

Catchpenny Gazette



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"A sincere message from the soul of another human being"

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Artwork

Cover: photograph by David Burton

Gerri Sullivan (4), Madeleine Willis (7), Brad Foster (12, 16, 18, 19)

I was apparently *very* confused regarding the date of the last issue. In the black bar above it read "December 2006" but the page footers all read "January 2006," which, for clarification for future fanzine historians, is the correct dating.

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Dave Locke's

Dialog With Two Fans

Preface: December 27, 2005

From 1983 through 1993 I produced a series of fan-writing called "Dave Locke's Dialog with Two Fans: a chat with _____". Chat... These had too many of the elements of a dialog for me to call them interviews, though they had elements of that as well. All but the final one appeared in Bill Bowers' *Outworlds*. "A chat with Steve Leigh" was the first, appearing in 1983. In order, that was followed by "Walt Willis" (84), "Mike Resnick" (84), "Buck Coulson" (84), "Denise Parsley Leigh" (85), "Bill Bowers" (live at Corflu #4, in print, audio, and video, 87), and "Al Curry" (88). The final one was done with Roy Tackett in 1993, but by that point *Outworlds* had become a fanzine with a Real Soon Now publishing schedule and after a few years I told Bill the time was ripe to move that particular installment to a different venue. So "A chat with Roy Tackett" appeared in 1997 in *The Least Horrible of Roy Tackett* ("Thirty years of writings by the honored Fan Guest of the 1997 World SF Convention"). Although his name wasn't on it, this admirable production was put together for the 1997 Worldcon by good-fan Richard Brandt.

I enjoyed doing all of them but my favorite was from 1984 and was with Walt Willis. Walt passed away from a heart attack in October of 1999, after being in poor health for a year subsequent to a heart attack in 1998. During the period from 1984 through 1998, Walt produced a good many letters of comment, which were his main venue of fanac during his twilight years.

But, for now, back to 1984, and to -

A Chat with

Walt Willis

For those who know of Walt Willis, what follows is simply an interview/dialog by correspondence, initiated by me in search of material to lay before you here.

For those who don't know of Walt, much background is revealed in the dialog. Going in, what you need to know is that Walt lives in Northern Ireland, got into fandom in 1947, and has been highly regarded for his writing and for being the person that he is.

In the "Fanwriter Symposium" published in *Outworlds* #28/29 in 1976, thirty of fandoms best fanwriters were asked: "Who are your three all-time favorite fanwriters?" Five names stood out like beacons, and first place was a landslide.

I'm going to speak to that gentleman now.

Dave: I wondered if there weren't some way I could tweak your interest in an idea. Faneditors like Bill Bowers keep asking me to come up with something for the next issue. Forgive me if I've become unduly creative in casting about for suitable fan material, but it occurred to me there's nothing I'd like better than to have an informal interview and discussion with you, if you have the time and inclination.

Walt: What a very good idea. I'll be happy with such an interview/discussion by mail.

Dave: Now that you're retired, how are you and Madeleine spending your time these days?

Walt: I read the London *Times* thoroughly every day and two more local papers, play golf, work in the house and garden, read books and watch TV. James White and George Charters call irregularly. Bob Shaw was here last Sunday. As for Madeleine, her time is occupied in the same way as mine, except that she reads fewer newspapers and takes an interest in the affairs of the golf club (she's Lady Captain this year).

There have been distractions other than the warm weather. One of them was that my son Bryan had his passport stolen from his car just before he was to go to the States, so I had to drive into Belfast nearly every day for a week to get a new passport and visa for him. All of which was very time-consuming, but curiously nostalgic. For instance I had to produce evidence of the reason for his visit, and it took the form of a sort of fanzine. He is taking part in the World Championship of the GP14 Cass of Sailing Dinghy, at Cape May, New Jersey, 8-13 August; which sounds quite impressive, but in fact there are only a few hundred people in the world in these sailing dinghy fandoms and they seem to be confined to the US, the UK and Australia. The World Championships (every 2 years) are their equivalent of the Worldcons. In some ways attendance is more difficult for them

Originally published in *Outworlds* #37, 1984



Walt Willis (l.) and James White, August 1995

because they have to arrange transportation of their boats (there's a sort of TAFF fund for this) but on the other hand they tend to be more rugged types than SF fans and go to more outdoors places. Bryan packed a tent and sleeping bag in his boat and sent all off in the container months ahead, leaving here with all his gear in an airline bag including a 7 lb. lead weight (to bring his boat up to standard weight) which will worry the Customs people no end. The reason he left in July was to take part in the US National Championships held the last weekend.

Dave: Are you still in touch with Arthur Thomson? Highly recommended reading, if you haven't seen it: Dave Langford's TWILL DDU #20, with its full page of little Atom-illos.

Walt: Yes, I thought the Atom cartoons in *TWD* were great; especially after being worried when Arthur had his coronary. (He's fine now, back at work and everything; though he says he has had to give up group sex and shark wrestling.)

Dave: When a person fades away from fandom for a period of years there are usually still threads of contact. During such periods, what were those threads for you, and what kind of a picture did you get as to what might be going on?

Walt: I don't seem to be able to answer this question properly, for much the same reason that an amnesiac cannot say just what it is that he's forgotten. Letters, fanzines, conversations get overlaid and forgotten under the stress of events which caused the *gafia*. If I tried now to set out what I do remember of them I fear I would miss some that were of immense value to me at the time.

However I had one constant contact throughout the period, namely James White, who regularly attended conventions and kept me informed. It was he, and especially his *Exorcists of IF* (published by Terry Hughes) – to my mind the best piece of fannish fiction

ever written – that preserved in my mind the comforting feeling that I had not really left fandom, that I knew where all my friends were and that I was not entirely forgotten, and that I could and would always be a part of fandom.

It's important to remember that in my case *gafia* was not caused by being jaded or disillusioned with fandom in any way. There were only two reasons, one congenital hypertension diagnosed in the mid-sixties which made me reduce my activities (I seem to remember in my retirement message from FAPA that I commented that I had a medical certificate for *gafia*) and then the problems of Northern Ireland, of which you have have heard. Now that I have retired from work I would like to be active in fandom again but I have to take what they call Beta-blocking drugs whose function is to defeat adrenalin, or as we call it, inspiration. This is why my part in fandom today is not only less than I would like, but more erratic; whether or not I reply to a letter or comment on a fanzine depends less on their merit or interest and on whether or not the drugs have the upper hand, and I worry a bit about this.

As to the picture I got of what was going on, well the one of American fandom was vague but it seemed much the same as ever, except more diffuse. As for British fandom I went to the Manchester Convention in 1976, partly as a result of the urgings of James White and partly because of my admiration for Chris Priest's *Inverted World*, and received some contemporary fanzines. I have a carbon of a letter of comment I sent to Greg Pickersgill in June 1976 which begins:

Thanks for sending me *STD* 3. I enjoyed it all, but it made me feel like some Japanese soldier of World War II who emerges hopefully after 30 years in the jungle, only to find the war is still on. I can hear the bullets whizzing past me in all directions, and am only glad that my name is not likely to be on any of them.

Dave: When congenital hypertension and vocational

obligations kept you 'away from it all,' it sounds more like you were forced away rather than intentionally getting away. We can expunge your record of all gafia charges. Charges of gafia are never logged anyway, as it serves no purpose to keep track of something that happens to most everyone.

Yes, it happens that I have heard of the problems of Northern Ireland. Word occasionally filters through, and from diverse sources. The last time of consequence was just a few months ago when Al Curry brought a jar of poteen to a local party. He told me about it, and the story lasted as long as the jar did. At least, when the jar was empty he look alarmed and then wandered off.

Now that you're retired from professional Nudgist activities, which is how you've described senior civil servant duties in dealing with the problems of Northern Ireland, do have any idea where all this might end?

Possibly my question is naïve and requires massaging. You may, for instance, believe that the problems will keep evolving; that they may eventually have a quite different appearance but that they will still be a set of problems. The thrust here is this: now that you've a retired solder, how do you view the battle?

Walt: I don't want to write at length about the NI question. To try and penetrate to the truth is like peeling an onion: there's always another layer underneath, and it makes you cry. However to me at the moment the irreducible core is the geographical fact that N. Ireland is only a few miles from Scotland, and the rest of it isn't. This was so before there were any Catholics or Protestants or Englishmen on the scene, and the history of Ireland before them, stretching back into myth, is one of conflicts between Ulster and the South. (*Cf.* The Cuchulain Saga: it was the hordes of Leinster whom this Ulster warrior fought.) On this interpretation Irish separatism is a major historical error.

Dave: In your vocational life have you ever been able to draw upon the fan side of your experience? Perhaps some skills have their roots in fandom, or matured there. Your experience with the written side of fanac and with the in-person side, which includes two journeys from Northern Ireland to the U.S.A., might have generated or honed something useful in another context when you weren't wearing the propeller beanie.

Walt: The vocational side of my life may have been helped to some extent by experiences in fandom, but my overall impression is of the care I took to make sure that neither aspect of my life impinged on the other. The two compartments remained completely waterproof for nearly 30 years, during which I became quite a senior civil servant. (My equivalent rank in the British Army was Brigadier General.) Then one day I was walking along a corridor with my boss on the way to an important meeting when he said, quite casually, "By the way, Walter, are you Ghod?

With an 'h'?" It emerged that he had just read Brian Aldiss's autobiography, in which fandom and me are mentioned.

This leak could not be repaired. A year or so later, as a result of the Burgess and McLean defections, there was introduced the system called "positive vetting" for intelligence agencies, and they were interested not only in your political opinions, but in your sex life and hobbies, looking for something that might make you vulnerable to blackmail. I answered all their questions truthfully, but without volunteering any additional information, and the man left apparently satisfied. But in three weeks he was back, regarding me with sorrow rather than anger. "You didn't tell me you'd written a book," he said. "And what's with this science fiction fandom thing?"

I've often wondered since if there's now a file about fandom in the recess of M18½.

Dave: I'd be curious as to the the investigator's reaction, if any, about the nature of The Improbably Irish and the fact that it was published under a pseudonym.

As for "And what's with this science fiction fandom thing?", I think we've all had to deal with that question. How did you approach it, and were you able to keep his eyes from crossing or glazing over?

Walt: The investigator regarded it as quite normal for me to use a pseudonym; in fact that is the approved practice here for civil servants indulging in extramural activities that might attract attention. It is of course also easier for the writer, who can say what he wants without having to worry about the reactions of people other than those he is addressing.

I can't remember how I explained fandom, but I recall he wasn't surprised; he said something to the effect that it seemed quite a sensible hobby compared to some he had come across, and I got the impression that the private life of some of my colleagues was bizarre in the extreme.

Dave: It's a familiar scenario that a person gets into fandom through science fiction, believing them to be the same interest. Later he observes the two becoming separate interests, which bump up against each other with warm regards. Still later... well, that varies. I think I've just described a scenario for you as well as for me and a few hundred others. What does science fiction mean to you these days?

Walt: It means something I used to find in Campbell's *Astounding/Analog* before it sank in a cesspool of Dianetics and duckshit: it means books I occasionally come across in the public library, like Tiptree's *Up The Walls Of The World* or Priest's *Inverted World* or the latest Bob Shaw or a Terry Carr anthology, or even a Ben Bova anthology with a Fred Pohl story, which reassure me that I am still a science fiction fan. It also unhappily means long lists of Hugo and Nebula nominations of stories and authors I never heard of.

Dave: *What in particular appealed to you about the two books you mentioned?*

Walt: What appealed to me about those two books was I think they had interesting philosophic or scientific ideas and that they were well written.

Dave: *This is one of those questions that either intrigue you or make your face pinch up. If you could commission any science fiction writer from any point in his or her lifetime to write a SF novel to order, who & when, and what would you say to him?*

Walt: If I could commission a SF novel to order it would be from A.E. Van Vogt before he lay down with the Dianeticists; and it would be a condition that he send the ms. to Ted Sturgeon for a rewrite.

Dave: *It is reasonably safe to advance the perception that the purpose of fandom can be stated only in terms of the person who stops to consider the question. Broader pronouncements seem only to prove that reality is an elusive vision, and to further complicate things it seems true that the purpose is not always a constant within the universe. There's a question in there someplace. Tell me, Walt, have you ever been inspired to envision the purpose of fandom? An answer of "no" will leave us standing around with our bare faces hanging out, wondering what to do with our hands.*

Walt: No. But, I hasten to add, only because the word 'purpose' implies a conscious aim and fandom as a whole does not have that. It certainly has its uses, which are different for different people, and sometimes I think it might be quite important. It is to my mind an influential example of what you might call horizontal organization. Most of the organisations we recognize as such – nations, political parties, trade unions, companies, churches – are vertical in character, located in one place and hierarchically constructed, like tower blocks in the form of ziggurats. They are regarded as organisations by the media, which themselves are vertically organised. But in practice, to the average person the really important organisations are those which are horizontally structured, like the family, the neighbourhood, the factory or office workmate ingroup, the pub or club. This is where his real life is lived, and from his point of view the role of the vertical organisation is to supply essential services, like sewage. The only author I know of who has realised the importance of the horizontal is Nevil Shute, whose novels convey vividly a world of interlocking human relationships, periodically disrupted by the blundering activities of nation states and similar vertical interlopers. In *Trustee From The Toolroom* he actually presents a fandom based on model engineering, and the plot of the book is just a sort of TAFF trip.

Bearing in mind that the commerce of fandom is ideas, who is to say that in the long run it is not more

important than, say, General Motors?

Dave: *I bobbled a moment at the notion that the commerce of fandom is ideas, but the Lexicon Webster bears you out: "idea: a thought, conception, or notion; an impression; a conviction or opinion; a plan of action; an intention or design; a mental picture, sometimes merely imagined without corresponding reality: a vague knowledge; inkling; a fleeting thought or whim." Now I don't bobble anymore. The commerce of fandom is mental pictures, sometimes merely imagined without corresponding reality...*

Good point, though. Vertical and horizontal, or formal and informal. A mix of people with a common interest and no specific program is one of the similarities that applies to much of fandom, and to my taste is one of the better things it offers.

Walt: Many years ago Sid Coleman was invited to a conference of physicists in Istanbul. His ticket allowed for one stopover so he called on us, planted a willow tree and left us a salad bowl. He also told us the classic Jewish joke, which may be summarised as follows:

A Jewish merchant and a Prussian officer were in the same railway carriage on a very long journey in Eastern Europe. Eventually sheer boredom induces the Prussian officer to make conversation. "You Jews," he says, "how is it you're so smart?"

"It's the fish we eat," said the merchant.

"I'd heard about the fish," said the officer, "but Gentiles eat fish too."

"Yes," said the merchant, "but you don't eat the heads, and that's where the virtue of the fish as brainfood is concentrated."

"That sounds reasonable," said the Prussian officer and at the next stop he bought half a dozen dried fish from a vendor on the platform and ate the heads, discarding the rest to the merchant.

So it went on for the next three days of the long journey, until suddenly the Prussian officer exclaimed: "Here, fellow. For three days I've been paying good money for fish heads and you've been getting the best of the fish for nothing. Where's the justice in that?"

"You see?" said the Jew. "It's working already."

Last year Bertie McAvoy visited us and I told her the joke. After she had laughed she said reflectively, "Of course he was right. There's nothing like injustice for sharpening your wits."

So you see, first a New York Jew comes and tells me a story, and then a Polish-Irish girl comes from California to explain it. Can General Motors do as much?

Dave: *I'm not certain, but I don't think so. They seem to spend their time and money crying on the government's shoulder because, in the face of international*

competition, it is no longer possible to successfully market shit. Injustice, apparently, is seen everywhere, and might only be good for sharpening wits when there's an edge to work with.

You've already given one example. When you stop and reflect on the good that came from an association with fandom, what other images immediately jump up?

Walt: There are too many of them to list. If I had to offer one sentence it would be "Fandom is a correspondence course in getting along with people, with yearly *viva voce* examinations." (*Hyphen 17*.)

Dave: *The two Chicago Worldcons and your travelings in the U.S.A. were back in '52 and '62. Memories go through a settling process, and some wind up farther down than others. Certain jewels remain on top, though some may be unpolished or even uncut. What lies on top in your memory grab-bag of those experiences after twenty and thirty years of settling?*

Walt: I no longer seem to have memories of these events in the usual sense. When I read my two trip reports in *Warhoon 28* much of them was quite unfamiliar, and I could think of nothing that was not included. I think that what has happened is that having recorded as completely as I could everything I remembered at the time, I have then subconsciously told my memory that the tapes can now be wiped.

I remember reading an account of a similar phenomenon in the life story of a man who had a photographic memory and perfect retention. He used to earn his living by displaying these gifts, but after several years he got worried at the idea of all this useless information cluttering up his brain. But how to get rid of it, if you have a photographic memory and perfect retention? What he did was visualise each page of information being pinned to an enormous blackboard, and then the whole lot being set fire to and consumed by flames. Whether the information was really destroyed, or merely hidden, in fact the man could no longer remember it in the usual way.



Dean Grennell and Walt Willis (r.) 1962

Dave: *All right, enough of this great mystery. Even I read the incident about Jim Webbert and the ashtray, but I don't remember where, either. I would guess, but right or wrong it would still be a guess. Come clean, now, where did it appear?*

Walt: I can however answer questions when I have documentary evidence to consult, as in this case...

In October 1952 (there is no date on the carbon, but it's clear it was written shortly after I returned from the trip described in *The Harp Stateside*) I wrote to Shelby Vick:

From what little I've heard of reactions to me at the con it seems that I was quiet. Well I was of course, but not just as quiet as all that. I must have been talking to the wrong people. Since it's in all our interests to make out that I not only enjoyed myself (which of course I did) but that I occasionally said something I have screened my memory banks for remarks above the "duhhhh" level that you might like to quote as fillers or something. I know this would sound pretty egotistical to an outsider but I guess we know each other well enough to understand. I don't want people to think you went to all that trouble to bring over a wet blanket.

There followed a dozen or so snatches of dialogue with various people, including the following:

In Bloch's room...

BeaM. "You want an ashtray?"

WAW, tossing his ash out over Chicago, "No, thanks, this one isn't full yet."

It's interesting to notice how time has changed this simple little joke into a sort of legend. Ten years later I was astounded to be told by Terry Carr that it had become part of the repertoire of raconteur Randy Garrett, and alarmed as well as surprised to discover even later that the current version of the story was of a put-down by me of some unidentified neofan. Now, in the most recent version as published in a fanzine only a few months ago, the neofan has become Jim

Webbert. Well, one can understand how that came about, but the truth is that it was not a put-down at all (obviously no one would put down Bea Mahaffey whom we all loved) except of the city of Chicago itself. You have to remember that Chicago in September – at least in September 1952 – was a very hot and dusty place, in which every now and then the wind would blow the litter along the streets. It was for me exactly like the inside of an ashtray, especially the kind with the whirling lid on the top which were common in those days.

Dave: I haven't seen that recent fanzine you refer to, but I did read the story and I would have bet money that Jim Webbert was part of it. Hard to believe that Bea Mahaffey lives just a few miles from me, and I had to write to Northern Ireland to learn the truth...

Walt: Do give her my love and tell her everyone here thinks of her fondly.

Dave: You got it.

I feel that Warhoon #28, the collection of your writings, is the best single document fanzine fandom could offer up if suddenly pressed to show that it had ever produced anything worthwhile. Let's accept that is is one of the very best of all fan publications and that Richard Bergeron did a fine job in putting it together, and then let's zip off to an alternate universe where we can play "what if" without worry that we would disturb anyone. In this other universe a paste-up of Warhoon #28 is handed to you and your whimsy solicited: given your druthers, what might you add to or delete from the publication?

Walt: My reaction to *Wh28* is so subjective that it led me into a reflection on the relationship between a writer and his past work which it would take me far too long to explore. At times it seems I dislike everything in *Wh28* except the bits I have totally forgotten.

*Dave: In the minds of many you are the all-time #1 fan as well as the all-time #1 fanwriter, and most of those who disagree don't do so by much. You've handled this regard well, which in itself has reinforced it. Naturally, to some social morons, the iconoclasts without critical faculties, all this automatically makes you a target. Everyone's a critic, but some people are nicer about it than others. Most are at least civilized, and some of those are also witty. A few play criticism like an abandoned moment in a *Dungeons & Dragons* skirmish. Let's go behind how you deal outwardly with that. In general, what are your reactions when something in print refers to you in a way that makes your eyes bug out?*

Walt: I don't think I'm different from anyone else. I greet praise with a willing if transitory suspension of disbelief. When abused, I believe it and cry a little inside.

Dave: Going back to that 1976 letter of comment to Greg Pickersgill, your next two paragraphs might shed some light on the subject:

"It occurs to me, as it evidently has to Jonh Ingham, that the English have a unique gift, if you can call it that, for being offhandedly rude. It's not just a fannish thing, because I've noticed it at mundane conferences in the remarks of speakers from the floor. Possibly it's one of those ruling class characteristics which have permeated down through the population: a lady was never supposed to show her underwear unintentionally, nor a gentleman to be unintentionally rude. Whereas of course the non-Wasp Americans and Irish lack the necessary self-assurance, for historical reasons. Americans tend to insult one another in public only in the heat of emotion, and the Irish only when they have thought of something particularly clever to say.

Malcolm Edwards' Mancon report is a case in point, not only the report itself but your editorial reaction to it. I thought it well written, perceptive and full of interest, and I agreed to some extent with most of the generalisations he makes or quotes, but it would not have been natural for me to say anything to hurt the feelings of people who have worked hard to give pleasure to others; unless of course I'd thought of some insult so clever I couldn't bear not to use it.

Would you like to see more in your mailbox, given the understanding that the load coming in could far exceed the load going out?

Walt: Yes. I always like getting mail, except for one stressful period which passed, but was a Terrible Warning. I have always been curious about fandom and even the worst fanzine has some interest for me because it is generally a sincere message from the soul of another human being and should be treated with reverence. Sorry to sound so pretentious.

Dave: That doesn't sound pretentious at all. To me it sounds warm, and reflects maturity and understanding. After finishing Warhoon #28 I decided that WAW stood for Warmth & Wit, and I hope this observation doesn't server to make your ass pucker up. Everyone is "pretentious" on occasion, but the word describes you less than it does most everyone else I know. For example, in The Star King Jack Vance was describing many fans we both know when he mused: "There are also those who...ensconce themselves on a thunderous crag of omniscience and, with protestations of humility which are either unconvincing or totally absent, assume the obligation of appraisal, commendation, derogation or denunciation of their contemporaries." I sense that you know yourself too well to fall into such horse's-ass posturing.

Let's stick with the subject of pretentious for a minute, and move in directions I don't think you've

heard before.

I wrote an editorial for Gallimaufry #1, September 1983, which includes the following about an 18-year-old me attending his first convention, the 1962 Chicon III:

I met Willis at that one. I must say that Walt made about as favorable a first impression as I've ever run across. He was, in my mind, the kind of person who chose to sparkle rather than dazzle, given that I viewed him as capable of making the choice. I viewed his choice as a byproduct of his relaxed energy, his patience, and his interest in people. In a situation where he was with a teenager who wished to tilt the conversation toward wordplay, he chose to give-and-take rather than overshadow. One thing that pleasantly surprised me, and as I teenager I watched for it like a hawk, was that his demeanor showed no discomfort in shucking around at a level far below his capabilities. Twenty-one years later, and the lasting impression he made has not resulted in the performance that I might desire in my own dealings with pubescent youngies. I have a tendency to stay in the bar, where they can't get in.

The second major impression you made on me took place when I finished Warhoon #28. You might call in a reinforcement of the first impression. The aspects of warmth, humility, and emotional balance struck me harder than they should have because they opened a window on some of my past sins, and the view hadn't been clear before. While I appreciated your writings for the usual reasons, to me they also had impact on a personal level. It was a matter of style and approach, and to be succinct about it I suddenly became aware of how much horse's-ass was in my makeup. Essentially, Warhoon #28 is the story of one fan's odyssey through fandom, and I was impressed by the way you comported yourself. As a consequence of reading it I've slowly - too slowly - been making changes in my own comportment. They were, and still are, overdue.

Of those who expressed admiration for Warhoon #28, I wonder if I'm the only one who benefited in this particular regard? If so, it's a shame, as there are many of my contemporaries who could use such a benefit...

As I said, I don't think you've heard this before. It must be disconcerting to stand accused of being a good example.

Walt: I feel awed and a little frightened by what you say here, but that sort of thing is a great comfort and pleasure to hear at my time of life. Thanks.

Dave: *The last time I frightened anyone was the first time I publicly agreed with something Ted White said. The last time I awed anybody was after I saw the FAAN Award award and wrote Buck Coulson that it looked like the end result of a robot horse-fucking two pounds of playdough, and he published the remark. When I next*

have cause to refer to the last time either type of thing took place, I can point to the same incident for both ("Oh yes, I awed and frightened Walt at the same time. No, it wasn't easy. In fact, it wasn't even intentional.")

How a person feels about his writing is always subject to time and place and inclination and whether he thinks it's in his blood. Are you nebulating on any writing for the future, such as articles or another book?

Walt: Not really. I did once for a few minutes contemplate writing the Great Ulster Novel, but the foolishness soon passed. The piece of grit which gave rise to this conception was excreted as the little piece *A Kind Of Immortality* in the current *Microwave* (Terry Hill). I thought about the difficulty I would have in writing a novel and identified one aspect of it as the impossibility of visualising the readership. I first noticed this phenomenon when I mailing the second issue of my first fanzine. I found that my attitude to the just-produced fanzine depended on whose issue I was reading, so that I could be depressed or pleased depending on whose reaction I was anticipating. Later, when writing columns and articles, I found myself mentally scanning all the potential readers I knew before settling on a word or phrase which would have the maximum appeal to them and was staggered by the complexity of what the mind was capable of in a millisecond. Nowadays with personal computers and all, the concept is commonplace, but the fact remains as that as Deindorfer points out fan writing is an exceedingly complex mode of communication.

Dave: *Right, it doesn't take long in fandom to realize that you are no longer just writing for yourself. The more you know your audience, the more you write to share what it is that you're writing. Whatever is to be communicated or shared is better executed if you make use of what you know about your readership.*

The enjoyment of written material is an interaction between reader and writer. It's easier to engage reader interest in fandom because generally you know more of and more about the readership, and can work or play with it more effectively. Forewarned is forearmed, knowledge is power, and all like that. Perhaps it's a touch uncomfortable to go back to when you didn't know who was reading what you wrote, but whether the medium is book or fanzine you could at least count on visualizing the same core readership. The difference is the relative size of the core compared to the whole onion...

Wrenching ourselves back to the subject of time and place and inclination, but not to the possibility that you would write another book, it seems obvious that you will now play fanwriting by ear. With specific regard to articles, how much is Walt Willis motivated by inspiration and how much by the editorial weapons of plying, wheedling, and cajoling? It remains a little-known truth in fandom that the best writers are seldom asked to write. Would you occasionally entertain a

request for an article, or would you prefer to generate articles as you own spirit moves you?

Walt: I have hardly ever been “moved by my own spirit” to write an article; usually they are painfully extracted by a request or commitment. I meant it when I said somewhere that I wasn’t really a writer. I used to wonder if that would change when I retired from my job, which involved quite a lot of writing, but there’s not much sign of it yet. Indeed for the first few years of my retirement I felt such a revulsion from my job (which I had thought I quite liked) that I found it almost impossible to write anything. However I think that I can detect signs that this is wearing off, and indeed a couple of months ago I actually wrote something (the LoC in *Still It Moves 4*) which I didn’t have to, which formed itself in my head first, and which I liked. I can’t remember when that happened last. And the little piece in *Microwave 5* had some of those characteristics too, so maybe I’ll turn into a writer yet.

Dave: *Perhaps it’s a vanity that I consider myself a writer, though an amateur, and I use ‘amateur’ in the original French meaning of someone who pursues a subject solely for the love of it. I’m also a tennis player, though no one ever told me I had to be good to be interested, and a chess player (“Of course you’ve never seen that response before. I just invented it.”). And to approach the subject from yet another direction, while flying on gossamer wings, we both know deep in our vanity that we have written better than some of the things people get paid for, and for that matter we’ve each been paid for some of the things we’ve written. The New Merriam-Webster (argument from authority...) says a writer is one who writes, especially as a business or occupation, but not necessarily so. What is it you feel is missing, that you don’t consider yourself a writer amongst all the other labels that might befall you?*

Was James Fenimore Cooper a writer, and Walter A. Willis is not? The mind bobbles.

Walt: I don’t consider myself a real writer because I so very seldom feel the spontaneous urge to write something: whereas, as I understand it, your natural born writer is never happy except when scribbling away like a Gibbon.

Dave: *If this is so, Walt, what motivated your relatively large output of fanwriting in the Fifties?*

Basically, writing is one of my interests and I indulge it when I’m moved to and able to. If I’m moved to, I’m usually kicked-off by something and usually that’s either a request or an idea. When it’s an idea, I need a format and a market. When it’s a request, I need an idea.

Robert Moore Williams had “the spontaneous urge to write.” One of the things he wrote was: “Writing seems to be in my blood. Words appear to stew out of me. There is really nothing I can do about this except

direct them at a typewriter and hope they will emerge in the form of stories or books.” As David Hulan put it: “Yes, and he did it without the intervention of a brain anywhere along the way.” Whether that made Williams a “natural born real writer” is a question that would make us both pause, but he was obviously a writer. And, generally, a bad one. Even bad writers are writers.

I suspect that how much or how little you write, or are urged or motivated to do it, speaks only of degree and not kind. Degree fluctuates; kind is constant. If you do write, you’re a writer, and if you write well, then you’re a good writer. Matters financial and motivational and numerical and locational and so on are relegated to secondary and tertiary information. If it looks like a duck...

A writer you are, sir, and a fine one. You deserve the label more than most.

Speaking of your writing, somewhere in the later -’50s/early-’60s I remember a mild surprise when I tumbled across a quotation by you in an issue of Reader’s Digest. How did that come about?

Walt: What happened was that Rotsler asked me for quotes to send to *Reader’s Digest*, etc., and eventually they began to appear in various places. (Bob Shaw found one of his remarks translated into Spanish in a Mexican edition of *Coronet*.) I asked WR what about the money and he replied by pointing out that he had secured us immortality. Hence the *Hyphen* bacover quote, “AFTER IMMORTALITY, WHAT?”.

Dave: *Indeed. And now we’re almost after this dialog. Any last thoughts or retrofits?*

Walt: I’ve no improvements to suggest to the interview: it seems to read quite well, and certainly from my point of view it was one of the most painless, indeed pleasant forms of fanac I’ve come across yet.

Dave: *I’ve enjoyed having this correspondence with you, and I’ll continue looking forward to encountering your typeface elsewhere in fanzine fandom.*

As of this moment it’s been 21 years since the last time you and I spoke directly to each other. Now that we’re seeing more activity by you in fanzine fandom, hopefully less time will pass before it happens again. •



Notes From Byzantium

Eric Mayer

Not Always What They Seem

Even if you're not published yet, if you read the right blogs you know something about the realities of trying to make a living by writing fiction. If you read my blog, for example, you know (in a vague sort of way) that a half dozen excellently reviewed mystery novels from a high profile indie publisher does not necessarily a living make. If you read [Mark Terry's blog](#)¹, you know (in much greater detail) how you can be making a living writing, but not entirely from fiction.

Just as I'm a lot less forthcoming about my finances than Mark is about his, there are plenty of writers who are even less forthcoming than me.

Writers aren't required to make public financial disclosures and most don't. Just because writers might give the impression (purposefully or not) that they are deriving their sustenance from their fiction doesn't make it so.

When I was a kid I assumed that the writers whose books lined the library and bookstore shelves made their living by writing. Why not? Adults did stuff and got paid for it. That's how it worked. My dad left the house to teach every morning and so he could afford a place to live and groceries. One friend's dad sold cars, another's went to some office to do something or other. Why would writing books be any different, particularly since books were so much more important than cars and schools and whatever people did in offices?

By the time I was in college I knew better. (Goodbye SF novels, hello law school.) And the older I get, the less writers there are who make a living at the job.

Some writers simply don't mention their work life outside writing, and why should they? But there are a few who – to put it kindly – don't exactly go out of their way to disabuse those who might get the impression that they don't need to do anything but commune with the muse.

Then too, the fact that someone does write fiction full-time is no guarantee there's a living being made. Some writers will be very quick to let the world know

they do nothing but write but not nearly so quick to reveal that their gainfully employed spouse brings home pretty much every oinking bit of bacon. Well, the former information is much more interesting than the latter, I suppose.

I can see it might be a good policy to keep readers in the dark about one's literary compensation. A potential book buyer might well ask, why should I waste money on a novel by this guy who's so inept he could make more flipping burgers at MacDonald's if he'd cut his hair to get the job? (Which he's too stupid to do.)

If, however, you aspire to write fiction, are wondering whether to give up the day job right now or in the future, are feeling discouraged that you might never be able to write full time, or generally depressed about wherever it is you perceive yourself to be on the writing accomplishment scale, it is good to keep in mind that when it comes to published writers and their livelihoods, things are not always what they seem.

Sitting Cat

If there are typos in this entry I have an excuse for a change – it's because I'm working around a cat. Sabrina has insisted on sitting in my lap a lot the past few weeks. During the summer, when the weather's hot, she hardly approaches, but as soon as the cold sets in she's on me constantly. I think you could estimate the outside temperature by timing how long she's in my lap during the day.

Why I allow myself to be inconvenienced by a heat seeking feline I don't know, but I cross my legs to give her a seat, angle my chair slightly to the side so she doesn't bump her head on the keyboard by accident (even though that gives me a sore shoulder). I even have to pick her up. She sits on the floor and stares wistfully at me until I do.

Well, she *is* fifteen. Not as nimble as she once was. She goes back to another era in my life, way back to the end of my first marriage. A neighbor found kittens in her garage and held a garage sale. Kittens were on special. Free.

Sabrina was one of those innumerable sale items my ex thought she couldn't live without.

I'd like to reminisce more but I need to get a paper towel and wipe the cat drool off my space bar.

More Seasoning

Whenever I write on the Internet about the seasons (which I do much too often) it always, belatedly, occurs to me how parochial my viewpoint is. As a lifelong resident of the northeastern United States, I've only experienced one set of seasons and the autumns and springs I describe, which to me seem so natural, are nothing like those experienced by people who live elsewhere in the world.

It's a reminder of how easy it is to forget that what

we happen to be accustomed to is not necessarily normal or the way things should be or have to be. Yet we all tend to fall into that way of thinking occasionally, about certain subjects.

There was a time when you couldn't discuss the weather with people who lived on the other side of the country or the ocean. The people you discussed the weather with were used to the same weather you were. It must have made things easier.

Too many people today spend too much energy concerning themselves with subjects they don't actually encounter in their own lives, surprised and offended that the moral or intellectual climate is different, someplace in the world, from what they're used to, forgetting that what they're used to, like the falls and springs they experience, is not the measure of what is normal or right or good.

Maybe someday more people will just accept that, like the weather, things aren't the same everywhere. Then again, maybe someday we'll see six foot snowdrifts in Georgia.

No Multi Tasking For Me

I don't have a multi tasking brain. I got my brain a long time ago, before they managed to stuff all those new features into the cranium. NASA hadn't even started in on miniaturization when I was assembled. Kids today can watch TV, do their advanced calculus homework and explore a Gremlin castle on level 56 of the newest computer game while listening to their iPod. (Whatever an iPod is.) Or so I've been told. Me, I can't maintain two lines of thought at the same time.

Last week Mary and I began to put together some ideas for the next novel. A change of pace. Not really a mystery. Set in 1895 London.

I went ahead and wrote the prologue and the first short chapter. Seeing as how we don't have a complete plot or even know what the characters look like yet, the 2,000 words will probably all go out the window, but I always like to get something concrete down early on. Having the beginning (or a possible beginning) actually written makes a new project seem more real to me.

But, of course, with my non multi-tasking brain, all ideas for blogs were immediately deleted. Too bad I can't upgrade. These brains are pretty impressive things (even the obsolete models), but technical support is awful.

Anyway, my thoughts seem kind of sluggish this morning. Low on system resources. Time for a caffeine reboot.

Helpful Form Rejections

An entry in [The Diana](#)² caught my attention:

"Yesterday I got a form-ish rejection, made somehow more depressing by the fact that this was the second rejection in a row from this editor where my name was misspelled. Okay, maybe I'm being overly touchy, but two misspellings in a row was a bit

of a sting. Can't really explain why, but for some reason that particular bounce really got me down."

When you're face to face with an impersonal form rejection letter, you're usually thinking, "Rejection just doesn't get any worse than this." But, of course, it does.

I never had my name misspelled but I recall the days when Fantastic sent out a form rejection with about two dozen boxes which could be checked off, to helpfully explain why your story was being bounced. Stuff like:

- Wooden characters
- Stilted dialogue
- Clichéd
- Trite
- Bad grammar
- Run-on sentences
- Flaking whiteout
- Poor paper quality

I still recall getting a rejection form on which the reader had considerably taken the time to check off every last box. And as if that was not helpful enough, he or she had gone to the trouble of scribbling in extra helpful comments, such as "hackneyed," "dreadful descriptions," "turgid prose."

The slightly personalized form rejection I got from a small literary type magazine seemed pleasant by comparison. I had sent in an essay involving my grandfather. On the bottom of the form the editor scrawled: **No more grandfather stories!!!** •

Eric's column is extracted from his blog at <http://www.journalscape.com/ericmayer>

1. <http://www.journalscape.com/Markterry>

2. <http://www.journalscape.com/RedDiana/2005-02-01-19:52>



Found In Collection

Christopher Garcia

This is the first “Found in Collection” where I didn’t actually find the thing in the museum’s collection. I found it while I was searching to add things to the museum’s collection, so it counts!

The time was December 2005: America was at war, Christmas shopping was aided by the Internet, and gay cowboys were all the rage. I had asked The Little One, my girlfriend’s daughter Evelyn, if she wanted anything special and she said that she wanted two books, one on spaceships and one on unicorns. I found the spaceship book, but the unicorns were eluding me like some mythical beast...which I guess they are. Work made a bold decision to send me out in holiday shopping mode to find computer books at a large used book store in San Jose. Specifically, they wanted older computer humor books. I took the challenge and drove down there.

Recycle Bookstore is one of those San Jose traditions that seems to make good money and no one but the hard cores will admit to going there. I used to pass through at least once a week when I was living a few blocks away, but since I moved, I’d only made it once or twice. I went through their humor section (good stuff, nothing computer) and their computer section (good stuff, nothing humor) and then remembered that I had to look for the unicorn book. I headed over to the section where they kept graphic novels and fantasy art books and started peeking through, looking for anything. While I was stuck on a Boris Vallejo book for a bit, something caught my eye. It was a hardbound book that had 1976 MidAmeriCon on it. I didn’t know what it was, but I bought it along with a copy of *When Harley Was One* for the museum so that they’d not be totally disappointed.

I didn’t get a chance to look at the book until I was home at my desk on the second floor of the former SGI Marketing Headquarters. Sitting there, when I should have been cataloging, I discovered that this hard-cover, beautiful piece of work was the programme book from the 1976 WorldCon! I’ve been to a lot of cons in a lot of places, and I don’t remember there ever being a hard-cover programme book. Not only was it hard-cover, but it was beautiful. There was art all over it from the likes of Tim Kirk (who I recently met and is a very nice guy), Alicia Austin, Bill Rotsler, ATom and more! It was amazing! Just skimming through you could see that this

edition was amazingly well put together, far better than any of the WorldCon programme books I have at home (2003 Toronto, 2002 San Jose, 1993 San Francisco) and it was doing exactly the same thing as any of the others.

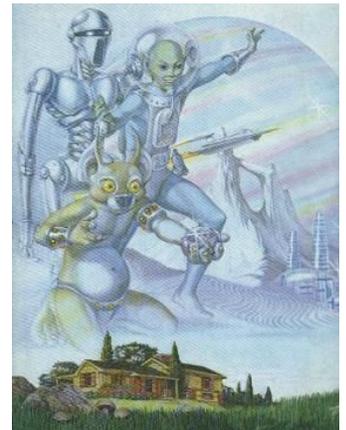
The guests were some guy named Bobby Heinlein, and his bio made him out to be a big deal. George Barr was the Artist, and Bob Tucker was the Toastmaster. Tucker’s bio was the best of them, but it was the little things that really got me excited.

There’s a fiction piece from Harlan Ellison, and while I’m not a huge fan of the Little Man, it was still a nice touch for a WorldCon programme book. There was a complete (as of June 1st) list of attendees. I went through and counted nearly 100 people who I’d met personally who were there. There was a notice that the N3F had a fan lounge, something that they’d never do today. They had an amazing film programme, featuring some truly awful classics (*The Incredible Shrinking Man*, as an example) and some wonderful films of the 1950s (like *The Day The Earth Stood Still*) and later (*THX-1138*). There were a couple I hadn’t seen, but I know that they’re those kind of films that you’d see on old Late Night Creature Feature shows.

The thing that got me most was at the bottom of a page with a bunch of other things on various lounges and parties. There was a note that said *Star Wars*, and of course, my eyes went right to it. They said that there’d be a room full of props and they’d be showing some footage. They also said that the prop master, the producer and one of the stars would be there. The name they mentioned was Mark Hamill.

Now, I’m not as big on the lore of 1970s fandom as I should be, but I’d never heard of Mark Hamill being at WorldCon. I know he wasn’t famous, so folks probably chatted him up and had no idea that he’d be a big deal in less than a year, but still, how awesome is that? I’d not known that George Lucas, who has said some nutty things about *Star Wars* fans in the recent past, would ever think of sending folks to WorldCon (and he was even mentioned in the ad).

So, that was the best find I’d ever made while trying to make a find in something that wasn’t in the collection. Yes, it’s a cheat, I know, but still, it was very cool. Maybe another WorldCon will do a hard-cover programme guide that’s as beautiful and well put together as this one, but somehow, I seriously doubt it. •



Don't Pass Him By

Peter Sullivan

Okay, so some of you will have cottoned on by now to the fact that I am a bit of a Beatles fan. Why there should be such an instant loss of street cred in admitting to this I don't know. It's not as if it's the early "mop top" stuff that first attracted me, but the later "meaningful" stuff, especially from *Sgt. Pepper* onwards. And this latter body of work is quite easily as good as Dylan and his ilk (in fact, "Hey, You've Got to Hide Your Love Away" from *Help!* is a rather wicked Dylan parody by Lennon). But of course, the Beatles committed the ultimate sin in the aging hippie's book – they were popular.

Anyway, no need to worry. I don't intend to inflict too many Beatlemania articles on you. There is a large body of Beatles literature, and I don't see the point in parroting much of what has already been said. I am only likely to burst into print where my views go significantly against the received wisdom. Such as over Ringo.

For many people, Ringo Starr is the joke Beatle. Unable to drum, unable to sing, unable to write songs, he is seen as just an appendage to the rest of the group. Critics gleefully point out that he was reduced to the role of tambourine player on the "Please Please Me" single, as the producer George Martin was sufficiently unimpressed with his abilities to bring in a session drummer.

But Ringo was an essential member of the Beatles team. His drumming ability has been much knocked, but people fail to realise the role of a drummer in a band like the Beatles. The Beatles were not about producing as heavy as possible straight rock and roll. With Lennon & McCartney songs, the melody and even (*shock horror*) the words are as important as the rock beat. Thus, the Beatles required a drummer who knew when *not* to ham it up, and when to leave certain drum licks understated.

And when a song calls for frenetic bashing and a strong drum line, Ringo can oblige. Just listen to the drums on "Matchbox," especially the vigorous live version recorded for the BBC's *Pop Go The Beatles* series.

Which leads us to the topic of Ringo's singing. Whilst not up to the standards of the others, Ringo's nasal tones were ideal for certain types of rhythm & blues numbers. Lennon & McCartney were quick to see the potential of writing a "Ringo-type of song" for each album, culminating in the classics "Yellow Submarine" on *Revolver* and "With a Little Help From My Friends" on *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band*.

Ringo managed to write a couple of his own songs

towards the end of the Beatles' group history. Excluding the part-writing credit for "What Goes On," Ringo's first song was "Don't Pass Me By," a nicely off-beat love song on the *White Album*, followed up by "Octopus's Garden" on *Abbey Road*. Neither are numbered amongst the great Beatles classics, but both are well worth their place on their respective albums.

What it comes down to in the end is Ringo's personality. He was the nice chap, just doing his job. He stayed as far away as possible from the group politics which split the band up. In a group of three individualists, he was the team player. The girls did not scream for Ringo as they did for the others. But in terms of his image and personality, he was as important a member of the group as any of the others. Considering the already large egos of the other members of the group, having a Keith Moon style self-publicist on drums would probably have spilt the group even earlier.

Perhaps Ringo's public persona probably comes across clearest in the Beatles' films. In *A Hard Day's Night*, it is Ringo who befriends the lonely boy and persuades him to return home. In the psychedelic adventure of *Yellow Submarine*, it is Ringo who first agrees to help Old Fred from Pepperland from the Blue Meanies. And it is Ringo who (despite opposition from the others) who brings along the lonely Nowhere Man, who in the end saves them all. Although this is fiction, it is indicative of the way Ringo was seen by the fans.

It's possible to argue that Ringo's talents were never fully utilised in the group. Although by no means as artistically frustrated as, say, George Harrison (who had a triple album of previously unreleased songs out within months of the split), he certainly managed quite a reasonable solo career – with a little bit of help from his friends. He was never going to be a right-on megastar like John, but he was certainly a competent journeyman.

In fact, his 1973 solo L.P. *Ringo* is probably one of the better Beatle solo efforts. As the only ex-Beatle still on speaking terms with all the others, he was able to cajole Paul, George and John into lending a hand for separate tracks. Indeed, "I'm The Greatest," written by John, is virtually a Beatles reunion track, featuring Ringo, John, George and Billy Preston (pianist on "Get Back"), with only Paul missing.

So I don't feel that it's fair to write Ringo off as the hanger-on, the drummer who couldn't drum. His understated style was ideal for some of the smoother Lennon & McCartney ballads, and he could rock with the best of them when required. His personality, as the team player in a group of individualists, kept him out of the bitter divisions which were to eventually split the group. And he is basically my favourite Beatle.

What do you mean, you've already guessed? •



(Originally published in *C'est Magnifique* # 75, October 1989.)

Epistles

Lettercolumn

Earl Kemp

Dave, thanks for sending me *Catchpenny Gazette*. I hate you. You look so good and talk so real.

Your childhood memoirs remind me of similar events. I also did one of those pony photos when I was just a little kid. I never even once wondered what sort of perverted things the photographer did with that poor pony and I think you must be pretty screwed up inside like most everyone I know especially me. The bit about hospitalizations, tonsils, etc. also happened to me, with a bit of a twist ... a devoted Munchausen's syndrome by proxy mother who kept prescribing all kinds of things for me that I didn't need.

Anyway, you did a great job with the issue and I'm sorry about that. Hold back a little on the perfection for the next issue. •

I hate you too, Earl, and your fanzine el. Hugs and Kisses.

Brad Foster

Loved Locke's used book store tale. I recall similar semi-sleazy used paper shops of my younger days. I think the last time I found one of those was about twenty years ago. Still lots of used stores around, but much more organized and cleaned up, and the owners seem to be aware of the value of everything, no "everything a buck" type of inventory that was always worth the time to dig around in, looking for some hidden treasure. sigh

In re [Eric's] "Dangers of Digitalization," I'm certainly not one of the folks who totally hate modern technology, but I also don't think anything that has been developed yet is the perfect substitute for permanent reproduction on hard paper. Aside from the usual arguments I read about the dangers of electronic copies (loss of material at each electronic transfer; no longer having the equipment to access the information contained), I'll also toss in the paper is much tougher when it comes to the ravages of time. I've old beat up, water logged, horribly-handled books that can still be read, the contents brought up whenever I want them. I've also had to toss out tons of cassettes, discs, floppies and whatnot that for whatever reason took some kind of blow, or got damp, and the *entire* contents were now totally gone. Yep. Use all the cool new technology, but if you want to make sure what

you are doing lasts, make some paper copies and put them in a few different places. (Come to think of it, that's a pretty good description of publishing a zine. You write down your thoughts, you make a bunch of hard copies, and you mail them off to various locations, thus increasing the chances of those ideas surviving longer than you yourself might.) •

As far as I know, Robert Lichtman is still printing out copies of CPG, so there are at least two paper copies floating around, separated by a couple of thousand miles. And I save multiple copies of the PDF files and underlying word-processing files a couple of different places, Just In Case.

Chris Garcia

Eric Mayer mentions George Pal's classic *War of the Worlds*. I watched it all the time when I was a kid and I rewatched it recently, instead of seeing that lame Spielberg remake, and I wasn't too impressed. Ann Robinson was a hotty. She was really a great actress too.

For me, the question of digitization isn't a tough one. I *can* look at all the old formats (even some of the really obscure ones) anytime I go to work. It's the biggest advantage of being a Computer Historian. I've looked at a bunch of the old disks I had from when I was a kid, plus one or two old disk-based magazines, and I've always had a good time doing it. The key is to save to something that currently isn't going to die anytime soon. For example, saving to CD-ROM is a safe bet, but DVD-ROM probably isn't going to be the safest of formats. Strangely, one of the safest and most likely to survive and be readable is punched cards.

I love typewriters. I remember reading *The Hemmingway Hoax* and being so excited because we had that exact typewriter in the collection of the museum. I've owned about 20 or so typewriters over the years, but sadly, never a Selectric, which is the one that I've always wanted to have. I've bought many Underwoods from thrift stores over the years, and even more large adding machines. Those suckers are heavy!

Back in the 1960s my Dad had a desktop adding machine/calculator that was, I suppose, fairly high-tech for the time since it actually had an "electronic display." But in those pre-LED days, each column had 9 separate elements to display numbers, stacked on top of each other. You could get some really funky 3-D effects with it!

How long has it been since I've heard the words Stag Movie. No one uses it anymore. I wish we could go back to the days when we gave all things related to porn nice titles.

I have no fear of a Mass Crowd of fans popping up at the Museum like Peter says. I've asked a lot of fans to pop by for a tour more than once and seldom do any turn up. I'd love to be able to give my SF-heavy tour, but noooooo ... they never come in. •

Eric Mayer

Wonderful photo on the cover. There's a quality of loneliness about those lights in an empty parking lot. I've noticed them often but never thought they'd make a picture. And it's accentuated by the water (I think) with the reflections behind.

Nice story by Dave Locke. Man, he was writing great stuff when I wasn't even grown up and he's not all that much older than me. Used book stores can be weird. Not surprising they can come and go like magic. How anyone made a dime off some I've been in I'll never know. There was one where I was going to college which used to let you fill a grocery bag with coverless sf books and magazines for a quarter. I think the owner considered it cheaper than the trash pick up. That store vanished in a flood and never reopened.

Your reminiscences hit home. They were either beautifully done or I'm getting to be a blubbing, over-emotional old man – well, probably both. I suppose people of a similar age will share similar memories. Meyer's Lake sounded eerily familiar. My parents ran Mayer's Grove, a lakeside picnic place. No rides, just tables and pavilions, a boat launch, a bit of beach.

Hanson's Amusement Park was a short distance away. You could see it across the lake. It was a larger park than the one you describe, but not much. We didn't picnic there because, of course, we had our own place for picnics, but I loved the rides, particularly the miniature train and the Whip and the arcade where you could have a penny squashed and imprinted with the Gettysburg Address or operate a miniature crane to snag trinkets – great trinkets like ceramic monkeys that smoked miniature cigarettes. Last I saw the

guttured concrete shell of the arcade remained, along with the platform where the Whip used to be and a few remnants of the wooden roller coaster, including the first big hill.

It seems a shame that young people these days will miss a lot of the "smaller" pleasures we enjoyed growing up. Now everything has to be big to be good, from Wal-Mart to King's Island. The last time I was back to my hometown (Canton, Ohio) many years ago, I checked on Meyer's Lake. I knew that it had been closed for a long time; it's now a housing development. No big surprise, I guess...

I can't remember what I thought about things when I was very young, or what I envisioned my future would be like. I don't think I ever came to grips with the idea of growing up. I was constantly lost inside my own head and still am I guess. My dad, who taught school for years, wore a suit and tie. I did for awhile, until I left the corporate world (or rather was asked to leave) In the past seven years I've worn a suit and tie only once, last year, to my Dad's funeral. The time before it was for my aunt's funeral. My dad, who didn't have a suit and tie by the time of my aunt's death, bought them specially for her funeral with the stipulation that he could also be buried in them, which he was. •

Mark Plummer

Well, if it's any help in propping you up in your conceit, I printed off a copy of the latest CPG. Took for ever, mind, with the printer virtually running at minutes per page rather than vice versa. No idea why this should be as it's not a particularly large file or



anything. Still, looks nice; I always think *CPG* is a very elegant fanzine and is certainly worth turning into hard copy.

You say you're considering reverting to a design optimised for on-screen reading but surely it's not an either/or situation. Why not offer both print and on-screen versions? I mean, I don't want to devalue the design work or anything, but one of the beauties of the electronic medium is that you're not locked in to a particular presentation; you can take the same text and cut it several different ways if there's a reason for doing so.

While I particularly enjoy the "mechanics" of designing and laying out an issue, I don't enjoy it quite enough to do two different versions. What I may decided to do is to design one format that can be viewed on-screen or printed out, using the simple expedient of a landscape 8½ x 11 page size. In the past I used several different page sizes for the on-screen versions of CPG, none of which would print out very well. (For my e-APA zine I use the size that John Foyster pioneered in eFNAC of 9.85 x 6.93 inches, which appears to be an optimal size for on-screen display.) While I'm not a big fan of 8½ x 11 landscape PDFs, it seems to be the size that would work best for both uses - and it can be printed fairly conveniently by non-US readers if they desire. It doesn't produce the more conventional vertical layout we're used to, but I guess it's the best compromise I can think of.

I did hesitate over commenting on Eric Mayer's 'The Dangers of Digitalisation' as I fear that, taken in tandem with recent letters to *Vegas Fandom Weekly*, it might seem that I'm obsessed or something. Still, I should say that I'm actually in agreement with Eric's basic point that it's important to keep updating anything stored electronically to viable media. I recall hearing Peter Nicholls talking about creation of the 1993 second edition of the *Science Fiction Encyclopaedia* where they initially tried to work off the electronic copy of the first (1979) edition. Even specialist data recovery firms couldn't read the disks.

The problem, I think - and I should say that I've not read the Rall article to which Eric links (drawback of reading *CPG* on paper, I guess) - is where there's a conversion from paper to electronic storage: basically, has it been done properly and, if it hasn't, will anybody notice before it's too late? Some interesting examples of this are to be found in Nicholson Baker's book *Double Fold: Libraries and the Assault on Paper* which is mostly concerned with the habit of libraries to microfilm their runs of newspapers and other print journals and then dispose of the hardcopies. I was particularly struck by what he refers to as 'The Ace Comb Effect' and the Library of Congress definition whereby a microfilm of a **mostly** complete run of a paper or journal is deemed to be complete. Thus, several differently incomplete collections might be

replaced by multiple copies of a still incomplete microfilm. There's a specific example with the *New York Sun* where the microfilmed copy is missing a six-month run from 1862. It seems that all libraries that had collections of this paper have 'upgraded' to the microfilm version and it's now quite possible that the issues from that six-month period has now been entirely lost. The book also features a plate showing a quite wonderful illustration from a 1911 *New York World* which is reduced to an undifferentiated blob in the microfilmed copy. •

John Purcell

Allow me to inconvenience more electrons in your direction.

Thanks for an enjoyable read in *CPG* #13. Your inclusion of Eric Mayer's writings is fast becoming one of my favorite bits in the zines I have been reading in recent months. This issue's installment is no exception, especially when he writes about cats (we have seven) and "typewriter heroes." I am surprised that he never mentioned the typewriter used by Harry Warner, Jr. for decades; in my mind, Harry is a famous writer. If I remember correctly from an old issue of my zine from the 70s and 80s, *This House*, Harry once said that he used a Royal manual typewriter, and that he never really cared for electric typewriters; he didn't like the 'feel' of the keyboard because you didn't have to smash so hard on the keys which took all the physicality out of the writing process. Makes sense when you think about it. Ned Brooks, of course, had that mammoth typewriter collection housed in its own building in his back yard in Newport News, Virginia. I am assuming that it's still there, and it makes me wonder if he's going to bequeath it to a college for posterity since there must be some historical and antique specimens in that typewriter collection. In early September of 1982, instead of going to the Worldcon, I was in the neighborhood, so to speak, being in nearby Virginia Beach on vacation visiting fan Leslie David, so I could have visited Ned and seen the collection. Go figure, but I still had a great time.

And the collection theme continues with Dave Locke's contribution. All of us fan-types probably love rambling through used bookstores in hopes of the rare find. Back in the late 70's, I was in on probably one of the weirdest book collecting acquisitions. The owner of J&J O'Donahue's Bookstore in Anoka, Minnesota had a garage full of books - stacks and stacks of them - that he wanted to unload for landfill since it was fast becoming winter and he wanted to put his car in the garage, or so he told Lee Pelton, Steve Glennon, and myself. Not wanting to send an untold multitude of precious books to such an ignominious fate, we offered to buy the entire garage full of books - some 3,000 of them - for \$30: ten bucks from each of us. We split the hoard into thirds for storage and sorting purposes in each of our houses

(basements, usually), and then spent a month of sorting through them all into stacks each of us wanted to keep. Whoever's house or apartment that we were sorting at got first crack at that particular portion. The bottom line meant that whatever we found was gravy; disposing of the rest was up to the individual storing that third. All I know is that I ended up with something like 135 books for my ten dollar investment, or 7cents a book. Not a bad return.

I loved Chris Garcia's old convention button find. Great story, reminding me of the hoax Worldcon bid for Little Rock in '81 I helped foment in *This House*. A bunch of us fans attending Minicon in 1978, I believe it was, discovered that a regional teacher's convention was going on the same hotel. The teachers, apparently, vote for regional convention locations three years ahead of time, so we each grabbed a handful of "Little Rock is ready for 1981" buttons and snuck off. For the rest of that year we attended cons with these buttons prominently displayed on our chests, handed them out, and garnered suitably odd looks from fans with comments like, "Really? I didn't know they were bidding!" The fake ads in my zine helped perpetuate the hoax bid. It was a bit of fun for about six months before we exposed our own ruse, thereby avoiding Margaret Middleton's perpetual ire in the process.

Since it's the season, I agree with Peter Sullivan's appraisal of office social events, such as the obligatory office Christmas party. For three years while I was working at the St. Paul Companies I was a member of the employee's club, serving one year as President, which meant I was in charge of organizing said party at the Richfield, Minnesota VFW down by the old Metropolitan Stadium. The event went off pretty well once the band I had booked finally showed up one and a half hours late! Turns out they went to the *other* VFW in Richfield, the one up on Lyndale Ave and Crosstown Highway. Needless to say, I was sweating bullets, but we had an open bar going, got everyone involved in some party games and kept things rolling until the band was ready to go. Thank God they had the good sense to call our VFW locale to make sure we were there. Turns out that they had played at that other VFW many times, forgetting about the VFW by the baseball stadium. Once they got there, I stood there in awe; never in my life had I seen a band set up and start playing in less than 15 minutes. Impressive. •

Lloyd Penney

Humanity may be getting its entire cultural info base digitized, but I hope this doesn't mean discarding the originals. I shudder to think that all of what we've done, and the evidence of having done it, would be reduced to disposable ephemera. If everything is saved to disk, where are the back-ups? Neither paper nor storage media present any permanence. Who'd be willing to fund the megaterabytes of storage needed to preserve our info base? Who'd be willing to find the

dry cold storage to hold those originals? Will our past disintegrate because no one was able or willing to fund this kind of storage?

Many years ago, at a Worldcon, I believe, I found a Montreal en/in '77 button, for the bid to float a Worldcon into Montreal by New York fans. Still have it, and I bring it with me any time I get to Montreal for a con. I have been warned that the button might just be Andrew Porter's personal button, him having lost it some years ago. I have to have something historical at home...

So many cons are family reunions and group hugs. There's a number of young ladies I'll meet at cons...I'll run up to them, hug them, and threaten not to let go. Lots of hugs all around then it's the end of the con, too. Let's *all* break Rule 6. It's good for you!

There's lots of zines online now, and we all benefit from Bill Burns having set up eFanzines.com. Yet, there's so many other sites to look at, and the Web being as big as it is, it's still tough to find it all, or even a part of it. We need a book, the Web Guide to Science Fiction, or similar.

Freedonia? I thought that was a small town outside of Buffalo, New York. My memories of getting my tonsils out sum up as hoping Daddy would come back soon. I was in one hospital in downtown Toronto, and my brother Steven was being born in another, and my father was running himself ragged going from one hospital to another. And he wore Old Spice, too. Probably still does, and I have some in the medicine cabinet, too. •

The town in New York is spelled with only one "e" – I was really thinking of the wonderful little country lead so capably by one Rufus T. Firefly (aka Groucho Marx) in the movie Duck Soup.

WAHF: Shelby Vick.





Contributors to this issue

Dave Locke is a world-famous cynic and lepidoptarist whose work has appeared in many fanzines; unfortunately, most of them ceased publication shortly afterwards. He currently divides his time between a small shack on Pitcairn Island and Cincinnati, Ohio, where he lives with his wife Vicki, 16 cats, and a kangaroo named Jerome. In addition to his other activities, Dave enjoys writing letters (“Q” and “R” are among his favorites), and creating lyrics for rap songs.

“**Eric Mayer**” is the pseudonym of Eric Mayer, whose six “John the Eunuch” novels, co-authored with his wife Mary Reed (aka “Mary Reed”), have been well-received historical mysteries. His hobbies include getting lost in the woods (he prefers to call it “orienteering”), becoming snowbound eight months out of the year, and being “painfully thin,” the result of breathing hecto gelatin fumes while producing fanzines as a youngster.

Christopher Garcia is a well-known fanzine publisher and fanwriter, computer historian, and fan-about-town. Chris has been known to keep readers waiting up to 27.6 hours for a new issue of his fanzine, *The Drink Tank*. In his spare time, he enjoys creating decorative typos, particularly “teh” and “somethign.” A little known (or widely ignored) fact is that Mr. Garcia is a hoax perpetrated by 16 fans working around the clock to produce the prodigious output credited to “him.”

Peter Sullivan is an accountant living in England with his wife A., whose parents were so poor they couldn’t afford to give her an entire name. He was formerly a mover-and-shaker in “diplomacy gaming fandom” until he was recently asked, rather undiplomatically, to leave and never return. Peter’s plans for 2006 include attending every single science-fiction convention held world-wide during the year with A. and their children, G., R., and T., and writing a con report on each one for *CPG*.

Brad Foster is currently a full-time resident of the Texas Institute for Whacked-Out Cartoonists, where he creates wonderfully weird artwork that he sends to grateful fan editors. When not drawing, Brad’s hobbies include drinking India ink and seeing how far he can jab a 0.5mm Rapidograph pen nib into his pinky finger.