

# Scratch Pad 70

August 2009



Jennifer Bryce in Bogota

John Litchen tells of his life in science fiction; and dives underwater

Leigh Edmonds has fun at Conflux 5

Tributes to lost friends: Catherine Murnane, Maureen Brewster, David McDonnell, Charles N. Brown, Enid Spry

Bruce Gillespie's favourite books, films and music :: Dick Jossen's favourite books

Letters from: Kam-Hung Soh; Robert Elordieta, Jennifer Bryce, Steve Jeffery, Jan Cregan, Lloyd Penney, Steve Sneyd, Doug Barbour, Tim Marion, Charles and Nic Taylor, Ray Wood and Robyn Whiteley

# Scratch Pad 70

---

Based on the non-mailing comments sections of *\*brg\** 57 and 58, fanzines for the February and August 2009 mailings of ANZAPA (Australian and New Zealand Amateur Publishing Association) written and published by Bruce Gillespie, 5 Howard St, Greensborough VIC 3088.

Phone: (03) 9435 7786. Email: gandc@pacific.net.au. Website: GillespieCochrane.com.au  
Member fwa.

---

## Contents

- |    |   |    |  |
|----|---|----|--|
| 3  | <b>Adventures in Bogota</b> — Jennifer Bryce  | 32 | <b>Bruce Gillespie's favourites 2007, 2008:</b> Books; Films; Music  |
| 10 | <b>My life and science fiction</b> — John Litchen   | 36 | <b>Books read in 2008: The 10 best list, in order</b> — Dick Jenssen   |
| 13 | <b>Letter of comment</b> to John Litchen — Bruce Gillespie  | 37 | <b>Letters? letters! letters</b> — Kam-Hung Soh; Robert Elordieta; Jennifer Bryce; Steve Jeffery; Jan Cregan; Lloyd Penney; Steve Sneyd; Doug Barbour; Tim Marion; Charles and Nic Taylor; Ray Wood; Robyn Whiteley. |
| 15 | <b>Underwater swimming the hard way</b> — John Litchen  |    |  |
| 22 | <b>A convention report, or sorts</b> — Leigh Edmonds  |    |  |
| 19 | <b>Endings</b> — Bruce Gillespie's tributes to: Catherine Murnane; Maureen Brewster; David McDonnell; Charles N. Brown; Enid Spry |    |  |

---

## Photographs

Front cover: Jennifer Bryce; Back cover: Dubock Funerals; Cordelia Brewster; pp. 4, 5, 6, 7, 8: Jennifer Bryce; pp. 11, 16, 17, 20: John Litchen; p. 23: Eric Lindsay; p. 20: Gerald Murnane; p. 29: Richard Brewster.

Jenny Bryce's most recent article for *Scratch Pad* was 'African Diary', about her visit to Botswana. Since then she's been to Berlin, various Australian cities, and now . . . Bogota!

---

# Jennifer Bryce

*text and photos*

---

## *Adventures in Bogota*

---

**One of the good things about being over 60 years old is that you have the freedom to travel. In this sense, thanks to my work, 2008 turned out to be a bumper year. I travelled to Botswana for two weeks in February and in late July I went to Berlin. According to my diary, at 5.00 p.m. on Sunday, 15 June I went by taxi to Melbourne airport to catch QF462 to Sydney. This was the beginning of my travel to Bogota, Colombia.**

I was a little anxious about travelling alone to Bogota because of all the press about drug crimes. I bought a new secure backpack and had it wrapped in plastic at the airport so that it would be difficult to make me a 'drug mule'. The first leg of the journey was a flight to Sydney, where I stayed at an airport hotel to be sure not to miss the flight to Santiago the next morning. At 1055 hours on Monday, 16 June, flight QF321 (run by Lan Chile) took off and I left behind the security of a familiar language, culture and currency. The people sitting next to me didn't seem to speak much English, and the Lan Airlines flight entertainment wasn't working, so it was just as well that I had a lot of preparation to do on the 16-hour

flight to Santiago. I arrived around lunch time and the next plane to Bogota left at 9.30 in the morning, so I sampled a South American-style airport hotel which, unfortunately, is not very different from an Australian one. There was a shuttle bus to the hotel, but no clear way of getting from there into the Santiago city centre, which was some distance away. So I prudently remained close to the airport and forced myself to stay awake until South American bedtime by having lunch (assisted by my Latin American phrase book) and wandering around the hotel swimming pool area, which was not very extensive. I was reassured that I was actually in Chile when I looked out to the snow-capped craggy mountains, which I assumed were a part of the Andes.

Next morning I set off for Eldorado: the name of Bogota international airport. The plane was going on to Miami and there was a small part of me tempted to remain on board rather than face up to the challenges of finding my way around downtown Bogota and the work I had to do. My three star Hotel Bacata would send transport to the airport — that was all I knew. And I ultimately recognised it — a taxi driver holding up the



Photo (top): Jenny's view of the Andes.

name: 'Jenifa Brais'. We set off down Avenue Eldorado, detained by a student demonstration and the need to buy petrol.

Miranda Foyster loves Colombia (even though she and her partner had precious luggage and passports stolen there) — so she was able to give me a lot of practical advice and introduced me to the delicious *ajiaco*, a very thick chicken soup with whole corn cobs and capers. Miranda had suggested that Hotel de la Opera would be a lovely and convenient place to stay. But unfortunately it was fully booked. Hotel Bacata was close to the Instituto Colombiano Para El Fomento De La Educacion Superior (ICFES), where I would be working each day. It was cheap, so I booked a 'Junior Suite', a step up from a regular room. There was one member of staff with some English. I quickly learned the Spanish for my room number. One problem — there seemed to be no key to my Junior Suite. From my extremely patchy understanding, it seemed that the previous occupant had taken the key and they didn't have another one. I expressed some displeasure and a key was ultimately produced, but I think I spent the first night in an unlocked room and didn't sleep very much at all!

The hotel did its best to accommodate me comfortably. It was the kind of hotel that catered for local sports teams rather than international visitors with no Spanish. At home I go for an early morning walk but this seemed inadvisable in Bogota. When travelling for work in such places I usually make use of the hotel gym. Hotel Bacata had a gym that opened at 6.00 a.m. I fronted up at 6.30 a.m. There was no one around. I could not get any of the machines to work — they weren't turned on, yet there seemed nowhere to turn them on. I looked fruitlessly behind curtains and partitions for a master switch. There was a phone and a sign (in Spanish of course) — and I knew it said: 'For service please call this number'. But I also knew that I would not be able to make myself understood, so I gave up, somewhat deflated by the defeat. For breakfast there was a choice of lumps of meat floating in watery soup, or watery scrambled eggs. I went for the scrambled eggs.

One evening I decided to avoid the heavy stewed meat offered in the hotel dining room and to try a pizza at the coffee shop connected to the hotel. There was a huge screen showing a European soccer game — it dominated the restaurant, so you couldn't avoid watching it. The waiters politely tried to talk to me — although we didn't have much common



View from the Hotel Bacata.



Tourists at the top of Monserrate.

language. They wanted to know the difference between soccer and Australian Rules. I became an instant authority. People who know me and my lack of involvement in footy will find this extraordinary. By now I had acquired a few Spanish words for various foods, but I had no football vocabulary at all — I think I drew the shape of the ball and the goal posts on a paper serviette. I am sure I gave a rather inaccurate impression of the game, but now two young men of Bogota think they know all about Aussie rules!

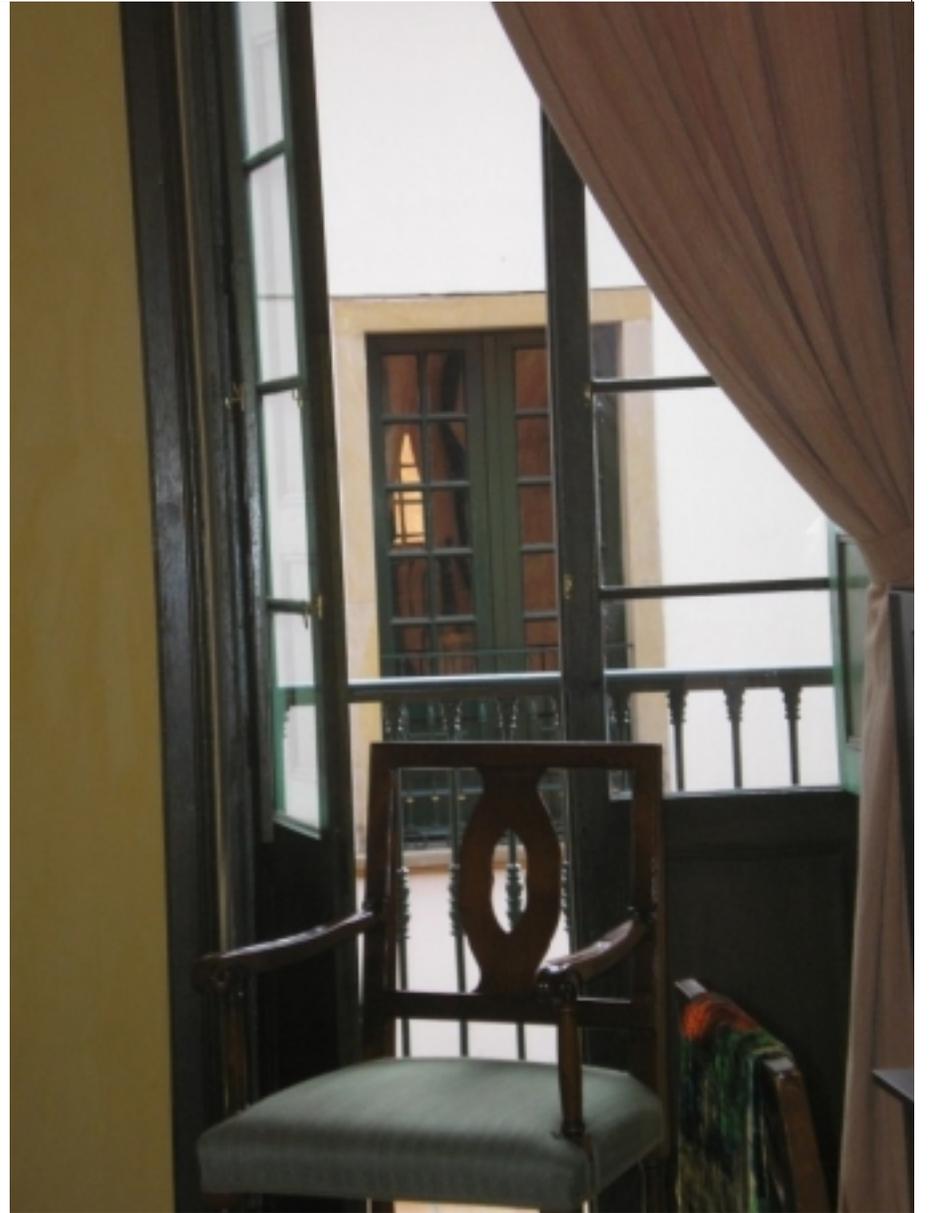
I arrived in Bogota on a Wednesday. On the Thursday and Friday I had planning meetings for the workshops I would be delivering the following week. Then a chance to relax — the weekend. If there had been an obvious tourist centre with bus trips to the Salt Cathedral or surrounding countryside I would have taken one. Failing this, I decided to explore Monserrate, a 3160-metre peak that towers over the city, with its church and 1650s statue of the Fallen Christ. According to the *Lonely Planet Guide*, you can reach the peak by cable car or funicular. It was an easy walk to the tourist area at the foot of the mountain. Then I looked for signs to the funicular. I couldn't find it. There were lots of visitors, so I followed them. Surely they would be going to the funicular. I tried to ask for directions, but no one seemed to understand 'funicular'. So I kept walking along with the other visitors. We were climbing a bit — I assumed to the funicular. I did think that the path would be very demanding for

disabled people. We kept walking. There were stalls selling bottles of water at the side of the track. I bought one. Every so often a group of people would come thundering down the track — in the opposite direction to us. Ultimately I recognised an American accent and I was able to have my suspicions confirmed. I was indeed climbing Monserrate and by now I was probably a quarter of the way up. I stopped and pondered my situation. I was wearing a coat and carrying a bag with more in it than I would have taken on a vigorous climb. The Lonely Planet Guide had advised against walking up the mountain except with pilgrims on a Sunday (this was a Saturday): 'You'll be a prime target for thieves who prowl the mountainside'. Also, Bogota itself is at a high altitude, and some visitors are affected by the depleted oxygen. I had not seemed to be affected, but climbing to a higher altitude might be asking for trouble. On the other hand, I had already covered a fair bit of the distance and there seemed to be plenty of people around, including Tourist Police who did not speak English — I had already tried to ask them the way to the funicular.

So I decided to keep climbing. If I started to feel faint from lack of oxygen, I would turn around immediately. It would be stupid to faint on the mountainside with thieves wandering around! I tried to stay close to other people (I noticed now that most were young men wearing track suits and runners) and even they had to stop to catch their breath from time to time. Whenever I sat down to rest—and as we neared the top I had to do this more and more frequently — I made sure that I was in sight of some Tourist Police. There were little stalls from time to time selling delicious tropical fruit juices and slices of pineapple, but I decided it was best to keep to bottled water. The view was utterly magnificent and the vegetation seemed to me not unlike Australian plants. I was certainly puffing as I neared the top, buoyed on by some kind of private heroics. My coat was tied around my waist and I was sweating profusely. It couldn't be far now — there were stalls selling trinkets — replicas of the cathedral and the Fallen Christ. I rounded a corner — it must be the final stretch . . . and I was hit by the stench of boiling offal! It was so overwhelming and repugnant that I felt I had to beat my way through it although I had practically no reserves left. Somehow I covered the last few metres and tottered up a flight of white stone steps to the cathedral where I joined the crowds and gave thanks, sitting up the back, panting and marvelling at the crystal chandeliers.



View from Hotel de la Opera.



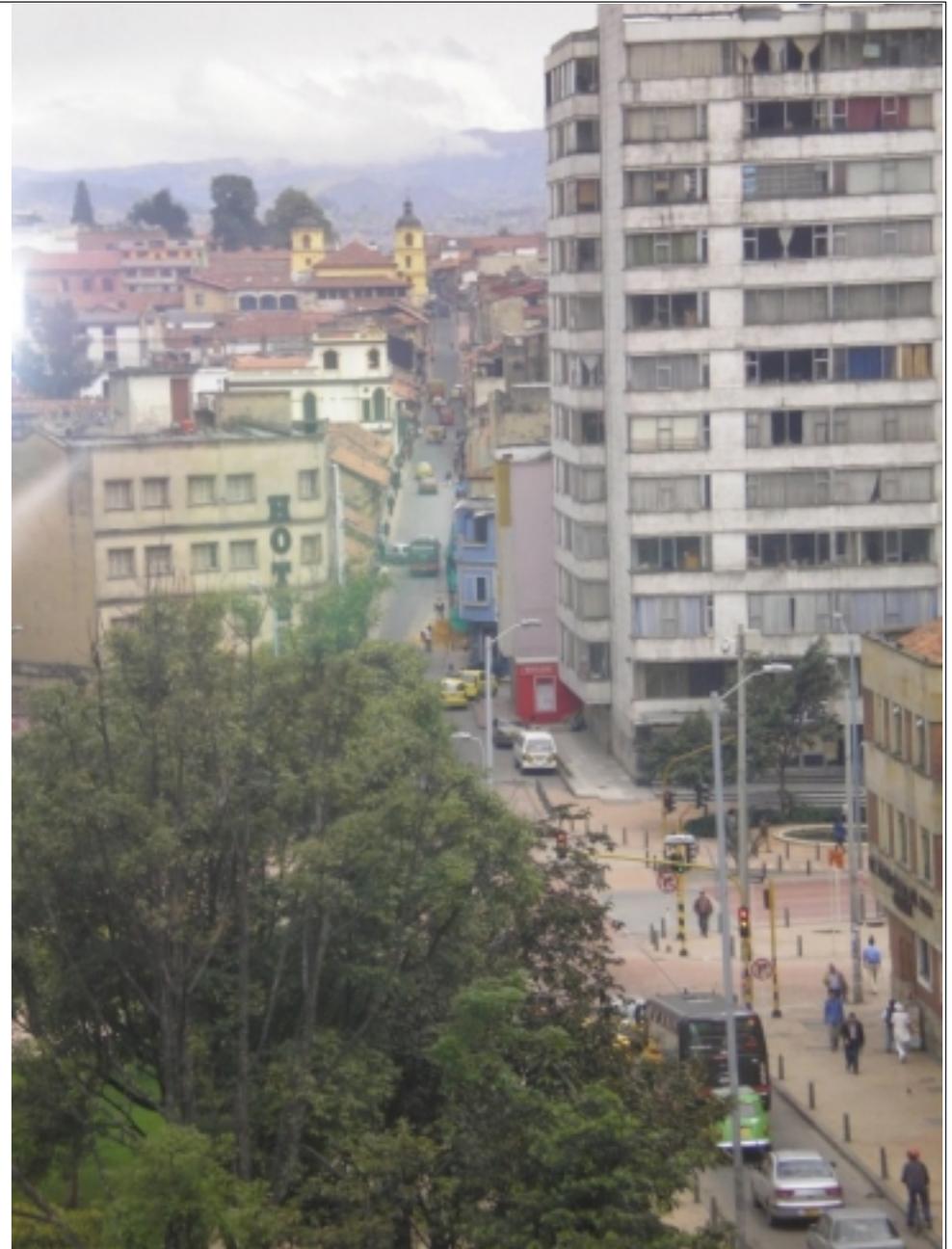
Jenny's room at Hotel de la Opera.



The ICFES Building — designed to be a museum.

I think I bought some postcards at one of the many stalls set up for tourists; then I went to what is probably the best restaurant, sat at a table with a magnificent view and ate a beautifully baked fish. From the restaurant I could see the funicular — and that's how I descended Monserrate. It took about 5 minutes. Some Americans I met in the queue invited me to go shopping for gold with them, but I declined.

Miranda had warned me that it rains a lot in Bogotá. It is close to the Equator, but a high altitude, making the average temperature only about 18 degrees Celsius. During my stay there wasn't a lot of rain. But on this particular afternoon, when I got off the funicular, there was a light drizzle. I strode off confidently along the newly brick-paved walk-way . . . and slipped over! Men came rushing to my aid — could they carry my bag? Could they drive me away in their cars? I assured them that I was perfectly all right. I got up very quickly and although my right side was covered with dirt I walked briskly away. But that night my right arm was so sore I couldn't sleep. The whole arm was one purple bruise. In a semi-delirium of pain and lack of sleep at 3.00 a.m. I thought of phoning a physio friend in Melbourne to ask advice about how to bandage a broken arm. I'm so glad I didn't trouble Neville, who would have been terribly worried. The thought of a local hospital casualty department was not at all appealing. By morning I could move the arm a little. The bruising remained for several weeks and there was some pain for about six months. My Melbourne doctor was quite unsympathetic. I probably



Carerra 3, Bogotá, taken through a window of the ICFES building.

cracked a bone in the elbow.

On my first Friday in Bogota I had met the CEO of ICFES — a very impressive and energetic woman, the type who gets things done. She was concerned that I was at Hotel Bacata and asked her personal assistant to arrange accommodation for me at the wonderful Hotel de la Opera (recommended by Miranda). Of course she could get me in there. I was to move in on the Sunday. There was no time to worry about my arm. I packed up and arranged a taxi. I had expected to have to explain myself (somehow) to the Hotel Bacata management, having booked a fortnight's accommodation. But they seemed to be quite accepting. Maybe it was a relief for them to see the last of the strange foreign woman.

Hotel de la Opera was not far away, in a beautiful old part of the city known as La Candelaria. My recollection is that the streets were cobbled or brick paved. Some were closed off for pedestrian traffic. The area, a haven for tourists, had a well-to-do feeling about it whereas walking around the Hotel Bacata area there was a lot of rubbish on the streets and the footpaths were in need of repair. For my own safety I didn't ever walk around displaying my camera. So most of my photographs are of interiors, or taken through windows. But I did go for a walk after setting myself up in Hotel de la Opera — I wandered around the surrounding streets and into a cathedral, where a service was in progress. On another day I left ICFES early and managed to see most of the Botero art museum, just a few minutes away from the hotel.

Hotel de la Opera is actually two late nineteenth-century houses, joined by a central courtyard that provides a covered-over restaurant where breakfast is served. My room was small but delightful — dark-panelled with windows opening onto a tiny balcony. The walls are so thick that you cannot get Internet access — no matter; there are several cosy lounges as well as a business centre where there is 24-hour access, and also waiters enquiring whether you would like a glass of wine or a cup of chocolate. The cosy lounges are conducive to chatting with other guests. I was intrigued by one group who seemed to be a research party maybe going on some kind of archaeological dig (they consulted their laptops at the breakfast table, wore well cut jeans and good leather walking boots — not business clothes). One evening I met two men from

Houston who were celebrating. They had just received a permit, which they had been trying to get from the Colombian government for fourteen years, to dredge up gold and jewellery from a Spanish galleon somewhere in the Caribbean Sea. 'It will be in the news in ten years' time', they told me. Were they joking? There in the bar of Hotel de la Opera it seemed quite plausible.

My work was quite exhausting. I walked to ICFES each morning — one morning I was recognised by a workshop participant, who gave me a lift. We started at about 8.00 a.m. and there was a long break for lunch around noon when a solid cooked meal was consumed. Everyone was very hospitable and every day I was invited to join a different group at a restaurant. Most days I gave a two to three hour 'plenary', which was simultaneously translated, then the participants would break into discussion groups. I suspected that some participants were attending under sufferance — such things are difficult to gauge in another culture, and everyone is very polite so it is hard to assess whether you are really meeting their needs. At about 5.30 p.m. I would walk back to the hotel, do a couple of hours' preparation for the next day and then sit in a beautiful restaurant on the top floor, looking out over terra cotta roofs to bell towers and some distant hills, often eating *ajjaco* and drinking vino tinto.

The ICFES building is quite impressive. It is located on a grassy square and was designed to be a museum. It reminded me a little of Gaudi architecture. It was built in the 1950s, much of it in dark stone, making it rather sinister. That feeling was underlined by the very tight security. Every time I entered I had to show ID and have my laptop inspected.

On my last day, the CEO of ICFES insisted that her own driver would take me to the airport. Once again I had my luggage wrapped in plastic. This time I was flying Avianca to Santiago. It was pretty hard to sleep because my seat was broken! It could not recline at all and the right arm of the chair (the side where I had all the bruising) had no padding, just bare metal. No choice of flight entertainment, but, although I can't recall what it was, the movie was quite diverting.

— Jennifer Bryce, June 2009

# John Litchen

---

## *My life and science fiction*

---

When John Litchen and family moved from Williamstown in Victoria to Robina in Queensland in the nineties, Melbourne lost one of its most valued fans. We've kept in touch by fanzine and mail, and saw each other at Aussiecon 3 and occasionally since — but Melbourne fandom misses John's energy, enthusiasm and creativity. He always did lots of things other fans didn't do: aikido, scindiving, playing music and much else. The following article was written in response to my Fan Guest of Honour Speech (*Scratch Pad* 69).

PS to John's article: I did not ever share a flat with Paul Stevens. Leigh Edmonds did for awhile, and wrote about the experience for early mailings of ANZAPA.

---

Everyone is an amalgam of all the things that happen to them in life, and in my case it seems I lived separate yet parallel lives simultaneously. For example I was a dry cleaner, while at the same time I was musician, playing in nightclubs and later on the *Don Lane Show* as a fill-in percussionist when Gary Hyde (the regular percussionist) or his cousin Barry Quinn were not available because of other commitments. And during the late 50s and early 60s I also played percussion on some other TV programs, shows at Festival Hall, as well as recordings in studios. I was also involved in scuba diving and underwater photography, fascinated by film-making, and of course loved reading science fiction ... and all this while still being a dry cleaner. In 1964 I went overseas, taking my drums with me, and spent five months in Paris playing with a Cuban band (Los Matecocos), then worked in a kitchen in London, drank booze in Seville in Spain, and laid around on a beach in Greece reading Kazantsakis while soaking up the sun and drinking Turkish coffee.

I came back towards the end of 1965 to find Australia was a different place to the one I had left in April 1964. But the point of this is to look at some early moments that dovetail into your recollections at the start of your article 'My Real Life as a Fanzine Editor'. I don't think I met you

until about 1969 or 1970 or thereabouts. I may have seen you at Space Age Books before that, but I don't remember. I do remember, however, going to a flat you shared with Paul Stevens, which overlooked a public garden in East Melbourne or was it Carlton? But that is an isolated memory. I most likely officially met you when Paul Stevens and I showed the partially completed Aussiefan film at a convention in Sydney in late 1972 in preparation for our bid for the Worldcon in '75.

If that was the one I don't remember much about it other than a rousing ovation for the film and Paul Stevens' wonderful characterisation of Antifan. That this film was most likely instrumental in winning us the right to stage the Worldcon in 1975 is now part of fan history, and I'm proud to have been involved in that. You published an article about the making of this film in *The Metaphysical Review* in July 1994 under the title 'What was the name of that film?' And no, it didn't take you that long to publish it; it took me a long time to get around to writing about it.

In 1952, when I was 12 years old and attending an intermediate level high school (year 7 and 8) in Hyde Street, Footscray, there was a milk



John Litchen (l.), with Paul J. Stevens, star of the *Anti-Fan* film, which John directed in 1973. More than anything else, showing this film all over America won our bid to hold Aussiecon 1 in Melbourne in 1975.  
(Photo: John Litchen collection.)

bar in Hyde Street right on the corner of a side street opposite the front entrance to the school. For those who don't know, a milk bar was not a piece of chocolate, but what we called a shop that today would be like a 7/11 store minus the service station and petrol sales. It sold groceries, pies and pasties, and sausage rolls, as well as ice creams and lollies, and soft drinks and milk shakes and all those things that we see now as separate franchises endlessly repeated in shopping centres around the country. It also sold some fresh fruit and vegetables, and like a general store it even had small range of hardware items. It sold newspapers and magazines and paperback books; books like the *Carter Brown* detective stories, Westerns, Romances, and Science Fiction and Fantasy novels — an endlessly changing selection. These books were all short, being no more than between 98 and 128 pages. Only rarely did one of them have something like 180 pages.

It was in this little shop that I discovered SF, books often with lurid covers depicting half naked maidens being rescued by men in space suits

wielding of all things medieval swords from attacking alien monsters with ray guns. If not, the covers often showed weird spaceships battling each other with vast energy rays or destroying major landmarks in London or New York.

To a twelve-year-old, these books appeared wonderfully exciting. There was no TV, only radio, which I listened to sometimes, and picture shows (movies) to which I sometimes went on Saturday afternoons at the St Georges Theatre in Yarraville near the station. What we had for entertainment were the games we played in the streets we lived in and what we could conjure in our imaginations as we read books. The lurid books in that little corner shop certainly fired my imagination, and I saved up as much as my lunch money as needed to buy at least one of them each week. It very quickly became two a week, and I discovered my preference for Science Fiction far outweighed fantasy, but if it wasn't SF, then Science Fantasy would do. I didn't mind spacemen battling with swords, no matter how incongruous it seemed. I also like Edgar Rice Burroughs books, and just loved the Mars and Venus novels. I was a fan of Tarzan as well, and read every one of those books. I guess I liked adventure stories.

It seems strange, though, that the books I bought and collected, apart from Edgar Rice Burroughs, were the pulp novels of Vargo Staten and Volstead Gridban, of which there was a new one almost every week. I even had a copy of the novelisation by Vargo Staten of *The Creature from the Black Lagoon*. If I remember right, that one was about 180 pages, a long book in those days! I kept these for many years, and eventually gave them to Merv Binns to sell for me at a convention.

I had so many books mounting up in my room (a veranda that had been converted into a sleepout) that I went to the local greengrocer and asked him if I could have some boxes. Fruit used to come packed in wooden boxes about two and a half feet long by a foot deep and a foot high, a perfect size when stacked sideways to make bookshelves. All my books went into these improvised shelves.

The power of words to create worlds within one's mind is profound. And people of today who get their entertainment passively from watching TV or playing video games, or attending the latest movie, will never understand, because they didn't grow up in a time when those things

didn't exist.

I loved those stories. They transported me to worlds far more real and exciting than the reality of Melbourne's western suburbs in the early 1950s. The writing was no doubt awful, corny, ridiculous, over the top, with totally unlikely situations — isn't most SF like that? — yet for all that it captured my imagination as films and radio never could. I spent hours absorbed in these books. I couldn't get enough of them.

In 1954 I went to University High School in Parkville, where I was to continue with years 9 to 12. To get there I took buses from Yarraville to Footscray, then a tramways bus from Footscray to Queen Street in Melbourne. I would walk a block to Elizabeth Street, where I could take a tram up to Parkville and the University High School, which was situated just off Sydney Road behind the Royal Melbourne Hospital.

It didn't take long for me to discover McGill's, and the fine selection of SF books right by the front entrance as you walked in. McGill's was the very first real bookshop I ever went into, and the array of books I saw there was astounding. But I rarely got past the section where the science fiction books were displayed. Usually standing near that selection was Merv Binns. He might have been the manager of the book shop, but he probably spent more time in the science fiction section than anywhere else in the shop; at least it seemed like that to me. It didn't matter whether I walked in on my way to school or on my way home again later in the afternoon, he was always there, ready to recommend and sell me the latest SF book. I discovered authors I had never heard of, and found magazines I never imagined existed: *New Worlds*, *Nebula*, *Galaxy*, *Astounding*, and many others. I didn't know what to choose, but Merv was there to tell me the latest news, what the plot of each novel displayed was about, even to the plots of some of the short stories in the various magazines. He must have read everything. It's hard to believe that today, but back in 1954 it was certainly possible, and I reckon I made a good effort to do just that. What I loved about these books was the sense of wonder, the adventure, the weirdness of other worlds, the technicalities of space travel, the delusions of hyperspace and faster-than-light travel, matter transmission, telepathy, telekineses, longevity extending over centuries and all those other almost impossible ideas. I loved every one of those books, and continued to buy and stack them up in my makeshift box-bookshelves.

I had no idea there was a science fiction club behind McGill's in Somerset Place. If Merv at some stage mentioned it, and I'm sure he would have, I don't remember, but not knowing about it I never went there.

At the end of 1957, having finished year 12 at University High School, I decided not to go on the Melbourne University because I didn't have any idea of what I wanted to do. I had an uncle who was head of Plant Industry in the Northern Territory, who was instrumental in setting up the big rice-growing experiment south of Darwin at Humpty Doo, so I decided I would hitchhike to Darwin, which I did in January of 1958. He arranged for me to have a job out at Humpty Doo. Once I was settled in there, I wrote to Merv and asked him to send me some magazines because I could find 'nothing intelligent' to read in Darwin. He started mailing me *New Worlds* magazine as well as *Astounding SF*.

I soon discovered I preferred reading the English magazines in preference to the American. I guess it was the more flamboyant style, or perhaps the assumption that the future would be American, is what turned me off *Astounding*; I don't really know now. I just remember I preferred the British magazines. After coming back to Melbourne ten months later I stopped buying American magazines, but continued my subscription to *New Worlds* right up until it stopped publishing in the format that I was accustomed to.

I did of course continue to read SF novels, no matter where they came from, and for years kept up with reading the latest, which of course I got through Merv, by then at his Space Age Books.

As an aside: I had given up playing classical music and studying violin at the Conservatorium of Music (across the road from University High School) because of an accident that broke the little finger of my left hand and severely sprained that wrist. When it came out of the plaster I used the excuse that it was no longer flexible enough to play the violin properly, which as true at first, but if I had really wanted to I would have gone back to it. Dad was disappointed, because he had visions of me being a classical violinist, but they were not my visions and I wanted little to do with them. The decision to go to Darwin was probably spurred on by guilt at using such a poor excuse to give up playing.

Darwin was an eye-opener, a true cultural shock. In 1958 it was

considered the 'arsehole of Australia', a city full of drunks and deadbeats living on the beaches, sleeping in their cars and relying on the dole. They knew there was little work in Darwin, which is why they went there in the first place. They didn't have to worry about accommodation, since the place was tropical and they could live out in the open. There was plenty of booze and plenty of fights. There was a melange of people from all over the world, as well as from nearby Indonesia, New Guinea and the Torres Strait islands. There were also the descendants of the Japanese pearl divers who used to work the luggers all around the northern coast of Northern Territory and West Australia, and plenty of Indigenous Australians to add to the mix. It was a wild frontier town, and there was no other place like it in Australia at that time.

Fortunately I didn't stay in Darwin, but almost immediately got sent out to Humpty Doo, where I worked as an assistant field biologist looking after the experimental section of the government-controlled section of the rice farm. The guys out there taught me how to drink beer, hunt

buffalo, chase wild geese off the rice, drive a four-wheel-drive old army truck, apart from ploughing and harvesting rice. I had a fantastic time, had my eighteenth birthday there, and eventually came back to Melbourne a completely different person to the one I had been when I left school 10 months earlier.

As soon as I got back I discovered Mum and Dad had bought an Admiral TV set, a monstrous boxlike piece of furniture that sat in the corner of the lounge room where it dominated everyone with its flickering grey images.

I went back to reading my books, and so life went on, but it was never the same as before.

Perhaps I'll write more about that later.

— **John Litchen, December 2008**

---

Here is my letter of comment to John, which I sent after I received the above article.

---

**BRUCE GILLESPIE**  
**5 Howard Street, Greensborough VIC 3088**

I had heard rumours of your early life, especially your prowess as a jazz musician, but I had not realised you had begun with classical music as a boy. Classical music meant nothing to me while I was a boy and teenager. As shown in my article, it took the interest of people like John Bangsund and Lee Harding to alert me to what I missing out on.

I had always wondered about your possible connection with Darwin. All I remember is you saying at a party in the 1970s, 'A friend of mine phoned from Darwin and said, "You have to see this bloke in concert when he hits Melbourne... you must see Little Richard!"' Or have I got the story wrong, and you rang somebody in Melbourne because *you* had seen Little Richard in Darwin? Either way, it's astonishing that Little Richard played Darwin, since most of the visiting rock and roll performers played only in Melbourne, Sydney, Brisbane and Adelaide.

You probably always had more connection with John Bangsund than anybody else in fandom, as he too escaped school as soon as he could, and admired the fact that you had gone off to Europe for a year. For me, school, then university, was the only way I could see to earning a living, since I had then (as now) no practical skills. I joined fandom only after I had gained that all-important degree in 1967.

Thanks for more memories of Merv, McGill's, and the atmosphere of Melbourne in the fifties. Do you have any photos from that era that could go with your article?

I didn't ever share a flat with Paul Stevens. Leigh Edmonds did, and did not recommend the experience. He shared with Paul at several places after they both stopped living with John and Diane Bangsund, but in early 1971 Leigh set up on his own, then met Valma later that year, and the rest is history.

However, I did take a flat by myself in Carlton Street, Carlton, in mid

1973, and that lasted until the house was sold from under me at the end of 1976. I loved that flat intensely, and for years later dreamt about living there — but if I had stayed there my life could never have progressed beyond a grumpy bachelor existence. When I had to get out, I and my cat Flodnap were taken in by Elaine and her then partner Francis Payne at Johnson Street, Collingwood, then Francis was sent to Tasmania at the beginning of 1978, and the rest (it seemed to everybody but Elaine and me) was history. There was no certainty about what happened, though. Elaine and I had noticed we ran the household well together during 1977, but we could easily have gone our separate ways. Instead, we got together in March 1978 and married in March 1979 (and yes, I had better remember that 30th anniversary in a couple of months time!)

There are still some milk bars around, but not in Greensborough. Here, if you want a bottle of milk or an ice cream you have to go to the Safeway to get it, or go right down the hill to the petrol station. I notice there are still occasional milk bars in the inner suburbs, such as the one near the Westgarth station in Northcote. (It is close to the Westgarth Cinema.)

I wonder when Merv started putting the little slips of paper in every SF book he sold at McGill's. I was quite used to them after I discovered the shop in 1959, but there was no way I could come into town at night to attend a meeting. Also, I was too shy to join any club. It was enough that the McGill's front counter existed, with those Ace and Berkeley paperbacks.

I read the English magazines because they were marginally cheaper than the American magazines, but I see what you mean. *Galaxy* seemed very exotic, with a quite different tone from Carnell's magazines, but it cost 5/6d, a fair slice of my pocket money. I settled for *If*, which had dreadful production values, often even worse stories, but would include occasional brilliant stories. It was Fred Pohl's 'scratch pad'.

I didn't face the television crisis. Mum and Dad had three kids studying while I was still at home, so they had no intention of buying a TV set. We all came top of our classes in 1964. When this fact was picked up by the local Bacchus Marsh newspaper, Dad offered the lack of a TV set as an explanation for all this potential genius. He would never mention that he himself had won the Exhibition (top of the state) in one of the maths when he did Matriculation at the age of 15 in the early 1930s. ('It was a very easy paper,' he used to say. The need to make a living during the Depression made it impossible for him to attend university, so he joined the State Savings Bank, and stayed with it until he retired, except for his stint in the Army during World War II.)

When are you visiting Melbourne again? Elaine and I could easily meet with you somewhere in the inner suburbs.

Best wishes to you and Monica... and is there any news on Brian?

6 January 2009

John Litchen has been waiting years for this article to see print. Apologies, John, but I put it in the *Metaphysical Review* folder. I really thought *TMR* would have been revived by now.

---

# John Litchen

*text and photos*

---

## *Underwater swimming the hard way*

---

It was summer of 1956. I was sixteen and my friend Brian Mealy was seventeen and a half. We were full of restless energy as only teenagers can be. For us summer holidays meant riding our bikes to Williamstown Beach, swimming and experimenting with the new sport of skindiving. We had both read *Diving to Adventure* by Hans Haas, and couldn't wait to try this business of underwater swimming.

Masks, snorkels and swim-fins (now called flippers) could be bought in some of the sports stores, but they were by no means common. You could even buy dry rubber (frogman type) diving suits from Pirrelli, if you could afford it. We couldn't. We went snorkelling with our masks and fins, breathing through the long snorkels with bent ends after having removed the useless ping pong balls meant to stop water flooding into the snorkel. We wore several old jumpers and T shirts to keep warm.

People who saw us thought we were mad.

We had homemade spear guns and we used to go in a lot at a place called

the Crystal Pool, just by Williamstown beach a bit past the life saving club. There were lots of fish there in those days, mostly butterfish (banded morwong) and brightly coloured leatherjackets. We often saw pike and barracuda, and schools of garfish would scatter as we blundered into them, re-forming behind us to continue happily on their way. Tiny squid and cuttlefish would hover in gullies between large rocks covered with undulating green sea lettuce, vanishing in an instant if we moved too close.

If you looked at the weed-covered rocks there were heaps of small clams, pippis, periwinkles, mussels, small and large abalone (or mutton fish, as we derogatively called them), a huge number of crabs, shrimps, sea-urchins, anemones, ascidians and many other weird living things we had no names for. There were various starfish, from the ubiquitous biscuit stars to the monstrous eleven-armed *Cosinasterias calamaria*, the dreaded shellfish predator.

Sometimes we even bumped into a Port Jackson shark, and on rare



John Litchen.



occasions a carpet shark. We often swam over sinister-looking stingrays lying on the bottom partly buried in sand. We could see their eyes follow us as we swam by. If they felt threatened they would lift up off the sand and with a snap of their wings shoot towards us, making us frantically backpedal to get out of their way. The ray would then veer off to fly across the bottom and disappear into the murk beyond our visibility. Some of those rays were as big as two metres across, and were a magnificent sight, if not downright scary.

After a hard day of swimming and snorkelling, if we sat quietly on the promenade by the Crystal Pool and waited till the sun had set, as the sky slowly darkened we would see the big butterflyfish come up into the shallow water to feed. They would slowly work their way along the rocks near the edge nibbling at the sea lettuce. It was like watching tame fish in a giant fishpond.

The area was so full of life we could not imagine it being any other way. Just getting into the water was exciting, never knowing what we would see, but knowing that there would always be something interesting to see.

Now forty-four years later, it is difficult to imagine what it was like then, all that time ago. The seaweed is still there, and the tiny things like shrimp and little fish, but it is rare to see anything bigger than a few centimetres. The butterflyfish have gone, the leatherjackets too. There are no mussels, or abalone, or clams and pipis on the rocks. They have been stripped bare by voracious humans and predatory starfish, though I think the humans did most of the damage. There are signs screwed to the poles along the foreshore prohibiting the taking of shellfish. \$500 is the fine if you are caught.

To me the gullies between the rocky reefs now look devoid of life, but I suppose to the kids of today it is probably as exciting as it was to Brian and me back in the late fifties. I took my own son Brian into the Crystal Pool to teach him how to skindive, and he loved it in there. The water is shallow, but still deep enough to swim in and dive. Lots of large rocks are exposed at low tide. If there is a problem with the mask or snorkel, you can simply stand on a partly submerged rock and be almost completely out of the water, or you can walk over the exposed rocks back to the foreshore. Access is simple: walk down the steps or climb

over the rocks to step straight into water no more than a metre deep. The Crystal Pool has been extremely popular with generations of kids over more than half a century.

As soon as I had saved enough money I bought a sealskin. This was a black rubber vest that wrapped around the body from the neck to the crotch. There were holes for the legs and arms and a buckle at the front held it together. I wore a jumper underneath the sealskin and around the waist I had to use a belt with lead weights to counteract the buoyancy. Like a modern wetsuit, though nowhere as efficient, the sealskin allowed water to enter and become trapped against the body. This trapped water was warmed by body heat, and so after an initial few minutes of coldness you then swam about with a thin layer of warm water against your skin. This increased the time you could stay in the water before getting too cold.

Of course Brian thought this was fantastic. He tried it, but because he was a taller than I a lot of cold water came in under the arms. The sealskin didn't work as well for him as it did for me.

We all know that throughout history, when the time is right for an idea to present itself, for something particular to be invented, it will occur to many people in widely different parts of the world. Often the person who gets credit for the invention is not the first one to invent it but simply the first to patent it or produce it commercially. Whoever first started manufacturing wetsuits is a mystery, but Brian would have been among the first to come up with the concept. He loved the idea of swimming in cold water with a fine layer of warm water against the body, so he thought of making a vest like the sealskin only from sponge rubber.

Brian's stepfather worked for an oil company and they manufactured sheets of sponge rubber. We spent many nights cutting these 5 mm thick sheets of sponge and experimenting with different glues to see if we could get the pieces to stick together to make a jacket. Nothing seemed to work and it never occurred to us to stitch it together. In the end we made a vest similar to the sealskin. It wrapped right around and was buckled at the front. It worked, and was infinitely warmer than my flat rubber vest, and Brian was as proud as could be every time he wore it.

Neither of these vests was that efficient, and after a time we still got very

cold and had to come out of the water. We used them for a while because we had nothing better. Once we had saved enough money however, we bought the real thing — Pirreli dry suits.

The dry suits were absolutely fantastic. They came in two halves: a pair of legs you stepped into, and a top that was pulled down over head and arms. Soft surgical rubber sealed the neck and the wrists. It took some getting used to because at first it felt like you were strangling. The suit sealed at the waist. The bottom half came fairly high over the waist and was folded down. The top half came down over this and the two pieces were folded up several times and sealed over a hoop around the waist. You had to wear long underwear and maybe a jumper under the suit, as all the suit did was keep you dry.

I remember how strange it felt the first time we tried them. When you jumped into the water they ballooned up and you had to let the bulk of the trapped air escape by pulling the neck out. Swimming around and feeling the water against you while remaining absolutely dry was deliciously exhilarating. The really marvellous thing was we could stay in the water for hours and hours on end without any discomfort other than wrinkled skin on our fingers and a very cold face.

Not long after we got these suits we started using simple aqualungs. We never went to a diving school because there weren't any. We were on our own. Learning to scuba dive for us was a trial-and-error effort combined with common sense. Technical knowledge was obtained from a US Navy manual for divers, a book by Hilbert Schenk Jr and Henry Kendall called *Shallow Water Diving and Spearfishing*, and from books by Hans Haas and Jacques Yves Cousteau.

Apart from entertaining us splendidly, a careful reading of these books taught us a lot. We learnt about air embolism, nitrogen narcosis and decompression sickness, about bottom times and decompression stops. We found out about buoyancy control, buddy breathing and how to take a mask off and put it on again underwater, about not holding your breath and breathing naturally underwater. We practised these things in the shallow waters of the Crystal Pool once we had obtained our aqualungs.

We also discovered that panic can be a killer and that you should be absolutely familiar with your equipment, so you don't have to think about

it and can simply enjoy being underwater. We had a wonderful time teaching ourselves those things you now must learn at a diving school. It was the best summer we ever had.

As our confidence increased we became more daring and looked for deeper water to dive in. Barwon Heads was our first choice. We had often camped there and knew the area around the cliff quite well. There is always a swell and the reefs drop away into deeper water. There is some current but it's not too dangerous. We got heaps of crayfish. Apart from the fact that it was unsporting — no one thought about that back then in the fifties — it has been forbidden for a long time to hunt crayfish with aqualungs and spear guns. You are supposed to grab them by hand while holding your breath. There was plenty of everything to take, and access was good. Sadly, for many years now all these spots have been fished out. All of us, those early over-enthusiastic divers are to blame.

Brian was eighteen months older than I and the moment he turned eighteen he bought a car. It wasn't much of a car and he was constantly fixing it, but when it did run well it got us to places like Phillip Island where the diving was excellent.

We were very confident in our ability to dive anywhere, so we chose a spot that looked terrific. It was an inlet not far from The Nobbies with a rocky black lava beach. As we looked down from the top of the cliff we saw a rocky kelp-covered ledge uncovered by the outgoing tide. This ledge extended some ten metres out into the sea and we thought it would be a good spot to dive from. Because this ledge was uncovered we had assumed that the tide was out. This was a stupid assumption, as I soon found out.

The cliffs here were all black, and though it was a beautiful day with not a cloud in the sky, the water surging about the edge of the rocky ledge also appeared black. In retrospect it looked ominous, but at that moment to us it looked exciting. We couldn't wait to get in.

We got our gear out of the car. The paths down the cliff would have challenged a mountain goat so we decided the easiest way to get everything down to the bottom was to put it on except for the flippers and spear guns. We did this and half slid, half scrambled down the cliff with showers of small dislodged pebbles and rocks accompanying us. It

was a wonder we didn't puncture our dry suits. When we got to the bottom we were so hot, and sweating so much inside our dry suits, that we had to sit in the water by the small beach to cool off.

Now that we were on the beach we could see there was quite a swell. Each wave surged up the beach rolling tiny black pebbles forward then sucking them back out with considerable force. The water was absolutely clear. It had only appeared black from the top of the cliff because all the rocks under the water were black, the same volcanic rock that made up the cliffs on either side of this inlet.

We put our flippers on, cleaned our masks by spitting into them and rinsing them in the sea — this stopped them from fogging — checked that our tanks were turned on and air was released when we breathed through the regulator, then we floated out and emptied the air from the suits.

The water got deep very quickly as we swam past the end of the rocky ledge. Visibility was exceptionally good. We swam through the heavy brown kelp growing up from the base of the ledge and came out onto a sandy bottom. Strangely enough I didn't see any fish; no kelpies, no toadies, no leatherjackets or anything else. Once out of the kelp I could see giant sandy ridges extending down and disappearing into the murky distance thirty or forty metres away. I drifted down and swam along the top of the ridges. I could see the sand trickling over the top of each ridge as the motion of the swell above pushed the sand towards the beach then drew it back again. It brought to mind the image of wind blowing sand off the top of giant dunes in the Sahara. It was fascinating to see this same action underwater, though on a smaller though no less monumental scale. I let the water carry me across the ridges, not needing to swim at all. It was an exhilarating feeling.

I suddenly realised I was alone. Brian had stayed close to the cliff edge as we swam down. He was looking for something to shoot with his spear gun. I was just looking. I had even forgotten that I had the spear gun with me and had not pulled the rubber back to load it.

I looked back, then spun around in a circle. Brian was nowhere to be seen. I couldn't even see the cliff or the rocky ledge that marked the spot we had entered the water. There was nothing but ridges of sand as far



Brian Mealy.

as I could see in all directions. I could feel the pressure of the water. The suit was pinching so I knew I was much deeper than I had ever been before. And to make matters worse I was drifting at an ever-increasing rate. I tried to swim against the current but could make no headway.

Damn. Don't panic. But that was exactly what I could feel myself doing. My heart raced, and my legs ached from that short spurt of trying to swim against the current. I started to sweat inside the dry suit.

I forced myself to think. How long had I been in the water? I looked at my diver's watch. Only ten minutes! Seemed longer than that. I had plenty of air so that was not something to worry about, but the drifting out was. Then I noticed the current was not constant but moved in and out, as did the swells above. I would drift forward over a ridge, pause for a moment, only to be sucked back over two or three ridges by a stronger outgoing current. It suddenly occurred to me that if I could hang on to something I could stay in the same spot while the current sucked past me. When the swell pushed shorewards I could swim with it to gain a few metres then hang on once more while the current again sucked out.

But hang on to what? There was nothing but sand everywhere. No rocks, no kelp, only ridges of shifting sand.

The speargun! I could dig it into the sand and hang on.

As soon as the next swell stopped pushing me forward, I dug the gun into the sand in front of the ridge beneath me. Then the outgoing water surged past me. Now that I wasn't drifting it was obvious just how strong that current was. No one could swim against that. I could see the sand around the speargun ripped away by the out-

ward surge. It disappeared underneath me to run down the ridge behind me. As soon as the surge from the next swell started to forward, I pulled up the speargun and swam as fast as I could with the water. As the forward momentum slowed I again dug the gun into the sand, having gained two ridges.

Now I knew I could get back. But where was I? Had I drifted down the coast towards the Nobbies and Seal Rocks? Or had I gone straight out away from the spot where we entered the water? There was only one way to find out. I would have to give up what I had gained and swim up

to the surface.

At the surface I realised how lucky I was. The beach in the tiny inlet where we climbed down the cliff was right in front of me, but such a long way away. It seemed like a kilometre, but it was probably only two hundred metres. I rose up and down with the swell. I tried to swim towards the inlet but gained nothing. The swells were too high. The water smashing against the aqualung on my back was too strong. I thought briefly about dropping my lead belt and aqualung and swimming in, but then I remembered how strong the outward surge and the current was. I could not swim against that in any case even though the dry suit would keep me on the surface.

There was only one way to get back. Reluctantly I pushed down to the sandy bottom. Again, using the spear gun as an anchor, I laboriously worked my way across the sand ridges, alternately swimming in, then hanging on against the outward current. It seemed to take forever, and just when I started to worry about having used all the air, I felt the pressure of the water lessening. Black rocks appeared, sticking up through the sand. Then I saw the edge of the kelp by the cliff wall and the rock ledge. With a huge feeling of relief I pushed through the kelp and swam towards the beach.

When I crawled onto the beach I saw Brian sitting there, his aqualung, lead belt, mask snorkel and flippers beside him.

'A lousy spot,' he said. 'Nothing but kelp and sand.'

'It wasn't much of a dive,' I agreed as I pulled off my mask.

'What took you so long?'

'I don't know. I just wanted to have a look around.'

Climbing back up the cliff was the worst part of the whole day. Wearing lead belts, carrying aqualungs and the other bits and pieces made it a hard slog. We must have dislodged half the cliff face as we struggled to

climb back up.

Later, after a long rest we dived again on the other side of the island. We snorkelled out from the beach where there were no big swells. A couple of hundred metres offshore were some nice reefs full of butterflyfish. Brian shot a couple, which we took home and had for dinner that night.

I never shot anything with my spear gun. I carried it into the water with me at first because everyone who went skin diving had one. The only time it was of any use to me was when it stopped me from being carried away by the outgoing tide in the channel between Phillip Island and the mainland.

Not long after that first trip to Phillip Island I bought a second hand Bolex 16 mm movie camera. I made a primitive housing from a length of tractor tyre tube sealed at each end with elliptical pieces of plate glass. I could look through the tube from one end to the other and see what the camera was pointed at. Using a very wide-angle lens everything was in focus from 5cm to infinity. I could push the shutter button through the rubber and shoot short sequences. I had to surface and dry everything in order to rewind before going under to shoot another sequence, so this system was limited to shallow water, and was time consuming. I was happy with the film I shot and never again looked at a spear gun.

In no time I had a proper underwater housing for the Bolex. I never looked back after that. I shot sharks at Middleton Reef, abalone divers in Port Phillip Bay and a documentary in the Arabian Gulf. I even wrote a book called *Cinematography Underwater*, but that's another story.

The wonder is that so many of us early skindivers survived, not knowing what we were doing, learning things the hard way. They were good times and I will never forget them. Nor will I ever forget Brian who was my closest friend. He died from a heart attack at 42 brought upon by the stress of modern living.

— John Litchen, January 2000

# *Leigh Edmonds*

---

## *A convention report, of sorts*

---

It is an honour to welcome back Leigh Edmonds to ANZAPA, of which he is the founder. Not that he has disappeared completely since 1986, when he sort of formally/informally stopped publishing. He and Valma Brown have attended conventions occasionally. For about 40 years he has been a regular contributor to SAPS (Spectator Amateur Press Society, one of the oldest amateur publishing associations). The following Conflux report also just been published there.

---

At the beginning of October Valma and I went to Canberra for a week to work on the Tax Office history. As it turned out, the weekend before we were due to be there was also the occasion of Conflux, the annual Canberra convention, so we organised ourselves to go to that too. The arrangement was that we would fly up to go into the office to get Valma signed in (getting security clearance to enter or work in Tax Office buildings is a challenge in itself) so that she could get a 'building pass' that lets you wander around the Tax Office in search of historical material. Unfortunately, at Melbourne Airport the aeroplane that was supposed to take us to Canberra was feeling sick so they had to get another one, which just happened to be a 737-800 that was coming in from Perth. This was nice, because the 737-400s that usually do the Canberra route are a lot less comfortable than the long range -800s, but it meant we had to wait around the airport for an hour or so, which meant that we were late in getting into Canberra, so there was little more we could do on Thursday afternoon than go down to the main Tax Office building to say hello to people. We also learned that since the name 'Valma Brown' is relatively common, the security checks had thrown up a red flag — which meant no building pass for Valma until that was cleared up.

After all that, we went shopping for all the necessary provisions prior to a convention and a week in another city, and tottered back to our motel

room.

Next morning I was up not so bright and early to go to work. There's plenty in the Tax Office archive and library to look at and not too much time to look at them, so every minute counts. Our motel was right next to the convention motel, so I dropped in to see what was happening. The answer was, breakfast, and there were three old-time fans, Bruce Gillespie, Jean Weber and Bill Wright, at ease around a breakfast table. I had time for a brief chat to remind me what conventions are supposed to be about (in my world anyhow), which is meeting people. Then a quick walk down into Civic for a morning in the library looking at some of the more recent annual reports, a process over which we will draw a quiet curtain for fear of boring all my humble readers insensible.

This convention offered a number of what it called workshops, most of them for aspiring writers. One suggested it would be about learning how to write 'more dynamic characters', and since part of my business is in bringing historical actors to life, I thought it might be interesting. So I left the office around noon to attend it.

Let me give you a brief outline of the set-up. The venue was your fairly standard motel, two or three storeys high facing onto Northbourne



Leigh Edmonds, at Conjure in Brisbane, 2006. (Photo: Eric Lindsay.)

Avenue (the main road into Canberra from anywhere civilised). It has the usual facilities, including a bit of a bar behind the reception area and a restaurant along the front. The convention facilities was a large square box built in the rear of the motel that was divided up into five separate rooms, one for hucksters and the others for multistrand programming.

As an aside, this was a convention with 100 or so attendees and yet they multistrand programming, sometimes with five things running at once.

This seemed rather extravagant to me, but then I don't organise conventions these days, so I can't complain.

After a bit of flailing around I found myself in the appropriate room, where there were a dozen or so people gathered and a sole leader sitting up on high behind the table. It didn't promise to be very exciting or interactive. After a while it turned out that what the person running the panel meant by 'dynamic characters' was actually the process of inventing characters for multivolume fantasy novels, which are apparently all the go these days. I'm no fan of these; they remind me of Wagnerian epics where people carry on about nothing for great periods of time, but usually put off getting to the point until late into the piece. I was bored and uninterested, so I made my departure at some point not too far into the proceedings.

Something may have happened for the rest of the afternoon but it can't have been very exciting, since none of it surfaces in my memory now. In fact, I have to note that a great deal of the convention turned out to be fairly tedious so I either can't remember much about it or it's not worth spending keystrokes on, if I can. But there were some highlights.

On Friday evening, Valma and I embarked on a food-finding expedition with two West Australians, Dave Luckett and Ian Nicholls. Dave has a Masters in history and is probably one of the most popular and well-paid stf writers in Australia, but you wouldn't know about it from his presence on the program at the convention. At some point during the rather convivial evening we had a brief discussion about the writing business, in which his world is quite different from mine. He lives on royalties and income from the library payment system while I live on commissions from clients. As a result he has to be more positive in promoting himself and his books, while I can forget about what I write after it has gone off to the printer. I think I prefer my arrangement.

The other participant in our expedition is, according to some sources, a acquired taste. I find that the quality of his company depends on which Ian Nichols you are talking to, and these days I find him one of the more interesting and enjoyable people you will meet at a convention. Ian does his share of fiction writing too, but it isn't his day job.

So we hurtled up Northbourne Avenue to the Dickson shops, which has

grown out of sight since we used to go up there to splurge at McDonald's and eat on the lawn. There is now very little lawn and lots of options for food addicts, but we found our way to the Workers' Club where, for the payment of a nominal joining fee, we were let loose in their rather pleasant environs. The wine, the food and the company were all highly pleasant, spoiled only by the impediment that we had to shoot through early because Ian was on the program for the evening.

This turned out to be the not-new innovation of the Great Debate. The panellists did their best, and Russell Blackford put on a particularly fine display, but as for the content, the only thing that I can now recall was the pie-in-the-face episode.

After that the convention had three more days to run, with Monday being a public holiday in Canberra. I must have gone to quite a few panels, but most of them have now evaporated from my memory. Overall I got the impression that conventions are no longer run by fans for the entertainment of fans but are run for the deification of people who want to become writers, perhaps big-name writers. There were apparently some important editors and authors of these multivolume Wagnerian epics floating around but I didn't get to meet any of them — so far as I know.

There were lots of books on sale, so I picked up three, which is a bit of record for me, not having bought a book for years (if you don't count that volume of women's reminiscences of the English Civil War). The first was a slim volume of Ian Nichols' short stories. He prints them off in small batches — which is a very convenient thing to do these days — and sells them himself when the opportunity arises. The second was a huge doorstopper of a collection put together by Jack Dann, which is mostly a who's who of who is writing stf in Australia at the moment. The Ian Nichols collection is a little ripper, full of crisp, tightly written and focused stories; I'd recommend it to anyone. On the other hand, the Jack Dann collection reflects the editor's own interests and is full of crafted pieces with often flowery and sometimes florid prose, which is enough to put me off. I read the beginnings of most of the stories and found myself bored with most of them before I got too far. The third book I bought was a collection of Australia's best stf for some recent year. It fell somewhere between the Nichols collection and the enormous Dann edifice, but I left it lying around somewhere at the convention so it never got finished.

I find myself, these days, attracted to the idea of writing some fiction, if nothing else as training exercises for writing better history. I recently came across a computer file that has fifteen or so drafts of short stories in it, some of which are interesting ideas but are not very interesting to read. So the convention and what I read at it set me thinking about what I like to read, in fiction anyhow. If, as seemed to be the trend, people are being paid good money from writing Wagnerian epics, I find myself more interested in what happened after that in music, with Schoenberg and the Second Viennese school. All I have to do now is find the time to go about rewriting some of those story ideas in the fashion of Webern or Berg. However, commissioned histories pay a lot better than most fiction writing, so it takes priority at the moment.

There were a handful of events that did attract my attention and stay in my mind, so I can mention them here. Two were put on by Bruce Gillespie and were perhaps the most interesting and thought-provoking items of the whole convention. Sadly, almost nobody attended, because the slant of the convention was on how to become a stf writer and not on the history and traditions of stf and fandom. Only a handful of people were at Bruce's Guest of Honour speech so they missed an interesting, informative and sometimes lightly humorous (in the Bruce Gillespie style) presentation about his life in fandom and his contribution to the milieu that was Australian fandom (not that he set out to achieve the latter). Even less attended and even more rewarding was a conversation between Bruce and Colin Steele, a delightful fellow who had knocked around with the likes of Aldiss, Ballard and the New Wavers when he was in England and who became the Librarian at the Australian National University, reviews with skill for the *Canberra Times*, and organised one of the most memorable sercon conventions I've ever been to. What an enjoyable hour to spend in the company of such enjoyable and erudite company. Sadly, only a handful of people were there. Their loss.

At one time during a desultory afternoon I found myself in the company of Dave Luckett, who was talking to a man who, it turned out, was at the convention to pick up a couple of people to talk on his session on the local public broadcasting station. The other person didn't turn up, so I invited myself along. Having recently given a paper at a seminar on broadcasting in Australia I was curious to see what broadcasting was like these days. The three of us wandered down Northbourne Avenue chatting, learning that our radio presenter had worked for the National

Library until his retirement, and he now occupies himself in doing things like this. The 2CR radio studio occupies a few rooms in a new building in Civic overtopped by Tax Office buildings on either side. It was, I think, Sunday afternoon, so there was very little activity as we waited for a while until the studio was vacant, and he ushered us in. For the first half of the talk he quizzed Dave on a few things, but it was fairly clear that he hadn't done much preparation, and didn't know what kind of questions to ask, so during a break I invited myself in to a microphone as well. After twenty minutes or so our moments of fame were over and we wandered back to the convention.

Valma and I didn't go to the banquet, which was apparently amusing at times and dull at others. We went with Marilyn Pride and Lewis Morley (who, we're pretty sure, we first met at a convention organised by Jack Herman in Sydney in the early 1980s). We ended up at the Ainslie Football Club, which was not as convivial as the place in Dickson, but who could not enjoy talking to Marilyn and Lewis?

On Monday afternoon there was another dose of workshops, most again aimed at people who want to be writers. The one that caught my attention

was about how to raise money through grant applications. This was given by somebody who has been filling out grant forms for a long time and knows most of the tricks of the trade. I've done a bit of this but not for some time, so this was interesting. Knowing that I was going to have to give a similar presentation to professional historians a week later I bought myself a notepad and took copious notes that I could pass on. Sadly, I lost the notepad before the end of the day.

Last was the usual end-of-convention closing ceremony, which also makes more sense to the people who ran the event than the general convention attendees. However, who would deny people who put in so much effort a little bit of self-indulgence? There was apparently a dead-dog party, but we were feeling a bit too dead to attend, and instead stayed in our room and watched an episode of *Midsomer Murders* on the box.

The following day it was back to work ...

— **Leigh Edmonds, January 2009**

# Endings

---

## Catherine Murnane (1937–2009)

---

We knew the ending was coming. Gerald Murnane sent round-robin letters to some of his friends nearly a year before her death, to tell us that Catherine had been diagnosed with lung cancer, and that she was expected to live six months. Gerald sent letters every few months from then until February: they give an epic account of his and Catherine's very difficult last few months. At one stage she was waking every hour, twenty-four hours a day, and so was Gerald.

We hadn't seen a lot of Catherine during her last years, because she contracted a condition that immobilised one of her legs. She and Gerald called for afternoon tea about two years ago, and she had entertained some other friends and us one afternoon since then. She was a tough lady.

My central memories of Catherine are of her kindness during the 1970s. I met Gerald at the beginning of 1971, when I began work at the Publications Branch of the Education Department. He was my immediate supervisor as I learnt editing and writing skills. He invited me to several dinners and parties out at Macleod. Catherine then was a young mother, coping with three young sons, including twins. Like Gerald, she probably knew more about me than I did about her, especially as she read my magazines. I knew she had been a teacher, and aimed to be a psychologist within the Education Department's Psych and Guidance Branch. She did not make much of her abilities, many of which I discovered only while listening to Gerald's eulogy at the funeral.

Catherine was a great cook; in particular I remember a meal she gave me a month or so before I left for overseas in 1973. I had moved out of

my parents' place into the the Carlton Street flat, and for the second time in my life I was feeling like a lost bachelor. Catherine's Yorkshire pudding that night, and the general cheer offered, sent me on my way to America, perhaps a bit too optimistic.

In the early seventies, the parties held at Catherine and Gerald's place were legendary, not just for the food and drink supplied, but for the way in which they invited unlikely combinations of people. In this way I met Bernard Slattery and Val Noone for the first time. They were part of 'the Retrieval mob', the group that put out a small Catholic left-wing magazine *Retrieval* during the first half of the seventies. Others included Daniel Zika (Melbourne University historian) and his wife, and many other people I have kept meeting during the last forty years.

After I returned from America, Catherine and Gerald became most concerned that I remained a bachelor. Catherine tried a bit of match-making that almost worked. Through her friends the Zikas, she had met an American girl Kristin, who seemed a bit lost for male company. At the same time, Noelle de Clifford, who lived downstairs from me at Carlton Street, was working with Kristin at a nursing home, and she had a similar idea of pairing us. Kristin and I fell in love when we met, but found living together not so easy. I've always hoped that Catherine was not too disappointed by this failure.

By the late 1970s Catherine was facing her own personal problems, detailed for the first time (in my hearing) during Gerald's talk at the funeral. She had told me about the unexpected problems she faced when working at Psych and Guidance Branch, while Gerald was on an Australia



One of the only two photos I have of Catherine Murnane.

On the back cover of this issue of *Scratch Pad* is the photo taken at her wedding, as featured on the cover of her funeral program.

Above is the photo taken by Gerald Murnane in Goroke, a northern Victorian town, about a year before she died. Catherine and Gerald had picked out grave sites in the Goroke Cemetery, next to the site of a local racing identity. Catherine and Gerald have been aficionados of horse racing throughout their lives. Gerald and his son Giles will probably move from Macleod to Goroke during late 2009.

Council grant for three years. I did not realise that she had had to seek psychiatric help. She quit the Branch, and tried to go back to teaching. Despite putting an enormous amount of work into returning to teaching, eventually she had to leave the profession. About that time Gerald became a full-time tutor in writing.

In the meantime Elaine and I had got together. We visited Catherine and Gerald occasionally. Elaine was a bit annoyed that Catherine seemed to be separating her from the general conversation; whatever I and Gerald and other friends were talking about seemed more interesting than Catherine's choices of subject matter. It occurs to us now that Catherine must have become fairly isolated by that stage, compared with Gerald, who was constantly meeting students and other writers.

We suspect that Catherine's physical difficulties, ending up with almost complete immobility, began long before we were told about them. We probably should have visited more often. But as a couple they always seemed very busy, and so were we. Regrets, regrets.

We do wish Catherine had had a much less painful last decade of her life. She was a good friend, and it's very hard to believe we won't see her again.

---

## Maureen Brewster (1946–2009)

---

If Catherine was a sympathetic friend during the 1970s, Maureen Brewster was almost another sister to me — the kind of sister who knows much more about you than you do yourself.

I met Rick Brewster first in late 1962 in Sunshine, a western suburb of Melbourne, when we were living in Melton. He and his family moved to the eastern suburb of Mt Waverley, he did first year University while I completed Matriculation, then he took a year off and worked on the trams. During that year he met Maureen.

In early 1965, Rick and I were both doing first year at Melbourne University, so we saw quite a bit of each other. Rick invited me to visit his flat in Prahran, and there I met Maureen for the first time. She was a nurse, and her best friend was Lois. Lois was like a sister to Maureen. Lois and Rick's brother Barry met, and they became a couple. This inspired some envy in somebody like me, who didn't have the self-confidence to ask a girl for a date.

Maureen had a dazzling, zany sense of humour that gave me a completely new view of life. For Maureen, *nothing* seemed sacred.

Reen and Rick (as they called themselves) moved to a flat in Windsor. There I met Maureen's brother — and didn't meet him again until her funeral. She lost a nursing friend to suicide at that time, so I gained some idea of how deeply Maureen could feel about her favourite people.

Maureen, like Catherine, took me on as her Big Project. When I was able to spend a few days with Lesleigh Luttrell during her visit to Melbourne in 1972, it was Reen and Rick who took us on a trip up to the Dandenong Ranges and a ride on Puffing Billy. Later, in 1975, when I was trying to live with Kristin at Carlton Street, Reen and Rick were almost the only people who visited us. I suspect that Maureen knew immediately that this relationship was not going to work!

In the early seventies, Maureen began an Arts degree, a project that she completed only a few years before she died. Her main interests were painting and sculpture on the one hand, and cinema on the other. She and Rick joined the Melbourne Film Society. In those days, long before video and DVD, the film societies were the only way to catch up with interesting alternative films. The members of the society gathered every month at the Palais Theatre, St Kilda. Both upstairs and downstairs would be filled: about 3000 people per screening! I travelled by public transport down to Rick and Reen's place, and have dinner, go to the show, and they drove me home afterward.

Rick and Reen also went with me to one of the best concerts of my life, and certainly the longest: the Reefer Cabaret at the Much More Ballroom (the weekly concert at the Ormond Hall in Prahran). The concert lasted about four hours. We sat upstairs, surrounded by a fug of funny cigarette smoke for most of the night. Most of the acts, both musical and comedic, were given only half an hour, but the last hour was taken by the Captain Matchbox Whoopee Band. This band, led by the Conway Brothers, more than any other band captures the excitement of Melbourne music-making in the early seventies. Captain Matchbox's combination of satiric songs and send-ups of old blues and jazz numbers ended with a quarter-hour-long version of 'Hernando's Highway'. Today, each of the Conway brothers has his own band: one a jazz-comedy group, and the other a blues group. No later Australian band was ever as interesting.

Maureen was often helpful; for instance, she drove me over to Dandenong to pick up the Gestetner duplicator upon which most of the issues of *SF Commentary* after 1974 were printed. She and Rick visited me at Carlton Street one Christmas; Maureen disappeared for an hour or two, then returned from the kitchen. She had completely reorganised and tidied it, stacked away all the accumulated newspapers, and made it possible for me to live there comfortably. What a Christmas present!

I visited Maureen once in hospital while she was pregnant with Cordelia.



Maureen Brewster in 1976, , with a very young Cordelia.  
This is how I best remember her.  
(Photos: Richard Brewster.)



She faced quite severe health difficulties in going through with the birth, and already knew she would not be able to have any more children. A few months later I was at the fannish gathering place in Rathdowne Street. Rick put his head in the door to announce that his new daughter had been born.

I was made Cordelia's unofficial godfather, if Maureen believed in such things, which she didn't at the time. I visited quite often. The family moved into a house in Kensington, and acquired a little dog called Em. Their cat had kittens, and I was given one of them: my first cat, which Randal Flynn named Flodnap.

And if I had not had Flodnap (although I had no real knowledge of how to take care of him), Flodnap would not have made friends with Julius the black cat from downstairs, and Elaine might not have been so charmed by my cats that she and Francis might not have asked me to move in with them at

Johnston Street, Collingwood, and my life would have been Utterly Different.

So in her way Maureen was very much responsible for Elaine and I getting together eventually. A month or so after that happened, everything changed. Maureen called at our place with Richard Felix, a mutual friend. She had left Rick, and had moved in with Richard in North Fitzroy.

We visited Maureen and Richard from time to time, and occasionally they visited us, but things were never the same. For a start, Rick disappeared. He did not want to keep up with anyone who remained friends with Maureen. The last time I saw him to talk to was in 1984, and he has made no attempt to visit since then, although he did send me a few letters a year or so ago.

A few years later Maureen moved to Greensborough. She had split up with Richard. Later she had a relationship with a bloke called Rob, but

that did not last. We found we were supposed to exercise telepathy to guess what Maureen would do next. We never did work out how she was able to afford a house in Greensborough. Her life became mysterious to us. After Cordelia graduated and had become a teacher, Maureen adopted a girl named Rosie, who occupied much of her time during her last ten years.

When we also moved to Greensborough, we thought we would see a lot of Maureen, but that didn't happen. We would ring and leave messages, but she would not ring back. We did visit once or twice, but did not know most of the people who were also at those parties. It turned out that many of them were members of the local Catholic church. At some time during the last twenty years, Maureen had completely changed her view of religion. She joined the church at Greensborough, and as we discovered at the funeral, she became a much-valued member of that community.

In the late nineties, Maureen told us that she had contracted multiple sclerosis. She was operated on for breast cancer about ten years ago. However, we still thought Maureen would go on forever. Although she

lived not far away, I never quite went for that walk along Hailes Street to visit her. Therefore we had no idea that the breast cancer had returned in 2008. We did not actually speak to her during the year and a half of her life. I will always feel ashamed about that failure.

At the funeral Cordelia was too busy to speak to us for more than a minute or so, but I did get to talk to Maureen's brother, and to Barry and Lois and their older daughter Skye, who I had last seen in (I guess) 1977. Barry and Lois have not changed much, but Barry (who is younger than I am) did say he had suffered a heart attack a few years ago. Lois is still as merry as I remember her; very much as I remember Maureen from the seventies. They now live in Upwey; it turns out they know Nick and Pam Arvanitakis, friends of mine since the Oakleigh Primary School reunion of 1993.

As I lose people like Maureen, bits of me go missing. I know little of her life during the last twenty years, but I hope it was enjoyable despite all the physical problems. She seemed happy enough when last we met. I just wish I had taken the trouble to call in more often.

---

## *Also missing*

---

### **David McDonnell (1952–2009)**

About fifty people, about half family and half fans, attended the Celebration Service for David's life on 29 July at the Studley Park jetty. David's sister and niece spoke warmly about his life, and Phil Ware said: 'One thing you can always say about David: he was a fighter.' David had always wanted a Viking funeral, so his model boat (and his ashes) was launched into the Yarra River.

I wouldn't have known David if it had not been for our mutual friend Mark Linneman, who went back to America in 1989. David was part of a group that included Terry Stroud (he turned up at the gathering), Phil Ware and Mandy Herriot, Chris Chittleburgh (who travelled from the far west

of the state to be at the gathering), and others. Before that, as we discovered, David had been a founder member of Austrek in the seventies, so other mutual friends, such as Geoff Allshorn, were also at the gathering. I knew David mainly through the conventions he helped organise in the late eighties and early nineties. David began the 'What I Have Been Reading Lately' panel that was featured at several Melbourne conventions in a row, and has been continued at Nova Mob meetings.

David had suffered health problems all through the nineties. He had been diagnosed with lymphoma about five years ago, given the all-clear six months later, then succumbed to the disease again recently. Phil Ware says that David seemed to give up on life when he was told that he could

not return to his own house. He was a punchy character, as Phil said, but always interesting and good to talk to. Thanks to Phil and Mandy for keeping in touch with him during recent years.

### **Charles N. Brown (1937–2009)**

Until six years ago, the few times I had met Charlie Brown, he had struck me as a grumpy old bastard, who had no time for fans and only sought out the company of pro writers and artists. But I had been his *Locus* agent in the early seventies, and he had been *SF Commentary's*. His advertising of the magazine had a lot to do with my three Hugo nominations.

Little did I know that Charlie was a great classical music fan. When he visited Melbourne in 2003, he rang me up, and we shared a very pleasant seafood dinner down by the old Port Melbourne docks. We toured the local music shops, which failed to yield the kind of CDs Charlie was looking for. A week later he found all 37 CDs of Peter Sculthorpe's music in a shop in Perth.

When the Bring Bruce Bayside fund paid for my visit San Francisco in 2005, Charlie invited me to visit Locusville (his house in Oakland), where his staff entertained me and Peter Weston with a fabulous lunch and a tour of his library. The library! There cannot be another like it.

A few days later I stayed at his place on the way to Las Vegas, and Charlie put on a wonderful dinner, where I met Terry Bisson and his wife; Tim Pratt and his wife-to-be; Liza, who will now become the executive editor of *Locus*; John Berry and others. At home, Charlie proved very easy to get along with. Late at night he brought out the armagnac and played John Adams on his fabulous stereo system.

'You should travel more,' he advised me, but didn't explain how I could afford it. It seems appropriate that Charles Brown should have died in his sleep on an aircraft carrying him home from Readercon, an SF convention dedicated to the printed word. *Locus* will continue, and we hope it will stay dedicated to the written word.

### **Enid Spry (1919–2009)**

Enid has been our next-door neighbour since October 2004, when we moved to Greensborough from Collingwood. She was then 86, and just a bit alarming. It took her awhile to forgive us for not being reincarnations of her good friends, who had lived in our house until two years before. We suspect she reported us to the local council when all those tiles were dumped on our front lawn.

Elaine persisted in helping her in little ways (such as remembering Enid kept her front door key when she locked herself out of the house), inviting her in for afternoon tea, and patting her cat Puss. Enid warmed to us. She forgave Elaine for ripping up our front lawn after she saw what a spectacular garden native plants could make.

As we heard during the eulogy at her funeral on 6 August, Enid and her husband had moved out to Greensborough in the late 1940s, when the roads were unmade. Her husband, like my father, died in 1989. Thanks to the continual help from her daughters Karina and Yvonne, she had been able to stay in her house all her life. She had kept the garden looking superb, and was greatly comforted after Puss came to stay in late 2004. Puss looks much like our Archie, but is not as placid. Elaine is still trying to find another home for her.

At Enid's funeral we met two of the people who had lived in our house until two years before we moved in. We found out that the front of our house was built in the early seventies, and the back part in 1977. The back part had been added to 'keep the kids at home': therefore there is a back toilet and small room that I now have as my study.

We wish we had won Tattsлото so that we could buy Enid's house when it comes on the market. As it is, it will probably be torn down, and the block converted into flats. But we are grateful that for the last five years we have had Enid as our neighbour.

— **Bruce Gillespie, 12 August 2009**

# *Bruce Gillespie's favourites 2007, 2008*

---

Only a few lists so far for 2007 and 2008. To work out the 'Short Stories' list I have to go and read all the main contenders again! It's very hard to remember a short story because of its title, even from only a year or two ago.

For my music lists, I have the problem that for years I have written down only the CDs I have bought in a year, not those I have listened to. When I look back over the lists, I find I still have not heard many of them. In 2009, for the first time, I am making lists of CDs as I listen to them. Meanwhile, I have made tentative CD lists for 2007.

Dick Jenssen has contributed greatly to all the following lists, especially the films list. We have an understanding that some day I will write about all the films and books to which he has given me access. Not at the moment, as during December and January I've enjoyed the longest, most satisfying jag of genzine-editing for the last ten years. *Steam Engine Times* 10 and 11 have been published. *SF Commentary* 80 is a mighty sunken *Titanic* that I have been raising to the surface, file by file, article by article. It's nearly all here and reassembled, but I do feel like Superman after biting into kryptonite cake. I will probably divide it into two bits, one 80 pages long and another about 40 pages long.

Dick did not feel up to concocting a film list in answer to mine, but he did send a Favoute Books 2008 list that I'll add at the end. I call your attention to it as a good guide to the Best Science Books of the Year.

---

\* **Books or films I couldn't have read or seen without Dick Jenssen's help.**

---

## *Books*

---

### *Favourite books read for the first time during 2007*

---

- 1 *Well Done, These Men*  
Barry Heard (2005; Scribe; 303 pp.) pb
- 2 *The Country You Have Never Seen*

- 3 *The Amber Spyglass*  
Phillip Pullman (2000; Knopf; 521 pp.) hb

- 4 *Open Secrets*  
Alice Munro (1994; Knopf; 294 pp.) hb
- 5 *Northern Lights*  
Phillip Pullman (1995; Scholastic; 399 pp.) pb
- 6 *Towards Another Summer*  
Janet Frame (2007; Vintage; 242 pp.) pb
- 7 *Redshift: Extreme Visions of Speculative Fiction*  
ed. Al Sarrantonio (2001; Roc; 544 pp.) hb
- 8 *The Ax*  
Donald E. Westlake (1997; Mysterious Press; 273 pp.) hb
- 9 *Sir Ronald Wilson: A Matter of Conscience*  
Antonio Buti (2007; University of Western Australia Press; 474 pp.) tpb
- 10 *Author, Author*  
David Lodge (2004; Viking; 390 pp.) pb

---

*Favourite books read again in 2007*

---

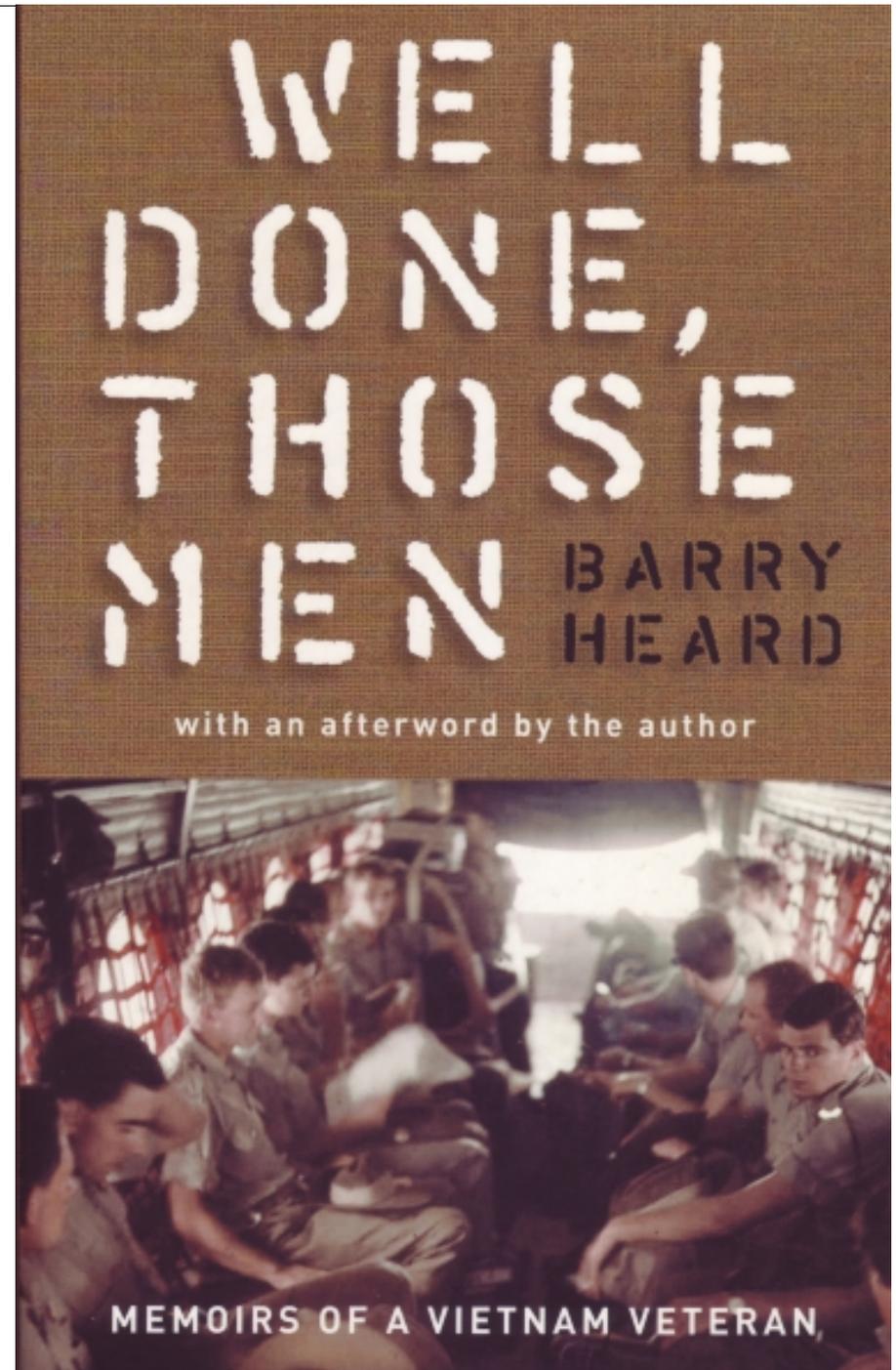
- 1 *The Tree of Man* (Patrick White)
- 2 *War and Peace* (Leo Tolstoy)
- 3 *All the King's Men* (Robert Penn Warren)

---

*Favourite books read for the first time during 2008*

---

- 1 *The Time of Our Singing*  
Richard Powers (2003; Vintage; 631 pp.) pb
- 2 *Gone Baby Gone*  
Dennis Lehane (1998; Bantam; 511 pp.) pb
- 3 *East of Time*  
Jacob G. Rosenberg (2005; Brandl & Schlesinger; 220 pp.) pb
- 4\* *The Aspern Papers and Other Stories*  
Henry James (1976; Penguin; 232 pp.) pb
- 5 *Looking for Enid: The Mysterious and Inventive Life of Enid Blyton*  
Duncan McLaren (2007; Portabello; 319 pp.) hb



- 6 *The Echo Maker*  
Richard Powers (2006; Vintage; 569 pp.) pb
- 7 *The Yiddish Policeman's Union: A Novel*  
Michael Chabon (2007; HarperCollins; 414 pp.) hb
- 8 *Wonder Boys*

- 9 *The Given Day*  
Dennis Lehane (2008; Doubleday; 704 pp.) tpb
- 10 *Maps and Legends: Reading and Writing Along the Borderlands*  
Michael Chabon (2008; McSweeney's; 222 pp.) hb

---

*Favourite book read again during 2008*

---

1\* *The Amazing Adventures of Kavalier & Clay*

(Michael Chabon)

---

---

*Films*

---

*Films seen for the first time in 2007*

---

- 1\* *War and Peace* (Sergei Bondarchuk) 1968
- 2\* *Monster's Ball* (Marc Forster) 2001
- 3 *The Lives of Others* (Florian Henckel von Donnersmark) 2006
- 4\* *Breach* (Billy Ray) 2007
- 5 *Smiley's People* (Simon Langford) 1983
- 6\* *Stranger than Fiction* (Marc Forster) 2006
- 7\* *Five Graves to Cairo* (Billy Wilder) 1943
- 8 *Code 46* (Michael Winterbottom) 2003
- 9\* *The Lady Eve* (Preston Sturges) 1941
- 10\* *Bite the Bullet* (Richard Brooks) 1975

- 11\* *The Great Waldo Pepper* (George Roy Hill) 1975
- 12\* *Pan's Labyrinth* (Guillermo del Toro) 2006
- 13\* *The Good Shepherd* (Robert de Niro) 2006
- 14\* *Black Book* (Paul Verhoeven) 2007
- 15 *Death in Brunswick* (John Ruane) 1990
- 16\* *The Royal Tennenbaums* (Wes Anderson) 2001
- 17\* *The Illusionist* (Neil Burger) 2006
- 18 *All the King's Men* (Robert Rossen) 1949
- 19\* *Army of Shadows* (Jean-Pierre Melville) 1969
- 20\* *Ratatouille* (Brad Bird) 2007

---

## *Films seen again during 2007*

---

- |                                       |   |
|---------------------------------------|---|
| 1 <i>The Innocents</i>                | 12* <i>I See a Dark Stranger</i>        |
| 2* <i>My Neighbour Totoro</i>         | 13* <i>A Place of One's Own</i>         |
| 3* <i>The Shining</i>                 | 14* <i>Kiki's Delivery Service</i>      |
| 4 <i>The Triplets of Belleville</i>   | 15 <i>Hail! Hail! Rock and Roll!</i>    |
| 5* <i>The Taking of Pelham 123</i>    | 16 <i>Brazil</i>                        |
| 6 <i>Buffalo Bill and the Indians</i> | 17* <i>The Prisoner of Zenda</i> (1947) |
| 7* <i>Riddle of the Sands</i>         | 18* <i>Blade Runner</i>                 |
| 8 <i>War and Peace</i> (Vidor)        | 19* <i>Wordplay</i>                     |
| 9 <i>True Stories</i>                 | 20 <i>The Player</i>                    |
| 10* <i>Cottage to Let</i>             | 21 <i>Mad Dogs and Englishmen</i>       |
| 11* <i>Green for Danger</i>           | 22 <i>Leonard Cohen I'm Your Man</i>    |
- 

## *Favourite films seen for the first time during 2008*

---

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| 1 <i>The Princess Bride</i> (Rob Reiner) 1987                                       | 16* <i>The Third Secret</i> (Charles Crichton) 1964           |
| 2* <i>Michael Clayton</i> (Tony Gilroy) 2007  | 17* <i>The Fountain</i> (Daniel Aronofsky) 2006               |
| 3 <i>The Dancer Upstairs</i> (John Malkovich) 2002                                  | 18* <i>The Lost Moment</i> (Martin Gabel) 1947                |
| 4* <i>Seven Days to Noon</i> (Boulting Brothers) 1950                               | 19* <i>The Aviator</i> (Martin Scorsese) 2004                 |
| 5 <i>Lord of War</i> (Andrew Niccol) 2005   | 20* <i>7 Men from Now</i> (Bud Boetticher) 1956               |
| 6* <i>The Walker</i> (Paul Schrader) 2006   | 21 <i>Porco Rosso</i> (Hayao Miyazaki) 1992                   |
| 7* <i>Youth Without Youth</i> (Francis Ford Coppola) 2007                           | 22* <i>Easy Living</i> (Mitchell Leisen) 1937                 |
| 8* <i>The Fall</i> (Tarsem) 2006  | 23* <i>Midnight</i> (Mitchell Leisen) 1939                    |
| 9 <i>O Thou Transcendent: The Life of Ralph Vaughan Williams</i> (Tony Palmer) 2008 | 24 <i>Breaking and Entering</i> (Antony Minghella) 2007       |
| 10 <i>Charlie Wilson's War</i> (Mike Nichols) 2007                                  | 25 <i>Things We Lost in the Fire</i> (Susanne Bier) 2006      |
| 11* <i>There Will Be Blood</i> (Paul Thomas Anderson) 2007                          | 26* <i>Force of Evil</i> (Abraham Polonsky) 1948              |
| 12* <i>Sweeney Todd: The Demon Barber of Fleet Street</i> (Tim Burton) 2007         | 27 <i>In the Valley of Elah</i> (Paul Haggis) 2007            |
| 13* <i>Mr Brooks</i> (Bruce A. Evans) 2007  | 28 <i>Runnin' Down a Dream</i> (Peter Bogdanovich) 2006       |
| 14* <i>The Search</i> (Fred Zinneman) 1948  | 29* <i>Desert Fury</i> (Lewis Allen) 1947                     |
| 15* <i>Act of Violence</i> (Fred Zinneman) 1949                                     | 30 <i>Hey Hey It's Esther Blueburger</i> (Cathy Randall) 2008 |
|   | 31 <i>Clerks</i> (Kevin J. Smith) 1994                        |

---

## *Films seen again during 2008*

---

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| 1* <i>2001: A Space Odyssey</i> (on Blu-Ray) | 8* <i>A Clockwork Orange</i>                     |
| 2 <i>L'éclisse</i>                           | 9 <i>The Last Detail</i>                         |
| 3 <i>Five Million Years to Earth</i>         | 10 <i>Klute</i>                                  |
| 4* <i>The Furies</i>                         | 11* <i>This Happy Breed</i>                      |
| 5 <i>The Prestige</i>                        | 12* <i>The Thief of Baghdad</i>                  |
| 6* <i>The Spy in Black</i>                   | 13 <i>Zelig</i>                                  |
| 7* <i>The Boston Strangler</i>               | 14 <i>The Charge of the Light Brigade</i> (1968) |
- 

---

## *Music*

---

### *Favourite popular CDs bought during 2007*

---

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| 1 <i>Songbird</i> (Emmylou Harris) (4 CDs)                                       | 7 <i>Versatile Heart</i> (Linda Thompson)                           |
| 2 <i>Famous Blue Cheese: The Leonard Cohen Show</i> (Monsieur Camembert) (2 CDs) | 8 <i>Diamonds to Dust</i> (Gurf Morlix)                             |
| 3 <i>Salvation Blues</i> (Mark Olson)  | 9 <i>Kane Welch Kaplan</i> (Kieran Kane, Kevin Welch & Fats Kaplan) |
| 4 <i>The Envoy</i> (Warren Zevon)  | 10 <i>We'll Never Turn Back</i> (Mavis Staples)                     |
| 5 <i>Mercy Now</i> (Mary Gauthier)   | 11 <i>Scene of the Crime</i> (Betty LaVette)                        |
| 6 <i>Milly's Cafe</i> (Fred Eaglesmith)  | 12 <i>Last Man Standing Live</i> (Jerry Lee Lewis) (CD + DVD).      |
- 

### *Favourite classical CDs bought during 2007*

---

- |   |                         |
|---|-------------------------|
| 1 <i>Vasks: Symphony No 3/Cello Concerto</i> (Ytonen/Sorgards/Tempero | Philharmonic Orchestra) |
|---|-------------------------|

- 2 Mozart: *The Magic Flute* (in English) (Mackerras cond. London Philharmonic Orchestra) (2 CDs)
- 3 Beethoven: *Five Cello Sonatas* (Rostropovich & Richter)
- 4 Beethoven: *Piano Sonatas* (Gilels) (9 CDs)

- 5 Prokofiev: *Sinfonia Concertante*/Miaskowsky: *Cello Concerto*/Rachmaninov: *Vocalise* (Sargent cond. Royal Philharmonic/Rostropovich cond. Philharmonia)

---

## Dick Jensen

---

### *Books read 2008: The 10 best list, in order*

---

- 1 *The Age of Innocence* (Wharton)
- 2 *The Princeton Companion to Mathematics* (ed. Gowers)
- 3 *Beyond the Zonules of Zinn* (Bainbridge)
- 4 *The Black Hole War* (Susskind)
- 5 *Vaccinated* (Offit)
- 6 *Euler's Gem* (Richeson)
- 7 *The Pea and the Sun* (Wapner)
- 8 *The Time Axis* (Kuttner)
- 9 *Titus Groan and Gormenghast* (Peake)
- 10 *The Jack Vance Treasury* (Vance)

---

Well, Item 2 hasn't been read, because it's *not* that sort of book: 1000+ pages in a mini-coffee table book (about 3000 ordinary pages), but it has been thoroughly scanned and lots read. I'll *never* read it all, since it's not that sort of book, and, besides, I'll ever understand more than 60 to 75% of it, but so far it's a major addition to my shelves. (Amazon sold it to me for half the Australian price — which includes postage, *and* the collapsed Aussie dollar.)

As you can see, only only one mainstream novel: but one which also will be on my never-to-be-discarded book shelf.

— Dick Jensen, January 2009

# Letters? letters! letters ...

## **KAM-HUNG SOH**

**25 Hargreaves Street, Huntingdale VIC 3166**

You're writing too fast! I haven't even read your latest *Steam Engine Time!*

7 December 2008

## **ROBERT ELORDIETA**

**20 Custer Circle, Traralgon VIC 3844**

Re 'Images: My real life as a fanzine editor': I've read some Enid Blyton books, but not Edgar Rice Burroughs books. I do remember reading somewhere that ERB created Tarzan. I've seen some Tarzan movies with Johnny Weismuller in them. I've also seen some episodes of the TV series with Ron Ely. I've been to McGill's Newsagency in Elizabeth Street many a time. I still haven't read Philip K. Dick, but have seen some of his adaptations in movies such as *Blade Runner*, *Minority Report* and *Pay Check*. The photos were great. It looked like that Lee Harding was having a great time at the costume party of Syncon 2, August 1972. It was also classic what you had to say in your final image: 'Bliss: August 1972'.

In Gillian Polack's Guest of Honour Speech, at Conflux 5, it looks as though she hasn't had a easy life. At least she is now doing something for herself, and she is writing again. I'm curious which primary school she went to in Canberra. She mentions that her old primary school had a little school and a big one, for the different grades. So did mine. I went to Ainslie Primary School in Braddon. I was there until near the beginning of Grade 4 and then my family moved to Traralgon, Victoria. Good luck with your new novels Gillian.

Re 'Books in my life' by Colin Steele: I wouldn't class myself as a bibliomaniac or a bibliophile. I love buying and reading books. I'll read more fiction than non-fiction. I don't buy first editions or go looking for

rare books. I've bought more books than I have read. I just can't help myself.

I've read and enjoyed some of Robin Hobb's trilogies, such as the Farseer trilogy, the Liveship Traders trilogy, and the Tawny Man trilogy.

26 December 2008

## **JENNY BRYCE**

**c/o ACER, Camberwell VIC 3124**

Your article 'Fun in Canberra' will be very useful for my forthcoming trip there. I loved the whole issue — especially the photographs! I had heard a great deal about 'The Lift' at the old Melbourne SF Club. Now I can see it — formidable cattle-truck doors. Mervyn Barrett was obviously a brave lad (he is visiting in February — I'll show him the picture). And I had no idea that Merv Binns was so far ahead in setting fashion. Was he the first to wear a baseball cap at a fetching sideways angle?

2 January 2009

There is quite a *\*brg\** following now at Australian Council for Educational Research (in the Humanities team). I showed my spare copy to a non-Nova Mob person and he was impressed (of course!). Quite extraordinary that there are three Nova Mobees in my team.

4 January 2009

**[\*brg\* That's Ros, Brad and David. Ros Gross has reviews in the next SF Commentary, but Brad hasn't sent me an article yet. He talked brilliantly on Gustave Doré at a Nova Mob last year.\*]**

**STEVE JEFFERY**

**44 White Way, Kidlington, Oxon OX5 2XA, England**

It is b\*\*\*y cold here. The daytime temperature hasn't risen much above freezing since Boxing Day, and the nights have been well below, down to between minus 5 to minus 10. Not nice. We are huddled in layers of jumpers even with the heating on which is struggling to get much of the house above 15C.

I'm pleased that an audience of four people didn't put Colin Steele off being interviewed. From his article which you reprinted in *\*brg\** he sounds fascinating. And yes, very reminiscent of John Baxter in *A Pound of Paper*. (I keep hoping the local library will remainder their copy so I can buy it, but on the other hand I'm obscurely pleased there are enough apparent bibliomaniacs to keep it on the shelf.)

Despite a circular table with half a dozen computers (one of which is the online catalogue search) and a shelf of DVDs, our small local library still seems resolutely book-orientated. There are even story readings for groups of kids on some mornings. Am I odd in feeling obscurely pleased that this sort of thing still goes on, and when I see small children chattering excitedly about the books they've chosen in the check-out queue?

I haven't worked out whether I am a bibliophile or a bibliomaniac. I have the requisite congested library (indeed libraries if you count separate rooms) and atrophied bank account, but I am trying to be less compulsive. Partly because of space (we may shortly need to institute a 'one in, one out' policy) but also because I am, in my old age, getting a lot more picky about what I want to read and keep. This Xmas, for the first time I can remember, there weren't any SF books on my Santa list. (I'd already bought and read Stephenson's *Anthem*.)

On the matter of mushy peas, Vikki and I probably embody the North/South divide in one household. There are three tins of the stuff in the cupboard: one standard, one 'chip shop' style and one minty. (Are minty mushy peas pukka, or evidence of a creeping southern affectation? I wonder.) I don't touch the stuff on the principle that anything that shade of luminous green is entirely unnatural, and quite possibly something Homer Simpson stole from work, and given what it does to pans I dread

to think what it would do to my insides. Vikki, on the other hand, will not touch guacamole (with the strange exception of aforesaid mushy peas) almost anything gloopy. (Part of this is a severe allergic reaction to anything containing mayonnaise). Dave Langford apparently has the same aversion and has written of the need to carefully disassemble any shop-bought sandwich to scrape off and discard anything suspicious (i.e. that doesn't actually resemble meat).

I can take or leave guacamole (mostly leave), but when I was in Texas it was pretty much the only vegetable available at most places apart from a relish of mix of tomatoes, chillis and coriander called pico (?), which required a certain amount of caution.

I'm also glad that an audience of eight didn't put you off delivering your Corflux 5 Fan GoH speech. I hope they enjoyed it, and the transcript makes a splendid article for *\*brg\**. I liked the idea of tracing out shaping formative moments of your development as a SF fan as a series of images, though I'd love to see a follow-up as to what happened after 1972.

**[\*brg\* I left out many images from before 1972. The talk structure provides a useful structure for the autobiography probably I will never write.\*]**

I'm not sure my own memory is good enough to be able to do something like this, especially when it comes to dates and places, but the discovery of PKD at an early age resonated with me. In my case the book was *Now Wait for Last Year*, and if I remember right, it was on holiday in Majorca when I was 12 or 13. Leading up to that, though, was a whole series of Gerry Anderson puppet series on the TV, from *Supercar*, through *Fireball XL5* to *Stingray*.

Vikki and I were trying to remember some of the characters from these. I can remember Jimmy, Mitch the Monkey and Dr Beaker from *Supercar* (I had the 'Time Machine' episode on an LP record; lost now, but apparently worth a few hundred to collectors), and I am sure there was a robot who co-piloted with Steve Zodiac on *XL5*. Vikki doesn't remember that, but recalls a little alien who used to close each show with a 'Welcome home' to the crew, but I've completely blanked on that.

I was following Dick Jenssen's 'the energy of the universe' up to the point of the last paragraph in the quote from Stephen Hawking, which suggested that during the period of inflation the universe expanded in size by  $10^{50}$  but without any change in density, at which point my brain sort of melted and I lost the rest of the argument.

5 January 2009

**JAN CREGAN**  
**Rozelle, NSW 2039**

I just thought I'd let you know that I did in fact write a poem. What's more, I entered it in a local poetry competition, and it came ... NOWHERE! The winners and runners up were very complex and carefully crafted, so I'm not too bothered at missing out with my little bit of free verse (do they still call it that?).

On the other end of the writing spectrum, I've had a paper accepted for a conference in Hanoi in April, and am hoping that a second one will also get up, mostly to make the trip and the cost worthwhile. The already successful one is a new analysis of some of the data from my (long-post-poned) PhD research, and the one I am still waiting to hear about is on my own experiences negotiating cultures and colonialism while teaching counselling and doing clinical psychology in Laos. I am pretty keen to work that one up into a paper, even though it will mean writing two papers in about eight weeks instead of only one. And it will be great to return to the region as a visitor rather than a worker, catch up with friends I made and visit places I missed seeing because I was busy and preoccupied with cultural challenges.

My wonderful Lao language teacher is visiting some of her students in Australia, and will be with me for the next four days. I am really looking forward to seeing her again, despite the fact that I will disappoint her by the amount of Pasa Lao that I have managed to forget in only seven months.

5 January 2009

**LLOYD PENNEY**  
**1706-24 Eva Road, Etobicoke, Ontario M9C 2B2, Canada**

Yvonne and I have been Fan GoHs at other conventions, and there's

nothing better for the ego than to guest at a convention. I have found that that different conventions have different idea of what they expect of you as a Fan GoH, and it's always good to ask. Some want you as busy as possible, and I think that's best, and others want you to just relax and enjoy, and as appealing as that sounds, you wind up as being invisible. Special themes at conventions can be fun; some of my local conventions we plan to go to may have steampunk subthemes, and I think they can be quite enjoyable. Those who take part will be in costume, but more clothing- orientated than costume. We're working on costumes, something we haven't done in decades.

One of the challenges in being a Fan Guest of Honour is having the attendees of the convention actually care about you and the programming you're doing. One convention we guested at, Robert J. Sawyer interviewed us during our GoH hour. We figured that there were probably more people there to see Rob than to see us. Many of us have noticed that in order to add more attractive names on the convention flyer to draw more people, the Fan GoH position is being dropped for another author guest, or in some cases, an actor guest.

My congratulations to Gillian Polack on such a personal revelation in her speech notes. I guess if you are where you are the most comfortable, a convention of your science fiction friends, you can be as revealing as you please without embarrassment. Are we ever as good a writer/artist/human being/etc. as we think we are, or we'd like to be? The achievement would be desired, but the striving is the true goal.

Good to see that Geneva and Zara have resurfaced ... I am hoping that Geneva will do another fanzine, and we can all keep in touch with the both of them. For me, moving from one side of Canada to the other for a few years was emigration enough.

19 January 2009

**STEVE SNEYD**  
**4 Nowell Place, Almondbury, Huddersfield,**  
**West Yorkshire HD5 8PB, England**

Speedy reply before kipple gets yours (complete aside: I have always wondered, and have never found the answer: did Philip Dick get the term kipple from the ancient music hall joke: 'Do you like Kipling?' 'I don't

know. I've never kipped.' The only non-PKD use I ever came across was in Wright's *Dialect Dictionary*, which gave 'kipple' as a northern English (Cumberland, as I recall) dialect term for intercourse, therefore 'kipple' becomes cognate with 'couple').

The Hall of Memory (on the cover of *Scratch Pad*) has a curiously science-fictional feel to it. Oddly, it echoes Gustave Doré — Dante's Paradise? — so was the echo deliberate?

The Colin Steele article includes anecdotal gems: the bargain Raleigh first edition, repackaged as an expensive presentation; the wonderful image of the Bodleian excursions to Hay-on-Wye — an invasion of dons in Kiss Me Quick hats sprang to mind.

My one visit to Hay-on-Wye was for a Pendragon Arthurian Society convention at Baskerville Hall in nearby Clyro, claimed as the source for Conan Doyle's name for the hound of that ilk, as the era also has a demon hound story, and Conan Doyle apparently knew the Hall's owners. During the time not spent at the convention I walked to various castle sites, of the old Welsh Marches war zone neighbourhood. The weather for once was excellent, so I exercised great restraint and steered clear of the myriad bookshops, except one stop. I purchased a tatty *Ingoldsby Legends* from the outside stalls at 'King' Richard Booth's castle. (I read recently that other Hay book traders are trying to 'depose' him, saying his increasingly obsessive behaviour is now damaging the Book Town image, although they are still grateful to him for putting the place on the map in the beginning.)

Liverpool already has a legend that Hitler spent some time there before coming to power, which is a variant on the Steele-confused woman who thought she'd met the man whose flat Hitler shared while there.

The history of poetry in SF goes back to Gernsback's pre-SF radio tales magazines — much of it filler. Several SF pros had poems as their first sales: Sam Youd (John Christopher) and Robert Silverberg are examples that come to mind, and there are always pros who were or are also poets, including ones much more serious than Asimov with his limericks (though he deserves thanks for ensuring that the magazine that bears his name uses poetry). Aldiss, Bradbury, Brunner, Disch, Le Guin, Haldeman, Moorcock, Pohl, Watson, and Zelazny are just many names in a long list.

As you say, generally the SF community has taken little interest in poetry (for instance, the absence of a poetry Hugo, partially covered by the SFPA's Rhysling Awards, which are included in the Nebula anthologies) except for a liking for the wannabe-humorous light verse.

I did do a history of the field, which appeared in *The Zone* some years back. In total about 25,000 words, they would be a bit long for reprinting in *Steam Engine Time*. You could also reprint some of my separate articles (list attached) on separate aspects of SF poetry.

16 January 2009

**DOUG BARBOUR**  
**11658-72nd Avenue, Edmonton,**  
**Alberta T6G 0B9, Canada**

Replying to a fanzine seems a bit shallow as fires continue to burn just north of you. I hope they haven't reached your part of Melbourne, anyway.

Watching the newsfeed covering the fires is horrifying enough; being there so close must be terrible. I'm not sure where your new home is with regard to the bushfires. I understand from poets I know in Melbourne that they didn't get that close to the main city, but it isn't clear how close they came to the northern suburbs. Certainly, the pictures of the burnt-out cars on the highways, the whole towns burnt to cinders, strikes an apocalyptic, future disaster somehow come to us now, chord.

Anyway, thinking of you and hoping you and Elaine are all right.

12 February 2009

Good to see that you are busy on interesting things. I am slogged by a giant paying work project, and the subject matter is not interesting. Some of the technical problems of preparing an electronic manuscript are interesting, but the sheer weight of the job (260,000 words, to be edited on screen) is giving me headaches. If only I had the money to do nothing but edit fanzines.\*

I've been editing, too, but mysteries, novels, and, for pay (as those were for NeWest), a poetry MS, which is far shorter than your tome. I had the interesting situation of spending a few hours on Skype with my authors,

going through the MS page by page in those sections where I was making suggestions, and it was really helpful to be able to talk in real time while we looked together at the ms on screen.

I can well imagine that you'd love to just edit your fanzines. But pay must feel good in its own way, eh?

14 May 2009

I read a lot of my SF&F while pedalling on my stationary bike, so I can take some rather loose stuff, although I'd like to think I don't let my critical sensibility go absolutely to sleep. I have read some of those trilogies, but anything longer than that won't go far with me. I do agree about wanting to have the whole thing there before beginning (although with Stephenson's huge one, for example, I had to read them as they appeared as I was reviewing some of them; and each volume was so huge that it was enough for a time anyway). But, again, the writing carried me through those many pages; I'm not sure it would with many other writers. A short trilogy, so to speak (an oxymoron?) can work quite well; I just read, at some speed, 'The Night Angel' trilogy, a first book(s) that had some neat world building, and some nice twists on various countries fighting one another. Nothing too special, but I did enjoy it on my bike. Jo Walton's 'Farthing' trilogy, a World War II alternate history, on the other hand, is something special in three volumes that play off one another in intriguing ways. I've also really enjoyed some of the new wide-screen baroque space opera, started by Banks, whose recent huge volumes I like, but also by Ken MacLeod and Alistair Reynolds. And, although it's a bit old now, I completely agree with John Clute about the importance and wonderfulness of Mary Gentle's *ASH: A Secret History*, a huge mind-blowing novel.

Ha: I could go on. With all the work I seem to have since I 'retired', I still get a lot of reading done, too.

15 May 2009

**TIM MARION**  
**c/o Kleinbard, 266 East Broadway, Apt 1201B,**  
**New York NY 10002, USA**

Regarding worries about old age and health benefits in your lettercol: my sister is only a year or two younger than yourself and she likewise

has no hope of ever being employed again, after being let go because of political pressures from a job where she had long served. Not only are there not, at present, free health care benefits for everyone in the country (which in itself guarantees a cheap and standard type of medical service, i.e., cursory), but various parties are still talking about abolishing Social Security, something I have been paying into for well over 30 years. If this occurs, there really won't be any provision for the poor and elderly. Growing old is such a scary enough prospect by itself, considering one's various senses and organs failing over the years, that the thought of not having any means of support then makes one wish that a global apocalypse during the Winter Solstice of 2012 could be a certainty!

Thanks for *\*brg\** 55. Unlike most fans, apparently, I really get a kick out of reading mailing comments to an apa of which I am not a member — it helps to give me some sense of what is being discussed in that apa. And *\*brg\** 55 is certainly the most attractive apazine I've ever seen.

I noted with interest your claiming that you can perfectly remember your first day of school, as that is the day your life began. I can well remember my first day of school as well, but I would hesitate to say that my life began when I started attending an institution which I was forced by society to attend. No, I would say the first day of my life was 11 July 1971, the first day I ever attended a convention. Of course, it was just a minicon in someone's large home, but it made such an impression on me, that here were other people who took science fiction and comic books seriously also!

You mention the Sydney local apa, Applesauce, which you say is no longer in existence. Another defunct apa is Apple, an American-based apa whose main subject was food.

John Litchen is an excellent writer. Many of his experiences, while not similar to mine, at least parallel mine, despite the difference in years.

I wish I could see *Five Million Years to Earth* again (on your list), but it's either prohibitively expensive or not available on DVD.

Reading through *\*brg\** 55, I saw you correct someone who had said *Wild Palms* was by David Lynch, not Oliver Stone. This immediately rang a bell: I remember it being called *Oliver Stone's Wild Palms. Twin Peaks,*

however, was by Lynch.

Looking it up on the internet, I see that I was right, and also that Norman Hollyn was one of the editors! (Used to be known as Norm Hochberg.)

23 March 2009

**\*brg\* I remember that Norm was a member of APA-45 in the early 1970s.\***

### **CHARLES AND NIC TAYLOR Somewhere in Dubai**

We have been having a reasonably good time here, the weather is currently warm, but not uncomfortable. I should mention that I met Brian Aldiss at a literary festival a couple of weeks ago and that he said to say hello, and to say sorry that he hasn't written to you recently.

We have now got limited Internet access at home, courtesy of our next door neighbour's wireless connection — we are sharing the costs of a single connection so the cost is minimal, although the speed is not so fast.

The teaching has its ups and downs: you will remember how dispiriting it can be at times. Generally I am finding it bearable, even enjoyable, but Nic hasn't been so lucky with her allotments and is finding the Year 7s and 9s to be a real trial.

We have met quite a few new people: two couples that we get on well with, and various other people that we know moderately well. We are not exactly social animals, but we do have a social life, which we didn't have in Perth.

We haven't been out to see much: we don't have a car as yet, so we are travelling around town in taxis, or getting lifts with people. We did get as far as the border with Oman where we had to go to renew our tourist visas, but mostly we have been restricted to Dubai.

I will read *Steam Engine Time* from efanazines.com. There is no point trying to send a hard copy: we literally don't have a street address (apart from the school address). There are so much construction going on that

there are lots of streets that haven't even been named as yet, including the one our apartment is on.

12 March 2009

### **RAY WOOD PO Box 188, Quorn SA 5433**

I've just finished watching the DVDs of the first season of *Terminator: The Sarah Connor Chronicles*. I didn't watch it when it was on free-to-air. A so-so series, but just this side of watchable, I thought. But there was one superlative moment in it, when Reese (I think it was) is harping on about the purely machine-like nature of cyborgs, and their incapability of being anything more than that; and then the cyborg Cameron is seen immediately afterwards dancing ballet with wonderful grace, giving a purely visual lie to what he's just said. Such a powerful image always sends ice-cold water trickling slowly and unstopably down my spine.

Sometimes I find that a whole long feature film is worth watching for a single moment like that. For example, the film *Billy Elliot* has that almost unbelievably poignant moment when Billy's father smashes his mother's piano to pieces in their house's tiny brick-lined back yard, to get wood for their Christmas fire, with the tremendously discordant 'music' it makes in the process of being destroyed.

What a powerful image that is! — what a dichotomy between the demanding practicalities of everyday life and the just-as-demanding need for artistic expression! (Reminds me of Patrick White's great piano images, such as Elizabeth Hunter in the hurricane's eye seeing on the beach 'a wrecked piano, all hammers and wires, ... half buried in wet sand'.) And with Billy slammed back hard against the brick wall watching in horror. And the place in which this happens is that absolutely sterile brick yard. It's an image that resonates (ironical word given the nature of the image) on and on through you afterwards. (But of course, an image like that doesn't get all of its power in isolation from the entire film; it in a way encapsulates the whole film in a single moment, and you have to absorb all of the film to get the utmost power from the single image.)

I remember the immense power of one image in the Australian Ballet's performance of *Coppélia* in the '70s, where you have a human in the pretence of a ballet dancer, pretending to be the 'human' Swanilda,

## A Prairie Home Companion\*



Garrison Keillor at the Fitzgerald Theater

This is the A side of the postcard Robyn Whiteley sent us. Robyn's message is on the other side. The text of the postcard reads:

'In 1974 Garrison Keillor hosted the first live broadcast of A Prairie Home Companion. During the early years the radio show was broadcast from various locations, and came to the World Theater in 1978. The theater was purchased by Minnesota Public Radio in 1981. The Theater was renamed the Fitzgerald Theater in 1994 and has served A Prairie Home Companion as its Minnesota home base. The broadcast audience of A Prairie Home Companion is heard nationwide by over 4 million listeners every week. The Fitzgerald Theater was built in 1910 and is St Paul's oldest theater.'

A one-hour version of PHC is broadcast every Sunday night on the ABC's Radio National. We would prefer all two hours.

pretending to be the automaton Coppélia, pretending to change into a 'human' to fool Dr Coppélius, and then pretending to revert to the character Swanilda — a most powerful complex of switches between real-fake-real-fake- real-fake-real. And as she goes to flee from the Doctor's laboratory, she turns in a moment's pity for him, and reaches down to touch him as he lies in despair on the floor, but pulls back before her fingers actually do touch him. All those switches make that one small gesture of reaching down to commiserate with him such a stupendous one.

It's an image full of so many switches between real and fake that my mind seems always to stagger back from its complexity, and how it reflects so potently on the nature of art and the artist.

(Actually, SF has something of that kind of complexity for me, where you have a human reader succumbing to the artistic medium of fiction, that deals with the realities of science, that are used in a fictional sense, to say something real about life and the universe. Which is another series of switches of the real-fake-real-fake-real kind. And which is one reason why SF is more complex than the other fictional genres.)

But returning to the image of the cyborg Cameron dancing ballet: that image made me think how powerful a novel you might have, a kind of Autobiography of a Cyborg, which deals with a cyborg's life-long attempt to learn to be human. In a way, that attempt would be something similar to an autistic person's attempt to figure out how to be 'human', and you can see a parallel between the cyborg and the autistic person in real life.

The title of Dick's *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep* led me before I read it decades ago to think that that story would go into some territory like that, but if I'm remembering correctly, the story disappointed me there by not making enough of it. And *Blade Runner* touched on it, too, of course, but I've always felt that it didn't quite develop that theme as much as it deserved either. It seems to me that such a story as an

Autobiography of a Cyborg could be a wonderful way to come to grips with what is the 'real' nature of a human.

As I'm someone who's not an SF aficionado or fan, I then wondered if you might know of such a story dealing with this theme more adequately. Do you? — I'd love to know.

By the way, I notice in your reproduction of my maunderings that the em-rules (which I get with the Extended Character Set's ALT+0151 hot key) vanish between my original texts and your reprintings of them.

19 April 2009

**ROBYN WHITELEY  
overseas; usually in Richmond VIC**

Our hostess at St Paul had quite a program lined up for us, but I had been in touch with the Fitzgerald Theatre before I left home, and it had been reasonably welcoming, so I told our hostess we wanted to go there. The Rings (our hosts) have never been Garrison Keillor fans, which is a bit odd, because they're very proud of Charles Shulz (of Snoopy fame) and F. Scott Fitzgerald, for whom the theatre is named.

After the visit Jane was very pleased to have been to the theatre. Its most recent show was Kasey Chambers and her husband, so the lady who showed us around was very pleased to see some more Australians. She and her surfing boyfriend (they met in Hawaii) are keen to visit Australia. She showed us the bricks signed by famous people, gave us printed Google directions to the bookstore, and told us the Keillors had moved into their big new house in the 200 block on Summit, which is on a bluff overlooking the river and the town of St Paul.

19 July 2009

**WE ALSO HEARD FROM: Rose Mitchell** (thanks for the enjoyable letter).



Catharine Mary Murnane  
31 May 1937 - 19 February 2009

Memorial Service  
Cordell Chapel  
Fawcett Crematorium  
26 February 2009

