

# I Remember Me and Other Narratives

Walt Willis articles and essays from *Mimosa*



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edited by Rich Lynch

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# I Remember Him

I remember the exact moment when I met Walter Alexander Willis. It was on September 5<sup>th</sup>, 1992 at MagiCon, the 50<sup>th</sup> World Science Fiction Convention. More precisely, it was in the aftermath of the Hugo Awards ceremony that evening where *Mimosa*, the little publication I co-edited with my wife Nicki back then, had won the ‘Best Fanzine’ Hugo. All the award winners had congregated, along with the convention’s guests, in a backstage lounge area prior to us all departing for various parties and meet-ups that evening. And that’s where I found Walt. He was Magicon’s Fan Guest of Honor, and until then our convention schedules had not meshed to the point where I could have a chance to finally meet him. I recall that we sat next to each other on a couch for 10 minutes or so, though at that point I was still so stunned by winning a Hugo (and the way it happened, but let’s not go into that) that I cannot remember a single thing we talked about. One of my friends took a photo of the two of us but after all these years I can no longer locate it. And maybe that’s for the best – I remember that I had an open-mouth look on my face that made it seem like I was trying to cough up a hairball.

I also recall the moment (though not nearly so precisely) that I *first* met Walt Willis. It happened a bit more than five years earlier, when I found a postcard in our mailbox from him that commented on the second issue of *Mimosa*. Walt had the deserved reputation for being perhaps the best writer that science fiction fandom has ever produced (if that’s the right word) but he was equally adept at providing egoboo to fledgling fan publishers (as Nicki and I were back then) in the form of perceptive and usually entertaining letters of comment on fanzines he had received in the mail. The one he sent in response to *Mimosa 2* led off with a witty remark about a Bob Tucker article in that issue but also made grand use of what very limited space was left on the card to colorfully describe “the ultimate convention hotel” that he and his friend Chuck Harris had discovered in Greenore, on the shore of the Irish Sea:

Set in beautiful countryside, it had a railway station and a boat dock actually in the hotel, but was completely deserted. It seemed it had been constructed towards the end of the great railway boom for a new Irish Sea crossing (Fleetwood/Greenore) which never took off, leaving a newly built hotel high and dry. Ireland is full of such ruined hopes.

You won’t find those words in the *Mimosa 3* lettercol, however, because in my infinite lack of wisdom (and I hasten to add that Nicki had nothing to do with it) I had edited Walt’s postcard down to only the specific comment about the Tucker article. It was obviously the wrong thing to do and I now feel horrified about it, and I can only say that my abilities as a fanzine editor did improve over the final 27 issues of the run. I am truly grateful that Walt didn’t immediately give up on us after that slight.

But this fanzine is about Walt, not me. After publishing ten issues of *Mimosa*, Nicki and I finally felt confident enough to ask Walt to write us an essay, but what resulted was a lot more than that – instead of a single piece, Walt contributed a series of 12 historical articles which ran starting in the 11<sup>th</sup> and continuing through the 22<sup>nd</sup> issues. Two of them are reprints of sections of fabulous trip reports and other essays that Walt wrote during the 1950s but the rest are a different kind of trip report – an annotated guided tour through his correspondence files from that period. Those

ten articles he titled “I Remember Me”, and they were a continuation of a series of that same title that had been collected and published 14 years earlier in the mammoth and now legendary 28<sup>th</sup> issue of the fanzine *Warhoon*, which contains more than 600 pages of vintage Willis writings over the decades of his involvement in science fiction fandom. *Warhoon*’s editor, Richard Bergeron, had described “I Remember Me” as “...a revelation of high fannish secrets, low fannish secrets, gossip, eavesdroppings, skeletons, skeleton keys, opened letters, and glimpses into Machiavellian machinations...” and the resumption of the series in pages of *Mimosa* was more of the same. And with that, I am happy to now collect all of Walt’s *Mimosa* articles under one cover for current fans and future historians to marvel over.

And marvel you will. There are many famous writers and personalities both within and outside the science fiction genre – Robert Bloch, Horace Gold, Harlan Ellison, Robert Conquest, John Brunner, Damon Knight, and Eric Frank Russell to name just a few – who appear in this continuation of “I Remember Me” via their letters to Walt and his return correspondence. The excerpt from the postcard I reprinted above is a representative sample of the quality of writing you will find in these articles. I had an enjoyable time bringing this collection together. I hope you’ll have an enjoyable time reading it.

Rich Lynch  
Gaithersburg, Maryland, U.S.A.  
February 2021

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#### **A note to readers (and historians):**

For ease in comprehension, I’ve made the following editorial decisions concerning text appearance. As you’d expect, much of these “I Remember Me” articles are excerpted passages from correspondence. Those mostly have been indented (for clarity) and in all cases I have used the ‘Calibri’ font for them – blue in color for letters to Walt and green in color for correspondence that Walt himself wrote. Once in a while there will be an editorial annotation by me (also for clarity) and these are violet in color and delineated by curly brackets. I’ve kept Walt’s framing text for each article in the ‘Times New Roman’ font, and black in color. My ‘Editorial Afterword’ again use this same ‘Times New Roman’ font (but, for easier reading, black in color instead of purple). Readers’ comments reprinted from the *Mimosa* lettercol are in ‘Calibri’ and brown in color. (Apologies to anybody who is color-challenged, but there didn’t seem to be any other reasonable way to do it.)

And finally: I’ve been asked to include an acknowledgement that the terms ‘World Science Fiction Convention’, ‘Worldcon’, and ‘Hugo Award’, as used in my essay above and elsewhere in this fanzine, are service marks of the World Science Fiction Society, an unincorporated literary society.

RL

# I Remember Me

(from *Mimosa* 11, published in December 1991)

I remember 1953, but dimly. That was the year after I went to America for the first time, in a trip that proved to be the precursor of TAFF, but all I could say about that is in the report I wrote, which has taken the place of actual memories. The only original document that has survived from 1953 is the following letter from Robert Bloch, which I obviously thought worth preserving. I still do, and I reproduce it here in the hope that it will be as much help to you as it was to me. It's on the note paper of the Gustav Marx advertising agency in Milwaukee, where Bloch worked before he went to Hollywood. There's no date on it, but it obviously originates from early 1952 or late 1951...

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Your apologies and explanations are accepted but are entirely unnecessary.

So are your fears about the Convention.

Perhaps I had better explain a few things to you about conventions. The first explanation is that I am a timid and retiring soul. I go through agonies every time I am called upon to make a speech. So I never go to conventions unless I am sure they are going to let me speak.

This is not as paradoxical as it may sound, paradoxical as it may seem. It's not even doxical.

You see, Conventions are filled with, roughly, two kinds of people – and for the sake of argument we will temporarily classify fans as people, though I have my doubts and even some anatomical research to prove otherwise.

There's Class A (the type who carries a ray gun and drops bags of hot water out of hotel windows) and Class B (the type that watches this activity and writes it up for fan magazines, meanwhile commenting on the horror of it all).

Class A has a lot of fun at the Con, and Class B has a lot of fun gloating about it afterward.

Now this puts me on the spot. By temperament I'm a Class B, but I don't have a fan magazine, and by profession I must diplomatically temper my remarks; not hypocritically, but merely through courtesy.

And I cannot be Class A, because I'm a pro and too many people are watching. Also it doesn't express the true me, because there are laws and stuff. And also, in some hotels, not enough hot water.

But I'm on the spot, as I say, because I'm a pro, and pros are expected to do something besides play poker and drink and talk to other pros.

So I figure the easiest thing to do is make a speech. You make a speech, people remember you did something, and your duties are automatically fulfilled – anything else you occupy your time with during a Con is forgotten as long as you've spoken. It's official, then.

Now, how can I make a speech, being shy?

Well, I haven't any trouble writing speeches. So that part is simple. Same goes for you.

And when it comes to delivery... here's the gimmick... I merely PRETEND I AM READING SOMEONE ELSE'S STUFF.

I go into their character and let fly.

I commend this viewpoint to you.

I might also point out that from what I have seen, you won't be facing any terrific elocutionary competition. Some of them are pretty long, and some are pretty loud, but they're all amateurs.

And the crowd is on YOUR side. You have a reputation as a wit (what with stealing my stuff, that is) and so anything you say will be automatically accepted as funny. And if you slap it to them, they'll thereafter let you alone to be yourself during the remainder of the Convention.

So have no fears. My only additional advice is this – avoid subtlety. The spoken word is not the written word, and the *mot juste* is for the small audience. When you face them en masse the effects must be broad and burlesqued.

Enough of advice. I am looking forward to seeing you at the Con... I will bring my wife, and she has never seen a live Irishman in person, but I anticipate no great adverse reaction. We will have to get together. I have no idea how I'm going to recognise you, but imagine you'll be the one between Lee Hoffman and Shelby Vick. (There is some remark about Christ being between two thieves which I could work in here, but won't.)

As for me, I am short, fat, fair-haired, and walk with a pronounced stoop, named Tucker. And I shall be walking faster in anticipation of our meeting.

I'd say hello to Madeleine, but since I am fairly confident that she reads your letters to you aloud, that is unnecessary.

Hoping you are the same...

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The speechifying, such as it was, went off pretty well. I remember defending crudzines, on the grounds that what is worth doing is worth doing badly. Years later I found that this proposition should have been attributed to G.K. Chesterton, and welcome this opportunity to apologise for the unconscious plagiarism.

Altogether, I was fairly pleased with how the trip had gone, and plunged right into a report. A large section containing the report of the convention was sent off within a few weeks, and I started on the second half, which contained a report of the cross-country trip by car to Los Angeles, via Utah, with the Ackermans, Rog Phillips and Mari Wolf, and back to New York via Kansas (Manly Banister), Florida (Shelby Vick), and Georgia (Lee Hoffman). Lee Hoffman wanted to split the con report between two issues of *Quandry*, but I pleaded with her to keep it together, and she published it as a double issue of *Quandry*. That must have been towards the

end of 1952. A piece about being back in Ireland had already been published in Shelby Vick's *Confusion*, and the first two installments of the postcon travelogue appeared in the issues of *Confusion* dated May 1953 and February 1954. Meanwhile, Lee Hoffman had bought a horse, Kehli, and entrusted the future of *Q* to local fan Charles Wells. This development was noted in the Oblique House Christmas Card for 1953...

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There is a knock at the door.

BOB SHAW: I hope that's Little Mother with the samovar. Who's there?

VOICE: An Agent of the Galactic Federation, with tea.

BOB: It's Madeleine all right. Open the door, someone.

Enter MADELEINE with a tray. As they sit drinking their tea, the sweet sound of childish voices raised in song is wafted through the open window.

WALT: Do you feel a waft from that window?

JAMES WHITE: Yes, it almost sounds like childish voices raised in plaintive sound.

WALT, looking out: So it is. Why, it's Seventh Fandom. Listen.

CHILDISH VOICES:

Good King Charles Wells looked out.

He surely was a grand homme.

(JAMES: This must be a French window.)

He watched Lee Hoffman gallop past and founded Seventh Fandom.

(BOB: Has anyone here seen Kehli?)

Hari Silverberg has said

That cycles run in fandom.

But surely *Q*'s one isn't dead

That cycle was a tandem.

WALT, pleased: Why, I think they want me to accompany them on The Harp.

BOB: Are you going to?

WALT: Yes, in the new *Opsla!*. Let's all try to be Big Wheels in this new cycle.

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My correspondence file for 1953 is thick, but largely taken up with explanations for not answering letters. These were of a varied and picturesque nature, like the belated reply to a long letter from Vernon McCain...

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I'd just finished stapling *Hyphen* and *Slant* last February and was reading the things when a wave of nausea and weakness swept over me. Ghod, I thought, they can't be as bad as all that, and I started to send a few out, starting with Zimmerman this time instead of Ackerman by way of redeeming the balance in favour of the unfortunates at the end of the alphabet. I'd got to somewhere along the 'W's when I had to go to bed. The doctor came up, gave me some sulfa pills, and went to bed himself with the same type of flu. The second doctor came up and then retired to a dugout, sending a nurse daily into the area with penicillin injections. I tried mailing out a few from my death bed. They remonstrated with me, but I told them I was thinking of my pals. A clear case of cerebral palsy. Actually, it was pneumonia, and to cut a dull story short, I was off fanac for about eight weeks.

As a matter of fact, the damned mailing isn't finished yet, because after I was able to get up I started learning to drive on my father-in-law's car so we could go down to Shannon to meet Bea Mahaffey and drive her round Ireland before taking her over to the London Convention. So altogether, I've been out of fandom since the end of February. Meanwhile, it seems that something calling itself Seventh Fandom has arisen and I'm now relegated to the status of a legend. I thought of taking up the post permanently – the work isn't hard and the hours are good – but I've got so many things I want to do yet that I think I'll postpone it for a decade or so. All I'm wondering is whether I should represent my second fannish existence as a...er...recrudescence of 6<sup>th</sup> Fandom or as a harbinger of 8<sup>th</sup> Fandom. Anyhow, look out for my reappearance on the fannish scene. You can recognise me by the reincarnation in my buttonhole.

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In 1953, I also heard from:

Eric Frank Russell, Vince Clarke, **Harlan Ellison**... "Whether you are aware of it or not, you dirty low down sneaking slob, I've been holding up my annual since February on the promise of an article from you..."

Come now Harlan, I'll have to speak to you like a Dutch Uncle. Luik Mynheer, you can't expect me to believe you've been holding an annish on account of me, especially as I didn't promise you anything definite...

...Eric Bentcliffe, Eric Frank Russell, Fred C. Brown, Charles Wells, Jim Harmon, Les Cole, James Rattigan, Joel Nydahl, Pete Campbell, Vic Waldrop, Don Cantin (Invention), Grayson & Grayson, Wrai Ballard, Ken Slater, Vernon McCain, Ethel Lindsay, Bryan Berry, Ken Potter, Bob Johnson, Dick Ryan, Henry Oden, **Groff Conklin**... "To me, the idea of a personal letter like *Quandry*, to which all friends contribute their own madness, whether or not it deals with science fiction, is genuinely delightful. Science fiction is not a be-all and end-all. People are. If a little more of this lovely intercommunicating nonsense on a strongly intelligent, imaginative, humorous, screwball base could be built up in this world, we might (I say *might*) have a little less animosity between nations and a little more peacefulness – and fun."

...Joseph Semenovitch, Harry Turner, Charles Wells, Mack Reynolds, **Dave Ish**... “I no longer worry about Harlan. We have, due to some unexplainable but binding force, become the best of friends.”

Don't you find most fms today are rather dull? I think you and I will have to do something about this. Anyway, I mean to get right back into fandom this autumn and see if I can help to keep the old 51/52 type fandom from perishing altogether. It's funny how we all went into semi-retirement at once. Lee with her horse, me with pneumonia, Max Keasler with whatever it was, and now Shelby with polio. The Golden Age seems to be withering away, but there's no reason why it shouldn't come back as long as there's some of us left. Bloch and Tucker are as keen as ever, and so are we over here.

...EJ Carnell, Ray Palmer, Pete Taylor, Hal Shapiro, Herbert Warren, International Fantasy Awards Committee, Peter Hamilton, Paul Enever, Paul Mittlebuscher, Bert Campbell, Bryan Berry, Karen Kruse, Charles Duncombe, Fred Robinson, City Lights, Don Ford, Dick Ryan, Nigel Cadell, Colin Parsons, Paul Enever, Andrew Harris, Bob Stewart, Redd Boggs, Shelby Vick, Paul Enever, Dave Cohen, Pete Taylor, Joel Nydahl, Harry Turner, Rich Elsberry, **Horace Gold**... “You were no disappointment to me. Remember that I move among writers and fans, and am used to finding poets' souls in truckdrivers' bodies and vice versa, or discovering that someone who is hilarious socially goes wooden on the typewriter and the other way around. You are one hell of a nice guy by mail and an armadillo in person. I'm the same by mail and a terrier in person. Your armor goaded me into a yelping hunt with muzzle and claws to find the chinks, and my ferreting made you pull into a tighter ball. Internally, we felt alarm and frustration and fear that we were not measuring up. Hell, we don't have to measure up: we're already there with each other.”

...Bill Morse, Lyle Kessler, Groff Conklin, Leo J. Harding, HP Sanderson, Tony Thorne, Archie Mercer, Mike Rosenblum, Pete Campbell, Terry Jeeves, EF Russell, Mike Tealby, Gregg Calkins, Bert Campbell, Robert Bloch, Forry Ackerman, FL Smith, **Walter Gillings**... “While I'm writing, I must take the opportunity to thank you, as I should have at the time, for the rather pertinent things you said, or questions you asked, in some fanzine or other, following the Convention at which I bowed myself out (?) so ungracefully”...

...LE Bartle, Maurice A. Weekly, Norman Wansborough, Dean A. Grennell, William Rotsler, Redd Boggs, Don Ford, Rory Faulkner, William F. Temple, Marie-Louise Share, Richard Eney, Kenneth G. Hall, Stuart Mackenzie, George L. Charters, Dean Grennell, Bob Kvanbeck, Ted K. Wagner, DR Smith, Don J. Nardizzi, **Addie Huddleston**... “I am very proud of my complete file of *Slant*”...

...David Rike, Sid Gale, Claude R. Hall, Julian Parr, John D. Roles, **Max Keasler**... “Rising from the grave is always such a try, but here I am. Obviously wondering whatever happened to 'Good Ole Max' (tell Madeleine she no longer has to wear black), I shall tell. I'm one of Uncle Sam's Blue Boys – yes, a sailor. I wanted to wait until I got permanent station before dipping back into channel of activity in fandom. Thanks a million for faithfully sending *Hyphen* without receiving any acknowledgement. I'm reading them now and will comment later on.”

Max!!! Am I glad to hear from you! There was me thinking you were fannishly dead, nothing more than a source of interlineations in other people's fanzines, and shedding a silent tear over your memory, while telling everyone 'but you should have been in fandom when Keasler was there' ... By the way, did you ever know I called at your frathouse in St. Louis on the day you were supposed to be back at school? I got a ticket with a six hour stop-off in St. Louis, and made my way to the address you gave me. There was no one there, so I waited a while on the porch, and then went in to look round for some fannish mail. Couldn't find any, had a wash and shave and went out again on the porch. After a while I gave up waiting, went downtown again for something to eat and went to a movie house showing burlesque queens. One of them with an Irish name wasn't bad. Look, we have a U.S. naval base here in Londonderry, just a couple of hours away. Just run along to the Admiral and tell him you want posted (as a first class mail) to Londonderry. What a fan group we could have then. It'd be bigger than when Battle Creek, Michigan, moved to California... ☀

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### **Editorial Afterword:**

There were several thoughtful letters of comment we received in praise of this first article in Walt's revived "I Remember Me" series. But it was the one from Alan Sullivan which succinctly pointed out the overall worth of Walt treating us to a leisurely stroll through his correspondence files – there is a continuing timebinding nature of fandom and by looking back it was possible to observe and even map the changes that have occurred in it over the previous four decades. Alan wrote that:

In "I Remember Me", the Robert Bloch comments on conventions and the duality of Fans (A and B) and 'Professional Detachment' is rather different from the current state of affairs. Nowadays, not only do the Type A fans have a good time, they also write about how outrageous it was, afterwards, with utmost relish. I like to read articles such as this one, because it gives you a perspective, and reminds you just how much fandom has grown and changed.

It was deliberate timing that brought Walt Willis into the pages of *Mimosa* at the end of 1991. We had wanted his article to act as a prelude for his return to the United States. MagiCon, the 1992 Worldcon, was the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Walt's epic first visit to America and it had selected him to be the Fan Guest of Honor. Walt's 1952 trip had been financed by one of the first fan funds (for him attend the Chicago Worldcon) and influenced the origination of the Trans-Atlantic Fan Fund (TAFF) two years later. That was undoubtedly one of the main reasons why MagiCon wanted him as its Fan Guest (which was actually a long-overdue honor for him), and there were several events that weekend where Walt regaled and engrossed the convention attendees with timebinding tales of his fabulous Irish Fandom of the 1950s and 1960s.

It turned out that we were able to publish another issue of *Mimosa* prior to MagiCon, so readers had a second opportunity to timebind before the convention. For that next installment, Walt revisited the fannish year of 1954 with letters from Robert Bloch and William F. Temple.

# I Remember Me

(from *Mimosa* 12, published in July 1992)

Apparently 1954 started off, in style, with a letter from Robert Bloch.

-----  
Can't think of a nicer way of starting the new year than by dropping you a line.

Actually, I have only two alternatives – getting started on a new novel or filling out my income tax. Both are unthinkable...though I fear I'll be getting round to them as soon as I've finished this note. Doing the novel is perhaps easier than the income tax: both are works of fiction, but I hope to get paid for one whereas I have to pay for the other. As you know, I am doing suspense stuff and the characters are mainly aberrated. The job I have in mind concerns an exhibitionist. This guy is so exhibitionistic that every time he goes to bed with a girl he puts a glass eye in her navel. (So help me, I'm gonna put it in the book, you'll see!)

What's all this about Chuck turning pro? I was delighted to hear about a sale, and hope he gets the bug. The more fans turn to pro writing, the less time they'll have for fanning, and that will leave the entire fan field open to us old pros to desecrate. Maybe there will be some small semblance of renaissance in 1954...but I'm afraid many newcomers haven't yet learned the secret of fanactivity which is simply this: you have to meet or correspond with people like you. It's a very personal thing, this fan business. Those who attend Cons and enjoy themselves generally are enthusiastic about the field. Those who attend and don't find congenial companions usually snipe. Those who find friendships in or thru fandom remain, as a rule; often people quit as a result of disillusionment of a very personal nature. (*Cf* Laney, *et al.*) Seems to me that the expansion of the field has tended to make it more difficult for newcomers to make firm friends; their interest, therefore, is superficial or limited to their liking of the reading matter. And in time, interest lags. It's one thing to like the stories of George O. Smith and quite another to know that gentleman and see him demonstrate the Law of Diminishing Returns, bottle in hand. But why should I tell you this? You, of all people!

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I see here a faint, almost illegible carbon, which may be a reply to this.

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Funny you should come off with that comment on fans just at the moment. It's a thing I've been thinking about ever since I read that article of Tucker's about the fans who have visited him; the one that was on the lines of Laney's "My Ghod They Might Come to My House". God, I thought if Tucker is going to get disenchanted with fans it would be the end. Theretofore I had been consoling myself with the thought that Forry Ackerman and he, who had met more fans than anyone in the world, still thought they were worth continuing to mingle with. I still thought so myself, but there'd been so many attacks on fans as a group I was wondering if maybe my own amiable view of my fellow men was leading me astray. So I

was interested in your opinion. I don't think they're just like people though. It seems to me the greatest difference between fans and people is that fans are much less average. The morons are more moronic, the drips drippier, and the nice people nicer than they are in the great wide world.

Tell me, is fan activity a sort of secret vice with you? I mean, is it an insidious temptation to which you succumb when you should be writing for money? I know that when I'm having to write something, I resort to almost any kind of subterfuge to get out of it – clean the typer, tidy the room. Do odd jobs about the house. I hate creative writing. I never, or very seldom, have 'inspiration'. I just have to force myself to sit at the typer and type. And yet, sometimes when I'm asleep or half awake, whole articles, stories, novels, plays, movies flash through my brain, each one perfectly complete. Whole sf serials swarming with complex action and characterisation spread out before me and I lie there and admire them with a sort of reverent awe. I'm sure they're there all right – occasionally I have remembered phrases and situations and used them, but at the thought of sitting down and actually writing them, I get a cold desperate feeling inside. Do you think Dianetics or Hadacol might help? I was wondering if you felt the same way about your pro stuff and if fanac was your equivalent of getting away from it all? It is with Vince Clarke, I know. Every now and then he writes pro stuff. But of course all that happens is that he comes into fandom again and starts a few more of his Projects... He gives them all names, like Operation Shamrookie (that's one that did come off, though he's never got round to writing it up – that issue of *SFN* {{ed. note: *Science Fantasy News*}} has been part mimeoed for over a year). You would like Vince. What he needs is someone who can take over his projects and finish them, as I do with Bob Shaw's. It's a pity that Chuck Harris doesn't live nearer to him. You'll like Chuck too: I guess you do already. He's one of the finest people I've ever come across in my life. A brilliant writer, too, but his form of escape from writing for publication is writing letters. I think Chuck's letters are the best body of writing in fandom, and I only wish it were possible to publish the whole lot of them. That selection in *Pamphrey* {{ed. note: *Walt's fanzine for FAPA, the Fantasy Amateur Press Association*}} was a mere fragment of the stuff I saw when I was looking through his files. He and Vince carry on a mock war off and on, on the lines of that duper correspondence I quoted. My favourite phrase ... well, you may have gathered that Vince is getting a little thin on top? Every time the word 'hair' crops up in a letter from Chuck it is followed in parenthesis by '(sorry)'. I was also tickled to notice that I am referred to in their correspondence as "Ghod". Apparently this started when Chuck was trying to get Vince to produce the *Fen Crittur Comical Book* while I was away in America in 1952, and his frequent references to my instructions gave Vince the opening to accuse him of worshipping me.

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I quoted this letter partly to give me an opportunity to explain why there was no letter from Chuck quoted in the last installment of "I Remember Me". It was simply because I was going through the general correspondence file, and Chuck of course has a file all to himself which was

not available to me at the time. It is in a bookcase in a brick hut at the end of our garden, and hemmed in by a mass of stuff left over from the remodeling of our kitchen last year which I haven't recovered enough strength to shift yet. If I manage it for the next installment, that is likely to be all Harris. Meanwhile, here is a letter in reply to one from Ashworth's Amorphous Abstracts, makers of coloured steam, suggesting a tie-up with the Fort Mudge Steam Calliope Company *{{ed. note: of Lee Hoffman}}*. I don't seem to have the original letter from Mal Ashworth, but my reply may interest those few who remember this part of the Sixth Fandom mythology.

-----

Your Reference: Yr. Ir. (undated) (No reference number)

Our Ref: Tch Tch

Dear Mr. Ashworth,

I am directed by Mr. Willis to inform you that the firm of Hoffmanothing Incorporated of which he was the agent was wound up in 1953 – the spring of that year – Miss Hoffman having caught a colt, and succumbed to gafia...

With regard to the FORT MUDGE STEAM CALLIOPE COMPANY... I am to inform you that this COMPANY continues in fool ruining order in front of Mr. Willis and as soon as he noticed it, he expressed interest in your invention. He feels that while the FORT MUDGE STEAM CALLIOPE represents the epitome of perfection to music-lovers everywhere, it is the duty of a concern as progressive as the FORT MUDGE STEAM CALLIOPE COMPANY to further any invention which may lead to the development of the steam calliope as an artform. I should be glad if you would accordingly forward samples of red, white, and blue steam for use during the playing of the National Anthem...

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But here, dated 6th February, 1954, is a letter from Bill Temple, with more contemporary relevance to us...

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Thanks for *Hyphen*, which gave me a welcome lift of spirit in these dull, cold winter days.

I'm glad most people enjoyed the Beacon Report as much as I did. But I'm not surprised to find D.R. Smith among the rare exceptions. Even before the war, in the days of *Novae Terrae* and *Tales of Wonder*, he was adept at throwing buckets of cold water over people as a reward for their hard work and self-denial in attempts to entertain him. I'm afraid he's a type. Sam Youd is of it. But there are signs lately that they may both eventually grow out of it, if very belatedly. It's only a matter of growing up.

In her recent book, *Pleasure*, Doris Langley Moore mentions the type: "Disparagement is a relief to minds that are ill at ease – a relief they may grasp at eagerly... but like any other drug, when it wears off it leaves the addict at the mercy of his bitterness. The fundamental

unhappiness of destructive people is usually transparent enough, and often very much to be pitied.

“People who are for some reason socially uneasy often think it is a mark of superiority to be hard to please. The young just emerging from adolescence are almost always hypercritical, especially on subjects where they have only recently acquired knowledge, and the uneducated do not like to show when they are impressed, in case they should commit the *faux pas* of overvaluing, which is thought to subtract more from our prestige than undervaluing. Unfortunately, any pose that is long sustained is pretty sure to become second nature...” ☀

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### **Editorial Afterword:**

Of the comments we received on this second installment of the series, the most interesting was by Lloyd Penney, who wrote:

Walt Willis' short bit is a signpost of fannish life, and a signal that our Shields of Umor have grown tarnished with time. The bit from Robert Bloch about meeting and corresponding with other fans in order to survive and enjoy fandom is spot on.

Lloyd went on to say that he had recently met Bloch for the first time at a local convention in the Toronto area and that the two of them had “a very short conversation about fanzines...later, we auctioned off a shower curtain with his autograph on it.”

For his next two articles, Walt stayed firmly entrenched in the 1950s. For *Mimosa* 13, the thread of Walt's correspondence file took us from London Circle fan club meetings with Vincent Clarke, to learning touch-typing with Chuck Harris, to James White's hospital stay. And for *Mimosa* 14, we were guided on a trip through darkest Ireland (with knife, fork, and spoon) to the tower of the Enchanted Duplicator. And during that passage, Walt gathered quotes from Eric Frank Russell, noted fuggheadedness from F. T. Laney, and was roused for a late-night phone call from Harlan Ellison.

# I Remember Me

(from *Mimosa* 13, published in January 1993)

Once again you are entering into the golden age of frequent letters from me.

Thus wrote Vince Clarke in a remark which went straight into the *Hyphen* back cover quotes. He went on to explain that he had lost his job, his boss admitting under questioning that he had given it to his own brother. Halfway through his letter, Vince touched on London Circle parties.

London fan parties are odd things in that, fandom and sf not being well known, the talk usually borders on the fantastic embroidery of some current news or set of facts (this latter commonly known as s-c-a-n-d-a-l), and Ted Tubb and Bert Campbell being two of the best extempore talkers around, the party usually hinges on their topics. The funniest party I've been to in London was at the Ratigans' old place, when Bea *{{ed. note: Bea Mahaffey}}* was here, and Ted and Bert were discussing the possibilities of founding a new religion. I shall never cease to regret not having a tape recorder for that. After laughing for three hours I had such a violent pain in my side I had to go and walk in the garden out of earshot. That was 3.30 am.

I'm getting a tape recorder this week...in bitter opposition to Dot *{{ed. note: Dorothy Ratigan}}*, who's been trying to mother me, and who still expects fans to act like normal human beings. Would I be mothered if I moved to Belfast, Madeleine?

((Madeleine commented: No. It would be more likely that she would find you two at an auction.))

On 20th January 1954, Chuck Harris reported getting his typewriter back from the repair shop, a development greeted with relief by all his friends who had been suffering from stiff necks from trying to read his backward sloping handwriting. I had quoted at him Napoleon's comment on the handwriting of Marshal Nez, "Who has been sending me maps?"

Top o' the morn from the top o' the heap, keed. A veritable frabjous day! "Dear Mr. Harris," the chit said, "the Management have decided to increase your salary." All this and a FAPA mailing too.

The typer came back on Friday, but I didn't write before, because I didn't have anything to say – which is, come to think of it, a peculiarly fuggheaded reason for not writing to you.

I did intend to spend some time stencilling that Redd Boggs thing, but I got carried away on a Ken Slater letter and didn't have enough time left. If I'm impotent or not working on Sunday, I'll do it then. I want some normal sex life this Sunday. Sublimation is all very well, but it gets tedious.

27 Jan 54. After the egoboo from Vince, I think the last two pages (of *Hyphen*) pleased me most of all. I always think you are at your very best when you're being icily rude to someone you dislike. I'm awfully glad that I always seem to be on your side.

Whaddaya mean, “no one, literally no one, will be told anything until the poll for TAFF closes”? Do you mean me????? Ghod, eighteen nicker in the kitty, and you go have an attack of scruples.

Feb 54. I lent an Ellery Queen book from the library months ago and I owe about twice its value in fines. I used to get special treatment down there, but I’ve antagonized the woman and she’ll insist on every damn farthing. She’s one of those motherly types, and got the wrong idea about me. At first, she used to save me all the new Westerns because she approved of them. (I didn’t mind because my father likes cowboys and indians.) When I kept a book out late, she would gently chide me and let me off the fine. This suited me very well. I don’t mind being polite at all, if it saves me money. But it’s all changed now. I put in a reservation card for *Sexual Behaviour of the Adult Female* and she hasn’t gotten over it yet. She told my mother, too!!! My mother isn’t very tactful and told her that, “He already has the other volume, but he couldn’t afford this one so he’s going to get it out of the library.”

Somewhere about this time an undated letter from Vince Clarke, containing some unused quotes...

I will face my fate steadfastly and go down with a smile on my face and a water pistol pumping in each hand.

– James White

Are we oneshots in some cosmic FAPA?

– WAW

Bea Mahaffey trod on these paving stones.

– James White

I’ll retire to fondle my tramcar collection.

– FAPA

Anything that can’t be done in New Orleans is impossible. In America’s Most Fascinating city it is impossible for a Science Fiction Convention to fail – if the Con Committee should drop dead to a man, the Chamber of Commerce would all hastily become fans and carry on...

– advert in *Dawn*, August 1950

Here’s a curiosity from Chuck, undated, and containing an average of about two typos per line, each corrected in ink by hand.

Haven’t heard from anyone at all since I last wrote to you. Every time this happens I start to worry. Do I stink in the nostrils of all decent fen, along with Bill Morse? Is Walt sore about the advert? Has he got pneumonia again? Did Vince finish off his part of the zine? Have I been banished to the outer wastes? Has fandom aborted again, and all my friends started to write for dirty pros?

Say something, if it’s only goodbye.

I haven't been wasting my time. I am learning to touch-type. I bought a Pitman's *Commercial Typing* and have been spending all my spare time (about 15 hours so far) in practising.

Sprague de Camp is to blame for all this. In his *SF Handbook* he advises all would-be authors to learn touch-typing. That's me, Bud.

The main trouble with learning is that there is a constant temptation to cheat. It has been a little tough for me. The family have a low sense of humour and seem to find something funny in the curtain I have invented. This is a piece of cloth with one end tied to the baseboard and the other round my neck. For some reason this seems to amuse them. Last night, I forgot about the curtain and got up to fetch my cigarettes from the mantelpiece. I nearly broke my neck. They nearly bust a gut.

As you'll have gathered, this correspondence file includes Vince Clarke as well as Chuck Harris. We were at this time sending each other carbons of our letters. Here is part of a general reply from Vince, dated 10th February, 1954.

Mike Wilson and self were at Ted Tubb's over Christmas and we had borrowed Arthur Clarke's tape recorder. About 1 am Boxing Day morning, Ted and I were sitting at the table with the recorder... it had been going rather oddly and we were testing it. Suddenly, Ted leaned forward, and in the appropriate tones, went into quite a long monolog that left me with bugged eyes and a tremendous admiration for him. I won't give it all now, but this is the beginning... quite without preparation, mind...

*"For there in fairy planets of long gone, the crystalline towers of civilisations long dust remain a mute memorial to their wanton pride. And there the sons of men do walk arrogant in heart and questing of mind, to mould amid the rotting dust, strange secrets of civilisations spent, relearn and with their new toys do hunt and kill their brother men. ... On such a ship once I served, many years ago now, Aye, young I was then... Now, withered and old and bent as a tree... Wed! Not once but thrice... and red with wine and sitting 'neath this foreign sky, this instrument of music playing softly, speaking to those who wander by..."*

And then he went into histrionics, with self playing anti-strophe. Of course, it's not the sense in the above that matters, but the realisation of the rhyme of the words: Poetry lost an asset when Ted took up sf.

I notice from a letter of mine a mention of an issue of *Hyphen* that never appeared, a 'Special Science Fiction Issue'. This imaginary issue was to be...

...partly a burlesque of the serious constructive fanzine, with for instance a scholarly deadpan analysis of something utterly trivial, and partly our usual fannish stuff in thin disguise – Chuck's "The Decline of *Astounding*" (with particular reference to James' story) and James' review of the second issue of the *Vargo Statten Magazine* (in which Chuck's first and only professional offering appeared). And partly genuine serious constructive stuff

better than the serconmags can do it. (Vince is the main hope for this, I think.) I'm expecting an anti-London Circle blast from Hamilton which should fit in nicely. Even Toto could fall into line, right down to cartoons like the Rotsler one: "We know all about him – he throws away his old prozines."

On 25th April 1954, I was reporting to Chuck on James' admission to hospital:

"After his food poisoning cleared up and they put him on the new insulin, his metabolism went haywire. Medical profession baffled. They were pumping him full of insulin but his sugar count or whatever it was still up there in the googols. It got so that every time he asked them how long it would be before he was out they'd double the previous answer. The last one would have taken him away past Easter (when he was to get engaged. He is engaged now officially and I can clear the information to you. They went down to Dublin for the ring on Easter Tuesday because it's cheaper to buy them there free of Purchase Tax and smuggle them across the border, and you're in fine fettle for the honeymoon when you get out of prison), and he was getting really worried. Then one evening, the doctor stopped as usual by his bed, and shook his head over him. Just as he was moving away, he asked the nurse idly to confirm that this patient hadn't been getting any drugs. "No," she said. "Huh," said James, "that's what you think." (He'd been getting them every other day, on the average.) The nurse clapped her hand over her mouth, and she and the MD had a hurried consultation. Next day, James was back to normal and they sent him home. Apparently there had been another patient in the ward called White, and every so often James had been getting his medicaments. Now don't go around telling people like Wilkie Conner about this, as if it was a reflection on the National Health Service. After all, he didn't have to pay for the drugs, did he? He was getting killed perfectly free of charge."

In another letter to Vince, I asked him, did he ever feel that one of his hoaxes had ever been too successful:

"Mal Ashworth, evidently prompted by my cracks about first issues, sent me an 'advance copy' of *BEM* consisting entirely of spoiled sheets, scrap and slipsheets (one of them featuring the outline of a neck tie) with a neofannish note explaining it was the best they could do. Naturally I cut a hole in the stencil of p.2 of *Hyphen 8* and inserted a violent denunciation of *BEM* as a disgrace to fandom, urging everyone to refuse to sub to it as a dreadful botch, and ran off one copy for Ashworth. Just got a bitter letter from him – he's going to run off a circular over the weekend, explaining how *his* hoax was too successful, and write to KFS *{{ed. note: Ken Slater}}*, *Orbit*, *Space Times*, and Ghod knows who else. Poor Mal, he's all worked up about the unfairness of it all. I've just been out to send him a telegram suggesting he call on Tom White and look at his copy. Heigh ho. But gosh, he should have guessed. I hadn't time to do a proper job on the stencil and there's blank space and black lines round the inserted bit." ☀

# I Remember Me

(from *Mimosa* 14, published in August 1993)

In April 1954, we published *Hyphen* 9. On 2<sup>nd</sup> May, Eric Frank Russell, as usual, returned his copy with a letter of comment:

Your MSS returned as unsuitable for publication.

After some thought, I've come to the conclusion that should have been obvious without the strain of thinking, namely that no faned can contribute more than about 50% of the success or failure of what he puts out. The other 50% is completely beyond his control because it depends upon the mood of the reader and a mess of fortuitous circumstances. You don't mind polysyllabic words, do you?

This ish of *Hyphen* may not be more than average for you. But to me it seems extraordinarily good because (a) it caught me in a mood to be humoured and (b) it came in the same post as another much inferior fanmag which I happened to read first; whereupon *Hyphen's* scintillating self-sufficiency was enormously magnified by contrast.

Anyway, I must say that I enjoyed this *Hyphen* very much and let half a dozen promags rest untouched while I read it. In fact, compared with one or two promags which shall remain unnamed, it's more value for money.

Some more items for you to use as you wish --

Here's a pathetic relic of the Pogo-Tigrina Dynasty... I'm starting a fan mag and would like you to write it for me... There's an active fanny club in Beaulieu... It's extremely hard to conceal mental uniqueness... How can anyone paint zebra crossings and still be a fan?... Why did the entire bunch get blackballed from the White Horse, answer me that? ... I suppose you know he can't cut a stencil without taking his corsets off... I'm one of the Old Guard, having started with the first ish of *Galaxy*... It costs quite a piece merely distributing my photographs... I've only just discovered that the keys are supposed to turn the ribbon reel... She's withdrawn into herself, a typical actifan's wife... I shall carefully time my entry into fandom.

This last paragraph was intended as a source for the quotes we used for the back cover of *Hyphen*. So far as I know, this lot was never used so they're available for use by any aspiring faned.

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In July 1954, Chuck Harris visited us in Belfast, a trip which he later wrote up as *Through Darkest Ireland, with Knife, Fork, and Spoon*. It gave rise to the one-shot we produced for FAPA called *WAWCRHETC*, possibly better known as *Wilde Heir*, after my own contribution, which was a satire on Francis Laney's denunciation of homosexuals in *LASF*S, with Chuck playing the role of Laney and myself as Charles Burbee. It was reprinted in *Warhoon* 28. We sent a copy directly to Burbee, together with a Fandango Fugghead Award for him to pass on to Laney. It was described in this letter we sent to Robert Bloch:

As you probably know from the headlines in the sporting sections of your newspapers, I am far too busy to engage in much fanac. At this season of the year I am perhaps better known as Yaroslav Drobny, or Ken Rosewall, and it is particularly exhausting when I happen to meet myself in the final. You have no idea of the agility required to play both sides of a tennis match. I am glad I didn't go in for the doubles.

You'll understand, then, that I have only time for the barest minimum of fanac and must confine myself to works of mercy, like giving shelter to the needy -- as required by the traditions of Oblique House. Every day, people pass by crying "Succor! Succor!" and when this happens I send out neofen with casks of Amontillado tied round their necks. (This is part of a large supply I picked up for a song the other day when, for some reason, the bottom dropped out of the Poe market.) The other day, one of them dragged in a poor wretch who called himself Chuck Harris and claimed to be a friend of yours. In spite of his exceedingly unprepossessing appearance, I felt we had to give him asylum, because he would otherwise have been torn to pieces by the enraged forces of law and decency.

Judge of my horror to find that this refugee, a renegade from the Rainham Society for the Advancement of Science Fiction and Imaginative Literature with a price on his head (he has buck teeth, which makes 24 dollars for them alone), who only escaped the Society's agents through an ultimate sacrifice by the beautiful Miss Hepzibah Snoopwhistle, and whose life was not worth a moment's purchase... (HALP!) ... Judge of my horror to find that this human derelict, once I had fed and clothed him and given him instruction in the elements of civilised behaviour, *began to try to usurp my position*. Yesterday there were five items of delivered to this house. *Every one was for Harris*. Worse still, today he brought me a letter which, with many a sly smile and unctuous hand-rubbing, he claimed to have emanated from you. Almost at once I knew it was a forgery. Admittedly, the writer had succeeded, at heaven knows what cost to the balance of his mind, in emulating your style, but he had made one laughable mistake. He had represented you as suggesting that I might reply to your letters.

You may well say "Faugh!" It is well understood between us that you will write me brilliant and witty letters every month or so by way of penance for being a vile pro and that I may print them or file them away as I think fit. Henry Kuttner, Eric Frank Russell, Damon Knight, and others of your ilk know not to expect anything more... until the end of the tennis season, at least.

But now, so that you will see that my reports about Harris are correct, I am going to allow him to use the typewriter. I wish you could see him. It would gladden Mr. Pitman's heart to see someone typing with all fingers and toes.

Chuck here. Well, what else can you expect from just a faan. I travel 400 miles to get here and, instead of introducing me to hoardes of Connemara redheads, he forces me into the attic and presents me with three gross of the *Vargo Statten* magazine to autograph *{{ed. note: which contained Chuck's one published story }}*. Instead of whooping it up in

Amelia Street, I am forced to stay home and play Laney to his Burbee. Furthermore, I spend my time washing up the dinner things instead of slaving over the promised Hot Dishes. O'Bleak House is a veritable home from home. (Although I must say that the room service is the best I've seen anywhere – I'm told that even the Tucker Hotel doesn't slit open the envelopes before handing out the mail.) Willis is pestering me to be allowed to write something else to you and if you can bear with his pathetic attempts at literacy, you may find solace in the fact that I shall be writing again after I get home.

Walt here again. Well, as you can see, Harris has left the typer without producing the works of Shakespeare. Another 49,999,999 to try.

We did a Burbee-type oneshot the other day and sent you a copy. We also sent Francis Towner Laney a 'Fugghead Certificate' for stamp collecting. We got it out of a copy of *Fandango*...you know, one of the Awards printed by Laney himself, and added a citation, 'Francis Towner Laney earns this Award by squandering his fine mind and fabulous talents on the accumulation of small pieces of paper inherently limited as a medium of literate self-expression.'

We sent it care of Burbee, with a covering letter which read as follows.

Dear Charles. Perhaps you'd send the enclosed certificate to Laney the next time you don't see him. We're not sure of his present address.

Yesterday, we mailed you 68 copies of the enclosed oneshot for the August FAPA mailing. We sent them first class with a rich assortment of stamps for which Towner would probably trade a complete file of *Acolytes*. Let's hope you get them in time.

In *Hyphen 9*, mailed about two weeks ago, we used your "Al Ashley: Elfin Edison." If the comments of the English readers are anything to go by, it hasn't lost anything over the years. However, we don't know how you feel about our reprinting your stuff without formal permission, and maybe you'd let us know if there is anything which you specifically don't want reprinted?

When *Hyphen 1* was published just over two years ago, I – Walt speaking at the moment – enclosed a note with Towner's copy to the effect that my ambition was to produce a mag that you and he might write for. I don't know whether we've done that yet or not, but the inestimable Redd Boggs tells us you enjoy *Hyphen*, and also that you were looking for a publisher, so here we are clamouring at your door. We would be proud, nay willing, to publish any material by you. Naturally, a regular column is what we would like most, but anything would be appreciated. It does not, of course, have to be aimed at British readers; we have some 200 US subscribers, fairly congruent with your old *Quandry* group. If you have any thoughts overflowing from your San Francisco report for *Skyhook*, for instance, they'd be very welcome.

As far as I remember, I never got any reply to this letter, nor reaction to the Award to Laney. I did, however, get a letter from Harlan Ellison, about a phone call he made to me, an enterprise

which was slightly handicapped by the fact that I didn't have a phone at the time. He got my father's house, which was a block away, and my sister didn't come and get me because it was raining.

To say I'm merely angry or hurt would be a gross understatement. I'm completely devastated.

You sent me "Mike Hammer at the Philcon," and I sent it out to be illustrated. Sure, it took me a year to get to it, but I was suspended with college work. Now when I have it on stencil and run off and announced as in the next issue with illos by Nasman Peterson, I pick up Mari Wolf's column and see *Space Times* has already pubbed it. I'm really in a mess with the thing, and personally I think it was both poor taste on your part and a gross injustice not to at least write and tell me what had happened, before you sent a carbon to anyone else.

I'd like a reply on this if you get the chance.

Tried to call you the other night, but they took so long I left the house where I was visiting, and the call didn't go through till noon of the next day, over fifteen hours later. Oh well...

Expectantly, Harlan.

I replied as follows.

Dear Harlan,

Come now, old Birdbath. In the first place, how do you expect me to know you wanted the MS if you didn't even acknowledge it? You wrote several times asking me to do something for you, but when I did send it there wasn't another peep out of you. In fact, you folded your fanzine, retired from fandom, and changed your address. Not that I thought all this was on account of the MS, but in the absence of any acknowledgement or mention of it in any of your blurbs except the last one, how was I to know you were going to publish it? Especially since it had been meant to be topical.

In the second place, I wrote you a postcard about six months ago asking you to send the MS back and you didn't reply to that, either.

In the third place, the thing as published in *Space Times* was at my request billed as a reprint from *SF Bulletin* *{{ed. note: Harlan's fanzine}}*. *Space Times* was running a regular series of reprints from prominent US fmz, and this was one of them. It wasn't my fault if the reprint was published before the original.

In the fourth place, *Space Times* has probably only about half a dozen Stateside subbers, and you have only about the same number in England, so I don't see where the injustice lies. The thing will be new to 95% of your readers.

I waited an hour and a half for your phone call that night and was disappointed at not being able to talk to you after all. I still am, because I don't imagine you'd have spent the whole time recriminating, but – haw – it was still good for something. Chuck Harris was staying

with me at the time. The mail had just arrived, he had got five letters and there were none for me, and he was pulling my leg about my fan status having declined. Then my sister came round with the news that there had been a phone call from a Mr. Ellison of Ohio. Thanks, pal.

All the best. Walter.

This was at a time when transatlantic phone calls were almost unheard of in fandom. My recollection is that Chuck asked me, did I often get phone calls from American fans, and I said, "Only when it's something important."

Harlan apparently didn't bear any grudge against me, because we have been on the best of terms since. I have met him twice, on both my previous visits to America, and consider us to be close friends. I think he feels the same.

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While staying at Lee Hoffman's house in 1952, I accidentally came across a piece called "The Mind of Walter Willis", in which Vernon McCain attempted a psychological evaluation of me. It was never published, and I don't think I was supposed to see it, but writing to me in June 1954, Vernon raised it himself by saying, in the course of some remark I made about his writing that...

...I long ago learned to discount by about 60% everything favourable emanating from your typewriter (as I mentioned in "The Mind of Walter Willis") since you obviously feel a compulsion to buck up everyone's ego whenever possible.

In my reply to Vernon, I said...

...I do have a compulsion of that sort, though it's hardly the way I would have expressed it. I've noticed it since I came into fandom...I seem to have appointed myself a sort of clearinghouse for egoboo and spend quite a lot of time passing on complimentary remarks about people to those concerned. I have quite a guilty conscience when I omit to do it – it seems to me almost a crime to allow pleasure like this to go to waste for the lack of a little trouble on my part. I also, as you've noticed, seem to have acquired a sort of Messianic complex. Ghod knows when this came on the scene, but I've noticed I seem to have developed a sense of responsibility for fandom. Instead of doing what I want to do, I spend time writing encouraging letters to neofans, in the hope of securing the continued existence of fandom, by as it were, promoting desirable recruits. I suppose if my basic motivation were revealed, it would be a desire to keep fandom alive so it could worship me, like God created mankind, but I do think there's a little more to it than that. I know I can never meet a beautiful woman without feeling a strong need to tell her she's beautiful, and though of course I'm all for the continuation of beautiful women as a species, even my subconscious is not likely to think I am ensuring their perpetuation by flattering them. Especially as I'm happily married with no urgent desire to assist towards that end myself. No, I must have some bee in my bonnet that virtue should be rewarded. I am the sort of person who writes to employers when their staff gives me particularly good service.

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Six months after the publication of *The Enchanted Duplicator*, we were still getting enthusiastic letters about it. This one, from Richard Geis, was notable for its use of outdated slang...

I lent my copy to Jim Bradley to read, and he thought it was the most to say the least. Real dark green with sheen. Simply cataleptic and gone. He flipped and lay there stoned and cold after he'd pinned your crazy diary.

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Next time: My life with damon knight. ☀

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### **Editorial Afterword:**

We didn't actually get very many comments on Walt's column from *Mimosa* 14, but the ones we did get were both interesting and amusing. In particular, the note we received from Robert Bloch made us smile, and I'm pretty sure it must have also had the same effect on Walt:

Scary to realize that Willis, Harris, and others are still apparently in possession of all sorts of incriminating material from forty or more years ago. One would think all that stuff had been shredded by now!

There was an overt theme of 'Food!' for the 15<sup>th</sup> issue of *Mimosa* and when we informed Walt of that he begged off from doing an installment of "I Remember Me" for the issue, as his correspondence files from the 1950s apparently did not have very much in the way of descriptions of culinary-related happenings. Instead, he pointed us toward one of his past writings which did. I've already cited his 1952 trip to the United States for the Great Chicago Worldcon, but I haven't yet mentioned that Chicon II was just one stop in a much larger coast-to-coast fan fund trip that was eventually chronicled in his magnificent trip report, *The Harp Stateside*. Following the 1952 Chicon, Walt went west to Los Angeles as the guest of Forry Ackerman, and while in L.A., he met up with many of the fan groups active at that time. So to start things off in that food-themed issue, Nicki and I reprinted an appetizer from Walt – an excerpt from *THS* about that Los Angeles stopover, including an encounter with a hot nut fudge sundae of transcendental malevolence (as Walt described it) and a hamburger with, I mean, *everything* on it.

# Foot and Drink

(from *Mimosa* 15, published in April 1994)

Friends, I should like to warn you all here and now about the hot nut fudge sundae served in The Melody Lane, Los Angeles. It's a wonder that the LASFS, the Insurgents, and the Outlanders do not parade before this restaurant in shifts, or some other striking garment, bearing placards inscribed 'Beware the Hot Nut Fudge Sundae!!' The fact that this was no ordinary hot nut fudge sundae, but a hot nut fudge sundae of transcendental malevolence, was brought home to me when I realized it was making me feel ill even before I saw it. The miasmatic aura of the thing (say, this is pretty highclass writing, isn't it? First transcendental malevolence and now miasmatic aura) extruded round me from the catacombs of The Melody Lane where it was even now being awakened to its hideous pseudo-life. Cold shivers ran up and down my back as I realised it was crawling to me from the vaults. By the time it reached me I knew the best I could hope for was that I could get home to South Sherbourne Drive before I was physically sick in the presence of the elite of West Coast fandom. The sheer horror of that thought, of being ever afterwards known in Los Angeles fan circles as the guy who was sick in The Melody Lane made me summon up my last reserves. Calling on Roscoe for aid, I struggled desperately against the hypnotic lure of that hot nut fudge sundae. Ghod knows what would have happened if I had succumbed and actually tasted the thing, but I finally overcame it. Driving a sharp spoon through its heart, I staggered out into the night. It had been a grim fight but I had won. I should be known in Los Angeles as nothing worse than a guy who bought hot nut fudge sundaes just to look at. (They might think I belonged to a Sundae Observance Society.)

Next morning we set out for the Pacific Ocean. This ranked up with the Insurgents on my private list of the sights of the West Coast, and since as far as I knew it had never carried on a vendetta against Forry Ackerman, I expressed a wish to see it. I had quite a clear picture of what it would be like. There would be this spectacular cliff road and beside it a beautiful golden strand, deserted except for an occasional beautiful film star committing suicide or playing immersion heaters with Burt Lancaster. You can imagine my surprise then, when after a drive of about half an hour – I'd always thought Los Angeles was on the coast – we pulled up at a sort of fun-fair. Hot dog stands, ice cream vendors, shooting galleries, the lot. One of the sideshows turned out to be the Pacific Ocean. It had a concession of a few square yards of rather dirty sand, and looked depressingly like the Atlantic. I valiantly tried to feel like stout Cortez, silent upon a hot dog stand in Darien (I am now equally valiantly trying not to attempt a joke about a Peke) and sat down at the water's edge to take off my shoes and socks.

It was my intention to wade out a short distance, thinking appropriately solemn thoughts – such that I had now reached the furthestmost point in my journey westwards and this was the turning point – and feeling as poetic as I could in bare feet with my trousers rolled up, I stalked rapidly into the Pacific Ocean. Only to slow down abruptly with an aching sense of injustice. It was COLD. My Ghod, the Pacific was cold! It was intolerable.

However, I suppressed my indignation and continued on to where the water got deep. I paused, savouring the solemnity of the occasion. Here I was in the Pacific Ocean... My romantic reflections were shattered by a shout from Forry. I looked round. He pointed. I looked down.

There, sailing past in line ahead at a good fifteen knots, were my only pair of shoes in 7,000 miles. With a strangled cry I leaped after them, letting go my rolled-up trouser legs, which immediately fell down into the water. I overtook my shoes halfway to Hawaii and struggled back to dry land. I regret to have to tell you that Forrest J Ackerman, a fine man in many ways, failed to show the quiet sympathy which would have been appropriate at this tragic moment. He was rolling on the sand, *laughing*. And as I trudged up to him, he said, “A slow boot to China.”

I wrung out my trousers, put on my shoes and squelched back to the hot dog stand for a chocolate malt to restore my faith in life. Feeling hungry after the afternoon’s surf sports, I also ordered a hamburger. Then I took my shoes off again and began to drip quietly on the floor. I realised the hamburger man was speaking to me.

“What?” I said.

“With?” asked the man.

“With,” I said. Whatever it was, it was evidently free and I wasn’t going to pass it up.

“With onions?” asked the man.

“With everything,” I said recklessly. Forry looked at me.

“*Everything?*” asked the man, with an air of incredulous hope.

“Everything,” I said. I was beginning to have vague premonitions, but since I didn’t know what he was going to put in, I didn’t know what to tell him to leave out.

A wild gleam came into the fellow’s eye, and he momentarily disappeared in a blur of motion. He was leaping about his booth like a mad thing, collecting samples of every organic substance within a radius of ten feet and piling them onto the foundation stone of my hamburger. I stared aghast. Obviously this man had dedicated his life to thinking up things which could be incorporated in a hamburger. I could see him waking in the middle of the night and noting down the name of some edible Peruvian root he had overlooked. But then as the years went by, his simple faith in his mission in life must have been disturbed: was it, he must have asked himself during the long frustrating years of preparing commonplace six-ply hamburgers, was it all worthwhile? Would his genius ever be recognized? And then, at last, I had come along, his soul mate, the Perfect Customer, the Man Who Wanted Everything. This was his destiny, the culmination of his career.

The hamburger rose to the sky like an edible Tower of Babel, an awesome monument to the ambition and ingenuity of Man. And still it grew, tier after tier, higher and higher. Until finally the human whirlwind subsided and looked about distractedly at his depleted shelves. I kicked my shoes out of his reach. After a few more moments of ... meditation, he sighed and delicately added the roof to the hamburger, like a great artist signing his masterpiece. He stepped back and gazed at it, tears of pride in his eyes.

Cowering in the shade of the edifice, I looked helplessly at Forry. He pretended he wasn’t with me, and went to make a phone call. Looking round the hamburger, I could see the fierce eyes of its creator on me. I nibbled guiltily at the fringes of the thing for a while, and then desperately lifted it in both hands and began to gnaw at it. A shower of mustard, onions, beetroot, pickles,

lettuce, and countless other foodstuffs began to descend over me and the immediate neighbourhood. I hoped Forry was warning the Fortean Society.

After some time, I had absorbed, either internally or externally, enough of The Hamburger to give me courage to make a break for it. I stole guiltily away, resolving to make a will leaving the remains of it to the United Nations Famine Relief Fund.

In the evening, Forry took me out for a last drive. I saw Hollywood Boulevard and Sunset Boulevard and everything, including Grauman's Chinese Theater where they have the impressions in cement of such anatomical characteristics as Joe E. Brown's mouth and Durante's nose. I noted that for some reason, Jane Russell was represented by her feet.

I know I didn't see much of California, but what I saw was a bit disappointing. I'd been thinking of it as a green and golden paradise, and hadn't realised it was largely reclaimed desert. The surrounding hills were unexpectedly barren and ugly, and the houses among them looked from the distance like matchboxes scattered among uncompleted excavations. Los Angeles had some fine streets and buildings, but seemed too diffuse to have an integrated personality, and the most lasting impression I took away with me was a café sign advertising 'The Original Rain On The Roof'. The notion of simulating the sound of rain as a seasonal attraction seemed to me quite startling. ☀

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### **Editorial Afterword:**

Walt's article gathered many comments of praise from *Mimosa* readers, but none were as lavish as the one we received from Harry Warner, Jr.:

The thing that most impressed me about this collection of food pieces plus a fakefood item or two is how far superior the Walt Willis reprint is to everything else as far as sheer writing ability is concerned. Nobody in fandom today can achieve such writing over the course of several pages, although a few contemporary fans may get out a paragraph here and there that is superior, and thus sticks out conspicuously among the more routine remainder of the piece. I don't mean that other contributors in this issue aren't interesting, and amusing, and informative. But none of them lets off the verbal fireworks in a continuous barrage like these pages from *The Harp Stateside*.

For the 16<sup>th</sup> issue of *Mimosa*, Walt resumed his "I Remember Me" series, this time (as previously promised) describing in great detail his long-distance interactions with Damon Knight (or 'damon knight', as he was known back then).

# I Remember Me

(from *Mimosa* 16, published in December 1994)

## My Life With damon knight

In my fan column in the Scottish prozine *Nebula* (which brought Ethel Lindsay into fandom), I instanced some of the concrete rewards that might come from fan activity. They included receiving from damon knight a device for blowing bubbles from the top of one's head. No explanation was given for this, I having assumed that the potential fans of that time would have no difficulty in seeing the advantages of such a contrivance. It consisted of a plastic cap, rather like a helicopter beanie, incorporating a little tank containing bubble-making fluid, from which a plastic tube ending in a bulb operated by the wearer produced a steady stream of large iridescent bubbles, to no little effect. The general impression produced was one of a comic book character being portrayed as Thinking.

The chain of events which led me to receive this unusual headgear started with a suggestion from Redd Boggs that it might be a good idea to send a copy of *Hyphen* to damon knight. I did so, and eventually received this letter:

Sir,

Sorry to be so late in thanking you for *Hyphen* 8, but the truth is the little beast is so meaty I haven't finished it even yet. I keep picking it up to see if there's anything I have missed, and there always is. On the hunch that it will give out eventually, though, I'm forwarding a money order for ten shillings – a shilling for *The Enchanted Duplicator*, of which I hear great things, and the rest for a double-barreled subscription. I find I can't stand not having all the back issues.

The magazine's illegibility may be part of its charm, but it was a near thing with me. I read the easy parts, passed over the back cover as totally impossible, and shudder to think what would have happened if Jim Blish hadn't picked it up and started laughing like a maniac. What unsung genius said, "You haven't lived until you've been goosed with a copy of *Fahrenheit 451*"?

I was going to tell you what I liked, but I liked every damned thing in the magazine, even the verse. Since when has there been readable verse in fanmags? Good lord, I have been out of touch too long. What's Seventh Fandom? Does it hurt? Why aren't A. Vincent and Arthur C. the same person?

"Now about sex and smut" should have been an interlineation. So businesslike.

Down Neptune! Up Uranus!

Just went back through the wilderness looking for something to deprecate and thought I had found it in the serious and constructive reviews, but struck that remark about "the practiced robot-spotter" and gave up.

Resignedly, damon knight

I find that, amazingly, I didn't answer this letter for six weeks. It seems I sent it to my co-editor, Chuck Harris, with a pencilled note asking for it to be returned as soon as copied – for the next issue, which was to be produced by him and Vince Clarke – and asking him to say that the *Fahrenheit 451* quote was overheard by our agent Terry Carr at a meeting of the Golden Gate Futurian Society.

I apologised for the delay as follows:

Believe me, I'd have replied to your first letter with such rapidity as to alarm the cablegram companies if it hadn't been for my current estivation. (At least it would be estivation if we had a summer in Ireland. I think we had better just call it hibernation.) I found the receipt of word from you as an accolade (you know accolade, Arthur C. Clarke's favourite drink) and nightly I call down blessings on the head of Redd Boggs who suggested I send you a sample copy of *Hyphen*.

The least I can do is to give you a more adequate reply to your enquiry about Seventh Fandom. Sixth Fandom flourished in 1951 and 1952, and is supposed to have centered around Lee Hoffman, Max Keasler, and myself. It reached its climax in the fall of 1952 when we all met at the Chicon and then suffered a temporary eclipse. (Lee bought a horse, I caught a colt which developed into pneumonia, and Max was draughted.) Just previous to this, Bob Silverberg had written an article in *Quandry* classifying fandoms, naming the present one Sixth and speculating on what Seventh would be like. When *Quandry* suspended publication, a horde of brash young neofen arose calling themselves Seventh Fandom as if all they had to do to justify their existence was to call attention to it.

...What I would like would be some original material from you, but I haven't the nerve to ask for it.

This last arose from my request for the loan of some old copies of Damon Knight's fanzine *Snide*. In a later letter, which has not survived, he apparently made some comments about *TOTO*, *Hyphen*'s reprint supplement. I offered to lend him copies of *Quandry*, and he replied as follows:

Ho. You brightened my morning. Kindred soul, I salute you. (I admire your puns but don't expect any back; I use them instead of story ideas.) Am sending you ten tons of stuff from my memory box... Got the damndest things in this box. Here's a sheet of paper headed...

**The Cosmic XXXX**

by Chester b. Conant and Damon Knight

(The missing word was FART. It was in the typewriter when some Chelsea semi-tarts were coming up, and Cohen, who has no inhibitions at all about women except this one, pencilled it out.)

*It was mid-day in Paris when the cloud from space drifted down. People sitting at sidewalk cafes looked up, sniffed the air enquiringly, and then shrugged shoulders, turning back to their demitasses and polite banter.*

*But the smell grew stronger. It grew, at last, to an intensity that even a Parisian could not stand. With a curious mingling of odours like the amalgamation of the dregs of a thousand sewers, it settled in the chasms of the city streets and seeped through doors and windows into the innermost corners and crannies of the world metropolis. Paris grew alarmed, then outraged, then frantic.*

That's all. Cohen was supposed to go on from there, but all he did was correct the title.

All this is in hope of deserving your fantastic offer to lend me fanzines. You ought to be twice shy by now, but good lord, I accept! You mean to say you're going to lend me *Quandries*? You're mad! I'll guard them with my life.

...Would dearly love to write something new for *Hyphen*, but am intimidated. Nothing drearier than would-be *Hyphen*-type wit. Will eat lots of Wheaties and have a go at it.

I replied as follows, after some complimentary remarks about the copies of *Snide* he had sent me:

Your promise to try and write something for *Hyphen* fills me with awe. You really have no idea of the ... veneration I have for you, in both your fan and pro aspects ... We don't expect or want "would-be *Hyphen*-type material" – we want *damon knight*-type material, which we think is better.

His reply was swift:

Kindly cut out the goddamn veneration. Am only 32, damnit, and consider myself in the bloom of youth. Have as much hair as ever, and feel twitchier in every way. I venerate you, you bleeding genius. There, how do *you* like it?

No, seriously, the only thing I am tooled up to do besides fiction is the book review column, which is too serious and constructive, and probably too long as well.

On thinking it over, am more surprised than ever that you have heard of *Snide* before; one of the old guard, probably. Faintly surprised to discover, a while back, that Harry Warner was still kicking... Then there's Tucker and Ackerman, who go back to the beginning of the world. The odd thing about my generation in fandom – Joe Fortier, Gerry de la Ree, and a gaggle of others whose names I've forgotten – is that we all disappeared.

Was in a typewriter repair shop last summer, I guess it was, left to my own devices while the man's wife went to see what had become of my machine, and I read part of a mimeographed circular hanging on a nail behind the counter. It was a testimonial written by a British cigarette card fan who had been visiting in this country and had many nice things to say about American cigarette card fandom. Odd. Would it be fun to dump a bunch of these people into the next convention and see how long it took for anybody to notice the difference.

...Hallohallohallohallo. I just happened to be looking through *Hyphen* No.5 (honest) and I see where you say, "Not that I wouldn't welcome intelligent literary criticism..." I don't see how you can weasel out of that. About how many pages per issue would you welcome?

And in a later letter:

I saw John Michel a few years ago at a showing of that Russian decapitated doghead film down in Greenwich Village. He had got disgustingly plump and shiny. Mutterings in *Grue* to the effect that he's some part of Dean Grennell... Warner's notion of writing obituaries on people who have retired from FAPA is the most delightful thing I've heard in years. Didn't know he had it in him. Didn't have much contact with British fandom. Corresponded for a while with Bill Temple. Found him solemn, and all the Temple madness I began to read about later came as a complete surprise to me. Probably we just got off on the wrong foot and he found *me* solemn.

The fat bundle of *Quandries* arrived yesterday. Large bite, but I've been nibbling away at it, starting with "The Harp". Now, by god, this is marvellous stuff.

Damon's column in *Hyphen* 11, November 1954, was well received: DR Smith, the old-time British fan, wrote: "If you and damon knight had striven for years with the sole object of pleasing me, you could not have done better than for him to write and for you to print his comments on some aspects of present-day sf. This indeed I enjoyed. I delighted in every well-chosen phrase of it. This is the sort of thing I would aspire to produce myself had I the talent."

John Brunner said: "Liked knight's masterly exposition of the art of being rude without being impolite."

Chuck Harris wrote: "He's invaluable. Just what we needed. He's not merely picturesque, he's impossible. For years we've been needing a regular fairly serious contributor who has something to say and a smart way of saying it, and knight is truly the answer to our prayers."

I passed these comments on to damon, who himself had written a letter of comment on *Hyphen* 10, in which he said...

The reason *Hyphen* is so good, I take it, apart from the accidental assemblage of half a dozen geniuses in Britain, and the reason so many serious and constructive fanzines are so ghastly dull, is that the former is an original contribution, and the latter are self-consciously second-hand. I would like you to ponder this thought though, if it hasn't already occurred to you: it's exactly the fun-loving fanzines like *Hyphen*, Bradbury's *Futura Fantasia*, and *Snide* (not a plug -- the mag's 2<sup>nd</sup> and final issue was published 14 years ago) which have profoundly influenced science fiction.

This reminded me of Terry Carr's denunciation of Ed Wood for, by his own admission, destroying his copies of *Hyphen* unread, the same copies which contained the reviews by damon knight he was going to later reprint professionally. The copies of *Hyphen* were presumably sent in exchange for Wood's fmz, *The Journal of Science Fiction*.

Next issue, I'll conclude the damon knight saga and also reproduce the Robert Conquest letter touched-on in the recent biography of Philip Larkin. I'll just mention now that the only complaint damon knight made about my standard of reproduction of his reviews in *Hyphen* was

that I inadvertently reproduced the name of a famous publisher as ‘Funk and Wagballs’. I was able to mollify damon by pointing out how much worse it could have been! ☀

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### **Editorial Afterword:**

Much of *Mimosa* 16 was intended as a look-ahead toward the 1995 Worldcon, which was held in Glasgow, Scotland, and we had prefaced Walt’s article by mentioning: “Someone else we’re looking forward to seeing next year, hopefully at Intersection, is Walt Willis. We last saw Walt in at the 1992 Worldcon, where he was the Fan Guest of Honor.” But he was apparently unable to attend. That one, brief meeting during the 1992 Worldcon was the only time I ever had a chance to speak with him.

As for Walt’s article in *M16*, it generated several comments from readers that mostly added their appreciation for the historical aspects of him showing us parts of his correspondence files. And there was also one respondent, Brad Foster, who was very envious of a certain fannish artifact that Walt had described:

I desperately want one of those bubble-blowing hats Willis described, if for now other reason than to be able to stand around, not saying anything but pumping out the bubbles, waiting for someone to come up and ask me about it, and I can go “Shh, can’t you see I’m trying to think?”

One thing about the science fiction genre and its fandom that becomes more and more obvious the longer one delves into its history is that there are no ‘fences’ around it – there are many, many interactions with famous so-called ‘real world’ personalities that have been documented over the years. One of these happened back in 1954 when noted author, poet, and Cold War-era Soviet Russia expert Robert Conquest became a correspondent with Walt Willis. It was all described in Walt’s next installment of “I Remember Me”, which was published in our 17<sup>th</sup> issue.

# I Remember Me

(from *Mimosa* 17, published in October 1995)

In April 1954, Bob Leman and other cognoscenti (and it's pleasant to see just how many there were) have drawn my attention to the fact that in *Selected Letters of Phillip Larkin, 1950 to 1955*, Larkin in a letter to Robert Conquest dated 19th April 1954 says:

"I never came across Willis, though several times I have heard *Slant* mentioned." The editor of these letters, Anthony Thwaite, has, by and large, done a commendable job in annotating such references, but he has failed to furnish a footnote for this one. The letter is dated a few weeks after Larkin left Belfast, after four years as Librarian of Queens University, and the context of Conquest's question is made clear by Larkin's reply here. Of course, it has to be about you. I confess I felt a flash of reflected glory in being able to claim the acquaintance of a fellow who was a topic in the correspondence of such admirable luminaries as Larkin and Conquest.

The name of Philip Larkin will be well known to readers of modern English poetry. That of Robert Conquest is even more famous, first as a poet, but more recently as an expert on Soviet Russia. His scholarly analysis of the Stalinist regime, in particular his account of the massacre of the peasantry by starvation, as part of the imposition of collective farming, did much to equate in the public mind the regime in Russia with that in Nazi Germany. It is true that Conquest was a subscriber to *Slant*. I have kept my old card index and it reveals that he subscribed in time to get *Slant* No. 6, and his subscription was continued by *Hyphens* Nos. 1 to 11, when it was renewed by a ten shilling note, until he was finally dropped for lack of response after *Hyphen* 27.

Two items survive of my correspondence with Conquest. The first was hand-written, dated 23<sup>rd</sup> June 1954:

Dear Walter,

I don't suppose you saw any of my recent attempts to defend SF to the intellectuals of the *New Statesman*. There was a bloody article by a dopey professor of radio astronomy attacking it in the March 13 issue. They published a pretty rude letter of mine countering this on March 20<sup>th</sup>.

The Moscow *Literaturnaya Gazeta* has now taken this up; I attach a copy of an article in their issue of June 3<sup>rd</sup>. (I have sent a copy to *Astounding Science Fiction*.) Very good fun. (You will remember their attack some years ago, reprinted in *ASF* of June 1949.)

Meanwhile, the *New Statesman* asked me to do a review, which was published in their June 12<sup>th</sup> number (and in which I have a crack at *Lit.Gaz* for their earlier article. I don't know where all this will end, as I was purposely provocative and hope for some more fuss from the intellectuals.)

I am greatly enjoying this. A friend of mine, the novelist and poet Kingsley Amis, is promising to back me up. It all proves that the top levels haven't yet been stormed adequately – did

you hear the abysmal nonsense talked by the Radio Critics about *Childhood's End*?

Further news from my side is that I am now a vile pro, having received an advance for an SF novel from Ward Lock and Company. I've only written the synopsis so far – a bloody long thing – so still have the creation to perform, but I take it that one becomes a pro by accepting the money, not on writing the order?

It shows how dopey I am in the pun-deciphering, which is the mark of a true Willis-fan, that I have only just realised that your interim sheet is *Hi! Fen!*

This letter was hand-written, and so must have been my reply because there is no carbon of it on file. However, Conquest's reply (a portion of which is reproduced below) was mostly typed.

Dear Walter,

Delighted to hear from you. Yes, I think it was worth having a bash at *The Statesman*, because it is almost the last little circle of people who feel themselves superior to science fiction – but really it is only a mopping-up operation after you and your colleagues have borne the main brunt of years of campaigning.

There is certainly some SF in Eastern Europe – I have read some of it myself. And it is inaccurate if fans take the *Literaturnaya Gazeta* article as proving the opposite. Still, Communist SF is extremely limited in type – owing to the obvious directions in which the imagination cannot be allowed to stray; and SF as we know it is indeed banned, together with most of the rest of modern Western literature. So I do not think that the fan is really being unreasonable in concluding that the Russians are hostile to what he himself is reading. It is quite legitimate for fans to feel disgusted by the misrepresentations and bullying of the article. It is perfectly true that there is a lot of unpleasant SF, but *Lit.Gaz's* attack was not a legitimate criticism of this. What is really objectionable is that it was intended to show, in a dishonest fashion, to a public which has no opportunity for forming a judgement of its own, that Western literature is poisonous sadism. In fact, it was more hate-mongering of the sort you rightly deplore in another context. *Lit.Gaz*, incidentally, is a great purveyor of articles saying that war stories should glorify battle.

On the issue of sadism in SF, incidentally, my own feeling is that one needn't worry too much. Many educated people who like to think of themselves as humane are addicts of suitably disguised sadistic attitudes. Orwell says somewhere:

*"An adolescent in a Glasgow slum worships Al Capone. A New Statesman reader worships Stalin. There is a difference in intellectual maturity, but none in moral outlook."*  
(*Critical Essays*, page 154)

I think there is something *more* corrupting in the sadism which is obscured and justified by intellectual finagling. Indeed, I think the main attraction of Communism (in the Western world, that is) is that it enables someone to satisfy his sadistic inclinations while at the same time being provided with the luxury that it is all being done for 'humane' and 'liberal'

reasons. It is comparable to the satisfactions of the hanging judge and the 'strict but fair' schoolmaster.

The only query one has is not whether people derive pleasure from fantasies, but whether this has a generally bad and demoralising effect. I expect you have seen the researches in America carried out in the cities in which lurid comics are forbidden, to discover whether there was any appreciable effect on juvenile delinquency compared with cities where they were freely sold. There was none.

Other things being equal, my own bias has always been in favour of permitting pornography, or any other sort of objectionable writing, rather than suppressing it. It is an unfortunate result of modern society that there is so much of this low mass culture. But stopping it has always been the corollary of censorship methods which have been a bloody sight worse for literature, common decency, and everything else one values.

Personally, I think it is clear that the Soviet system is, in all essential matters, as bad as the Nazi one, and that its theory that this system is suitable for imposition on the rest of the world is the greatest danger there is. On the other hand, I fancy that if we can solve our own problems and keep the Communist states from breaking out, while at the same time pointing out to them the advantages that would accrue if they ceased to exclude themselves from the world community, their internal tensions would finally force these states to evolve or perish.

As you'll probably have noticed, I didn't really appreciate Conquest's importance. At the time, he was mainly known to me as an anti-Soviet polemicist, and my politics then were more pro-Soviet than anything, based on the assumption that whatever was wrong in the Soviet Union, at least their hearts were in the right place. I don't have any recollection of further correspondence with Conquest, though I can't say what might not turn up in the files, but as far as I know, my last reference to him was in my report of the visit of Madeleine and myself to the World Fair in Seattle in 1962:

"Even now there is such a cloud of fatigue in that corridor of my memory that I cannot believe there would be much of interest in it to you. Except possibly the still vivid recollection of seeing at the exit from the U.S. Science Pavilion, in great gold letters on the wall, a quotation from a *Hyphen* subscriber. Unaccountably they failed to mention this fact, mentioning just the name, Robert Conquest – presuming, no doubt, that his chief claim to immortality lies in his poetry and not in his letters of comment on *Hyphen*. Admittedly, he hasn't written many of the latter recently, his subscription having lapsed, but let that be a warning to you. Let your *Hyphen* subscription lapse, and you may find yourself reduced to writing on walls in Washington."

I see that at the same time I was writing to Conquest, I was also writing to Robert Bloch, trying to persuade him to move to Ireland:

Having just been defeated in the semifinal of our club tournament, I have now written a volume of scurrilous memoirs of the tennis club and retired into fandom...

About my proposal that you should pull up your skates and come and live out here, I have an item of information which will gladden your heart. You know the National Insurance Scheme we have over here? Of which the National Health Service is part. Well, Ted Tubb is now a full-time writer and as such is insured as 'self-employed' and stamps his own cards, etc. The other day he had a bad cold and didn't feel up to writing. So he went along to his NHS doctor and got a certificate that he was unable to follow his employment. He then claimed – and received – sick pay from the Government! Doesn't this open up a wonderful vista for authors? Couldn't you also claim for lack of inspiration, shortage of ideas, and from being burnt out? All as much occupational hazards of the writer as silicosis is of miners. I tell you, socialism is the answer writers have been seeking for years!

I must have written in similar terms to Damon Knight, because he commented as follows:

God heavens! This Tubb thing is apocalyptic! Will you kindly find out for me if he was able to live on what he got from the government, and if so, what the requirements are for immigration to the British Isles? I'm 99% serious about this. Damn, your butcher shops don't refrigerate their eats, though, do they? All those flies and maggots...

**I couldn't tell if it was puke or a butterfly... And here's room for your name, address, and solar system... Gophers are turtles in Florida... We're running into some unstable isotopes... Zeitgeist indeed**

Must tell you about the 'unstable isotopes' thing. We were watching a mess called *Unknown World*, a Lippert Picture, on television. These people had what they called an 'ovular bathysphere', otherwise called the 'cyclotram'; it was a rocket-shaped thing on treads, with rock-chewing blades at the nose. Well, they were in this thing, climbing up the side of Mount Mele to get to the crater, and the machine began to rock. One fellow consulted an oscilloscope, and that's when they said it... ☀

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### **Editorial Afterword:**

The comments we received on Walt's article tended a bit toward the scholarly, as perhaps you might expect, including this one from Joseph Major:

A couple of years ago when I bought Robert Conquest's *Stalin and the Kirov Murder* at Carmichael's Books here in Louisville, our fannish contact there commented that there was an old fan from England of the same name. Since then I have added to my Conquest collection, even his SF novel *A World of Difference* (Harry Turtledove has no reason to fear the competition). Nevertheless, the Willis article is a welcome addition to knowledge.

Walt's next column, for *Mimosa* 18, once again returned to matters specific to Irish Fandom. In particular, we learned about Walt's discovery of an amazing art talent as well as a revelation from author John Brunner.

# I Remember Me

(from *Mimosa* 18, published in May 1996)

I discovered Arthur Thomson the way the Law of Gravity discovered Isaac Newton. One day in October 1954, as I was sitting under a deadline for *Hyphen* 11, the apple fell on me in the shape of a handwritten letter from a strange address in London. There was, as I remember, nothing particularly striking about the letter itself, just a subscription to *Hyphen*, but the writer had, as a mere afterthought apparently, scribbled a little drawing at the bottom, and another on the back of the envelope.

I can at least claim the credit for recognising genius when it comes up and hits me in the eye. After years of headshaking over the laboured drawing and threadbare ideas of most fan artists, my old eyes popped out of their worn sockets at the sight of this easy fluent style and the original sense of humour that it seemed so perfectly to express. I replied by return of post, full of enthusiasm; I didn't even wait to get home from work, but wrote from the office, so I don't have a copy of the letter. And I don't even have Arthur's letter, either, because I sent it back to him to do the cartoon properly; it appeared in *Hyphen* 11 – page 23, if anyone wants to gaze in awe at the first explosion of ATom in fandom.

Arthur's second letter arrived in an enormous envelope containing two big drawing books filled with cartoons, and great sheaves of loose pages. He told me later that when he got my letter, he sat down and did about 30 drawings straight off, thereby proving that for generating energy in fans, egoboo has carbohydrates beaten to a frazzle.

I also learned (from six handwritten pages of ruled foolscap) that he was already experimenting with stencils, which a friend at work had run off for him, and that...

I'm Scotch myself, born and bred. Came to London about 1931. So I'm not a mercurial unworldly crazy Scotchman (wife's English, a steadying influence) and whiskey is my Ghod (scotch of course). But my grandfather came from Northern Ireland (could we be related, huh?). Not me and my grandfather...oh, you've got it.

Later, on 29th November, Arthur wrote to report his first meeting with Chuck Harris.

Well, I think the visit to Chuck's was a success. We hit it off together from the word go. Chuck is one of the nicest fellows I've met and I think we can become firm friends. I'll say again, we really got on well. Going to meet him in London Saturday and have a look at Gestetners.

When Chuck found out that I can write and draw with either hand, he almost chained me up to the Gestetner with a pile of stencils to work on.

Later:

Met Chuck up London Saturday morning, and we tromped round town, gazing in Gestetner office windows; that was all we could do as the damn places were closed. So we went and had something to eat and a good natter. We got on terrifically. We just seemed to blend in with each other. I think we shall probably combine and become a 'gestalt'.

Through reading most fanzines for the past year in a few months, I've sort of caught up with fandom and now I seem to be waiting with my tongue hanging out, for things happening. Can't wait for 'Ketcon', can't wait to do more stuff for *Hyphen*, can't wait to meet other fans. I must be bitten pretty badly by the virus.

Notice how my writing gets worse. I am doing this at work, and keeping my head swivelling about for the foreman.

It can't have been long after this that Arthur was deputed by his mates to approach the management about some dispute. He was so impressive that the management put him in charge. This is one of the episodes I had in mind when writing *The Enchanted Convention*, which is basically about how fannish skills can help in the mundane world.

I was going to go on about the arrival on the scene of John Berry, but I came across this letter from John Brunner, which seems timely in view of John's sudden death at Intersection. It sets out his relationship with fandom. The story to which he refers, "The Watchers", had appeared in my fanzine, *Slant*. It was John's first published work.

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Pilot Officer J.K.H Brunner  
Royal Air Force Bletchley

Dear Walt,

Nice to see you again, even if it was only at odd moments [at the convention] throughout the day and night. I meant to say quite a lot of things to you, chiefly apologies for not writing in such a long time, and inquiries as to whether this Aussie publication was going to use "The Watchers" after all, but still more mostly to say the hell with that letter of mine to you a while ago which got into *Hyphen* where it had no real reason to be, because it'll take me months to live that down.

I seem to recall that in it I was arguing that the divorcing of sf and fandom was a Bad Thing. Walt, I was nuts. Sf is a good excuse and that's all. I've seen the light, I'm saved. I can only blame the Air Force and a bad attack of rationalization for my earlier and indiscreet statements.

This weekend has reminded me of what I'd forgotten – that there are people in the world who are sane enough to be crazy. I wish to Ghod I could find the time and the money to get right up to my neck in fandom and then duck my head. It's like finding a friend after hating the world for twenty years; it just feels *right* – and it took this weekend to wake me up to it.

In '52, when I was dabbling my toe in fandom, I was a kid fresh out of school. I'd written "Thou Good and Faithful" and hadn't got to worry about selling something else for pocket money until it ran out. But fresh out of school and missing my few close friends, I was feeling unsociable more than somewhat. The Air Force has made me hate the world more still. In between, I've tried to find a niche I could fit into in jazz fandom – but there's nothing in jazz fandom that I can find that even approximates to Fandom with a capital F. I've been

called an intellectual masquerading as a lowbrow. Not true: I know my erudition shows sometimes, but it's part of me as I am and not an acquired, deliberate gloss, and nowhere, barring fandom, is there a place where I believe I can be me.

I think I ought to fit after all, despite everything; I think I've been trying to exist in my intellect too long, and it can't be done. Next January, I get out of this insane rat-race, and then I am going to spend a year at home writing (if I make 500 pounds out of it that year I shall go on) and *fanning*. I like fans. I feel that for too long I've been trying to live on an intellectual level way beyond my years. But that's bound to be a pretense any way you look at it. I'm tired of it, and I know it, and I think that at long last I may really be starting to grow up. Congratulate me on my first birthday.

You know, this is rapidly becoming a soul-searching expose ('The Truth About Brunner'). Hell with it *all* – and fen, you have been warned. I'm getting in. ☀

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### Editorial Afterword:

After seven installments of Walt's "I Remember Me", we finally got a comment that, actually, I had been expecting somebody to make years earlier. It came from one of fandom's best correspondents, Harry Warner, Jr., which provided instant credibility to the point being made:

The fine new installment of Walt Willis's series caused me to think once again about the probability that almost all fannish correspondence is doomed to be lost. I don't think any of the institutions that preserve fanzines have any interest in letters between fans, unless perhaps some of the correspondents became famous pros. Certainly there is no place in fandom that can serve as a depository for preservation of letters. Very few fans leave, at their death, direct descendents who will preserve correspondence files as a symbol of filial piety. So it would be good if other fans would imitate Walter's example and publish in fanzines extracts from their letter files, guaranteeing continued existence for some samplings.

And now, a full quarter of a century later, there's starting to be some preservation of fan correspondence over at **fanac.org**. Bravo to them for making this a priority. As for Walt's next column, in *Mimosa* 19, there was unforeseen happenstance which made him put the next installment of "I Remember Me" on hold. We described it in our intro to his essay in the issue:

First, some bad news. A few months ago, Walt Willis wrote us an apologetic letter, saying that due to recent upheaval in his life (a back operation followed by moving to a different house), he was unable to do a new installment of "I Remember Me" for this issue of *Mimosa*. Luckily, there is a silver lining to this, as it gives us an opportunity to present some vintage Willis. The following was edited together from Walt's column "The Harp That Once or Twice" that appeared, in the early 1950s, in Lee Hoffman's legendary fanzine *Quandry*; we begin at the 1951 British National Convention, and Walt's recollection of [his] first encounter with Forry Ackerman.

# The Harp Meets No.1 Fan

(from *Mimosa* 19, published in November 1996)

## Friday, 10th May 1951, at the First International Convention

When we arrived from our lunch, Forry Ackerman was just about to start speaking. From his articles and letters I had formed quite a clear mental picture of a thin, dark and neurotic type, eccentric and egocentric in his ways, quick and impatient in his speech. Instead, his appearance came as a great surprise! I found a big easy-going giant of a fan, quiet-spoken and gentlemanly. There was no loudness or ostentation about him at all, and he was very easy to talk to, once you got used to a disconcerting habit he had of going “Mmmmmmm?” with a rising inflection, whenever you paused for his reactions to what you were saying. Maybe everyone does this in California, but it certainly derailed my train of thought the first couple of times.

Forry Ackerman is a true fan in a way that most of us don't come within a mile of being. Forry really believes in fandom; he still insures his life for \$5,000 every time he sets out for a convention, in favour of the convention committee, so that if he is killed by some traveling accident on the way, he will be worth more to the convention dead than alive. (From what I saw of what Ackerman did for the convention, \$5,000 wouldn't be nearly enough.) His will still provides for his priceless library to go to fandom. It will be inadequate compensation. There are two things that every neofan learns: one is that John W. Campbell, Jr. is the editor of *Astounding Science Fiction* and the other is that Forrest J Ackerman is the No.1 Fan. For my money, Ackerman's position is infinitely stronger. I am sold on Ackerman.

## Sunday, 23rd June 1951

I might have realized this was no ordinary day. In the first place, this was the day of our tennis club's annual garden fete, and it wasn't raining. Definitely, they had slipped up. In the second place, the July *Astounding Science Fiction* arrived only three days after publication date. Not only that, but it had some good stories. It's lucky I didn't read them all at once. I would never have gotten over the shock of finding that they were all good. On top of that, one of the letters in 'Brass Tacks' actually looked as if it hadn't been written by Campbell. How can such things be?

Round half past six that evening I was sitting outside in my slippers – sometimes I wish I could afford a chair – when a telegram boy arrived carrying, of all things, a telegram. I opened it. It seemed the only thing to do.

MEET ME GREAT NORTHERN RAILWAY STATION GLENGALL STREET 7:40 THIS EVENING  
BRITISH EUROPEAN AIRWAYS TERMINAL FORRY

“Steady now,” I said to myself and clambered down off the roof. I dashed through the front door to show the telegram to Madeleine. I think she suspected the moment she saw me that something was up. Feminine intuition I suppose, or it may have been the fragments of wood and glass hanging around my neck. I really should have remembered to open the door first. If you have ever seen a woman who has just been told to expect an important visitor in less than two hours you'll know what happened next. I stepped hastily out of the path of the blur of motion and tore off to borrow some money from my father and order a taxi. Don't think I spend my life ordering taxis – there was a strike of public transport at the time. Don't ask me how they knew Forry

Ackerman was coming. Then I went back to the house; it was vibrating rapidly like a power station. There were all sorts of things to be done. I won't bore you with the complications – I haven't decided yet just what else I will bore you with – but at the time, it seemed to me that I had spent the better part of my life knocking beds to pieces, carrying them up and down stairs, and putting them together again. It was a scene of utter chaos and indescribable confusion, something like the subscription department of *Galaxy* magazine.

Finally the taxi came and at exactly 7:41, I found the World's No.1 Fan standing quietly in the middle of the railroad station, like a petrified Forrest. I brought him home in triumph and left him with a copy of Lee Hoffman's *Quandry* No. 11 while I mounted my rusty steed once more to send telegrams to James and Bob. I thought of telephoning them, but it would have been difficult since none of us happens to have a telephone. I found they couldn't be reached that night, so I told them to come early the next morning and went back to Forry. I got the distinct impression that he liked *Quandry*; the first thing he asked me when I got back was whether he could get his suit cleaned and pressed. I looked blank, and he explained that he got it all dusty from rolling around on the floor. And the Irish are supposed to have a reputation for making extravagant compliments. As far as I can see, the Americans are way ahead of us. For instance, Forry told us later about one Dr. Keller paid to his wife. They were both seeing the Grand Canyon for the first time. It was a romantic and impressive sight. "You know," said Keller, "when God made the world He thought it needed something like the Grand Canyon, so he just scored His thumbnail across it and made all this." He paused and looked at his wife. "But," he said, "when God made you, dear, He had to use *both hands*." I thought that was perfectly charming, and I should imagine the Kellers are very happily married. It will take more than Dianetics to break up that home.

James and Bob arrived about ten o'clock the next morning and stayed for lunch and tea. Whether through delayed airsickness from his first flight or some mutated virus, Forry wasn't feeling too well, for which we all felt unreasonably guilty, but he didn't let it get him down. He revealed an unexpected talent for mimicry and his impersonations of various fans were delicious. Incidentally, I found the reason for that habit I mentioned he had of going 'Mmmmmmm?'. Apparently he had great difficulty in understanding what people were saying and didn't want to be asking them all the time to repeat themselves. We were a bit surprised at this – after all, we only talk about four times as fast as he does and, of course, we have no accent at all.

In the afternoon, I showed him my magnificent collection of books and magazines, which covers the whole field of science fiction from A to B. It must have taken all of two minutes. Then, showing a laudable freedom from envy, Forry wrote a couple of little commemorative pieces for the next *Slant*, and we set up one of them and ran a proof. The other was an unbelievably complicated pun which we didn't feel strong enough to tackle just then. Doubtless, after time has exercised its healing influence, we will be able to face it again.

Not quite twenty-four hours after he arrived, Forry had to fly back to Edinburgh. It seemed an awfully long way to come for such a short visit, but we thought it was worth every penny of Forry's money. I only hope he thought so, too. ☀

# I Remember Me

(from *Mimosa* 20, published in May 1997)

I see that on the 23rd of March 1954, I was confiding my inmost thoughts to Chuck Harris on the question of nationality:

You know, I think Vernon McCain had something there when he talked about this part of Ireland inducing schizophrenia. Can you imagine what it's like to be torn always between two rival patriotisms? Three, rather. Ireland, Ulster (which has a national mythos of its own), and England. We accept English standards of conduct and find ourselves supporting them in cricket test matches and so on, and yet we're ambivalent about them. The ones we have experience of here, of course, are the ruling classes, the hunting and shooting types, and a more obnoxious crowd of bastards you never met, and yet you've got to respect them. There's a curious mixture of hate, envy, and amusement in the Irish attitude to them, and even I feel a vague inherited sense of inferiority when speaking to someone who talks like Vince.

Then, on the other hand, we like to think of ourselves as Irish, and we appreciate Irish folk music, etc. Yet we reject unity with the rest of the country because they are dupes of the RC Church. We could build up a national mythos on Ulster itself – the Cuchulain saga and so on – if it weren't for the fact that we know quite well that we are descendants of the Plantationists who drove those people out. Many people here dispose of the problem by frankly claiming allegiance to Scotland.

This country is a godawful mess of contradictions.

One thing though. Belfast girls are not only more highly sexed than Southern drabs – we have the highest illegitimate birth rate in the British Isles – they are the best looking ones I have found anywhere. That's counting America. I've never been anywhere else where you can walk through the city just admiring the scenery walking by.

In a postcard no bigger than a man's hand there now appeared on the horizon the first Englishman to manifest himself in Irish Fandom:

5<sup>th</sup> July, 1954  
31, Campbell Park Avenue  
Belfast

Dear Mr. Willis,

I would be obliged if you would kindly forward to the above address the latest copy of *Hyphen*, which I note is mentioned in *Authentic Science Fiction* No. 46. I enclose PO for 1s 9d, including 3d postage.

Yours,

John E. Berry

The first thing I did was to look up the address in the Belfast Street Directory, of which there was a copy in my office. I noted that the occupier of the address given was a policeman, and a small warning bell rang. (I had recently fallen for a hoax by Vince Clarke in which he sent over Mike Wilson to represent himself as a neofan.) However, my office was empowered to send for police files and within a couple of days I had before me the file on Constable John E. Berry. It disclosed nothing suspicious about him, so I invited him to call at Oblique House. He turned out to be friendly, congenial, and enthusiastic, so I invited him to come again the next night there was a regular meeting of Irish Fandom. Again, he proved very congenial and I reported on the new acquisition to *Hyphen* co-editor Chuck Harris, who responded prophetically...

Berry sounds all right. I'm already wondering what he'll turn out to be a genius at. It would shake fandom rigid if a wheel of IF turned out to be just mediocre.

I was also breaking the news to Dean Grennell...

We now have a new member of Irish Fandom, and a *prolific* one. The third time he came up here he produced a top drawer fannish type article which will be in the next *Hyphen*, and he's written enough for the next two issues already and shows no sign of slowing down. His latest project is a series of studies of the Old Guard of Irish Fandom. (He has uncanny powers of observation and also I learned today has been in the habit of taking notes of the conversation here when he gets home.) We think it would be egotistical to publish them in *Hyphen*. Would you like them for *Grue*? Oh, the name of this latter day genius is John Berry.

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I have been criticised for including praise of myself in these memoirs, and I can understand why. But I ask you to understand my feelings at being expected to throw away this letter of comment by Robert Bloch on *The Enchanted Duplicator*. I think it deserves to pass before your eyes on its way to the waste basket.

Dear Walt,

I have never read a finer piece of fan writing than *The Enchanted Duplicator*.

It is the most delightful, whimsical, provocative, wise, witty work I've ever had the pleasure of reading... and re-reading. You and Bob Shaw have immortalized yourselves in this effort... and reflected a radiance of spirit which redounds to your mutual credit.

Let Laney quibble about the presence of a Fairy in the story... let Clean Fandom shudder in horror over the dreadful word ending Chapter Eleven... I can only say that this, for me, is the epitome of fan-fiction. Thank you for sending me a copy... and over and above that, thank you both for having written it. *The Enchanted Duplicator* is truly and evidently a 'labor of love' in every sense of the phrase. And I loved it!

I might as well be hung for a sheep as for a lamb, so here's a letter of comment from Chuck Harris on my report of Chicon 2. It's a very model of what a letter of comment should be like, and I defy anyone receiving such a letter to willfully destroy it without regret.

This Convention Report is wonderful. It took me an hour to read and I finished it just three minutes ago. I've made a cliché out of 'the best thing you've ever written' during the last couple of years, but I'm in grave danger of becoming a sincere acolyte of yours. Look, forget everything nice I've ever said about your stuff. Forget that I'm a friend of yours. Forget that I know all these fannish names and references. Ready? Walt, this was the best thing that you've ever written – it's the best thing I've seen in any fanzine anywhere. I'm still full of the sort of exhilaration that I get after reading Sturgeon or Heinlein. Whilst reading it I felt that I was making the trip with you and meeting all these people, just as if I had been in Chicago too. I think the biggest compliment I could pay you was that after deciphering twenty-five pages, I felt bitterly disappointed when I reached the end because you didn't carry on with a report of what happened afterwards.

I'm more than a little awed with you just now – it's as if Vince had suddenly become a better writer than Heinlein, or James blossomed out as a second Messiah. Do you remember talking about how you intended to get a sort of monopoly on conreports so that any future committee would automatically put aside your retainer before planning anything else? With stuff like this you stand a damn good chance of pulling it off. It's true that I'm the world's No. 1 sucker for any sort of conreport, but this was different. I was quite excited and kept trying to read faster than I could absorb the words in a sort of over-eagerness to find out what the holy hell was going to happen next. I was so interested that I even forgot the cup of tea that was standing on the mantelpiece. Tonight I'm too effusive to comment on it. I've got little word pictures skidding over my cortex and I'd rather wait until I come down to earth before making with the fearless comments.

If Lee drops dead before this coming issue of *Quandry*, remember that *Hyphen* is first in the queue for this report. In fact, I've a good mind to write her trying to persuade her that it's crap so that she'll reject it, and then I can earn undying egoboo as its publisher.

I feel very proud of you. Please keep your clay foot out of my eye. I shall probably address you as 'Sir' when I see you again. ☀

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### **Editorial Afterword:**

Of the comments we received on Walt's column, Rodney Leighton pretty much spoke for all of us when he remarked on the two letters of praise that Walt had reprinted:

Any person who has been active in fandom as long as he has, and who has made such an impression on fans and fandom deserves a number of pats on the back.

We had introduced this installment of "I Remember Me" by stating that Walt would be describing "the discovery of another amazing fan writing talent" which, as we saw, turned out to be the eminent John Berry. For his column in our next issue he told us about a visit with another famous fan from that same era, Dean Grennell. And along the way describe some of the events from his first two trips to North America, in 1952 and 1962, including tales of bottomless ashtrays and man-eating elevators. But he started out with some bad news.

# I Remember Me

(from *Mimosa* 21, published in December 1997)

I have a confession to make. I have come to the end of my correspondence files for the 1950s. All I have left are the gutted remains of 1954. I don't have the slightest idea of where the rest of the 1950s have gotten to, but I suspect they are in the garage in a bookcase behind the old wardrobe which was too big for the auctioneer to sell. I don't feel like shifting it myself so I'll just have to wait until the next visit by my son, Bryan. Meanwhile, I can only offer you some vestiges of 1952/3/4 from an envelope marked 'Interesting Pages From Pre-1954', which my hand had refused to destroy.

The first is a carbon of a letter to Shelby Vick, written a week after I had gotten back from my 1952 trip to America. It's dated, retrospectively, September 1952, but it must surely have been written in October of that year.

I got back just over a week ago and I've hardly had time to look around. I've started on the report, but I just don't seem to be able to write. I guess it'll come eventually though. After this, however, I'm going to cut down on that form of crifanac...I don't like the way people were beginning to talk about WAW in every zine. I've got a sort of mental bloc (not to be confused with Tucker's father) about writing about the U.S. trip till I've got the report done, so I won't talk about that. It was wonderful, though. I would like to say something about this suggestion that Lee 'monopolized' me. Must say I didn't notice it. I don't suppose Lee and I were alone together for more than a few minutes from the beginning of the con until the end except for an hour one night – we went out on the observation tower for some fresh air and a rest, and talked quietly for an hour about Life and similar subjects. The rest of the time I was either roaming around talking to people or sitting quietly watching the convention. Admittedly, Lee was at the same table, but since when have fans been frightened by girls? Anyone could have come along and talked, and plenty did...

From what little I've heard of reactions to me at the con, it seems I was quiet. Well, of course I was, but not as quiet as all that. Since it's in all our interests to make out that I not only enjoyed myself at the con (which of course I did), but that I occasionally said something above the 'duhhh' level, I have screened my memory banks for remarks that you might like to quote as fillers or something:

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In the coffee room, Tucker: "Well, how about some mush?"

WAW: "What's that? Eskimo hotdogs?"

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In the penthouse, BeaM *{{ed. note: Bea Mahaffey}}*: "He was a good writer until he began to think his stories ought to have significance."

WAW: "He sold his birthright for a pot of message?"

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In Bloch's room, BeaM: "You want an ashtray?"

WAW (tossing his ash out the window over Chicago): "No thanks, this one isn't full yet."

Ten years later, Terry Carr bet me \$1,500 that that last remark was to be found in *The Harp Stateside*.

Now here, completely out of place, is what looks like a carbon of part of a letter from Dean Grennell and me to Chuck Harris, written in 1962 in the Grennell house...

**[Willis]** S'funny, the last time I wrote a letter in the States it was on an Underwood, the one [at Lee Hoffman's home] in Savannah, Georgia, and it was probably to you. It's not one of the cream of contemporary typers (like the electric portable in Lupoff's flat, which is terrifying – imagine it, power-operated typos) but a solid satisfying affair. Madeleine and I have been having a wonderful time since our plane landed, but I think here is the nicest of all. Isn't it wonderful you can come a quarter of the way round the world and meet people for the first time, and feel among old friends?

Well, briefly, what has happened so far is that we landed in New York on Monday evening and were, in accordance with a fine old tradition, met by two rival groups of welcomers. The immediate problem we solved by splitting ourselves into two cars, the marriage-disruptive influences of NY fandom thus operating immediately, and found ourselves eventually in the Wollheim flat on Clyde Street (you remember, "When Wolls Clyde"?) with Terry Carr and Ted White. They told us they had met Ethel Lindsay too and taken her home immediately and given her a bath, but miraculously they didn't insist on this with us. Next day we roamed around NY and to a dinner party in Greenwich Village. Next day a party in the Lupoffs' luxury flat, and on Thursday by bus to Chicago. Then the Convention, a vast sprawling affair where Madeleine had a wonderful time and I enjoyed myself nearly as much. Then in Dean's vast luxurious Oldsmobile at speeds up to 100 miles per hour to Fond du Lac and the fabulous basement, where we are now. This is a fabulous place, a bit like the Oblique House attic and three workshops rolled into one. Only thing wrong with it is that you could hardly play ghoodminton in it, with all the stuff that's down here. Dean is still developing photos, about 200 of them since 7:30 this morning, but I think he's ready to take over now...

**[Grennell]** Well, yessss...for a bit anyhow. Some of the film we developed early this morning is dry and ready for printing. A couple of fannish things happened at the con and you might as well be filled in on them at this point: Bjo Trimble (My Favorite Chipmunk) saw some poor chap, far gone toward blotto, whimpering and cringing in an elevator car gone berserk. This thing would close its door, give a couple of ruminative jiggles, slip its door open again, and jolt a couple of times. The poor cove would make a despairing lunge for the door and the robot brain of the mad thing would emit a couple of sardonic clicks as the door slid shut once more. So Bjo went down to the lobby and amid a crowd of faans and mundanes, leveled a petite forefinger pistol-wise at the desk clerk and proclaimed in her voice (a thing of astounding stridency which has made her the absolute dictator of LA Fandom):

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"Your Elevator EEEATS People!!!"  
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[Willis] Dean has just heard the tocsin from his timer and gone off to do whatever he does. Bjo is a dear, a little freckled ball of fire, and I'm glad we'll be meeting her again in LA. The other thing we were going to tell you... well, you remember how last time in '52 we were persecuted by Catholic girls, the ones who were doing Nameless Things in the Convention Hall? Well, they were there again this year, no doubt looking for Harlan Ellison, and including some ladies dressed in long black frocks who would have been a sensation at the Masquerade Ball. The sf convention must have puzzled them a bit. The last morning, one of our lot collapsed in the main lobby, either from a mild epileptic fit or from just having looked at his hotel bill, and a little crowd of these MABLA people (Midwest Association of the Society of the Lay Apostolate) gathered round. Passing by, Dean heard one of them make this sinister and unsettling remark:

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"He's One of Those World People."  
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[Grennell] Well, we've been off trying to do a mock-up of a Flying Saucer photo. We just got the film out of the developer and stole a peek at it, and I'm happy to be able to say that it looks as though it will make a fairly deceitful print. We are going to terminate things for now and dash off for a bite to eat. You have not heard the last of this, Chuq 'arris, nor you, Sue 'arris, but we wanted you to know that whenever trufen get together, the name of Harris is on everyone's tongue, amid the fur and such. ☀

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### Editorial Afterword:

There were others besides Nicki and I who were aghast at learning that Walt had come to the end of his correspondence files. One of them was the indefatigable Harry Warner, Jr., who commented that:

I certainly hope that Walt Willis manages to find the missing correspondence files before someone offers him a small fortune for his big wardrobe and hauls away those precious fannish documents. Walter's column is perhaps the most entertaining thing in this issue, as distinguished from the informative and eulogistic contributions.

But alas, there was never any word from Walt if he had been able to access his other treasure trove of past correspondence and in the end there was only enough left immediately at hand for one final installment of "I Remember Me", which appeared in our June 1998 issue. A few months later we heard a report that Walt's health had deteriorated from a stroke and about a year after that he died from a heart attack. His final column, for *Mimosa* 22, was also the last fanzine article he ever wrote and we felt very honored we were the ones to publish it. And it's a good one, centered around his friend Lee Hoffman. There was also an example of how *not* to construct a science fiction story, a correspondence exchange with *Galaxy* editor Horace Gold, and more...

# I Remember Me

(from *Mimosa* 22, published in June 1998)

## Horace Gold's *Galaxy*

When I was in the States in 1952, I made the acquaintance of Horace Gold *{{ed. note: then the editor of Galaxy Science Fiction}}*, and I have here a long letter from him dated June 28, 1954.

...You didn't have to explain why *Galaxy* has the same kind but not the same degree of pleasure that sf used to have when it was truly scarce. I went through those days too, remember. To find a Wells or a Verne on a library shelf made everything inside me that wasn't nailed down give a giant lurch of discovery and excitement. Naturally I can't possibly ever again recapture that great joy and ecstatic gulping of the stories...

As for running letters, Isaac Asimov and a few others can tell you how clear the mandate was from our readers. They went through thousands and were astonished at the vehemence and the almost unbelievable preponderance of 'antis'. In any case, the formula is successful, so we're not rocking the boat. I don't know if I've mentioned this, but we have a clear lead in U.S. and Canada circulation – so far past *Astounding* that there seems no chance whatever of its catching us up. And of course, our five foreign editions. You blame us for not wanting to tamper?

I replied to this letter on 8th July:

Interested, and pleased to hear about your outstripping *Astounding* in circulation. I wish you would say about items of information like this whether I may quote you or not.

Your own rating of stories was fascinating. The reader normally assumes that the editor likes equally well all the stories he prints, whereas it's obvious that he must print many of them as a *faute de mieux*, or for some other odd reason, like encouraging a new author or because he needs a story of exactly that length. I often wonder if some editors deliberately print bad stories to make the other ones look better (like the restaurant in the old vaudeville joke that employed midget waiters to make the steaks look bigger) or even to encourage potential authors. As Bob Shaw once wrote, "I always like reading *Planet Stories* because it gives me the pleasant feeling that I could make money writing science fiction."

"The Impossible Voyage Home" had a nice idea, but the human interest angle didn't come off with me for some reason. I found myself not giving a damn whether the old folks got to Earth, especially after they played that dirty trick on the sentry who trusted them. But then maybe I take too much to heart the interests of the subsidiary characters. It infuriates me in movies, for instance, when the hero tears a page out of a phone book or knocks over a fruit barrow in a chase. I know the gesticulating barrow owner is a stock figure, of course, but I still feel I'd like to see a movie, just one, where the hero stops and picks up some of the fruit he has knocked over, or replaces the page in the phone book.

## A Regretful Rejection

Now, here is a letter to Mal Ashworth in which I turn down regretfully a submission to *Hyphen*. This may be the last occasion in which a fanzine mentions the word 'mimeoscope'. Or indeed, the term 'wavy scramgravy'. I've lost all memory of the origin of this expression. Are there even older fans who remember it? 'Mimeoscope' is easier; it was basically a box with a lamp inside

and a glass lid on which you spread out a stencil which you could then read and check for typos. This story was attributed to Algis Budrys:

There was this keen fanned, you see, who couldn't bear to give up his fmz to get married, and yet couldn't work happily on his fmz for the love of this girl. His two loves seemed to be incompatible. Then one day while he was driving his girl home from a convention they had a bad smash and she was taken to the hospital with grave internal injuries. Her whole stomach was damaged beyond repair. Ordinarily her life would have been despaired of, but just recently this famous scientist had invented a mechanical stomach and took this opportunity to try it out. So they fitted in the mechanical stomach. Being more efficient than the crude natural one there was plenty of room and since they wanted to be able to observe the working of this untried invention they let a glass plate into her abdomen and installed a light inside, working off the same little atomic power pack as her stomach. Everything seemed to be OK so after she regained consciousness they let her boyfriend in. He dashed in anxiously, beanie whirring, and they explain to him exactly what had happened. They draw the blanket aside and show him the illuminated frontage. His face is suddenly suffused with joy and relief. "Darling!" he cries, all his problems now at an end, "Darling, will you be my mimeoscope?"

Miss Monroe has asked me to apologise for the delay in answering your letter to the FORT MUDGE STEAM CALLIOPE COMPANY but she has been getting rid of a pitcher who didn't go often enough to the well.

Yours for wavier scamgravy,

### **The Short Unhappy Life of *Escape***

In July 1954 I got an eight-page letter from Fred Woroch of Toronto announcing the impending publication of *Escape*, a professionally printed fanzine. It was to be produced on the equipment he was in charge of, at no cost except that of the paper and plates used. This seemed to me a wonderful opportunity to pass on some of the material I had been holding for *Slant*, so I sent it all to him, including the first part of Forry Ackerman's autobiography. This was all about his childhood, first prozines, etc., and while interesting enough would have been a chore to set up in type. What I had been really hoping for was Forry's rebuttal to Laney's *Ah, Sweet Idiocy*.

Of course I got no response at all, and there was never any sign of *Escape*. Nor was there ever any complaint from Forry, a lack of reaction for which I am eternally grateful.

### **Lee Hoffman and Her Horse**

Everyone knows that Lee Hoffman left fandom for a horse, but few fans have been introduced to the horse in question, as I was in this letter, undated but followed by another dated May 11<sup>th</sup>, 1953...

Dear Walt,

Do you remember the night we sat on the front steps and I told you that of all the really big things I wanted, like attending the Nolacon, going to college, etc., I'd gotten all but one?

I've gotten my horse.

I will tell you the whole wonderful story as soon as I have gotten over it enough to be coherent.

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Dear Walt,

Gosh, I didn't know you were sick. I supposed maybe you were gafiating like me. For a long while, there I was a negative fan. I hated the sight of mail, except for letters from a few special people. I let them lie around unopened. I actively avoided any sign of fan activity. I rode my hoss, painted pictures furiously with my oil paints, drew pics with ink, took art lessons with watercolors, read non-stf books, and saw 3-dimensional movies. But I avoided the taint of a *Galaxy* or *Startling*. I felt anti-fan.

Then one day a *Confusion* came in which ShelVy predicted that I would return to fandom this summer with a bang. The next thing I knew, a *Quandry* was in the works, laden with material by Speer, Tucker, Silverberg, and others, and featuring a letter from Bloch. A stencil was in the mails to ShelVy for confusion, and a few measly bucks were deposited in my account toward a trip to the Philcon. I am happy old self, once again a fan.

I will tell you about the horse. He is a gelding. He's ten years old, and bay. He was once five-gaited but has been misused until he is thoroughly confused, and off his gaits to the extent that he paces instead of trotting. But otherwise he is a dream of a horse. He's sixteen hands, and has beautiful conformation. When one rides him, he holds his head and tail up and steps along like a really high-class animal. He looks expensive, well-bred and high-spirited, but he is as gentle as a dog, and almost as friendly. And he's a dream to handle. He doesn't shy at anything. Cars to him are a common sort of thing, dogs just another nuisance to be ignored. Nothing flusters him except other horses. They get him excited, because he is alone in the field all the time and misses the companionship or his own kind.

I would say that when he was on his gaits he would have sold for around \$500. I got him for \$125. I think he was a gift of the gods. ☀

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### **Editorial Afterword:**

There were several interesting reader responses to Walt's final installment of "I Remember Me", including one from Ron Bennett who noted the contrast with other contents of the issue:

Lovely, gentle article from Walt Willis, gentle because it sits pleasantly among pieces of more frenetic activity. Loved the mimeoscope story; haven't heard of one of those things for goodness knows how many yonks. The piece was, of course, far too short.

And then he was gone. There were two remembrances of Walt in our 25<sup>th</sup> issue, and we closed it out with an article that I had assembled from some vintage Willis writings. Here's the intro:

With Chicon 2000 coming up later this year, it seems appropriate to close this issue with some classic Willis – a narrative from his visit to the 1952 Chicon, reprinted (slightly abridged) from *The Harp Stateside* and the 7<sup>th</sup> issue (Winter 1952-3) of *Slant*. We will very much miss him – he was a link to fandom's Golden Age; he was our friend.

# The Harp at Chicon

(from *Mimosa* 25, published in April 2000)

As the night wore on, the party stayed very close to our ideal – not too many people and all of them conscious. The only noise seemed to come from the pros round the bar, where for a while I got caught up in a crowd which seemed to consist mainly of Mack Reynolds, though one caught glimpses of Tony Boucher, Poul Anderson, and Jerry Bixby roaming around his outskirts. I scored an almost fatal success with a couple of limericks they hadn't heard before. "This Willis is a *well*," announced Mack reverently. "A *well*, that's what he is!" It wasn't that I didn't enjoy the present company, but I wanted to get back to Max Keasler and Lee Hoffman; god knew when us three would ever meet again. But Mack would have none of it. "Willis is a *well*," he insisted to the crowd at the bar. "We can't let our well get away," he pleaded, pressing another drink on me to make sure I didn't run dry. Finally, I promised to mail him a complete list of all the limericks I knew and escaped, followed by resentful rumblings of "I tell you the man was a *well*! A positive *well*!"

I went back to the window ledge where I'd been sitting between Lee and Max. We spent the rest of the night there, holding court with various people who dropped by. Mack Reynolds made occasional sorties out of the bar to beg for more limericks. I would dredge the resources of my memory and he would retire again, shaking his head and muttering to no one in particular, "A *well*!" Poul Anderson came along wanting to be taught some Irish drinking songs. I sang him as much as I could remember of "The Cruiskeen Lawn" and promised to mail him the rest. Max was dispensing No-Doze tablets to everyone. He had been living on them himself for days and was beginning to feel very odd indeed.

Time went by and things got quieter and quieter until we seemed to be the only ones who were fully awake. As the dawn broke, the three of us were quietly very happy and talked about how wonderful it had all been, and how much we were going to miss each other and how we must meet again some time. As for me, I was as happy as I'd ever been in my life. I had now been just seven days in America without even having had time to think about it, but now a feeling of utter exaltation swept over me to realize that here I was sitting between Lee Hoffman and Max Keasler at the top of a Chicago skyscraper, watching the sun rise over Lake Michigan. Life can be wonderful. It was one of those moments that has to be broken while it's still perfect, and when the sun was fully up we went down to have breakfast.

###

I came home from my U.S. trip to find that half of you good people didn't know I'd been away, and the rest had written anyway. I'm sorry I haven't replied to your letter or appeared in answer to your writ, or whatever it was, but for the last six months I've either been getting ready to go over to America, been over in America, or been getting over America. And believe me it's a hard place to get over. People keep asking me what I thought of it. Well, that's a good question; I wish someone would hurry up and tell me a good answer. There were some things I liked a lot. Malted milk, the Okefenokee Swamp, orange juice, the Gulf of Mexico, hamburgers, the Rocky Mountains, pastrami, the Grand Canyon, fried chicken, the New York skyline – subtle nuances like that in the American scene which the less perceptive tourist might pass unnoticed. What

really did impress me was the American small town, which seemed to me the nearest thing to the ideal place to live in that has appeared so far on this planet. Pleasant houses, tree-lined streets, young people in summer clothes, and warm evenings filled with the crepitation of crickets and of neon signs – symbolically indistinguishable in sound. ☀

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### **Editorial Afterword:**

I'll let Fred Smith provide the coda to this collection. In response to "The Harp at Chicon" he wrote us that:

In '55 or possibly '56, my wife and I visited Oblique House on our way to our holiday in Dublin. We took an overnight sailing from Glasgow to Belfast arriving at about 6.30 a.m. and were thoroughly taken aback to find Walt and Chuck Harris (who was staying with the Willises) waiting at the quay to escort us to the house in the trusty Morris Minor. Because I had warned Walt that we were dropping in en route he arose from a warm bed to meet us at the boat. That's the kind of person he was. The Shaws and John Berry turned up later and we ended up spending about ten hours there. I even played ghoodminton with Bob, Chuck, and Berry, which nearly caused more demolition of the room.

Walt's Chicon piece reminded me that I consider "The Harp Stateside" to be the finest thing that even he wrote and one of the finest sustained pieces of fan writing that there has ever been. I'm glad I managed to tell him as much before he had his stroke.

In the end, there's not much to say about Walt Willis that isn't a superlative. He was the most prominent member of fandom's most famous fan organization, the legendary Irish Fandom of the 1950s. Bob Shaw, another member of IF and also one of fandom's finest writers and humorists, once described Willis as "the best writer [he'd] ever known". But it was Harry Warner, Jr., in his book, *A Wealth of Fable*, who described Walt as the "best and most gifted fan of the 1950s, who also might qualify as the Number One Fan of any and all decades".

And you know what? Harry was right.

When a notable person passes on, there's usually somebody who makes what in retrospect often seems a superficial remark: "We will not see his like again." But in this case that's exactly right. We really won't. Walt was unique in fandom – an absolutely great writer, fanzine editor, correspondent, and humorist, all in one. I am very happy that I got to meet him, if only for what turned out to be a few moments. A century from now, if fandom still exists, it would be a great compliment to me for some future historian, before mentioning anything else I had done and accomplished in fandom, to write that: "I'm envious that he got to meet Walt Willis."

RL