alone the 2005 Corflu in San Francisco. So the BBB Fund was a miracle out of nowhere.

Who was I to look a miracle horse in the mouth?

**brg**

**Everyone knows you're hopeless at practicalities, so who put together this little expedition?**

**BRG**

The initial idea was to raise enough money for the air fare from Melbourne to San Francisco. I would attend Corflu on the last weekend of February 2005. Then came the news that Potlatch (the readers' convention about science fiction) would be held at the hotel around the corner the following weekend. Could the special fund raise enough money to finance me to attend two conventions, plus some sightseeing and people-meeting around San Francisco?

Arnie and Joyce began to publish the *BBB Bulletin* every week on the Internet. They invited fanzine fans to become One Per Centers: people who would donate at least \$25, one per cent of the expected air fare of \$US2500.

I asked Bill Wright to become the Australian fund raiser. Bill is very good at handling other people's money. He had recently retired from a 47-year career working for Colonial Mutual Life, so of course he needed something to do with his time.

Robert Lichtman offered to set up a fan auction to raise further money, and in the final months of the fund took over control of American finances.

Claire Brialey and Mark Plummer offered to become British agents, although I had little hope of visiting Britain during the trip.

Alan Rosenthal and Janice Murray wrote from Seattle offering accommodation in Seattle during the week before Corflu. They also offered enough frequent flyer points to fly me from Los Angeles to Seattle, then back to San Francisco.

Billy Pettit, who had visited Melbourne a few years ago with his wife, had some good ideas for the San Francisco week of the trip. Art Widner asked me to stay with him in Gualala, California, for a day or two. And Art and Bruce Townley offered to pay for my memberships for Corflu and Potlatch.

Irwin Hirsh from Melbourne offered to edit a collection of my best fanzine pieces. After all, my only claim to fame is writing articles and publishing fanzines. It was called *The Incomplete Bruce Gillespie*, and it appeared in September 2004. Dick Jenssen contributed a brilliant cover to the 40-page, 35,000-word collection. The con-

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To

**LAX**

SEQ NBR

**68**

Class

**ECONOMY**

tinuing committee of Aussiecon 3 donated \$430 towards the cost of printing and posting *TIBG*.

At Conflux, the national convention held in Canberra in April 2004, the other fan funds, such as DUFF and GUFF, donated \$50 out of auction proceeds to the fund, as well as \$125 raised directly for the BBB Fund in the Fan Funds Auction. The fund also benefited from a \$500 donation from the Conflux surplus. I suspect that Mark Loney and Justin Ackroyd had quite a bit to do with that. At Continuum 2, the Victorian regional convention held in June 2004, the permanent fan funds again chipped in \$50. Bill Wright tells me that that there were also some very large donations from individual Australians, although the bulk of contributions were from One Per Centers.

**brg**

**So all the excitement had happened before you left Australia. The miracle is that you ever got on the plane.**

**BRG**

It took months to gather umpteen bits of ID, obtain my birth certificate, then take it and umpteen more bits of ID to the Post Office to get approval for my passport application.

Bill Wright's travel agent Charlie Caleja made it easy for me to buy my ticket. It was a lot cheaper than we expected.

Bill and I went shopping for luggage. A large case on wheels proved to be what I needed for my main luggage. For hand luggage I bought only a carry bag, which often became too heavy during the trip. I should have bought one of those bags with wheels and a long handle.

Early on the morning of 17 February 2005, my birthday, I said goodbye to Elaine and the cats, and Justin Ackroyd drove me and my luggage to Tullamarine Airport.

## MY LONGEST BIRTHDAY PARTY

**Thursday, 17 February 2005**

**brg**

**You still don't enjoy flying?**

**BRG**

I still didn't enjoy flying 14 hours from Melbourne

directly to Los Angeles, in a seat too small for a tubby guy like me. When much of the journey is night flying. And not enough food is served on the flight . . .

Both Justin and I believed that we should reach Tullamarine early in order to get through security and check-in. We didn't need to get there quite so early. At first it seemed that the international area was swamped with Vietnamese people flying home. After asking this and that person, I found the right Qantas counter. After going through security and check-in quickly, I had to wait two hours for anything more to happen. I was sick of reading before I boarded the plane. While I was lolling around in the departure lounge I heard somebody say that there would be 184 passengers on our flight — less than half full.

The plane left at 12.20 p.m., more or less on time.

One thing I remember vividly from my 1973 trip was the sheer amount of food and frequency of meals served on the trans-Pacific flight. Things have changed. The stupidest thing I did during the trip was not to buy myself some sandwiches before boarding the plane. About a half an hour after taking off, we were served a pre-lunch cup of whatever-we-fancied (coffee for me, of course). About an hour later we were served lunch. Because of the direction we were taking, we flew into darkness. Ten hours later we were served breakfast.

The flight was tolerable because it was only half full. I moved to an aisle seat that had an empty seat beside it. At least I could walk around the plane when I felt like it. I was a bit reluctant about keeping on the overhead light throughout that long, long night. Everybody else turned off theirs, and most people seemed able to sleep. I couldn't. I felt as if I eaten a handful of No-Doz tablets.

I found no relief from the boredom from the little TV screen attached the back of the seat in front. Each time I switched on a TV channel, it said '79 minutes elapsed'. I tried listening to various music channels. The earphones provided by the airline are so inadequate that I could only just hear a bit of music over the plane vibration. After listening to the Vivaldi program twice, I risked the wrath of other passengers and turned my overhead light back on and went back to reading. I might have enjoyed David Mitchell's *Cloud Atlas* a bit more if I had read it under other circumstances. I was quite enjoying the stories in Eileen Gunn's new short story collection when some light started to show through the blinds, people began waking up, and cabin stewards made moves toward serving breakfast.



**brg**

**But you arrived in Los Angeles eventually?**

**BRG**

Breakfast was served — still leaving me feeling hungry — and we landed at Los Angeles at 7.30 a.m. on the day I had left. It was still my birthday, 17 February. (In Melbourne it was now 2.30 a.m. on 18 February.)

Security for incoming aliens (Australians) is now ludicrous. Even little blue monsters will have it easier when they rocket into Earthport in a century's time. Security people now take a snapshot of the iris of one's eye (the film *Minority Report* is no longer science fiction) and take one's fingerprints. At least nobody found anything interesting in my hand luggage, then or at any other airport. Since I had worn my leather slippers on the trip instead of my clodhopper shoes, I didn't even need to remove my shoes.

I wheeled my case from the international terminal to the local terminal for Alaska Airlines. I would have got lost if it had not been for the advice of airport staff.

Los Angeles Airport (LAX) is a very strange airport, or perhaps merely ripe for retirement. The local terminal for Alaska Airlines looked as if it had been flung together for the flight. Security was going on in one corner. Ticket check-in was in another corner.

The check-in bloke looked at my departure time for Seattle. 'You're much too early,' he said. 'You can't even check in for that plane yet. You'll be waiting around here for six hours. Let me book you on the earlier plane. Do you want a window seat?' Hardly for the last time, I benefited from a sensible bit of American kindness.

Janice and Alan had bought a phone card in America and sent it to me. I tried it out. Caramba! There was Janice on the other end of the line. 'Sure,' she said, 'I'll pick you up from the earlier plane.'

I sat in the departure lounge, and tried to order my first coffee in America. I hadn't been able to scrounge nearly enough cups of coffee on the plane, and I was desperate. What was the Starbuck's equivalent of a 'long black'? I guessed that it might be a 'double espresso'. I received a small cup with two tiny teaspoonsful of strong coffee in the bottom! I gave up. Maybe coffee would be served on the plane to Seattle.

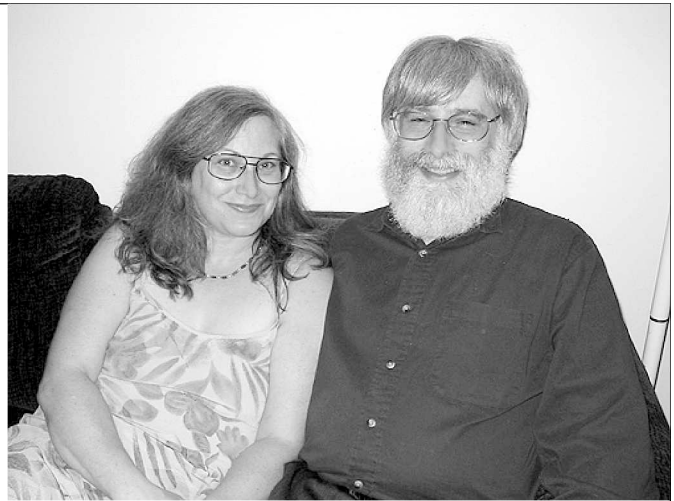
**brg**

**You sound pretty tired and desperate at this stage. When did things start to improve?**

**BRG**

On the plane to Seattle. The only food served was a little plastic-wrapped snack, but I did score a cup of coffee. And that check-in bloke had given me a window seat. While we were still turning on the ground before taking off, I watched planes take off and land like taxis. Then we rose. We flew over freeways that seemed to leap along and between the tops of ridges, with bits of suburbia between them. We flew north along the central California valley. 'That's Lake Tahoe down there,' said the plane's captain, but I had missed it.

We flew over mountains that were snow covered and didn't seem very far below us, then over mountains from which the snow had disappeared. Snow covered only the vast volcano peaks of the Cascades. According to the map I was looking at the other day, I think I was looking at Mt St Helen, Mt Hood, Mt Rainier and Mt Adams, all in a row. I couldn't find any steam or smoke rising from what I thought was Mt St Helen, but during my week in Seattle there were continual newspaper reports of cone



Janice Murray and Alan Rosenthal at home (Photo: Janice and Alan.)

building there. The four volcanoes looked bloody spectacular, all lined up like that, as unAustralian a sight as I would see on the trip. (Australia's highest mountain would disappear into the foothills of most of America's ranges.)

Coming into Seattle, I saw lots of bits of water. Each suburban factory site seemed to end in a wooded gully, which would have a little lake at the bottom of it.

When we landed, Janice was there to meet me. She was cheerful, but told me that the day before she had been afflicted by an increasingly sore eye. It turned out to be an abraded cornea, something I've suffered from, and hope never to suffer from again. We packed my stuff into her new red convertible car, and buzzed up the freeway to the Murray-Rosenthal home in northern Seattle. The freeway goes right under the city for about a mile.

By this time I was feeling really really hungry, so Janice took me to the 125th Street Diner, where I had a wonderful clam chowder. Clam chowder seems to be the Washington state dish, but during the whole trip I didn't taste one better than that first one. I liked this diner a lot, because it seemed just like the all-purpose, high-quality American diner that I remembered from my 1973 trip. I didn't realise that such diners have disappeared in parts of America, replaced by chain restaurants of varying quality.

**brg**

**So did the Murray-Rosenthal hospitality live up to its reputation?**

**BRG**

And some.

Janice and Alan keep a part of their house — a spare bedroom and bathroom — available for stray fan visitors, and I was its latest beneficiary. Some well-known Australian fans have stayed there, and some very well-known American fans have stayed there until they have been able to find jobs in Seattle. It didn't take me long to get settled in to this very quiet room in this very quiet area of Seattle. The house is quiet because it faces backward — the whole property backs on to the main north-south street in the area, while the front faces a lane between two lines of houses. Only a small amount of traffic ever travels down the lane. The postbox is on the main street, and sometimes Janice and Alan have real trouble giving instructions to strangers on how to find the house — but apart from that, it's a perfect way

Seattle as I nearly saw it. Because of the humidity during my week in Seattle, Mt Rainier seemed to float ghostly on the horizon. The Space Needle is on the left. (Source: postcard.)



to set up a neighbourhood area.

My 43-hour birthday hadn't quite finished yet. Janice drove us down to the university, picked up Alan, and they shouted me for my birthday to dinner at the Ram Cafe, which is part of the gigantic university shopping centre.

At midnight my longest birthday finished. I settled to a much-needed good night's sleep.

## SEATTLE

**brg**

**So you liked Seattle a lot?**

**BRG**

Immediately. I loved all the patches of water I glimpsed through the trees as we drove around. And the wooden houses, clinging to the hillsides. Lots of the public buildings are brick, of course, but it seems that most of the residences are wooden.

Seattle seemed so convenient for the people who live there, although Alan later assured me that it's not very convenient if you depend on the bus system. The main routes are arterial, stretching north and south from downtown, as do the trains in Melbourne. There are few crosstown buses.

It took me awhile to get used to the compactness and accessibility of Seattle. Not that Seattleites have much choice in the matter. Puget Sound is the boundary on the west side, and Lake Washington the boundary to the east. I'm told there are some suburbs on the far side of Puget Sound, but you need to take the ferry to get there. And there is Redmond, to the northeast, where Alan works. It's a suburb almost taken over by Microsoft. That's an 18-mile drive around the shore of Lake Washington, or a freeway ride over islands. There is an area south of the airport, but we didn't visit there.

**Friday, 18 February 2005**

Janice's eye had become much worse. She had had a bad night trying to sleep, so she was going off to see the doctor. Alan had already taken the day off in order to show me the city, so he took me off to a very pleasant breakfast at the Original Pancake House, before travelling by bus to downtown Seattle.

For a whole week Seattle welcomed me with (I'm told)

the best late-winter weather anybody could remember. Most years, Seattle would be overcast and/or drizzling during my stay. Instead, Seattle was going through a winter drought (I had brought Melbourne weather with me) and now settled in to week of cold mornings and perfect sunshiny days — and increasing smog. By the end of my week in Seattle, the daytime high temperature was reaching the high 50s (Fahrenheit; I had to keep guessing the Celsius equivalent), the air was still, and it became increasingly difficult to see Mt Rainier in the distance.

We got off the bus in 2nd Street, down near the docks, walked for awhile, then reached the Smith Building. It was built by the Smith of both Smith and Wesson and Smith-Corona. Restored some years ago, it has marble corridors and a marble-fronted lift (elevator) with a lift operator, and a amazing room attached to the observation deck. One of Smith's expeditions had been to Imperial China, where he traded typewriters for ancient Chinese artifacts. A small selection of his collection occupies the Chinese Room in the Smith Building.

The view from the observation deck is better than that from the deck at the Space Needle. One can see much further south from the Smith Building. Alan told me Seattle's pet names for each of its tall buildings, old and new. One is a spectacular triangle-shaped building (nicknamed the Darth Vader Building); another is sheathed in gold. Way to the south I could see on a hillside a building that looked like a combination of Orson Welles' *Xanadu* and one of the castles from Peter Jackson's *Lord of the Rings*. Alan told me that it was the old major hospital. It had been taken over and converted into the world headquarters of Amazon.com. If anybody need doubt that Amazon is bent on world domination, just look at its headquarters.

Near the Smith Building was an old area where many buildings had been knocked down and the vacant land either left derelict or made into car parks. I could also see the main railway station. Alan told me I could have taken a luxury train down the coast to San Francisco, but the trip would have lopped several days off my Seattle stay.

Always the water. On one side, the main freeway cuts along the edge of Puget Sound, from which ferries constantly stream across the water. On the other side, Lake Washington, with its island in the middle. Mount Rainier constantly hovers, seemingly just above the



## The Elliott Bay Book Company

"It must be a measure of something that I could place Seattle as the home of a famous bookstore before I knew that it was also the home of a famous aircraft company."  
Jonathon Raban

The Elliott Bay Book Company  
101 SOUTH MAIN STREET  
SEATTLE, WASHINGTON 98104  
(206) 524-6600

horizon, always separated from the other mountains by mist, like a moon coming down to land.

The real business of the day was visiting bookstores. Alan took me to Elliott Bay Book Company, which seemed to me almost as spectacular as the very first book store I entered, Peter Piper Books in Melbourne in 1953. Readings Books in Carlton would fit into a corner of Elliott Bay, which is even larger than Border's in Prahran. Elliott Bay is a treasure chest because it is filled with hard-back books, not those horrible trade paperbacks that fill the bookshops of Australia. Immediately I found and bought the two missing Steven Millhausers (*The King in the Tree* and *In the Penny Arcade*) that, I had been assured in Melbourne, were now out of print and quite unobtainable. Elliott Bay also had the new Michael Chabon (*The Final Solution*). I bought it because I knew it would be available in Melbourne only in some horrible British hard-back or trade paperback edition.

A store full of beautiful American hardcovers, with their tasteful covers and beautiful creamy paper! Surely some poet has celebrated The American Book.

Alan had already introduced me to the hardback of Erik Larsen's *The Devil in the White City*, a true story about end-of-the-nineteenth-century Chicago. The trade paperback edition had just appeared, so I bought two copies, one for me and one as a present for Race Mathews' upcoming seventieth birthday.

I could have bought much more, but how far can a credit card bounce? Would my Commonwealth Bank VisaCard work at all in America? It did. (But how would I keep track of my \$1000 limit?) How would I get my treasure home? In 1973 I had used the dollar-a-pound surface mail book rate to send eleven jiffy bags of books home to Australia. Surface mail has disappeared in recent years, and parcel costs promised to be more than I could afford. Ah well — there were still some books that *had* to be bought.

On to the Seattle Mystery Bookshop, where both Alan and Janice are well-known customers. After much discussion with the people behind the counter, we bought a present for Janice (we actually found something she hadn't already taken delivery of) and a Richard Stark (Donald Westlake) mystery for Alan.

Much walking in the sun brought us to a street so steep it had been converted to giant steps down to the docks, where people sunned themselves among the statues. From there we made our way to the Pike Place Market. It looks a lot like the Queen Victoria Market in Melbourne, with shops under one large roof, and lots of fresh produce.

Back north to 125th Street on an express bus, to find Janice asleep, having been treated with steroid eye drops and pain killers. She had been ordered to bed, so she missed out on the restaurant expedition that night. She and Alan had arranged for lots of Seattle fans to meet me and tuck into good food at the Doong Kong Lau (Hakka food which, I was told, is closest to Korean food). How could I get to talk to the whole of Seattle fandom

gathered in one place?

On that night I met for the first time Carl Juarez, Andy Hooper (but not Carrie Root, who was already coming down with flu), Hal and Ulrika O'Brien (Ulrika was a member of Acnestis, the British apa of which I was also a member), Victor Gonzalez, Randy Byers (who I'd met two months before in a Carlton restaurant when he was visiting Melbourne with Sharee Carton) and Stu Shiffman and Andi Shechter. I can't remember Marilyn Holt and Clifford Wind being there, but I did have a great reunion with former DUFF winners Jerry Kaufman and Suzanne Tompkins (Suzle), and John Berry and Eileen Gunn. It was a bit hard to know who to talk to, as everyone wanted to catch up with everyone else. After the mounds of superb food had been demolished, I got to talk to Victor, Randy and Carl (but was never granted a conversation with Andy Hooper during my whole stay in America) and catch up with John and Eileen (about the world of typesetting... what else?).

### Saturday, 19 February

brg

Were you a good little guest in Seattle?

BRG

I tried to be, but my week at Janice and Alan's seemed to bring nothing but misery to Janice. She was recovering from the abraded cornea most of the time I was staying there, and then she came down with a very heavy cold just as she set off for San Francisco. Alan was available for socialising on the first Friday I was there and during the weekend, but he had to work on the Monday public holiday, so it wasn't easy having me as a guest in the house.

Also, I came close to wrecking their kitchen and coffee maker.

One of the main quests of my trip was to make sure of the next cup of coffee. Alan didn't need to be reminded of the magic power of the first cup of coffee of the morning. He sets his coffee machine the night before so that it begins to brew precisely at 7 a.m. Ever the gentleman, he even left a spare cup of coffee for me after he set off for work.

The second morning I was staying in Seattle, I drank the cup that Alan had left for me, then refilled all the bits and pieces so that I could have a second. A few minutes later I was horrified to hear a steady drip-drip as coffee splashed to the floor. What had I done? I found that I had failed to put the entry point of the coffee from the brewing spout above the container in which it was supposed to collect and stay warm. The coffee had missed the container, spilled over the bench top and steadily made its way to the floor.

As well as I could, I cleaned the kitchen bench top and the floor, and hoped like crazy that the coffee had not seeped into any of the cupboards.

I know I am a machine klutz, but why did I have no idea how to operate the coffee maker? The answer did not hit me until I returned to Australia. I didn't know how to operate such a machine because I had never seen one like it before. It is quite difficult to buy here the type of coffee maker that is standard in American homes. The standard American machine has a water container on one side. Fill the water container. Click out a panel at the top. Put in a filter paper. Put in the required numbers of spoons of coffee. Click in the panel. Switch on the machine. The water begins to boil, then drops onto and through the filter paper, down into the container. The

coffee stays hot for several hours, even after you switch off the machine. I would love to have one of these machines. The coffee tastes superb. I could make four (or however many) cups at a time, especially after dinner. Without coffee, I cannot sleep well.

**brg**

**Janice and Alan did not throw you out of the house?**

**BRG**

They could have handed me on to somebody else. But Janice and Alan insisted that they should still hold the long-promised party that night (Saturday). Everybody was invited, but Janice had expected to be able to do the last-minute preparations on the day itself. Instead she could hardly get out of bed. She called for help from her friend Marci Malinowycz, who lives over the road. The party could not have gone ahead without Marci's help.

We were supposed to be visited on Saturday afternoon by somebody I hadn't met since 1985: Casey Wolf from Vancouver. I had only a vague memory of her from Aussiecon II, but we had kept up a long letter and email conversation over the years. At one stage, Casey was also hoping to stay with Alan and Janice on Saturday night, but this posed difficulties. Besides, I did not know whether or not Casey would get on with Janice and Alan. Casey had phoned, but arrangements were still unclear even on Saturday morning.

John Berry called to spirit me off to lunch at his and Eileen's place in Capitol Hill. Eileen prepared a wonderful salad lunch, accompanied by a splendid Canadian red wine. (Okay, I should have taken a note of the brand and year. It's difficult enough to make notes of any kind when you are enjoying such hospitality.) Eileen and John have a beautiful 1920s wooden house, filled with light and space, in an area that was affordable when they moved in, but wouldn't be now. Eileen is busy writing. Her story 'Coming to Terms' won the Nebula Award a few weeks after my visit, and her collection *Stable Strategies* had been nominated for the Philip K. Dick Award. (It was beaten only by Gwyneth Jones's *Life*, one of my favourite SF novels of recent years.) John has made himself an expert in typesetting and bookcraft,

John D. Berry at Corflu. Eileen Gunn made it to Potlatch, but not Corflu, so I never did manage to track down her photo. (Photo: Chaz Boston Baden.)



but, like me, is currently underworked and underpaid. He and Eileen have even been investigating returning to San Francisco if the right job came up. I could not see how they could leave that gorgeous house in Seattle, but then, not long ago I would never have considered leaving our house in Collingwood. We talked about all our favourite obsessions, including typesetting, bookcraft and fanzines, and listened to some music I hadn't heard (Holy Modal Rounders and Cindy Lee Berryhill). John gave me a wonderful present: the book of Kenneth Rexroth's poetry that he had edited and designed for Copper Canyon Press.

Eileen needed to continue working, so John and I headed down to 15th Street East, which has Horizon Books, a secondhand bookshop. I found much to tempt me, but really struck oil at nearby Twice Sold Tales. This shop is built entirely for the convenience of its resident cats, not visiting humans. Cat pathways that look like coat hangers stretch between the tops of bookshelves. A list of instructions on the wall says: 'Do not cuddle the cats.' I found hardback copies of two Kathryn Davis novels I had been looking for.

After saying goodbye to Eileen, John drove me back to Janice and Alan's. Casey had turned up, and all my doubts about this part of the weekend disappeared. When I had last seen her, she had seemed a rather lost girl, sitting in her poncho on the floor in a corridor of the Southern Cross Hotel at Aussiecon II (1985) with her travelling companion, both of them rather overwhelmed by fandom at its most exuberant. Casey is now nineteen years older, years that have given her elegance and maturity, and a great sense of humour. (All I've done during the same nineteen years has been to lose hair and put on weight.) She and Janice took to each other immediately, as if they had known each other all their lives. (Janice remembered later that she and Casey had belonged to A Women's APA at the same time for about a year in the 1980s, and they'd met once at VCon in Vancouver.) Casey's friend David, who had driven up from San Francisco, collected both of us, and we went out to dinner at Bhan Thai. David is not a fan, but he and Casey are very fannish. David had lived in Seattle during his student days, which is why he could head straight for Bhan Thai. He had also attended some SF conventions.

**brg**

**How did the party go?**

**BRG**

David couldn't stay to attend the party because he is allergic to cats. (I haven't mentioned Bob and Bonnie yet. I will.) He dropped us back at Janice and Alan's, where the party was just beginning. Marci had done a great job of collecting provisions. Janice had been able to kill the pain enough for her to dress up and enjoy the night. It was a bring-your-own affair, held in the beautiful large back room of the house. Guests included people I had met the night before at the Doong Kong Lau, such as Hal and Ulrika, Jerry and Suzle and the *Chunga* crew. Others I met that night included Loren and Lauryn McGregor, Tamara Vining and Hank Graham.

Music was a major topic of the night. First I talked to Ron Drummond, a very enthusiastic fellow who claims to have persuaded Naxos Records to record the Reicha quartets. I haven't found them yet in any store, but I did hear that Naxos had done a set of Reicha quintets. Perhaps that what Ron was talking about. Other people told me later that Ron is associated with Tachyon Books,

publisher of Eileen Gunn's *Stable Strategies* collection.

When talking to Victor, Randy and Carl, I found fellow Warren Zevon fans. Highlight of the evening was Carl Juarez singing a verse or two from a Zevon song; he had both a mellow speaking voice and an excellent singing voice.

I was a bit put out to find, through intense discussion with Victor, Randy, Carl and others, that there is still a division in American fandom between 'sercon fanzines' and 'fannish fanzines'. These days at Australian conventions people look at you sort of funny if you say you publish a fanzine. The distinction between sercon and fannish has disappeared here. In the early seventies, I felt that I had been cast into outer darkness by fannish fandom because I published a fanzine that talked about science fiction. I must have been forgiven eventually, because Arnie and Joyce Katz, masters of fannish fanzine fandom, are the people who offered to organise my trip to America. Now I claim to publish 'personal fanzines'.

Craig McBride from Melbourne and Karen Babcock from Seattle were at the party. I couldn't escape the Melbourne Science Fiction Club no matter how far I travelled. During my 1973 trip, I did not hear an Australian accent during the whole five months of my journeying. This time, Australians kept popping up everywhere. Craig and Karen were on their way from somewhere to somewhere, stacking up frequent flyer points as they did business all over America. They just happened to be in Seattle that night.

**brg**

**Tell us about meeting Walt Willis.**

**BRG**

Late in the night I was introduced to Walt Willis — 'the other Walt Willis'. In the early 1950s, the more famous Walt Willis, the Irish one, had been the recipient of fandom's second personal fan fund. Unfortunately, we never met. Seattle's Walt Willis is Anna Vargo's brother.

During the week I was in Seattle, fandom was suffering from losing Anna Vargo a month before, and F. M. 'Buz' Busby on the day I arrived — 17 February. Some people who had been taking care of Buz, such as Vonda McIntyre, did not feel up to partying. I did not get to see her. (We last met in 1977, at my flat in Carlton Street, on the night when my life changed absolutely, the night when Elaine and Frank offered to take me into their flat at Johnston Street because I had been ejected from my own place.) Walt was able to tell me about his remarkable sister, about whom I had never heard. He was astonished by the number of friends who visited her before she died. Walt asked to talk to me because he wanted to visit Australia sometime during 2005. He wanted to leave the USA and find a job somewhere else, preferably in Australia. I warned him that our paranoid government was not much interested in people who did not have a guaranteed job before they arrived in the country.

The party ended in fond farewells. Many people said with regret that we would not meet again at Corflu because they were either unemployed or underemployed. They simply could not afford the trip, let alone raise the cost of a convention membership and accommodation. In 1973, every fan I met was prosperous or expected to be. In Bush's America, most fans seemed to be underemployed or were facing a bleak retirement. This is the America our own prime minister wants Australia to emulate.

**Sunday, 20 February**

**brg**

**That sounds as if it was quite a day. Did it get any better than that?**

**BRG**

The journey stayed good, but my memories get a bit fuzzier because they are less well documented. I scribbled detailed notes up to Wednesday, 23 February, but they end there. After that, I have to rely on much shorter notes in my little pocket diary. I ran out of time to write notes at the end of each day.

On Sunday morning we all got up late. This is unusual for me, as I woke up about 7 a.m. on most days of the trip. What a luxury to lie in bed for a few extra hours and feel that there was nothing I had to do.

Late in the morning we set out for Microsoft headquarters in Redmond. Alan had to pick up a folder that he had mistakenly left on his desk on Thursday afternoon. We took the scenic route around Lake Washington — lots of abrupt rises and falls and gullies, lots of conifers, lots and lots of wooden houses, and always a view of some type of lake — till we arrived in Redmond. Alan told me that branches of the Microsoft empire have almost entirely taken over the suburb. During the ride, Janice and Alan had the idea of eating lunch at Salish Lodge in the hills about 30 miles west of Seattle. For the first time during my trip, we left the city altogether. We climbed upwards through woods, with the Cascades rising constantly in front of us. Alan pointed out Mt Si, which, like most of this range, is higher than any Australian mountain. We even caught a glimpse of Mt Baker.

Salish Lodge is a sumptuous guest house, built in 1889, with a restaurant attached. Janice said later that *Twin Peaks* was taped there. I assumed that the restaurant was quite famous, as we had to wait awhile before a table was cleared for us. Like many American restaurants, it offered the breakfast menu at lunch, so I ordered one of the best omelettes I've ever tasted. Alan and Janice also enjoyed their meals.

A good meal calls for a spectacular view afterwards, so we wandered down to the platform from which visitors can view the Snoqualmie Falls. Like most waterfalls, it has carved its own U-shaped valley as it progresses backwards. All we had seen from the lodge window was the top of the valley. From the viewing platform, the falls were not as spectacular as Alan had expected. He knows the area well, having bushwalked around there. Seattle depends on snow meltwater for both its water and electric power. The falls are the original source of hydroelectric power for the city. Today, they supply 3 per cent of its energy. Because there has been no real winter snow or rain during the 2004–05 winter, the 'falls' were down to a trickle. Seattleites are worried.

In America, you can actually see scenery from freeways. (Most Victorian freeways are bordered by very wide grassy margins or by sound baffles that protect surrounding houses from freeway noise.) Therefore the trip along the major interstate back to Seattle provided some nice panoramic views of the city — first over Mercer Island, one of the ritzier parts of the city — then sweeping into the city, then underground for about a mile.

Suddenly fire trucks and police cars roared up beside us. We saw caution lights along the roadside. Accident in the tunnel! The traffic slowed, as it became limited to one lane, but we did get past. It was hard to see what happened. A car seemed to have veered abruptly into





(l. to r.): Linda Bushyager hosted me during my 1973 trip to America. (She and Ron now live in Las Vegas). I first met Jerry Kaufman and Suzanne Tompkins in New York in 1973. Today they are leading Seattle fans. They won TAFF a few weeks after this photo was taken. (Photo: Chaz Boston Baden.)

oncoming traffic, leaving at least two cars mangled.

Janice was feeling a lot better on Sunday than on the day before. However, after we had phoned Casey and she had showed up in the afternoon, Janice was glad for us and Alan to go for a suburban bushwalk. Only three streets away from Janice and Alan's place is the extraordinary Carkeek Park, which looks out east over Puget Sound. It had been made out of the remnants of an old country estate before the city grid surrounded it. A part of it was eventually cleared so that walkers can descend steadily from street level to the shore. There is a slight barrier at the bottom of the path — the main interstate railway line, which goes along beside the beach. We went downhill through tall trees, then stopped dead at a wire fence. The beach is on the other side of the line, but the only way to reach the beach was to climb a steep flight of steps, cross the bridge, and go down an equally steep flight on the other side. But these were slat steps. I could see through them! Vertigo threatened, so I stayed on the park side of the line. Alan and Casey walked to the other side of the line, just to say they had done it, then came back. On the steep walk back to street level, Alan explained that in the park — the old farm — a field of old apple trees had been discovered, more than 30 species then thought extinct. From this stock, the 30 species are being re-created.

**brg**

**Tell me about the unfriendly Australian you met.**

**BRG**

I had offered to help clean up after the party, but Janice had waved me away. I didn't know how to operate the electric dishwasher, as I have never lived in a house with one. Janice had packed everything into the dishwasher, and cleared everything while we were away. She, Alan and Casey went out to dinner, while Jerry Kaufman and Sue Tompkins (who won TAFF a few weeks after I returned from America, so will go going to Glasgow for this year's world convention) picked me up. We went to Ray's Cafe, the upstairs version of Ray's seafood restaurant, on the waterfront of Lake Washington. There we met Clifford Wind and Marilyn Holt. Cliff had lived in Western Australia for several years during the 1980s, but I had met him only twice before. Still, we could pick up a few gossip threads based on people we had both known decades before.

We had to wait a bit for our table, so we went to the

bar for drinks. As soon as the barman opened his mouth I knew he was an Australian. 'Where are you from?' he said. 'Melbourne,' said I. 'Too bad,' he said. 'I'm from Sydney.' End of conversation.

The food was great — I can't see how the up-market Ray's below us could have been better. However, it was very crowded and noisy. Conversation was much easier when we went back to Marilyn and Clifford's house. Like most fans, they have a house full of books, and like most fans, they have three cats. They also have a chipper little chihuahua dog who likes to dominate the social scene. Most of the conversation was about a 60-acre farm that Marilyn had inherited. So what do two citified SF fans do with a 60-acre farm? They couldn't sell it, because that would have attracted horrendous taxes. They could hardly leave it to rot. Instead, they are developing it slowly into an organic farm. They had impressive aerial photos showing the progress they had made already.

**Monday, 21 February**

**brg**

**I believe you got stuck into some good beer in Seattle?**

**BRG**

Monday was Presidents' Day. Because he had taken Friday off, Alan had to work although it was a public holiday. I had already been invited to lunch with the *Chunga* crew, but Andy Hooper rang to say that Carrie had been struck down by the evil flu, and neither was going anywhere. Randy Byers rang me, and lunch was back on. Janice very kindly drove me to Randy's place, as I'm not sure I could have found it by bus. For a long time Randy has shared a house with Denys Howard (who I didn't meet during the trip) and Denys's vast collection of comics-based paraphernalia.

**brg**

**It was a very fannish afternoon . . .**

**BRG**

Randy and I were standing at the bus stop for twenty minutes waiting for a late bus. I gabbled away, and somehow Randy extracted from me the whole history of the split between Melbourne and Sydney fan groups over

Randy Byers,  
leading Seattle  
fanzine fan and  
beer  
connoisseur.  
(Photo: Chaz  
Boston Baden.)



the last fifty years. I have this sinking feeling that nobody in Australia is still interested in fan history, but as the bus pulled up Randy was kind enough to say that he was amazed to hear all this stuff and it should be written down someday. I thought: nobody at home would be interested, and very few people throughout the world except Mark Plummer and Claire Brialey in Britain! At the same time I was thinking: that's why I travelled to America, to meet people who are still somehow on my wavelength.

Which is something of an epiphany when all you are doing is standing in the sun on a Seattle bus stop, and you haven't even got stuck into the beer yet.

Eventually the bus arrived, and we found our way to Tangletown, a beer pub/cafe. We met Carl Juarez, who had just finished designing the latest issue of *Chunga*, the issue that was scheduled to be distributed four days later at Corflu in San Francisco. We drank some good North Western and Canadian beers and ate a good meal. Tangletown makes its own boutique beer. We were joined at the table by the beermaker, Dick Cantwell, one of the blokes who seemed to have been everywhere and done everything, with a bit of beermaking on the side. After a supremely mellow afternoon, Carl left for home (to tweak the last millimetres of the *Chunga* design), and Randy and I walked down to the University district.

The SF section of University Books is much better stocked than Minotaur Books or the old Slow Glass shop in Swanston Street. Many of the books on display were hardbacks. Randy introduced me to Duane Wilkins, who talks a mile a minute, and asked to be remembered to Justin Ackroyd in Melbourne. (Before I left on the trip, Stephen Boucher offered his opinion that the only non-American fans known personally to Americans were him, Eric and Jean, and Robin Johnson. Not so, Steve; by far the best-known Australian fan in America is Justin Ackroyd.)

Duane said that he would buy books directly from Australian publishers if it were not for the horrific postage rates from Australia to America (as we no longer have surface mail rates). He buys books by Australian authors when they are published in American or British editions. The Sean Williams/Shane Dix books do well at his shop. University Books also has a gigantic general fiction section, perhaps even as large as Elliott Bay's. I picked up the first Michael Chabon short story collection, *A Model World*. Again, this was a book that Australian booksellers had assured me was unavailable. Also I bought *The Best of Xero*, which is packaged the way I would like to publish a *Best of SF Commentary*.

**brg**

**Is this where you rave on about American kindness?**

**BRG**

The most frustrating aspect of this trip, compared with the 1973 trip, is that this time my decrepit old brain refused to make the immediate switchover from left-hand drive to right-hand drive. In other words, I would know which bus I wanted to catch, then find myself on the wrong side of the road and facing in the wrong direction, and simply not able to work out the right way! Or if I were on a bus I would go into a panic, not quite sure where I should get off.

That afternoon I really blew it. My brain went into meltdown. For a few minutes, I couldn't find the piece of paper with Alan and Janice's address, let alone the number of the bus I was supposed to be catching next!

I suspect that Seattle bus drivers are employed by

the Seattle tourist authority, not the public transport authority. To me, they represent American kindness, at least as extended to a poor idiot Australian traveller. The driver on the first bus I took somehow got me off at the right crossroads to catch the northbound bus. I staggered off, leaving Randy looking rather worried. He probably thought I would be found next day dazed and confused wandering along some highway. A nice bloke at the bus stop pointed out that I was — you guessed it — standing on the wrong side of the road to go north. The right bus came along, but again it took the efforts of a helpful bus driver to get me delivered to Janice and Alan's corner.

I expected waiters in American restaurants and cafes to be friendly, because the American wages system means that waiters depend on tips to make a living. Sure enough, American waiters are friendly and helpful. But during the whole trip I kept being surprised by Americans' willingness to put themselves out to help a stranger. Or maybe I just looked lost and forlorn.

When I arrived home, Janice was feeling a lot better, and she and Alan felt like going out to dinner. At the Wedgwood Broiler I ate my best steak in years. Later at home Janice and I watched a not-too-bad chat show — *The Daily Show*, hosted by Jon Stewart. One of the few media people known for his opposition to the Bush administration, he is a lot better than David Letterman.

**Tuesday, 22 February**

**brg**

**Were you the person who brought the flu to Corflu?**

**BRG**

I'm still not sure about that. Carrie had come down with the flu after Saturday night, which means that flu was already building up in the collective Seattle fan group before they descended on Corflu. However, on the plane from Melbourne I had been sitting between a cougher on the other side of the aisle and a cougher three seats the other side of me. Caught in the crossfire, that's probably where I picked up the cold that sneaked up on me during Tuesday.

I had no hint of a cold in the morning. Janice's eye had improved so much that she was able to go to work in the morning. I played with Bob and Bonnie, Janice and Alan's two wonderful cats. At lunchtime I went for a walk. The sunny days continued, each warmer than the one before, and the walk down the hill to Aurora was very enjoyable. I hoped to find somewhere to eat. There in front of me was the 125th Street Grill, the place I had visited with Janice on my first day in Seattle. The meal was even more enjoyable this time, especially as I ate my first genuine American chocolate nut sundae in 35 years. Later I wandered down Aurora until I found a Ross clothes shop, and bought some shirts at \$10 each to add to the inadequate supply I had brought from Australia. I wandered back to Alan and Janice's along 127th Street, enjoying the suburban landscape of wooden houses, dirt footpaths and pine trees.

When Janice arrived home from work mid afternoon, she wanted to show me some of the shopping sights of Seattle, so off we went in her red car. I had packed a box of books to go back to Australia. We went to the local UPS store. The box, more than 13 lb in weight, would cost \$110 airmail. Janice gasped. I gasped. We asked about economy airmail; the rate wasn't a lot better — over \$60. Janice phoned her employer, a non-profit organisation. Somebody there said that the organisation

could post the same parcel for \$32. Which is what Janice did the next day. (The parcel took exactly two months to arrive back in Greensborough, but it did arrive safely.) From then on, I was much more circumspect about buying books in America.

Temptation had not deserted me. Janice took me to Silver Platters, a CD store that, like Elliott Bay Books, could fit Readings comfortably in one corner. This is the sort of music store I've always dreamed about for Melbourne (and which John Clement's Basement was in the late 1960s). I could not afford to yield to too much temptation, but I did pick up one DVD that was unobtainable in Australia (Joseph Losey's film of Mozart's *Don Giovanni*) and three of the five CDs of what is claimed to be Roy Orbison's complete 1960s recordings for MGM. (When I arrived home I bought the rest in Melbourne, then realised the claim is not correct. The set does not include the soundtrack of Orbison's only movie, *The Fastest Guitar Alive*, so I'm still missing on CD one of Orbison's best singles, 'There Won't Be Many Coming Home'. A completist is never satisfied.)

We tried to find some Australian wine, but couldn't find anything that looked essential. We did, however, pick up a French wine that Alan likes. Even as we travelled around Seattle, I felt a cold descending on me like a bag over my head. The worst fate possible while travelling! What to do?

When we arrived home, Janice gave me a sample of every anti-cold tablet she could find in the house. I'm not sure which one worked, or whether it was the combination. Two days later, the cold had gone, but Janice had caught it. A day after that, flu seemed to spread noxiously throughout Corflu. But I didn't have flu, merely the lightest of colds. So it couldn't have been my fault.

**brg**

**So your overworked guardian angel stayed on the job?**

**BRG**

Yes. If there is a pattern to the trip, it was a cycle between me facing a situation I thought would be insurmountable, and other people rescuing me from the 'bad situation'.

I did feel pretty bad that night during my second visit to John and Eileen's. I told them I had a cold and they could let me miss the dinner if they liked, but the evening went ahead. Again, a superb light meal, made up of a perfect blend of vegetarian delectables and fine wines.

Eileen and John told me that their guests would be Steve Schwartz and his wife. Which Steve Schwartz? I had been emailing a Steve Schwartz in San Francisco about the Potlatch program. Or would it be Steve Swartz, with whom I had been in two apas, Acnestis and AN-ZAPA? Or would this be another Steve Schwartz altogether?

I was right the second time. Steve had dropped out of ANZAPA, after contributing two enjoyable fanzines. He is still a member of Acnestis, but we don't hear from him often. It turns out he got married, to the lovely, elegant lady he was with, Allison Merrill. Together, they had just that day bought a house in Snohomish, north of Seattle. They described it as the perfect house: old, made of wood, all original features, and huge, but also incorporating all the modern features, including speakers in every room. Allison, who had been a professor of fine arts somewhere back east, loves old buildings. She is now a freelance editor. I got the impression that the

books she edits are light years more detailed and authoritative than those I edit, but her hourly rate is half mine, even allowing for the currency difference. So how do editors in America manage to live?

Steve is a lithe, funny, articulate guy, but I remember seeing a picture of him carrying a lot more weight than I do now. Sure enough, he said that he managed to lose 80 lb recently, mainly through the program offered by Microsoft, where he works. He didn't exactly tell me the secret of his weight loss program. He did tease me by saying that one of the Microsoft staff said anybody could do it by walking 22 miles a day. From what Alan told me, Microsoft staff don't receive enough free time to walk one mile a day.

**brg**

**Surely people kept talking about the current political situation in America?**

**BRG**

President Bush, recent election winner, often came into conversations during my visit to the West Coast of the USA. Janice Murray, for instance, had worked strenuously for the Kerry campaign, and most people I talked to were still outraged by the result. (At the LASFS meeting a week later Jerry Pournelle loudly supported Bush, but that was hardly a surprise.) People such as we dinner guests that night disagreed about how to deal with coming social disaster and apocalypse. Steve put forward the Bush-as-totally-evil viewpoint. Eileen argued for a more subtle approach. Not believing that anybody can be completely evil, she was more concerned to work out how the current situation has come about. Many people I met during the trip said simply: 'There's nothing we can do about the situation.' This seems such an unAmerican thing to say that I was quite disturbed by the level of despondency in the nation. No statement could better sum up the difference between America 1973 and America 2005.

I was shivering by the time John delivered me back to Janice and Alan's — not because of political fear, but because my cold seemed to be turning into A-grade flu.

**Wednesday, 24 February**

**brg**

**What was your main practical problem while travelling through America?**

**BRG**

Laundry. Keeping myself nice without carrying around twice as many clothes as I had room for.

Before she left for work on Wednesday morning, Janice put all my dirty laundry into the washing machine and dryer. It was so good to have all my clothes clean again. How did I ever go on the road for five months in 1973-74? There was always the suspense of wondering when next I would get a chance to do my laundry.

Janice arrived home briefly, then set off for Corflu. She would be helping set up the hospitality suite. Alan, on the other hand, could not leave until Friday night after work.

**brg**

**What did you do during your last day in Seattle?**

**BRG**

I attempted to recover from my cold. But I could not bear the thought of mooning around the house and thinking

about my suffering. I wanted to see downtown Seattle again. Armed with Alan's detailed instructions, I braved the bus system by myself, and quickly found myself downtown during another perfect day in Seattle. Everybody had told me to visit the Space Needle and Science Fiction Museum. The Space Needle was great to look at, especially from right under the central disc, but the view from the platform was not as good as that from the Smith Building. Also, the buildup of pollution in the atmosphere made high-tower sightseeing a lot less satisfactory than it had been the previous Friday.

The Science Fiction Museum was a welcome surprise. I had been told that it had been financed by Paul G. Allen, one of the original partners in Microsoft. Instead of making it merely a monument to media science fiction, as I had feared, he had consulted both professional writers and fans when constructing the exhibits. Many of the magazines and books seem to have come from Forry Ackerman's collection, but the curators have taken a lot of trouble to keep the displays up to date. The displays of authors, books and magazines showed evidence of a lot of tender love and care. There is a display of classic fanzines, as well as a video dealing with fandom. The museum has some imaginative interactive displays. The one I enjoyed most was the motion picture holograph of vast spaceships moving past and through each other as they gather at some off-planet spaceport.

From the outside, the Gehry Building looks like a vast coloured slug arising out of the ground in the park beside the Space Needle. The SF Museum occupies part of the building, along with the Experience Music Project, a rock music museum whose displays I found much less interesting. It didn't help that most of the displays centred on Seattle musicians. Okay, a lot of good music has come out of Seattle, but it's hard to construct a history of popular music based on activity in one town. (It reminds me of all those 'histories' of Australian pop music that feature only performers from Sydney.)

I wandered down to the Market again, but did not re-find the good bookshops. Eventually the cold in my head caught up with me. I staggered aboard the correct bus and made my way home. (Yes, I nearly missed the stop at 125th Street, but yet another helpful Seattle bus driver got me off at the right corner.)

I had just collapsed when I reached home when Marci from across the road knocked. 'How would you like a ride to Seattle?' I confessed that I had just returned home from there. We had hardly seen Marci all weekend because her sister had been visiting from interstate. 'See

A postcard view of the SF Museum, with the Space Needle in the background.



you in San Francisco,' I said.

During the afternoon I played with Bob and Bonnie, wrote Trip Report notes (the last I would have time to make) and read. Janice said that Bob and Bonnie had both had disturbed lives before they had joined her household, and they were rather shy for most of the week. We made friends completely just as I was about to leave.

Alan and I went out to dinner that night (I recall that it was a good seafood restaurant, but I haven't written down its name), and said goodbye. He had had to carry the burden of entertaining the guest (me), and did a great job. His library helped. He has a wonderful collection of books I would love to own in hardback or would like to know more about. Also he has many maps, and various encyclopedia sets he had picked up secondhand. Alan also supplied vast amounts of coffee, and he and Janice did much more ferrying about than they should have. They made the Seattle part of the journey one of the really great weeks of my life.

While I stayed in Seattle, I could use Alan's computer to stay in touch with Elaine in Melbourne. I found out that John Bangsund had suffered what at first seemed like a stroke, although it was later diagnosed as a cerebral haemorrhage. For about two weeks it seemed as if John might have suffered permanent brain damage. (He improved rapidly during March.) Every few days Elaine was sending bulletins via the fannish email lists. When I reached Corflu, somebody said to me: 'You've been busy on the net, Bruce.' After I left Seattle, I was out of contact with Elaine until eventually I was able to phone her.

#### Thursday, 24 February

**brg**

**Tell us about how you nearly missed the plane to San Francisco.**

**BRG**

It wasn't quite that close. Yet another tale of a Gillespie boo-boo; yet another tale of American kindness.

Alan had arranged for the airport shuttle bus to pick me up in the morning, as he had to go to work early. I don't know if there is such a service in Melbourne. The bus had already picked up several groups of passengers, and picked up another after me. The service took me and my luggage from the north of Seattle to Seatac (Seattle International Airport), south of the city, for \$25 (plus tip), in comfort, without rush. Yet another perfect day in Seattle.

During the 1973 trip I met no Australians after Torcon II, and Americans knew very little about Australia. This time I met quite a few people who had toured the Australian continent. One of the couples on the shuttle bus had taken a recent long bus trip to central and northern Australia. They had been most unimpressed by Broken Hill, and by their chatty tour bus driver. Finally they had taken over command of the bus, changed hotels to ones not recommended by the bus company and escaped the tour group as often as possible. From what I've heard about inane Australian tour 'bus captains', the Seattle tourists had escaped lightly.

Off the shuttle bus. Plenty of time before the plane left. People were being booked in at booths on the footpath outside the terminal. Luggage checked in quickly. (Alan had bought the tickets through email, so it was easy to check in using a computer code number.) I threaded my way through the terminal, down stairs

and up stairs and along corridors, and was approaching security. I looked at my board pass. I had been given the pass for the wrong person. I went into panic (as I tend to do), but eventually found my way back to a check-in counter. I explained the problem to the lady at the counter. 'That's all right,' she said, after she had changed my pass, 'but I'll need to change the name on your main luggage as well.' Because she was extremely busy at the time, I thought it possible she might forget to do this. But I boarded the plane without any trouble, and my San Francisco luggage emerged safely at the other end.

## SAN FRANCISCO: CORFLU 22

**brg**

**At last — San Francisco!**

**BRG**

The trip from Seattle to San Francisco went so smoothly that I arrived ten minutes early, which is why Mike McNerney was three minutes late. He walked into the airport carrying a copy of one of my magazines. Even so, I might have guessed he was an SF fan of my generation — grey beard, kindly looks, something interesting going on behind the eyes — *fannish*.

Mike is one of a number of American fans I met who couldn't really afford to retire even if they wanted to. Mike has been able to land a job in the baggage-handling section of San Francisco International Airport, with his own office. We took the little train from the departure lounge to the carpark.

My first impression of San Francisco was pot holes in the city streets. Pot holes! We haven't seen those in Melbourne since (it seems to me) the Roads Department took over our state governments about thirty years ago. (Connection in my mind: Schwarzenegger as California's governor — cuts in taxes — cuts in public service and infrastructure spending — pot holes.)

Mike kindly lent me his map of San Francisco; I'd better send it back to him after I've finished this report. We discussed many things, including the Holy Modal Rounders. It seems they were a West Coast phenomenon who never reached Australia. John Berry and Eileen Gunn are also great fans of theirs.

We checked in at the Civic Center Holiday Inn, which is named after the Civic Center BART station over the

Robert Lichtman (l.) and me, outside the doors of the Civic Center Holiday Inn, San Francisco.



Frank Lunney, one of the few who made it from the East Coast to Corflu, and Ian Sorensen, one of the large contingent of British fans. (Photo: Chaz Boston Baden.)

road, not the San Francisco civic centre, which is several blocks away. Robert Lichtman had already arranged payment for my room. Since I had asked for an extra-long bed, I got a sumptuous room with double king-sized beds, with the windows looking out over the swimming pool. I was pleased to find coffee-making equipment and supplies of coffee. Bruce Townley had paid for my convention membership — thanks, Bruce.

Lots of people were already arriving for Corflu, which began the next day. I sat in the lobby and watched as Fannish Giants strode through the door. Frank Lunney and Ted White were two of them, and dozens more. I met Tom Becker and Spike Parsons, genial hosts of Corflu Titanium (Corflu 22). They showed no sign of the usual harried look that settles like a blanket over the faces of most convention organisers. No query was too small to be answered, and the convention did not seem to interfere with their socialising.

With Tom, a group of us went out to Mel's Diner. The good old-fashioned American diner has so much gone into decline on the West Coast that it has had to be revived as a chain of restaurants. Mel's Diners recreate the ambience and menu of the traditional diner. I can't remember what we ate, but it was filling, and the coffee was good.

**brg**

**What were your first impressions of San Francisco?**

**BRG**

For years people had been telling me that San Francisco is the wonder city of America, the city most unlike the big eastern and midwestern cities. It isn't around the area of the corner of Eighth and Market Streets. This is the seedy end of downtown, a seediness I've never seen in any Australian city. On the street were lots of people who are actually homeless, carrying their goods with them on giant converted supermarket trolleys, and sleeping in the streets. (I realise that Australia has such homelessness, but it's out of sight and out of mind for most of us.) The Holiday Inn, in one street, and the Ramada, around the corner, are, I presume, the last remnants of an era that ended some years ago. I've heard that there are about 30 million homeless people in the USA. Sometimes it seemed that most of them had drifted to San Francisco. This is the kind of society that our unloved prime minister wants for Australians.

The odd thing is that I felt safer scooting around the streets of San Francisco than I sometimes feel around the inner-suburban streets of Melbourne. It's as if the two societies — Bush's homeless squads, and 'ordinary Americans' — occupy parallel universes side by side. In Melbourne, beggars often don't look homeless, but they





A friendly tourist took this picture at Coit Tower for Bill Burns — the members of Bob Speray's expedition (l. to r.): Earl Kemp, Bill Burns, me, Bob Speray and Peter Weston.

are much more aggressive.

**brg**

**Tell us about the hospitality suite at Corflu?**

**BRG**

Corflu did not officially begin until Friday, but most people had already arrived. I wish I could say I remembered the party in the Hospitality Suite on the Thursday night to welcome me and other international guests (mostly Britons), but I don't. It was good to catch up with Peter Weston for the first time since the late 1980s. He doesn't change much, although his fannish star has risen. After being Fan Guest of Honour in Boston in 2004, he knows everybody. He introduced me to the wonderful Bill Burns, who still has a British accent thirty years after moving to America. Bill and Peter were cheerful companions during most of the convention. Claire Brialey and Mark Plummer had also arrived from Britain — they are now the international fannish celebrities I see most often.

At last I got to meet Earl Kemp, the kindly elf of fanzine fandom, whose *el* has become one of the wonders of electronic publishing (on [efanzines.com](http://efanzines.com)). Earl has an amazingly musical Southern accent; he speaks softly and slowly, relishing each syllable.

The hospitality suite was the star of the convention, as it was at Potlatch a week later. No wonder people were puzzled at the lack of such a facility at Aussiecon in 1999. Australian hotels insist on charging for every scrap of food and drink served within the hotel. American hotels actually welcome conventions. They allow the convention itself to serve food and drink continually in the hospitality suite. At midnight I could put on a new pot of coffee. People looked at me sideways — those odd

Australians! — but a true caffeine addict needs a fix at midnight (or 2 a.m.).

**Friday, 25 February**

A strong feature of the Holiday Inn was its large, flexible breakfast. I ordered a hot breakfast — a very enjoyable omelette — with toast and coffee. For the same price I could go to the buffet and choose from among fruit, cereals and other goodies. A cheap, sumptuous breakfast, but I didn't meet many other convention people. Most ate breakfast at small places near the hotel, but the even the breakfast at Steven's across the street was not as satisfying as the hotel breakfast. Also, I could put it on the tab.

**brg**

**Who is the amazing Bob Speray, and what's this about his vast collection?**

**BRG**

Earl had organised a trip guided by his old friend Bob Speray (though Bob seemed quite a bit younger than the rest of us — see the photo). He had driven in from San Jose, and offered us a guided tour of the high points of the city of San Francisco. Bob, Earl and I were accompanied by Peter Weston and Bill Burns. Bob was a splendid guide to the city, dropping the right amount of entertaining information about each place we visited. In turn, Bill seems to know the complete history of technology, and a fair bit about San Francisco. Peter provided a commentary about everything else, including a fair bit of the history of British fandom that had not fitted within the covers of his book *With Stars in His Eyes*. Earl and I stayed fairly quiet, offering the appropriate 'oohs'

and 'ahs' of astonishment and wonder when required to do so.

This was a whirlwind trip, so I'm not quite sure where we went. Our first destination was Coit Tower on Telegraph Hill. This overlooks the wharves and the section of the bay that stretches to Oakland and Berkeley. The tower has been restored recently, Bob said. We did not go to the top, but went around the inside base, which has amazing frieze of paintings made by the workers on the tower during the 1930s. In vivid colour, they give an idea of everything that was happening in the streets and workplaces, especially the sufferings of workers campaigning for improved conditions during the Depression.

Bob drove in a circle to sneak up to the back of Lombard Street. It is known as the steepest, most curvaceous street in the world (see the tourist photo). With Bob driving very carefully and slowly, we went down the seven or eight curves from Hyde Street, which has a cable car line, to Leavenworth Street, passing some very ritzy San Francisco real estate. (Peter remembers me saying: 'I hope we don't meet any cars coming the other way'.)

I kept trying to work out why San Francisco looks very different from Seattle, although both are surrounded by water. (San Francisco is a peninsula, with the 'Bay Area', such as Oakland and Berkeley, on the mainland across the bay. Most of my life I had thought that San Francisco was on the mainland, and Oakland and Berkeley on an island across the bay.) Not only are the hills much steeper in San Francisco than in Seattle, so that the houses seem to hang off the cliffs, but there is much less domestic vegetation. Houses in Seattle are mainly built of dark wood, while San Franciscan houses are mainly painted in pastel colours. In both cities, buildings are low (waiting for the next big earthquake), but from a distance San Francisco's hills seem much starker than Seattle's. The houses and apartments on display in San Francisco look much wealthier and picture-postcardy than those in Seattle, but the oldest buildings in each city must be about the same age (because of the 1906 earthquake in SF; the 1889 fire in Seattle).<sup>1</sup>

Bob took us on a quick bypass of the wharf area. He suggested that Pier 39 has better food and shops than Fisherman's Wharf, but I never did get back there to find out. We whirled up to the park area beside the Golden Gate bridge (which connects San Francisco to Marin

County and the wine country to the north), stepped onto the bridge for a short walk, took a look at the area used by Alfred Hitchcock for the Golden Gate Bridge section of *Vertigo*, and stepped past various bits of earthmoving equipment. The whole bridge is being reinforced against the next big earthquake, so parts of the park have been turned into a works site.

Bob took us to the Ocean Lookout from which you can see back to the bridge (looking northeast) and the other way, looking south, down one of the few long beaches around San Francisco. Bill, who has a Web site devoted to the history of cable laying in America during the late nineteenth century, told us that the area was the site where the first trans-Pacific cable came ashore. Bob told us about the Cliff House restaurant, which is on the site of two previous Cliff Houses, each of which burned down. The site also has the ruins of the Sutro Baths, a sort of Roman baths for the patricians of San Francisco during the early twentieth century.

Bob told us about the history of the beach itself, which is federal territory. During the hippie era, it was home to many who wanted to hang out and get high. For a long time the city of San Francisco could do nothing about the invasion, until eventually the federal government took over the policing of the beach.

We drove along and through Golden Gate Park and the Haight-Ashbury area, connected to what Bob and Earl obviously regarded as San Francisco's Golden Age — the late 1960s. Golden Gate Park, a huge area of the city, was home for many hippies who lived wild among the trees. Today the park includes an art museum, a planetarium, tennis courts, a stadium and gardens, but we didn't stop to look at them. We stopped for lunch in a side street somewhere in the Pacific Heights area, and waited while the sole proprietor made sumptuous health-food lunches for us.

We headed south through Redwood City, Menlo Park, Palo Alto and Santa Clara until eventually we reached San Jose, where Bob lives. This is the home of Bob's fabled collection, which was the point of the journey. Even Earl did not suspect what he had let us in for. Bob was unforthcoming about what he does for a living. Whatever it is, the job allows him to live much of the year overseas. During his trips overseas, he collects books. He is a funny man, self-deprecating, willing to admit that he collects whatever rare books and magazines he can put his hand on. His specialty, like Earl's,



A postcard view of Lombard Street, San Francisco. Even Bullitt didn't attempt driving down this street.

is 'sleaze books'. You would have to read Earl Kemp's fanzine *eI* or his new book *Sin-A-Rama* to get an idea of what 'sleaze' is — or was. Peter looked affronted. 'These are just jerk-off books,' he said. Yes, Earl admitted, but the covers are great, and they provided employment for many writers during the 1950s, including lots of writers who later became famous science fiction writers. They are digest-sized magazines that look like the SF magazines of the period. They have few pictures, which means they were made redundant by the graphic pornography that became available during the 1960s.

We walked into Bob's house. It was difficult to make our way around. More than anybody else I met during the trip, he has filled his house with bits of his collection. I wasn't interested in the sleaze books, but I kept seeing piles of books I was interested in: science fiction.

'Okay,' said Bob. 'You've seen this house. Let's see some of my other collections.' We bundled into his car, and sped off among the single-storey houses and low buildings on the flat plain of San Jose until we arrived at the back of a shop. Bob unlocked door after door, then let us into a large space about the area of a two-car garage. It was filled with more of his collection. Large sections were sorted, but other sections formed huge piles of books and magazines. Bob pointed to one long counter. 'That's my collection of every laser disk ever issued in America,' he said. They are all still plastic wrapped.

Peter picked up a thin digest-sized magazine. It was English, dated 1946. The cover showed a picture of a young E. J. Carnell, and it was advertising the first issue of a new magazine called *New Worlds*. Peter was almost speechless at holding such a piece of history. He put it back. The next day he was talking to Earl about this treasure. Earl must have phoned Bob, who said, 'If I'd known how valuable it was to him, he could have had it.' I hope Bob remembered which shelf in which warehouse Peter found it.

Bob's greatest treasure, he said, are some advertising posters he found in China. That's all they are: advertisements for cigarettes, but rendered exquisitely in an early twentieth-century Chinese engraving style. Bob could not work out how they had escaped the Cultural Revolution and had stayed intact until the 1990s. Bob said he had even tried to interest Chinese people in them, but nobody he talked to had any appreciation of their value. Today he just keeps them for the pleasure of looking at



One of the few Corflu panel items I remember — Bill Burns (centre) introducing Peter Weston (l.) and me (r.) to talk about fandom in Britain and Australia. (Photo: Chaz Boston Baden.)

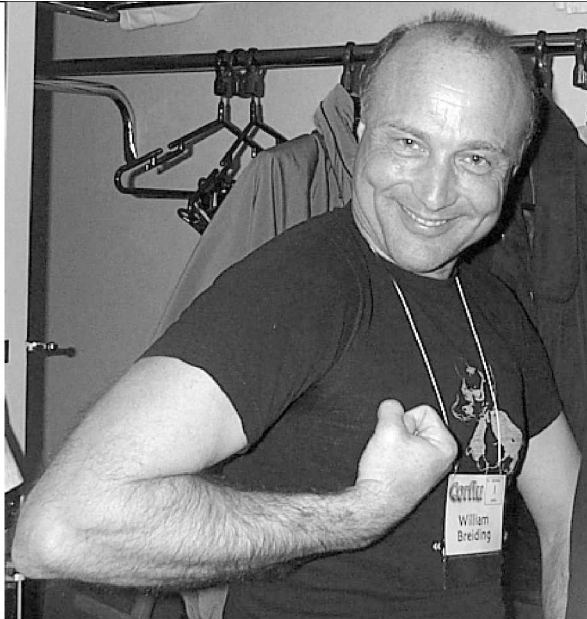
them.

We didn't have time to visit Bob's fourth collection, in some other storeroom elsewhere. That has all the hardbacks,' he said.

Bob was kind enough to drive us back to San Francisco, but he did not stay for dinner. Earl had arranged to take to dinner me, Robert Lichtman, Ted White, Pete Weston and Bill Burns. I had hoped I might be part of a great gabfest, but this didn't happen. I seemed to fail the Ted White test of conversational companionship, but it was wonderful to get to talk to Robert Lichtman. I had thought of Robert as a good friend for years, but we hadn't met until that day. It's not just that he's the top fanzine publisher of the last ten or fifteen years, or that he is married to Carol Carr, or that he managed all the last stages of the BBB Fund (and kept shoving cash at me so that I didn't have to rely on VisaCard), but it's simply that Robert radiates charm: a mixture of authority, modesty and quiet humour. He has a lot of interesting things to say, too, but we didn't get to talk a lot until the next Wednesday. The food at Basil Thai, near the convention hotel, was excellent, but it was a long table, and the restaurant had a high noise level. Nice idea, Earl, but we must get together at a round table sometime.

I can't remember a lot about the program at Corflu, since the program was hardly the point of the convention. I just wanted to meet as many people as possible, although I find it hard to push in and introduce myself. Most people I was meeting for the first time. I can't remember most of the conversations, and with many people I did not know how to ignite a real conversation. Bill, Peter and I did have the advantage of putting on the first panel of the convention, on the Friday night. It was a good chance to introduce ourselves and our fandoms. I can't say I shone on that panel, but Peter and Bill kept up a good conversation for an hour. With that over, we could retire to the hospitality suite. I went to bed early that night. Thanks to all the pills Janice had given me, my cold had almost cleared up. I ran into Alan Rosenthal, who had just arrived from Seattle. 'Janice has retired early,' he said. 'She's coming down with a bad cold.' Again, I wondered whether or not I had brought the flu to Corflu.





William Breiding, who benefited from the Waft William Westward Fund. (Photo supplied by William Breiding.)

**Saturday, 26 February**

**brg**

**Tell us all about the fabulous fannish social whirl of attending Corflu.**

**BRG**

Saturday morning felt like the third day of the convention, although it was only the second. I kept running into people I knew, such as John Berry from Seattle and Eric Lindsay and Jean Weber from Australia, via Olympia, Washington, where Jean had been taking care of her mother for several weeks. As I was finishing my sumptuous Holiday Inn breakfast, Spike came by and said she was going to breakfast at the Harvest Urban Market. Never say no to a second breakfast. Thanks to this market, just down Market Street, plus the Walgreen's a block or so the other way, I was able to stock up on bits and pieces I needed. The apples served with the Holiday Inn had been mealy and decayed, but the Market apples were fresh. Just because I was travelling, I wasn't going to miss my apple a day. The coffee was good, too.

Back to the hotel. More people I hadn't met before, but had always wanted to. William Breiding, for instance. He's moved all over the place in the last ten years, but one of his long-time hangouts was San Francisco. He doesn't have much money, so Jeanne Bowman and others put up a Waft William Westward Fund to spirit him from Tucson to Corflu. Not as expensive as the BBB Fund, but probably twice the value.

I met old friends who didn't have much to say to me. I'm not sure why I failed to connect with Moshe Feder, who did me an enormous favour a few years ago, and who I first met at Torcon II in 1973. He hasn't changed as much as I have; perhaps the shock of meeting me was too much for him. I know the shock of meeting me for the first time in thirty years would be too much for me. Jae Leslie Adams, fellow member of Acnestis, who I had met at Aussiecon III in 1999, didn't seem to recognise me for several days.

Other people were just nice to be around: Jack Calvert from Oakland, Michael Dobson from Maryland, Mark and Claire from Britain, Ian Sorensen and Yvonne Rowse from Britain, Spike and Tom, John and Eve

Harvey, always to be found in the bar with yet another good yarn from Britain (and now, France), Jerry and Suzle from Seattle, Karen Schaffer and Mike Ward from San Francisco, who were real discoveries (although I should have known Karen's name, as she is in the Secret Garden gardening apa with Elaine), Marci Malinowycz from Seattle, Murray Moore (fellow ANZAPAn and fine wit), Ian Stockdale, Bruce Townley (who was a shy teenager when I met him last in Melbourne in 1972, is now neither a teenager nor shy, and is really good company), Peter Young, ace new fanzine editor from Britain, Dave O'Neil from Britain, Art Widner from Gualala, Randy Byers from Seattle, R. Laurraine Tutihasi from Los Angeles, and Linda and Ron Bushyager, who had put up with me in Philadelphia in 1973 and now live in Las Vegas . . . always somebody to talk to, and I rarely had to talk about science fiction.

And more . . . Mark Linneman, honorary Australian although he's been back in America for fifteen years, came down from Sacramento, and was enjoying the culinary delights of the hospitality suite every time I visited there.

I cannot remember whether I met John Hertz first at Corflu or Potlatch. He's a Los Angeles fan who sends me bundles of his apazine every few weeks. The impression I got from his zines was of a very scholarly, serious fifty-year-old, perhaps an academic or retired academic. The John Hertz I met is bright, cheery, seemingly in his thirties, very unpedantic, and his main non-fanzine hobby is dancing. Meeting him was a delightful surprise of the trip.

On the Saturday afternoon, Robert Lichtman introduced me to his wife, Carol Carr, one of the most famous SF fans and writers of the last forty years. It was a bit startling to find that she looks about twenty years younger than me. Twenty? More like thirty. But everybody looks younger than me these days. I didn't quite know how to catch up on forty years of fannish gossip, so I didn't. We just chatted and I basked in the warm glow of her personality. All I can say is: wow!

On the Saturday morning was a pleasantly amusing panel called 'Exploring and Solving the Problems of Fandom Utilizing a Complex Scheme of Algorithmic Phantasmagoria'. The deep significance of beanie hats and other fannish trivia was explicated by Professor Hamish McSorensen of somewhere east of the Atlantic, and Dr X Bodden and Professor Nerfertiti Chipotle-Benton of somewhere around San Francisco.

For lunch, I took out Janice Murray and Alan Rosen-

After all these years, I was lucky enough to meet Carol Carr at last. (Yes, that is Carol on the right.) (Photo: Robert Lichtman.)





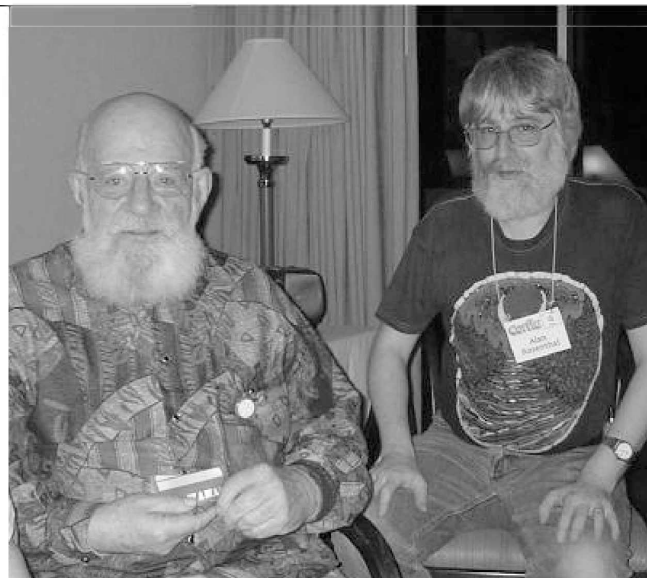
Tom Becker (co-chair of Corflu). (Photo: Bruce Gillespie.)

thal, and Mike Ward and Karen Schaffer, to a restaurant called Absinthe. It is part of the network of shops and public buildings that is in the Civic Centre only a few hundred metres geographically from the Holiday Inn area, yet light years away from it socially. Absinthe was crowded, up market, and served good food. By now Janice had really been hit by The Flu, and I did not set eyes on her again afterward until we were all saying goodbye on Monday morning. For dinner at night, I caught up with Mark Linneman in the Holiday Inn restaurant. Not that we had to catch up on years of gossip, since Mark rings us every couple of weeks from Sacramento.

Spike and Tom led a group of us on a slightly soggy tour of a few important San Franciscan tourist spots. This was the one afternoon when my fabulous Aussie guardian angel could not keep the rain at bay. Spike and Tom led us, on foot and by bus, to the Natural Science Museum, the Yerba Buena Arts Center, and the Vino Venue. There we paid \$20 each for a smart card. As we sampled each wine in the shop, the amount available on the card reduced. (I hadn't seen a smart card in action before; in a few years' time Melbourne's public transport system will be run with them.) I tried some zinfandels, but I seem to remember that the best wine I tasted was a South Australian red. It was probably one I cannot buy in Melbourne.

When we returned, we found we had missed what everybody else agreed was the best panel of the convention: Pat and Dick Lupoff, and Frank Robinson and Trina Robbins talking about the heyday of *Xero*, one of the greatest fanzines of all time. (This 1950s fanzine ran to only ten issues, each larger than the one before. A few days later, Robert Lichtman showed us his complete set.) They were launching *The Best of Xero*, a new hardback from Tachyon Press. I hope somebody recorded the panel.

The next panel item was one I enjoyed greatly, but people sitting more than halfway down the hall had great trouble hearing or appreciating it. Andy Hooper had written one of his famous plays, 'Read and Enjoyed, but No Content', a gripping drama in many chapters telling of the lives of your average fannish apa members. Various members of the apa (amateur publishing association) joined at its beginning, and every quarter hour or



(l. to r.): Art Widner and Alan Rosenthal. (Photo: Chaz Boston Baden.)

so we were invited to guess which members would minac out before the next stage of the apa. Some audience members actually guessed every dropout correctly. If the play was painful, it was only because of the accuracy of its presentation of the various types of people who inhabit apas, the odd directions in which their contributions (and lives) take, and the creativity of the excuses they offer for not having contributed recently. I presume this epic will be published in a fanzine soon.

**brg**

**Why was Corflu more enjoyable to attend than either an overseas Worldcon or a Melbourne convention?**

**BRG**

In a word: tradition. The Worldcon has overflowed way beyond the boundaries of fandom as I know it. Melbourne conventions are very social, but I meet very few people who are interested in the great history of fandom. Corflu is dedicated to keeping alive the spirit of fandom itself. It's not quite accurate to say it represents 'fanzine fandom'. Most of the people I consider the major publishers of paper fanzines couldn't be there, because of either poverty or other commitments. Or (as often happens with dedicated fanzine producers) they don't care much for conventions. Many of the people who shone socially at Corflu used to appear in genzines, but no longer do so. Many now publish only in apas or online, either at [efanzines.com](http://efanzines.com) or in blogs. It's enough to say

(l. to r.): Ted White and rich coad, in the not-yet-smoke-filled room. (Photo: Chaz Boston Baden.)







Hope Leibowitz. (Photo: Chaz Boston Baden.)

about the whole convention that I could enjoy a whole weekend of conventioning with hardly a mention of science fiction or writers, but much mention of fanzines, fans, fannish gossip, conventions, and many other shared interests.

Also, Corflu has its own traditions. The ever-overflowing provisions of the Hospitality Suite. The Ted White smoke-filled room (although, to judge from the shadowy figures that flitted past the window of the Hospitality Suite, I assume that smokers are now forced to freeze their butts off on the balcony.) The permanent group in the bar. (The Holiday Inn bar closed as early as 11.30 at night, but otherwise did a great job.)

This year Tom Becker and Spike Parsons started a new tradition: asking every member of the convention to contribute a short autobiography to the Program Book. Anyone who hadn't bothered to write one had his or her autobiography written by the committee.

### Sunday, 27 February

The Sunday morning brunch is a tradition that we could well begin at Australian conventions. That assumes, of course, that we could find a hotel that would cook a sumptuous breakfast buffet that has enough for everyone, plus seconds. Everybody at our table had more than enough.

Corflu's most famous tradition is the ballot to choose the annual Guest of Honour. If you know you could never deliver a Guest of Honour speech, you can bribe the committee with a twenty-dollar note to leave your name out of the ballot box. The name is picked during the Opening Ceremony. This year the name of Murray Moore from Canada came out of the ballot box. He had two days to prepare a speech. From reading his fanzine contributions and meeting him, I knew that Murray has a nice dry wit. I didn't realise that he would be able to deliver a first-class comedy speech, roasting most of the notables at the convention, without cracking a smile. He



Murray Moore delivering the Guest of Honour speech at Corflu. (Photo: Chaz Boston Baden.)

reminded me a lot of Tom Lehrer. When I was talking to Murray afterwards I was trying to explain this point, but could not remember Lehrer's name. Murray was puzzled when I compared him to somebody who poisons pigeons in the park.

The other tradition is to announce a number of awards, especially the Faan Awards, as voted on by fanzine fans. As the list was read, I realised that once again I had failed to convince fandom of the fabulous fannish qualities of my magazines and my own writing. I did not feature in the top 3 of any award, and only much later did I find out that I had placed No. 5 or 6 in some categories:

### 2005 FAAn Award voting totals:

**Best Fanzine:** 1. *Chunga* (Randy Byers, Andy Hooper, Carl Juarez) 122 points. 2. *Trap Door* (Robert Lichtman) (53 points). 3. *Banana Wings* (Claire Brialey and Mark Plummer) (34 points). 4. *eI* (Earl Kemp) (28 points). 5. *SF Commentary* (Bruce Gillespie). 23 points. 6. *Zoo Nation* (Pete Young). 22 points.

**Best Fan Writer:** 1. Claire Brialey (36 points). 2. Andy Hooper (35 points). 3. Arnie Katz (32 points). 4. Randy Byers (29 points). 5. Joyce Katz (24 points). 6. Bruce Gillespie (21 points).

**Best Fan Artist:** 1. Steve Stiles (78 points). 2. Brad Foster (42 points). 3. Dan Steffan (37 points). 4. Alan White (32 points). 5. Stu Shiffman (27 points).

**Best Fanzine Design:** 1. *Chunga* (137 points). 2. *Zoo Nation* (32 points). 3. *Plokta* (29 points). 4. *Trap Door* (26 points). 5. *SF Commentary* (22 points). 6. *Smokin' Rockets* (12 points).

**Harry Warner Jr. Memorial Award for Best Fan Correspondent:** 1. Lloyd Penney (50 points). 2. Graham Charnock (25 points). 3. Milt Stevens (19 points). 4. Robert Lichtman (17 points). 5. Ron Bennett (16 points).

After being disappointed by the Faan Award results, I was astonished when Tom read out my name as one of the candidates for the Immediate Past President of the Fan Writers of America 2004. I hadn't realised this award was given at Corflu, and it had never crossed my mind that I might be thought worthy of it. On a show of hands, I was elected to this august position: no certificate, no glittering prize, but, as Tom explained later, no duties or obligations, and you cannot campaign for the award. This was the highlight of the trip for me. Thank you, Corflu.

Another continuing tradition at Corflu is for Eric and Jean to bid to hold Corflu at their place at Airlie Beach, Queensland. The numbers were up this year, but Toronto won the bid for 2006.

## SAN FRANCISCO BETWEEN CONVENTIONS

**Monday, 28 February**

**brg**

**I thought you were going to spend the week between conventions getting to know the city of San Francisco?**

**BRG**

That was the plan. Monday was the day when most of us left Corflu at the Holiday Inn, only to reassemble the next weekend around the corner at the Ramada Inn for Potlatch. During the months before my trip, Art Widner had asked me to stay at his place at Gualala, about 100 miles north of San Francisco. At first I had said no, because the main obligation of my trip was to meet fans in general rather than go off on individual side trips. I had expected that somebody might make an offer of accommodation in or around San Francisco during the week between conventions, but this did not happen. I must have overestimated the power of my sparkling personality, or maybe all the fannish accommodation had been booked up long ago. In the end, I was very glad that Art Widner (and two days later, Billy Pettit) wanted to show me the California countryside rather than the city of San Francisco.

Monday was one of the few mornings when breakfast coincided with meeting people. Randy, Eric and Jean had breakfast with me in the hotel restaurant. As I was wandering around afterward, Hope Leibowitz asked me to go to breakfast with her at Steven's across the road. Again I said to myself: never say never to a second breakfast. I had hardly talked to Hope during the convention, but she proved to be a delightful late breakfaster with some good stories to tell.

I stuck around the lobby of the Holiday Inn, farewelling good friends who would not be back for Potlatch. I still hope to catch up with Jerry and Suzle sometime during the rest of my life, although I can't see how. Janice emerged, still looking overcome by flu. Most of the rest of the convention was coming down with flu, or about to be hit by it. I said goodbye to Janice and Alan, and hope to see them soon in Melbourne. (Alan is a great admirer of Melbourne's public transport system.)

Art Widner had to travel across the bay to where he had parked his car, then drive his car through San Francisco traffic (a permanent rush hour, like Mel-

bourne traffic these days) back to the hotel, a journey that took him until nearly 2 p.m. The surface of Art's car is a genuine Aboriginal painting. It causes a sensation wherever he drives it. Art did tell me the story of how he came by the car, but I didn't write down the story at the time. The story is in a past issue of *Yhos*, which Art is going to send me sometime.

You get to see a fair bit of untouristy San Francisco trying to thread your way from downtown around to Nineteenth Street, which in turn becomes Park Presideo Boulevard, the major freeway crossing the Golden Gate Bridge. Once we had crossed the bridge, we were in Marin County on our way north. We passed the famous Marin County offices, designed by Frank Lloyd Wright, but I only gained an impression of them as we passed in the car. We headed across country to Bodega Bay, famous site of Alfred Hitchcock's movie *The Birds*. The schoolhouse, where the children are attacked by the birds, is not in Bodega Bay, but in Bodega, three miles away. Art drove us there, and I looked at it respectfully. If I had arrived on the right day, I could have joined a tourist group to inspect it. The land behind the schoolhouse looks nothing like it did in 1962, but maybe it never did. Bodega Bay is hardly the sleepy fishing town depicted in the film; today it is dominated by a large marina.

Art is certain that I slept all the way up the magnificent coast road, which is even steeper and has even more bends than the Great Ocean Road along the southern coast of Victoria. Not so. But, sitting in the front sea of the car, I found that the late afternoon sunshine arcing across my eyes made it difficult to keep them open. So I slept for bits of the ride, and the rest of the time was amazed by the wonderful wild coast. In some sections, the road is supported from below by large beams because the soil falls away during rainstorms. At one point of the trip, we could see a colony of seals draping themselves across the rocks far below.

**brg**

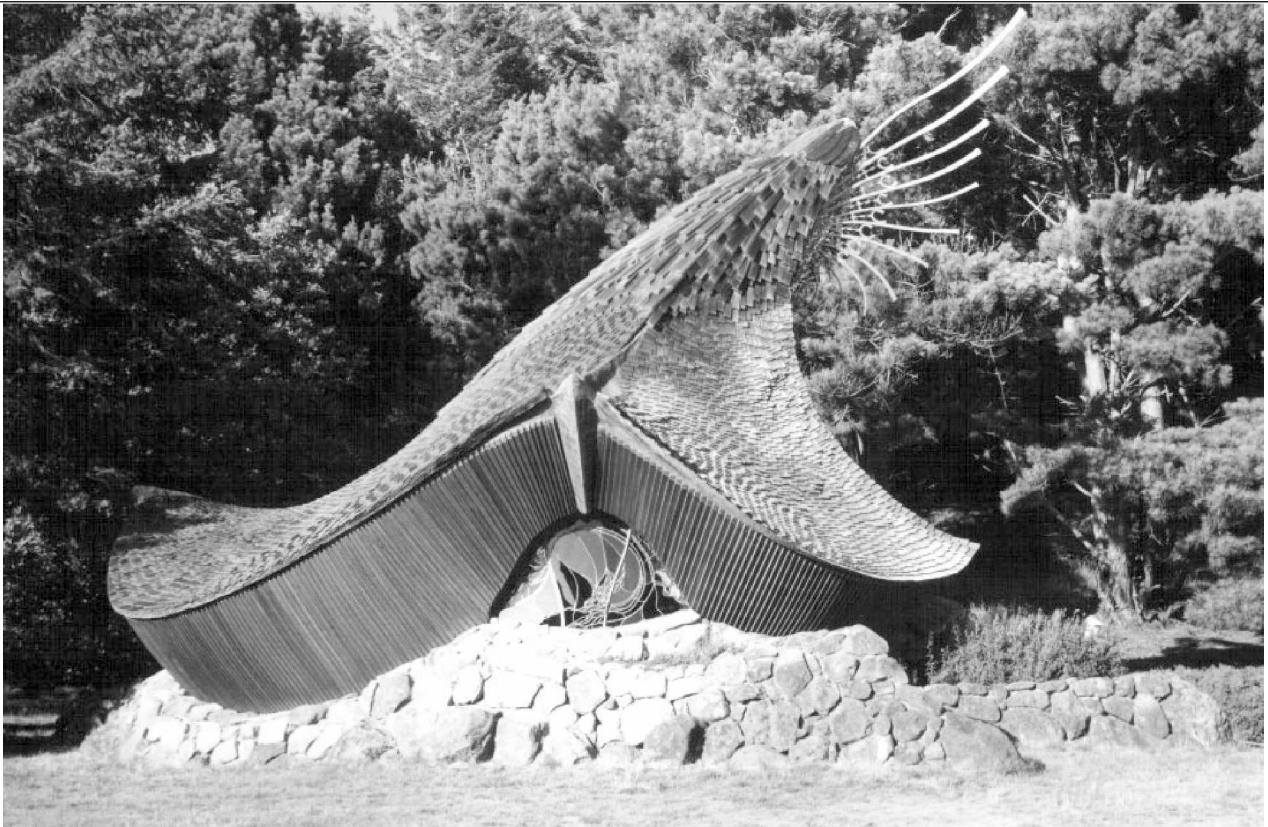
**You said that at Gualala you visited 'the most beautiful small building in the world'.**

**BRG**

When Art was visiting Melbourne in 2003, he said that the Gualala-Anchor Bay area was very 'left wing' by American standards. I translated this into a vision of voluntarily poverty-stricken hippies living in mudbrick cottages in isolated mountain valleys. Not so. The area can afford to think of itself as left wing because the repository of retirement capital in the area has been put into arts buildings and activities and community self-support projects. The hills are filled with astonishing pieces of architecture — or so I realised when I looked up websites after returning to Australia.

About seven miles south of Gualala, Art pulled over and went through a driveway into what looked at first like an empty field. The drive made a wide circle, then came out at another gate. Off in the distance, at the end of the field and just in front of a stand of pines, was a small building. Only when we pulled up did I gain any notion of it. It is the Sea Ranch Chapel.

Art says the Sea Ranch Chapel looks like a large wooden quail. To me it looks like a giant sea shell with its resident mollusc about to emerge from the top. You could also say it looks like a Dutch bonnet. All the photos I've found on the Internet misrepresent it. They make the building appear to poke out of the ground or ride up out of the field. Not so. It sinks into the field, with the



No photo of the exterior does justice to the Sea Ranch Chapel at Gualala. This is the best photo I could find on the Internet.

pinces leaning over it and guarding it. The door was unlocked. We went in. We found a delicious combination of polished wood and stone, with several small windows lighting the whole. It was built as an interdenominational chapel for meditation, and that's how we treated it. All one can do is stand or sit inside it and absorb its peace. It is the most beautiful small building in the world, or at least the most beautiful I will ever experience.

There are no signs or pointers on the road to tell you the Chapel is there. If you live in California, drive up that way sometime.

Also make sure you visit Art, and his octagonal house at Gualala. Night was falling as we reached Art's house up a steep road off the main highway. He opened up the house, and I dropped my stuff. We were welcomed by Olivia the cat, but we left her to her own devices as Art drove me back to Gualala. Most of the restaurants he was most looking forward to taking me were closed on a Monday, but eventually we found a place called Ocean Song in Anchor Bay and had an excellent meal. It was not exactly a peaceful meal. A group of local women had taken a table for a night out. They were entertained by the proprietor, whose jokes seemed very funny to himself and them. I haven't seen a performance quite like it since Enri used to run Enri's in Richmond as a kind of theatre restaurant starring himself.

In the dark, it was hard to get a good idea of Art's octagonal house, which he built himself about twenty years ago. It was also a bit difficult to get around inside it. Like several other people whose places I visited, Art has built up a fine collection of books, magazines and almost anything else, and he has run out of storage space. I tried to be careful about what I touched, fearful of dislodging mountains of fanzines. However, Art was able to clear a space for me on the sofa. We settled down to watch television. Olivia, a gorgeous fluffy black cat,

took pride of place on Art's lap. We chatted, then Art went off to bed. (Art told me that Olivia fends for herself adequately while he is away, but owns him as soon as he returns.)

#### **Tuesday, 1 March**

Before we retired, I wondered why Art had drawn back the curtains on his huge windows instead of closing them. I found out why when I woke up early the next morning. The sun slowly penetrated the pines that surrounded the house, the light never intruding, but slowly filling the place. No wonder Art would never live anywhere else. I got up and potted around, made coffee (Art had warned me that I had to bring my own, and I had), and found something to eat. I started reading the fanzines on top of one pile, and was most taken by *Bento*, a tiny fanzine I'd never seen before. I copied down the address, not realising I would meet the editors at Pot-latch in a few days time.

The phone rang. Eventually Art answered it from his bedroom. He groaned. Marci was already here, but he

Again, no photo does justice to the feeling of being inside the Sea Ranch Chapel. Imagine glowing stone and wood colours in this photo (from the Internet).





Marci Malinowycz in front of her van, which is behind Art Widner's car (you can see some of the Australian Aboriginal painting that covers it), with Art's house on the right (Photo: Bruce Gillespie, using Marci's camera)

hadn't yet risen or shone.

Marci Malinowycz, as mentioned, is Janice and Alan's neighbour-over-the-road from Seattle. When she was an employee at Microsoft, she took stock options instead of a high salary. As a result, she was able to retire in her mid forties. This seemed odd, since she appeared to be only in her mid thirties. I had never heard of her before I visited Seattle, but it turns out that she has done many things in fandom, including being on the board of the Science Fiction Museum. She'd driven her van down to Corflu, and we'd enjoyed nattering to each other in the bar on several nights. She wanted to visit

the fabled home of Art Widner in Gualala, and had offered to pick me up this morning. And here she was, on Tuesday night, having camped out overnight on the side of the road. (Would anybody still do that in Australia?)

Art showed Marci around the octagonal house. Marci offered to round up a gang of West Coast fans for a weekend convention in spring or summer to help Art clear up the house, file away the valuable stuff, and generally make it more shipshape. I wonder if Art has taken her up on her offer.

The house that Art Widner built (a few years ago) in the hills above Gualala. (Photo: Bruce Gillespie.)





Golden Gate marina, from the north side looking south over the city of San Francisco (on the horizon to the right). You can (sort of) see Alcatraz on the horizon, slightly left of centre. I wish I could remember what are the little sticks in the ground in the foreground. (Photo: Bruce Gillespie.)

**brg**  
**I can't believe that by this time you still hadn't used the little camera Bill Wright had bought for you in Melbourne.**

**BRG**  
 I can't believe it, either. I had never used a camera before. I have never owned a camera. I had been carrying around the camera during the trip, yet a mental block stopped me using it. (My father, on the other hand, was already taking great photos in his teens.) I did not have the money to buy a digital camera before I left Melbourne, so Bill bought me two little one-use-only cameras. Now the moment had arrived. I had to take some pictures of Art's house! (Since then, I have been kicking myself for not taking my own photo of the Sea Ranch Chapel or the Bodega schoolhouse.) So the photo of Art's house is my very first attempt at photography. The other photo, of Marci in front of her van and beside Art's car, is taken on her digital camera.

The morning was glorious, so all three of us headed off for one of Art's favourite brunch spots. Yet another enjoyable breakfast in America. Art went home, after we made brave promises to see each other again sometime. (But how?) Marci and I headed back down the coast road. There was no question of me falling asleep in the passenger seat. As we passed the entrance to the Sea Ranch Chapel, I pointed it out to Marci. She says she will be back this way to visit Art and the Chapel. The cliffs and bays seemed even more spectacular than they had the day before. In Bodega Bay, we stopped for refreshment — we looked around an interesting gift shop, then asked the woman in charge if she minded me using the facilities. We coffee drinkers get desperate on trips like this.

Heading overland east from Bodega Bay, we rambled through the rolling countryside of Sonoma County until we hit the main freeway into San Francisco. Marci dropped me at the Holiday Inn, then headed south to see friends in San Jose.

**brg**  
**Your specialty is finding good meals. Was there any meal that you didn't enjoy much during the trip?**

**BRG**  
 Yes, but not because of the quality of the food.

When I arrived back, I made contact with Peter Weston, who had moved around the corner to the Ramada Inn. 'The Ramada!' he said. 'It's a hole! Dark corridors! Dim lighting in the rooms! No coffee-making facilities in the rooms! I wish I hadn't moved!'

We finally reached Spike Parsons, who arranged for rich coad and his wife to pick us up to go to dinner. I had so many pleasant meals during the trip that inevitably one meal would not work. The Cosmopolitan Restaurant is obviously one of the ritziest eating spots in San Francisco. We could tell this when we walked in: classy carpet, classy furniture, silver service, the lot. But it was also very noisy that night, the table was long, and I was stuck at one end of it. No matter how convivial we felt, we could not talk to each other. The wine was fine, but expensive. The bill came to \$85 per person, which stripped me of about half the folding cash I had on me. Yes, the food was good, but not lavish in quantity.

**Wednesday, 2 March**

**brg**  
**Surely the visit to Robert Lichtman's made up in fannishness for the difficulties of the night before?**

**BRG**  
 Billy Pettit is a Bay Area fan (from Pleasanton, east of Oakland) who visited Australia with his wife Rosemary several years ago. Elaine and I showed them around Melbourne for a day, including an expedition to the new aquarium. At that time he was travelling the world for a major computer company. Like many other computer companies, it disappeared a couple of years ago, and Billy found himself involuntarily retired. Suffering from cabin fever, he offered to help as much as possible showing me and Peter Weston around the San Francisco area. Therefore on Wednesday we set off in his car for Robert Lichtman's house in Glen Ellen — after a detour to the Borderlands bookstore (where Alan Beatts was yet another bookstore owner who asked to be remembered to Justin Ackroyd).

We made a brief stop at Coit Tower, then headed over the Golden Gate Bridge to the park that is on the other side. From there I took the photos on this page. I'm looking southwards back toward San Francisco.

Then we went north through Marin County and the rich countryside of Sonoma toward Glen Ellen.



(l. to r.): Billy Pettit, Robert Lichtman and Peter Weston, outside Robert's apartment in Glen Ellen. A few months later, Robert moved back to San Francisco. (Photo: Bruce Gillespie.)



Robert Lichtman has been stuck with his current job at Glen until retirement in early August this year. (Heading towards 63, he looks much younger than I do at 58. Everybody looks younger than I do.) As I've said, he is married to Carol Carr, who lives in Oakland, but he can join her only at weekends. He is slowly taking his collection to her place, but meanwhile keeps a close watch on his fabulous fanzine collection at his place. He lives in a modest house, part of a set of houses arranged as a U-shape around a car park/courtyard, together looking rather like a large motel. I suspect Robert can survive in this house only because he is highly organised. He has fully sorted and annotated his fanzine collection, which occupies seven filing cabinets. The books he still has at Glen Ellen are carefully stacked. He was willing to let us look at his complete sets of such fabulous 1950s fanzines as *Xero*, *Lighthouse* and *Rhodomagnetic Digest*, but he could hardly hide his nervousness as we placed our fingers on their sacred pages. These 1950s fanzines are legendary in Australia because almost no copies ever reached us.

Billy, Peter and I choked back absolute envy at the sight of such treasures, but I for one would have no hope of collecting more than a small number of fanzines from the legendary era. (Curt Phillips, who wasn't able to attend Corflu or Potlatch, kindly sent me two copies of Terry Carr's *Lighthouse*, just to show me what I've been missing.) I hope these great fanzines will eventually be scanned and made available as PDF files, but I also know the enormous amount of energy and time that is needed to convert one issue of one fanzine to a downloadable file.

Robert wanted to take us to the Ranch House, his favourite restaurant in the area. Mexican restaurants are usually ghastly in Australia, so I enjoyed eating authentic, tasty and succulent Mexican food. Like most of the really good restaurants I visited in America, this one had modest, plastic-covered tables, a tiled floor, cheap prices, and quick, friendly service.

We nattered all afternoon, then Billy dropped Peter and me back to the Holiday Inn in time to have dinner at the hotel restaurant. Peter was always good company during Corflu, a part of Potlatch and the days between, but he was starting to flag. Like me, he was thinking about ways of cutting the trip short and returning home. I was committed to the heavy week ahead.

### Thursday, 3 March

**brg**

**How did you come to visit *Locus* headquarters twice?**

**BRG**

When I was arranging the trip, I had emailed Charles Brown to take him up on his offer (made during his stay in Melbourne between Christmas and New Year) to invite me to dinner during my week in San Francisco. It turned out he was leaving California for the week, attending the special convention in Portales, New Mexico, to honour Jack Williamson's 95th birthday. He wouldn't be back until the next Sunday, but arranged that his staff should show me over Locusville — my name for the ten-room house in the Oakland hills where *Locus* is produced every month.

Fortunately he had invited Peter Weston as well. (We had been the Australian and British *Locus* agents in the early 1970s, and Charles had been agent for *SF Commentary* and *Speculation*.) Peter had already done an expedition on Tuesday using the BART system, so he was able to show me how to pay for a ticket to Rockridge, the nearest station to Charles Brown's house. I wish I could say I gained a train's-eye view of San Francisco and the Bay Area by taking the BART, but that's not so. A long section of the line was the bit that goes under the bay. Most of the scenery after that was of wharves, warehouses and industrial city streets. A long section of the line travels down the middle of a freeway, so it was hard to get an idea of anything other than endless city, with hills in the distance.

But we did get to talk to Hope Leibowitz, who just happened to get into the carriage we were in. She got off well before we did.

When we got off at Rockridge there was nobody to meet us immediately, but eventually Karlyn Pratt found us in the Locusmobile (a van into which one can pack many boxes of books after visiting the post office), and off we went to the hills. We stopped briefly at the nearest suburb, high in the hills, then leapt up seemingly vertical roads that took us to the top of the ridge.

When Charles had said that his house has ten rooms, I expected to roll up to something looking like Frank Lloyd Wright's Fallingwater. Instead, the front of the house is one room wide, with a garage in front. The whole house faces backward across the valley. Most of the rooms are dug into the cliff and the floors supported by pylons. The top floor includes the main entertainment



(Above): Locus hospitality — a wonderful lunch, and the company of (l. to r.) Liza Groen Trombi and Karlyn Pratt; and (right) Kirsten Gong-Wong showing me a tiny fraction of the Brown collection. (Photos: Peter Weston.)

room and kitchen, as well as several offices. The *Locus* staff were hard at work, but it didn't take too much persuasion for Lisa Groen Trombi, Carolyn Cushman and Kirsten Gong-Wong to take time off to show us the wonders of the house. These included the really old books on the main floor of the house, then a trip down steep stairs to the real library below. This area includes a compactus containing nearly all the SF hardbacks. Many other hardbacks are on shelves in the corridor. They include Robert Heinlein's library, which distracted Peter's attention for quite some time. It wasn't clear whether Charles had inherited this library or bought it. It includes not only all the editions of Heinlein's own books, but many books that he had owned (with personal dedications from the authors).

The house also has a vast library of paperbacks, and somewhere buried at the back (we squinted into the gloom) all the fanzines and magazines Charles had ever received. Most seem to be stored in vast piles of jiffy bags. Kirsten assured us that Charles knows where everything is.

When we emerged from the library crawl, Lisa, Carolyn, Kirsten and Karlyn revealed that they had spent the previous hour preparing a vast spread of healthy lunch munchies, plus as much fine wine as we could drink. (I usually avoid wine with lunch, but I had to make



exception that afternoon.) Tim Pratt, who had been working somewhere in the house, joined us for lunch. I wish I could remember the brilliant and informative conversation, but I don't carry a pocket recorder with me.

**brg**

**How did Jay Kinney save your night in San Francisco?**

**BRG**

When Peter and I returned to San Francisco (an easy trip, as the Civic Center BART station is just over the road from the Holiday Inn), we didn't quite know what to do. The other overseas fans who had stayed in San Francisco had gone on a winery inspection tour that day. Peter tried to reach Spike and Tom by cell phone, hoping we could join the winery rousturers for dinner. No contact made. We were sitting in Starbuck's feeling gloomy and abandoned. We had hoped to visit Tom and Spike's place during the trip and/or Michael and Karen's, but both couples live a long way from the centre of the city.

Peter pulled out his cell phone again and phoned Jay Kinney. I hadn't met Jay to talk to during Corflu, but Peter had. Jay lived nearby, so he wandered down and took us around to his favourite Vietnamese restaurant, Tu Lan. It had a narrow front, a narrow door, and a pile of people bundling out of the door. We arrived early enough to get seats immediately. If we had been a few minutes later, we would have had to queue. We went into the crowded, noisy, small eating section at the back. The waiter slammed the menus in front of us. We ordered beers and tea, then food. A few minutes later the orders arrived. It was the best Vietnamese food I've tasted (which is a high compliment, since Melbourne has entire streets lined with Vietnamese restaurants). In half an hour we had finished, and it was plain that we needed to get out so the next group in the queue could get in. This method of shoving people out one end while shoving people in at the other end is also used by one of the restaurants in Victoria Street, Richmond.

Jay took us to his favourite small bar. Unlike most bars in Melbourne (which are part of pubs), it was just a bar — no food, no coffee, just a wide variety of beers and other liquor. Sit down on raised stools and keep drinking until you leave. The barman ran the place as his private sideshow. The guys hogging the footpath outside the door obviously couldn't afford the price of a drink. The barman had to keep them entertained so they didn't make trouble, yet not drive away the customers. Deep inside the bar was a gang of girls who were having



Jay Kinney.  
(Photo: Chaz Boston Baden.)



Okay, this is only a postcard. The air was never as clear as this any day I was in San Francisco. But I did get to ride on a cable car!

their own private laugh riot. Eventually they left, and the guys outside disappeared, and the barman started to close up. We took the hint, and wandered back to our hotels. Thanks, Jay, for a night that cheered Peter and me, and saved the trip when it had sagged to Low Point X.

#### Friday, 4 March

brg

**You finally got to ride on a cable car and see a bit of San Francisco?**

BRG

On Friday morning, it was raining. I felt pissed off. One thing after another had stopped me seeing San Francisco itself, and now my plans for Friday seemed rain-doomed. I checked out of the Holiday Inn, trolleyed my bags around the corner to the Ramada, and checked in. My room was available, so I unpacked. Peter had been correct. By comparison with the Holiday Inn, the Ramada was old, stately, gloomy, and downright depressing. There were no coffee-making facilities in the room. (Later that day, Peter asked the bloke behind the counter at the Starbuck's in the Ramada lobby how late they opened. 10 p.m. usually, and 11 p.m. on Saturdays. 'What do we do for a cup of coffee after then?' said Peter. 'Did they take the coffee-making facilities out of the guest rooms because Starbuck's opened up here?' 'Probably,' smirked the bloke behind the counter.)

I was pacing the floor of my room, wondering what to do until the Potlatchers arrived, when the sun came out. I went for a walk along Market Street. The streetscape is intimidating from 8th Street to 5th Street — large numbers of people on the street because they have nowhere to go. They're cheerful enough, and hold shouting competitions along the street. They didn't intrude on my personal space, and I wasn't going to intrude on theirs. Many of the shop fronts are boarded up or damaged along that stretch.

Abruptly the city changes at 5th Street to a big, affluent-looking American city full of department stores, shops and restaurants. At the corner of Powell Street and 5th I saw that a cable car had pulled in. I had been told that I had no hope of getting a ride on a cable car. However, there was only a small queue. I bought a ticket and hopped on, after peeking at the cable mechanism. I'd read about the cable car network in Melbourne (which finished in 1922), but I thought I would never have a chance to see a cable car system in action. On board, I

fitted into the wooden seat, and saw the warning to hang on. Good advice, as the cable car quickly started to go up. And up. There are no hills anywhere this steep and long in Melbourne's public transport system. The cable car seems to go straight up the side of the hill, then down the other side, with a few hang-on-to-the-sides swipes around corners. (At Potlatch, John Berry told me that until fairly recently he could use the cable car system as commuter transport to the Nob Hill and Chinatown areas, where his artist friends live. Now the cable cars are strictly for tourists, with a \$5 ticket price to match.)

This was all very exciting, especially as we hurtled down Russian Hill towards Fisherman's Wharf. Bill Wright has spent thirty-two years telling me that I should visit Fisherman's Wharf. Bill visited there in 1972. I suspect that today's wharf area has no resemblance to Bill's memories. It is now the most packed-solid commercial area I've ever visited. Everything is there to extract dollars from tourists. Out of every three shops, one is a souvenir shop, one is a cafe or restaurant — and the third is a digital camera shop. If I had had any spare money to buy a digital camera, that would have been the place to do it. It's difficult to wander along the wharf itself, as most areas are blocked off and charge admission. If I had had time, I might have taken the trip to Alcatraz Island, seemingly just over *there* in the bay. Also, I should have wandered along to Pier 39, which Bob had recommended. I had had a late breakfast, so I didn't feel like sampling the seafood restaurants.

I trudged and trudged until I found the Fisherman's Wharf terminal of the other cable car route that comes over the hill from Market Street. No cable car in sight, but already the queue was long. I gave up, found my way back to the trolley car terminal. The trolley took me on a very enjoyable journey around the edge of San Francisco, past all the wharves, coming into town at the top of Market Street. The journey showed again the sharp division between rich and poor in San Francisco. The glittering shops end at 5th Street.

#### POTLATCH 14

Back at the Ramada, I tried to find some of the people coming in for Potlatch. The first people I met were Eric and Jean from Queensland. The third person I met was Robin Johnson from Tasmania. Robin said he had decided only a week before to fly over for the convention. Four Australians in one place! (Grace Dugan from Brisbane was the fifth Australian there, but I hadn't met her yet.) I sat in the lobby until a group gathered for lunch. We went over the road to the Gyros Diner. I ordered what

(l. to r.): Jean Weber and Eric Lindsay, from Airlie Beach, Queensland. (Photo: Chaz Boston Baden.) Other Australians at Potlatch included Robin Johnson and Grace Dugan.



I thought would be a neat little shish kebab for a light lunch. The diner was very crowded, but a group of about ten of us found space. The dish that arrived was piled high with meat, rice and vegetables. Oh well — enjoy a mountainous American lunch while I could. Our party included David Levine, publisher of *Bento*, the little fanzine I had admired at Art Widner's, and Neil Rest, who I had last seen at Aussiecon I in 1975. Had Neil become any less abrasive than in 1975? Sort of. We swapped notes for awhile, then he fired off the remark that during his 1975 trip around Australia he had found much of the food 'tasteless'. Maybe he was right. The number, variety and quality of Australian restaurants has improved greatly since 1975 — or do Australian restaurants merely use more salt and spices than they did thirty years ago? Marci turned up. She had been visiting various fans in the area south of San Francisco since Tuesday.

I don't remember much about the rest of the afternoon, except buying too many books in the Hucksters' Room. For a quick, pre-program dinner I took Peter Weston and Robert Lichtman out to dinner at the Indian Garden restaurant. Fine food, but we had to rush a bit to get back for the first Potlatch program item.

**brg**

**Tell us about your big Potlatch moment.**

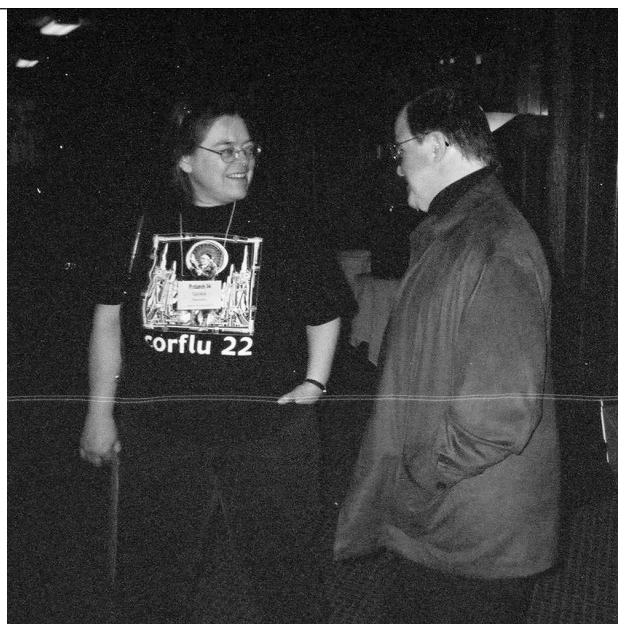
**BRG**

Each year, Potlatch has a Book of Honour, not a Guest of Honour. A month before, Steven Schwartz (the one who lives in San Francisco) asked me if I would do a presentation for the Book of Honour for the convention. This year it was Philip K. Dick's *A Scanner Darkly*. I had spent a week re-reading the book carefully and looking up as much reference material as I could find. I realised at the last moment that I would not be giving a talk as such, but would be part of a panel: the item would not be like a huge Nova Mob meeting, but more like an ordinary panel item. However, as I realised when talking to Lenny Bailes, another member of the panel, he had also prepared well. As had Howard Hendrix, author and academic, the third member of the panel. Only Grania Davis, the fourth member, arrived without clutching a sheaf of notes.

I had become more and more worried about the panel. I worked out which bits of my talk I could leave out. At Corflu Lenny had shown me a copy of his material, which seemed as long as my talk. Oh well, I said to myself, as we all sat down to speak, let's see what happens.

I gave a shortened version of my talk, then handed over to Grania Davis, who had known Philip Dick during the period he drew on as material for *A Scanner Darkly* (1970–72). She was the most interesting speaker, largely because of her insight that the book represents Philip Dick trying to pull together the two parts of his mind through the power of fiction writing. Lenny and Howard each delivered valuable papers. Howard's comments were sparkling, to the point, and shed new light on thoughts raised by Lenny and me. After our speeches, the whole panel could have collapsed. It didn't. Members of the audience seemed to have read even more than we had, and offered a host of original points. My only difficulty, as moderator, was not knowing who each person was. All I could do was point at 'you!' and hope I hadn't left out anybody.

I had treated *A Scanner Darkly* as a paranoid tragedy about loss of control, identity and, eventually, human-



(l. to r.): Spike Parsons (co-chair of Corflu and participant in Potlatch) and Jeff Hamill. (Photo: Bruce Gillespie.)

ity. Some people from the audience showed how Dick does not lose control of these things, only his characters. Also, given the events of the novel, the characters had every reason to feel paranoid. Some people (including Howard) found the ending of the book upbeat.

The hour went quickly. As I recovered, Grania Davis introduced herself. 'I've wanted to meet you since you wrote that article about Avram Davidson.' (Grania was married to Avram Davidson for some years, and is now married to Steve Davis.) 'Steve and I were in Melbourne last December because our granddaughter was born there then. I tried to get in touch with you via Jack Dann, but I couldn't reach Jack.' This seemed a bit dispiriting, especially as Grania's son and daughter-in-law are now living back in America, so she probably won't visit Melbourne again soon. Whenever Grania and I saw each other around the convention, we continued the conversation. On the last night of the convention I met Steve as well.

After the panel, I was pleased to meet Jeff Hamill and Larry Bigman, two *SF Commentary* readers who had joined the convention specially to catch up with me. Jeff Hamill had made contact because of our mutual interest in the works of Stanislaw Lem. We've been swapping emails during recent months. It was great to meet him. I hope Jeff and Larry got more from the convention than that panel. I saw Jeff talking to quite a few people he wouldn't have met before.

Friday was my one big party night of the two conventions. My motive for heading upstairs to the hospitality suite at midnight was simple: to find some coffee. The Starbuck's downstairs had long since closed, there was no 24-hour coffee shop near the hotel, and I was becoming a bit sick of drinking instant coffee using lukewarm water from the tap — which is what I had to do at the Ramada if I wanted a coffee fix in the middle of the night. People did look at me a bit oddly as I carefully refilled the coffee pot and waited for it to heat.

The evening was quite warm, everybody was at the party, and I enjoyed some wonderful conversations that night. I kept finding people who were also classical music fans (something unlikely to happen at an Australian SF convention), for instance, Gerry Nordley and his wife Gayle Weisner. John Berry introduced me to an

older man who seemed quite interesting. John told me later that this man is married to the editor of *Village Voice*.

### Saturday, 5 March

**brg**

**What can you tell us about the second day of Potlatch?**

**BRG**

I can't remember as much as I would like to have remembered. No time to keep notes. I caught up with as many people as possible, either people who had already attended Corflu, or people new to me. As a sort of guest of the convention, I thought I had better attend some of the panel items. 'Better Fiction Through Chemistry' (the Drugs panel) was the most entertaining item. I didn't know any of the panelists except Eileen Gunn, and I had never seen Debbie Notkin in action. *A Scanner Darkly* is a good point from which to take a dive into the world of drugs. The panelists took the subject in as many directions as possible, but Debbie Notkin kept bringing them back to heel. She gave the best display of panel convening I've seen. She knew the name of every person in the hall. She was able to line up questions from the floor in strict order, leave out nobody who wanted to ask a question, yet give members of the audience and the panel time to make their points. Bam, bam, bam was how the panel moved.

The only conclusions from the panel were that men and women use different drugs of choice (women prefer chocolate and shopping); that almost any drug will do if it will get you writing; and (at the end, from Eileen) writing itself is the best drug of all. I did not bother telling stories of my attempts during the trip to keep supplied with my drug of choice, coffee.

The following Transrealism panel was much less interesting. The organisers roped in too many authors, presumably on the premise that authors tend to drop out at the last minute. None of these authors did; they all turned up. Each had to be given an introductory setpiece before the panel proper could start. Rudy Rucker, the inventor and main promoter of the term transrealism, was an indecisive speaker. I trust he gave a better performance at ICFA (International Conference for the Fantastic in the Arts) in Florida a few weeks later,

Debbie Notkin, convention panel diva. (Photo: Chaz Boston Baden.)



when transrealism was scheduled to be the main topic. Terry Bisson, wearing motorbike goggles, did a sort of comic turn to introduce himself. The other panelists were Charley Anders, John Shirley, Richard Kadrey, Michael Blumlein and Laurin Beams. I would have preferred to have heard individual talks from such legendary writers as John Shirley and Terry Bisson, but Potlatch does not work that way. I gave up listening to the panel, as I was learning very little about transrealism.

I wish I could remember what I actually did during that afternoon apart from attending panels. Perhaps I took a nap later in the afternoon. It's the only way to survive late-night parties. Highlight of the day was being able to get through to Elaine by phone. Alan had sent me a phone card to use in America, but I just could not get through to Australia using it. I seemed to be leaving out a digit or two somewhere along the way, but I couldn't find out which digit. Eventually I rang Elaine through the hotel switchboard, paid \$30 for the privilege, but did get through. Elaine is not someone to pay compliments easily. She said: 'I never realised how much you do around here!' I must be a busy bloke when I'm at home. The cats are missing you. Flicker keeps pushing his way through the middle door, and looking glumly at me as I'm working. All the others are off their food.' Ah, nice cats!

When I came downstairs, Claire and Spike cornered me and said, 'We want to join ANZAPA.' I hadn't even been thinking about ANZAPA, but here I had two new members! Another highlight of the trip. Claire had already been named as Best Fan Writer 2005 at Corflu; a few weeks later she was nominated for a Hugo for Best Fan Writer, and she and Mark had their *Banana Wings* nominated for Best Fanzine. Spike is also a superb fan writer.

For dinner, I went to the Basil Thai with Marci from Seattle, Peter from Birmingham, and Claire and Mark from London. I took a picture of the table, but managed to leave Marci off the edge of the photo. I'm a crook photographer, but it was a great meal.

The one program item that night was 'The Complete Works of Philip K. Dick', a play reading that spliced together some of the best funny bits from Philip Dick books in order to give a notion of his chaotic and entertaining life and times. Later, I talked to some people who thought the play didn't work. It all depended where you were in the hall. As with the play at Corflu, the amplification was so inadequate that few people could hear the intricate text if they were sitting further back than the middle of the hall. I was close enough to the front, and enjoyed it.

I partied for awhile in the Con Suite, but suddenly became very tired and left. This proved to be a Big Mistake.

### Sunday, 6 March

Next morning I wasted an opportunity to tour San Francisco. I walked up to 5th Street and tried to work out where I would catch a bus that would take me up to City Lights bookshop. Buses kept passing me and not stopping. I suspected that I could probably walk to City Lights, but I didn't know that for sure. Nobody from the convention had been available to go on an expedition with me, so I gave up and returned to the convention in time for the traditional Potlatch Brunch.

When I arrived, Grace Dugan (from the Brisbane Vision Writers Group) introduced herself and her friend





Ruth Leibig and Ian Stockdale. (Photo: Chaz Boston Baden.)

Amelia Beamer, an editorial assistant for *Locus*. Amelia was in charge of transporting me to Charles Brown's that night for dinner. I would be staying there overnight, so I packed my case and checked out. When I tried to put my case in the back of the *Locusmobile*, the back panel would not open. Something was wrong with the electrical system of the van. Amelia had no idea what to do. I had no idea what to do. I took my case back to the hotel lobby and stored it there, when went off to brunch. This was very ungentlemanly of me, but Amelia assured me that she and Grace could solve the situation. She got in touch with somebody from *Locus*, and eventually was able to open up the van and have it running by the time we were due to set out for Oakland.

At the brunch I got to talk to Robin Johnson for the first time that convention, and to Jean and Eric. I was at the same table as Gerry and Gayle, and with Howard Hendrix and an academic friend of his. I caught up again with Ian Stockdale, one of my favourite people from *Potlatch* (he was treasurer). I took a few photos, but they haven't turned out well. I wish Chaz Boston Baden had been the photographer for *Potlatch* as well as for *Corflu*.

**brg**

**How did you nearly meet one of your favourite American writers?**

**BRG**

I said goodbye to John Berry and Eileen Gunn for the last time. John said: 'Did you know who turned up last night at the party? It was Michael Chabon. He turned up about 1 a.m., expecting an all-night party. Not many of us were left. As a con badge he was wearing a scrap of paper on which he had written his own name, so people took a while to realise he was *the* Michael Chabon.'

Now I can tell people that on my American trip I *nearly* met one of my favourite writers. The message is obvious: never leave a late-night party too early.

Grace and Amelia had solved the car problem, and were anxious to get on the road. Eventually I said goodbye to everybody, picked up my case, and off we went.

**brg**

**Make the inevitable sweeping comparisons between *Corflu*, *Potlatch* and Australian conventions. I dare you.**

**BRG**

*Potlatch* was a great success, but it seemed to be part of the same convention as *Corflu*, separated by a few days. The heart of both conventions is the hospitality suite, although, if anything, the hospitality of the *Potlatch* suite was even more lavish than that at *Corflu*. Ellen Siegel and Ruth Leibig did an amazing job, opening the suite regularly every morning at 8.30 with breakfast for those who needed it, and keeping the drinks and food flowing long into the night. (We haven't been able to do this at most Australian conventions years because of the money-grabbing attitude of convention hotels.) Steven Schwartz, David Bratman and Ian Stockdale did a good job of liaising with me and the BBB fund runners. The rest of the committee also did a great job. All I can hope for is the equivalent of a *Corflu* or *Potlatch* (or a *Cor-flatch*) in Australia sometime. The feeling of fannishness has disappeared in Australia, except for a widely scattered bunch of people. I really felt much more at home at these San Francisco conventions that I do at most Melbourne conventions, although I do realise that people like Sue Ann Barber, Rose Mitchell and Alison Barton are trying to bring back the trufannish spirit to our city.

**OAKLAND . . .**

**AND ON THE ROAD TO LAS VEGAS**

When we arrived at the Brown villa high in the hills, it was at the end of one of the warmest days I had felt in America. The birds were chirping in the eucalyptus trees, a dog was barking in some nearby back yard . . . the feeling on the porch looking out over the valley was as close to an Australian Sunday afternoon as one could find in America. John Berry and Eileen Gunn were also there, as were Charles Brown, Lisa Groen Trombi, and Tim Pratt and Heather. Tim has just received news that an SF story of his had been picked for the next *Best American Short Stories*, along with two other genre stories. This was the first time in fifteen years genre stories had been selected. The editor is Michael Chabon, the very same bloke who turned up late at night at *Potlatch*. Also, Tim and Heather had just decided to get married. Champagne was called for, provided, and opened.

It was pleasant to see Charles on his home turf. When he had been visited Melbourne in December, the pain of his two bung hips had slowed him down a lot. At home, surrounded by friends, he is a genial host. He had also invited Terry Bisson and his wife Judy Jensen. Terry and Judy had recently been married after more than 30 years together. I enjoyed talking to Terry in particular, not only because he is interested in Australia but also because we seem to share quite a few literary interests.

The highlight of the night was being invited to share a few sips of the Napoleon Bas armagnac that Charles obviously keeps for special guests. John Berry tells of finishing a whole bottle with Charles at some legendary party, but I found a few ultrasMOOTH drops were quite enough for me. (The only other time I had met a real armagnac, about fifteen years ago, I had horrified my hosts by drinking a second glass.) Very late in the night I begged for one last cup of coffee, and Charles played on his state-of-the-art home theatre sound system John Adams' *On the Transmigration of Souls*, an overwhelming choral symphony lamenting the New Yorkers killed in

2001.

I was shown the fold-down bed in the library. I slept well that night.

### **Monday, 7 March**

Next morning I found Charles also up. He pointed at the coffee and the fridge. We did not know when Billy Pettit would arrive to take me off to Las Vegas, so I packed as quickly as possible, and sat there as the *Locus* staff arrived. Karlyn had been to the post office. She brought in a large parcel that Charles unwrapped. It contained a 3000-year-old Greek vase bought from a dealer in Western Australia. For the first time in my life I touched a 3000-year-old Greek vase, and Charles pointed out the difference between it and a clever fake he also owns.

In December I had helped Charles find some CDs of contemporary Australian music, so he repaid the debt by playing for me sections of CDs from some of his favourite twentieth-century composers, especially American composers who are rarely played on Australian radio. He also gave me a few spare CDs of some of his favourite composers. Some names I knew already, such as Corigliano, Harrison and Virgil Thomson. The most impressive composer he played for me (apart from John Adams) was Aaron Kernis. I had never heard of him, and none of his music seems to be available in Australia. Charles showed me a ten-CD collection *The John Adams Earbox*, which I've been able to buy since I arrived home.

Billy arrived a bit after 10. I loaded my bags into his car while Billy followed Charles around the collection, his jaw dropping at what he saw there. I still haven't visited Billy's place, but I get the impression that he has his own extensive collections of books and fanzines. The Brown collection gives me something to aim for in the unlikely event that I ever have any money.

I said goodbye to Charles and the amazing people who produce *Locus* and we set off for Las Vegas.

**brg**

**What's it like to travel 550 miles overland in a day? Usually you complain if you have to be in a car for half an hour at a time.**

**BRG**

Billy likes to run an expedition efficiently so that nothing is likely to go wrong. We were already slightly late setting off, and because of my peculiarities we became progressively later during the day. Because of my coffee addiction, we needed more rest stops than Billy would have liked. Also, he might not have stopped for lunch near Bakersfield if he had been driving by himself.

Billy told me several times that the trip would be boring, and that I could get plenty of sleep in the car during the journey. This didn't happen. Billy provides an endless flow of interesting information about America in general and California in particular; and the landscape itself was quite new to me. The Las Vegas journey proved to be a highlight of the trip.

First we had to get out of Oakland, then out of the whole Bay area. Billy pointed over to the right, where Pleasanton, his own commuter suburb, lay in the distance. In front of us were the vague outlines of some hills. The hills remained misty all day, never quite in focus but never quite disappearing. I have never experienced a mist anything like the one that had settled across the San Joaquin Valley that day. Yes, it was a sunny day, but no, I couldn't see the sun, and couldn't see hills or mountains more than a few miles in the

distance. For quite a few hours we travelled through undulating country, lined each side by vast farms that disappeared to the horizon on either side of the road. Billy told me that about half of all the food grown in the USA comes from these vast Californian farms. Every now and again the road passed under giant towers carrying pylons. These bring power from hydroelectric dams in the mountains. The wide canals we crossed carry water from the same mountains.

We began to climb slowly. Along the crests of hills stood long lines of modern windmills. There was no wind, so no sails were turning. The windmills stretch for mile after mile, very decorative. (I can't quite see why Victorian farmers oppose the establishment of wind farms on aesthetic grounds.) Eventually we reached Bakersfield, at the southern end of the San Joaquin Valley. (Later I remembered that this was the infamous first destination of the Okies when they arrived in California in the 1930s and tried to find work harvesting oranges — see Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath*.) We stopped at a Denny's for lunch. Refreshed, we began our climb into the Sierras.

One reason why the trip remained interesting was because Billy has GPS equipment in his car. In this way I usually had some idea where we were going. We headed east from Bakersfield until we joined the main highway heading north from Los Angeles. Because of the misty air, the mountains came into view only as we reached them. There aren't mountains like these in Australia, no sir. They just go up and up, and we had to go up with them.

The higher we went, the less greenery there was. Soon vegetation disappeared from the side of the road. We reached 6000 feet and spotted the main train line between California and the east. At Tehachapi we saw a demonstration of creative train shunting. Billy said that it takes several engines on the front of a freight train and at least four engines on the back of the train to push it all the way to the top of the pass. When it reaches there, the engines at the back of the train detach themselves, then take a loop line at the side of the main line in order to reach the front of the train before it goes over the pass. The engines then sit at the front of the train to prevent it escaping and hurtling down the line on the other side. As Billy and I drove by, we saw three trains in the process of being shunted over the pass. A great sight for a train nut.

After the pass, we seemed to be travelling along a plateau until we reached Nevada. The only vegetation is that comical-looking cactus that looks like a clown with broken limbs. The GPS informed us that on one side of the road was government land. It is Edwards Air Force Base, the site of the early sections of the film *The Right Stuff*. It looks innocent enough, but that's because we couldn't see from the road the barbed wire that (I assume) stops anybody entering the base. Billy pointed to a range on the horizon. 'See those mountains,' he said. 'They have a very odd shape — all bumpy in all the wrong places. Wouldn't you like to know what they have buried under there?' Maybe. Billy saw, but I missed seeing, a fighter plane heading straight up from the airfield.

I also missed seeing the jet plane graveyard that is just beyond the base. All I could see was a vague glitter on the horizon. Billy told me that it is the place where every decommissioned American aircraft is laid to rest after retirement. Their parts cannot be recycled. Billy mentioned something about precious metals in their superstructure. Or does even the humblest commercial aircraft contain devices that are considered military



Not quite viva Las Vegas. This photo turned out oddly because: (a) I took the photo; (b) I took it through the window of my hotel room, which was on the twin of the tower block you can see on the right of the photo; (c) I took it just before dawn on the day I left. The towers on the left are part of the Excalibur casino in the middle, and they are meant to look vaguely medieval-towerish.

secrets? I wouldn't have been able to visit the aircraft park without arranging it several days beforehand. (Later, in Los Angeles, Karen Anderson said she could have arranged a tour of the place without any trouble.)

Entering Barstow gives you the odd sight of a series of abandoned and deteriorated houses and farms. Perhaps Barstow was once a town housing members of the armed forces, or perhaps it is just facing a bit of a recession. We reached Barstow at the end of daylight, and still had 200 miles to go. Last toilet break, last chance to fill up on petrol, and a last chance to buy a few drinks and edibles at the vast fast-food barn. As we pulled out I felt rather peppy, mainly because I had had a good snooze on the desert stretch, and the cramp had disappeared from my hip after we have walked around. 'Let's do the last 200 miles at one go,' said Billy, and we did.

Because we were now much later than scheduled, we did not see what Billy regarded as the real desert. Not that it could have been much barer than the area around Barstow. We were travelling in the dark, but the rush of traffic towards Las Vegas was building. Suddenly all heaven broke out on the horizon. It was not yet Las Vegas, but the border area between California and Nevada. Some casino owners have set up huge palaces just over the border. It's not a town; it's just casinos. Presumably it bankrupts some people before they reach the real thing.

## LAS VEGAS

**brg**

**I've heard a scurrilous rumour that you rather liked Las Vegas although you thought you would hate it.**

**BRG**

Whenever Billy talked about Vegas, before we arrived, his voice had an interesting mixture of scorn and admiration. Yes, he said, the place boasts the most tasteless

architecture on the planet. Yes, its primary purpose is to separate the ordinary person from his or her money in the most painless way possible, and send that person back to the USA happy but broke. Yes, the place is unbelievable. But if you don't gamble, you can have a great holiday in Las Vegas. Gambling subsidises everything else. Our hotel rooms were going to cost \$35 per night per person (each a double twin bedroom). The food proved to be cheap. Flights in and out of Las Vegas are cheap (my flight back to Los Angeles cost only about \$40). The Strip, which is only two long streets of casinos, subsidises the infrastructure, police force and all other services for a city of one and a half million. And most of Las Vegas's citizens live in a huge area of very ordinary suburbs that just happens to have a world-famous theme park in the middle.

Billy had booked us in at the Excalibur, but he could just as easily have booked us in to any one of the other casino-hotels. Each one has a different candy-coloured, Disneyland design. The Excalibur comprises two towers of hotel rooms separated by a casino covered in strange shapes meant to look like King Arthur's castle. Next door, at the Luxor, mock-Egyptian statues 20 feet tall stand in the lobby, and the whole hotel seems to fall in on itself, with the atrium in the centre and the outside shaped like an Egyptian pyramid.

Before we checked in, Billy took me on a tour of the Strip. One of the hotels boasts gigantic fountains that billow as high as geysers every few minutes. At another hotel, there is a permanent staged fight involving a pirate ship in the moat outside the walls. If you want to be really mundane, you can check in at the Holiday Inn at one end of the Strip. The traffic lights are set to make a car travel as slowly as possible, so that you cannot pass through town without being tempted to stop somewhere.

After this tour, we were doubly tired and hungry. We checked in quickly, then visited Billy's favourite place when he's in town, the Lone Star Grill. The restaurant proved to be a nice relaxing place serving great steaks,

(l. to r.): Arnie and Joyce Katz, amiable architects and US organisers of the Bring Bruce Bayside Fund. These photos were taken at Corflu in 2004, by I-know-not-whom.



(Below:) Teresa Cochran. (Photo: Alan White.)



(Above:): The Las Vegas party that Joyce managed to hold although she was having great trouble walking at the time. Ron Bushyager is over on the left, Teresa Cochran is seated, JoHn Hardin is on the extreme right. In the middle, with his back to us, is Arnie explaining the Theory of Fandom to me (on his right), and to somebody who had showed up for the first time to a Las Vegas party (Photo: Alan White.)

all decorations. Buffalo heads stare you down, many of the walls show some of the more famous paintings from the Old West, and one wall boasts the head of a 'genuine jackalope'.

### Tuesday, 8 March

The hotel room was comfortable and quiet. When I woke early next morning, I tried taking a photo of the mock castle between the residential towers. I didn't succeed well. In daylight, any part of the Las Vegas Strip looks very odd, waiting for night lights to give it existence.

As Billy had said, Las Vegas can boast the cheapest food at the best prices in America. We went to the giant breakfast restaurant in one of the nearby hotels. For \$10 we could line up at a long buffet counter for our choice of hot dishes plus drinks. Those finished, with the same ticket we could choose from about eight other buffets, each specialising in some type of cold breakfast. I was defeated fairly quickly, but I presume you could breakfast all morning if you had the stomach for it.

### brg

**You weren't supposed to be enjoying all this weird stuff. You went to Las Vegas for a Higher Fannish Purpose.**

### BRG

Yes, we went Las Vegas not to sample the weird delights of this alien planet but to carry out our sacred duty as ambassadors to the fannish capital of the world. Arnie and Joyce Katz could not attend Corflu. This was a great disappointment to them and to everybody at Corflu. Since they couldn't get to San Francisco to inspect the Gillespie, the Gillespie had to go to Las Vegas to be inspected. Here we were.

I had spoken to Arnie and Joyce several times by phone when I was in Seattle and San Francisco, but I did not know how our meeting would turn out. Would I pass muster? And what kind of person did they think I was anyway? Billy and I knew already that our visit would cause quite some strain for Joyce, who was still hobbling around because the broken ankles she had suffered nearly a year before. However, they had offered to hold a party for us that night, and they had welcomed us to call in during the day.



(l. to r.): The pre-party party: Arnie and Joyce Katz, and Ross Chamberlain.  
(Photo: Bruce Gillespie.)

Arnie and Joyce proved to be larger than life, super-friendly people with all the enthusiasm of fans who know how to enjoy themselves. If they were disappointed with the Gillespie package, they hid their disappointment well. Joyce insisted on playing hostess although she was having trouble moving around the house. They swapped notes with Billy about all matters of interest to fans and collectors. We nattered for quite a while until we went out to lunch. It was really gratifying that I was able to deliver from Corflu the get-well card to Joyce that Jay Kinney had drawn and everybody had signed on the last day of the convention. Just another reminder of how much Arnie and Joyce had been missed.

Arnie and Joyce chose the Bagel Cafe, a large but friendly place with a wide menu. Since Joyce's accident, she and Arnie haven't been able to get to many restaurants, so it was a great help that Billy could drive us all there and back. The food was good and plentiful, and I remember ordering much too much.

When we returned to the house, another car was pulled up at the kerb. A thin figure wearing a Captain

America t-shirt got out. It was Earl Kemp, who had driven up from Kingman, Arizona that morning. (He had been four hours on the road.) Arnie and Joyce needed a rest break for a few hours, so we and Earl went back to the Excalibur for a drink and a chat. Earl and Billy let me disappear for an hour or so for a quick nap, while they propped up the bar in the casino.

I had never been inside a casino before my visit to Las Vegas. I had been told that the gambling area was noisy. Yes, it is, but it's carefully engineered noise. Billy said that the electronic beeps and chimes from each machine have been designed to provide an overall sonic blanket that most people find pleasant. Although the sound level is high, it does not stop conversation, and there is no jangle in the noise. Again, it's part of an environment designed to separate people from their money as quickly and painlessly as possible while they feel they are having a good time. We surveyed the hubbub happening around us. Billy pointed out the woman who was sitting exactly where she had been twelve hours before. He also pointed out the police

The get-well card from the members of Corflu, 2005, to Joyce Katz. The cartoon is by Jay Kinney. (Scanned by Robert Lichtman.)





checking every cash register in the bar. Because of the corruption scandals that hovered over Las Vegas's early days, the state police check several times a day every place where cash is exchanged to guard against theft, money laundering and tax cheating. Lottery wins are taxed in America, but not in Australia. Billy said that if you won \$10,000 or more anywhere in the casino you would be marched to the main office immediately, where the tax would be extracted before you received the winnings.

**brg**

**Did Las Vegas fans hold a party to honour your visit?**

**BRG**

Late in the afternoon we returned to Arnie and Joyce's for the party. Originally they had organised it in my honour, but then they found it was also John Hardin's birthday. Tuesday night is not a regular party night for Vegants, so it began early and finished early. Ross Chamberlain was already there. It was good to meet this famous fan artist. He could stay only an hour as he had to go to work at 5 p.m. Just before he left, other party people began arriving. The people who attended, apart from John Hardin, Ross, Earl, Billy, Arnie, Joyce and me, were Woody Bernardi, Karla Hardin, Teresa Cochran, James and Kathryn Daugherty, Alan and DeeDee White, Gilda and Michael Cabral, Ron and Linda Bushyager, James Taylor, Lori Forbes, Michael Bernstein, Darmon Thornton and Dave Gordon.

How come I have that list? Because Arnie wrote a superb party report in *Vegas Fandom Weekly* 16. You can download the PDF file from [efanzines.com](http://efanzines.com), along with a several good photos and an untruthful photo of me looking dissipated.

It was great to catch up with Linda and Ron Bushyager. I had stayed with them in Philadelphia when they were living there in 1973, and had exchanged fanzines until Linda stopped publishing. I had waved at them in the corridor at Corflu, and said a few words, but this is the first time we had had a chance to talk.

Later I found myself sitting next to a very friendly chap who was interested in Australia, especially the works of George Turner. This seemed to be somebody on my wavelength! I asked him his name. 'Alan White,' he said. 'Hi, Alan,' I said. 'You're one of the people I came to America to see.' (We need name tags at parties as well as conventions.) Alan was interested in contributing art to my fanzines. 'Give me plenty of time,' he said. Like Dick Jenssen in Melbourne, Alan has been experimenting with computer graphics as well as extending his other skills, and he is one of America's best fan artists.

Most of the other people were new to me, except Teresa Cochran, who I knew from the Internet chat groups. I knew only that she was blind. What I found in Las Vegas is that this does not cramp her style at all. She gets to all the fan meetings, takes part in a lot of fannish Internet discussion, and has become one of anchor people of the Vegas group. I considered kidnapping her to take her back to Australia, but I then realised that Teresa, Elaine, the Vegants and the Australian and American governments might all object strongly.

We presented a birthday cake to John, and there was much celebration and deep and meaningful discussion of fannish principles. This was because two of the people at the party, Gilda and Michael, were attending a fan event for the first time. They are involved in a new sercon science fiction group in Las Vegas, and had expressed interest in the Vegants. They asked all the right ques-

tions of Arnie. If I had had a pocket recorder, I could have captured the Fannish Gospel According to Arnie Katz.

Most people at the party had to work next day, so they left about 10 p.m. Billy and I went back to the Excalibur, and turned in early. I was supposed to be at the airport by 7 a.m.

**Wednesday, 9 March**

**brg**

**Tell us how you broke the bank at Las Vegas.**

**BRG**

The hotel wake-up call was on schedule. Billy and I made our way through the casino to the lobby. As passed one of the 25-cent machines, I said to Billy: 'I can't leave Las Vegas without playing one game.' I had five quarters on me. Billy showed me how to play. At the end of that one game, a great flow of quarters spilled out of the machine: \$14 worth. I decided to quit while I was ahead. Billy tried one of the more complicated games, the one based on the values of playing cards. He came out even. Suddenly I could see how people became addicted to gambling at casinos. It has nothing to do with making money — people become addicted to the machines themselves!

All I could say to Billy when we parted was heartfelt thanks. I had thought the Las Vegas leg of the trip might be hard work, but he had made it an enjoyable, indeed unique experience.

**LOS ANGELES**

**brg**

**I believe you visited a horrible pestilence on Marty Cantor?**

**BRG**

I checked in at Las Vegas and went through security. Then I had to find the departure lounge. Nothing so simple in Las Vegas. I and the other passengers had to get on a high-speed tramway car that took us from the main terminal out to the terminal for Southwest Airlines. We waited. And waited. Departure time passed. In front of me the slot machines twirled forever on, the jackpot total heading upward toward \$1 million. Eventually there was an announcement that the plane was delayed because of fog in Los Angeles. The announcer did not offer a time of departure.

Fortunately I still had that trusty phone card (thanks again, Janice and Alan!), so I rang Marty Cantor in Los Angeles to tell him I would be late in at Burbank Airport. He told me that he was ready for me — sort of. He had spent the previous two days in hospital with a chest infection! I told him it was more important to get better than try taking me around Los Angeles. I said that I could make other arrangements if he still felt very ill. No. Marty was not to be deflected. He had promised to show me around Los Angeles. He had worked out our program. He would meet me at the airport.

At Las Vegas we waited some more. Eventually an announcement offered to put together everybody from our plane on the next plane. As we lined up, the bloke at the airline counter said: 'The plane is still only half full. Please make sure you take a window seat. When we turn around on the runway, people on the other planes will think our plane is full.'

Not that I saw a lot from the window seat as we came down into the Los Angeles basin. It was completely

covered in fog to a height of several thousand feet. We descended, and descended, and suddenly we were flying just above a whole lot of suburbs, and quickly we came down at Burbank. It was a sunny day, but visibility was low.

**brg**

**Some people had said uncomplimentary things about Los Angeles before you arrived. How did Marty and his guided tour change your mind?**

**BRG**

If it hadn't been for Marty Cantor (two days) and then Lee and Barry Gold (one day), I could not have seen anything of Los Angeles. I don't drive a car, so most of Los Angeles would have been unavailable.

Somebody described Marty to me as being just a bit inflexible. Inflexibility has its advantages as well as disadvantages. Marty is a kindly bloke who likes to stick to a strict schedule. He had written down a schedule for seeing some interesting sights in Los Angeles, and he wasn't going to be deflected by a severe bout of bronchial trouble. His breathing didn't sound healthy, but basically he's trim and fit for somebody who is ten years older than I am. (He says he eats only one meal a day. For me, that would be like cutting my own throat.)

After Marty had met me at Burbank, he dropped my luggage at his apartment, and we ate at a small nearby eatery run by Mexicans. A few weeks after I returned home, Marty emailed me to say that they had had a fire in the back of the shop and that it had to close temporarily. That's a pity. One of the many things I liked about Los Angeles were the large number of Mexican people. Like the Vietnamese in Melbourne, they come across as cheery people who get things done, always smiling and easy to get along with.

Marty uses his car most of the time, so he is not used to Los Angeles' meagre public transport system. However, he researched a route by which we could reach downtown: first a bus to one end of the Los Angeles metro system, then a quick train to town. The train still has only two branches, and the bus system is widely

Marty Cantor. Not only did he show me around Los Angeles, but he was the bloke who suggested the BBB Fund in the first place. (Photo: Chaz Baden Boston.)



The restored interior of the Bradbury Building, Los Angeles. Before restoration, the interior was used as a set in several films, including *Blade Runner*. (Photo from the Internet.)

scattered.

Union Station, the hub of the system, proved to be one of Marty's show-off pieces of Los Angeles architecture. From the outside, it looks like a long Spanish hacienda. Inside, it is one of the great art deco buildings of the world, with every tile of the walls and floors and every decoration on the windows and doors meticulously restored. Few railway stations are works of art in themselves.

It took us a while to work out the correct bus to take us downtown. I had always been told that there was no downtown Los Angeles, that the whole city is just a series of cities linked end to end. I was wrong. There are other large sections of Los Angeles that are made up of huge collections of skyscrapers and shops, but there is an actual Los Angeles city centre as well. We didn't see a lot of it, but Marty showed me a few of his favourite buildings.

The Bradbury Building was made famous by being used as a set in *Blade Runner*, and in *DOA* and several other movies before then. It is simply a six-storey-high atrium surrounded by offices that face inward to balconies that look into the atrium. The outside of the building looks squat and uninteresting. The inside of the building would look unremarkable, except that the balconies, stair railings and lift (elevator) are all made of black-painted wrought iron. The building is a wrought-iron-work piece of art.

The lift would take people up and down if the building were open to tourists. Marty said that the building had

a long period of being nearly derelict (presumably the period during which films were made there), then restored for tourists, and now is used for regular business tenants. As a result, visitors can only go as high as the first floor (in America, the second floor). The photo here is taken from the Internet site devoted to the building, and gives some idea of its wonderful combination of severity and flamboyance.

On one point Marty was particularly firm: he wasn't willing to visit any site associated with Los Angeles's film culture. He had a point. Disneyland is about 60 miles from his house, and tours of the film studios need to be booked ahead. However, I feel I still haven't visited Los Angeles because I have never been to Disneyland. (I had no idea how to reach there by tourist bus.) The next best thing to visiting a film studio is to walk the pavement of the stars that leads up to the building I know as Grauman's Chinese Theatre. Outside the theatre we found all those blocks of concrete with various people's paws imprinted. I took a photo of Cary Grant's from the early 1950s. The earliest concrete block I saw was Jean Harlow's from 1931.<sup>2</sup>

We made our way back to Marty's. He had things to do on the computer, and I was glad to stop moving and read some fanzines. Marty turns out to be one of those American fans who likes classical music. He had the radio in his apartment tuned constantly to one or other of the three commercial classical music stations in the Los Angeles area. His favourite is KMZT (Mozart, see?). The general standard of classical radio programming, both in Los Angeles and San Francisco, seemed higher than that currently offered by ABC-FM in Australia.<sup>3</sup>

**brg**

**I believe you met some unexpected large dogs?**

**BRG**

Wednesday night was the most difficult of the trip. Marty had told me some weeks before that he was determined not to miss his games night at the Newtons'. We were to eat at their place, and I would stay the night. (Marty has no spare room at his place.) At first I thought the Newtons are not fans. They were more than a bit puzzled as to who I was, and I had never heard of them. I also have no interest in gaming.

Marty had not warned me that the Newtons had two fairly large and bouncy dogs, as well as two cats. Why should he? He did not know that from an early age I have held a quite unreasonable fear of dogs, even the most innocent and delightful dogs. Barbara was very pleasant about this difficulty, putting the dogs outside until they went upstairs around bed time. But it would have been a lot less difficult for everyone if I had (for instance) stayed that night at the nearby Holiday Inn. Barbara and Terry put on a good spread for the people who gathered to play games, and I enjoyed meeting their teenage kids. But all I could do during the gaming session was sit and watch uncomprehendingly. And I didn't sleep very well, either. Ah well. (But early in the morning, Pokie came downstairs and rolled over for a pat, then snuffled away. Score one for the friendly dog.)

**Thursday, 10 March**

**brg**

**So how did you go the next day? Mooch around like you usually do after a poor night's sleep?**

**BRG**

Next morning, I said goodbye to Barbara and Terry as they went off to work. Marty turned up, feeling much better — quite cheery, in fact. We went off to the International House of Pancakes for a very good breakfast. As happened several times during the trip, a poor night's sleep did not spoil the rest of the day. Marty felt at home in his car, and he had some good places to show me. The day was warm, although the sun was still taking some trouble to break through the perpetual fog. And it was fog, too, not smog. Marty was annoyed that it stopped me seeing the Sierra Mountains, which form a solid border between the Los Angeles basin and the rest of California. I could see a vague outline always somewhere out there, but not the mountains themselves.

First stop was the Travel Town Museum. I know there are good travel museums around Melbourne, but I've never visited them. Travel Town is a model for any travel museum in the world. At one stage it included aeroplanes, cars and trains, but now it concentrates on old trains, including huge steam engines, old luxury carriages and a wide variety of vehicles that were once part of the Los Angeles public transport system until the 1930s. Most of the pieces of rolling stock are labelled, giving some idea of their physical capabilities and their role in the overall system. I came over all emotional as I looked at the map of the LA public transport system as it was in the early part of the century. My ideal city would have no freeways, and be covered by a lacework of train and tram (trolley) lines that could get anybody from anywhere to anywhere without the need to own a car. Before its system was dismantled, Los Angeles must have come close to that ideal.

Travel Town has its own miniature railway that people can ride on, but we didn't get to ride on it.

Next stop was San Marino, which, as Marty pointed out, is one of the ritzier areas of greater Los Angeles. Not that the houses are vast mansions. Most are single storeyed, with flat roofs and Spanish-style guttering and decorations. They sit on large lawns and are surrounded by unfenced gardens. It's hard to say why these houses exude the aura of wealth, as they don't look larger than many suburban houses in, say, our part of the northern suburbs of Melbourne. The houses have a quality of solidity, impregnability and greenness that stands out in a city where many houses don't have gardens.

In the middle of all this wealth is the Huntington Museum, a vast complex of art collections, libraries and botanical gardens that seem to stretch for miles. Or rather, the parks and gardens stretch for miles, surrounding a central core of white marble and brick, all classical in style and tone. We had time only to visit the library of first edition books, one of the art collections, and a few areas of the Botanical Gardens. The art collections we saw included a great deal of fine French art from the eighteenth century, including paintings, sculpture and much amazing porcelain. The same gallery has some of the most famous eighteenth-century British paintings, including Gainsborough's *Blue Boy*.

The library's exhibit halls showed an amazing display of old books, beginning with illuminated manuscripts, then a Gutenberg Bible, some of Caxton's earliest printed goods and a wide variety of first editions, includ-

ing the First Folio of Shakespeare's plays. Next we found the display of the major books of American literature and history, including first editions of such books as Thoreau's *Walden* and Melville's *Moby Dick*. The historical displays that surrounded the books are admirably detailed, too much information to absorb at one visit.

Marty saved his favourite part of the museum to last: the Botanical Gardens in general, and the Japanese Garden in particular. Marty says he likes to sit in this garden for hours. You find yourself strolling through a series of exquisite paintings, each of which changes while you walk through it. Each perspective alters the present scene into another perfectly designed scene. You know you are strolling through natural foliage, but you feel that you are enclosed a fine art work.

As we walked back to the entrance, I noticed the Australian Garden. Yes, it is impressive. All the plants are correct. But the effect is still of walking through cultivation, whereas to recreate a piece of Australia you need to emulate the feeling of wilderness. That's hard to do unless you want to build up a thick pad of flammable material on the forest floor. Staging a bushfire in the Australian Garden would be carrying authenticity too far.

Before we returned to Marty's place, he took me up to the Sierra Madre Canyon, an area of Los Angeles where he lived when younger. There is nothing like it in an Australian city, because we do not have U-shaped canyons. It winds back into the steep hills that form the border of the Los Angeles valley. The houses hang off the sides of the hills while the narrow road climbs up between them.

**brg**

**Does the LASFS reality match the legend?**

**BRG**

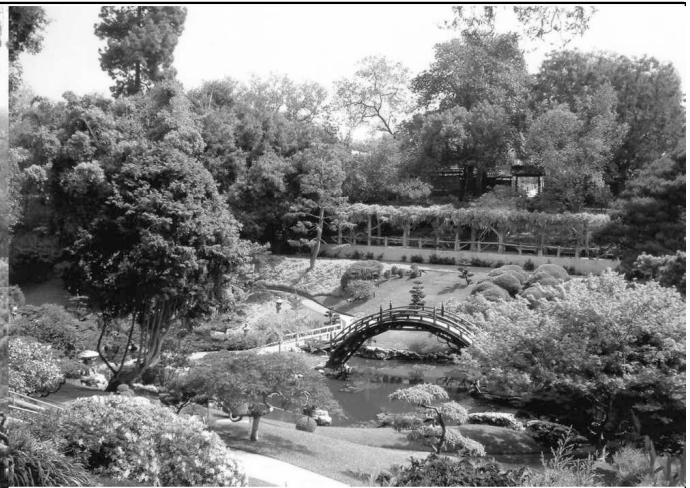
In the afternoon, Marty had to do some work for the evening's APA-L mailing. We then set off for the LASFS (Los Angeles Science Fiction Society) headquarters. Marty has sent me a map of the area around the clubrooms: it reminds me a lot of West Brunswick, the location of the Melbourne SF Club. The clubrooms themselves resemble a larger version of the Melbourne SF clubroom (without the attached church).

The LASFS rooms are in two sections, one of which seems to be mainly a library and storeroom, and the other a meeting hall and side rooms. In the large kitchen, Marty set about producing APA-L 2078 on his prized Gestetner duplicating machine. The machine looks nothing like the Gestetner duplicator that I hand-cranked for years while producing more than thirty issues of *SF Commentary*. The LASFS Gestetner works more like an offset machine, but more convenient. The page to be duplicated goes in one end; the device photographs it, produces a paper plate and prints the required number of copies. Presumably Marty puts in the ink and sets the controls. (I forgot to ask him whether or not the machine collates as well.)

People were arriving long before the official opening time or meeting starting time. I introduced myself to various people, some of whom I had heard of (including Phil Castora and Don Fitch) and some I hadn't (such as the bloke who calls himself Hare, and whose father had been taught by Don Fitch at Los Angeles's equivalent of the Burnley Horticultural College). I was told later that I committed a social booboo by introducing myself, but I'm glad I did anyway. I got to meet Milt Stevens (last glimpsed across a smoke-filled room at either Torcon II in 1973 or Aussiecon I in 1975), who is currently Official Editor of FAPA. I talked about joining FAPA if Acnestis

My favourite of the photos I took — Travel Town Museum from inside the railways shed.





Two views (from postcards) of the Japanese Garden, Huntington Museum, San Marino, Los Angeles. Walk from one part of the garden to another, and you are still walking inside a living painting.

disappears.

Marty was deep in production mode, so Don Fitch and I strolled off to find something to eat. We found a quite acceptable Denny's and enjoyed nattering while eating. Don depends on hearing aids, so I suspect he enjoys talking to people one-on-one much more than trying to keep up with conversation in a crowd. Don is a member of the same garden apa that Elaine is in, and is one of her (and my) favourite writers.

Back at the clubrooms, we found a large group already assembling for the Thursday night meeting. At least one person, Jerry Pournelle, had not changed a bit since 1973. His long-time writing partner, Larry Niven, wasn't there that night. Neither was Mike Glyer, an LA fan with whom I had really wanted to catch up. However, I did meet Fred Patten — which was fortunate, because he suffered a stroke two days later and was in hospital for some weeks afterward.

In the front row of the meeting was R. Lorraine Tutihasi, who had also been at Corflu and Potlatch, and the smiling face of John Hertz, who remains the fan most unlike the image I had gained from reading his fanzines.

Marty handed me *APA-L 2078*, hot from the duplicator. It said on the cover 'Welcome Bruce Gillespie'. And welcome I did feel.

I had heard that LASFS meetings were run 'by the book'. I presumed that that meant they were very formal affairs. Not so. Yes, the meeting runs by formal rules, and minutes are kept and motions proposed, debated and voted on. But it seems compulsory to make every bit of the meeting (except the week's obituaries) into an overall standup comedy act. Matthew Tepper was chair. He was upstaged by John De Chancie, the Minutes Secretary, who presented the minutes of the previous meeting as a Sam Spade episode. There was a presentation of upcoming films. Marty Cantor paid tribute to

Buz Busby.

The formal part of the evening ended. It seems that I was the guest speaker. I stood to speak. Most people left. It was a bit disconcerting, but I burbled on for a quarter of an hour anyway. Later it was explained to me that (a) Thursday is a week night, so LASFAns don't want to stay out late; however (b) they want to socialise after the meeting, so they congregate at a nearby eatery; but (c) it's first in, first served at the eatery, so people in the know rush off for the best tables. About twenty people hung around, and some asked searching questions.

**brg**

**I've heard that on your last night in America you got a very good night's sleep . . .**

**BRG**

I'm not sure how it had been arranged (did they volunteer or were they pushed?), but it was nice to find that Lee and Barry Gold had volunteered to put me up for my last night in America. I did not want to make them late by going off to the restaurant. Instead, we stood outside in the very warm night and I nattered to various interesting people, including Karen Anderson. She was dismayed to find that I had already made my journey through the Mojave Desert. 'But I could have arranged for you to see the airplane graveyard,' she said. Yes, but I hadn't met her then.

Lee and Barry Gold are very pleasant, accommodating people. They gave me my own room for the night, but not before offering a cup or two of coffee, a bit of natter and an inspection of their large collection of books, art and fanzines. Lee gave me several valuable items, including a copy of the collection of Tom Digby's writing that she had edited some years ago.

**Friday, 11 March**

In the morning, Barry went to work early, and Lee offered to show me some of south Los Angeles, especially La Brea tar pits and the Page Museum. On our trip there, I got some idea of the sheer enormity of Los Angeles: patterns and combinations of housing, businesses and skyscrapers that go on for miles and miles, with entire separate cities rising out of the streets every few blocks. Most of the residences are flat roofed, often with Spanish decorations around the sides or on the windows. As Lee said, 'Anybody who has anything but a flat roof in Los Angeles is being pretentious.' Yet Los Angeles had had vast amounts of rain dumped on it only a few weeks



(l. to r.): Lee  
and Barry Gold.  
(Photos: Chaz  
Boston Baden.)



before, and the weather remained misty, if warm and sunny, the whole time I was there.

Los Angeles is very good at museums. Melbourne has its new Museum, but nothing else to match it, because very few Australian families with private fortunes (except the Myer and Pratt families) put their money into serious philanthropy. During the last 200 years, America's richest families have consistently put fortunes back into the community. George C. Page had made his fortune during the first half of the century. He set up the Page Museum on the site of the tar pits that had been discovered on the Rancho La Brea. The tar pits have formed an entrapment ground for a wide variety of animals over the last 40,000 years. A woolly mammoth, for instance, would step into the pit and become bogged. A sabre-toothed tiger (or 'sabre-toothed cat', as they are now called) would leap onto the mammoth, which would then sink further, and so would the cat. Both would die on the site, and sink below later generations of victims and scavengers. More than three million fossils have been excavated from the pits, and now the museum is both a research lab for processing fossils and a display area.

The Page Museum is a beautiful mid-1970s building whose exhibits include dioramas, labelled displays and video displays. Guides were taking groups of school children on tours. It's rather impressive to stand under the tusks of the skeleton of a mammoth. The tusks rise high above you, and it would be quite easy for a human to duck under a mammoth's belly. Also impressive are

A postcard shot of the mastodon skeleton I actually stood under at the Page—La Brea Museum.



murals showing the area as it might have been when inhabited by the animals whose bones have been found in the tar pits. An exhibit shows an average fossil core — vast numbers of bones compressed so tight they become one bone.

For lunch we went to a Marie Callendar's, where I had a large chicken pie, perfectly simple with no frills, and delicious. Later, Lee showed me the science fiction mural painted around the outside wall of a library in Watts. The artists are David Rivas Botello and Wayne Alaniz Healy.

As we headed from there down to Santa Monica beach, the weather changed abruptly. It had been hot, but suddenly there was a sharp breeze from the ocean, and some of the perpetual mist began to disappear. Lee drove me along the beach past the Pacific Palisades, but we didn't stop to walk on Santa Monica beach.

When Barry returned home, I packed for the last time, and we headed out to dinner: a very good Chinese restaurant in the VIP Harbor building. As happened many times during my trip, I found that the food was of similar quality to that served in middle- to top-of-the-range restaurants in Melbourne. This probably means that Melbourne food has improved greatly during the thirty years since my previous trip.

My last assignment of the whole trip? To eat a hot fudge sundae at a Baskin and Robbins store. In 1973, I became addicted to Baskin and Robbins' hot fudge sundaes, but could find no equivalent when I returned to Melbourne. Barry drove us to one B&R store. Not only was it closed, but the whole area it had inhabited had been redeveloped. Eventually we found another B&R store. We went in, and ordered our sundaes. But this chocolate fudge sundae was no different from the one I had eaten a few years ago at Pancake Parlour in Melbourne! What had become of my dream sundae? Nothing, I suspect. My memory of 1973 sundaes was too glamorous. Meanwhile ice cream outlets in Australia had imported the recipes of the American chains. But I'm very glad that Lee and Barry had taken the trouble to find that store so I could check out my dream.

I was in the company of Lee and Barry for just a bit more than 24 hours, but their hospitality made the end of the journey into a real pleasure. That phrase 'American kindness' kept ringing in my mind, summing up the whole trip. Especially as I was about to begin the very worst part of the trip.

(Saturday, 12 March) Sunday, 13 March

## THE HORROR! THE HORROR! (THE TRIP HOME)

**brg**

**Why the horror! the horror! of the trip home? All you needed to have done was lose 30 kg around the middle and a few centimetres in height.**

**BRG**

I'm not sure why vast numbers of jets fly out of Los Angeles at 11.30 at night. To judge from the crowds that filled the International Airport, almost every American felt a sudden need to flee the country by midnight. The airport had no real provision for the demands made on the system by current security clearance regulations. Queues were everywhere. It took me much asking to find my queue for check-in. I thought I had succeeded, then realised the endless queue over there was actually mine. It moved quickly, as security has again become perfunctory at American airports. Eventually I found myself walking the endless distance to the departure lounge, which filled quickly. I had hoped to buy a bottle of single malt whiskey for Dick Jenssen at the duty-free shop, but the small duty-free near our departure lounge had almost no quality spirits.

I needed to buy a cup of coffee and found I had not quite enough US cash on me. An American woman beside me saw my plight, and put down the correct note. Another act of American kindness! I thanked her, but could offer her nothing but the last of my American small change. She took it and disappeared.

I hugged the cup of coffee and waited forever to board the plane, only to find it was full. No spare seats at all, and I had not been given an aisle seat or window seat. With my weight and height I scarcely fit in an Economy seat anyway, and there was no room for my hand luggage under my feet. I had bought some sandwiches for the middle of the trip, but I quickly found I could not put my hands on my hand luggage.

On one side of me was a young bloke and a young woman. On the other side was a thirtyish American. The young bloke asked the girl if she would like an aisle seat if his buddy could take the seat. The buddy proved to be a youngish Good Old Boy from Somewhere Down South who had already had a few beers and was gearing himself up to enjoy a few more during the trip. He and his friend were golfers.

Those who know me know that I can go into a total panic in some situations. This was such a situation. I really lost it. I had no idea what to do. I did not know how I would survive the journey. The bloke to my right said: 'Stop. Just calm down. Put the seat back, rest for half an hour, then see how it goes.' And that worked. I don't know who Tim is. I know that he was visiting Australia for a week or so for a trade convention at Jeff's Shed (the Melbourne Convention Centre). I will never meet him again. But for this last act of kindness he will forever be remembered as one of my favourite Americans. Since I was in a state of acute stress, I had to visit the loo quite often, but Tim didn't mind me climbing over him, even while he was watching films.

It was very awkward when meals and drinks were being served, with four people side by side. My companion to my right, the Good Old Boy who said quite clearly he meant to drink the plane dry, slept from time to time (as did I). When it seemed as if he was going to go into

alcoholic overdrive, the steward told him that no further drinks were to be served from then until breakfast. He fell asleep from then until breakfast, and from then on watched, on the little back-seat screen, the progress of the plane as it inched down the coast of Australia. It was light by the time Sydney came into view. As I didn't have a window seat, I missed Sydney. During the last hour the four of us actually began to talk to each other.

Our Southern companion was not a golfer, but he had brought his clubs just in case. He was representing an American wine firm, and aimed to visit all the small wineries in Victoria and South Australia during his trip. (And drink them dry?) He said to Tim: 'What's it like to drive on the wrong side of the road?' Tim said: 'When you come to a T-intersection and want to turn right, don't turn into the right lane of the road you're turning into.'

The Southern bloke was looking at his back-seat screen trying to work out the rules of Australian Rules football. 'Now I get it!' he said in triumph. They hit the crap out of each other, then they run like hell with the ball.'

I still didn't like him much. He had that fabulous Southern accent, but he didn't smile. And he was still determined to get 'rowdy'. Thank ghod the trip was only 14 hours long.

**brg**

**At the end of the 1973 trip you felt like doing a Pope and kneeling to kiss the tarmac at Tullamarine Airport.**

**BRG**

I couldn't do it this time. I didn't get near the tarmac — security arrangements make sure of that.

But when the plane touched down at Tulla, I let out the metaphorical breath that I had been holding ever since I leaving Melbourne four weeks before.

We staggered off the plane, and went through very perfunctory security and customs (much more relaxed than they had been in 1973, but this time I had much less hair). I bought Dick Jenssen's present at the duty-free counter in Melbourne. I didn't quite know how I would get back to Greensborough. In February Justin had mentioned picking me up when I returned, but I had no confirmation he would be there. Instead, there was Elaine waiting for me! Never before have we been so glad to see each other! I broke down and cried with relief. A few minutes later we found Elaine's sister Valerie, who had driven her there, we picked up the luggage, and went out to the car.

**brg**

**What hit you most when you returned from the trip?**

**BRG**

The light! The light! People have always talked about the difference between the quality of daylight in Australia and that anywhere else. It's true. The whole time I had been in America, fine weather had followed me, but always the sun shone through mist of some kind. As we drove home from Tullamarine I was dazzled by the dry bright light of an Australian summer. Green trees, bright light, summer heat — I could have done without the heat. When we reached home, the cats said hello. I changed into a short-sleeved shirt and shorts, and Flicker started to sit on my lap. He was most insulted when I waved him away. (Very large black cat on bare legs! No way.) Flicker had waited four weeks for me to

return home and now I didn't want him on my lap. His feelings were so hurt that didn't talk to me for days, but the other cats were very friendly.

## POST-TRIP NOTES

- 1 **American seagulls.** American gulls are twice as big as Australian gulls. A bit scary when they take off from the ground straight at your head. I didn't know about American seagulls until I visited Fisherman's Wharf in San Francisco.
- 2 **American cities.** Seattle and San Francisco have become boutique cities. If you live there, you wouldn't want to move out, because you could never afford to move back. Seattle reminds me of Melbourne; San Francisco reminds people of Sydney. Same problem: you wouldn't be able to afford to move into the city unless you commuted from 50 km away. The same thing has happened in Melbourne. Los Angeles? Don't know. Lots of money around, but also lots of migrants (especially Mexicans) and jus' folks. So maybe it's easier to move into Los Angeles than into the other two cities. Or maybe people just don't mind commuting endless distances.
- 3 **Politics.** A few weeks after I arrived back, Loudon Wainwright III released his CD *Here Come the Choppers*. The title song is a dark tale of USAF choppers firing from above as they fly down the freeways of Los Angeles. Loudon has gained the same feeling about his homeland as I gained from visiting it — that the Iraq War is not about Iraq, but is basically an excuse for a war on the poor, in America as in Australia. I hope we survive.
- 4 **The Curse of the Were-Gillespie.** Joyce Katz is still suffering from the effects of the ankle accident that happened a week after she and Arnie agreed to organise the BBB Fund. Robert Lichtman suffered from broken ribs three months before I arrived in America. The week I was in Seattle, then at Corflu, Janice Murray suffered from an abraded cornea, then flu. Two days before I arrived in Los Angeles, Marty Cantor suffered from bronchial troubles severe enough to put him in hospital. A month after I was in America, Art Widner received disturbing news from his oncologist. The Curse of the Were-Gillespie struck most disastrously at Fred Patten

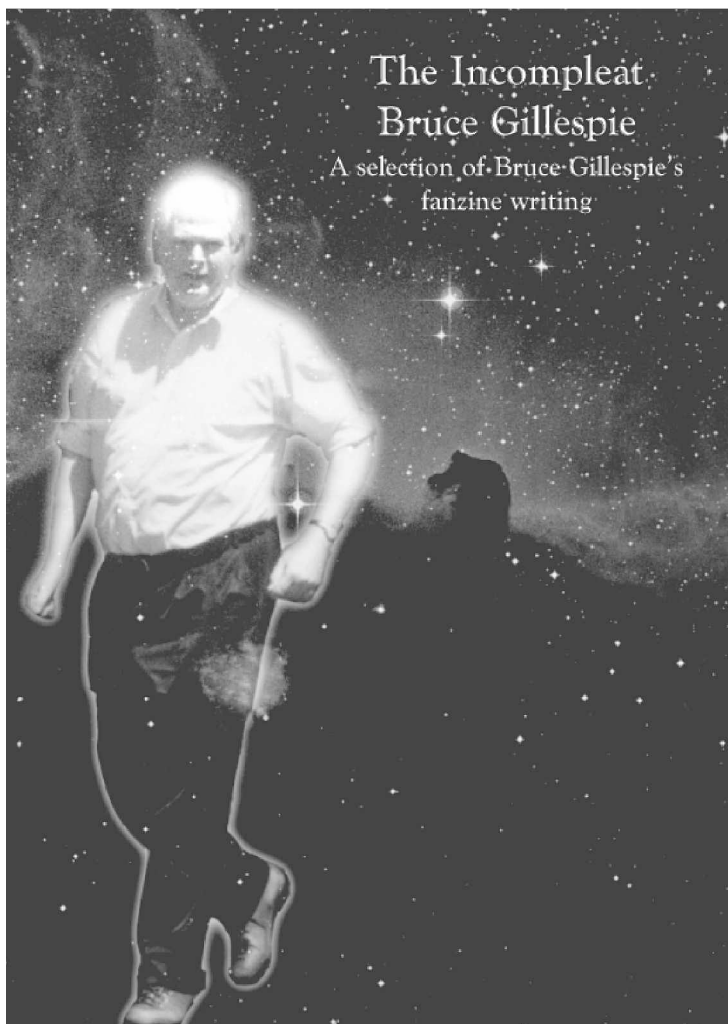
(who suffered a stroke a day after my visit to Los Angeles) and Lee and Barry Gold (Lee put a lot of money and effort into helping Fred after his stroke; then, last thing I heard, Barry had lost his job). I trust that everybody else is well.

- 5 **The rest of my life, etc.:** In November 2004, Hedley Finger had said to me: 'Don't go overseas, Bruce. They will forget all about you.' And it's true. For six months I had little paying work after I returned. I can't afford to publish fanzines, although the BBB Fund has enough money to fund this Trip Report. I won't ever be able to travel overseas again — not that I would fly again unless I could travel Business Class.
- 6 **Dream month.** I feel rather like people who say they have been abducted by UFOs — the experience was unbelievable, but I know it happened to me. Wonderful people, wonderful places. American kindness. Fannish kindness. Maybe I'll see some of the people again, but never the places again. I hope this report reflects the experience.

— Bruce Gillespie, 21 August 2005

## ENDNOTES

- 1 A note from Robert Lichtman: 'Actually there are plenty of older buildings in S.F. I lived in a house built in the 1880s back in the 60s and across the street from it was a house dating back to the 1860s. And these are not uncommon, but what they have in common is being on a more geologically stable part of the city, so not as affected by the quake itself and far away from the areas that burned.'
- 2 Another note from Robert: 'Actually, the oldest footprints there are from John Fairbanks and Mary Pickford, and were done in 1927, the year the theater opened.'
- 3 Robert Lichtman note: 'Alas, KMZT in San Francisco is no more. Like Marty, I really enjoyed it when it was happening, but suddenly one day it morphed into a '50s and '60s pop music (mostly rock) format, then to '30s and '40s music, and then the frequency got sold to KPIG, which does an eclectic mix of country, pop, rock, salsa, etc.'



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Original proceeds helped to fund the air fare so that Bruce could attend Corflu 22 and Potlatch 14 in San Francisco, February–March 2005. This was the BBB (Bring Bruce Bayside) Fund. Further proceeds will be distributed among the fan funds that helped make possible the BBB Fund.

Send your \$10 to Bill Wright, Australian Administrator of the Fund, at  
Unit 4, 1 Park Street, St Kilda West, VIC 3182.  
or to Robert Lichtman, current US administrator,  
11037 Broadway Terrace, Oakland CA 94611-1948, USA  
or to Bruce Gillespie, 5 Howard Street, Greensborough, VIC 3088, Australia.

*Did I mention I'd  
been to America?*

