Scratch Pad 5

Based on **brg No. 4 for FAPA, a magazine written and published by Bruce Gillespie, 59 Keele Street, Victoria 3066, Australia (phone (03) 9419-4797; email: gandc@mira.net) for the May 1993 mailing of FAPA (Fantasy Amateur Press Association).**

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HOW I BECAME AN EDITOR

My first one-issue, four-copy magazine was David Cook's idea. He had an impressive drawing talent, and saw a magazine as a way of expressing that talent. I wrote an article and an editorial. We had no way of printing the magazine we envisaged. I saw him last on the last day of school in 1958.

During the 1960–61 long school holidays between second and third forms I taught myself to touch type. For some years my father allowed me to two-finger type on the old Underwood typewriter, but I had become increasingly annoyed at having to look back and forth from the page to the keyboard. My aunt lent me an old Pitman College instruction booklet. By February 1961 I had become proficient, but to become fast I needed to type material other than mere school assignments.

My second magazine, published throughout 1961, was Ron Sheldon's idea. (I wonder what happened to Ron Sheldon?) His father, a school teacher, owned an ancient roller ink duplicator. I had the use of my father's typewriter, and Ron could use his father's beautiful little Royal portable manual typewriter.

I called the new magazine *Cashbox and Chatter* because I listened every night to Stan Rofe's 'Platter Parade' on 3KZ. Each Monday night Stan Rofe played the 'red bullet performers' from the American Top 100 pop chart as issued by the American *Cashbox* magazine. When I began to collect and work out my own pop chart every week I called it the 'Australian Cashbox' chart. That chart we published on the front page of the new magazine. This was despite the fact that only Ron, I and another friend were much interested in pop music.

Ron's instinct for entertaining readers was much better than mine. For each issue he contributed puzzles, games and jokes, while I wrote yet another episode of a turgid and interminable science fiction serial. We did not publish gossip about teachers or other students, which is probably why teachers allowed us to sell the magazine at school and other students did not mind buying it.

At the end of third form Ron decided that he would be faced with too much homework in fourth form to have the time to continue the magazine. He had done all the physical work of duplicating and collating the magazine. He was probably sick of it.

To continue the magazine in 1962 I went back to the most basic method of printing: typing with enough force on a top copy to produce three other carbon copies. I sent all the copies to friends and kept none for my files.

By the time I was in fifth form I was faced with a mound of assignments every night, and although I was quite astute at avoiding homework, I knew I had to give up magazine publishing. But the direction of my life had been set as surely as if somebody had signed me up on a contract. Those two years of magazine publishing had made me into a touch typist and convinced me that the only worthwhile way to write is to produce material for one's own magazine.

I felt I could not publish a magazine again until I had a better printing method. The obvious machine to buy would be an ink duplicator, but I received only eleven shillings a week pocket money. Also I needed an audience. When the family moved to Melton, and then to Bacchus Marsh, I lost contact with most of the people who had been interested in *Cashbox and Chatter*. I would never have returned to magazine publishing if it had not been for my enthusiasm for science fiction.

In the mid-1960s, when I first heard about fanzines, I knew that this was the sort of magazine I wanted to publish. A column in one of the professional sf magazines mentioned offhandedly a huge range of activities connected with the world of fandom. It was a secret world then, and it still remains hidden from most of the general reading population. I had no idea how to contact other science fiction readers, and I still had no money to print or post such a magazine.

The entering of a bookshop by a nineteen-year-old boy in July 1966 was not supposed to be the beginning of a modern epic, a tale of passion and pathos, delight and damnation. But it was. The bookshop was McGill's Newsagency in Elizabeth Street, Melbourne; and I was the boy.

On the counter of McGill's, lying beside all those seductive science fiction books, was a slim, duplicated magazine. It was *Australian Science Fiction Review*, No. 1. I did not buy it.

It says much about the increase in the cost of living since then that forty cents per copy then seemed too much money to spend on an unknown magazine. But *Australian Science Fiction Review* looked like the sort of magazine I should buy if I could justify spending the money.

The second issue of *Australian Science Fiction Review* (from now on referred to as *ASFR*) broke my resistance. I'm not sure why that edition was more attractive than the first, but at last I bought it. That crucial day in my life was somewhen in August 1966, during the university vacation. I was staying with my aunt and uncle in the Melbourne suburb of Murrumbeena. To read the editorial sections and most of the articles in *ASFR* 2 took most of the train journey from Flinders Street to Murrumbeena. When I reached my destination, had said hello to my aunt and uncle, and had drunk my cup of coffee, I read it all again.

Two and a half years later, in my own own magazine, I tried to create in my readers something of the excitement and delight I had felt when I read my first issue of *ASFR*. It's still what I would like to do with each issue I produce. That I've never quite succeeded is not to my shame: when one imitates the best one can never quite reach the same standard.

What made *ASFR* the best magazine about science fiction ever published?

The reviewers were the best. Only some years later did I discover that most of the reviews in the first ten issues were written by only two people — John Foyster and Lee Harding — under their own names and a variety of pseudonyms. George Turner, who until then was known only as a fiction writer who had won the Miles Franklin Award in 1962, made a spectacular first appearance in 1967, in No. 10. The *ASFR* crew brought to science fiction that acuteness of perception and sense of literary values that one expects to find only in the best critical journals.

If criticism and reviews had been the only strengths of *ASFR*, I doubt whether it would have gained more than a small number of readers. *ASFR* was filled with that Indefinable Other — some quality of writing that was so vague and entrancing that I had never experienced it before. Humour rippled through *ASFR*, especially in the editorials and notes written by the editor, John Bangsund. But Harding and Foyster added humour to the reviews as well.

Humour was not the only quality that attracted people to *ASFR*. The magazine had a quality of caring about its readers. I found this particularly in the letter column, which featured not only the best-known science fiction writers but also ordinary sf readers like me. To all his correspondents John Bangsund wrote fond, whimsical replies. *ASFR* made people feel warm and runny inside, even while its critics boxed their literary ears. *ASFR* stood for good fellowship, which was an achievement, since many of its readers had never met each other face to face.

ASFR stood for a life much grander, finer and more fully experienced than any I had known before. Much of the grandeur came directly from the typewriter of John Bangsund. He was ever ready to record the triumphs and vicissitudes of that small group of people I thought of as the '*ASFR* team'.

I did not write to John Bangsund immediately. For a year and half I bought *ASFR* at the front counter of McGill's, not knowing that Merv Binns, then the manager of McGill's, was also the organizer of the Melbourne Science Fiction Club.

ASFR appeared monthly. In those days, I did not realize how much of a miracle it was for any fanzine to appear regularly. When *ASFR*'s schedule slipped, I became so concerned that I stopped buying it at McGill's and sent a subscription to John Bangsund. A few months later, I sent him the first article I had ever written for anybody other than a school teacher or university tutor. It was a long piece about the science fiction novels of Philip K. Dick. Without realizing it, I had become a fan and sf critic.

It was typical of Bruce-Gillespie-1967 that I expected the next mail to contain the article accompanied by a rejection slip. A few days passed. One night in Bacchus Marsh the telephone rang. A trunk call from Ferntree Gully. 'This is John Bangsund. Hi. Listen; we like your article a lot, and would like to meet you. How would you like to visit us next weekend?'

There are people walking the earth who have such a sense of inner security that they could never have experienced what I felt at that moment — a distinct drift ceilingwards, a flight upwards from the mundane dusty soil of Bacchus Marsh. Someone other than a teacher or tutor had just told me that my writing efforts were worth something.

Early in 1968, on a Friday afternoon, I met John's first wife Diane at Flinders Street Station, and we travelled by train to Ferntree Gully. John met us at the station. At our first meeting we did not hit it off, and it took us some years to get used to each other's personalities.

John and Diane took me over to The Basin to meet Lee Harding. He was the first Published Author I had ever met. Lee talked. It was wondrous talk, full of delight, humour, splendid glitter.

A person remembers his first visit to Valhalla — I will never forget the events of that weekend. I spent much of the time at the Bangsunds' where they told me about their recent trip to Sydney. A new group of fans had met there and decided to form the Sydney Science Fiction Foundation. In this way *ASFR* was becoming the major force in the revival of science fiction activity throughout Australia in the late 1960s, after fandom had almost died in the 1950s.

At a meeting on the Sunday afternoon, I met many of the people who have remained important in my life ever since. It was the first time most of the *ASFR* people met George Turner, who later became Australia's first writer to be nominated for a Nebula Award by the Science Fiction Writers of America. For the first time I met Damien Broderick, whose career was already doing well.

During 1968 I wrote many reviews and articles for *ASFR*. Some of my pieces were published, but there was still no sign of a publication date for the articles on Philip K. Dick that had first stirred John Bangsund's interest. *ASFR* stopped appearing monthly; by early 1969 it had stopped. John was often between jobs, subscription income did not meet expenditure, and John wanted to move on to other things. The time had come for a successor to *ASFR*. I was determined to produce it.

In 1969 I earned my first salary cheque. I announced to anyone who would listen that I would publish my own fanzine. I had in my files the still-unpublished Philip K. Dick article. John Bangsund seemed glad to give me the *ASFR* subscription list and the articles that remained in his files when *ASFR* ceased publication. George Turner sent me some reviews immediately. He has been contributing reviews and articles ever since.

There was one catch: I still did not have the money to buy a duplicator. Worse, the Education Department had sent me to Ararat Technical School for my first teaching appointment, so I had no access to a commercial duplicating service.

I'm still not sure why John and Diane Bangsund, and Leigh Edmonds, an enthusiastic young fan who was living with them at the time, did not kick me out of the house when I asked them to print *SF Commentary* No. 1. Did I ask them at all? Did John actually offer to help? Did Leigh, in a rash moment, say that he enjoyed turning the duplicator handle and watching the pieces of printed paper fall out in neat

bundles? I cannot remember. Certainly no one offered to collate or staple the magazine; but then nobody at the time, including me, realized that the first issue of *SF Commentary* would be 66 pages long. But somehow the people at Ferntree Gully, including Lee Harding, saw hidden behind the lousy spelling, typing, layout and cover art, the beginnings of a valuable magazine.

In truth, I will never know how valuable *SFC* has been for the world at large. I know only what it has done for me. It saved me from terminal self-loathing. In 1967 I had so little self-confidence that I could barely hope that anybody would ever publish my reviews. After I put together the first issue of *SFC* I knew that I was a 'fanzine editor'. I had the ability to look at a pile of miscellaneous articles, reviews and letters and somehow see how they fitted together. I could not imitate John Bangsund's humorous style, but somehow I knew how to stir enthusiasm in readers. All I needed was the money and the means.

Quite early in my teaching career I reached that terrifying moment of realizing that although I had committed myself to teach for three years, I was not a teacher. I found myself in Ararat attempting to teach and knowing immediately that I was very bad at it. Isolation, like the prospect of death, concentrates the mind wonderfully.

John and Diane had allowed me to produce two more issues of *SFC* at Ferntree Gully but then put the foot down. Either I produced the magazine all myself or the whole project would cease. A friend I made in Ararat lent me the money to buy an old second-hand duplicator. No. 4 was the first issue *SFC* produced in Ararat.

Now I gained the self-confidence to produce something worthwhile without begging help from other people. While I was mailing No. 4 I received the first substantial overseas response to Nos. 1 and 2. Despite the fact that they were perhaps the worst-looking fanzines of the decade, they gained a remarkable response. My favourite authors began writing to me. Fans who had been only distant legends sent me their fanzines and letters. Review copies of books arrived from publishers. *SF Commentary* had arrived.

So had I. I had arrived on my first little island of self-trust. At the same time I loathed myself for being a lousy teacher. The more I despaired about teaching, the more energy I put into publishing my magazine. In 1969 and 1970, my two years in solitary confinement at Ararat, I produced eighteen issues of *SFC*. I've never quite regained the excitement I felt while producing those issues. Perhaps it's the memory of that joy, that sense of release at being able to communicate with the world at large, that has kept me going.

I owe most of the good things in my life to *SF Commentary*.

An isolated person with few friends, suddenly I had a world of acquaintances.

A person who did not trust even his few talents, suddenly I had a passport to the world of editing and writing. At the end of 1970, despite the fact that I might have to pay back a large amount of money to the Education Department, I sent in my resignation to the Education Department. During the long school holidays an inspector rang me. 'Would you like to come in here to Spring Street so we can have a little talk?' In those days, the Education Department wanted to keep staff rather than fire them. The inspector made me a series of offers, each more attractive than the other. I said that I would never enter a classroom again. He invited me to go to the Publications Branch of the Department on the first day of term. I had never heard of the Publications Branch, but this was the first offer that sounded attractive. I withdrew my resignation.

On the first day of term 1971, a panel of staff from the Publications Branch interviewed me. I showed them copies of *SF Commentary*. They offered me three months' probation. I was given a desk in an office with a friendly bloke who smoked a pipe. I survived the pipe smoke because I discovered that this man, now my superviser, shared many of my literary interests. He was wary of the mention of science fiction, but was interested that many of his favourite writers, such as Borges, were also claimed by science fiction. That man was Gerald Murnane, who was then writing a novel called *Tamarisk Row*.

That year about eight of us were the new people at the Branch. We were all tested in each type of publication, learning a vast amount very quickly about the crafts of writing and editing. I enjoyed the work immensely, and nobody tried to send me back to the classroom.

At the same time, the new skills I learned at Publications Branch helped me to improve *SF Commentary*. In 1971 and 1972 I produced its best issues, and in 1972 it received the first of many Ditmar Awards (Australian SF Achievement Awards), and was nominated for a Hugo Award. I felt that my overseas correspondents were my friends, so I decided to visit them in 1973.

In 1973, because the Education Department had changed its regulations, I had to resign in order to go overseas. 30 June 1973 was the last day I held a nine-to-five five-day-a-week job. I travelled in America and England from late August 1973 to 1 February 1974, met many friends, spent much money, and decided that never again would I return to a full-time office job.

The rest of my editing career follows a pattern familiar to anybody who has ever tried freelancing. While I had been at Publications Branch, I had built up enough contacts to gain freelance jobs when I returned to Melbourne in 1974. In turn, some of these contacts recommended me to others. Meanwhile, one of my clients offered me work for at least three days a week. This provided enough money to pay the rent on a grotty upstairs Carlton Street flat, buy food, and publish *SF Commentary*. In the late 1970s I did typesetting using an IBM Electronic Composer. I could not compete with photosetting, so I returned to copy-editing in the early 1980s. In turn that led to steady work with a major publisher, including the supervision of manuscripts from the copy-editing to blueprint stages. In turn, this led back to typesetting; a 386 computer and a laser printer now enable me to take a book right through to camera ready copy. If all this seems both accidental and inevitable, that's how it it has felt. After twenty years, the major problem of freelance editing remains: how do I pay the bills at the end of the month?

The above paragraphs give one version of my life since the early 1970s. Here is the other version:

As a person who spent his first twenty-five years without having the courage to ask a girl out, suddenly I gained the kudos and self-confidence to enjoy the company of the occasional woman who did not regard me as a freak. In 1972 my first passionate encounter lasted less than two weeks. She was visiting from America, and was married, but she did regard me as a worthwhile person, which seemed amazing to me. Because of her, I travelled to America and met someone else extraordinary. And it's only because of *SF Commentary* that in 1974 I met the woman who eventually married me.

All this is in the past. The golden days are over. The

excitement of the first four years of *SF Commentary* has long since dissipated. The academic science fiction journals that began during the 1970s took away many of my most important writers. Many early subscribers disappeared or lost interest in science fiction. For a time, I was so broke and became so sick of science fiction that I abandoned *SFC*. I revived it in 1989 for the Twentieth Anniversary Issue. I've even taken to producing the magazine by computer, and have sold my ink duplicator.

But I will never go dumb again. I will never return to that dreadful isolated state I inhabited before I discovered the world of fanzine publishing. If the postal system fails, I'll find a way to publish by fax or modem. If that option fails, I'll print thirty copies and hand them to close friends.

'Only connect', said E. M. Forster. I have no choice; I must connect or die inside; I will remain a fanzine editor until I can no longer write, or read, or type, or breathe.

— 20 September 1992

THE LARK ASCENDED: ROGER WEDDALL 1956–1992

After Roger Weddall's funeral on 8 December 1992, a large group of his friends gathered at the house where he had been living, ate afternoon tea, and told Roger stories. There are thousands of them, each as varied as the teller. Here are some of my Roger stories. Of course they are also Bruce Gillespie stories:

I

The first time I talked to Roger was in early 1974, after I returned from my only overseas trip. He and Alan Wilson visited the Degraves Tavern, which was once in a basement off Degraves Street in the city, and was the weekly fannish meeting place until it closed in early 1976. When I returned to the Degraves Tavern in February 1974, I found that a new group of people had joined Melbourne fandom. The most noticeable newcomers were Don and Derrick Ashby, who had identical midland English accents and black pointy beards. Loquacious and amusing, they held court at the centre of a group dominated by Lee Harding and Irene Pagram, and Leigh Edmonds and Valma Brown. Henry, the proprietor of Degraves Tavern, had arranged the tables in a large U shape. Roger and Alan sat way off at the end of one of the U arms. Nobody spoke to them. This was typical. Malcolm Gordon turned up every week for two years at Degraves Tavern before anybody spoke to him. Eventually I said hello, but little else, to Roger and Alan. All I knew about them is that they represented the Melbourne University Science Fiction Association (MUSFA), and that MUSFA people wanted to get involved in general fandom. This did not happen until the late 1970s, and Roger and Alan did not bother turning up to Degraves Tavern again.

During 1975 I was the only person from general fandom who discovered that the MUSFA people were friendlier and less cynical than the Degraves cabal. During 1974 Charles Taylor had introduced me to Elaine Cochrane and Frank Payne, the two people with whom he was sharing a house. The three of them were members of MUSFA. I visited them several times during late 1974. In 1975 Charles invited me to one of the monthly MUSFA Bistro Nights. The first I attended was at the old Jamaica House when it was owned by Monty, a tall black man who was known to everybody in food circles and Carlton bohemia. (After he died, at the age of forty, his wife Stephanie Alexander became Melbourne's most distinguished restaurateur.) Monty served the hottest food I have ever eaten. That night in late 1975, about twenty riotous MUSFAns drank a vast amount, and returned to 10 Johnston Street. Somebody was very ill in the toilet. In the early morning, Dennis Callegari walked home from Collingwood to Templestowe.

Me? I was suddenly stricken by *l-ov-e.*. Not for the first time was I transfixed by the presence of a woman who hardly noticed me. Claudia Mangiamele was the princess of MUSFA, and I suspected all the other males at Jamaica House were equally, hopelessly, in love with her. Not that Claudia meant to be flirtatious. She had (and still has) the rare quality that Roger had: the ability to focus her interest entirely on any person she considered a friend. Because most of her friends in MUSFA were young, single males, her presence created a stronger emotional effect than she intended.

Four weeks later, we held another riotous MUSFA night, this time at a long-defunct Lebanese food restaurant known as Green Cedars. We were placed in a large upstairs room. What better place for a polite riot? Most of these people were under twenty, and not used to alcohol. Yet again, a MUSFAn was very ill. Rigid, he was handed down the stairs of Green Cedars and carried out the door.

I can't remember Roger as being more riotous than any other MUSFAn in those days. He was a lot quieter than the (in)famous David Firman, who needed only the slightest hint of tipsiness to begin singing loud ribald songs. (Whatever happened to David Firman?) But already I recognised that Roger listened to what you were saying while talking to you flat out and carrying on three other conversations around the room. (He also conducted hour-long pun competitions with Dennis Callegari.) Roger included me in the group. That's more than anybody in general fandom bothered to do.

At the beginning of 1976, about thirty of us, mainly MUSFAns, went to Adelaide to join some people from the Adelaide University SF Association at an sf convention at a camp site in the hills. The aim was to repeat the very successful first Advention (held at another hillside camp site) of 1972. The weather was very hot, the chemistry of people not quite right (although meeting Marc Ortlieb for the first time was a highlight of the convention), and a very young, very drunk James Styles caterwauled loudly all one night.

I was glad to escape at the end of that convention, but some Adelaide University people enjoyed it so much that they returned the visit. Anaconda, an entirely impromptu convention held mainly at Claudia Mangiamele's mother's house in Carlton during the Australia Day weekend, 1976,

began the most extraordinary year of my life.

People who had been only acquaintances suddenly became friends. Roger decided that I was a person who should be cured of chronic shyness. On the Monday morning after the night of Charles Taylor's twenty-first birthday party, I heard a knock at the door of my flat in Carlton Street. Not only were all those people up, but they had decided to invade my place. After the invasion, they dragged me out to the Carlton Gardens across the street from my place. Never have I met a group of people so glad to be in each other's company! I enjoyed that company, and I was glad that Claudia was there, although it seemed obvious that she was already nuts about Roger. Add to that dynamic several other romances that had begun in Adelaide or during Anaconda, and you have an atmosphere of heady joy that had escaped me during my adolescence but was quite a tonic three weeks before my twenty-ninth birthday.

The events of the next three years turn on a sentence I spoke that morning in January 1976. 'The Magic Pudding Club is only two streets away,' I said. 'Let's invade them.' And we did. The Magic Pudding Club, in Drummond Street, Carlton, was a slanshack that at that time included (at least) Don and Derrick Ashby, Ken Ford and John Ham. (For the story of the Magic Pudding Club, read *The Metaphysical Review* 4; copies are still available.) Staying with them for the weekend was a very young Queenslander named Randal Flynn. Randal had travelled to Melbourne from Brisbane for the World Convention and Writers' Workshop held in August 1975. He decided that he liked Melbourne and Melbournites so much that he returned. Surely he could stay in Melbourne forever, for free! When we invaded the Magic Pudding Club in Drummond Street, everybody but Randal groaned, rolled over and went back to sleep. Randal invited us into the back yard. In that way Anaconda carried on, while the other Magic Pudding people swore at us and got breakfast.

By the end of that morning, when the Anacondans disappeared out the front door, Randal had become firm friends with Claudia and Roger. Two weeks later, by the time of my birthday party (catered by the Magic Pudding Club, it was also Valma Brown's birthday), the three of them had decided to set up house in Moore Street, Fitzroy, nearly as close to me to the east as the Magic Pudding Club was to the west. My peace of mind was about to disintegrate.

I visited Moore Street often, because Claudia lived there. Claudia didn't notice me, but she certainly noticed Roger. She and Randal agreed that Roger was behaving 'very peculiarly'. Randal had agreed to give a home at Moore Street to two cats, MGM and Gus. Roger had the same magical effect on them as he was to have on Apple Blossom, but at that time he had little idea of how to take care of cats. Claudia and Randal didn't like cats. Suddenly Claudia and Randal were living together, as well as living in the same house. To the outsider, Roger seemed an outcast in his own house. For perhaps the first time in his life, Roger had no idea what to do. Why hadn't he carried off the magic princess? Why had he left her to an cheeky upstart like Randal? And why did magical princesses never notice people like me?

I visited Moore Street when all three of them were there. Roger kept playing records that I had never heard, but which became favourites of mine. If it had not been for Roger, I would never had heard *Crisis! What Crisis?* by Supertramp. That album has never been played on radio, although Supertramp became popular later in the 1970s. Roger played *American Stars and Bars* by Neil Young. Like many other people, even today, I rather dismissed Neil Young because I had heard only *Harvest*. *American Stars and Bars*, with 'Like a Hurricane', the first of Young's power-guitar anthems, made me a permanent fan. It was because of Roger I discovered Lou Reed — not *Berlin*, Roger's favourite, but *Coney Island Baby*.

Roger, Randal and Claudia agreed that I was somebody who should be rescued from lonely isolation at 72 Carlton Street. Randal made this his crusade. Some days I had to chase him away in order to get some work done. (Unlike Stephen Campbell, another friend of mine, he was not much use for producing fanzines.)

Roger was less insistent than the others about the crusade, but one night he knocked on the door at midnight. 'How'd you like to come around for dinner?' he said. Since I had last eaten at 6 o'clock, and was feeling peckish and lonely, I followed Roger to Moore Street. There I found the main room full of people. I can't remember where they had been or why they hadn't eaten, but Randal and Claudia began preparing food at midnight.

At two o'clock in the morning we sat down to the one of the grandest feasts I've ever been to. It was the first time I really saw Roger in action as the Great Celebrator. He was able to draw the best out of everybody in that room. From then on, I took it as an axiom that even a social troglodyte like me would always enjoy a social occasion organised by Roger.

Roger's dinner parties become art events. Not that he cooked home dinners, or paid for restaurant meals. All he had to do was ring you. You dropped everything to make sure you attended these events. If you sat down between two people you didn't know, Roger made sure you got to know them. If you didn't, he changed seats to sit next to you. If the whole dinner party failed to sparkle, he managed to get everybody to change chairs. This was hell on the waiters.

Randal and Claudia moved to a large two-storey terrace house in Rathdowne Street, Carlton, leaving Roger by himself at Moore Street. Tony Sullivan, the almost invisible fourth member of the Moore Street household, had already moved. Charles Taylor moved into the new Rathdowne Street slanshack. Roger could not afford the rent, so he gave up the Moore Street house and moved in with Elaine and Frank.

Meanwhile, Elaine had picked up Apple Blossom on a building site at 1 a.m. while walking home from the Easter 1976 Convention held at Ormond College, Melbourne University. (All the action of this saga takes place within walking distance.) Roger and Apple Blossom fell in love.

II

In the end, 'Roger's cat' Apple Blossom outlived him by two weeks. Roger died on 3 December 1992, and Apple Blossom on 18 December. Not that Roger ever owned Apple Blossom; she owned him. So did every cat that Roger ever patted.

When Roger shared the house at 10 Johnston Street, Collingwood, with Elaine and two other people in 1976, he was already a person who slept during the day and lived by night. When he arrived home at some late hour, he listened to records on headphones. Sitting in the bean bag, he fell asleep. Apple Blossom fell asleep on top of him. When they were both awake and in the same house, Roger teased Apple Blossom. She spat and howled and clawed, having a wonderful time. She had the world's second-best vocabulary of cat swear words. Apple Blossom lived in the same house as Roger for only about four months. He ran out of money, and returned to his parents' place. Elaine and Frank asked the other person to leave, and I joined the household.

After Elaine and I got together, each time that Roger visited he called first to Apple Blossom, who always expected to be picked up and teased. Howl, spit, claw. What fun! In 1982, when Roger returned from overseas, and had been away from our house for about a year, Apple Blossom remembered him immediately. After Roger died, when his father visited us, Apple Blossom tottered towards him because for a moment it seemed that Brandon Weddall's voice was that of his son.

III

In October 1976 I was still in love, to the amusement, annoyance and embarrassment of everybody I knew. Instead of Worshipping From Afar, my usual approach to falling in love, I had Declared Myself. And got nowhere. But I still lived within a hundred yards of the Beloved. No, I was not ordered from the door. Claudia and Randal always welcomed me whenever I visited, as they welcomed everybody else in Melbourne fandom. It was quite common for a nightbird such as Don Ashby to call in at Rathdowne Street at midnight because he saw an upstairs light. Rathdowne Street became host to some of the most spectacular parties I've ever staggered away from.

For the first and only time in my life, I began to hold parties at my eyrie in Carlton Street. I went as close as I've ever been to madness. I needed people desperately. If I couldn't entice them around for a beer or a yarn, I would find any available excuse to visit them. Carlton Street became the epicentre of one instant party after another. Roger and I began to demolish bottles of Southern Comfort as if they were mineral water. During one party at my place, Roger succumbed to alcohol early in the night. He locked himself in the toilet and wouldn't emerge. Fortunately, long-suffering Martin, who lived in the flat below, was away for the night, so the rest of us could use the downstairs loo. When everybody else had left, Roger was still in the loo. I hauled the spare mattress down to the kitchen. Next morning, he was lying on it. He was lying so still that Flodnap, my cat who was so shy that nobody but me had set eyes on him for months, was circling him unafraid. For a few moments I thought Roger had died. He got up, said 'Good morning; I'm fine', staggered up to divan in the living room, and fell asleep there for another four hours.

One night in late October, one of my parties finished with Roger, Claudia and I sitting together on my living-room floor. Fuelled by Southern Comfort and coffee, we talked all night. It was bizarre magic. At dawn, Roger and I walked Claudia back to Rathdowne Street. We all said goodbye, and I floated home.

I slept for a few hours, and woke to the strangest weather I have ever witnessed in Melbourne. A seamless shroud of luminous orange cloud glowed across the sky. The weather was early-summer warm, but not yet hot. There was no wind. We all waited for the total eclipse of the sun. Roger had gone with a group of MUSFAns to the hills to observe the eclipse. I had been invited to Claudia's mother's place to join the eclipse-watchers there. The air became quite still. It became nearly dark, and the air glowed. I glowed, and knew I would never again feel such a stranger to myself.

Leigh Edmonds called the events of my life during October and November 1976 my 'crushing blows'. For years afterward ignorant fans believed that my entire function in life was to fall under crushing blows of ever more devastating strength. Within twenty-four hours, (a) Claudia told me very clearly of what she thought of the ragged idiot (me) who kept claiming her affections without having the slightest reason for doing so; (b) the estate agent sent a letter saying that the house at Carlton Street would be sold, and that I should leave the flat as soon as possible; and (c) it became obvious that my regular freelance employer had dispensed with my services for the time being.

Within a month I found a job of sorts (half-time assistant editor of *The Secondary Teacher* for the Victorian Secondary Teachers Association, at a miserable pro rata salary), but not until I had nearly run out of money. I survived only because Bruce Barnes, a kindly soul who is constantly in the background of all this action, lent me a large amount of money in order to set up *SF Commentary* as a commercially run magazine. Business success, as ever, evaded me, but the loan gave me an improbably provident cushion of money during those difficult months. During my enforced holiday I published some of the best issues of *SF Commentary*, but they produced few new subscriptions.

I decided to become a sensible person again, but this proved impossible. After spending most of my life trying to keep human beings at arm's length, I found I needed them very badly. Or was it simply that visits from friendly people gave me an excuse to drink too much?

I visited Elaine and Frank and Roger several times at Johnston Street, Collingwood. This old bluestone house had always been a gathering place for MUSFA people. However, Frank was often at Melbourne University, studying for fifth year Medicine exams, and Roger was rarely home. He returned very late at night, and woke up sometime during the day. Already Elaine and I were enjoying each other's company.

Soon my worries had narrowed to one problem: where would I live? Upstairs at 72 Carlton Street was the first place that was really *mine*. It was my home; I could not face the thought of living anywhere else. I was offered a few rooms in a vacant house, but I could tell from the description that my books and records and duplicating equipment could not fit there. The Final Notice to Quit arrived in January 1977.

In January Chris Priest and Vonda McIntyre arrived in town to conduct, with George Turner, the second large SF Writers' Workshop. (Ursula Le Guin had conducted the first in 1975.) Vonda visited a fan gathering at my place. People dropped in from everywhere to say hello to Vonda. Elaine and Frank visited as well. On that night, only about a week before I had to leave Carlton Street, they offered to accommodate me at Johnston Street. Roger had run out of money, and was returning to his parents' place. Elaine and Frank wanted to get rid of the other bloke. And I needed two entire rooms, plus a lot of the store room, to fit in my junk. And it was decided that night. I had always said that I would not share a house with other people — but I had grown desperate for company, and I needed the accommodation.

This story has become more about me than about Roger. Roger had separate groups of friends, entire worlds of people who did not know each other, but knew Roger well. He would disappear for weeks at a time, then visit every night for a week. Yet we never had a sense that he was slighting us. Of course he would always return. He would be drawn back by Apple Blossom as well as the other cats. The household now included Solomon and Ishtar, Elaine's cats from 1973/74, my cat Flodnap (inadvertently named by Randal in 1976), and Julius, a half-wild black kitten who was, strictly speaking, Flodnap's cat. I suspect the real reason why Elaine asked me to move to Johnston Street was because one day at Carlton Street Julius fell at her feet and declared his unending devotion to her. And thus it was until Julius disappeared in 1980.

IV

1977 was a difficult year. I had little money, and I was living a household in which Frank and I whinged at each other whenever we saw each other. I was sharing space with Elaine. We discovered that we ran the household together rather well. As far as I knew, she and Frank were a permanent couple, so I didn't allow myself to think libidinous thoughts. I published some magazines, wrote a bit, and generally wished I could find a way back to 72 Carlton Street. (The house sold for $50,000 at the beginning of 1977, was renovated and sold for $100,000 two years later, never occupied before it was sold again two years after that for $150,000, and would be worth at least $350,000 these days. This property-speculative process explains why none of us lives in Carlton these days.) The VSTA job seemed designed to make me feel incompetent — the lowest of the low. I gained some extra money by typing (including the first draft of what eventually became Gerald Murnane's *The Plains*) or editing occasional monographs for the company that had dumped me in late 1976.

1977 was also a healing year. I saw Randal and Claudia very little, so I regained a sense of perspective. I reduced my drinking, sobered by the rapidly rising price of alcohol during the mid-1970s. Roger turned to tequila from Southern Comfort; I was content to go back to beer or Coca Cola. Except for typing *Yggdrasil*, MUSFA's magazine, during that year, I was out of much of its activity.

The more I was sure that my life had stopped altogether, the more it moved towards great change.

Frank finished sixth year Medicine, and in December 1977 was offered a residency at Hobart Hospital. Elaine and I were left in the house together. Things did not seem well at Rathdowne Street. On the day when Roger introduced me to Patti Smith's *Easter* album, Claudia and Randal seemed hardly to be talking to each other. Roger, Alan, Dennis and the other MUSFA members were attempting to organise their first national convention for Easter 1978. Within twenty-four hours, both Roger Zelazny and Brian Aldiss accepted Roger's invitation to be *the* guest of honour at the convention. Roger moved house to Nicholson Street, Abbotsford, to live next door to Don Ashby, who had moved after the Magic Pudding Club broke up.

After a month of growing desperation, I asked Elaine if she would live with me. She said maybe, but flew to Hobart to work out with Frank if their relationship was actually over. It was, and I was deliriously happy. Elaine seemed pleased about the new arrangement, although she probably would have liked a bit more freedom from stress to decide the direction of her life.

Roger asked Don for a Tarot card reading about the rapidly approaching Easter convention. After giving his reading, Don threw away his cards. Is disaster, he reasoned, in the prediction or the expectation? And can the person who tells the cards escape the upcoming catastrophe?

Roger was merely one of a committee who ran Unicon IV, the notorious 1978 Easter Convention, but somehow he copped all the blame for its failures. His crime was to be the most visible to a group of upstarts who were trying to put on conventions without the help of the 'real fans'. The convention events were quite enjoyable, and I had a good time.

But my position was supposed to be *the* Ditmar Awards Committee. My decisions should have been absolute, so that the committee could not be accused of self interest. But the committee had allowed on the ballot (and allowed to win) MUSFA's own magazine. Worse, the committee changed my casting vote in one category. A rebel meeting during the convention declared several winners void. The recounted results pleased no one. When the awards had been given out, I received a non-Ditmar committee award for my work with Norstrilia Press. At the end of the day, the committee gathered all the attractive green lucite trophies for engraving. I kept mine. The other trophies disappeared into the Geology Building of Melbourne University, never to be seen again. Mine is still on the mantel.

The 1978 Convention had two Guests of Honour stalking the corridors glaring at each other. Roger Zelazny and Brian Aldiss each put on good shows for the crowd, and Elaine and I had several wonderful long chats with Brian. But Roger Weddall was blamed for the situation. Some years later, he visited Brian in England and they made friends again.

Roger's crime? Oh, he was young and naive in 1978. All through January, February and March 1978 he would insist on saying: 'Everything will turn out all right at the convention, you'll see.'

Then as now, I never trust anyone who says everything will turn out all right on the night.

Roger has rarely been under greater pressure than during those months. We knew his personal life was in tatters, but he could not tell us how or why. The convention was *not* all right on the night, but it was more memorable than any dozen perfectly run conventions held since.

Roger took everything right on the chest. So did Alan, Dennis and a few others who remained members of the convention committee. Nothing annoyed his critics more than Roger's relentless cheerfulness. In the end, that cheerfulness saved the convention and made Roger quite a few lifelong enemies.

A few days after the Convention, Claudia rang. She had split up with Randal. Could she bunk down at our place for a fortnight until she could find somewhere else to live? She arrived, but we hardly saw her. Soon she departed to join a strangely mixed household in northern Carlton (including Henry Gasko, Keith Taylor and Carey Handfield, as I remember it), and set out to make up for lost time. Roger and she were now, we were told, 'an item'. Okay, I thought, that settles that. That's how things should have been all along.

And Roger? Not for the first or last time, Roger disappeared. When Claudia visited his place, he was never there. Distraught, she would go next door. Don and whoever else was semi-living in the house at the time welcomed Claudia. A few months later, Claudia and Don began living together, and did so for five years.

V

From 1978 onwards, Roger appears less frequently in my story, yet becomes more and more a mainstay of it.

Roger made grand appearances. He disappeared for months at a time. Then a phone call. 'Why don't we go out somewhere?' And it would be the best night out for months. We went with Roger, Charlie and Gerald and Catherine Murnane to the Mermaid Restaurant before it burned down. One night when we felt rich we took Roger and Charlie to Two Faces, by reputation the most expensive restaurant in Melbourne. $100 for the four of us? Yes, that was expensive in 1979. The food came in tiny portions, and did not seem remarkable. The wine cellar *was* remarkable. The bottle of 1972 Wynn's Coonawarra Cabernet Sauvignon we had that night is the best bottle of wine I've ever tasted.

Roger and Charlie were sharing a house in Whitby Street, Brunswick. At the same time, Roger had gone back to university to do one subject a year. He joined what was called the Part Timers' Association, which connected him with a

completely new group of friends. Some of them were also in MUSFA, but many were not involved in science fiction. Charlie got a job teaching at Monivae College in Hamilton, in the Western District of Victoria. We saw him once or twice a year. Roger moved house many times.

In 1980, Roger set out on his first overseas trip. He worked out a way to extend the life of his Eurail pass. He often slept on the train to save on expenses. In a letter that he sent to Phil and Mandy, he drew a map of his European rail travels. The crisscrossing lines blacken the middle of the continent. He visited almost every country, and went to some, such as Finland and Hungary, whose languages were too difficult even for him. He walked along the coast of Cornwall to Lands End, and visited Bergen, the northernmost railway station in the world. He sent vast letters written in mountains of tiny writing. His photos, particularly of Norway in winter, were magical. On the way home, he visited Sri Lanka. A few weeks later, when we took him to Phantom India restaurant, he asked for the hottest curry in the house. He ate it, too.

There were odd elisions in his account of the journey. What really did happen during that glorious Christmas Eve at Innsbruck? Roger would never tell us, although he told a few people. He did tell us about the girl he spent some time with. They arranged to meet a few months later in Paris, but Roger said that he simply could not bring himself to turn up to meet the appointment. The lady obviously had marriage on her mind, and Roger (it always seemed to me) was determined to avoid permanent relationships of any kind.

Roger was always master of the information brick wall. I remembered a night at Enri's Restaurant about a year before Roger went overseas. We had dinner with a friend of mine who counted himself as a bit of a psychologist. Roger managed to get Rick's life story out of him without any trouble. When Rick began to ask questions of Roger, he gained nothing.

The head of the Lifeline telephone counselling service, speaking at Roger's funeral, said that although he had worked with Roger for six years, he had learned about his connection with science fiction only the day before!

I still wonder what Roger really discovered about himself during his first overseas trip.

When he returned, he seemed to be the same Roger. He still regarded the company of other people as the only valid focus of his life. He visited his friends regularly, offering gossip, humour and even advice and comfort when needed.

When he returned, he was *not* still the same Roger. During the early 1980s he began to shrug off many of his butterfly tendencies. For the first time, he would commit himself to a time and date, and *actually turn up at the right time on the right date*. For the first time he committed himself to regular publication of a fanzine. He and Peter Burns took over *Thyme* magazine from Irwin Hirsh and Andrew Brown. In that magazine Roger showed journalistic skills and powers of wit and sarcasm that nobody had suspected. Some people were determined to be annoyed by Roger's repartee; others realised that he had an unerring eye for the true pattern of events. As someone once said of Jane Austen — he might have been protected from the truth, but precious little of the truth was protected from him.

Elaine and I remember Roger best because he helped us so often. In 1982 and 1984 he allowed us to take trips to Mount Buffalo because he minded the house and took care of the cats while we were away. After we returned from our first Mount Buffalo trip in 1982, the woman who lived next door said: 'What has that man been doing to your cats? They've gone completely *mad!*' Of course. Roger knew exactly the right way to entertain cats.

Roger's 1985 overseas trip was quite a different journey from the 1980–81 lark. We received almost no letters. Several long letters from Egypt went astray. On the way overseas, he lost his luggage. (It stayed in an airline office in Manila for six months until he returned for it.) In Egypt, he suffered a near-fatal road accident. Or rather, it would have been fatal if the bloke he was travelling with hadn't been an American. Tranferred to the American hospital, his body completely wrapped in plaster, Roger gradually improved. Eventually he reached Britain, then home.

After he returned from the 1985 trip, Roger began to acquire an unexpected quality — purpose. Roger had always lived every moment as it came, usually successfully, but often to not much effect. Again he took up the reins of *Thyme* (from Peter Burns, who had successfully pretended to be Roger the whole time he was away). *Thyme* won a Fanzine Ditmar in 1987.

Roger became a volunteer of the telephone counselling service known as Lifeline. He took this activity very seriously, often going away for weekend training courses, and eventually becoming a trainer of counsellors. To judge from the eulogy given at the funeral by the head of Lifeline, Roger was one of the most effective counsellers they ever had.

Roger got a job. A real job. He became a social worker with Bridge House, a halfway house to train intellectually handicapped people to join the general community. As far as I know, he was very good at that job.

Roger disappeared again. Spectacularly. The people with whom he was sharing a flat did not see him. They woke up in the morning to find attached to the refrigerator a brief note and enough money to pay the rent and expenses. They guessed that he had, after all these years, become involved with somebody. They did not know how far he was taking the experiment.

After a yum cha lunch at King Wah Restaurant in the city, Roger took the tram home with us. This was unusual, as we thought he had been avoiding us. As we were clumping along Keele Street, I overheard him telling Elaine that he had just broken up with a particular bloke. His first attempt at a serious relationship had been a perplexing disaster.

I don't think we were surprised to be told, in the most offhand way, that Roger had decided he was gay. Or rather, that for him sexual relationships with men had become more satisfactory than his many relationships with women had been. Many bits of the Roger pattern began to fall into place.

Later we surmised that for many years Roger had been deeply puzzled about his sexual identity, probably beginning with the failure of his relationship with Claudia. Some event during his 1985 overseas trip had made him decide that a satisfying homosexual relationship might have been what he was seeking.

As I said, only during the 1980s did Roger gain a sense of purpose. Soon after his first relationship failed, he introduced us to a bloke named Geoff Roderick. They set up house together. Geoff is a very quiet bloke when you first meet him, but Elaine and I felt from the first that he was exactly the person Roger had been looking for all his life. (Yet for many years Roger did not know he was looking for anything, let alone anyone.)

Roger and Geoff's good luck ran deep for about four years. And then . . .

VI

In an issue of *The Metaphysical Review* that's appearing right now, you can read about our Garden Party. Right there at the beginning of May 1992, it was one of the few highlights of a dismal year. It wouldn't have been a great celebration without Roger's attendance. Roger sparkled. Everybody sparkled, especially Monty our cat. Roger introduced Geoff to Claudia.

A few weeks later Theodore, our ginger cat, couldn't pee again. (I've told the story of Theodore's ghastly 1992 in my reply to Mae Strelkov in *TMR* 19/20/21.) Roger rang. 'Geoff and I want to visit. We have some pretty bad news to tell you.' 'Even worse than a cat who can't pee?' I said. 'Yes,' said Roger, 'it's even worse news than that.'

On 30 May 1992 Roger and Geoff arrived at our place. The place had been full of visitors all day. It took awhile before Roger could begin his story. He had suffered a lump under the arm about six months before. It had been diagnosed as 'cat scratch fever'. The lump returned. It had been tested a couple of days before our Garden Party. In late May it had been diagnosed as lymphoma, but doctor said that it could be treated successfully.

Roger swore us to secrecy. He knew that the lymphoma was very dangerous, but all the medical personnel assured him that he should be optimistic. A Chinese doctor in Richmond said: 'I can cure you!' but put Roger on an unexciting 'treatment' of meditation and macrobiotic food. The important thing was optimism. We weren't allowed to be anything but optimistic. We would rather not have known the secret at all, especially as we could not say what we really felt. We could not even say: 'Roger, if your life is nearing the end, why not end it properly? Let's talk about all the good and bad times. Roger, have you made your will?' (He hadn't.) 'Roger, let's say goodbye.' But we could never allow ourselves to say goodbye.

Roger won the DUFF trip to America. He was greatly pleased at the honour given to him, and he and Geoff had made elaborate plans to travel through America and Europe for six months or more. However, he had to tell some people about his condition because he had to cut short his August–September trip to America in order to return to Australia for chemotherapy. When Roger returned, it was found that the cancer had travelled to a section of his spine, giving him dreadful pain. Treatment actually removed the growth in his spine, but not until he had been placed on heavy pain-killers. Also, no treatment could stop the growth and eventual spread of the original tumour.

We knew, as few people did, that he was ill and in great pain during the last two public events he attended — the farewell party for Mark Loney, and Mark and Vanessa's wedding. But Roger sparkled during Mark's party. Nobody could have suspected he was ill. I'm told that it was obvious he was in pain during the wedding, but in photos taken then he looks no different than most people remember him.

For Elaine and me, Roger *appeared* ill only about a fortnight before he died. Very few people ever saw him other than the exemplar of amiable energy photographed so well by Dick and Nicki Lynch in the latest issue of *Mimosa*.

On 3 December, Geoff phoned us late in the afternoon to tell us Roger had died. He invited us to the hospital to make our own farewells. There we met Beryl and Brandon, Roger's mother and father, Deb, his sister, and Dai, who lives with Deb. In 1979 Roger's father had built the renovations for our Keele Street house before we moved there from Johnston Street, but I had never met Roger's mother before. I had also never met Deb or Dai. It was a bit startling to meet Deb, since she resembles her brother very much. Within a few minutes we felt we knew her and Dai.

We went to say goodbye to Roger. As when my father died, I felt that the unmoving shape on the bed had very little to do with the person we had known. After all, hadn't Roger always represented the Spirit of Life Itself? And if that life disappears, cannot it reappear?

Roger's funeral at the Springvale Necropolis on 8 December was the saddest event I've ever attended. Many of the several hundred people who were there had not known Roger was ill until after he died. His co-workers at Lifeline and Bridge House were as afflicted as his family and the hundred or so fans who attended. The service included a brief section from Vaughan Williams' 'The Lark Ascending', Roger's favourite piece of music, and a eulogy. The celebrant spoke some paragraphs that Elaine and I had written. The head of Lifeline spoke about Roger's work with that organisation. And Deb, courageous, said: 'Roger was no saint; he was unique.'

Roger was unique because he was the only person I have ever met whose central interest was other people. Not just selected individuals or groups, but all people. Roger was equally available to all his friends. He paid absolute attention to our concerns, and remembered what was important to us. He made patterns from people, seeing unexpected connections between them or healing emotional wounds. There were only a a few people he gave up on, usually egocentric people who could not stand slights or prickings of their pomposity.

Roger became angry with friends who sold themselves short. A few weeks before he told us about the cancer results, he listened to me wondering whether I would ever make a success of anything non-fannish. 'Let's face it, Bruce,' he said. 'You're a failure! Enjoy it.' What he was trying to say but couldn't was: there are much worse things than petty abstractions like 'failure'. His impatience and his words seemed strangely liberating at the time, but gained extra meaning when I learned of his illness.

Roger's great strength was also a weakness. He never finished his degree in Psychology because the university course made it into an abstract study. Because he did not finish his degree, Roger could never get the jobs for which he was really suited until he gained the position at Bridge House.

In times of trouble, I trust the dream machine in my head to tell me what is really happening.

In one dream, I was sitting in the next room while Roger and Elaine were talking. I wanted to go in there and say, 'Why are you talking like this as if nothing is wrong? Roger will be dead tomorrow.' When I woke up, it took me some minutes to realise that it had been a dream. I dreamt it on the night after the funeral, but my main feeling remains disbelief that Roger is no longer a central part of my own story.

Another dream was surrealistic, but just as vivid. I was on an train travelling around a curved valley. The carriages of the train had running boards on the side, as in Western movies. Rocky Lawson appeared as a train-napper. He was climbing along the running boards outside the carriages, attempting to stop the train. He reached the engine, and I'm not sure what happened. The train stopped suddenly. Carriages spilled off the rails into the valley. The engine was balanced on its back end. People wandered around hurt and dazed, but nobody was killed. I was unhurt, but had no idea how to help the others. Suddenly Roger was there. I stared at him in disbelief. He shrugged. 'Sure, I'm back,' he said,

as if I should never have doubted otherwise. 'I'll be leaving in a transcendental ascent into heaven next time, but you won't be there to see it. Now let's help these people.'

In another dream, Melbourne University's Union building was a giant glass palace featuring a double-storey restaurant. I was at one huge table of diners, and went to get some extra wine for the table. As I looked down the sweeping staircase between the two floors, I saw the other group of diners I had promised to be with that night. I went down to talk to them, and they begged me to stay. But I still had to fetch the wine for the table upstairs! I had no idea how to resolve the situation. At the end of the dream, dressed in nothing but shirt and shorts, I was running in the driving rain away from the Union building.

I suspect my dream showed me what life was often like for Roger. He promised so much to everybody that often he was caught in the middle of all us, unable entirely to enjoy the celebration.

But Roger enjoyed most of his life. What I'm really mourning is life for all of us who are left. We're all stuck for someone to talk to in an emergency. We don't know to whom we can tell all those secrets and jokes we could only tell Roger. We don't really believe what's happened. And maybe we never will.

— 5 March 1993

THE REUNION

On 20 June 1992 Elaine was rung by a person whose name was unfamiliar to me. Puzzled, I rang him back. Nick told me that he had been in my primary school class from Grade 3 to Grade 6, yet still I could not recall his name. He said that some of the people from Oakleigh Primary School (then Oakleigh State School) have kept in touch with each other, as they live in the Ferntree Gully/Knox area, and planned to hold a reunion of Grade 6A, 1958, early in 1993.

Still puzzled, I said that I would like to attend that gathering. I still could not remember Nick, and I was not quite sure whether I really wanted to meet these people from my deep past.

I received a bulletin from the committee. It included our class photo from 1958. Of course! *Now* I recognised Nick. After emigrating from Egypt, he was the first boy of Greek ancestry to enrol at Oakleigh. And there in the photo were David, Vic, Janet, Carolyn, 'Jockey', Graeme, Graeme, Graeme, and the rest. Wolfgang was the first person of German descent to attend the school; Elja the first from Holland. The names were as familiar as if I'd left the class last year. Some personalities I could not recall. Some personalities I could recall only too well.

It was the committee's enthusiasm that kept me interested. I talked to Graeme on the phone. He is now known as 'Wal'. It took a bit of mind change to shift to his 'new' nickname. Nick and Wal had lived in the Ferntree Gully area for many years, but had met each other only recently. They made contact with Graeme, who also lived nearby. After a night at the pub, they started looking through Graeme's old photos. This led to the idea of a small reunion; Wal suggested that it should become a reunion of the whole class. They enlisted Sherrill to the committee; eventually Carol became the other member.

The hunt was on. The members of the committee were determined to find all the former students. They divided the class photo into sections. Each person had to find all the people in his or her section.

They began phoning surnames in the Oakleigh area. If this failed, they tried the Ferntree Gully/Knox area, since many Oakleigh families had moved there during the sixties. If this failed, they tried phone numbers for the whole south-eastern area of Melbourne.

Each person found could usually remember some tiny detail that would lead them to somebody else. Ian had moved to Canberra on the early sixties; it took only one phone call to find him. Of Marie, it was known that her sister had at one time been married to one of the prime ministerial Holts. Endless blind alleys and phone calls to London and back eventually found Marie married and living in Sicily. Somebody remembered that Graeme lived outside of Brisbane; he turned out to live 1000 kilometres north of Brisbane. I was one of the easiest to find, as my Auntie Linda still lives in Oakleigh. Bob was easy to find, as he still lived in the Oakleigh area; he is a train-driver; he knows Elja's husband, who is also a train- driver; the committee found Elja. David seemed impossible to find, as his family left Oakleigh in early 1959. One night while I was talking to Nick on the phone I remembered that he had a brother Richard. Eventually the committee made contact with Richard, who arranged for David, who was working in northern Victoria on the Dartmouth Dam, to ring back.

By early 1993, the committee had found every class member except one. That's forty-five ex-students out of forty-six. The missing girl, Gina, was in the class for only a year, and seems to have returned to Britain at the end of that year. Only one person had died: Doug, of cancer, at the age of forty-two, leaving a wife and two children.

In mid-1992 I said to Wal: 'What about Ron? What about Bill? How come they are not on the list?' 'Because they weren't in our class. They were in the other sixth grade, 6B.' I remembered Ron and Bill well because I had gone to school with them for another four years at Oakleigh High School. I had forgotten that they were in the 'other class' all the way through primary school. The committee put together a list of well-remembered people from Grade 6B. Eventually twelve of them, plus spouses, attended the reunion.

Don was part of a subcommittee that set out to find our teachers. Most of them had been in thirties or forties when they taught us. Our Grade 6A teacher, Mr Landgren, had died in the 1960s. He was the best teacher I ever had. Other teachers had died as late as the 1970s. Two were left: Mr Tonkin, who taught us in Grade 4A, and Mr Lewis, who taught the 'other class' in Grades 3B and 5B. We did not know their first names while we were at school, so I won't call them by their first names now. Mr Tonkin was in hospital during the reunion, although he wanted to attend. Mr and Mrs Lewis attended, and seemed to have the best time of all. Mr Lewis, who had organised the drum-and-fife band and many other school activities, remembered everybody from both classes.

The phone bill for the year was over $600. People put in $20 each for expenses, and agreed to bring their own everything

to the reunion. The date was set: 21 February 1993, at the Ferntree Gully home of Wal and Anna.

We were all rather nervous by the time we arrived. What do you say to people you haven't seen for nearly thirty-five years? Would we recognise each other?

The committee had taken care of the introductions. They enlarged a class photo and cut it into bits. When we arrived, we received a lapel button with our 1958 photo on it, plus our first name. Each person had to guess the surname of the other person. Each spouse received a button with just a first name on it.

About ninety people turned up on the day. I was almost the first to arrive, since my taxi from Collingwood took only forty minutes to reach the unfamiliar hills of Ferntree Gully. Graeme looked much as I might have expected him to look; so did Wal. Ian had flown in the night before. I could not associate him with the round-faced boy I had known years before. Fit and thin, he now looked much like a friend of mine who was now living in America. Bill was also a surprise. Even in his mid-teens, he had had a very round face. Now his face was aquiline, and he wore a beard.

The only disappointment of the day was that I was one of the few people other people recognised immediately. I had thought the addition of much weight and the deletion of much hair would have made me seem the mystery man of the day. Not so. But it was gratifying to find that since 1958 at least half the blokes had put on as much weight as I have.

I found it hard to recognise most of the women, even when told their names. I suppose females change far more radically in adolescence than males do. I rather wish everybody had brought progressive photos with them: 'Myself at twenty-one'; 'Myself at thirty', etc. I had a few with me, but there never seemed any chance to show them to anyone. Carol was much as I might have expected her to turn out; Jan and Lyn were very recognisable; the two Ailsas were still good-looking, but in different ways than those shown in their school photos; Carolyn and Lyn remain as funny as ever. Later in the afternoon, a woman express-trained into the gathering, greeting everybody with vast enthusiasm. I couldn't remember her. Someone reminded me that Joan had been the champion sport of the school. Not much had changed, since she still has the body of an athlete and the energy of a sixteen-year-old. Somebody said she works as a tree-lopper.

I had an extreme hatred of sport when I was at school, but I admit that those who were good at sport looked healthier than the rest of us. Quite a few people remain lean and fit. I knew that they were the same age as me, but I suspect that their friends and family rarely think of them as being in their forties.

Was it worth meeting these people after half a lifetime?

I don't remember their childhood selves with much affection. Some I hated, and some were willing to admit that they hated me because I found it very easy to stay equal top of the class.

I was always equal top of the class with Jan; we showed a good healthy hatred to each other all through primary school. At the reunion, Jan was one of the most pleasant people I met, and certainly has had the most varied life, with stints at cartooning, photography, film-making and psychological research, among other things.

Some of the boys had been bullies, and others were obsequious members of the gangs. The girls we had avoided on principle — or was it because the schoolyard was divided by a white line, over which neither boys nor girls were allowed to step?

Thirty-five years later, our class has become a group of thoroughly pleasant people. I'm so glad we all escaped from childhood. A couple of blokes I used to think of as overbearing have become successful business people. Many men had become accountants or engineers; many women had become teachers. Many of the men have changed careers, either voluntarily or involuntarily, during their early forties. Few have remained unmarried; several are now grandparents. There were no drunks at the reunion; no bores. A few people were still very funny, especially while the photographer was trying to take the 'class photo'. We had to stand or sit in exactly the same places we had taken for the 1958 class photo. This was difficult for some. Even the photographer began to make silly jokes.

Well-organised nostalgia gave extra pleasure to the day. The principal of today's Oakleigh Primary School lent the committee the original school bell and a drum from the drum and fife band. All other school artifacts from our era were destroyed in a fire in 1976. The committee used fruit juice bottles and tinfoil to mock up a crate of the school milk bottles we had to drink every morning recess during the 1950s. Somebody tacked together 'Mr Tonkin's strap' (since Mr Tonkin now says that he never used the strap) and an oldfashioned ink bottle. There were plenty of old photos and magazines. Somebody found an old desk; not quite as oldfashioned as the all-wooden desks at Oakleigh, but close enough.

At the end of the day, we felt the reunion had hardly begun. Some people I had merely waved to. Most other conversations had not gone beyond bare-bones discussions about children and jobs.

Stewart had been a little kid at school, not great at his work, and carrying what seemed like a permanent chip on his shoulder. He was famous for being the first boy to wear a crew haircut to school. Wal had told me that he had recently been an Olympic champion equestrian. 'I've heard you've had something to do with horses,' I said to Stewart. 'That's just a hobby,' he said. 'Sorry; I thought it was your job.' 'No, I'm marketing director of . . .' He named one of the major multinational companies.

With other people, I should have started by asking about their jobs, then talked about their hobbies.

The reunion hasn't ended yet. As they distributed the copies of the new class photograph, the members of the committee found that groups of newly reunited people are meeting all over Melbourne. Jan is trying to arrange a discussion group among us. A group of us visited Mr and Mrs Lewis, who still live in Oakleigh. Mr Tonkin was also there. I didn't want to interrupt their conversation; they kept telling funny anecdotes all morning. That afternoon we visited today's Oakleigh Primary School to talk to the principal. Yes, we are welcome to use the old school hall for our next reunion next February. 'And by the way,' he said, 'if you have the time, because we don't, would any of you like to put together a short history of the school?' We're thinking about it.

— 2 April 1993