

Scratch Pad 65

December 2006



2006 begins. Dick Jenson's ingenious photomontage of our three main rooms at Greensborough, now that all the books are up and the furniture is in.

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## Scratch Pad 65

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### In midair: 2006

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A magazine for efanines.com, based on a newsletter and Christmas card substitute from Bruce Gillespie, who wrote it with much help from Elaine Cochrane, 5 Howard Street, Greensborough VIC 3088. Ph: (03) 9435 7786. Email: gandc@mira.net Photos by many friends, especially Eric Lindsay, as noted in the captions. Front cover photo of Harry by Elaine Cochrane.

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#### **Of the glass half full and the glass half empty**

Whenever people make the distinction between the bloke who sees the glass as half full and the bloke who sees the same glass as half empty, they look at me meaningfully and say under their breath, 'He's the bloke who sees the glass as half empty.' The 'glass', in this case, is the year 2006.

Often I find myself almost skipping with the pleasure of walking the streets of Greensborough under overarching trees on a mild early summer day. I am free to do anything I want: I can take a walk, or go off and see a movie, or stay at home and write, read, listen to CDs or watch DVDs. The choice is mine. Most of my headaches are gone, except when a bit of hay fever hits me. Recently my GP gave me a clean bill of health. That's 2006, from the glass-not-just-full-but-overflowing viewpoint.

#### **Unfunded liability**

There's a slight catch. All this free activity is unfunded. At the end of November I had not had any paying work for five weeks. I'm living on savings. I'm hoping for a book to edit, but the book never quite arrives. Out of the blue, I received an email from an old friend who left her publisher employer to go freelance. I asked her if she had any spare work. She offered me a week's work, which occupied the first week of December. I don't know when I will be paid, so I'm still living on the income from a job I finished in October.

So should I be scared? Of course, in the same way as any freelance actor who waits for the phone to ring 'between engagements'. But I can also see the same situation from the half-full-glass viewpoint — if I had not received two unexpected phone calls in 2006, I would have earned very little for the year. One call was from a

company where today nobody now knows me and my work. A few years ago it provided me with non-stop jobs, but all my contacts left the company. The academic editor of a large book I copy-edited and organised a few years ago remembered my name. He insisted that I edit the second edition of the same book. When I was paid for what proved to be a vastly easier editing task than the first edition, I could live on savings for the next couple of months. The cheque also paid for the postage for *Steam Engine Time 5*. (Dr David Lake from Brisbane very generously paid for printing the same issue.)

The other phone call came from a company that had not used me for three years. My contact could offer only half a book, because the main editor had run out of time; but the cheque in payment for those five chapters will keep me going until Christmas.

My position has worsened during the last two years because my contacts at my former two most regular clients have themselves resigned and become freelancers. When I began as a freelance book editor in 1974, John Bangsund, I and a few other people had the field to ourselves. In 2006, most the people who once occupied desks at publishers are now out there trying to survive. I do have a couple of regular clients, but they are not big publishers who can offer continuous work. They do give me interesting books, though, and pay well and fast.

As for the company that gave me twenty indexes to compile a few years ago — nobody from the company answers my emails. What can I have done to annoy them? As happens when freelancing, I do not know; I will probably never know.

I feel like Coyote in those *Road Runner* cartoons. I've actually stepped off the side of the cliff. Until I look down, I'm in midair, free. But nothing actually supports me,

except Elaine's generosity. Soon I will look down, give a cry of horror, and plunge to the canyon floor below.

But, you might reply, Elaine will support me. She has perpetual work. Not so.

When we moved from Collingwood to Greensborough, we expected the difference between the selling and buying price would make it easy to move. Not so. Instead, Elaine kept reaching deeper and deeper into her savings, until they were nearly gone. Meanwhile, I have had two bad earnings years. Last year, Elaine had to take off quite a bit of time because of her double hernia operation. Recently she has suffered several major interruptions to her work schedule. There are no guarantees in the freelance book-editing biz.

### Friends

2006 did not start well: our old friend Noel Kerr died on New Year's Eve. He was cheery to the last, but cheeriness could not put off the inevitable. We met some of Noel's other old friends at the funeral at Springvale, and were impressed when WeG (Bill Green, one of Melbourne's best known newspaper cartoonists) turned up at the funeral and the gathering of friends afterward.

As a sort of balance to this melancholy event, in January I caught up with Gerald and Catherine Murnane for the first time in a couple of years. We were attending Joe Szabo's third exhibition of paintings — the first to be launched in Hungarian. This led to afternoon tea at our place a few weeks later, but since then Catherine has had such difficulty walking that she has not been able to leave the house. Gerald's name has kept underbubbling in my life throughout the year. In his critical articles, Peter Craven often mentions Gerald's name whenever he writes about quality Australian fiction. In October, Ladbroke's of London quoted Gerald as 33/1 to win the Nobel Prize for Literature. Gerald didn't win (the favourite did), but the fact that he was considered for the Nobel must have puzzled and annoyed many literary people around Australia (hah!). As Gerald has pointed out, his work is read and appreciated in Sweden rather more than it is here.

2006 was a year of fine friendships: Bill Wright, who insists on trudging up the hill from Greensborough station to help me collate ANZAPA every two months; Dick Jenssen (see below, 'The pleasure of their company'); Adrienne, unfortunately just departed from Harcourt Education, and Harjinder, who kept making valuable renovations to our house; Murray and Natalie, for many favours, including the swelling of the CD and chair collections; Yvonne Rousseau, for maintaining contact from Adelaide; Lucy and Julian, who pop in from time to time, and help our careers whenever possible; Race and Iola Mathews, for continuing to host the monthly film nights, and to Carey and Jo Handfield for enabling us to attend them; David Russell and Thomas Bull, stalwart supporters; Dennis, Alan, Francis, Charles, Charles and Nic, Peter and the other Friday-nighters; Andrew, Ian, Ori, Kirstyn, Tim (and Bill again) — the Tuesday-nighters; and all who attended the Nova Mob during the year — especially Justin Ackroyd, who somehow drops us at Westgarth station with one minute to spare. Special thanks to Claire and Mark, our true British friends who also visited Melbourne during Continuum. We weren't able to keep up with Sally and John the way we usually do, but it's nice to know they are still surviving. To everybody whose names I've forgotten, I apologise. And most of all, thanks to Elaine, who puts up with me.



Archie shortly after he arrived at our house. (Photo: Elaine Cochrane.)

### Cats in black and grey

Victorians might remember that it was ferociously hot on Australia Day, 26 January. Elaine was out in the back yard. She had noticed Victor, a neighbourhood cat who looks remarkably like Harry, in the back yard. Harry gets very upset when he sees Victor in *his* territory. Elaine happened to leave the back garage door open while she opened the side door into the house. Harry was off and away, chasing Victor over the back fence. When Elaine finally located Harry, he was four metres up a tree, on its only branch, in the yard of a house in the next street. The tree overlooked the back yard of the home of Victor's owner. The tree itself was in the property at our back. A Rottweiler circled the base of the tree. Fortunately, Victor's owner let us keep an eye on Harry while Elaine tried to coax him down. No luck. I rang the only phone number I could find in the Yellow Pages: a private animal rescue service. Nigel the Animal Rescuer had to drive from Cranbourne, a newish suburb on the extreme southeast edge of Melbourne, and the trip would cost us a small fortune, cash in hand please. When he arrived, Nigel put on his tree-climbing gear and was about to reach Harry when he leapt to the next tree (which is what Elaine had been trying to persuade him to do already for two hours), then down into another back yard. Nigel was rather annoyed at having failed, but at least Harry was no longer stuck up the tree. Nigel leapt over several fences, met the cat from two doors up, but couldn't find Harry. He gave up, and went home after we had paid him. At 5 in the morning, Elaine heard the sound of cats yowling out the front of the house. (Harry had never before been outside the cat enclosure, but somehow he still recognised home territory.) One of the cat voices was Harry's. Elaine had left the garage door up slightly in case he returned during the night. Harry



Above: Cats in black: (l. to r.): Harry, Archie, and Flicker. Below right: the same trio. (Photos: Elaine Cochrane.)



Above: l: Archie a month ago.

Below: (l:) Flicker; (r:) Violet. (Photos: Elaine Cochrane.)



slipped under the front door of the garage. Elaine caught him, brought him inside, and he hasn't escaped since.

These days, when Victor turns up the garden, Elaine tells him to go home. Victor looks hurt and disappointed.

In *\*brg\** 46, I wrote about the most melancholy event of the year, the slow death of Sophie. On 9 May, she was using all of her energy to breathe, and could no longer eat, so we took her for her last ride to the vet.

In June, we decided that we needed a kitten to succeed Sophie. Elaine visited the Greensborough Cat Protection Society. There were only a few candidates. One of them, a black fluffy kitten, purred at her: 'I've picked you.' On 22 June, Elaine brought Archie home. We gave him this name so that it would not sound like any of the other cats' names. Most of the time he still gets called 'Kitten'. Elaine introduced him to Violet, who was most unimpressed, so Elaine introduced Archie to the other cats. They accepted him immediately, although they did not like his immediate assumption that they were his lifelong friends and that he had a right to bounce on their tails. Male cats, it seems, can be very tolerant of kittens.

We travelled into the usual Friday night gathering on 23 June. When we arrived home, Elaine looked in the front room — and to her disbelief, found Violet lying dead! Violet had used the cat tray, finished the food we had left for her, and seemingly dropped straight over on her side, killed by what must have been a massive stroke or instant heart attack. She showed no signs of distress or struggle. She was only eleven years old, not old for a cat.

We don't have a photo of what Violet really looked like. Viewed in profile, she showed a magnificent square jaw. She looked what she was: a cat of character and determination. Whenever Elaine tried to take her photo, she always came toward the camera, preventing Elaine taking that hoped-for profile shot.

Violet had been brought into our Collingwood vet's surgery as an injured stray, with a severe wound along her back. The chap who had found her didn't really want a pet. Our vet fixed her wound and kept her at the surgery because he liked her so much. And Elaine and I liked her instantly as well.

Violet was a silent cat, but she understood English, and could give us clear instructions with the merest pointing of her nose. In many ways she was very civilised: she is the only cat we've ever owned who liked children, and she knew immediately that a cat's right place is under the bedspread, not on top of the bed. But she also bit people when they were least expecting it, and she was very frightened of industrial noises. There was something a bit wild about her, so she probably had suffered some very mean street life before she was rescued.

We needed a cat after Monty died. As a female grey cat, Violet seemed an ideal companion to Polly. Polly thought otherwise. She hated Violet absolutely from the moment we brought her home. Violet was a stinking intruder! The two grey cats had to be separated from then on. Even years later, when by accident we let Polly trap Violet in the front bedroom (which became Violet's territory), she ripped Violet's tail so badly that it needed eight stitches. Violet spent her days in the front two rooms at Keele Street, but the only place we could find for her to sleep safely was on top of the fridge at night, so she spent cold winters at Keele Street. Violet had to use the cat tray when Polly was outside, or occasionally sneak a stroll in the garden. As we planned the move to Greensborough, Elaine arranged that the new cat enclo-

sure would be split into two. Violet's territory would be one half of the enclosure, plus the front three rooms of the house. This arrangement worked well at Greensborough. She was very happy here, but then she died.

I doubt if we would have recovered from Violet's death if it hadn't been for the arrival of Archie the day before. Excuse me while I go all mushy . . . he is the sweetest, gentlest, friendliest, most delightful new cat we've ever taken into the household. He gets pleasure from everything: from us, his new cat friends, food (of course!), darting moths and blowflies, and any other entertainment we can offer. No matter what he does to Harry and Flicker, they take it patiently. Polly doesn't. She expected to be top cat when Sophie died; instead, Flicker has taken over as top cat, and Polly finds herself to be a complete outsider, snookered by a mere kitten. We have caught her playing with Archie instead of hissing at him, and we've even seen them sniffing noses and lying next to each other.

### **Elaine's interrupted life**

Elaine's 2006 routine has often been interrupted. In 2005, she was volunteered to become secretary of the local branch of the Australian Plants Society. Elaine had been attending their monthly meetings at Eltham for quite a few years before we moved from Collingwood. After she moved into the area, she became involved in some of the group's extra activities. Allowing herself to be made secretary seemed to be a logical step. She thought it would be an light task. Immediately she found that she had to attend an extra committee meeting each month. Then she realised that the group was relying on her to produce the publicity for the group's big events, such as the Annual Flower Show. Since Elaine is, above all, conscientious about doing a task, she taught herself to become a publicity agent, getting in touch with local radio stations, newsletters, newspapers and a wide range of other outlets. Often she had to attend yet more committee meetings — the Flower Show Committee meetings — which stopped her taking part in our usual Friday-night expeditions to meet people in Melbourne. In 2006 the Flower Show was being held at a different time (October instead of November) and location (Templestowe College instead of the annual Eltham Festival), so Elaine had to produce enough publicity to get over that hurdle. She feels that her efforts did not draw large enough numbers; I suspect that the show might have gone unnoticed without the work she put in.

While Elaine was trying to get her paying work done, and teaching herself the publicity game, her elderly aunt was causing great anxiety to her and her sisters. We had been puzzled that Auntie Vaisey had not been ringing Elaine with her usual monthly phone call. When Margaret and Elaine went to Altona to visit Vaisey, she seemed much as usual.

I haven't recorded in my diary when Elaine and Margaret first realised that all was not well. Margaret phoned Vaisey one day, but the phone was picked up by a stranger, who said that Vaisey had had a bad fall at home, and was being taken by ambulance to Williamstown Hospital. When she reached there, Margaret found Vaisey very confused and forgetful, as well as sore. The hospital said that Vaisey was very thin, one of her legs would not support her properly, and she needed home help. This was arranged. After Vaisey returned to her unit, she refused to let the home-help person or the district nurse in the door, and would not accept Meals on Wheels. She insisted that she was perfectly able to run her own life. Margaret and Elaine doubted this, but



My sisters (l. to r.): Jeanette Gillespie and Robin Mitchell, at the wedding of my nephew Philip and his new wife Leisha. (Photo supplied by Jeanette Gillespie.)

there was nothing more they could do.

The next emergency call came several weeks later. Vaisey developed a severe infection, and again was admitted to Williamstown Hospital. She had lost several kilos in only a few weeks. The hospital staff became suspicious, took an MRI, and found evidence of degeneration of the brain. Because Vaisey had refused assistance after her last visit to hospital, the hospital staff had had her assessed for aged care; this time they could not let her go home. Very quickly Margaret, Elaine and Valerie (the three sisters) had to gain guardianship of their aunt and find residential care accommodation. Elaine helped Margaret as well and often as she could, but it was Margaret and her partner George who did most of the running around. They had to find out about guardianship. (Lucy Sussex, who had recently been through a similar experience with her father, provided much useful information.) Margaret, Elaine and George visited fourteen different accommodation facilities in three weeks. The facility chosen ideally would be within public transport distance of us, and had to have spacious rooms, decent meals and friendly staff. Margaret, George and Elaine were surprised at the high quality of many of the facilities, but also brought up short by the various financial requirements needed when finding such accommodation.

All this time, Vaisey remained, very bored and grumpy, at Williamstown Hospital. The staff wouldn't allow her to return to her unit. Margaret and George, and Elaine when possible, faced a one-hour trip each way to Williamstown to visit her almost every day for two months. Vaisey kept packing up and waiting to be taken home, but soon she began to forget that 'home' was the unit in which she had lived for the last thirteen years. Several times when Margaret and Elaine visited, Vaisey remembered only the Williamstown house she had lived in until the 1990s or the house she had grown up in. There was clearly no longer any possibility that she could take care of herself.

On 24 November, Margaret and George received the final piece of paper needed from CentreLink, and a few days later, Aunt Vaisey went to her new home. Fortunately, it was top of the list of preferred accommodation.

Vaisey still insists that she can go home, but shows signs that she might settle in.

Elaine hopes her own life can more or less return to normal. However, Stage 3 water restrictions will be introduced for Melbourne on 1 January. During the two years since we've moved here, the main back garden has been filled with pots, each with a plant rescued from the garden at Keele Street. At about the time Elaine began to transplant the plants into the new garden beds, she had the bright idea of creating a system of trenches and garden beds. I've written before how she acquired the house tiles that to be broken up for the trenches, and how she quickly had to arrange for the pile of tiles to be taken from the front garden to the back garden. Since then Elaine has been methodically breaking up the tiles, creating the gutters and garden beds, and transferring the plants. She was interrupted for some months while she recovered from the double hernia operation. In 2006, she has been further interrupted by all the events I've just written about. Which means that Elaine is way behind her own schedule. The only way she can keep the plants in pots alive is by watering. When Stage 3 restrictions are introduced, she will be able to water for only a few hours per week. She risks losing lots of her as-yet-untransplanted plants.

This year the rain in Melbourne decided to stop. We try to save every spare drop of water. I did not realise until we began collecting waste water in buckets that the hot water system wastes nearly a bucket of water before becoming hot at the tap or from the shower.

This year even the politicians noticed that the rain had stopped. Suddenly global warming and drought have jumped to the top of the headlines. How long will they stay there?

### **My family**

My sisters Jeanette and Robin started the year well, attending the wedding of Leisha and my nephew Philip (one of Robin's two sons) in Margaret River, Western Australia. Both sisters were able to do a bit of touring around one of Australia's best wine districts, before attending the wedding on one of the hottest days of the year. The wedding was at the local Catholic church, followed by a reception at the Watershed Winery.

Later in the year I saw Jeanette and Robin when they found themselves facing a similar crisis at the same time. Jeanette is only in her mid fifties and Robin is a year younger than I am, but both suffer badly from arthritis of the hip joint. Jeanette has been a teacher for thirty-five years, which might account for the deterioration of her hip joint. She says she can remember a particularly bad fall at school that triggered her continuing condition. Robin was on her feet for more than ten years running a fast food outlet on the Sunshine Coast, Queensland. I got out of teaching in 1970, and I've never worked behind a counter, so I seemed to have missed out on this family curse.

Jeanette has a salaried position (the kind of regular job I haven't had since 1973), so she took out private health insurance some years ago. In September she was able to have her hip replaced not long after being booked into a private hospital in Heidelberg. She is recovering nicely, has taken the whole of Term 4 off, and has returned to driving.

Robin has had only a marginal income since she and her first husband John split up in the 1990s. She can't afford private health insurance, and the public health system in Queensland, once the nation's best, has put Robin on a three-year waiting list. When she visited



In Melbourne for Continuum 4: above (l. to r.): Mark Plummer and Claire Brialey from Croydon, London; (right top, l. to r.): Valma Brown and Leigh Edmonds, from Ballarat, Victoria; and (right bottom, l. to r.): Helena and Merv Binns, just in from beautiful downtown Carnegie, Melbourne. (All photos by Eric Lindsay.)

Melbourne recently, she could walk only with a stick. We wish somebody in our family had money to help her, but making money is not something we're good at.

My own mother is well at the age of 88, and still living in her own house in Rosebud. She became very forgetful at the end of last year. The doctor found that her blood folate levels were almost zero. Since then she has been taking folate additives, and has been able to lead a fairly normal life. Both Jeanette and Robin have visited her often during the year, but I've seen her only twice.

#### Continuum 4

Did 2006 bring any event that can be described as uncomplicated pleasure? Continuum 4, the annual Melbourne SF convention, held in August, came close. Some people thought it was an empty honour being named Fan Guest of Honour, because the committee overworked me. Not so. I felt overworked only once, when on the first day of the convention I had to miss an event I wanted to catch because I needed desperately to grab a meal . . . any bit of food . . . and eat it as fast as possible.

I felt very tired occasionally, but often I feel tired. I don't exactly overflow with energy when I'm home bashing away on the computer.

Continuum 4 had begun for us nearly a year before, when Elaine attempted to pay Ian Mond and Mitch, the organisers of the convention, for our memberships. Ian came over all conspiratorial and embarrassed. 'Um . . . we hadn't quite got around to asking Bruce yet — but we want him to be Fan Guest of Honour.' 'Oh,' said I, 'Thanks Mondy, but will anybody remember who I am?' I thought I had been long relegated to the position of the old man of Melbourne fandom, safely packed away in mothballs. But Mondy and Mitch wanted to wheel me out for a last hurrah. Why not? Being guest of honour is more fun than sitting around in corridors waiting for someone to acknowledge my existence.

Being Fan Guest of Honour proved to be a breathless experience, but enjoyable. Having checked into the venerable Victoria Hotel (the first SF convention there since 1987) on the afternoon of Friday, 4 August, I waved to friends who were expected (Mark Plummer and Claire Brialey on their third trip to Australia from London in seven years) and unexpected old friends (Leigh Edmonds and Valma Brown, down from Ballarat for their first Melbourne convention since Aussiecon in 1999).

I stumbled into my first panel, 'Melbourne Conventions', without having had time to prepare anything. I would have wasted my time if I had prepared. Terry



Frost, Jocko (James Allen) and Merv Binns led a fairly helter-skelter gabby chase through the corridors of historic conventions, without making much distinction between them. I tried to impose some historical order on the story, but a sense of history seems to be anathema to modern fans. Members of the audience received the important message: the purpose of conventions is to offer a lot of fun to likeminded people who want to meet each other.

Continuum 4 had one great advantage over nearly every Melbourne convention I've attended in the last thirty years: two-track programming (rather than four- or six-track programming). If you liked watching program items, you had a choice of only two. If, like me, you were usually running the least popular program item of the two, you still had a good-sized audience.

The panel on Greg Egan's works had been scheduled for 9 a.m. Saturday! To me this was an insult to Greg Egan, let alone to we poor sods, destined to front up to a nonexistent audience. The ever-helpful convention committee changed to time of the panel, to 6 p.m. on Friday. No problem with that, except it was now opposite the program on fanzines and weblogs where I was also supposed to be sitting. I'm told that Janice Gelb ably defended fanzines. Margo Lanagan wrote later that she had never heard of fanzines before attending that panel. I had wanted to find out about blogs.

For the Greg Egan panel I had spent a week re-reading his short fiction, but I had not had time to re-read his novels. Fortunately, Russell Blackford, Andrew Macrae and some bright members of the audience had done their homework. I hope we pointed a few newcomers towards Greg's work.

My memory of the rest of the night is scattered. I had to attend the Opening Ceremony at 7.30 p.m., but meanwhile I had not had anything to eat. Elaine and I

grabbed some fast food between the end of the Egan panel and the beginning of the ceremony, but I was still hungry after it finished. (I am often hungry.) I have a vague idea that that was a night a group of us trooped off to the Post-Deng Chinese restaurant in Little Bourke Street, enjoyed the meal, and returned in time for my 11 p.m. panel.

I have never before been to a convention where people sit down and try to listen attentively to panel members at 11 p.m. I couldn't believe that in front of us was an interested audience! This could have been because it was the only event during the convention, except the opening and closing ceremonies, featuring all four guests of honour — Margo Lanagan, Charles Stross, Shaun Tan and me. I'm sure they had little idea of who I was, or what a 'fan guest of honour' was, but we got along well. Every panellist had a different take on 'Guilty Pleasures'. Margo and Charles delivered funny pieces about their guilty reading pleasures. Shaun Tan took a more impassioned tack. His favourite reading matter, children's books, is itself seen by many as an illegitimate pleasure. He still finds himself having to pretend he is buying books for nonexistent child relatives. He still gets angry about the prejudice against children's books, especially children's picture books.

Since I was guest of honour of the convention, I was given a room for the convention. After Elaine went home to Greensborough on the train (to feed the cats), I got to stay up late, just like during 1970s conventions. At various times I found myself deep in conversation with the ever-entertaining Sarah Endacott and Cat Sparks. Jeremy Byrne even spoke to me. Much later in the night, Eric Lindsay and I solved the world's problems (as they apply to computer gadgets and the fanzine production methods), and Roman Orszanski and I nattered until 2 a.m. But that's as late as I could stay up.

It's many years since I've had the opportunity to wander around the centre of Melbourne early in the morning. This is how I spent Saturday morning. Mel-



Yvonne Rousseau, visiting from Adelaide for Continuum 4. (Photo: Eric Lindsay)

bourne now has an early-morning cafe scene, mainly along Degraeves Street. After good coffee and breakfast, I explored a few of the streets and arcades just north of Flinders Street. Federation Square wasn't open yet, but the new Brunetti's in the City Square was.

Back at the Victoria, I talked to various old friends, including Yvonne Rousseau, Roman, and others. At midday I caught Shaun Tan's Guest of Honour Speech. Until the 'Guilty Pleasures' panel the previous evening, I had never heard Shaun speak. Back home in Western Australia he often lectures and teaches. He reveals a fine sense of detail and passion. During his GoH speech, he illustrated his life and times with a visual display that showed stunning pages from his many illustrated children's and young adults' books. He told of the genesis and development of his amazing new book, *The Arrival*, which has no text. Its pictures tell the story of a migrant arriving in a very alien new homeland.

I grabbed a quick lunch at a nearby cafe, then returned for the Continuum 4 Nova Mob meeting. Andrew Macrae and I had staged a Nova Mob meeting two years before, just to show it can be done at a convention. This year, Charles Taylor agreed to deliver his talk on Jorge Luis Borges. Unfortunately, he was scheduled against Margo Lanagan's GoH speech, which I would have liked to have heard. However, a not-too-small and enthusiastic crowd turned up to hear Charles and ask questions.

As soon as the Nova Mob session finished, I had to sit on two panels in a row. The first, on Pulp Fiction, proved one of the highlights of the convention. We had the slight problem that Terry Frost believed he was running the panel, although I had been told I was running it. Fortunately, the other panellists — Justin Ackroyd, Race Mathews and Cat Sparks — were much more informative and entertaining than either of us. Both Justin and Cat had brought in a raft of pulp magazine covers, and were well able to explain to



Roman Orszanski, party animal and Tea Party organiser, also from Adelaide. (Photo: Eric Lindsay.)



Doing my Fan Guest of Honour schtick. (Photo: Eric Lindsay.)  
Nobody seems to have taken a photo of the Fan GoH Speech, so I can't show you Ian Mond performing as comedian-interviewer.

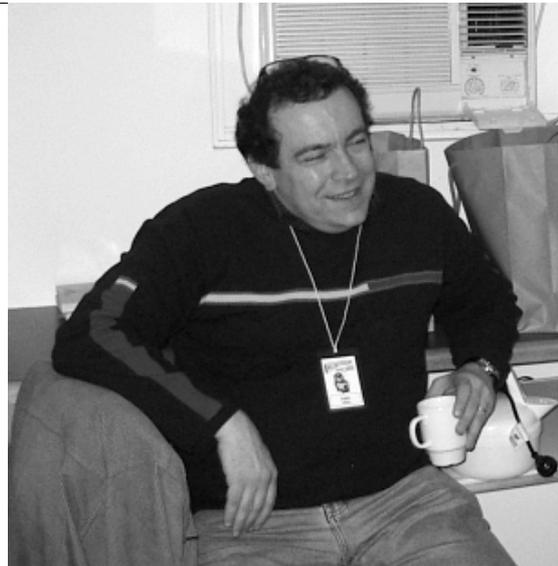
younger fans just what a pulp magazine was, why their covers are still highly valued, and why they were considered lascivious by Australian Customs officers in the 1940s. Race went one better: he brought in copies of pulp magazines from his own collection. Ah, the aroma of pulp paper! I felt nostalgia for an era I never experienced. (Pulp magazines disappeared in 1954, having ruled American and British popular magazine culture since the late 1890s.) Jamie Reuel's comments from the floor, making the case for a 'modern pulp' sensibility, were also helpful.

I was exhausted by the time I began to 'moderate' Sarah Endacott's talk about the editor's craft. Elaine volunteered to help. We became the straightpersons feeding lines to Sarah as she performed her talk, using the whiteboard to make her points. If Sarah gets sick of editing, she could easily always get work as a teacher or a standup comedian.

I'm damned if I can remember where we ate, before returning to the hotel for several book launches scheduled to be held in the little lobby outside the main meeting room. This lobby was much too small for the launch of Andrew Macrae and Keith Stevenson's *Cock* anthology. At the same time people were arriving for the Masked Ball, so things got chaotic. I decided that I was too tired to face the thought of a Masked Ball powered by loud disco music. I packed quickly, and Elaine and I went home early. We were greeted enthusiastically by the cats (especially by Polly, who told us all about how she had been persecuted by the others all weekend), and I caught up on a good night's sleep.

(Perhaps I should have stayed overnight. At 3 a.m. the stalwarts had headed off to a club called the Gin Palace. For those like Roman who could stagger to their feet the next morning, it was a highlight of the convention.)

On Sunday morning, we caught an early train to reach the Victoria by 11 a.m. I rushed into the lobby, hoping I would meet my sister before the striking of the hour. I had suggested a panel on the connection between fandom and music. Jeanette, my sister, is a major figure in folk music fandom, which operates very like SF fandom. Other panel members included Andrew Macrae, who has been performing with an indie-rock band for some years, and Paul Ewins and Julian Warner who, like me, listen to vast amounts of recorded music. Fans can talk about music and films with much more enthu-



Irwin Hirsh at the Tea Party, just to prove that Legends Live. (Photo: Eric Lindsay.)

siasm than they ever talk about SF or fantasy.

Kirstyn McDermott interviewed Charles Stross for his Guest of Honour hour. I warmed to Charles (a Scot who now lives in England) when he said that he writes because he cannot stand boredom, which is also the reason he rarely watches TV. Interviewed by Kirstyn, Charles a-burled with fabulous SF ideas. It's a pity I haven't read any of his books, but this did not lessen the enjoyment of his talk.

For my Guest of Honour spot, I had written a 4000-word information sheet, which I had sent to Ian Mond several weeks before so that he could use it as the basis of his interview-style talk. During the interview, Ian showed that he had read my autobiographical article, absorbed it, then thrown it away so he could ask the questions he really wanted to ask. Leigh Edmonds and Valma Brown prompted from the front row. They claim to know where the bodies are *really* buried. I hope that John Weekes (who was recording the convention) captured the event; if he didn't, it's lost forever. Unless something is written down, it doesn't exist. The audience seemed to enjoy me confessing to things I didn't even know I had done. Ian picked up the fact that, without Elaine being willing to marry me all those years ago, I would have been mad, broke, dead by now, or all three.

Most of the afternoon was taken up with Roman Orszanski's invitation-only Tea Party in his rather small room in the Victoria. The cabin scene from *A Night at the Opera* had nothing on this event. Somehow Elaine and I found a place to sit. Elaine (and most other people) had tea, but Roman was kind enough to find me a cup of coffee. People squeezed into the room as other people left. Leigh and Valma were there for awhile, Lewis Morley and Marilyn Pride hung in there for awhile, and even Irwin Hirsh, who doesn't attend conventions these days, turned up.

My next panel for the day was on Fan Funds. This was a strange event, as everybody on the panel, and most people in the audience, had been beneficiaries of fan funds at one time or another. For us, the main topic of discussion was what to do about the fan funds, because of the unwillingness to potential candidates to take advantage of them. Some people attended the panel out of curiosity. Duncan Campbell (nineteen years old) asked the question some other people probably wanted to ask: 'What is a fan fund?' Janice Gelb provided a



The Roman Orszanski Tea Party (l. to r.): not one, but two Bruce Gillespies; Elaine Cochrane, Lewis Morley, and Marilyn Pride. (Photo: Eric Lindsay.)

succinct and accurate explanation.

The Closing Ceremony gave us all a chance to thank the committee, especially Ian and Mitch, for running a glitch-free and very enjoyable convention. The big emotional moment, though, was our standing applause for Danny Oz (or Danny Heap, as he was then called), who started the whole thing four years before. Danny and his wife Sharon were just about to move to Canberra, leaving a gap that hasn't been filled yet. Danny, who has been suffering a mysterious debilitating ailment during 2006, was rather overwhelmed by our thanks to him.

The Continuum people, who have over the years included Danny, Kirstyn, Ian, Mitch, Andrew, Alison, Ori and many others, are taking a break in 2007. The Worldcon crew (the group who formed strong friendships during Aussiecon in 1999) will put on the national convention, ConVergence 2, in Melbourne in 2007, then bid for the 2010 Worldcon in 2008. Perhaps I should

volunteer to make my first-ever attempt at convention running in 2008. (That's a joke.)

The convention ended on a very high note when David Russell took a few of us out to dinner at the Flower Drum. Yes, the Flower Drum is as good as the food critics say it is. Thanks again, David.

#### **The pleasure of their company**

2006 has been full of enjoyable people-meeting events: two trips to visit Murray and Natalie in Altona Meadows, the wedding of Andrew Macrae and Sarah Marland at a restaurant in Federation Square, the annual visit to Truda and John Straede's farm and garden in Bunyip, the two-and-a-half-hour trek to the new home of Sarah Endacott and Jamie Reuel in Ringwood, which turned into a pleasant dinner and ride home with Charlie and Nic Taylor, who have also moved out that way . . . And they are just a few events that spring from the pages of

One of our last evenings at the Pepper Chilli, Little Bourke Street: December 2005 (l. to r.): Bruce Gillespie, Natalie MacLachlan, Murray MacLachlan, Bill Wright, Elaine Cochrane, Yvonne Rousseau, Thomas Bull. (Photo: Dick Jenssen.)



my diary. Thanks to everybody we caught up with during 2006.

As has been our habit for years, we've enjoyed meeting the 'Ciao group' nearly every Friday night. If anything, the food at Ciao restaurant in Hardware Lane has improved in recent years. Also, we had a great time at Frank and Rose's Winter Solstice party at their farmlet, in Upper Plenty, north of Whittlesea, in June.

We've also enjoyed plenty of dinners with Dick Jenssen, Bill Wright, Thomas Bull, Natalie and Murray MacLachlan, and others at various restaurants around town. Recently, we've been forced to restaurant-hop. Although my income has been declining steadily, prices at Melbourne restaurants have increased sharply in the last three years, after staying much the same since the early 1990s. In 2005 we abandoned Murasaki in Russell Street after its prices rose past our limit. At the beginning of the year we had to abandon Pepper Chilli in Little Bourke Street, after prices rose by 25 per cent. We've tried a few places since, some affordable, but mainly crowded and noisy. Thai City in Lonsdale Street is very good on a week night, but too crowded on a Friday. Key on the Wall in Carlton has been enjoyable a couple of times, except when I went with a different group to meet Mariann Macnamara when she was visiting from Adelaide. The service was insulting that night, although the company was fine. We would welcome suggestions about dark (or even illuminated) secluded city places we can afford.

In April, we were amazed at the sight of a giant flat electronic piece of equipment being shepherded into our house by Dick Jenssen and John Straede. Dick had bought himself a 42-inch LCD screen, and very generously had given us his 42-inch (104-centimetre) plasma screen to delight and entertain me. (Me, not us. Elaine wouldn't worry if we had no TV in the house.) Dick and John took away with them the huge Sony CRT screen that Dick had given us some years ago; it would find a new home with Merv and Helena Binns. I had seen a lot of good movies on the CRT screen, and I was destined to see a whole lot more on the new plasma screen. This was because Dick kept giving us movies that I thought I would never see again, let alone own, including many *films noirs*, such as *Stranger on the Third Floor*, *Laura*, *When the Sidewalk Ends*, *T-Men* and *The Narrow Margin*. Also, Dick gave us most of the great Michael Powell/Emric Pressburger movies from the 1940s and early 1950s. I spent a wonderful week watching all the extras that came with the *Canterbury Tale* boxed set, including the brilliant Ian Christie commentary. (At about the same time, I discovered the 'PnP' e-group, one of whose members is a bloke named Steve Crook. The boxed set includes a documentary showing Steve Crook and other Powell and Pressburger fans tramping around the villages near Canterbury, following the path the film's pilgrims took in 1942.)

### Smash the glass!

Since nobody expects me to stay optimistic for more than a few pages a time, I can now stop all this hoo-ha about half-full and half-empty glasses. Towards the end of the year I feel like throwing away the glass altogether.

At the end of the year Elaine and I are faced by imminent poverty. A few days ago we attended morning tea at one of Elaine's main suppliers of freelance work. Ostensibly the event was held to thank freelancers for their efforts during 2006. The real purpose, it transpired, was to let freelancers know that in some divisions of the company would be offering little work during 2007. For

the first time in many years, Elaine has not been booked up twelve months ahead. And I might have no work at all during 2007. Which might mean no Gillespie fanzines (except on *efanzines.com*), although I will have lots of time to write them.

### But . . .

. . . during 2006 Elaine's niece Linda married Steve and she acquired a new great-niece, Audrey; my nephew Philip got married to Leisha; and my other nephew, Colin, and Stacey are expecting a baby in the new year. We might be fading a bit (I turn 60 in February), but there is always new life and hope.

That's how we hope it is for you in 2007.

— Bruce Gillespie (for Elaine Cochrane),  
20 December 2006

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### Lost in action

It seemed that we spent the whole year losing old friends. I've already talked about losing Noel Kerr at the beginning of the year. Two more whose names leap off the pages of my diary are:

**Arthur Wilson ('Bob') Tucker**, aged 92. Nobody could work out how he lasted so long, given his famous delight in sipping Beam's Choice. He was one of my favourite science fiction writers, so much so that I devoted two different editions of *SF Commentary* (the first in 1976, the second the expanded edition in 2004) to his works. *The Year of the Quiet Sun*, *The Lincoln Hunters* and *Wild Talent* are just a few of my favourite Tucker novels. Tucker was famous for inventing SF fandom as we know it — a social group of people who refuse to take anything too seriously, even the reading matter that draws us together in the first place. Tucker's various fanzines, especially *Le Zombie*, remain models of how fanzine writing and publishing should be done. Tucker benefited from The Tucker Bag, the fund that brought him to Melbourne in 1975 to attend Aussiecon I.

In the many obituaries that followed Tucker's death, the main quality mentioned was his kindness: his almost limitless willingness to make things better for other people. What finer tribute could any person receive?

**Sydney Bounds**, aged 86, is also somebody I remember for his kindness. A subscriber to my *SF Commentary* almost from its beginning, he offered to put me up when I visited London in January 1974. Syd lived in South London in the smallest house I've ever been in: two up, two down. He gave me his very comfortable bed for the week, and insisted on sleeping downstairs on what looked like a cold and uncomfortable couch. He stayed in that house almost until he died because it was in a fixed-rent area of London. Syd devoted his whole life to writing — stories in the Carnell magazines of the fifties and sixties, and later in a wide variety of British magazines. He had several novels published. He kept up with all his old friends, even as they dropped around him, and was still selling stories and teaching writing courses in his eighties. He never gave up hope that I might abandon fanzine publishing and get down to real work: writing fiction. After he read each issue of one of my magazines, he filled an aerogramme with a letter of comment. I just wish I had been able to say goodbye.

'My Favourite Album'  
ABC TV, 3 December 2006  
Top Twenty

A very depressing event at the end of 2006 was the ABC TV presentation on 3 December of *My Favourite Album*. Most people with whom I later discussed the program objected to its format: a panel of self-conscious humorists making fun of the winners; a short video presentation, also designed to pour shit on the winners; and a summary of why the winner was on the list. This was the same formula as had been used for *My Favourite Book* (December 2004) and *My Favourite Film* (December 2005). Music fans, it seems, don't read books or watch films.

The presenter of this year's program was a bright and breezy young woman named Myf who, it seems, started life as an editor, and now appears on *Spicks and Specks*, which I've never seen. The only panellists I recognised were Judith Lucy, a comedian whose task was to stomp over all the winners; and Renee Geyer, veteran Australian blues singer, whose task was look astounded that such crap could even have been considered in the first place. After Number 1 was revealed — Pink Floyd's *The Dark Side of the Moon* — Renee put on dark glasses to guard against all the blinding white trash, and uttered the only intelligent statement of the night: 'No Rolling Stones! No blacks! No women! No Australians!' Worse, the highest placed Rolling Stones album was *Sticky Fingers* at No 95! Worse, four Beatles albums were in the Top 20, including two in the Top 10 (*Abbey Road* at 4, and *Sergeant Pepper's* at 5). The top 10 included only four albums I've ever owned (*Dark Side of the Moon*, *Abbey Road*, *Sergeant Pepper's*, and *Led Zeppelin IV*), three I've never heard (Radiohead's *OK Computer* at 3, Nirvana's *Nevermind* at 6, and Red Hot Chili Pepper's *BloodSugarSexMagik* at 8), and only one other of which I approved (Jeff Buckley's *Grace* at 2). I've never been tempted to buy Meat Loaf's *Bat out of Hell* (9) and U2's *The Joshua Tree* (10).

The gloom of watching the top 10 unroll was made much gloomier when later I printed the whole Top 100 from the ABC's website. *Graceland*, the best LP/CD of the last twenty-five years, crawled into No 30 position. Velvet Underground's first album, the most influential LP of the last forty years, scraped into No 100. And so on.

- 1 Pink Floyd: *Dark Side of the Moon*
- 2 Jeff Buckley: *Grace*
- 3 Radiohead: *OK Computer*
- 4 Beatles: *Abbey Road*
- 5 Beatles: *Sergeant Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band*
- 6 Nirvana: *Nevermind*
- 7 Led Zeppelin: *Led Zeppelin 4*
- 8 Red Hot Chili Peppers: *BloodSugarSexMagik*
- 9 Meat Loaf: *Bat Out of Hell*
- 10 U2: *The Joshua Tree*
- 11 Pink Floyd: *Wish You Were There*
- 12 Beatles: *The Beatles (White Album)*
- 13 Beatles: *Revolver*
- 14 Pink Floyd: *The Wall*
- 15 Radiohead: *The Bends*
- 16 Neil Diamond: *Hot August Night*
- 17 Neil Young: *Harvest*

- 18 Carole King: *Tapestry*
- 19 Pearl Jam: *Ten*
- 20 Fleetwood Mac: *Rumours*

Taking up Renee Geyer's challenge: first entry by a woman: Carole King's *Tapestry* (18); the *only* entry by an African-American: Miles Davis: *Kind of Blue* (65); first entry by an Australian act: Cold Chisel: *10-9-8-7-6-5-4-3-2-1* (23); the *only* Rolling Stones album: *Sticky Fingers* (95).

Bruce Gillespie: 'My Favourite Album'  
Top Ten

- 1 Rolling Stones: *Let It Bleed*
- 2 Rolling Stones: *Beggars Banquet*
- 3 Roy Orbison: *In Dreams*
- 4 Rolling Stones: *The Rolling Stones*
- 5 The Shadows: *The Early Years 1959-1966*
- 6 Loudon Wainwright III: *Album II*
- 7 Rolling Stones: *Aftermath*
- 8 Paul Simon: *Graceland*
- 9 Kate & Anna McGarrigle: *Kate & Anna McGarrigle*
- 10 Neil Young: *American Stars and Bars*

Oops. Still no African-American artists: my top entries would be *Ray Charles Live* or Miles Davis's *A Tribute to Jack Johnson*. Top Australian album? *The Dingoes* or Captain Matchbox Whoopee Band's *Smoke Dreams*.

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2006

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I should have mentioned my favourite Books, Stories, Films and Music for 2006. Usually I spend hours preparing my Top Twenty lists for each category. No time now, so here are a few recommendations:

**Books**

Those I remember off the top of my head include Julie Phillips' biography *James Tiptree Jr: The Double Life of Alice B. Sheldon* — my Book of the Year — and Suzy McKee Charnas's *My Father's Ghost*, her moving tribute to her grouchy old dad. My favourite novel is one I read right at the end of the year: Ann Patchett's *The Magician's Assistant*. Anne Tyler's *A Patchwork Planet* and Ursula Le Guin's *Gifts* are also highly recommended.

**Films**

Far too many to list. Look out for the boxed set of Powell and Pressburger films, or any of the Robert Altman films (especially *A Prairie Home Companion*), or the Criterion edition of Sturges' *Sullivan's Travels*; or *Children of Men* or *The Prestige* when they appear on DVD.

**Music**

Many of my old favourites provided disappointing CDs this year. No disappointment from Neil Young. His *Heart of Gold* DVD is a superb film, and a feast of music. Richard Thompson's five-CD set *RT: The Life and Music of Richard Thompson* is also essential.