

Middle MINDS

First Issue



SUMMER FUN ANNUAL

Middle MINDS

First Issue



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THE CORE**

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Art & Photo Credits

All fan photos by Alan White, except the Bacover, which is by Alan White & Bill Mills.

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Idle Minds #1 is the combined effort of Las Vegrants, Las Vegas' informal, invitational Core Fandom Fanclub. This issue was mostly done at two meetings of the club (816, 9-6) at the Launch Pad (909 Eugene Cernan St., Las Vegas, NV 89145; Email: crossfire4@cox.net; phone: 702-648-5677). Member: fwa Supporter: AFAL

Arnie Katz

In the summer, a young fan's fancy turns to thoughts of fanac. I guess it's true of an Old Fan, too, because here I am, kicking off the first Vegnants' fanzine in a couple of years. Once again, the duty of a Wordy Introduction falls to me; the rest of them are too damn scared to face a totally blank page.

I'm made of sterner stuff. Behind this sensitive fannish face is a brain honed to fannish sharpness. I was a Fanoclast when that fannish finishing school didn't turn out many wallflowers or shrinking violets. I'll try to get it off to a rocking, as opposed to a rocking chair, start.

To be candid, the onset of summer has turned my fannish thoughts to Insurgentism. Why, if publishing a fanzine with the word "Insurgent" in its title wouldn't put me under surveillance by the Federales, I'd be tempted to chop my mailing list by two-thirds and do a fanzine that would justify such a name.

Joyce claims that the warm-weather months always have this effect on me. She may be right. This time, what set me off is the multi-faceted controversy about the fan Hugos. My feeling that fan Hugos are worthless and should be eliminated or ignored pretty much takes me outside the hubbub, but reading some of the greedy, self-serving and just-plain-fuggheaded statements is very disappointing. The only thing worse than whoring after an award is putting on your booty shorts and stiletto heels and finding out that no one is buying.

Las Vegas Fandom loved oneshots even before we organized the Vegnants in the early 1990's. We did 60 monthly oneshots under the umbrella name *The Vegas All-Stars*, one at each of the monthly Socials at Toner Hall. We stopped doing them in favor of *Wild Heirs*, but even that fanzine had a oneshot-style editorial.

After *Wild Heirs*, the winds of change swept through the Vegnants. Las Vegas has always been a transient town; three of the five couples at the center of the Vegnants moved to other parts of the country and a fourth became immersed in family problems that required just about all their time and attention. In addition, several other members, including JoHn Hardin, Bill Kunkel, Su Williams and Stan the Inferno moved away or cut activity, too. (I hope it wasn't something I said.)

HOBO QUIRE EDITORIAL

We published two issues of *Crazy from the Heat*, but it became too stilted when we were dispersed across the US, so we never finished the third one. The group published a couple of issues of *Implications* and three of *The Glitter City Gazette* during the transition period between the Veggrants of the 1990's and the 21st Century edition, but the club wasn't yet ready for high -voltage fanac

Joyce thinks it's time for the current incarnation of Las Vegas' informal, invitational Core Fandom fan club to Strut Our Stuff. It may take a couple of issues to tell if she's right. Meanwhile, give us the benefit of the doubt.

We aren't going to revive an old title, though *Wild Heirs*, in particular, holds some cherished memories for me. It's tough enough to get this collection of sulky prima donnas to bestir themselves; why facilitate direct comparisons to what I think of as the Veggrants' *first* Golden Age (1993-1998). I feel the current group is, in its way, every bit as charming, talented and artistic.

One of the most interesting recent debates is the relationship between blogs and Fandom. During the course of the discussion, Dave Locke ginged me, properly, for saying that blogs are unfannish.

Blogs are not unfannish.

Blogs are non-fannish. There is nothing about them, intrinsically, that stamps them as fanac. Of course, if the context is supplied, then a blog can certainly be fannish.

There's a fundamental difference between blogs posted on LiveJournal and the like, and fanzines. A fanzine (or equivalent) is part of the fannish subcultural network while each blog is essentially its own universe, unconnected to and unaffected by other blogs.

Core Fandom is like a party. We all know each other and we all enjoy entertaining, and being entertained by, each other. A blog is like standing on a stage, orating into the darkness.

A blog is more like those non-fandom fanzines that *Factsheet*

Five once reviewed in such abundance. Those pseudo prozines scrambled for subscribers and either competed with or ignored other publications. LiveJournal blogs similarly lack the community context that draws us together in Core Fandom.

Bill Mills is actually out of town, though we expect him back in time to take a more active role in the second part of this TwoShot. Before he left, though, he sent this reminder that even old fans have a few other thoughts when the weather in Vegas turns hot.

Bill Mills

"It's summertime and the living is sweaty, the fish are jumping 'cause the lake's boiling dry!" Las Vegas Nevada in the summer... now *there's* a HOT topic. I'm told that there are *a few* places on the planet that reach higher temperatures, but only a few. The Sahara desert for one. Dunno how them Saharans survive it... without even a single cocktail waitress in sight. When I first moved to Vegas thirteen years (or so) ago, I heard a stand -up comic tell his audience "... I don't know why they didn't just build this city on the face of the sun and be done with it!". I laughed then. But, a few months of Las Vegas summer weather and the amusement value wears a bit thin.

However, in the summer Las Vegas is literally and figuratively a pretty *hot* place and it's a good bet that most guys in Vegas will tell you there is



Bill Mills returned in time for the second Idle Minds session. He and Teresa Cochran combined musically on a number of very entertaining selections. And both contributed to this editorial.

an 'up side' to the oppressive heat and sun's killer rays. During the summer months, people here share a sense of desperation and a common bond in the need to find a way to get on with life in spite of the baking heat. If people go around outdoors carrying open umbrellas and constantly spraying themselves with water, no one comments or thinks twice about it. *It's smart... it's survival.* Therefore, when the women of this city start to wear less and less clothing in public, it's only seen as a means to escape the heat and be comfortable, not as a flagrant flaunting of female flesh! No matter how skimpy the shorts or tops it's viewed as a perfectly reasonable defense against heat prostration. I think of it as the Las Vegas Ladies City Beautification League. I think that fact should be included in all lists of "the sights of Las Vegas". In fact the city should start including it in all their summertime ad campaigns... "Come to Las Vegas where it's so frakkin' hot in the summer that the women go 'round damned -near NEKID!". *Yeeeeeha... grab yer Vitalis and gas up the pick up truck LeRoy, we're a'goin' to Vegas!*

Man... ya' gotta love this town!

Joyce Katz

Actually, when I think of summer I very rarely give the heat a moment's thought. My pulse quickens at its approach, as I gladly contemplate the summer holiday. No matter that I'm over 50 years out of school, I still think in those terms, kicking up my heels at the end of the term, and dreading September with all my heart.

In between, my focus is generally on cool watery spots, picnics in a well-manicured park and swimming after. My family's favorite such spot was at the Big Spring State Park where we took the water, shared our lunch under the trees at the foot of the mountain beside the stream, then swam in the icy Current River.

Unfortunately, anticipation of the season was sometimes the best part. The realities of summer in Southeast Missouri were often sticky with heat and



Joyce Katz, co-founder of the Vegrants and the club's hostess since its inception, is responsible for the existence of this fanzine. Whether or not that's a Credit or a Demerit is yet to be determined.

humidity, and the trips my family took were more often to their favorite fishing spots. Watery yes, but also muddy and mosquito -rich. I did not, and still don't enjoy fishing, though yes, I've done it successfully. My time was most likely spent hiking around the perimeters, up and down the river banks, hoping there might be other teens in the camp, and hunting for a cool spot to sit and read a book.

We were a camping family. We went camping every weekend from April to October, and sometimes more when the weather permitted. When we started, it was roll-up-in-a-blanket, on the ground next to an open fire where Mother prepared meals in a great black iron skillet. By the time it was over, camping involved tents and butane stoves and sleeping bags and cots, and eventually that most unnatural of equipment, The Camper (sleeps six, stove and chemical toilet included.) I didn't really understand the reason for going into the Wilderness in order to simulate the comforts of home.

Now that I'm older I certainly see the benefits of not trying to sleep on the ground, and bending over an open fire to cook the burgers doesn't sound like much fun. I guess I see the point of all that equipment now.

Now summer means frying pan heat and plan-

ning one's life to be indoors at all times except in the night. There aren't any shady cool spring streams nor icy rivers for me. Now summertime means reruns on TV, and Conventions all around the country, and maybe, if I'm lucky, an invitation to a friend's backyard barbeque.

But still my heart turns back to simpler days and draughts of cold water dipped fresh from Big Spring.

JoHn Hardin

Why are so many of my memories of the summer? The heat gets into my blood in the summer time. What spring fever promises, summer delivers. I believe the heat makes everyone impulsive and prone to do foolish things (why else Las Vegas?).

It was the fourth of July, 1985. St. Reagan was

still in the White House, Michael Jackson was still the king of pop and the Soviet Union was still an existential threat to the American Way of Life™. President Reagan was building a six hundred ship navy, the better to bankrupt the Soviets with, and he needed naïve desperate patriotic young men like me to man the front lines.

This Fourth of July, I was Fireman Recruit Hardin, three months out of basic training and studying the basics of steam propulsion at the Navy's training center on the shores of scenic Lake Superior. The day wasn't memorable, in so far as I remember nothing of it. The evening, however, was different.

We gathered at the training center's shoreline park for the requisite fireworks display. Before the show, a group of guys was singing "Rock the Casbah" along with the radio, except they were changing the chorus to "fuck the navy." I thought it was in poor taste because it was a mixed crowd of sailors and civilians, and I was a conservative southern boy who was easily shocked.

Eventually the fireworks started, and they started to go wrong immediately. The first sign was a couple of shells that seemed to go off too close to the ground. Soon after, there was a long delay.

There was only one guy doing all the work of setting up and then setting off the fireworks. Of course this seems incredibly wrongheaded today but I guess laws and practices were different in 1985, or else the guy was just stupid and deserved to get blown up, which is precisely what happened next.

I was close enough to watch as he bent over the shell (which he was lighting by hand!?!?) right before it exploded on the stand. The sound was like cannon shot as the fire worker was thrown about 10 feet through the air. That sort of put a damper on the fire works show.

Paramedics and firemen soon arrived to care for the injured man who, if I recall correctly, was not badly injured. A little shrapnel and some hearing loss, call it even. Before that was all worked out, though, there was a lot of confusion and a little screaming and a great deal of milling about aimlessly.

I wanted to help, partly because it was beat into me to pitch in when work needed doing and



JoHn Hardin has returned to Las Vegas, the Vegrants and professional writing. Welcome back!

partly because I thought I looked important in my uniform. I crossed the barrier of shore patrol officers who were restraining the crowd from the accident scene. Guys were dragging 55 gallon trash cans full of unexploded fireworks off of the beach (I remember thinking that it would have been one hell of a show). I saw one guy in dress blues dragging a full can alone. I fell in and gave him a hand dragging it back to a big truck where all the other people were going. After we made it through the shore patrol and into the parking lot, he took a sudden left turn. At first I thought there was another truck, and then I wasn't sure where we were going until he led us into the woods and with a dawning horror I realized he was stealing these fireworks. He was stealing these fireworks and *I was helping him!*

Not knowing what else to do, I went along with him. I suppose I wasn't entirely opposed to stealing the fireworks because, hey, I liked fireworks, but I also knew that it was bad. It was bad and stupid and dangerous and foolish and hot, so hot outside. Summer hot and summer humid and the heat had infected my brain and I went along because it was better than not going along.

I don't recall how, but we had picked up a third party and soon enough the three of us were in a thicket, standing around a 55 gallon trash barrel of stolen, industrial grade fireworks. Somebody asked the obvious question.

"So, now what?"

"Let's light one" said the mastermind as he produced a book of matches.

I suggested we set the matchbook alight and drop it into the trashcan and run. They laughed, but I was at least half serious. If you're going to do something insane like steal a bunch of explosives, you might as well do something insane with them. Instead, they picked out a likely canister and decided they would light just that one. It was then that I knew this was an incredibly bad idea and I wanted no more of it.

As they looked for a place to set

it off, I started walking away out of the trees. When they found a place I was just out of the trees and heading towards the beach. When they set it off there was a tremendous "whoosh" as the bright white starburst shell went off *sideways*, on the ground in the trees.

Immediately there were whistles blowing and flashlight beams penetrating the night; someone had missed the shanghaied fireworks. Just as suddenly, I was running as fast as I could (which was pretty fast in 1985) down the beach, trying to put distance between me and the scene of the crime. One guy looked at me and said "uh oh" as I ran by, but nobody else noticed. Nobody with a whistle and a flashlight, anyway.

After a short distance, I slowed down to a fast, desperately nonchalant walk. My legs were rubber and adrenaline was a sharp taste in my mouth but after I walked for a ways, I realized I had gotten away. I had escaped from the consequences of my stupidity.

The other guys? I don't know. I never saw them again, and probably wouldn't have recognized them if I did. I sort of hope they got caught for being stupid, but also I know we didn't mean any harm. It was a spur of the moment prank, not a malicious theft.

Did I learn a lesson? Yes: Always start running



Siome times, in the course of laying out a fanzine, you have a photo you want to use, but it needs a long caption due to the unfortunate way the text breaks. The photo shows (*left to right*) John Hardin, Lori Forbes and DeDee White. Apart from that, there really doesn't seem to be a lot to say about this trio, except that two of them lent their spirit, if not their words, to this undertaking.



Jolie LaChance listens attentively to the typical Vegtrants palaver at the oneshot session

before the fuse is lit. Good advice for summer, good advice for life.

Jolie LaChance

“Always run when the fuse is lit”; that’s great advice. More great advice, pull over before you pass out. No one beats the heat, the trick is to avoid it. I was riding my motorcycle with a group of friends from Brianhead Utah (high altitude, cool) back to Las Vegas (over 110 but it’s a dry heat). All was well until we hit Mesquite Nevada which is roughly the same altitude/same heat as Las Vegas. We stopped for gas in Mesquite and I downed a liter of water. It wasn’t 10 AM yet and I was feeling fine. At that point the water was just a precaution. However there are about 60 miles or so between Mesquite and Las Vegas and as we rode south the sun got higher and it got hotter.

It was actually pretty sudden when the heat stroke hit. I went from fine to not fine, to where’s the next exit in about five miles. I signaled a turn at the Indian Reservation/Casino/Smoke shop (a local phenomenon worthy of its own article) and parked. At that point my friends pulled up and told me that if I hadn’t pulled over they were expecting me to fall over. Apparently I was weaving.

I bought two gallons of water and started drinking one while a friend poured the other gallon on my head. The water was ice cold and almost stopped my heart right there but almost is only almost and I lived.

I drank the gallon, got on the bike and made another 10 miles into town, pulled over at a 7-11 and repeated the experience. The same thing occurred a mile or so from my home but I made the last couple of miles without stopping. I lived but I learned. Heatstroke is sneaky and the sun always wins.

Ross Chamberlain

It also rises, I’m told. There could probably be some clever wordplay about rising and baking and other stuff, but I draw the line when it comes to discussing things involving yeast.

I had a friend whose hand was damaged by fireworks back in my teenage days in Texas, but otherwise I’ve never had any near misses such as JoHn describes.

You can always depends on Ross Chamberlain, one of the quieter Vegtrants, for a trenchant observation.





(L to R): Roc Mills, Jolie LaChance and DeDee White. The fan smiling happily is Ross Chamberlain. No need to ask why.

So I'll stick to acknowledging that I've managed to avoid heatstroke so far... But not sunburn. I've had some marvelous occasions where I could've stood in for Hellboy, minus the cutoff horns.

In New York, July 4th, 17... uh, 1976, we had the big Bicentennial celebration with the Tall Ships and all, and I had recently acquired a Super8 film camera and spent a lot of time shooting film of the ships from a variety of vantage points. I, uh, failed to wear a hat... Arnie and Joyce were hosting a party to watch the fireworks that evening – their apartment building had a great view of New York Harbor from the roof – and I arrived with a glow on to rival the show...

When I was preparing to move from NYC to Las Vegas (via Cleveland) in 1992, I pulled a similar stunt while arranging for a truck. There have been other occasions, but those were the most ferocious.

Roxanne Mills

For most people, I'm sure that the first thing

which comes to mind about summer is the heat. Before this last weekend, the same could be said of me. Not anymore, though. From now on, I will always remember summer in Vegas as being when I got my first ever case of frost -bite. It's just a talent of mine, these sorts of things.

Last Saturday, in the wee small hours of the night/morning, I woke up with an urgent need to pee (this is what I get for drinking two bottles of vitamin water right before bedtime). I staggered to the bathroom in a half-awake state, did my business, and then staggered back towards the bedroom. While I had been out, it seems that the fan had blown the bedroom door half-way shut. Being me, I stumbled gut first into the sideways protruding door knob.

If I had hit the door knob straight on, the door would have just reopened and I'd have suffered little more than a small bruise; because of the angle of impact, the door didn't move and I took the knob solidly in the flesh, just belly -button side of the hip bone, with the full force of 145 pounds of sleepy momentum. Though it hurt like the dickens



Roxanne Mills is one of the sweetest-natured Vegrants, but then, all things are relative.

and burned mightily, I just crawled back into bed and soon fell asleep again.

The next day, however, it hurt even worse - like I'd been sucker-punched in the gut - and so I wrapped an ice pack in a towel and placed it over the sore spot. I swapped the used ice pack for a fresh one several times during the day as the pain would leap back in full force whenever the ice was removed. Please note, I wrapped the ice pack in a towel! So how I still managed to end up with a large red spot that looked just like a severe burn, I'll never know. It's just a talent of mine. The burn stayed for days, and in fact I can still see a small spot of it and the skin looks just like it would had I burned it against an open oven door or an open flame.

So there you have it, frost -bite in the summer in Las Vegas. Like I said, it's a talent of mine. For my next feat, I'm contemplating sun-burn during a

blizzard... if only I could find a blizzard.

Ross Chamberlain

Seems I remember a Dairy Queen down t' the corner.... Or am I mixing parlors?

Topic moves to nonsequitural realms, but as that topic deals with a similar concept, perhaps this can serve as a strange segue...

The Wikipedia article on "Koan" begins by referring to the classic koan: "Two hands clap and there is a sound; what is the sound of one hand?" We most frequently hear this quoted as "what is the sound of one hand clapping?" but there is a subtle difference.

I long ago discovered I could produce the sound of one hand clapping, fingers closing sharply upon the palm. I felt inordinately smug about this until, recently, I realized that "fooling" the koan is only slipping off the edge of the path to that awareness it was meant to evoke.

The article defines koan as "a story, dialogue, question, or statement in the history and lore of Chán (Zen) Buddhism, generally containing aspects that are inaccessible to rational understanding, yet may be accessible to intuition." Zen masters will ask or tell a student a koan, of which there are many examples, most of which sound like prime examples of a nonsequitur.

An example given is: "A monk asked Dongshan Shouchu, 'What is Buddha?' Dongshan said, 'Three pounds of flax'" The article does not attempt to explain this or other koans. It seems there is much literature on the subject, many collections of koans, but none is acceptable if it attempts to define their meaning. Like much of zen, the koan is about the moment, and how it reflects the eternal.

It is left to the student to consider or meditate upon a koan, or, in the context of training, to respond to it. Not to explain, but to show awareness of its connotations or significance in a higher context. Cleverness is not an acceptable approach. One student might take the koan too literally, another provide an answer that can be right for the moment when it is spoken, yet if it does not show the spirit of enlightenment, the master may not accept it.

Zen isn't linear; that's what koans are all about. Oops. Make that one element of what koans

are all about. Context is important but sometimes more obscure than one might expect.

What is the sound of one hand clapping? A raven alights on a distant branch.

Probably too literal. But I kinda like it.

Another answer to the same question, in the context of today's topic: Labor Day.

The master slaps the student upside the head...

Teresa Cochran-Taylor

Leave it up to fans to give you trial by ice, fire and Zen koans. This is why I'd much rather be around these folk in person at least some of the time than stick strictly to blogs. It's sort of like the difference between browsing the CD rack in the store and sitting around with a bunch of friends playing music.

I did just that recently. Some other fiddlers



Teresa Cochran is one of our prime music-makers. She and Bill Mills often serenade us with a variety of folk, rock and country tunes.

from the Nevada Old-time Fiddle Association and I went to Goldfield to play at their little town festival. It's about 120 miles from Las Vegas, and noticeably cooler. The stage was so crowded that I was getting my bow in other folks' hair. There were huge amounts of good, down-home barbecue, including collard greens, surprisingly enough.

There's nothing like playing music. It's soothing and forgiving in an odd sort of way, especially in a situation like a jam. There are lots of ideas and new songs flying all over the place, much like a one-shot.

Bill Mills

It is indeed a hot motley lot the one-shot got! I enjoyed reading Hardin's description of the folly of being too damned helpful. I can relate to that, dude.

One morning years ago, as I arrived blurry-eyed for work at Daily Video in Hollywood, I helped jump-start the beat up old Cadillac Coupe Seville of a small family group of four that included an elderly woman (presumably the old mom) who had stalled out in front of the building. Unfortunately, I didn't know that they had spent the night before totally stripping MY (well kept and beloved) Cadillac Coupe Seville that had been parked overnight behind our building! An event that definitely drove home (so to speak) the point that (say it with me now JoHn) "No good deed goes unpunished".

And how enlightening to read that the Guru Rossivishnu Chamberlain is now teaching FenZen. I have heard of his admirable project... opening a FenZen Monastery an hour or so out in the Nevada desert to minister to the Neos. I think it's a worthy effort, but I'm not sure that "The Bunny Ranch" is an appropriate name for it. But tell us, what is the sound of one Fan LoCing, Guru Rossivishnu?

Joyce's memories of summer rang a resounding bell for me. I think it was the recess bell, in fact. As a youngster, until I learned of the science, astronomy and such that motivates the Earth's seasonal changes, I was certain the summer simply waited in abeyance until the end of the school year. No matter what the calendars may have said, summer was only real once one had finally arrived at the anxiously awaited last day of school and heard the classroom announcement "... and in clos-



Lucky James Taylor is a steady and rational influence on some of the more rambunctious Vegants.

ing I want to say I hope you have a wonderful summer vacation. Class dismissed".

So in closing I just want to say, I hope you had a wonderful summer vacation.

Class dismissed.

James Taylor

I'm beginning to hate summer after 10 years in Las Vegas. I don't care if it is a dry heat. I can now understand why my parents left Lake Havasu City after 13 years. They had retired there after living in the SF Bay area for 20 years. And Lake Havasu was a fascinating place laid out in one fell swoop in the 1960s by McCulloch of chainsaw fame as a 'new town' built from scratch. No subdivisions, you picked out a lot and found a builder and that was that.

But it's a small town and my parents had always lived at least near a big city since they had been married. No opera, no symphony and no museums. It did have power boat races but somehow that didn't fill the void. Arthritis kept my father from taking up golf or fishing and my mother found keeping books for a church and working on regional health board to be dull and unchallenging. They began to fight about things for the first time

in their marriage.

They figured out what was happening and started looking for somewhere else to retire. They systematically crisscrossed Arizona, Utah, Oregon and California looking for some place with a more moderate climate, a University and an Opera. They settled on Keizer, Oregon (and no Arnie that's not a spelling error) just north of Salem. Still a smallish place but a lot bigger than Lake Havasu City, it has Willamette University and an hour away Portland with an Opera House and Powells Bookstore.

I'm not going anywhere for now but I find the period from May through October to be a trial. In idle moments I wonder about where I would live if I got the chance.

Ross Chamberlain

All else equal, I'd've probably liked to retire to the mountains of North Carolina, in the vicinity of the town where I was born. Not so much nostalgia for the place as we moved away from there when I was five, and memories were not much impressed on my psyche. But some years later I went to spend a summer with my older brother, who did return there to live after a few years gallivanting, and I found the sense of the place to be very conducive to living comfortably, if one were well off enough...

The food! Ah, the food. We had a discussion of grits and corn meal mush and other variants like scrabble a little while ago here in the living room, and it made me hungry for some of the same. But back in Transylvania County (yes! As I've noted elsewhere, and say, with a fair-to-middlin' Lugosi accent, I was born in Transylvania!) is where I learned to love good -ol' Southron Cookin', much of which I was, of course, introduced to in the earlier years and thus formed a basis of familiarity for it.

But I like it here, where I can open my FanZen Academy for and Feng Fooey Dojo with impunity. That is, if Ms. Im Punity doesn't dodge out on the down payment.

Arnie Katz

That's the editorial for this issue. Now, on to the articles.

Arnie Katz

Just yesterday, I discovered that they'd taken away one of the semi-innocent pleasures of my youth, As of December, 2008, the folks at Archie Comics, once known as MLJ, redesigned the look of the entire franchise.

Perverts (hereafter to be referred to as "connoisseurs of fine graphic story artistry") of a Certain Age will immediately recognize the significance of this seemingly trivial footnote to comic book history.

The redesign, aimed at making the Archie franchise more contemporary and acceptable to today young comic book reader, removed the last vestiges of what made me a devoted "Archie" reader.

Before I share my memories of Archie, and the recollections that caused us to name this **Idle Minds** the "Summer Fun Issue," I'd like to give you some historical perspective on Archie and the company that published the comics. Besides, I've done all this research and it has got to be good for *something*.

At first, Archie was just a skinny, redheaded teenager in a crowd of super-powered crime-busters and Nazi fighters. The closest thing he had to a costume was a sleeveless pullover with a proud "R" on the chest.

Looks are often so deceiving. Decades after most of his super-heroic comic book compatriots became four-color history, Archie Andrews remains one of the most recognizable characters in popular culture.

Maybe Archie *does* have super powers, if you count persistence and enveloping charm as super powers. From the mid-1940's to the early 1960's, Archie and his Riverdale gang weathered the comic book business' dizzying roller coaster fortunes to rank among the elite comic book franchises. While former sales titans like Captain Marvel and The (original) Human Torch bit the dust, the Archie family of comic books continued to sell. And though Archie's golden age now lies in the past, millions around the world still follow his exploits.

Archie has at least one thing in common with the super-doers he largely displaced in the late



GOOD
GIRLS
GET
SPANKED

This issue marked an important milestone in the history of Archie. It was the first one to feature the redheaded teenager on the cover, which signaled the beginning of the end of its second class status as a back-of-the-book feature. Note the circular insert in the upper right; The Shield was definitely still the top name at Pep Comics, even if he had to make a little room for "The Mirth of a Nation." It was the large number of pages of 1940's comics that made it possible for strips like Archie to start small and slowly build a following before having to carry a whole comic book.



1940's: a great origin story. The birth of Archie is much more interesting than the silly stories that introduced most of the super heroes who never attained a fraction of Archie's popularity.

There *were* a lot of super hero origin stories published between Superman's first adventure in *Action Comics* in 1938 and Archie's debut at the end of 1941. Once the Man of Steel caused a sensation, other publishers tried to exploit the groundswell of interest with super hero titles of their own.

Comic book sales soared as the nation's economy heated up on the eve of World War II. Costumed characters became such a fad that even poor ones had some chance of success.

Some of the most impoverished of the poor Superman imitations bore the symbol of MLJ Magazines on their lurid covers. MLJ was far from the worst comic book publishing house, but it never grew into a serious rival to DC, Timely and Faucett in the super hero field. .

Three men contributed their hopes for prosperity and their initials to form MLJ Magazines. Morris Coyne, Louis Silberkleit and John Goldwater brought publishing and distribution expertise to their infant company, but none of the trio actually wrote or drew. I suppose we can be grateful that, at least to my knowledge, none of them tried.

At first, the company got content for its titles from the Harry "A" Chesler studio. That got MLJ the comic books it needed, but Chesler's assembly line production didn't encourage excellence. The poorly paid Chesler staff couldn't match the commitment and flair like top comics guys like CC Beck (Captain Marvel).

The first MLJ comic book, *Blue Ribbon #1* reached newsstands in late fall 1939 with a November '41 cover date. The three partners had to be a little disappointed by their maiden effort. If the title wasn't outright fraud, it was a considerable exaggeration. The public wasn't going to put down many dimes for stories about an obvious rip-off like Rang-a-Tang, The Wonder Dog. The other features weren't quite that bad, and included a couple of reasonably well-known newspaper strips (*Foxy Grandpa* and *Little Nemo*),

Blue Ribbon #2 put the emphasis on super heroes, but the results weren't a lot better. Who wants a super hero named "Bob Phantom?" Evidently, not many people did, because MLJ got the message, dumped Chesler and brought writers and artists in-house to create more substantial characters.

Pep #1 introduced one of the best of the MLJ

costumed crusaders, the Shield. He was another red, white and blue campaigner from Joe Simon and Jack Kirby, who did Captain America. It wasn't very original – even MLJ already had a resident patriot in Captain Flagg – but the Shield had vibrant art and some of the wildest stories ever seen in comic books. It's one of the few MLJ heroes who retains some interest for collectors; I traded two of his comics to Jon White for a copy of *Fancylopedia II*.

Pep #22, December featured the Shield and the green-clad Hangman on the cover, but a little story tucked inside had a more lasting impact. Writer Vic Bloom and artist Bob Montana's story introduced a trio of 16-year-olds in an adventure that must have seemed pretty tame beside the exploits of the super-doers who clustered under the *Pep* banner.

Despite the absence of bleeding, twisted bodies in the strip, Bloom and Montana's *Archie* proved more than a one-shot wonder. The all-American kids from Riverdale High didn't foil any crimes or slay any monsters in that first story, but the super hero lovers found the lightly humorous tale strangely appealing.

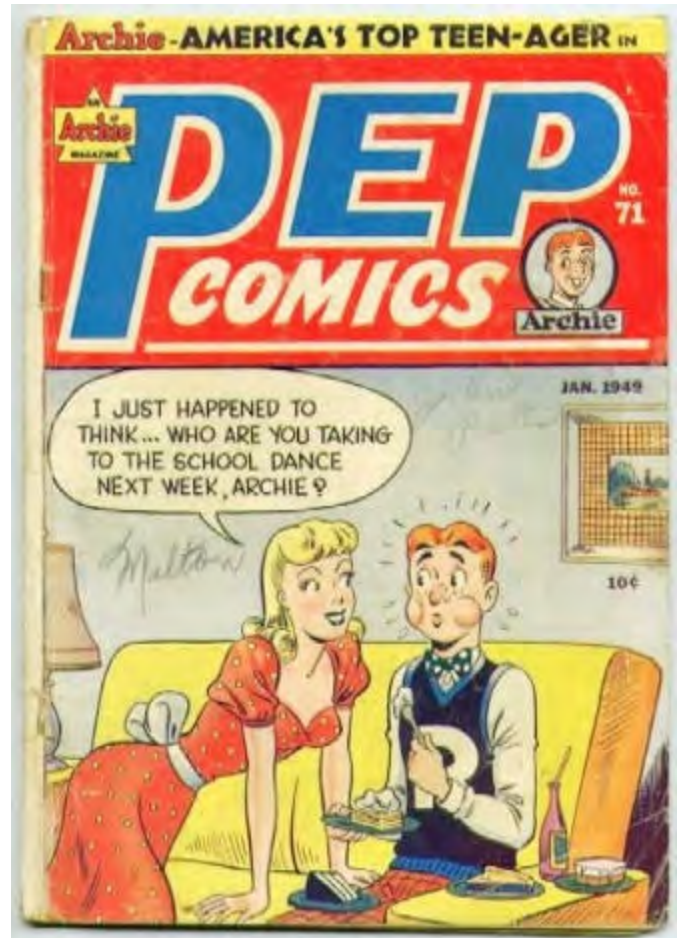
John Goldwater was responsible for the existence of this back-of-the-book story, and its thousands of sequels. Although Goldwater, like his two partners, appreciated the company's later characters like The Black Hood, Mr. Justice and The Wizard, he became the first of the partners to concede that there wasn't a Superman or Captain Marvel in the lot. Goldwater began to look for an alternative to the costumed characters.

Wholly original, unique ideas are very rare. Just as Superman owes something to Phillip Wylie's novel *Gladiator*, *Archie* drew upon a couple of pop culture hits of the 1930's and early 1940's. The "Andy Hardy" movie series, which starred Mickey Rooney as a fine young American teenager, provided the main inspiration.

Henry Aldrich, starring Harold Stone, presented the humorous exploits of a teenager. Henry's escapades, often involving his friends and parents, are lighter in tone than the "Andy Hardy" films and a lot less preachy.

Archie steered away from heavy subjects and adopted the "Boys will be boys" attitude that prevailed on *The Aldrich Family*. The *Archie* gang was older than Henry Aldrich and his pals, though, more like the high schoolers in the Andy Hardy movies.

Vic Bloom quickly left *Archie* for other projects.



The cover of Pep #71, a 1940's discloses almost as much about the franchise as Betty's dress does her figure.

The drawing, more detailed than in the 1950's when I started reading them, makes this classic "Good Girl" art. Note Betty's pose.

Note also the motto above the title — the concept of "teenager" as a distinct demographic group was so sketchy at this point that the spelling had not yet regularized.

The cover also makes sure that anyone browsing the comic book rack will know that this is a comic with Archie.



Bob Montana not only continued as artist, but he started writing the stories, too.

The first *Archie* story didn't have all the elements that became familiar to millions of readers over the next few years. Originally, it was just Archie Andrews, his blonde girlfriend Betty Cooper and his ne'er-do-well sidekick Forsythe P. "Jugghead" Jones.

MLJ wasn't even certain about their teen hero's name. John Goldwater plucked the name "Archie" from his memory, a figurative tip of the hat to a childhood friend. Yet in the opening story, the affable redhead introduces himself to Betty and asks her to call him "Chick." Fortunately, Archie dropped that affectation quickly and stuck with "Archie." It's probably just as well. Can you imagine a comic book called *Chick* or even *Chick's Pals & Gals*?

Jugghead is a remarkable character. The prototype-beatnik/hippie/slacker is Archie's opposite in almost every respect.. Jugghead eats like a pig, hates women and soap, slides through school one step ahead of expulsion, and dresses in a filthy sweater. Archie loves people, parties and group activities, while Jugghead is an introverted loner. Today, most writers would make them bitter enemies, with Jugghead a constant threat to go Columbine on the rest of the Riverdale student body.

In *Archie*, however, Jugghead is the one person who is always there, always faithful He is Archie's best friend, a pal who'll even suffer the presence of Betty

and Veronica to please his friend. (Max Shulman, creator of the *Dobie Gillis* novels and TV sitcom, patterned the relationship between Dobie and Maynard G. Krebs on Archie and Jugghead.)

The publisher has always claimed that *Archie* was an immediate hit. That may be 20-20 hindsight, because the strip stayed a back-of-the-book feature in *Pep* for several months while Montana elaborated the concept into the version of *Archie* everyone knows today. For instance, *Pep* #25 introduced Archie's famous red jalopy and, even more importantly, gave readers their first look at Archie's slick rival Reggie Mantle.

Pep #26 marks the first appearance of the aristocratic Veronica Lodge and the start of the romantic that has fueled the stories ever since. The Archie-Betty-Veronica love triangle was quite unusual at the time. Generally, two guys fought over one girl.

About the only thing that visually distinguished Betty from Veronica was hair color, but they had diametrically opposite personalities. Veronica Lodge had everything a teenage heiress could want and often treated "common people" with condescension. Despite her upper class attitudes, though, Veronica wasn't a villainess, even if she sometimes acted ruthlessly to keep "Archiekins" to herself and away from her best friend Betty.

Betty Cooper *is* the quintessential American Girl as that image existed in the 1930-1960 era. She is pretty and innocently sexy, yet also generous, intelligent and sensible. Betty was nuts about Archie and often sacrificed her own interests to further his.





Other '42-'43 stories added the fat principal of Riverdale High School, Mr. Weatherbee and the spinster teacher Mrs. Grundy. Over the years, the gang expanded to include the petite and intelligent Midge, Midge's jealous jock boyfriend Moose and parents for all the main characters.

MLJ waited a little over a year to give the fledging strip its own comic book. *Archie Comics* #1, Winter 1942-1943, confirmed Archie Andrews as MLJ's fastest-rising star.

Despite the creation of *Archie Comics*, the strip stayed little more than a barely tolerated guest in the super hero-dominated *Pep*. It wasn't until *Pep* #36 that the publisher thought enough of the alleged "teen sensation" to put Archie's likeness on the cover!

Not that he was *Pep*'s star attraction, even then. The illustration shows costumed crime-fighters running toward the reader, almost ready to burst from the cover. Archie, resplendent in his letter sweater, is 'way in the back, jumping into the air so he can be seen above the heads of the charging super heroes. A cover blurb described the teen as the "Mirth of a Nation."

It wasn't until *Pep* #55, nearly two years after the strip made its debut, that *Archie* banished the super dupers from the cover. This change put the seal on MLJ's great metamorphosis. Shortly thereafter, the company changed its name to Archie Comics Group and largely abandoned the super hero genre until the mid-1960s revival.

Those used to the highly stylized Archie artwork of the post-Korean War era would be sur-

prised by the way Archie and Veronica look on that *Pep* #55 cover. Modern comic book collectors are often surprised, when they encounter the frequently reprinted *Archie* parody, "Starchie." By the end of that lampoon, the artwork evokes the gritty starkness of the Edward G. Robinson gangster pictures.

Bob Montana gradually abandoned the highly detailed character drawings and realistic backgrounds. By the late 1950's, when I started reading the comic, Archie, Veronica and the others had "cathedral window eyes" and most panels had featureless monochrome backgrounds.

Fandom has a slight connection to Archie, but it's to one of the character's radio incarnations. Calvin Thomas Beck, New York area fan and publisher of *Castle of Frankenstein*, played Archie's nemesis Reggie on a Saturday morning incarnation in the 1950's.

I began reading the Archie family of comic books in the mid 1950's at about age 10. I liked super hero comics best, but they were fairly scarce in the 1950's until the DC revivals in *Show-*



case and the launch of Marvel Comics. Since there weren't enough costumed heroes, I at least sampled all the other genres, including westerns, mysteries, science fiction and oddball titles like *Big Town*, about newspapers.

I got a chance to read some Archie Comics when visiting relatives in Silver Spring, MD. My second cousin Shirley, a couple of years older than me, introduced me to Elvis Presley (*Heartbreak Hotel*, *Hound Dog* and *Don't Be Cruel*), the comic book *Mad* and the titles that featured Archie Andrews and his friends.

The world of Archie appealed to me much more than the ones depicted in *Father Knows Best* and *Ozzie & Harriet*. On both TV shows, the adults controlled everything, knew everything and judged everything. Many of the plots focused on the parents' efforts to keep the kids on the straight and narrow while teaching them Right Thinking.

Stories in the Archie comic books revolved around the kids, not the parents. Adults in Archie are pretty much as I saw them in real time at the time, significant obstacles that had to be handled, avoided or dodged as the circumstances dictated.

Leave It to Beaver was about teaching the kids Moral Lessons to steer them through childhood into an adulthood of stultifying conformity like the Beav's parents.

Archie may have instructed at times, but not by having some authority figure lay down the law to Archie, Betty and Veronica. The stories emphasized happiness, social success and personal satisfaction. It was assumed that the Riverdale High gang would grow up and become fairly responsible – well, maybe not Jugghead – but the plots aimed at achieving happiness in the here and now, not in some nebulous future.

Archie also affirmed the paradoxical dictum that good kids have the leeway to be a little bad. The parents pounced every time they caught those TV kids in even the slightest infraction – and they seemed to be omniscient.

The parents and teachers in the Archie titles didn't know *anything* about what the kids were doing. Like many real-world parents, they didn't really care all that much, either. As long as Archie, Betty and Veronica didn't get put away for hard time, their little peccadilloes were roundly excused and inevitably forgotten.

No, what really counted in *Archie* was who was going to Pop's Soda Shoppe with whom, what accessory Archie had to have to make his jalopy run and how Riverdale High could win a



Veronica Lodge, shown here in a typical saucy pose, was the embodiment of my mother's sage advice: "It's as easy to love a rich one as a poor one." She never found an answer to the question I asked in reply: "If they have money, why do they want me?"

Nonetheless, Veronica Lodge wanted Archie and didn't want Betty Cooper to have him. The combined motive incited her to do anything possible to get and keep him as her devoted boyfriend.



The redesigned Betty and Veronica look a lot younger and less stylized than the originals.

game or competition.

Betty and Veronica might stoop to tricks that would shame a streetwalker in their endless battle for Archie's affections, but one method that never occurred to either of them was to do anything overtly sexual. They dressed provocatively and posed suggestively, but no one ever got past "first base" in an Archie comics. That didn't seem so strange to me, since, as a sixth grader, I wasn't getting very far beyond that limit, either.

The strip featured an engaging group of characters that embodied an assortment of teenaged stereotypes. What made *Archie* so engaging was that Montana fleshed out those stereotypes until they seemed like representations of real teens, albeit ones caught in a time warp.

Archie Andrews had much the same function in the strip as Mary Tyler Moore did in her legendary, eponymous TV program. He was a relatively pallid and conventional character who served as a foil for a colorful ensemble cast.

Viewing the strip from my vantage point as an alienated pariah and future Core Fandomite, I didn't like Archie all that much. He came across as a grinning glad-hander whose outstanding talent

was likeability.

He wasn't all that smart, but he sure was popular. In short, he was the type of kid who, in real life, would've had nothing to do with me and my oddball friends. Some people say that *Father Knows Best* gave them a glimpse into an ideal American family; *Archie* offered a window into the world of the popular kids who always seemed to be involved in everything and in charge of most of it.

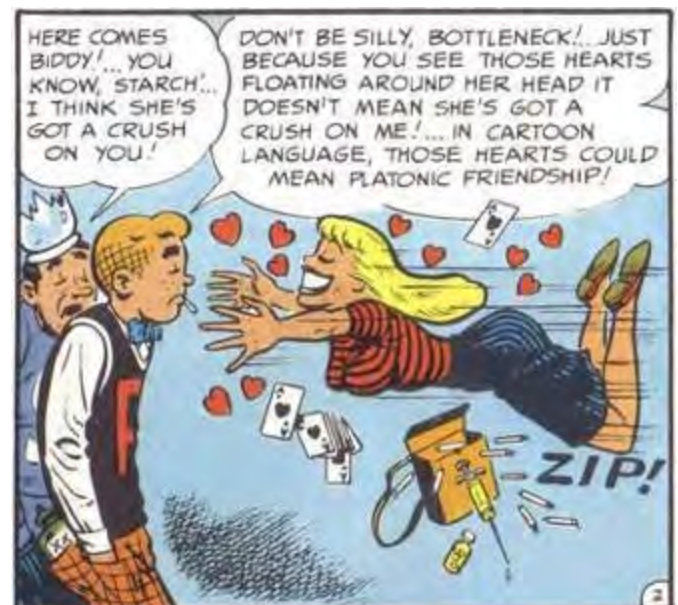
Betty and Veronica were a matched pair of teenaged temptresses. Except for hair color and style, they looked like sisters.

Their personalities, however, were diametrically opposed. Betty Cooper was a toned-down, teenaged version of "all-American girl" Betty Grable. She was sweet, benign and, usually, sensible.

Veronica was the somewhat snooty and spoiled rich girl, the non-ethnic prototype of the Jewish American Princess. She wanted for nothing and wanted everything. Veronica could certainly do the right, even the noble, thing, but she was most at home scheming ways to make Archie her love-slave.

Jugghead Jones, Archie's best friend, was the strip's rebel, a bohemian who paved the way for Maynard G. Krebs on *Dobie Gillis*. Sadly, the writers were pretty much middle-of-the-road white bread, so Jugghead's rebellion had no real substance to it. Jugghead wore sloppy clothes, didn't comb his hair and didn't put a high priority on bathing. He had no use for girls and shunned the very social engagements and complications that

This is how *Mad* parodied the 1940's version of the strip.



consumed Archie Andrews' full-time attention.

In keeping with the strip's adamant opposition to any form of nonconformity, Jugghead was a poor student and bone lazy. If he didn't like girls, it was also true that they didn't care much for him, either. Jugghead played to readers whose sexual interest was a little slow to develop and gave the rest of us someone to whom we could feel superior. The teens who read *Archie* may not have been as successful with women as Archie Andrews, but at least they had their eye on the prize, unlike Jugghead.

Every story needs a villain. Reggie Mantle really wasn't much of a villain, but then, there wasn't a lot of drama and tension in the stories. Reggie was the rich kid who rubbed your nose in it, the popular kid who raised himself by lowering everyone around him.

Archie stories did sometimes aspire to Redeeming Social Value, but it was more likely that Archie would borrow money from his arch-enemy Reggie and have to do whatever the strip's villain wanted until Archie repaid him.

Those comic books taught me some unintentional lessons, too. For example, it deeply impressed me with the desirability of having two girlfriends. While this proved harder to handle in real life, where Lois Dugow and Joanne Rosenfeld proved much harder to control, it remained a goal.

Archie Comics embraced the 1950's with breathtaking enthusiasm. When I started reading, the



somewhat more realistic stories of the postwar 1940's were gone, replaced by the featureless, banal world of the Eisenhower administration.

And once Archie reached the mid 1950's, the strip stayed there. The sexual revolution, the Vietnam War and the counter culture simply didn't exist in Riverdale. When the Riverdale High gang finally heard about the war, some time in the 1970's after I had ceased reading about their adventures, war protesters and draft resisters were in short supply.

Archie and his pals and gals didn't go to teen-aged drinking parties or toke up in the bedroom, either. You knew they were good kids, because when they did something bad, it was *fun* bad, not Betty-turns-tricks-at-the-truck-stop bad.

Everything I've written so far is an attempt to intellectually analyze the appeal of Archie – and why that appeal disappeared after a few years of my devoted readership. There was, however, one additional factor: the sexual provocativeness of the artwork.

Betty and Veronica retain a bit of their sexiness outside the actual comic books.



That might seem farfetched to anyone who looks at the strips and compare them to today's 920 million Internet porn sites and seemingly inexhaustible supply of x-rated movies. The newsstand guy wouldn't sell *Playboy* or its imitators to a kid and adult bookstores were forbidden territory, even if you knew where to find them

That's precisely the point; those things didn't exist back then, so hormone-enflamed young men had to resort to other sources of libidinous excitement.

Fortunately, I was able to apply the same imaginative thinking that later made me a professional writer and a prolific fan to the problem.

"Properly viewed, *everything* is lewd," Tom Lehrer sang in his *The Old Smut Peddler*. In that spirit, Archie Comics in the 1950's were sufficiently lewd to appeal to an adolescent boy.

I didn't know it at the time I was reading those comic books, but I probably would've gotten even more out of 1940's Archie artwork. It had a lot more detail and shading than the art in the stories I read in *Archie*, *Archie's Joke Book*, *Laugh* and other titles in the late 1950's.

Montana had simplified and stylized the art by then. In a smut-starved world, Archie artwork still retained enough of its original prurient quality to inspire a horny young fellow such as I was in those days.

Archie Comics specialized in a species of drawing called "Good Girl" art. These softest of softcore visuals dealt in inference and suggestiveness. It is all about poses and the same peek-a-booo sensibility that made cheesecake photography so popular in the 1940-1965 period. Mr. Heller, who owned the local Rexall drugstore, wouldn't sell me pin-up magazines, but he had no problem selling me copies of *Betty & Veronica's Summer Fun Annual*, even though it was full of drawings of women in much the same poses.

And now, I see, the folks who make today's Archie Comics have taken away this feckless boyhood pleasure. No longer will junior high school boys retire to the bathroom with the latest *Summer Fun Annual*.

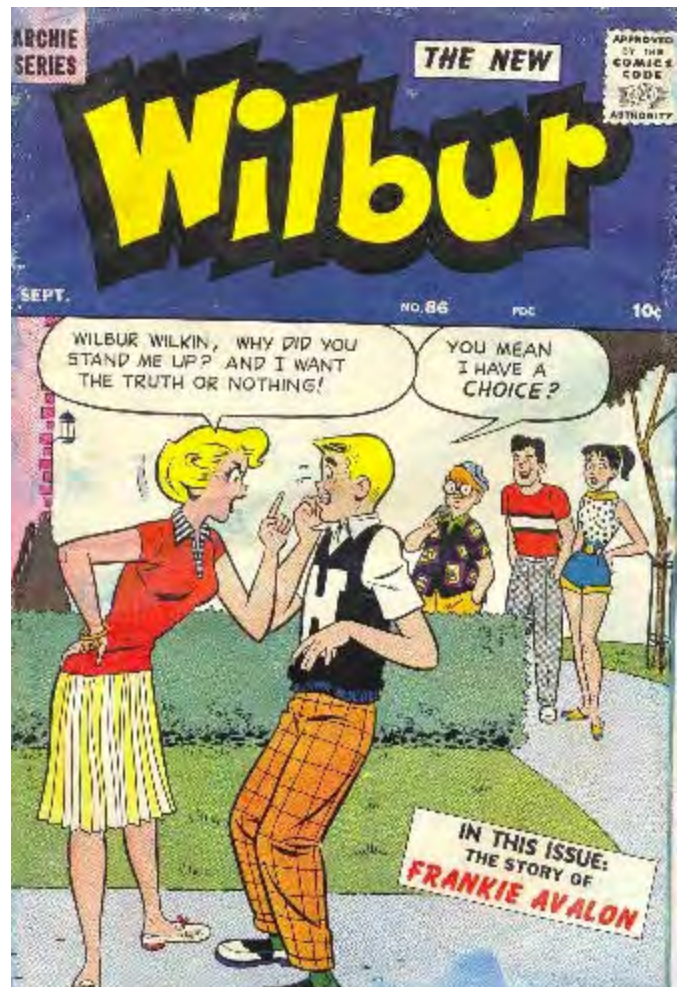
The "new-look" characters are more detailed and, very likely, better drawn, but they lack any of the "Good Girl" aspect. Betty and Veronica can probably still inspire pederasts, because they look very young, but they are no longer the almost grown pin-up queens of my youth.

-- Arnie Katz

The creators of anything new, like *Archie*, expected imitators in the hotly competitive comic book business of the 1940's. Not every publisher, however, produced its own imitation.

MLJ concocted *Wilbur* in 1944 and it would be hard to find any comic more like *Archie*. It was like an alternate reality version of the familiar world of Riverdale High. *Wilbur Wilkins* and *Archie* were virtually the same, except that he had a blond crewcut instead of *Archie's* red hair. The blonde was the sweet one and the brunette was the bitch.

Despite *Wilbur's* wholly derivative nature — they could use the same scripts — the strip lasted over a decade. It never seriously dented the audience for *Archie*, *Betty* and *Veronica*, though.



Teresa Cochran

When I was a kid, I was lucky enough to go to summer camp, because there were charity-sponsored camps for blind children. I was always puzzled as a teenager when I would tell other working-class kids that I went to summer camp, and they'd act like I'd told them I'd just won a million bucks. The camps were odd in a lot of cases. Some of them were Seventh-day Adventist, and one that I went to seemed to be run by all ten bohemian types who worked in special education for the State of Idaho. Needless to say, this last was my favorite.



I lived in Northern Idaho (Lewiston, near Clarkston, WA) when I was eleven and twelve years old in 1975-76. I was invited to participate in a summer program at the Idaho School for the Blind. It was going to be sort of a home-grown "vision-quest" program with about ten kids, and I was one of the youngest. My mom was very willing to let me go, since there was a lot of adult supervision. I even flew by myself to Southern Idaho and someone from the summer workshop picked me up at the airport.

The workshop was held in one of the dorms. We were told a lot of fun things that just plain blew me away. We could stay up as late as we wanted, as long as we were up at 7:00 am. No problem for me; I already had bouts of insomnia and strange sleeping habits. We were told there wouldn't be a lot of hand-holding and talking down to us as if we were incompetent. We were expected to pull our own weight if asked. We might work in the little "canteen" after dinner or do chores around the kitchen, or do some heavy labor when we went camping in the Sawtooth Mountains. We were given some music to listen to and a TV to watch, some Braille supplies, etc.

It was an interesting bunch of kids. There was Sharon, who was going deaf and almost blind, and played the piano beautifully. There was Patty, the tiny comedienne with boundless energy. There was Kathy, who made my fascination with bats

RITE OF PASSAGE

look like a passing interest, and who had an eidetic memory for show tunes. She was also narcoleptic, and you wouldn't know at any given moment when she'd be sound asleep. The staff and volunteers were colorful and cool, too. My favorite was Starr, who wore long dresses and beads and had very long hair. I wanted to be like her when I grew up. She was also the staff member who played Harry Nilsson's "The Point" one evening and got me hooked on it.

We mostly took day trips out to Shoshone Caves and some sand dunes. The second year I went, we were going to go camping in the mountains, and take the train part of the way there. This was the first time I'd ever been on a train. It was about a four-hour ride between Boise and Idaho Falls. I think some of us took the train and met others who drove to meet us. I just loved the sounds the train made, and the rhythmic swaying on the tracks. It was pretty much the way Steve Goodman wrote about it in the song "City of New Orleans". I hummed the song to myself as we went along. The other passengers must have thought I was kooky.

My memory is kind of hazy as far as transportation went from there on, but I remember a van or a bus with a bunch of us on it going off to Sun Valley and then up into the mountains. Up and up. Way, way up there. I was excited, because I had a feeling this was going to be a real camping trip; not just a baby summer camp with cabins. It turned out to be the most rustic camping trip I'd ever been on, even with my family, and we're good campers.

The campsite was a quarter-mile from the bathroom. At night, we could just find a likely spot in the dark in most cases. Otherwise, we had to wake up the adults, which I hated doing.

The adults had us doing everything. The division of labor was pretty conventional, with boys chopping wood and girls cooking and doing dishes. I loved putting my hands in a hot pan of water just off the fire, while the rest of me felt twenty-degree air temperatures. There's something kind of exhilarating about that.

During the day, we might take a nature walk, or do some chores around camp. We'd make the meals and in the evening, we'd turn in pretty early. The first night, I remember Starr telling me how she loved being in the mountains and looking at

the stars, because it looked like she could reach up and touch them. I was awestruck by that idea, and went to sleep imagining touching stars. I'd already been reading SF for awhile by this time, so this was a wonderful new concept for me to ponder.

I woke up shivering harder than I would have thought possible. My teeth chattered, and my whole body convulsed. I instinctively curled up in a ball, but that didn't help. I made a note to myself that a slumber-party-cotton-sleeping bag was no match for subfreezing weather in the mountains, even if it was in the middle of summer. What was I thinking? What were the grownups thinking? Who'd missed the fact that I'd brought the wrong sleeping bag from home? Well, I was going to be a big girl and make it stoically through this ordeal. I wouldn't complain.

The next morning I proudly told a grownup I was really shivering but I'd made it through the cold. That night I suddenly found myself in a different tent with a few other girls, which made the inside temperature a lot warmer. I also found myself using someone's parka or blanket. No one said much to me, but I was grateful for what they did. I think they were humoring me and respecting my sense of dignity. Who knows? It's a good thing my silly kid self called out for help.

I'll never forget that camping trip. Actually, it pretty much established my love for the outdoors and camping. The general experience of the summer workshop was a good test of my maturity, too. I found out that I needed to grow up a lot more, but was also well on my way to forming my own personality and philosophy of life.

— Teresa Cochran

Las Vegrants Online

Las Vegrants is well-represented online. The main site is LasVegrants.com where you can gain access to files of the Internet TV show "The Wasted Hour," Bill Mills' TheVoicesOfFandom (TVoF.Info), check out the audio and video files at The Fan Video Network, and more.

It's all free and fairly entertaining.

Brenda Dupont

Since living here my view on what heat really is has changed. Summer here always brings back memories of what I thought hot was. Living near the beach in Torrance, California, I was sure that anything over 90 would cause me to melt completely. Now 90 feels like a cool night and I often wear a light shawl or sweatshirt over my tank top.

On one of these sizzling 90+ nights, my husband and I lay in bed, laughing about the impossibility of sleep in such heat. We were living in a small duplex that butted up against the one next to it, with a little walkway between the two. This allowed for very little airflow into the one window above the bed. I kept lamenting the fan I should have bought.

Just after midnight the phone rang. I looked at Craig and asked, "Were you expecting a call?" Most of our friends weren't in the habit of calling so late. His answer being in the negative I picked up the phone to hear our friend Ron announce, "Kathy and I have decided it's way too hot to sleep and it's sure to be cooler at the beach. We're gonna cruise the 34. Want to come along?" Ron owned then, and still does, a chrome - plating business. His hobby is rebuilding classic cars, and he had a cherried out brick red '34 Ford with a rumble seat.

We jumped at the chance to be outside with the cool ocean breezes. Around 12:30 a.m., we hopped in the rumble seat and headed for Redondo Beach.

The street in front of King Harbor was crowded and buzzing with locals and tourists alike. The night was clear; the street lights caused little stars to beam off the heavily lacquered brick red paint. I felt sooo "American Graffiti," and just like a star as people pointed and waived at us.

We made the loop around the various beaches, Redondo, Torrance, Hermosa, then up through Palos Verdes Drive West before we were dropped off back in Torrance. The duplex had cooled a bit and made sleep possible.

Craig and I are divorced, and Kathy has passed away, and his steady is now Doris. But Ron still has the car. I'm going to my 35th HS reunion and staying at Ron's for the weekend.

Maybe I can talk him into taking us for a cruise on the beach - I've got dibs on the rumble seat!

RUMBLE SEAT

Bryan Follins

Maybe it is just me, but when we first moved to Las Vegas, which was in the summer, it seemed as though a lot of people spent their time in restaurants, especially during the mid-afternoons. I began to believe the reason for this was that people wanted to stay cool without running up their electric bills at home. Obviously this is what the restaurant owners thought because when we dropped by several establishments later we noticed the cafes were using fans. So much for customer comforts.

Can anyone say blast furnace? That is Las Vegas in the summer. I do not see that many people sweating in Vegas in the summer. That is probably because it is so arid that it tends to keep a person dry. This is very deceptive however. If one is not careful, one can leave the house standing six feet tall and weighing 170 pounds. But when one returns to the house after a summer day in Vegas, they may find themselves standing 5'5 and weighing 20 pounds.

Can anyone say the Mojave Desert is right next door? When the sun goes down in Vegas in the summer, it does not get cool, it just gets dark. People who have lived in Vegas for some time say it actually used to rain more than it does now. This is probably true, but so is sun stroke. Most people try to cheer you up by saying (about the heat): “*You’ll get used to it.*” Burn baby burn.

Summer in South Central Louisiana

Folks down home in Louisiana will say, “It may not be as hot here, but we have the humidity.” This is true.

Can someone say sauna? Also, it rains in Louisiana. The afternoon heat causes convection



FOUR
DEGREES
OF
HEAT



Bryan Follins, resplendent in his LSU shirt, relaxes at the Vegrants meeting amid some of his Vegrants buddies. This article is Bryan's first for a genzine.

showers. Since Louisiana is half swamp, when it rains it is no big deal. It can rain for four or five days and it is no big deal.

A strong thunderstorm in Vegas means rock-slides, flash floods, hide the women and the children. I know we are in a drought here in the West but seriously. Can't we all have a refreshing rain-storm without worrying about getting washed to Flagstaff?

Also, summertime in Louisiana means more and more insects. Mosquitoes are out full force. Spiders eat the mosquitoes. Roaches, ants, crickets abound.

Can someone say Wild Kingdom? Ah yes, but Louisiana has the *humidity*.



Summer in Missouri

I spent three summers in Missouri, and it was not much different than summer in Louisiana. Both states are in the geographic region known as the Mississippi Valley. It can get hot and sultry.

Summer in the Bay Area

Probably the most enjoyable place I have enjoyed spending summer is in the San Francisco - Oakland Bay area. This is because summer time here feels like spring time everywhere else. The days are mild and the evenings are pleasant. Sometimes it can get cold in San Francisco in the summer. It's like what Mark Twain said, and I paraphrase:

"The coldest winter I spent was a summer in San Francisco." However, on the East Bay and in San Jose, it is nice.

I would be willing to bet that air conditioning salespeople do not do to well in San Francisco and the Mid-Peninsula. The trick is being able to afford to live in this area, which most people can't.

— Bryan Follins

About the Bacover...

We wanted to include everyone, especially our two ace photographers Alan White and Bill Mills. They took turns taking substantially the same photo with the other in the group.

Then Alan Photoshopped it into a single picture.

Joyce Katz

Why Don't We All Quit Fandom?

The end of summer always brings regrets – those school's-in-session, nothing-to-wear, dread-the-cold-weather, back-to-work blues. The gaiety of spring long past, the dog days of August mark changes coming, and I always felt it was change for the worse. Living in Southern Nevada, the land of endless summer, has been a big help – there's not much autumn in Las Vegas, and very few of those cold and rainy days that drove the point home in Missouri.

But this year the end of summer blues hit hard in August, and didn't let up even when the Mohave grid-dle cooled to blissful comfort. A new frock hasn't dispelled the Death Valley Doldrums. I don't have to look too hard, to find the reasons I'm so down-hearted. To quote Bill Rotsler: "Oh, fandom, my fandom...."

In August, a fan's thoughts rightfully should be on the WorldCon. But this year, everything seems all wrong. We can't even anticipate the Labor Day Weekend reunion; instead it comes mid-month. And, it's hardly a fan family reunion – hasn't been for a long time – when there are upward of three thousand fans Getting High on SciFi in Denver. Thinking about the WorldCon is depressing; it just reminds me of how diffuse the Great Brotherhood of Fandom has become. I don't know about you, but I can't be blood brother to 3500 fans.

I guess it started in the 1960s, when fandom was finally getting a little better treatment from hotels, so had meeting space to spare. We opened the doors to lots of special interest groups, giving everyone a chance to convene their hobby group at the WorldCon. All-night movies and huge open parties brought in new faces. At first, it seemed like a bonanza; we were growing strong; we had Power. But somewhere in the 1970s and '80s, we had to recognize that it was no longer Our WorldCon, it belonged to Everyone. And somewhere around the turn of the century, we had to admit that Everyone Else outnumbers Us, and "fandom, my fandom" is now one of those splinter groups tucked out of sight in a side room, while larger interests dominate the main hall.

Then there's the question of the hall. No more intimate hotel ballrooms – now we have to use city



THE END-OF-SUMMER BLUES



convention centers to accommodate the numbers! Just thinking about the long walks tires me out.

The WorldCon Horrors might not be enough to kill our spirits, but then along comes the Hugo Awards to further depress us. As the number of fans increased, so has the number of voters. Inevitably, that means there are more who aren't qualified, voting for those items that they recognize by name, even if they haven't read the rest of the slate.

I suppose the rockets on the pro side are about as accurate in accessing the books and stories to honor, as any professional awards. All such seem to be determined more by the popularity of the writer, than the merit of his or her work. Couple that with a little bribery, occasional coercion, whining for the pity votes, and outright begging, and it's surprising that the award winners take any pride whatsoever in their statuettes. But we're long accustomed to such self-promotion in all entertainment professional awards, so pass it off with a sigh and a shrug.

It's harder to shrug away my gut feelings when the fan awards are named. I can't feel much pride in our field, after seeing John Scalzi win the Best Fan Writer award. It seems preposterous that a pro should lobby to win the fan award, but apparently he does find this appropriate. It isn't that he's a bad writer — it's that

he devoted significant effort to asking for votes in the blog he created, evidently just for that purpose.

The Best Fanzine Hugo has rarely gone to the best fanzine of the year, and the Best Artist awards only go to fans appearing in large -circulation venues, particularly those with work in the WorldCon progress reports. In fact, usually the winners seem to be professional artists. Again, name-recognition value is the coin that fuels the rocket. And, it saddens me to note that too many fans have decided that it's ok to campaign for awards. It's not; it is bad manners.

I strongly regret that the worldcon gives Hugo Awards to fans. I wish that they had been named "Pongs", back in 1967 when this question of nomenclature arose. Maybe that would have kept this unpleasant Hugo Fever from breaking out every year. But, I doubt it. I believe the existence of this prestigious statue has caused unattractive behavior in "Fandom, My Fandom". Personally, I'd like to discontinue the fan Hugos.

My end-of-summer fannish blues is extended by blogs. I do not consider a blog to be the same thing as a fanzine. While I concede that there is every kind of blog available, it seems to me that they aren't directed toward the fan community in the same way that fanzines are. They lack the sense of community that ties us together. I have found it hard to explain exactly why I

have such antipathy toward blogging. But a recent conversation on line, prompted Ted White to make some remarks that sharpened my wit a bit. He said:

“Originally fandom was a small community of only a few hundred people, spread out over a significant portion of the world, who, with rare exceptions, felt isolated from both their fellow SF fans and from the mundane culture which surrounded them. These circumstances bred fannishness. A crucial element of fannish writing which evolved was the fact that *we all knew each other*. We knew our *entire* audience, and, if we published our own fanzines, which most of us did, we completely controlled that audience. (My friend John Magnus once published, circa 1957-58, a fanzine with a circulation of *35* which he deemed the cream of fandom.)

“So an essential element of fan writing was that it was for a completely known audience. That shaped both what we said and how we said it. As I remarked recently on another list, I tried to put in *something* that would resonate specifically with each one on my mailing list, to make them all feel part of that ‘in-group.’ All feel *included*.

“This is impossible when you write for an unknown and potentially unlimited audience. As a professional writer, I know the difference. It’s the difference between my editorials in AMAZING and in EGOBOO (which were contemporaneous). It’s the difference between telling a story to a circle of friends at a convention party, and telling it from a program platform at that same convention (unless, as can happen, the audience consists entirely of a few friends). I shape my stories differently, depending on how well I think my audience will know their contexts or backgrounds, to give only one example.

“Blogs address the wide unknown audience. It’s an anti-fannish medium. It’s not a *bad* medium, but it doesn’t foster fannishness.” --Ted White

Top off my August blues with a new arrival in the Las Vegas fan group, of a woman who volunteered to work on the Xanadu convention scheduled for 2009. She’s busily making contact with the greater Vegas fan community, mining Star Fleet, the Tunnel fans, even comic and anime’ groups for members. She enthusiastically told us that she’d talked “over a hundred Star

Wars uniform-wearing Storm Troopers”, into attending. (Speaking of being on the wrong side of a conflict!)

I tried to explain why I wasn’t happy. Even Linda Bushyager, normally the most agreeable of fans, was prompted to remark, “Some of us don’t want to attend that kind of convention.” But there was no understanding; apparently “big tent conventions” are exactly what a segment of fandom actually wants.

“Oh Fandom, My Fandom. . . .” indeed.

I think the last of my end-of-summer complaints is really the one that hurts the most. Back in the Olden Days, all these lovers of science fiction wrote letters to each other, attended conventions to see each other, and started fanzines to continue their conversations and acquaintanceship. They called it “Fandom”. But eventually there were a whole lot more people, some of whom were not so interested in communicative spirits, so we started speaking of our gang as Fanzine Fandom. But then a lot more people started ragging us since that didn’t cover us all; there are fanzine editors and writers and artists, but there are also collectors and art lovers. So we quit saying that, and started calling ourselves TruFandom. That didn’t last long, because some felt it disparaged the others. Now we say we’re Core Fandom. But that riles some people because they say it is exclusionary and elitist.

So, we’ve not only lost our conventions to the masses, we’ve also lost our name. More than once, and it’ll undoubtedly happen again—there seems to be such an attitude of resentment toward us, that they’ll probably never let us have a country again.

This fandom, as it has grown to be, is way different from when it was started. That original concept, “Fandom, My Fandom”, is more often than not a small group of enthusiasts trying to stand up despite the tidal wave of changes that have inundated us. “My Fandom” is now absorbed into a well-populated mass of well-intentioned folk, who unfortunately have no idea whatsoever what we want. Further, they don’t care.

So, as someone else said a long time ago, why don’t we all quit fandom? Personally, I am no longer excited about being connected to the masses. Whether we call it “Core Fandom” or “Fanzine Fandom” or “My Gang”, I prefer to stand with a couple hundred other people, give or take, with similar attitudes to my own.

A new dress can no longer halt my End of Summer blues. I think it’s going to take more than that to end my sadness about what happened to My Fandom. But halting the effort to get along with a bunch of people who really don’t want me with them, will go a long way toward making me happier in my fanac.

— Joyce Katz

