

splotch

September 2002

First Issue

WRITHING IN THE SAND

Oh no... Not the Bore Worms

Whew... that was a close call, a *damned* close call. I back-burnered fanzine fandom for "just a little while" and I very nearly wound up back in the gafia that ripped me in the late 1970s and 1980s.

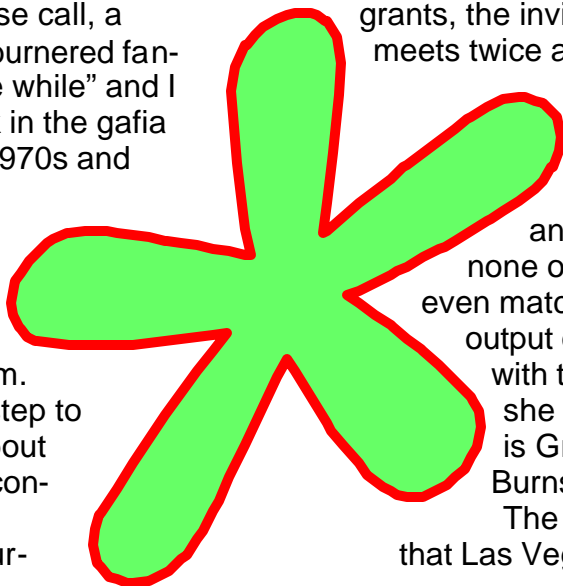
It crept over me like a gradual paralysis. I pretty much stopped publishing and writing fanzines and then I stopped reading them. From there it was a short step to seldom, if ever, thinking about fandom or anything much connected with it.

Now, you might ask your-

self how I could be co-host of Las Vegrants, the invitation fanzine fan club that meets twice a month here at Toner Hall and not be awash in fanatic.

That's a good question which has a two-part answer. The first part is that none of the other Vegrants has even matched my meager fannish output over the last 18 months with the possible exception of she who, in light-hearted times is Gracie Allen to my George Burns, Joyce.

The other part of the answer is that Las Vegrants didn't suck me back



Splotch #1, September 2002, is brought to you by its writer and editor Arnie Katz (330 S. Decatur Blvd., PMB 152, Las Vegas, NV 89107). It is as available as an aging streetwalker at the end of a cold, "no sale" night. Letters (email: crossfire@lvcm.com) are very much desired as are fanzines in trade. Member: fwa. Supporter: AFAL.

Corflu Blackjack in '04!

Don't sing it... bring it. If you don't like me... bite me. — Rick Steiner

into fanzine fandom (or any other portion of All Known Fandom), because *the topic almost never came up at the get-togethers.*

Dave Van Arnam, friend and Fanoclasts lately deceased, used the same excuse to explain how he could visit the Nunnery several times weekly during its fannish heyday and never tumble to the fact that Ellington, Donaho and the rest were active fans even though Dave had already had ample contact with fandom back in Florida. The difference in the two situation is that Dave never detected the existence of fanac that was there, while with the Vegrants, there was scarcely any to detect. The meetings stayed good, social fun, but their fannish content dropped off the low end of the scale.

And then, when I could just glimpse those beckoning Glades of Gafia rapidly approaching over the horizon, everything changed. Suddenly, almost without warning, I started to feel like bestirring myself to renewed activity.

This renewed compulsion is rooted in the friendships I have made here over closing in on 40 years. One advantage of making so many mistakes in life is that I mostly know how to avoid making the same one a second time.

The realization that I would lose all those relationships made me think. And even though there are a few fans I'd happily forget, there are also quite a few I'd miss terribly.

Maybe it was the Westercon that threw the invisible switch that turned on my fanning impulses. I went as a show of fannish solidarity, because Westercon picked Robert Lichtman as Fan Guest of Honor and Ross Chamberlain as Art Guest of Honor.

Spending the weekend with a few old friends like Lenny Bailes and some of more recent (but nonetheless valued) vintage like Ken and Aileen Forman and Ben and Cathy Wilson reminded me of how much I stood to lose if the drift away from fandom continued.

The Westercon had an energizing effect on many other Vegrants, too. You'll see the results of that in the form of a new group fan-

zines soon enough, but meanwhile I'm also starting **Splotch**.

Right now, I figure it'll be monthly. I like to publish as frequently as possible, to reinforce continuity and heighten the effect of momentum. but there are limiting considerations. Work doesn't leave as much time for hobbies as I'd like and, besides, I don't think I've got enough to say to fill up a weekly fanzine. I sit in front of a computer and pound keys for 12-15 hours a day, not exactly compelling subject matter.

I'm also aware that a good deal of my work focuses on things that don't interest a lot of my friends. That means I probably won't write much about professional wrestling, except as it brings up things that would possibly interest even those benighted souls who don't yet realize that Brock Lesnar is The Next Big Thing.

On the other hand, some of my wrestling friends are pretty articulate and hopefully will make their presence felt in the letter column. (This paragraph is in lieu of an engraved invitation to those less familiar with fanzines to email a few comments after you've read an issue.)

What's a Splotch?

In some ways, **Splotch** is the antithesis of my last major fanzine *Jackpot!* They are similar in that I expect to write everything but the letters — that's *your* job — but differ in all other aspects about as much as you can expect given that the same editor/writer is guilty of both.

Jackpot! was lavish, fancy, experimental, formal and not a bit fannish. Except that the choice of subjects reflected my weird lifestyle, it was not very personal and certainly not intimate.

Although *Jackpot!* got an absolutely tremendous reception, it didn't altogether satisfy me. I publish for my friends and, with a few conspicuous exceptions, few of my closest one took much notice of what I was doing.

Jackpot! was, in part, my attempt to show that I could produce a first-rate fanzine

Unless a Publishing Giant flashback overwhelms me, **Spotch** is likely to be informal, graphically simple, personal and maybe a little fannish. (I'm saving most of that energy for *Crazy from the Heat* and contribution to zines like *Smokin' Rockets*, *Hairy Eyeball* and *Crifanac*.

You won't have to be a fanzine fandom trivia expert to decipher most of the allusions, but I won't shy away from talk about fandom when the mood strikes.

The Westercon FAPA Party

Speaking of the Fantasy Amateur Press Association (FAPA), a group that must be questioned for again electing me its president this year, as I was earlier in this issue, I attended one of the liveliest FAPA gatherings I can ever recall at Westercon this year. A good turn out of former, current and future FAPAns made the most of the fanzine lounge that Marty Cantor and Milt Stevens put together and most stayed longer and had a better time than they probably expected.

In a sense, it was surprising that I was even *at* Westercon in the first place to partake in all that FAPA sociability. I'm not much enamored of All Known Fandom, because they remind me uncomfortably of the Mundanes I thought I'd avoided by joining fandom, so I generally don't go places where they are likely to predominate.

That means large conventions, like worldcons and Westercons, are pretty far down the list of locations at which you are likely to find me. Life is a matter of timely exceptions and I decided to make one when I discovered that Robert Lichtman and Ross Chamberlain were among the convention's honorees..

That showed such brilliant insight and good sense — qualities I had last noticed when Westercon made *me* Fan Guest of Honor — that the desire to be with my friends during their weekend of triumph overcame reservations about being a mote in fandom's eye.

Ken and Aileen Forman and Ben and Cathy Wilson nurtured this feeling in a vari-

ety of ways. So it was that Joyce and I found ourselves in a car with Ben at the wheel zooming in the general direction of Shangri-LA and the 2002 Westercon.

Once in the belly of the beast, I found it had swallowed a small but significant number of people I very much wanted to see again and even a few people well worth meeting for the first time. I can't say that I felt a palpable connection to more than a few dozen of the hundred who roamed the soon-to-be-demolished hotel, but I've always favored quality over quantity. I never ran out of people to chat with, especially since there were so many current, past and honorary Vegnants, and that's more than enough to satisfy me.

The FAPA party on Friday night may well have been the surprise hit of the weekend for most of the fanzine fans in attendance. It just sort of caught fire.

You never know what's going to ignite a party like that. In this case it was Ken Forman strolling up to me with a complete annotated FAPA membership list in hand. This document, which I believe was compiled (or at least updated) by Milt Stevens, listed all the FAPA memberships since our group's beginning in chronological order.

"Read me a couple of names," I said to the Mainspring. He did.

Instant fascination. I wanted to hear more names out of the past. I figured that other people might enjoy this trip down memory lane, too, so Ken and I set up in one of the spacious seating areas.

Soon, we had the likes of Art Widner, Robert Lichtman and Len & June Moffatt with us as Ken read each name from the sacred list. He'd read a name and then one or more of us would try to place the individual, detail his fan accomplishments and personal deficiencies.

This may not sound like much, but it kept the majority of attending FAPAns happily occupied for at least two hours. As we moved through fanhistory, survivors of each period would take the lead in identifications. They were still going strong when I withdrew from

the circle to give others a crack at the 1980s and 1990s.

Beyond the fact that it kept so many reasonably entertained, the romp through the all-time roster had its instructive side, too. It proved that FAPA is truly forever. You cannot pass through this organization, whether you are a “top 10” Egoboo Poll finisher or someone who goes three mailings and out, without leaving some kind of mark on the FAPA consciousness. Sometimes it’s a positive impression (Dean Grennell, Norm Stanley, Bob Leman) and sometimes negative (Edgar Martin), but there is always some kind of after-image that lingers decades after the FAPA member in question is long gone and forgotten..

The party also got a lot of my Vegrants friends talking about fanzines and similar stuff. We egged each other on and embarked on our already mentioned joint effort soon after we left the Los Angeles gathering.

Remembering Fans Who’ve Passed

The Westercon offered two very different examples of how fans remember, and keep faith with, those who have gone on ahead to scout out The Enhanced Convention (or, in some cases, the Netherregional).

Thursday is meeting night for the Los Angeles Science Fantasy Society so it seemed natural to devote part of Thursday evening at Westercon to a LASFS meeting dedicated to the memory of Bruce Pelz.

Like a lot of other fans who had feelings for Bruce, nothing would prevent me from going to that open meeting to participate in the memorial. Bruce always treated me well, right from my neofan days, and his varied fannish accomplishments certainly merited a maximum effort.

There is no question that (most) LASFS hearts were in the right place, but the same could not be said for their brains. Seldom have I witnessed a grubbier, more ill-conceived, graceless event than this. Perhaps its only virtue was to show the rest of fandom how much of the group’s brainpower went to the grave with Bruce.

The LASFS meeting which preceded the memorial was wretched with shocking examples of juvenile, inappropriate. There were laudatory exceptions, of course, but the inability of too many members to control themselves or keep their repetitive, dumbass comments in check for this one special night, was downright shameful. The audience mostly seemed embarrassed to be there, which raised my opinion of them quite a bit.

Next came a big build up for one of the projects that claimed Bruce’s attention during his last few months of life, the Pillar of the LASFS Award. Perhaps “award” is a hasty word, because, in keeping with current LASFS practice, this honor is purchasable for \$4,000.. For that amount, you get your name on a plaque nailed to a load-bearing pillar in the LASFS clubhouse.

The practice of selling honors as a fundraising method is well established in general society, but I’d always hoped fandom could stick with the merit system.

Silly, idealistic ole me.

In any case, the floor-hoggers expressed what sounded like a touching and noble sentiment, a desire to make Bruce Pelz the first name to go on that plaque as a Pillar of the LASFS.

“An excellent idea,” I whispered to Joyce. “Except for maybe Forry Ackerman, no one did as much for LASFS over as long a period as Bruce Pelz.”

Then they dropped the other shoe. They wanted to *raise* the money through an auction and *buy* Bruce his rightful place on that plaque.

Some groups might have simply designated Bruce as the first Pillar of the LASFS, thrown in Forry and Bjo, and gotten the whole thing off to a fine start. If you’re buying your place in LASFS history, next to those three fans isn’t a bad place to be. Still, I told myself that we must respect the quaint customs of the locals, however counter to the Spirit of Trufandom. It was, literally, their funeral.

Imagine my surprise, a feeling shared by hundreds of others from my observation,

when they announced that that auction would begin immediately. Then they sold a bunch of stuff that had little connection with Bruce or even fandom.

Truthfully, auctioning off copies of *The Enchanted Duplicator* and *A Sense of FAPA* wouldn't have made it less offensive.

I heard several fans advance the justification for the auction that Bruce loved raising money. "He would've wanted it that way," they told me, with a lot more confidence than I'd have guessing the wishes of someone not able to make them known.

I don't think there's any recorded instance of Bruce Pelz auctioning anything at anyone else's memorial service, so at a guess, that's probably how he felt about the intrusion of crass commerce on what should be a human and sensitive moment.

There's a time and place for everything and a little good taste would've worked wonders here. EE Evans was a child molester, but that wouldn't be a justification for violating one at his memorial service. If I predecease her, I don't think Joyce is going to decorate my funeral with bebies of nude large-breasted women, no matter how much I liked them at this moment.

After the auction sucked the life out of the room came what seemed like a not-very-well prepared memorial for Bruce. They opened a mic and let people line up and speak their bit about Bruce. One or two, most notably Westercon Pro Guest of Honor Harry Turtle-dove, pretty well, but more people wanted to speak than had anything to say about the colossus of three decades of LASFS.

The Saturday evening party in memory of Bill Rotsler, held in the Fanzine Lounge, struck a very different note. Some of the people who knew him and his work got together and swapped stories about one of fandom's genuine larger-than-life characters,

The anecdotes ran the gamut and included Bill Warren's emotional account of Rotsler's last days. It wasn't only the account that was emotional. When I walked out of the Fanzine Lounge, I had tears standing in my eyes.

My Weekend in Celebrityville

I went to a convention of a very different sort in August, the Classic Games Expo. Started as an Atari-oriented event five years ago, it has blossomed into a 1,200-person event that brings together fans of classic video and computer games and the pioneers of that hobby.

I spent about 20 years in the games field and did enough that they put me (and Bill Kunkel and Joyce) into the Hall of Fame a couple of years ago and have asked me to speak on the program each year. If the organizers — John Hardy, Sean Kelly and Joe Santulli — want to get rid of me but are too polite to show me the door, this is not the way. I always enjoy their convention very much and am likely to keep returning as long as they are willing to make such a fuss over me.

The thing about the Classic Games Expo that would probably surprise you most is the age of the participants. Although the pioneers are, like me, in their 50's, most of the fans are 30's and younger with a lot of 20's and teens. In other words, people who did not personally experience the early years of computer and video gaming are now caught up in the Classic Games hobby.

Joyce, Bill and I constituted a Sunday panel on Collecting Games and Game Memorabilia. Until recently, most classic game fans were content collectors. They tried to acquire the games and the systems needed to play them. They collectors were, first and foremost, players. They searched for the game in order to play them.

Now, an array of software-based video game system emulators gives classic gamers access to just about all the titles they crave right on their computer.

The computer has had the same effect on game content collecting as the CD has had on pop music collecting. When you can buy a CD box with every recording, including every radio and TV performance, of Hank Williams, the days of haunting the used record stores for Bocephus songs is pretty much over.

Electronic game collecting is now veering away from its preoccupation with the games to an interest in artifacts from the Classic Game era.

This parallels a similar movement that is rapidly changing another of my interests, old time radio. Collecting the shows has been the big thing, but now MP3 has revolutionized the hobby. Fans used to paying \$3-\$5 per show with extremely limited availability can now buy 450 episodes of *Great Gildersleeve* or 650+ installments of *Jack Benny* for under \$20! Suddenly, the typical old time radio fan will have most, if not all, the shows they have ever wanted for a fraction of the prices they previously paid.

Our panel, superbly supported by Laurie Kunkel (who picked out many items and helped work the crowd), discussed the general concepts of collecting and showed a few of the many little treasures that we accumulated as a result of our journalistic activities in the field.

We kept showing the audience unbelievable stuff that many did not know existed and they got pretty damn excited. We displayed a safari jacket from a 1981 Activision party, vintage hand-held mini-arcades, an Accolade Sword-in-the-Stone paperweight and a Spectrum Holobyte slider puzzle.

The lively interest in collectibles has led the four of us to start a new business to address this market. I'll have more about this next time, but I'm pretty enthusiastic about this partial return to the scene of one of my greatest professional successes.

Carry Ye Back to Glitter City

One of the most exciting things to come out of the resurgence of fannish interest in Las Vegas is the possibility of Ken and Aileen Forman and Ben and Cathy Wilson to spearhead a bid for the 2004 Corflu. If fanzine fandom gives the approval, then my absolutely favorite fan convention will return to my hometown in the early Spring of that year.

I've longed hoped that some of the other Vegrants would step forward with an effort to

bring Corflu back to Las Vegas, where Corflu Vegas was such a success. The Wilson-Forman bid seems just about ideal. Their leadership promises a con that won't just be a rerun of the one Joyce and I chaired a decade earlier, yet they'll be able to draw on our experience and that of other Vegrants.

I hope the rest of you folks like the idea of a Vegas Corflu in 2004 as much as we do. We'd love to welcome all of you for another wild weekend in the Sodom of the Southwest. More specifically, Joyce and I would love the chance to welcome all of you to our home for the pre-con party on Thursday evening as the springboard into the delights of the convention itself.

State of the Art

As one of the pioneers of electronic fanzine publishing, I've watched the development of digital publishing in its three major forms — electronic fanzines, web sites and listservs — with consistent interest even during the period when I hardly tracked fandom at all.

The biggest surprise to me is not the rapid spread of digital fandom, but the tenacity of the traditional hard copy fanzine. The high cost of materials and the hellacious postage couldn't have done more to discourage publication of paper fanzines if it was a conspiracy, yet *Trap Door's* annoying account shows a goodly number of fanzines came out in 2001.

I love the print fanzine a lot, but it has become increasingly impractical to do one of any size and frequency. I know that the low cost of doing such a fanzine is probably the difference between us doing *Crazy from the Heat* or not. No one around here wants to pay for 250-300 copies of a 40-60-page paper fanzine nor does anyone want the dull work of administering a subscription list to defray even a small portion of that expense.

CftH's success and continuity hinge on many factors, but one of them *isn't* cost. We plan to run perhaps 90 copies and won't mail more than a handful individually. That means an issue will "cost" — this doesn't

count the sweat equity of massed fan-power — under \$100. If we ran 300 copies and mailed 250, the cost would be over three times higher!

The Repository of Fandom

When Donald A. Wolheim founded the Fantasy Amateur Press Association in the late 1930s, part of the rationale was that the organization would provide a way to distribute fanzines to what amounted to all of fanzine fandom.

The whole printed fanzine field had collapsed under its own weight and Wolheim believed that fans had learned that it was fruitless to pursue subscriptions. He thought FAPA could rid fandom of the whole filthy business. He felt that FAPA, essentially a fanzine trading club with a central mailer could replace sending out copies separately to each recipient's address.

DAW had no way to foresee the escalating costs that turned doing a print fanzine from cheap entertainment to a costly, once-in-a-while activity. Printed fanzines remain surprisingly plentiful, but few are both large *and* frequent.

Electronic distribution is fanzine fandom's answer to spiraling postage and paper costs. We are currently in the midst of a shift from print to digital fanzine publishing.

And isn't it ironic that FAPA may represent the last stand of the classic printed fanzine? I've put hard copies of all my electronic fanzines into the mailings for some years. I did it partly to reach Internet holdouts, but the permanence of FAPA also prompted the decision.

FAPA mailings endure. They pile up in dozens of collections and only a handful of recipients break them into component parts or trash them altogether. Therefore, it's likely that FAPA mailings will migrate into larger, institutional collections which will then preserve it all for posterity.

Despite the efforts of the Post Office to discourage contact with other countries through exorbitant foreign postal rates, FAPA remains a relatively cheap way to

send a regular fanzine to a sizable batch of fanzine fans.

These factors may induce those who feel an allegiance to the waning printed fanzine to gravitate to FAPA as the best compromise between an expensive genzine and going full-tilt digital.

Someday, and that day is probably not too far off, FAPA (and possibly a few other apas) may host the last 50-65 important print fanzine publishers. Who knows, the waitlist may even make a brief return as the last of their breed huddle together in front of the sputtering fire.

A Katz By Any Other Name

I've always loved the idea of nicknames. I feel they add a dash of color to a world in which given and family names are so often duplicated.

He was just Anthony Bernardi, nondescript local Vegas fan until Bill Kunkel renamed him "Woody." Now he's known from coast to coast as Woody Bernardi, the lovable screw up. (You can put a ribbon around something, but it still is what it is.)

Kunkel, too, for that matter has gradually acquired a nickname, "Potshot." It started as the name of a tiny fanzine he did for a sim baseball league we had back in New York in the 1980s. Then he began signing his cartoons "Potshot" about the same time as he became one of the few Art Guys in Pro Wrestling Fandom. Now he's Bill "Potshot" Kunkel," easily distinguished from the late American League umpire and pitcher as well as from his nephew Bill Kunkel who sometimes draws comic books. (He goes by "Will Kunkel.")

It was I who dubbed Ken Forman The Mainspring and gave rich brown the nom-de-fanac of "Dr. Gafia." I enjoyed making these small contributions and very pleased that the recipients liked them enough to perpetuate them.

I try not to overreach and, therefore, haven't bestowed as many duds as sportscaster Chris Berman. I very much doubt if anyone would praise a nickname record lit-

tered with non-starters like John “Bleed Till It” Hertz, Rob “Not the Singers” Hansen.

Until about two years, however, my nicknaming achievements did not extend to myself. My fervid mid spewed forth all manner of enticing nicknames, but none stuck tome.

When I started writing about pro wrestling for *ProWrestlingDaily.com*, I began to come in contact with a lot of young wrestlers and valet/managers who sported some pretty impressive nicknames.

I’d never thought of “Arnie Katz” as a drab name before. A clunky name? Yes. The name (“Arnold”) of the pig in *Green Acres*? Yes,

But it didn’t strike me as ho-hum, exactly, until I found myself with buddies with names like Sexyboy Bobby Storm, Slyk Wagner Brown and Dr. Heresy. I know an Uptown Frankie Capone and a Downtown Bobo Brown.

So I decided I needed a nickname, a spot of additional color. I didn’t want to pilfer something already in use, like the clods who insist on referring to themselves as The Game, The Nature Boy or The Brahma Bull, sobriquets already appropriated by actual wrestlers.

I write a daily column for *PWD*, so one day I just started identifying myself as “The Kingfish Arnie Katz” in the brief introduction that precedes my daily dose of ring wisdom.

It’s an *homage* to one of my favorite characters in old-time radio, George “Kingfish” Stevens of the Mystic Knights of the Sea Lodge on *Amos ’n’ Andy*. (It was also a little bit for Huey Long, because I admire any man who

had Blaze Starr as his mistress.)

This nickname succeeded beyond my wildest dreams. It didn’t take long before people started to write to me, “Dear Kingfish” and a less imaginative fan began signing his letter “Catfish.” Now everyone in wrestling calls me The Kingfish.

When I decided to answer fanzine fandom’s siren call once more, I had to decide whether to extend this new moniker to my personal fannish resurgence.

I ultimately decided on the path of least resistance, benign neglect. I doubt my old fan friends will suddenly start calling me “Kingfish” and my wrestling friends are equally unlikely to stop.

Hey, maybe I could set up one of those telephone polls they’re always taking under the flimsiest of pretexts. You know: “Democrats should be drawn and quartered... yes or no?” Maybe I could make enough, at 99 cents a call or whatever, to buy one of those swell Pillar of the LASFS things.

That feels like enough for this first issue. I hope you’re as happy to see a new Katzine as I am to be producing one. I also hope you will express your interest in the concrete form of a letter of comment.

I’ll be sitting at the screen, my brain slowly frying in the digital glow, until *your* precious and unique email pops onto the queue.

— Arnie Katz
9/4/02

