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2006

MUMBLINGS FROM
MUNCHKINLAND

24



Virgil
Finlay

A THRILLING
PUBLICATION

Mumblings from Munchkinland – the only West Australian fanzine published in Fiji – brings you a real coup!

VISIONS OF THE PACIFIC 3: CROOKS, COPS AND COUPS IN FIJI

You'll have heard about the coup, so let's start with the crooks and cops.

Around 9:00pm on a Friday night in April I was washing up in the kitchen when I heard our front screen door squeak. This was not a comforting noise. It is a heavy steel-lattice screen door as used on most homes in urban parts of Fiji, not the light aluminium type common in Australia. I'd locked it earlier after Megan left to attend a school function and the girls were all in bed. I should not have heard that familiar squeak. I glanced through our serving window to see the screen door wide open – sure confirmation that we had uninvited guests. Short as it was, I'm glad I had that fraction of a second to realize this and compose myself, for it lessened the shock of having a stranger come around the corner into the kitchen.

My immediate thoughts were: Remain calm. Figure out how many of them are in the house. Get between them and the girls. This turned out to be a pretty good plan, as far as it went.

The part about remaining calm was immediately tested when the intruder threatened me to be quiet or he would kill me. "Okay", I said. Speaking obviously contradicted his command, but I was concentrating more on his clenched fist at the time, wondering what it concealed, and he didn't seem to care. "We want money," he said. "Okay," I repeated, making a mental note of his use of the plural, "I'll show you what I have." This gave me the opportunity to move into the hallway. From here, I could see another fellow ransacking a chest of drawers in the bedroom Megan and I use. And I could block their way down the hallway to where the girls were sleeping.

I was a little relieved to see there were only two of them. Home invasions are, sadly, not that uncommon in Suva. Organised gangs target the very wealthy and often send groups of six or more men armed with iron bars and/or cane knives, but they usually strike in the middle of the night. These two were the more common garden-variety robbers, bored young Fijian men just trying their luck. We live on a busy connecting road that gets a lot of pedestrians, providing plenty of opportunities for people to size up houses for this sort of raid. These two weren't terribly professional. They had pulled their t-shirts up to try and hide their faces but the shirts kept slipping down. This would have been farcical under less stressful circumstances.

A similar duo had probably been responsible for a snatch and run we suffered last year when we had forgotten to lock the same door. Strange though it may sound, this also gave me some comfort. In that case, Megan's purse and a work laptop had been taken, but we found her purse on the front lawn with the contents tipped out and nothing except her cash and a car key missing. The key had been tossed back into the yard the next day and, on the night, the culprit(s) had, conscientiously, placed some asthma puffers she had bought that day on the porch, as if to prove that no harm was intended, they just wanted the money. I suspected the same of the present two.

That said, I was a bit worried about the one going through my papers. One of the first things he would have found was a bank statement lying on top of the cabinet. The figures on this no doubt convinced him that we must have loads of cash laying around the house. He pulled \$80 out of my wallet and, despite assurances that there was no more in the room, he persisted in tipping the contents of drawers onto our bed in search of money. He settled for some loose coins and a pair of small binoculars. It's funny what appeals to criminals – they ignored the laptop I'd bought in New Zealand at Christmas, which I was sure they'd grab with glee given our previous experience and the ready black market for such items in Suva.

I guess he was more interested in checking out Megan's bedside cabinet and drawers, looking for more cash and jewellery. He found some of the latter, but only the cheap costume stuff that Megan deliberately leaves out for such occasions as this. While looking through it he said something in Fijian to his colleague. That one turned and asked "What's up there?" motioning past me to where the girls were in bed. (Ruby was asleep; Ella and Lauren, they told me later, were both wide awake and wondering what was going on. Lauren even hopped out of bed to peep down the hallway but, thankfully, came no closer.)

I told them my kids were asleep down there and we had no money in either of their rooms. He nodded but passed the information on to the other fellow. That one must have been more suspicious, for his reply caused the one beside me to take a step forward and ask again what was down the hall. I didn't gesture hypnotically with my hand, but I may well have sounded like Obi-Wan Kenobi as I said again: "You don't need to go down there. There's no money, just my kids, sleeping."

This had the intended effect of causing him to hesitate long enough for me to think of a good distraction. "Would you like some alcohol?" I suggested. He didn't comprehend the word, so I made a drinking gesture with my hand. Bingo! He checked with the brains of the operation again but they both agreed this was an excellent idea, allowing me to lead them both back into the kitchen. Megan had just picked up a few bottles duty-free on her return from a work trip to Sydney, so our liquor cupboard looked pretty impressive. They were both so excited at the sight that they dropped what they were holding to snatch up bottles. Loose change scattered over our kitchen floor and one of the girls' whiteboard markers was revealed as the object in the clenched fist. They happily tucked bottles of gin, whiskey, vodka and Irish cream under their arms and then headed for the door. Unfortunately, the leader also noticed a large kitchen knife on the counter and managed to juggle that as well. I was relieved he hadn't noticed it earlier but still wonder if it assisted him in another criminal act elsewhere.



Ella relaxing at the crime scene (before the event).

As soon as they'd bolted, I bolted the inside door, chagrined at not having done so earlier, of course, and rang the police. The first car arrived in about ten minutes -- not bad for Suva, even if the police post is only a few minutes drive away. Another car arrived a short time later to check nearby streets and then a van of detectives turned up. Until this point I'd assumed that the two burglars had forced our screen door open; one of the detectives pointed out that there was no damage to either door. That led to questions about who had keys to the flat and I told them that we had had several househelpers since moving here. None had left disgruntled as far as we knew. After our robbery last year we'd changed the lock on the solid wooden door, but hadn't bothered with the screen door as the landlord intended to replace it. The detectives just shrugged, said we should leave everything as it was until the forensics squad could attend the scene, and left. Megan came home to find we were sleeping in the living room that night.

In the morning, half of the entire forensics squad in Fiji arrived. She told us that her boss was in Australia for training on an automated fingerprint identification system. Yep, they still do matching of prints by hand and eye, painstakingly flipping through sets of cards to compare whorls, loops and arches. How long this must take was academic in our case as the officer found no good prints on anything once she'd dusted the crime scene. She took the marker pen for further examination.

Four detectives returned a little later. One stood around looking bored; another examined our morning newspaper for clues. The boss asked me a few more questions and directed a junior officer to record my statement. From their desultory manner I could see that they remained unimpressed with our crime prevention measures. I soon felt the same about their procedures. Junior spelt my name wrong and crossed out half of what he had written in the first paragraph before asking me to sign both sides of the paper -- the reverse being completely blank. I hope his muse inspired him back at the station.

The Fiji Police Force has a near impossible task, of course. Maintaining law and order in a country where the rule of law is brazenly disregarded on a periodic basis would be difficult enough. Add to this racial and religious divisions heightened by widespread corruption, a decline in the influence of traditional authorities -- village elders and the church -- as rural populations drift into urban areas, and the complexity of the task becomes apparent. In recent years the morale of the Police Force had begun to rise under the leadership of an Australian seconded to the job, Andrew Hughes. His predecessor had been criticised for doing little to prevent (very selective) looting of businesses during the 2000 coup, so one could argue that standards could fall no further. But Hughes became genuinely respected for his disciplined and diplomatic approach to the job and his popularity ratings regularly topped those of any public servant or politician in the country -- around 80%, across the board. (By comparison, the ratings for Prime Minister Laisenia Qarase, Opposition Leader Mahendra Chaudhry and Commodore Frank Bainimarama, of the Republic of Fiji Military Forces, generally peaked at around 45%, largely limited to their respective ethnic power bases.)

Hughes' job became even harder during 2006 as he became caught up in a struggle for power between Qarase's government and the military. Although Bainimarama had chosen Qarase to be Prime Minister in the aftermath of the Speight fiasco, the military chief expected him to be compliant on certain issues. By the time of the May elections, however, Qarase had become confident he had sufficient support to introduce a range of legislation contrary to the military chief's wishes. Particularly galling to Bainimarama was a Reconciliation, Truth and Harmony Bill that included an amnesty clause for "politically motivated" acts during the coups of 2000. He had almost been assassinated at the time, had rather strong feelings about amnesty clauses as a result, and so directed all servicemen to campaign against the government. The churches came out in favour of Qarase, with subtle full page newspaper ads like the one opposite.

TO ALL CHRISTIANS & FRIENDS IN FIJI

THE ASSEMBLY OF CHRISTIAN CHURCHES
IN FIJI (ACCF) IS REQUESTING

that we all please go
and vote during this election!

Note: PARLIAMENT IS THE SUPREME
LAW MAKING BODY OF THIS NATION

It is God's Will that the Laws of this Land are
based on the Laws of God!

IT IS THEREFORE THE DUTY OF ALL CITIZENS OF THIS NATION
**TO ELECT A GOD- FEARING
& PROVEN PRIME MINISTER**
whose Party will make righteous Laws

Prov 29:2

When the righteous are in authority, the people rejoice;
But when a wicked man rules, the people groan. NKJV

GOD IS WITH US

when we build our nation according to His ways!

**BUT NATION BUILDING WITHOUT GOD
IS A REWARDLESS LABOUR!**

Ps 127:1

Unless the LORD builds the house, they labor in vain who build it;
Unless the LORD guards the city, the watchman stays awake in vain. NKJV

In nation building Fiji must be ruled
by the Laws of God given at
Mt Sinai and at Calvary

Building with the practice of compromising Christian
and non Christian values
as already reflected in the Constitution
is misleading the nation to stand on false foundation
which is demonic and disasterous in nature.

THIS WILL SURELY BRING CURSES UPON THE NATION:

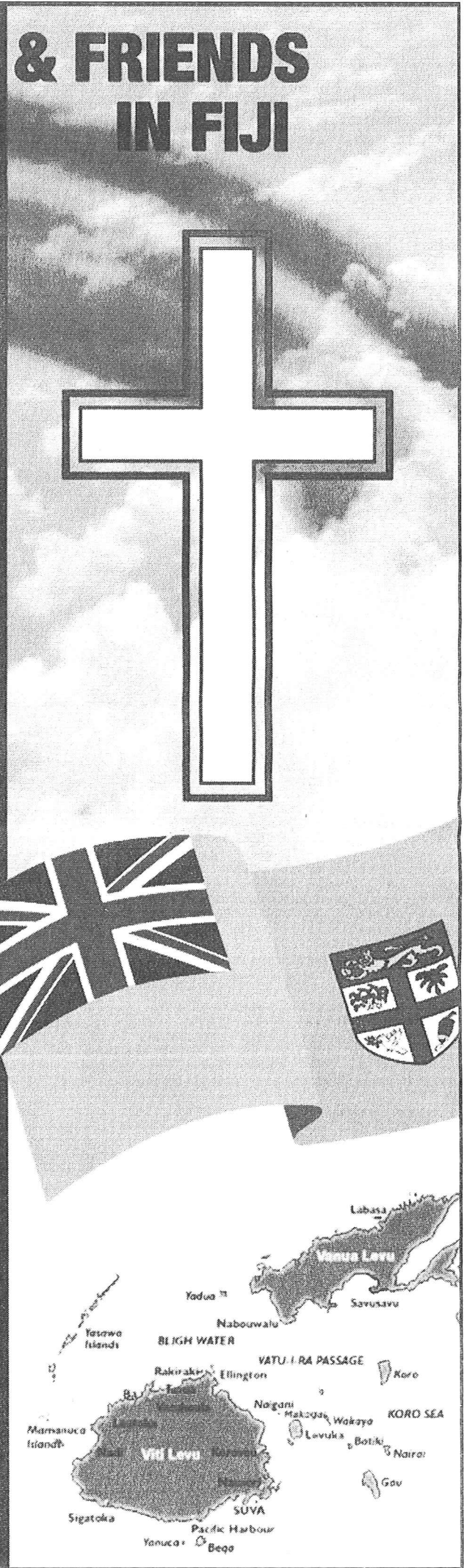
- Droughts and Famines!
- Earthquakes & Tsunamis!
- Poverty and Slavery!
- Diseases and Deaths!

(Amos 4:7-11)

Healthy Nation Building should be founded in God's Law
which reflects the higher and eternal values
of the Kingdom of God.

- LOVE
- JUSTICE
- PEACE
- RECONCILIATION
- UNITY

**WE THEREFORE HAVE NO OPTION
BUT TO VOTE FOR THAT LEADER WHO
CHERISHES AND LIVES BY GOD'S LAWS**
Only then would we be assured of Peace and Prosperity
(Ezekiel 34: 22-31)



The election result was a knife-edge return of the government of Qarase, who declared that he now had a clear mandate to introduce his legislative program. In addition to the RTH Bill, this included a reduction in military spending in the budget and the Qoliqoli Bill, which was designed to return control of coastal fishing to indigenous Fijians. Bainimarama was quick to warn the government against any of these measures. In a farcical side show to all of this, Chaudhry declined an offer to join Qarase's national unity government and the official Leader of the Opposition became a chap whose party had only two elected representatives.

As the year progressed, this state of play was maintained, Bainimarama making deliberately ambiguous threats – denying any plans to stage a coup whilst threatening to commence “clean up action” against the government if they didn't back down. While tensions rose and fell, no one took the idea of another coup seriously. Commentators uniformly agreed that the impact on Fiji's economy, heavily reliant upon a resurgent tourism industry, would be too great and that even Bainimarama understood this. Qarase played up this theme and appealed to Fiji's traditional Great Council of Chiefs to reign in the Commodore.

The situation only started to become truly tense when a shipment of ammunition arrived at the Suva Wharf and the Army declared it would take delivery of this. By law, the shipment could not be released without the Police Commissioner's signature and he refused to sign without a commitment from the military that the ammunition would not be used in any illegal action. Bainimarama was visiting Fijian troops in Iraq at the time and his second-in-command gave a belligerent response. Hughes made a public statement suggesting that the absent Commodore was probably not aware of what his man in charge was saying and he had no doubt the whole affair would be resolved amicably when the Commodore returned from overseas.

Bainimarama was almost certainly directing his second-in-charge from afar, of course. In any case he chose to back him up, in word and deed. In the dead of night, a convoy of military trucks arrived at the wharf, threatened police officers posted there and took possession of the ammunition. They later presented documents to Customs officials purporting to show that the Police Commissioner had given permission for delivery of the shipment. Hughes exposed the documents as having been forged and dropped all pretense of confidence in the Commodore, stating that the Police would need to interview him in relation to sedition charges.

Distant powers now intervened. Alexander Downer hinted that he had received secret word of another coup in the wind and dispatched Australian naval vessels to evacuate all Aussies if this occurred. (This backfired badly when a navy helicopter on some secretive manoeuvre off the coast of Fiji crashed into the Pacific Ocean, with loss of life.) The New Zealand response was considerably more constructive. Foreign Minister Winston Peters invited Qarase to talks with Bainimarama, who had flown to the Land of the Long White Cloud to visit family. The talks, mediated by Peters and PM Helen Clark, appeared to bear fruit, in that Qarase emerged and threw in the towel by declaring that all contentious legislation would be withdrawn and most other demands of the military would be met.

A brief period of calm was rudely interrupted when Bainimarama announced that the talks had in fact failed. It's possible that planning for the coup was too far advanced at this stage for him to back down without losing face within the military. In any case, he recommenced making threats of a clean up campaign unless Qarase stepped down. At the same time, more pointed threats were being delivered to Andrew Hughes and his family. This was beyond the pale; his wife and sons returned to Oz and shortly afterwards, in an attempt to reduce the tense situation, he took leave and joined them. We decided to follow their lead. Megan and the girls flew out to New Zealand while I stayed to complete arrangements with our removalists. (We were only a fortnight short of our planned departure from Fiji.)

[continued on p.15]

VALE, ERIC FRANK RUSSELL

(Reprinted from the newsletter of the Lane Cove Historical Society Inc., no.198, February 2005)

On October 31, 2004, Eric Russell, historian, author and book collector, passed away at Royal North Shore Hospital, Sydney. Eric was a long-term resident of Greenwich and more lately of Kamilaroi Retirement Centre. He was the commissioned author of two of Lane Cove's important histories.

Eric was born in Paddington, Sydney, in 1922 and spent his early years in the Woollahra-Paddington area, attending Woollahra Public School. He had one brother, Edward, born when he was five years old. When Eric was just seventeen his mother passed away and the family split up.

When Eric left school he worked in a shop in the city. He was also a reporter at council meetings for the original *Bondi Daily*. His brother has remarked that when he was a teenager Eric had a passion for books and reading. His writing started at this early stage, in the pre- and post-second world war years, when he produced a science fiction newsletter called *Ultra*. He had a lifelong interest in science fiction, belonging for many years to a group of enthusiasts called the Futurians. He was still reading and collecting science fiction as late as 2000. He was smitten with the BBC Radio series, *The Hitch Hikers Guide to the Galaxy*, and its sequel.

Eric was also interested in playwriting. In 1947 he produced a play *Vintage Bread* which, with other plays, was recorded by his brother Ted. He wrote numerous radio plays and short stories, only two of which were broadcast. The first was an adaptation for broadcast by the Australian Broadcasting Commission (ABC) of a science fiction short story and the second a 32-part serial of Dickens' *Pickwick Papers*. Later he had a close association with our local Greenwich Players, and mourned their folding in the 1980s. In 1993 he offered the Theatre of the Deaf some mime sketches he had developed. He had no suitable venue to try them out after the demise of the Greenwich Players. He commented that Marcel Marceau had expressed strong interest in them.

Hi interest in book production started with work in the publication department of Dymock's Book Arcade in George Street, Sydney, in the early 1950s. During this period he also worked as a casual reporter in the Sydney newsroom of the ABC Radio News, often on the late shift.

In 1953 Eric contracted tuberculosis, had one lung removed and was sent to a sanatorium in the Blue Mountains west of Sydney with a prognosis of six months to live. He wrote:

In hospital with plenty of time on my hands I gradually cooled down and began to realize that I now had a golden opportunity to change my life. I put ambition to one side, took up leisure in a big way, read large books slowly and gradually turned to thinking about a different and less frantic kind of future in my chosen field. The first dividend of this little campaign was a radio serial that I wrote for the ABC. By the way, the doctors were mistaken.

From 1954 to 1970 he was employed as an editor by Angus & Robertson, dealing initially with a wide variety of books, but eventually specializing in histories. Among the latter were some of the most significant reference works on Australia, including *A History of Australian Literature* by H.M. Green in 1961, volumes 5, 6 and 7 of Ferguson's *Bibliography of Australia*, the wonderful facsimile editions of the *Sydney Gazette*, *Songs of Central Australia* by T.G.H. Strehlow in 1970 and many others.

He also worked as an indexer. In 1975 he indexed the second volume of David Collins' *The English Colony in New South Wales* and, for nine years from 1975 to 1984, the very important periodical *Art in Australia*. He was also involved in the Royal Australian Historical Society's project in the eighties to index part of *The Sydney Morning Herald*.

It was in the 1960s he started writing histories of Sydney municipalities – he came into this field at a time when the writing of local history was not viewed as an academic discipline; professional historians were derogatory about the standards of local histories. It is remarkable that Eric, with his limited formal education (finishing school during the Depression he probably only completed his Intermediate Certificate, so leaving around 15 years of age) was one of the first to raise the standard of local histories. He plumbed the depths of original resources in both the Mitchell Library and the State Archives, uncovering materials that had not been used to any extent before. In a later letter he pointed out the inaccuracies of histories that depended solely on secondary sources. He referenced his writing in great detail and usually provided detailed indexes.

His second home for much of his working life was the Mitchell Library in Sydney. Staff from the Mitchell have mentioned his generosity at Christmas when he would bring in beans from his own garden or items purchased overseas as gifts. Jim Andrighetti of the Mitchell Library has drawn attention to a recent conference paper by Margy Burn of the National Library of Australian the relationship between librarians and researchers. In this she states:

North Shore local historian Eric Russell once brought in a box of broad beans he had grown. I still have the note he included which read: "Some eat broad beans, some grow broad beans, some have broad beans thrust upon them."

Over the period from 1966 to 1995 Eric completed municipal histories of Willoughby, Lane Cove, Drummoyne, Woollahra and North Sydney, with a second edition of the Drummoyne history and a further publication on Lane Cove called *A Century of Change: Lane Cove Municipality 1895-1995*. *The Opposite Shore*, his history of North Sydney, was commended in the 1991 Fellowship of Australian Writers Local History Award. Not all his suburban histories came to fruition – he did considerable research for histories of Parramatta and the City of Sydney which, sadly, were not published.

Eric's staunch support for the typewriter led to many great discussions on the advantages and disadvantages of computers in writing. However, he did allow one to be used for his last Lane Cove publication. Eric was very aware of the importance of photographs in historical publications and spent considerable time collecting them, usually copying them himself with his faithful camera. One early publication in 1975, *Victorian and Edwardian Sydney*, was largely based on photographs.

A particularly interesting assignment he had in the 1970s was the research for the re-creation of Old Sydney Town as it was in 1810 – the buildings, streets, shops, furniture and clothing. He published a portfolio of documents in conjunction with his research. Following this, from 1976 to 1985, he became a consultant historian for the Sydney City Council.

On his death Eric had three further books partly researched but not completed. An unfortunate mishap which occurred while he was researching one of these books left him without sight in the left eye. He had been a member of the Book Collectors' Society of Australia since the 1950s. In a letter to a friend in India he wrote: "Although I am not really a true collector and my accumulation of books and magazines are largely the tools of the trade of a writer and researcher...I am a book person nevertheless."

Eric long had a passionate interest in India and visited the country four times – in 1977, 1978, 1983 and 1997. His two closest friends were an Indian couple, Ali and Sonhail Manek. His second incomplete work and most recent project was related to both India and the history of the *Sydney Gazette*, with which he had been involved in earlier years. He was comparing the Sydney colonial newspaper press with that of India in East India Company times.

His third incomplete work is a history of printing and publishing. It is hoped that researchers can be found to complete these tasks that Eric, with his indomitable optimism and despite his recent blindness, always planned to finish.

Eric's wry sense of humour, which stayed with him to the end, can be illustrated with two examples. Firstly, he felt strongly about many issues but especially about printing and publishing quality. When making a suggestion relating to this that he knew would be controversial he would soften it with this prelude: *"I don't want to rock the boat so violently that it capsizes and we find ourselves in the shark-infested sea without a paddle."*

In April 1995, in his speech to launch his centenary history of the Municipality of Lane Cove, he described the occasion as the launch of a brain child. (Throughout he is having a dig at the abhorrent computer.) The product was "A book – it required no licence, no electricity or battery, it required no spare parts and was not subject to rust. To access the information all you had to do was open the volume and read." He also described writing as being like pregnancy: The birth was assisted by three midwives, the author had evening sickness, the printer nursed the patient and delivered a 60-page, 100-year-old new brainchild with graphic art.

We will miss his humour and we will miss his friendship. The legacy of his histories is with us forever. The Committee has agreed that Eric's ashes will be spread in the garden of our historic house *Carisbrook* in Burns Bay Road, Lane Cove.

Judy Washington

From the letter column to Bob Tucker's *Le Zombie* #35, December 1940

THE FOREIGN ANGLE

Eric F. Russell: " You news, and article on the Chicon, are being used in the First Anniversary ish of Ultra, which (will) be out late in October, and should arrive in the mail after this missive. Now for some Australian news: Vol Molesworth, editor of Cosmos, and late secretary of the Futurian Society of Sydney, is laid up in the hospital with Sugar Diabetes, and will be there for about 3 months by all indications. Cosmos will probably be taken over (again) ... by Bill Veney and Bert Castellari of Futurian Observer fame.

Another Australian fan is laid up with a relapse of pneumonia; he's Keith Moxon of Queensland. He was to have been editor of IMAGINATIVE STORIES, our first semi-prof

(Russell - cont. :) The first Anniversary ish of Ultra will have about 34 pages (pica type), cover by Edw. H. Russell, illustrations by Sawyer, Smith, Ted Russell and self. There will be material by nearly every Australian fan. * * * Ultra's supplement Hermes will have a swan song issue in December because we have discovered that there is/was a fanmag named Hermes edited by Jack Speer. (ours) will appear later under another name, which has not been decided as yet. A copy of the first issue of Hermes is enclosed with this letter.

About science fiction magazines--: Could you act as an agent, thru which I can get magazines by sending money orders or unused Australian stamps or whatnot? Recently I sent a money order to PJ Ackerman for 5 magazines.... This was June 20th, and it is now late October and he has not sent the magazines yet. So, next time you write to him could you wake him up about them? * * * LeZ is arriving regularly. "

MY OTHER FANZINE

I joked in a previous issue about how the University of the South Pacific provided me with fanzine material by way of a collection of line illustrations when I was in Samoa. At PIMRIS they went one better, making publication of a 'zine part of my job description.

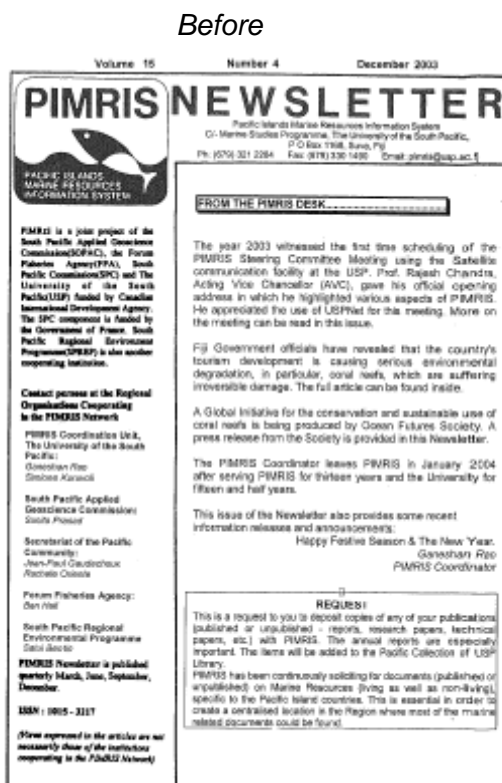
The beast in question was the *PIMRIS Newsletter*, a round-up of regional fisheries news that had been published ever since the network started in the late 1980s. No record compared to, say, Bill Danner's *Stefantasy* or others, certainly, but long enough to become established in the region and to make me eager to maintain standards when I took it over in 2004.

This proved pretty easy. The previous editor had been in the position for many years and had clearly lost time to do the newsletter. Nominally a quarterly, the schedule had slipped often, one year seeing only a single issue. (I know what you're thinking – the pot calling the kettle black – but nobody pays me to produce *Mumblings!*) The layout was dreary and the content dull, often material just cut and pasted onto 4 or 8 pages.

So I changed it, from the title banner to the back page. Much of the actual news content could be sourced from a monitoring service the university subscribed to, so we expanded issues by including meeting reports, topical articles written by the academic staff, reviews and charts. The mechanics of preparing and editing an issue I found fairly easy, helped by my experience with *Mumblings*. Printing was done commercially and we introduced an electronic version of the newsletter, too, so I learned a little about Adobe Acrobat and PDFs.

It was fun while it lasted -- what fanned can resist pubbing an ish? I even managed to sneak in one family photo (opposite). But it did take up time better spent on my one true fanzine, so I won't miss it that much.

If you're curious, the PIMRIS publications page is at www.usp.ac.fj/index.php?id=4652

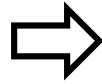


Producing the PIMRIS Newsletter: a photo essay



PIMRIS staff research and type up draft articles.

The Coordinator edits pages and sends the final versions to the printery.



Page proofs are printed and photographed.



Stencils are cut for each colour and burned to light-sensitive aluminium plates.



*The presses roll!
The printery collates,
folds, staples and delivers.*



Mail-outs are child's play!

(The web version is converted straight to PDF before being added to the PIMRIS website.)





Robert Lichtman, Glen Ellen, Calif.

19 August, 2006

I particularly liked "Chaos in Kiribati" and the contrast between WW2 reportage and your own. A strange pleasure to see that American military planning was just as bollixed back then as now, contrasting with sadness to read about a place that will probably cease to exist if global warming isn't soon stopped in its tracks. The color centerfold was a delight to view, especially after I broke out a magnifying glass to focus more sharply on the detail.

At the end you write, "...I hope to have another issue out before too long. Your locs will of course help...." I have to confess that I was a bit sad to see *no* loc section in this issue, especially since I'd responded to No. 22 (actually, to it and the previous two issues all at once) with what I thought was a pretty good one. Just in case it's gone walkabout, here it is down below...

Two issues of *Munchkins* have stacked up here and both got read in succession, which was a nice way of taking in both parts so far of Joe Haldeman's most interesting Samoa diary. I'm looking forward to its conclusion in your next issue. Samoa is a part of the world about which I know little history, so it was particularly interesting to read your account in No. 20 of how devastating the 1918 flu epidemic was on the population there and also to read Helen Clark's belated apology for the excesses and stupidities of New Zealand's administration of the territory. It's truly unfortunate that so much of the history of so-called "Western Civilization" is mirrored by the sort of things that went down in Samoa under colonial rule. It would be nice to think that this is now behind us and we're living in a more enlightened age, but one has only to look at my country's recent actions in Iraq to see that, sadly, in the words of Hugo Gernsback, "Plus ca change, plus c'est la meme chose."

The swastika on the cover of No. 21 has something of the same effect. While I know that the design is Ganesh traditional, as part of "Western Civilization" I have something of a gut reaction to its presence. I've made a study in recent years of Navajo Indian weavings, and the swastika figures in their early work as well, so I'm sort of used to it and can, pretty much, put my rote reaction aside. It *is* a gorgeous cover!

I remember reading "Jerry Is/Was A Man" many years ago, and by a little searching around I find that it was collected in *Assignment in Eternity* as well as in *The SFWA Grand Masters Volume 1*, edited by Fredrik Pohl (Tor, 1999). Since I never read it in *TWS* (never owned an issue of that zine) or the 1999 collection, I can only assume I either read it in the above collection or perhaps anthologized elsewhere. I *do* remember it making quite an impression on me at the time and, as you write, over fifty years down the line we are closer to having to make the sort of decisions about the "non-human hominids" that the court in Heinlein's story labored over. While I generally agree with the aims of the Great Ape Project as you describe them here, I'd hope that such efforts would not detract from the pressing need to extend the protections of the International Bill of Human Rights – the blanket term applied to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights -- to all humans. We still fall far short of doing so on a planetary basis.

I know I've seen that photo of Harry Warner Jr. on the inside front cover of No. 22 somewhere before, but I can't remember where. *[I think I found this on the Advent website.]*

Your brief account of vacationing on Fiji was yet another look at a culture and place with which I have little familiarity and I thank you for it.

I remember the "Happiness Is" book fad with a certain degree of nausea, but liked your list. On specific items: I had a tree house when very young and living in Cleveland, Ohio, where at the end of the block on which I lived was the edge of the city at that time. The treehouse was a joint venture of me and some of my young friends (I was about 6-7 years old) and was torn down not long after completion by an evil neighbor living in the last house on the block, adjoining the woods, who had some imaginary sense of control over that area. We knew who'd done it and, as I recall, exacted some sort of revenge. "Finding out things you didn't already know" was a constant part of childhood; indeed, it's still going on.

"Having a stamp collection" was a thing I did in later childhood, roughly ages 10-12. After I showed some interest and began a small stamp album bought at the local 5&10 store, I received a *large* one as a birthday or Christmas present and got fairly serious about it for a while. Of course it was eventually set aside when the next obsession struck and I eventually sold it to get money to feed that next one. It lives on in a vestigial way in the form of a large manila envelope in which I stuff non-U.S. stamps received with fanzines. I've been doing this for over a decade and the envelope is *very* thick. If one of my grandchildren ever takes up stamp collecting (and so far I have only one, a girl, who shows no signs of it), there will be one helluva present awaiting him or her from their grandfather Robert.

[Thanks, Bob, and apologies for the long delay in publishing your letters.]

Graham Stone, Sydney, NSW

1 October 2006

I knew about Tarawa, and somewhat about present Kiribati and Tuvalu. A sorry outlook for their environment.

As for the 1954 convention report in *SF News*, I must have written it, as I wrote all of *SF News* but a few bits signed by others. But no recognition. It is of course a partisan report. My general approach was always to say nothing about anything discreditable to SF. I never responded to attacks, I never acknowledged arguments I didn't endorse, I never objected to errors or challenged false statements of fact. It's easy to see weak points in this policy, but it was the way I worked. Consequently, it is easy to see now that I did a lot of things the wrong way. But if you've never made a mistake you've never made a decision.

Eric Lindsay, Airlie Beach, Qld.

21 November, 2006

Thanks for Mumblings #23. Nice front and back covers. Even seems appropriate. Lots of ocean stuff, plus creepy crawly animal like mechanical things.

Kiribati straddles both equator and international date line. Wow. Well, at least they miss cyclones. I guess a small country may as well use notes from Australia as their official currency, rather than do their own. The results of overpopulation and consumption do tend to show up faster on small islands than on large ones. Not surprised PCs there are scarce and in poor shape. They don't react well here to being exposed to sea spray. However I no longer use floppy drives, haven't for most of this century. Haven't even got a floppy drive any longer, except in a 1986 homebrew 68000 computer. Nice review of Joe Haldeman's *Camouflage*, and its Samoan connections.

Megan's adventures floating around the Pacific are not something I'd want to do. It is a bit different sailing with someone who knows what they are doing in the smooth waters of Pioneer Bay, sheltered by the Great Barrier Reef. Even then sudden winds can make things exciting, but you don't get giant waves.

THE FOURTH AUSTRALIAN SCIENCE FICTION
CONVENTION

by Roger Dard

The 4th Aust. S-F Convention was held over the week-end of March 19-20, 1955, in Sydney. As a prelude to the actual Con, however, a Fancy Dress Ball was held on the night of March 18th, at the Con site - Dunbar House, Watson's Bay, Sydney. 40 fans attended, garbed in colorful costumes - "Salome and the Wandering Jew", "A Martian Grub", etc., while pro-author Norma Hemming turned up as a Venusian Swamp Girl from a Dynamic cover. Another fan was attired as a character from Sprague de Camp's "Stolen Doormouse", and another pro-author, Douglas Nicholson came as a ghoul.

The morning of the 19th saw an informal get-together of fans, who spent their time getting acquainted and admiring artwork donated by New Worlds and Nebula. At 2:30 that afternoon, the session was formally opened, with Dr. John Blatt being introduced by Chairman Pat Burke. Dr. Blatt's address was "Science In Science Fiction." Dr. Blatt made the usual points, i.e., science-fiction stories were dreary descriptions of gadgets until John W. Campbell brought about the Renaissance in the late 30's. This was followed by a talk "Transportation In The Future" by John Spence, and a talk on dianetics by Wing Commander Ian Scott. Guest of Honor Arthur C. Clarke, and Dr. Blatt then went onto the platform and spent some time in answering a variety of questions from the floor. During the course of this, Mr. Clarke disclosed that the United States were advanced in their plans for an Earth Satellite Vehicle, and predicted that the Satellite should be in operation within 10 years. This concluded the first day of the Con, attendance being 51. That evening two films were screened, 20th Century Fox's "The Day The Earth Stood Still", and Fritz Lang's silent classic, "Metropolis".

Sunday morning (the 20th), the second and final day of the Con, only about 20 fans turned up for the Auction with the results that prices were very

low. Top price went to a pocket book edition of "Fancies and Goodnight" by John Collier. A 35¢ pocket book, this sold for the equivalent of almost \$2.00. Sunday afternoon commenced with the Business Session. Reports were received, and read, from fan groups in most of the states of Australia. David Cohen, leading Sydney science-fiction dealer, reported on the activities of his "Blue Centaur Book Center". Doug Nicholson reported on the state of his semi-pro science-fiction magazine "Fore-runner", and revealed that issue #3 will be the last. A motion was moved by Fantasy-Times correspondent Vol Molesworth, praising Tasmanian fan Don Tuck for his Handbook Of Science Fiction And Fantasy. Vol Molesworth also moved a resolution condemning the literary censorship in Australia, and this motion was passed unanimously. The meeting then became very stormy and heated when a clash developed between the two warring Sydney fan groups. The meeting became so heated, that a suggestion was made that the tape recorder should be switched off, but after some discussion, it was decided to leave the recorder on. On an unhappy and bitter note, the Sunday afternoon session finally ended.

The last portion of the Con took place on Sunday evening, and consisted of an original play by Nora Hemming. Titled "Miss Denton's Dilemma", it was tagged "Sex With Hex" by the tabloid newspapers who subsequently reported it. The play was a Thorne Smith-ish piece of work, with Gods and scantily-dressed Goddesses wandering around in gay abandon. The cast consisted of Norma Hemming, Bill Voney, Jack Leggett, Brian Finch, and Bluey Glick.

Next year's Convention will be held in Melbourne, the first time the Con has not been held in Sydney. Profits (if any), from the Sydney Con will be passed on to the committee in Melbourne.

READ
STARTLING STORIES
EVERY ISSUE!

[continued from p.6]

On the night of December 5th Bainimarama called a press conference to finally play his hand. This was a curious affair. Although as belligerent as ever, he appeared ill-prepared, pausing frequently and contradicting himself during a rambling speech intended to justify his actions, explain what would happen next and demonstrate that he was in control. It did none of these. He still refused to accept that he was leading a “coup” and berated any foreign journalists who dared used the term. Eventually, in the middle of another contradiction, his media adviser tapped him on the shoulder and the press conference came to an abrupt end.

What might have unsettled him was some quick thinking by Qarase, who managed to disperse his entire cabinet to locations across the country that evening to avoid a quick round up. It was only a matter of time before the military secured control, however, and soon Chaudhry and even some members of Qarase’s own party had signed up to the Commodore’s interim government. Most Fijians seemed resigned to the situation and the only immediate noticeable change was military patrols on the streets. Ironically, this made Suva safer for a while. When the soldiers returned to barracks, the city’s common criminals returned to business, too.

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The front cover for this issue features a lovely Virgil Finlay illustration from the original pulp publication of Wilson Tucker’s *The Time Masters*, in the January 1954 *Startling Stories*. I learned of Bob’s death from a posting on the sf history list by Bruce Gillespie. Both Bruce and Keith Curtis enthusiastically recommended Tucker’s works and I’ve enjoyed catching up with them ever since. Like another favourite author of mine, the late Bob Shaw, Tucker was as famed for his fannish activities as for his professional writings. On the back cover are the infamous letters he sent to Brass Tacks (*Astounding Stories*, January 1936) purporting to be his last words before dying during an operation. Editor F. Orlin Tremaine was not amused when he discovered that this was a hoax. The staple wars are now long forgotten, but Tucker certainly won’t be.

Roger Dard’s account of the 1955 natcon comes once again from Jimmy Taurasi’s *Fantasy Times* (#223, May 1955). My thanks to Graham Stone for forwarding the extended obituary notice on Eric Frank Russell.

In case it’s not clear, we are back in Australia now, adjusting to what passes for reality in the nation’s capital, Canberra. This issue was largely completed in Suva, but our slightly hastened departure from Fiji and subsequent search for home, work and happiness have prevented its publication until now. As always, I hope to have another *Mumblings* out soon and look forward to your locs on this issue. Our contact details now are:



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or

nelsonleeoz@hotmail.com

"I Will Answer Them All"—Bob.

Note: I want every serious science-fiction reader to receive this message just as I received it. I want you to all receive the same impression I received as I read these two letters. Please read them carefully.

Dear Editor:

Inclosed is a letter I was instructed to mail to you the 15th of October, but in the sudden turn of events that followed, I overlooked it until to-day.

Perhaps you may already know it by this time, but our friend Bob has passed on. Strangely enough, the last words I ever heard him say concerned your magazine. As I left the hospital, he gave me the inclosed letter to mail, and requested that when I returned the next day I bring a new copy of Astounding Stories with me. I did, but unfortunately, I was too late. He was operated upon that morning and never regained consciousness.—Anne Smidley.

Dear Editor:

To-morrow will be the third Wednesday and Astounding will help fill in a lot of empty hours. I never knew before how much I liked Astounding until I found myself in a spot with nothing to do but count the days.

What I want to talk about is all these fly-by-night societies popping up in Brass Tacks. In my opinion, the majority of those are for one reason only—publicity. Perhaps they got jealous of all the space SPWSSTFM was hogging, and decided to cash in on some of the free advertising. Dozens have already appeared, to-morrow's issue will doubtless announce a half dozen new ones. And I bet that you get plenty of letters announcing others that you don't print. In fact, there are so many clubs, the whole thing is becoming a bore.

I have thought a lot about it, and have come to only one conclusion: all of these societies must be banded into one or two. The combined rosters of the—two, shall we say—will amount to hundreds.

The two clubs with the largest membership should be the leaders, all the smaller ones merging into the two larger ones. For instance: all the societies for staples join the SPWSSTFM:

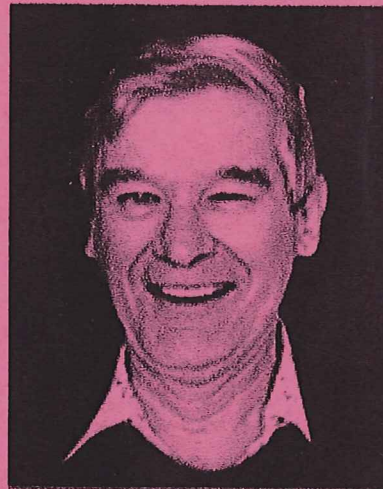
all societies against them join whoever has the largest roster on that side—which is not the IAOPUSA by any means.

I intend to work toward this goal when I get back on my feet again. In the meantime, I wish some of the gang would start the ball rolling. You have favored such a move, editor. I would suggest one person take it upon his shoulders until I can get back into the fight.

You know, the SPWSSTFM will be one year old this November. I intended to put out a birthday issue of the D'Journal, but the pill rollers and sawbones have taken all my cash—so it must wait.

Am going to close as the eats are coming—and you ought to see the swell nurse that feeds me. You fellows that haven't got any letter from me, please excuse it. I will answer 'em all as soon as I get out of here.—Bob Tucker.

Note: We have lost a staunch supporter, and he leaves a challenge to you to carry on. Think carefully over his message concerning science-fiction organizations. There could be no finer tribute to his memory than the accomplishment of the goal toward which he bent his thoughts. Will you accept his challenge and work for unity?



Wilson (Bob) Tucker

1914-2006

