

NEVER QUITE ARRIVING



NEVER QUITE ARRIVING 4 is the delayed fourth issue of a personalzine produced by *Christina Lake*, currently of 12 Hatherley Road, Bishopston, Bristol BS7 8QA, but soon to be contactable at *21 Sunnyside Place, Belmont, MA 02178, USA* (4th June 1996 onwards, till around the end of November)

Cliffhangers and how to avoid them

Anyone paying attention during the colophon above will notice that I have billed this as a personal zine. This means that it has all been written by me (apart from the letters, though that has been known too), which in turn means that this issue does not contain the resolution of Tony Walsh's nightmare flight on the plane from hell (or at least from Africa). Unfortunately, Tony hasn't been feeling up to writing much recently because he's been suffering from lots of headaches brought on by sinus troubles, and though he has promised he WILL finish the article some time in the future, he can't say at the moment when. Of course, I could use the continuing non-arrival of *Out of Africa* part 2 to explain the long gap between the previous issue (produced for *MisConstrued* in February 1995) and this, but it wouldn't be quite true. The reality of the matter is that NQA fell victim to my decision to produce bi-monthly issues of *Balloons Over Bristol*. And one bi-monthly fanzine in the family is quite enough even for me. But all along, I knew that NQA was only on hold, waiting in the parterre for the moment when it would leap forward to fulfill its destiny. I've even known what I was going to write about for this issue for quite some time - though the notes only existed in my head, and have been amended, rewritten and generally sullied by life over the course of the last year. So this is what you're getting this time folks - a rambling article about my decision to finally leave home and seek my fortune, plus a soundbite from *Evolution*, the 1996 Eastercon, and a piece I did for the women's apa, TWP, which seemed germane to one aspect of the subject in hand. There's also the aforementioned letter column and a superb front cover from Sue Mason, produced for me in situ at *MiS-saigon*. Next issue, I hope, will be less introspective, and maybe feature some of my adventures in America or the rest of the world. I'll keep you posted.

Itineraries and how not to write them

Ever tried working out a plan for where you might like to be over a year in advance? I have, and I can tell you, it is hell. How on earth can you possibly decide whether the version of yourself knocking around the world in 1997 will be feeling adventurous or just plain tired? Whether it will be wanting to party with fans or hike through rainforests? Whether it will wish to embark on solo adventures with backpackers in South East Asia or sit in a garden in Sydney, drinking strawberry spritzers with one of its best friends from university? Oh to have the opportunity to make such decisions you might say. And I would concur - but it doesn't make it any easier to second guess myself. The air ticket that I have bought is, according to the travel agents, extremely flexible. I can change destinations (within the limits of the routes serviced by Qantas/BA), I can change timings (subject to availability) and I can even junk it in and sell it; but, all the same, I was obliged to decide on a proto-plan before my first flight could even be booked. So, back in February, I worked out my first itinerary, which I shan't bother printing here as I have changed it twice since then (though to be fair to me, the air industry apparently has such stupid computer systems that it is impossible to book flights more than one year in advance, so even my original itinerary came to an abrupt halt in December when I hit Australia).

Itinerary Version 3, goes as follows :

04/06/96 Heathrow - Boston
03/12/96 Boston - Los Angeles - Fiji
10/12/96 Fiji - Sydney
09/03/97 Sydney - Auckland
01/04/97 Wellington - Sydney
17/04/97 Sydney - Jakarta
01/05/97 Jakarta - Singapore
03/06/97 Bangkok - Heathrow

The New Zealand bits are a side trip necessitated by the fact that Australian fandom has most inconsiderately decided not to put on an Easter convention for 1997, but there is one in New Zealand (apparently). Originally I was going to do New Zealand en route to Australia, but going there mid-way through my Australian trip also gives me more time to visit New Zealand without hitting the Christmas rush, so it's not all bad. Also, it gave me one spare stop, so I substituted Fiji (after flirting with the concept of Mexico, only to have this soundly scotched by the fact that neither BA nor Qantas fly from Mexico to Australia - though I could have completely re-arranged my trip and booked with United and Garuda. Arggh! I decided that maybe I would just try and pick up a cheap flight down to Mexico whilst I was in the States.) Not that I know anything about Fiji, as my travel agents told me that the stop would be in Tahiti - so I read up on Tahiti in the travel section of Waterstones, decided it might be worth a stay for a few days, then returned to my travel agents to get them to do the booking only to find out that actually the stop was in Fiji. Sometimes it's just not worth trying too hard to direct your fate. Ditto, the lack of flight between Singapore and Bangkok. I decided to do this bit overland so that I don't have to make up my mind in advance how long I want to spend in each of Singapore, Malaysia and Thailand. Will it ever work out? Will I get ill en route? Will I be called back for some great family crisis? Will I run out of money before I even leave America? Damned if I know - but that's as near as I can say, on the current information, as to what I might be doing and where I might be in the first half of 1997.

But now, let's backtrack to last year and the various events and mental gymnastics that cause me to be sitting here, in May 1996, contemplating with horror the task of boxing up all my possessions so that I can let out my house while I abscond for a year :

THE UPWARD SPIRAL?

In March 1995 I applied for a job with Skillshare Africa to be a librarian in Lesotho. It wasn't necessarily the first indication that I was getting restless, but it was certainly the first sign that I was prepared to do something about it. After getting the interview, I started to gather information on Lesotho - good and bad - fantastic scenery, political unrest, craft projects, a workforce employed mainly in the diamond mines in South Africa. Someone at work who had been there, lent me photos, and regaled me with tales of all the clubs I could join, and the jolly ex-pat activities that went on out there. I began to feel pretty psyched up to wanting to go, to get away from the seeming futility and selfishness of my life to do something different and, I hoped, socially valuable.

As luck would have it, the day before the interview, the director of my part of the company summoned me to her office. I wondered what she wanted - had someone finally caught on to my photocopying apa contributions and bits of fanzines? She told me that she had been approached by some people aiming to set up an environment centre in Bath who wanted Wessex Water to second them a member of staff to help with the project. Looking through the job profiles suggested - setting up an information resource, CD ROMs, databases - she had thought of me. I was gratified. Too often my superiors tended to overlook me. I was also excited at the prospect. But primarily I was frustrated. As if I had already been offered the job in Lesotho, and had to make the choice between going out there, or trying for this unprecedented opportunity being offered to me.

So I set out for Leicester, where the interviews were to be held, with a divided mind. The first splinter of doubt in my conviction that Lesotho was to be my destiny. This conviction was soon to take a series of much harder knocks when I arrived at the interview. First of all, the other candidates, all five of them women, seemed at least as good as me. Then, I saw pictures of the school where the librarian would be working, and felt daunted by the Africaness of it all - the smiling black faces, the rather missionary-like building, the arid countryside around it. Did I really want to go there? These doubts were reinforced by the talk on the work of Skillshare Africa. How their volunteers (known as co-operantes) would be expected to live and work in the local community and not mix with other English workers out there.

I thought I had done all right on the initial group exercises, but then I was plunged into the cultural interview, and asked how I would cope with being the only white face for miles around, how I would deal with facilitating rather than achieving, how I reacted to problems at work. The worst part of all was when they asked me to think of some occasion when I had had a problem with a person, and overcome it. My mind immediately went to my friend Barb, who had suddenly refused to have any more contact with me. I had finally received a letter from her, a week or two before the interview, explaining what it was all about. Inexorably, driven by the silence as my brain refused to think of anything else, I embarked on the story, realising even as I did so that it was a) far too complicated to do justice to, featuring as it did a German group that turned into a gay dating agent, fanzines, Woody Allen films, writer's circle, and a whole sequence involving her sleeping with members of the Bristol SF group, a row with Jenny Raggett and petulance over not being invited to Peter-Fred's firework's parties; that b) I never had overcome the problem; and that c) the story almost certainly wouldn't show me in a good light.

After that I became rather reckless, writing all sorts of unwise things about myself in the essay on how one would cope a few thousand miles away from friends and family, without the luxuries of Western civilization. Instead of the idyllic picture I had drawn for myself of an ascetic lifestyle, dedicated to completing my novel, keeping my correspondence up to date and learning about my African neighbours (which if truth be told had dwelled more on me returning a transformed and successful person than the actual passage of time necessary to achieve this), I began to remember all my bad experiences abroad, most notably my year as an assistante in a French school, and my imagination went into overdrive on the loneliness of it all. Even as I wrote, I became less and less convinced that I had the right character for the job. God, I was emotional wreck who had just written a fanzine telling people how I liked

to lie on the floor and cry, and that the highpoint of my life was cooking my dinner; I was this awful person whom an erstwhile friend had chosen to ostracise. Just when I should have been presenting a confident persona (and after all, if there's one thing I claim to do, it's write, so it shouldn't have been hard to make one up), I was letting my insecurities run riot so that every one of them could be read between the lines of my text. The only way I could put an even marginally positive slant on what I had committed to paper was to hope that they would be so impressed with my honesty and evidence of self-knowledge, that they would dismiss the balanced accounts of my fellow candidates as facile fabrications which would break down under the pressures of real life and award the post to me forthwith.

Not at all convinced by my own rationalisations, I stopped trying to get the job and simply enjoyed myself, talking to the other candidates about their lives and why they wanted to go to Africa. Because the pattern of interviews left us in the recreation room in different combinations, we had plenty of time to exchange confidences about how we were doing, what we thought of it all, and build up a fair spirit of camaraderie. By the end, we had worked out that what we would really like to do was go out there together. It seemed a pity that only one of us could be chosen. But less of a pity, if I was going to be totally honest, that it wouldn't be me.

On the train back from Leicester to Birmingham, I was still feeling pretty hyped up after a day of intense interaction. In Coventry, a couple of football fans joined the train and sat opposite me. One of them insisted on talking to me and the woman next to me. His conversation was rather annoying, but I just answered it as non-controversially as possible. The woman next to me, probably about my own age, tried her best to ignore him. But Terry kept going on at her trying to make her answer. His mate tried to get him to shut up, and so did I. The weird thing about it all for me was that I would normally have been the person studiously ignoring them. It was only because I had spent the whole day communicating that I wasn't sitting in my normal shell. I had this delirious sensation of being out of myself, as if all the bits normally inside were out there on the surface. So I could talk to these men, and defend my neighbour without there being any brittle, inflexible parts waiting to crack.

By the time we reached Birmingham, the football fans had graduated from bullying my neighbour to trying to persuade me to give them my address, but I managed to make my escape, and went to look for my connection. As usual for cross-country routes on British Rail, connections were in short supply, and I found I would have to wait over an hour for my next train. The football fans on the train had been talking about going for a drink, and it suddenly occurred to me that after such a day as I had had, that was exactly what I needed. Like many women, I'm not culturally very comfortable with the idea of simply going to a bar by myself and buying a drink. On the other hand, station bars aren't really like going to drink by yourself in a pub - it is reasonably self-evident that you are passing the time waiting for a train, rather than trying to be picked up. Anyway, I decided this would be a better place to wait than in Burger King or on a draughty platform. I went in, bought a pint and found myself somewhere to sit. Only then did I realise that the football fans from the train had not gone on to Wolverhampton as I had thought, but had just arrived in the bar. Worse still, I realised that this must have been where they had been talking about having a drink, and dreaded them thinking that I had gone there to meet up with them again. Too late, Nick, the more sensible one, spotted me. I smiled weakly and pretended

that I was pleased to see them. Terry, the asshole, wandered off somewhere in the bar, no doubt to annoy some other people, or beat up a fruit machine, while Nick stayed and talked to me. Nick, without his mate, was not so much of a headcase. But all the same, he was from a different world to me, a car worker from Coventry who never read books and wasn't sure where or what Lesotho was. He started telling me about his ex-fiancee, and how he'd had everything to give her - car, house, steady job - and still she'd broken up with him. He couldn't seem to follow that it took more than the right possessions to make a successful relationship. Then again, given my own experiences, I couldn't really tell him what it did take. He started asking me for my address again, so I tried to put him off by telling him how old I was (I thought I was about ten years older than him, but it turned out to be more like five), then that I had a boyfriend (true, if you count a long-term and by then rather shaky relationship with someone else's husband). In the end, I pacified him by taking his address and promising to write (accompanied by the jeers of the returned Terry to the effect that I wouldn't. Nick, though, chose to believe me.) My pint was finished, my train, unfortunately, not quite due, but I made my excuses and went to hide on the platform, praying they wouldn't look at the timetable display and follow me.

Later, safely on the train to Bristol, I tried to wrap my mind round the events of the day. Stupid as it had been, the episode with the football fans had also given me a sense of empowerment. I looked at why I had wanted to go to Lesotho, and came up with the answer that I believed that I needed to go a long way from home to make any sense of my life. Yet, it seemed to me suddenly that if I could keep hold of this energy and openness that the stresses of the day had brought out, then perhaps I didn't have to go all the way to exile in Lesotho to change things. Maybe it wasn't actually necessary to go to Lesotho to get out of a relationship that was going nowhere (the above-mentioned married man), or to get over the stigma of no longer being Barb's friend (after all there's a lot to be said for NOT being friends with someone who used to ramble on so long about her cat that I had to read to pass the time while I was on the phone to her), or to do something worthwhile for society, or to clear a space in my life to think and write.

In the event, the first three surmises proved to be true, but involvement with Bath Environment Centre meant that my life grew more pressured rather than less. The combination of Intersection work and evening meetings for Bath Environment Centre meant that I more or less didn't draw breath between May and September. Bath Environment Centre brought with it a whole bunch of new friends, a new social life and a new sense of purpose. In the past I had been a lukewarm green sympathiser, but association with committed environmentalists and exposure to the books, leaflets and campaigns at the centre soon had me identifying with the group's ideals, considering alternative ways of living and developing a passionate attachment to the success of the Centre. It also showed me very clearly that the job I had been doing in the library at Wessex Water for eight years was no longer stretching me or enthusing me or contributing anything worthwhile to my life apart from the monthly pay packet. Various projects were in the air. Maybe a research grant from the British Library to investigate other environment centres. Maybe a full time job running the information resource at Bath Environment Centre. Maybe work on entries for a CD-ROM of sustainability. Sitting out in the pavement cafes of Bath in the perpetual summer of 1995 anything seemed possible. Anything except staying on at Wessex Water for another year.

The summer culminated with a real buzz. At the Worldcon I met American fan Frank Lunney and ended up going to Amsterdam with him and Dan and Lynn Steffan. There is something surreal about going to a foreign city with people you barely knew a week before. I was high on that sense of distance from my real life, the excitement of venturing beyond my normal boundaries and into a cinematic version of reality where nothing and nobody is the same. I was high, too, it has to be said, on my first prolonged exposure to dope. Dope is legal in Amsterdam, and I just could not get over the coffee shops, where you could go in and ask for the dope menu, or go up to a deli counter of selections to choose your pot. Compared to the resinous substances I had encountered in my limited exposure in Britain, the fresh herbal aromas of Amsterdam were temptingly good. As a non-habitual smoker, I kept having to be reminded to inhale, but once I had topped up my imperfectly metabolised dope with a beer or two, I could simply float around Amsterdam, holding Frank's hand, feeling totally out of this world. It was a bit like one extended dream sequence of trams, canals, street markets and cafes. I had never been on a holiday like this. I kept feeling I ought to be doing something definite and touristy, like going to an art gallery or taking one of the boat trips, but instead we would go to another cafe, or buy some Vlaamse Frites or herrings, or wander into a record shop in Frank's endless quest for On-U Sounds. Vacation, Frank called it. The American word for holiday. Vacate your mind. Vacate your life. It was all new to me, scary, amazing, peppered by weird moments like when a drunk 18 year old tried to talk Frank and me into adopting her. I wasn't sure if my life was really like this. It had never been before. But I sure as hell wanted it to be, while the dream sequence lasted.

After Amsterdam, things began to change. All summer I had had this sensation of my feet not quite touching the ground. I had thrown so much energy into keeping everything going that I don't think I realised how tired and strung out I was. What I needed was two weeks on a beach somewhere, doing nothing. Instead, I went to America, tired myself out some more and came back to massive backlogs of work that had not been touched in my absence. The winter closed in, harsh and bitter. My ex-husband suddenly refused to talk to me (see article later in the issue). Bath Environment Centre lost its momentum, the sense of creativity replaced by rows over mission statements and volunteer policies. I realised I hated my life. Hated everything about it. Living with my brother. Travelling to Bath every day. Working for Wessex Water. Being cold, even when the heating was on full. Being in the wrong time zone to talk to Frank. It all seemed so pointless and futile. Full circle to where I had been before the Lesotho job interview, before Bath Environment Centre, before Frank. Was I just destined to spiral through positive then negative phases, always landing that little bit further down? Or could I get out of the loop altogether? Slowly, throughout December and beyond, I began putting myself back together. I could do something about it. I had choices. I had seen from my friends at Bath Environment Centre that there was more to life than a (relatively) well-paid job. I was lucky, I had savings. I could get out. Always before when I thought of travelling, there had been something to hold me back, something I wanted to do, a job, a convention, work projects. Suddenly all this negative energy in my life was adding up to one positive push in another direction. Damned if I would stay in a city where there was not one but two people who no longer wanted to see me. Damned if I would hang around whinging to my friends about how bad everything was. Life didn't have to be that way, and it sure as hell, wasn't going to be. My friend Jenny had said I could come to Boston and write a book with her. My friend Sibylle had been inviting me to Australia for

ages. I would forget about conforming to the expectations of society for a while, and put together the trip I wanted to do and see where that took me. On the last working day in December I had my appraisal, and I told my manager that I was planning to leave. After that, I talked to Jenny and Dave Raggett who were back in Bristol for New Year, and sorted out use of their basement for a few months. Then I went to the travel agents and started negotiating my ticket.

The only difficulty since then is that having made the decision I wanted to leave straight away, that instant, rather than take time to plan the trip, discharge my commitments here, sort out my mental state and wait out the long days, weeks (and, it turned out, months) before I could leave my job and get going. But here I am, less than three weeks away from America, counting backwards now as I think - how on earth am I ever going to get everything sorted out in time, and do a fanzine, have a party, go to Leeds, visit my parents and take leave of all my friends? I no longer feel negative - there are plans already, things I want to get back for, like, maybe, a British Corflu, an idea for a convention in Bristol (hmm, it looks like the new me will be a conrunner - what *is* going on?), more cool music weekends, holiday plans for '97, people to call about jobs when I get back. It could be that the spiral has changed direction at last. Or maybe not, but I'll just try to ride it upwards while I can, and keep hold of that sense of openness to life that I've managed to find at times this year, those heady moments when you let go of your familiar self and its expectations and just see what happens.

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BALLOON FIESTA

Before Evolution, I decided it would be a fun to hold a launch party for the latest issue of Balloons Over Bristol in order to introduce people to the new editors, Pete and Sue Binfield. Pete and Sue agreed to come in on the party, so we all bought loads of drink, food and balloons en route to the convention. The only problem was - where to hold the party? Now Read On :

Friday 4 pm Poolside Bar

"Keith, can we have a party in your room?"

"My room?"

"Yours and Richard's. We need somewhere to hold a party for the fanzine and Sue won't let Pete hold it in theirs. And I don't think Lilian will want it in mine."

"I don't know."

"There'd be beer. Lot's of it. You like beer. Oh please, Keith."

"Umm. I'm not sure about this."

Keith hastily finishes his pint and leaves.

"Do you think he'll do it then?" says Pete.

"No." Richard laughs. It's his room too and he hasn't agreed to a party either, but I've chosen to ignore that.

"Keith likes sitting around with people, drinking beer. Why shouldn't he want a party?" I'm still baffled. Men, particularly drinking men, are normally a soft touch for parties. It's only women that fuss about waking up in a room full of beer cans, half-empty crisp packs and vomit stains.

Saturday 4 pm. A corridor

"Where we going to have this party then?"

"My room, I guess."

"Midnight?"

"Midnight."

Saturday 11 pm. Room 4047

"Blowing up balloons is giving me a hangover."

"The balloons, Richard? Not all the cider that you were drinking earlier?"

"Any more yellows? The yellows are easiest to start," I assert.

The floor is covered with balloons, but Pete looks disconsolate.

"I told everyone it'd be knee high in balloons. We didn't buy enough."

"We could put them in the bath. With the beer, like at an American con."

"You need ice for that. And Lilian's dribbled every ice cube in the hotel down her back already."

Lilian is lying on the bed in her customary post-dinner mode. She is concentrating on listening to the Trainspotting soundtrack and ignoring all these intruders blowing up balloons in her room.

"If you'd been in constant pain for the last two weeks," she says, "you'd understand."

"Your hair is beautiful...toonight," intone Sleeper in a pretty damn beat for beat imitation of Blondie.

"Yeah, well, we'll get out your way once we've blown up these last balloons."

"Fuckers! Whose idea was it to buy novelty balloons anyway? I can't start any of these."

Sunday 0.01 am Room 4047

Knock knock

"Hi Pete!"

"Hi Sue!"

About twenty of Pete and Sue's friends troop into the room and arrange themselves over bed, chairs, table, floor etc.

"Have a fanzine!" I offer, rather desperately.

Sunday 0.45 am Room 4047

Knock knock

"Hi, Christina. Oh, looks a bit busy in here."

"Have a fanzine."

"Thanks."

"Can I get you a drink?"

"Naah. I think I'll just go back to the bar."

Sunday 0.50 am Room 4047

Knock knock

"Hi Christina. Who are all these people?"

"The Manchester-Edinburgh-Aberdeen group mind."

"Having a good time, aren't they. Umm, Christina, no offense, but there's not much room. Maybe we'll just..."

"Hold on a bit. I can get you all drinks and we can talk in the corridor."

"Well, okay. I wouldn't mind one of those small bottles of lager."

Sunday 1.10 am The corridor

"Someone's just complained about the noise. We're going to have to leave."

"We could go to my room," says Kate Solomon. "It's just down the corridor."

Sunday 1.20 am Kate's room

"Hey, this is more civilized. In my room they're all bouncing up and down on the beds, hitting each other over the head with balloons, while daring people to drink 60 degree proof liquors."

"We're having a nice conversation about corsets."

"I guess it's the age gap. I'd say that they're all at least ten years younger than us. I used to go to room parties like that back when I first came into fandom."

"We're just getting old."

"No way," says Kate, zestfully. "I still know how to have ten times more fun than my students at school."

"Yeah, I know how to have fun too," says Krisia Oborn, smiling. "You just wait and see."

Sunday 1.30 am Room 4047

"Ah, there you are Ms Lake. We thought we were at the wrong party."

Joseph Nicholas and Judith Hanna are peering at the mass of bodies on the bed, perhaps speculating that I'd been buried in the orgy.

"No, but if you want a quieter party, people have adjourned to Kate and Malcolm's room down the corridor."

"What a good idea," says Judith, as a few more balloons burst, and Joseph spots that all the remaining alcohol seems to be cider.

Kev McVeigh, Lesley Ward and Brian Davies decide to hang on in there with me.

"This is the Balloons Over Bristol tape," I shout above the noise. "I recorded some of the tracks mentioned in the fanzine."

"That's Frank Black, isn't it?"

"Yes."

"His previous album was about the best thing that happened to me the year it was released," says Lesley, shuddering still at the memory of her neighbours from hell.

Kev puts his ear to the cassette player for a while.

"Sixty Foot Dolls," he announces. "Pity no-one can hear them."

"Never mind. I'll shut everyone up for a minute."

I go over to the mini-bar and extract the bottle of champagne I've bought for the purpose.

"Pete, time for your big moment. Hope you've written your speech."

"Pete for Pres!" says one of his minions, right on cue.

"Silence!" I call. "We're here tonight to toast the new editor, or editors of Balloons Over Bristol. Sue says she wants nothing to do with this mad enterprise, but no doubt she'll be get drafted in to help, sooner or later."

Sue Binfield crawls out from under some of the bodies on the bed. "Yeah, like when he went away the week before that convention we were supposed to be running in Aberdeen, and left me to do all the work."

"It wasn't my fault. I had to go away on business."

"You're lucky I didn't spend the whole convention with Rob Holdstock."

"Shut up!" I say, sensing matters getting out of hand. "Let's open the

champagne."

"It's only Australian sparkling wine."

"Don't quibble!" I say, hastily popping the cork. "To Pete and Sue - future editors of *Balloons Over Bristol*."

"Thanks, Christina. We're... umm.. honoured. It's come to my attention that there's been some criticism of the Miss Lee letters in *Critical Wave* and elsewhere. Well, my first editorial decision is this. Fuck them, the Miss Lee letters WILL continue!"

Everyone applauds, even though most of them have never read a Miss Lee letter in their life.

Sunday 11.30 am Room 4047

Une vision de devastation complete

"Lilian, stop bursting the balloons! Lilian, I was trying to get some sleep!"

"They're all over the bathroom. And there were half a dozen of them drifting down the corridor when I came in last night. They tried to come back in the room with me."

"You're just mad because that was the only date you could get."

"Better than bloody Martin Smith of Croydon."

"Oh God, oh God. I'm going to kill Pam when I see her."

"So, what happened?"

"Nothing. Nothing, I promise you. Pam just thought I wanted to get off with Martin, and I didn't. I thought it was all a joke. What's happening to my body language?"

"Sexual frustration? Tell me about it."

"Is that why you're bursting all those balloons?"

"No, it's a new form of therapy for my back. What do you think?"

"I think this is the last time I'll host a party for someone else's friends, at least not without making them sign a cleaning contract in advance. Do I have sucker written in big letters across my forehead?"

"Quit moaning and save your energy for cleaning up before the maid comes in. I'm off for a swim. See yah, sucker!"

BALLOON FIESTA

*Join in a Mass Ascent of Balloons Over Bristol!
(Flight path clearance authorised by Heathrow Airport)*



And finally on to a piece I wrote for TWP, the women's apa in December last year. I'm reprinting it here so that I don't have to keep explaining what's happened to Peter Fred (and because I didn't want to go in to it again in my other article.)

BROKEN

A sad tale of white goods and white lies

When I moved into my house two years ago I inherited among other pieces of furniture and electrical appliances, a washing machine. Unfortunately, it didn't work. Or rather, I couldn't even get the door open to find out whether or not it worked. Peter-Fred, my ex-husband, promised to come round some time and look at it for me, but meanwhile offered me use of his washing machine. Since I was broke at the time, and rather jaundiced about the costs of repairing washing machines, after seeing Peter pay over £100 for a part for his, I just took advantage of the facilities on offer. Peter's house is only about a 20 minute walk away, and often he would let me borrow his car to do some supermarket shopping while my clothes were washing. This "wash and shop", as we jokingly referred to it, became a part of the pattern of our new post-marital relationship. We didn't live in each other's pockets, but we did retain some of the benefits of mutual support. I would have Peter round for a meal and chat if neither of us was doing anything at the weekend (I would often have Richard Hewison round too. Richard is another member of the Bristol SF group who lives by himself and doesn't do much at weekends. I thought of it as community.) I also used Peter shamelessly as support engineer and help desk for my house. I'm not a terribly practical person, and more to the point don't have the good collection of tools that Peter has built up over the years. So when my hot tap washer snapped and I couldn't get the tap top off to do anything about it, I called him in. When I accidentally poured water over my keyboard at a critical stage in doing the Intersection fanthology, he came round and took the keyboard apart, dried it off with the hairdryer and lent me his lap-top to use while it finished drying. He put up shelves for me, and curtain rails, and helped me chose my microwave.

It did worry me slightly that the favours all seemed to go in one direction. The most I could do for him in return was to drive him to his office occasionally to pick up the hire cars he used for his increasingly frequent work trips abroad, and check that his house was all right while he was away. But since this also gave me use of his car in his absence, it could hardly count much towards redressing the balance.

About six months or so ago, Peter did finally get round to looking at my washing machine. It didn't take very long to get the door open, but then he and Richard spent about an hour wrestling with drums and other washing machine parts while I cooked dinner for them. Eventually they gave up, concluding that it was definitively broken beyond their capacity to fix and I would have to call in a professional. By this time, I did have enough money to afford to get it mended, but not enough time to organise the job. Good God, I hadn't even managed to paint the one skirting board that needed finishing in my kitchen, and which I had been dying to do (in a rather abstract and aesthetic sense, it has to be said) since early March.

So, I didn't get my washing machine fixed. In the meantime, Peter was having a rather exciting summer. While I spent all my time working on Intersection fanthology, Intersection programme and Bath Environment Centre, he was out with this crowd of people he had met through some rather up-market dating agency. They seemed to spend all their time going on walks, having barbecues, eating out and

generally having the sort of carefree and sybaritic time I would have liked to be having. He even dated a couple of women, though he thought they tended to be put off a bit by his Buddhism. On the whole he seemed to be having a good time.

Then he met Nicky through the agency. This was just before Intersection, so after the convention it felt like we had a certain communality of experience as I had just met Frank Lunney and we were both excited about the possibility of new relationships. But the parallels soon began to break down. Frank was thousands of miles away, while Peter was seeing Nicky every weekend, going to films with her, taking her out for meals, letting her help him update his wardrobe. Still, I was looking forward to meeting her, even though Peter described her as "intense" and didn't feel that she would really get on with the people at the SF group. He talked optimistically of maybe getting us all together at a party as then Nicky wouldn't be forced to stay in close proximity to people she didn't have much in common with. Or bringing her along to the "cool music" weekend that Anne, Lilian and I had been mooting for a long time. I did ask if she would be worried about meeting me, but he didn't seem to think that would be a problem.

Well, none of this happened. Peter stopped coming down the SF group, so I never saw him. He decided not to go to Novacon, even though he had only joined up shortly after Intersection. I did continue to use his washing machine, but felt bad about it because he was never there and it seemed an intrusion. He reassured me (by e-mail), saying that Nicky didn't like his house, so they were always round at her flat, so it wasn't any problem. But suddenly it seemed pointless to walk twenty minutes to sit by myself in someone else's house, waiting for my washing to finish. I might just as well go down the laundrette. I did look in at the laundrette en route to Peter's, but the whole idea of going back to using public laundrettes just made me shudder. All that business of finding the right change, bringing your soap powder, sitting with creepy strangers watching your underwear go round just seemed so retrograde, like I was a student again, or like that cold winter in Chislehurst when I first started working and I had to walk all the way to Sidcup to get my washing done. (I can't remember why - surely there must have been laundrettes in Chislehurst?) One of the less creditable reasons why I had held on to my marriage for so long was because I was scared of losing all the amenities I had grown used to at Peter's house - car, washing machine, answerphone, cable TV - things I thought I would never afford on my own. Eventually, though, I had rearranged my life, and it turned out not to be as bad as I thought - but going back to using laundrettes? No way! At least in Peter's empty house I could sit and watch TV or listen to music and get on with writing. And maybe when my brother had stopped going on his computing course and was in during the day I would arrange for someone to come round and look at my machine and get it fixed.

After not seeing Peter for some time, I decided to be proactive and invite him and Nicky round for a meal. Peter sounded keen (by e-mail) and eventually decided, after consultation with Nicky, that we would meet up for a meal on neutral territory in one of the pasta restaurants in Clifton. Then about half an hour before I was due to set out, Peter rang to say that Nicky had some kind of food poisoning and couldn't go out after all. Peter sounded a bit strange, but I didn't think anything of it. In a way I was relieved because I had such a wretched cold that I didn't think that Nicky would think much of me with a sore nose and an endless supply of handkerchiefs.

The next thing that happened was Peter suggested we meet up the following Friday to talk as he didn't think things were that good between us. I took this as

being a response to a rather sarky e-mail I'd sent him about the SF group Christmas party, suggesting that he might like to put in an appearance as people were beginning to think he didn't like them. I also took it as being positive, in that he still had time to see me. I thought maybe I could show him my holiday photographs and talk a bit about life in general. Of course, what I should have remembered is that Friday is a day he does aikido with Nicky, and so whatever reason he wanted to see me, it wasn't just for a social chat. But no, I went ahead, thinking Nicky must be away or doing something else, expecting just to have a relaxed drink with him. So, it came as a total shock when he rang up to say that he wasn't going to be able to see me that evening, and he wouldn't be able to see me ever again.

I could go on endlessly about what he said and how I felt (I already have, as various people will testify!), but it doesn't really serve much purpose. The main thrust of it all was that being friends with me was getting in the way of his relationship with Nicky. I was living in the past, clinging on to the dregs of our marriage, and the clinching proof of that was that I still used his washing machine rather than getting mine fixed.

I suppose I thought about this quite a bit over the subsequent weeks. I still don't believe I was living in the past, at least not emotionally. But it seems plausible that Peter was. That's why he would come round and do little projects for me. By taking advantage of his car, washing machine and advice on my house, I was making him feel needed, and preventing him from moving away completely from our relationship. I thought it was so handy that I lived not far away from my old house, that we had a good friendship, that we didn't have to fight over our old friends, that I never saw the hidden dangers of not making a complete break. Like our marriage, where we had given each other a lot of space, we were running against the conventional wisdom of what you have to do when you split up. And in both cases we thought we had found a better way, and in both cases we failed. Conventional wisdom obviously has more going for it than I ever suspected.

So, now I'm out there on my own, without Peter's car, tool box or washing machine. My first trip to the laundrette was a bit traumatic. How awful to be a new girl at something so basic as doing your washing! The laundrette I use has a centralised control box - which I only noticed after trying to stuff twenty pee pieces down a closed up slot. I was so phased by this that I pressed the wrong machine number on the control panel and then had to frantically move all my washing from machine number three to machine two (which fortunately wasn't in operation at the time), then borrow some more twenty pence pieces to buy myself some soap powder (since all mine was a free gift to the next user of machine number three). What a farce! How can you pretend you have a cool lifestyle when you end up pitching your dirty underwear around the laundrette? But at least now I've perfected my routine I can truly claim that there is not a moment wasted during the washing process. As soon as the machine starts its cycle, I'm across the road at the local supermarket, doing my shopping. Then it's back to the laundrette to move the washing into a dryer, back up the road to my house, shopping dumped on table, empty bottles for recycling put in laundry bag, bottles dropped off in bottle bank en route, then back to the laundrette in time to pick up dried washing. If such efficiency doesn't kill me, maybe I won't even need to get my machine fixed?

NEVER AGAIN
A letter column

This is the part of the fanzine where I shamelessly exhume the letters received back when people still thought I might be on a schedule of two issues a year, so bear in mind that any domestic arrangements described below may be somewhat out of date. But, the observations, are, of course as universally valid and timeless as you would expect from the letter column of any fanzine.

Bridget Hardcastle, 13 Lindfield Gardens, Hampstead, London NW3 6PX

This isn't what I remember reading back in November, it's... The Wrong Never Quite Arriving 3! Ho ho ho! Nah, sorry, I've not been in fandom long enough to pretend I think that you and Lilian are the same person. Besides, it's the right NOA3. The bright yellow beer (??!) stains on the front cover are a dead giveaway. I remember spilling stuff all over it but I don't remember what I was drinking at the time. Now it's got curry sauce on it too.

It's always salutary to watch one's latest carefully crafted fannish artefact hit the real world of conventions and accrete layers of real life in the form of creases, beer, and in this case, if I recall correctly, large quantities of cider.

Never Quite Arriving - hmm, the title reminds me of Xeno's Paradox, where it is "proved" that you can never quite arrive anywhere as to get to a place you first have to get halfway to that place, then halfway again, and again, taking ever smaller steps. (By the same argument, you can never have enough chocolate, You Can Never Go Home Any More, and you can never finish your list of Things To Do.) Unless you believe in quantum physics (and as we all know, it is better to "travel hopefully" than to believe in quantum physics). Have I guessed the secret significance of your title or isn't there any?

Yes, the not so secret significance of the title is that it is suggestive of a number of concepts, including some of what you describe above. I could go on, but it would get boring, and destroy any mystique by over-explanation.

I am like you in that I crave the company of others and like to socialise of an evening yet also need my private space to retreat to; and I would be the middle child of three if only my parents have thought to have another child before they had me. Pop psychology, eh?

I'm still cooking for one at the moment, it's been six years now and I've not yet got the hang of making the right quantities. If I could get the hang of freezing leftovers my waist would be a lot narrower. I don't over-scoff on purpose, for comfort, it just seems to happen that way. I can't leave food until it is all gone. Living in Hall (as I am for the moment) may change all that; the kitchen is shared between 50 people and I have one cubic foot in which to store all my food, cutlery, crockery, saucepans, utensils etc etc. And there's eight people in the fridge, which was chock full when I moved in. Cooking won't be so much fun there as it is at home, where I had everything easily to hand.

And no bodies in the fridge to distract you either.

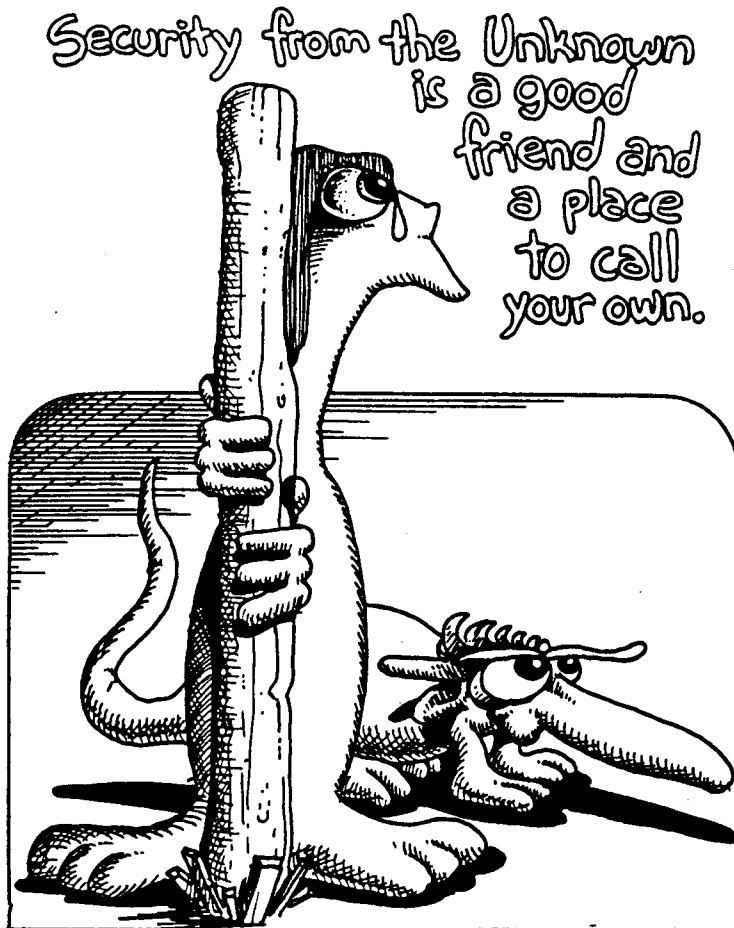
I thought Hall would be dreadful, poky little rooms and obnoxious room-neighbours with appalling taste in loud music who use your frying pan and never clean up, but I was determined to stick it as it's only for four months and I could get lots of work done while everyone else was going out and refusing to talk to me. As it happens, it's turning out quite alright. My room's nice and big and gets cleaned fortnightly, the other people on my stairwell are okay (if a little shocked at my advanced years - they're all 18 or 19) and talk to me and stop me getting lots of work done. I'm worried about eventually moving into a place of my own and living alone, as I do like to have people around. Sharing flats and houses does have its disadvantages, but there's usually someone around to talk to of an evening (and to emotionally blackmail to do your hoovering - it'll be a long time before my back's up to that). Still, it'll be a fair few months before I have to do that. I've got to finish my degree and get a job yet.

Which is one thing, I believe, that hasn't changed over the last year! (The main difference being that Bridget is now rationing her loc output in the cause of completing her PhD)

Robert Lichtman, P.O. Box 30, Glen Ellen, CA 95442 USA

I read your piece on the ups and downs of living alone with more interest than usual since this is something I've been doing since Labor Day weekend of 1993. While I was away at the Worldcon in San Francisco my No. 2 son Arthur moved away. None of my other boys have moved in, so I've had an allegedly "spare" room since then. Of course it's filled up with overflow from all the other rooms. Like you, I enjoy

having freedom to do whatever I want, eating when I please, never having to wait to use the bathroom, and being able to leave projects sitting around. But on the other hand, I have to do all the housework, cooking and kitchen clean-up. Like you, I don't get by on cheese and crackers. I enjoy a certain amount of cooking and am willing to do the necessary tidying up in order to have interesting meals - meals that I cook to *my* tastes and serve in my own good time. I suspect you're right that switching to full-time work had as much to do with your summer mood [of depression] as dealing with living alone. Part-time work hasn't ever been an option for me, so the very concept of it is, well, almost science-fictional. (Because one of stf's early visions was of a future filled with leisure time, where "machines" would take care of the grunt work and humanity could devote itself to the pursuit of desperate fun. Too bad we



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get *Bladerunner* instead, or so it seems.) But I'd watch out for that fantasy of having your house-sharer be your job share partner. Even if you did turn out into each other's "best friend in all the world", that might be too much "work" in your life. I'm really glad to forget about my work entirely when I leave for the day.

Well, I nearly DID get to try out a version of that particular fantasy. I was going to let my spare room out to Merryn, who was working with me at Bath Environment Centre, but in the event she only stayed one day (after taking about a week to move in all her belongings). At the end of the day, she came back from work with her boyfriend, announced she had discovered that some friends in Bath had a spare room to let, and was out again in one evening. So I never did get the projected month of decadent clubbing and drinking with my 22 year old friend. Probably just as well...

Claire Brialey, 26 Northampton Road, Croydon, Surrey CR0 7HA

As for living alone, I hope you're more settled now. I'm not wild about the idea of living alone but I think I'd prefer it to having a lodger; I need personal space quite severely, although I don't like to feel isolated. The fortunate solution of a partner, a cat and a large house seems to be working fine for now... On the few occasions when we've had lodgers, it's not worked well. It was always a temporary arrangement: can I come to stay for a couple of weeks while I find a job/find a flat etc? The most memorable was probably an offer to keep me company for a week while Noel was way, which turned into a five weeks' sojourn with boyfriend in tow. I get to resent people very quickly and just want my home back. I like entertaining and I'd like my friends to feel comfortable in our house; I'd rather that people feel able to make themselves a cup of coffee rather than waiting for me to offer - provided they make me one as well. But I do like some privacy, and not always to be joined in whatever room I'm in because they're bored, and to be able to sleep with no clothes on; and I *don't* like them turning off my washing in mid-cycle so that they can use the tumble drier (on a really sunny day when the clothes would have dried outside, at that), or channel-flicking through cable TV while I was actually videoing something from the original cable channel, or bringing back a previously unknown dinner date, going upstairs with him and then expecting Noel to rescue her when the date got over-enthusiastic. And so on and so forth. Sorry - I wanted to comment on your experiences rather than cap them with mine. I suspect the way to avoid the lodger from hell is to ensure that it's on a proper financial foot and with some very strict ground rules - and perhaps to make sure your lodger isn't anyone you knew as a friend before they moved in, unless of course you have better-behaved friends than I do...

I think the point in the end is not what your friends do, it's as you say, about setting up the ground rules. If someone is living in your house as a favour, then almost anything they do is going to be wrong, however minor, because you resent them being there. And that's really not something you want to do to your friends. Or your brother... On the other hand, if it's a formal lodger arrangement, you either put up with it because of the money or you decide the money isn't worth your loss of freedom and give them notice.

Meanwhile, back in March 1995, Joseph Nicholas was left behind while Judith went off to Australia for one of her sister's weddings :

Joseph Nicholas, 15 Jansons Road, South Tottenham, London N15 4JU

My response to living alone certainly doesn't involve lying on the floor crying, which sounds a terribly girly thing to do and quite un-British. (Frankly, I have great trouble imagining Christina J Lake indulging in anything of the kind. Besides, the floor must be very hard.) Nor does it involve cooking large meals and then spending ages eating them, which would take a big chunk out of the evening and prevent one from Getting On With Things. Indeed, most evenings I find that cooking anything is just too much effort, principally because I'm doing it only for myself -- so instead I tend to put together a sandwich or two, or open a can of soup, and munch a few sticks of celery before settling down to scrutinise an Important Text (Seumas Milne's *The Enemy Within: MI5, Maxwell, And The Scargill Affair*, Will Hutton's *The State We're In*, and Peter Long's *LETS Work, Rebuilding the Local Economy* have all been learnt in the past couple of weeks). Television? Apart from *The Glam Metal Detectives* and *The X Files*, there's nothing worth watching, and I'm certainly not going to switch on to watch the crap you say you can tolerate.

Well, I solved the problem of centring my life round cooking the dinner by developing such a hectic lifestyle that there was barely time to fling a lasagne in the microwave, assuming I made it home to eat at all. Which of course means that I fail entirely to Get On With Things (though oddly enough, there always seems enough time to keep up with crap TV). As to lying on the floor and crying, I've given that up in favour of lying on the floor and listening to music, an altogether more rewarding past-time (though if only I'd organised my house so that I had a chair in the optimum place for sound quality, I could give up lying on the floor altogether.)

I enjoyed Tony Walsh's article, too, but was disappointed that it stopped in mid-story, with one or more parts still to come. Tut-tut -- here is a gripping true-life near-death flight aboard an aircraft with a broken engine belonging to a dodgy airline of which none have heard, and you cut it just at the point where we'll iddiscover whether the plane is about to run out of fuel! We know that he survived, obviously, because he is writing about the experience; but how do you expect to maintain the tension, the narrative drive, the razor-edge terror that gives these stories their *raison d'être*?

Perhaps that's why Tony never rose to the challenge of writing part two?

I note also that Tony works for an oil company. I therefore deduce that, since he was flying back from Lagos, the company is Shell, and if he was working in Nigeria then he was active in the south-east, around the delta region -- which unfortunately makes him complicit (though Shell has tried to deny it) in the persecution of the Ogoni people by the military government. One would like to call down upon him all the rage and bile which one can muster, but the requisite vocabulary is no longer there. Not because I'm lost for words, but because the extinction of the Soviet Union as a political entity has also extinguished an entire lexicon of political abuse. No longer can one label someone a fascist hyena, a capitalist gangster, an enemy of democracy, or a CIA conspirator -- never mind a lover of dissidents, an arch-clown of the western reactionaries, or (my favourite) a saboteur of the people's economy. In this respect (and this respect alone), the collapse of Stalinism is to be regretted. (Well, I suppose we still have Chinese political abuse to fall back on. But accusing someone of failing to toil in harmony with the party and the masses somehow does not have quite the same ring to it.)

I'm sure that by now a whole new political vocabulary has been invented for those who support Shell's activities in Nigeria. (Though I've no idea who Tony worked for out there, so perhaps we should spare him the invective until proven guilty.)

Claire Brialey

I did like Tony's article, although it made me very nervous; my new job is sending me to exciting places and although this is mostly around Europe (look, for me, abroad is Holland in 1990. Anywhere outside the UK would be exciting) there is a possibility of a huge conference in Uruguay next autumn. So tales of dangerous long-haul air trips from exotic places, with an imagination like mine, may not be the best idea. But it was still gripping, and six months later I remain gripped and want to read the next part...

Well, let's hope your interest will inspire Tony to finish it some day! Like you, the last thing I need is tales of dangerous flights - which didn't stop me reading all the details of that flight that just went down in the Everglades, just when I was thinking I might pick up some cheap internal flights in the USA.

Robert Lichtman

I'm looking forward to the continuation/conclusion of Tony Walsh's piece. This initial installment was certainly enjoyable reading, though I've no particular comment beyond that. I don't fly enough to have tales of my own to relate - and the ones I do have I ought to save for my TAFF report.

Quite so. We'll look forward to them.

Speaking of TAFF reports. You and Lil conjecture that perhaps you'd "hit America at the height of Elvis-mainia", and that's true to an extent. But Elvis-mania has always been with us, continuing to this day. (The lady who works next to me told me of her several trips to Graceland in awed reverent tones.) What was happening in August 1988 was the eleventh anniversary of his death.

The Italian section of San Francisco isn't called Italytown. You'd think it ought to be, since there's Chinatown and Japantown, but instead it's "North Beach."

Doesn't sound very Italian to me.

Lucy & John's friends "called Terry and Pam, and their kid Alex," are Terry Floyd and Pam Davis, who have a second kid now and are celebrating their 10th wedding anniversary later this month with a big party at the Westover Winery, way out in the hills southeast of Berkeley and Oakland. Terry is one of the fans who, at the first Corflu, ran off a fanzine printed in white ink on dark green (almost black) paper. Several of my sons remember him well because they came into the hotel to find me on the last evening of the convention and encountered Terry and others laboring over the mimeo trying to get this ink/paper combination to be readable.

I quite agree with Irwin Hirsh that it's asking a lot to expect fan fund winners to produce a report in any sort of timely way. I followed my trip with three years of administration that I don't begrudge, but which *did* take lots of my time. And I've never written anything that ran for fifty pages even generously fonted and spaced.

But Brian Earl Brown is more encouraging to us unreported former TAFF delegates when he says a ten-page batch of "good stories" would be acceptable in lieu of fifty pages. This could work for me... I wrote up about 8,000 words of a diary-type semi-outline report back in 1989, starting from the day I heard I'd won to my return to Glen Ellen, wanting back then to get at least the bare bones down before I lost the chronology. This runs about six pages in 9-point type with tight margins, but if I ran it in Courier (typewriter pica) it would run at least ten pages. But I don't want to do that. I offered this mini-report through the pages of my TAFF newsletter for a nominal donation, and maybe four or five people ever sent for it. I have several hours of unplayed tapes of notes I took at ever possible occasion during my trip that will remind me of enought additional stuff to flesh out my outline quite nicely. But somehow in the intervening years since I left TAFF administration my everyday fanning has been enough to keep up with.

I'm surprised so few people sent for your preliminary report. I suppose they wanted to wait for the finished product, and not spoil all the best stories. But then, if you'd had a bit more response, you might have felt inspired to begin on the full report. I must admit that I felt much the same as you, that once I'd finished administering TAFF (also a three year stint), I didn't have much energy left over, not even for my normal fanzine activity. All credit to Dan Steffan for starting to serialise his trip in Apparatchik at the same time as running the current TAFF race!

D M Sherwood, PO Box 23, Port Talbot, Wales

Nice enough fanzine but not chock full of comment hooks. I mean I'm glad that you're managing on your own & sorry that you had your problems but such-like are not witty yet profound comments that will get me a Nova next year. Despite the fact I've got nothing more to say than a *Hmm* or *Oh really* I liked the personalzine stuff. Do more.

The trip report was lively (especially considering how far back this stuff is), gave an impression of frothy fun. Am on the other side of Brian Earl Brown, if a trip report ain't well done, will as soon as do without. There is enough competent but boring stuff to plough thru. On the basis of this section you have my (reluctant) permission to persist.

Hey you want lessons on the British style in vomiting; I'm your man. I'll start you gently with a stomach full of sweet red wine followed by 1/2 dozen or so of the hard stuff then we can move on to advanced stuff like the greasy bacon sandwich.

Hmm, hate to be a spoilsport, but I think I'll pass on that.

William Bains, 101 Beechwood Avenue, Melbourn, Royston, Herts SG8 6BW

I left my left ventricle in San Francisco, and my blood has had a 7000 mile round trip between my brain and the lungs ever since. Could explain a lot.

Sounds a lot like my gas system, which apparently detours all round my house to get back to the kitchen, leading to an erroneous pressure drop and a forthcoming expensive re-piping bill for yours truly.

Anyway, your mission to find comix and other forms of literature in the Bay Area

missed Future Fantasy, 3705 East El Camino Real, Palo Alto. It is, well, was really easy to find. You just ... well... drive down El Camino Real in Palo Alto. There is also a really good second hand bookshop a few blocks South of Golden Gate Park, where I bought 'The Compleat Enchanter' a couple of years ago, and then read most of it in a fish restaurant in Pier 39. I could not find it again last trip, and Future Fantasy seems to have gone bust. Oh Tempora, O Mores, Oh Cetera.

I cannot quite match a computer book in Chinese, but my second book, co-authored with Jenny Raggett, has recently been published in Hungarian, and one comes across bizarre typeset gargling noises interspersed with short bursts of Prolog or references to Jenny's or my children, who starred in many an example. My real problem with this is that I got three copies, and I only know one Hungarian. Who will appreciate the other two? Hazel Langford?

Bridget Hardcastle

New Orleans is definitely the place to go on a TAFF trip. There's all those cocktail bars for a start, and then there's all those cocktail bars! I enjoyed it when I visited America a few years back, and I'd like to go back again. It was quite a thrill reading some of Lisa Tuttle's books afterwards and recognising in them Parks In Which I Had Sat. So, I should set my plan in action - find some Mississippi fans, persuade them to bid for a NO WorldCon, plug them heavily till they win the bid, then win TAFF and go over there! Or lose TAFF and go over there anyway! Or find some Msss fans and go over there without the hassle of a WorldCon in between! Or start NO fandom in North London!

Or just get Richard Hewison to make you a few cocktails (in exchange for writing his next fanzine?)

Is there any worth in TAFF reports written long after the event? It depends what you want from a trip report I suppose. If I had voted for someone to go all that way I'd like to hear what they thought about the trip. If it's up-to-the-minute news and gossip for those who couldn't make it then obviously ten-year-old reports aren't that interesting. If it's a more rounded and comfortable piece of writing you're after then leaving it to mature does help, the anecdotes tumbling over in your mind become polished (like pebbles in a river, she adds whimsically) and the memories settle into a more story-like shape (instead of lists of trivialities). As time goes on you subconsciously select those aspects of the memories of the trip that contribute to narrative flow (or am I talking bollocks again?) Ha! I sound so experienced in these matters, but yours is the second TAFF trip report I've read.

Claire Brialey

It took me a while to understnad the point of TAFF, and longer to see why people still get so worked up about trip reports. I found your excerpts interesting, though; it would be good to have them all together in one dedicated volume, but I've no problem with reading them amidst other articles in a fanzine. How would you sum up what you got out of the TAFF trip?

A good question! Confidence, for one thing, from the experience of being an important person for six weeks, and, also, more relevantly to the people who sent me, an abiding interest in America and its fandom.

Brad W. Foster, POB 165246, Irving, TX 75016, USA

Hey, cool, more TAFF report - it works for me!! I certainly wasn't bored brainless. You've injected enough personality and personal observation into it to make it fun to read -- which is what I look for in a trip report. I hope you can publish an installment in every issue.

Maybe next issue, Brad. I'd have liked to do one for this, but I seem to be running out of time. So, I'll close with a couple of comments on the TimeBytes anthology, edited by Lilian Edwards and myself for Intersection (now available to American fans for \$10 while I'm in the US, and Australian fans for A\$12 when I get to Australia. British fans hurry now and get your copies for £6.00, while I'm still in the country or ask me when I get back!)

Jerry Kaufman, 8168 Linden Ave. N., Seattle, WA 98103, USA

I finished reading Timebytes over the weekend, and really enjoyed it. Thanks very much for sending it. I liked the stuff about fandom in the UK rather more than I expected to. Lots of wit and bite and thought went into those pieces. I note that D. West is nearly the only illustrator in Volume 1, while he has nothing in Volume 2.

Yes, by the time we'd failed to resist using all of D's fannishly relevant and time-binding work in Vol 1, we thought we'd try and give some other artists a look in for Vol. 2.

My favourite piece in either volume is Alison Freebairn's on Kurt Cobain and her reaction to his death. This was possibly more relevant than usual for me because I had just finished a history of Seattle music by Clarke Humphrey, called "Loser: The Story of the Real Seattle Music Scene." Like Timebytes, it concludes with Cobain's death and the immediate aftermath.

Jilly Reed, Hill House, Moats Tye, Suffolk, IP14 2EX

Damn right it [Timebytes] deserves all sorts of plaudits! I particularly admired the editorial frame you put around your selections, which managed to give enough background information to make them comprehensible while retaining an admirably cool objectivity about all the controversies. The choice of pieces was excellent; not only as a showcase of enjoyable writing but as a picture of British fandom clear enough to give an ignoramus like me the feeling of knowing what had gone on.

But just to prove it's not all been unalloyed praise...

William Bains

An opinion. Fanzines that start out with a single-spaced A4 page of type justifying their existence should not exist. If you think Timebytes was a good idea, then just do it. Don't bleat about how you dithered about what sort of fan history to do, whether to include this sort or that sort of writing, and above all don't say what the fanzine is about. It is either about something, or it isn't. If it is, but fails, then burn it at the stake. If it is just some random jottings, say 'This is just some random jottings. Enjoy it.'

The only thing that the first page should say, for Intersection, is "This is British fandom. Enjoy it!" And that is the one thing you did *not* say.

You're probably right, but having taken so long to work out what we were doing, we couldn't resist the temptation of telling everyone else what it was all about - just in case they missed the point.

Other comments - Tony Chester has the right of it. Basically, fandom is a fringe activity at best. The TV people at Conspiracy, weird although their choice of individuals may have been, had the right approach. Here is a bunch of slightly off-ordinary people doing slightly off-ordinary things. End of story. Fandom is much better read, probably brighter, certainly more articulate than average. But as viewed from an Olaf Stapletonian viewpoint of eternity, Fans are *not* Slans. They are not, basically, important at all, even to themselves sometimes.

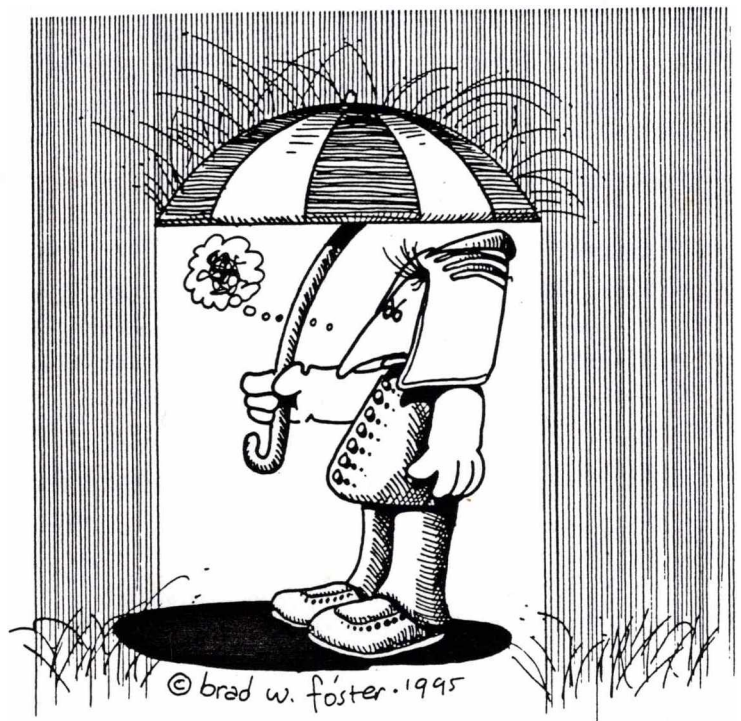
Fandom should run conventions accordingly, as Abi Frost hints. They are *Conventions*, not conferences or workshops. They are places for like-minded people to get together. Parallel programme streams make no sense, because they keep people apart. Conventions with 10,000 attendees make no sense, because you just lose your friends, yourself and your mind in the crowd. I suppose that is why I stopped going to them... I can get the same experience travelling the London Underground. Kate Solomon makes a related point with her comments about the consumerism of a big convention. Fancy lighting and sound is essential if anyone at the back of a 500-seat hall is to follow a conversation at the front, but it turns the fans into an audience, passively listening. And at the end, you switch it off. There is nothing wrong with con-runners as a breed. I know one quite well. I don't think that she is a fan, though. She is a professional conference organiser. (And, no, she did not turn the lights out on me when I ran over time.)

I think someone better turn the lights out on me, I'm running seriously over time - but then is it humanly possible to sort out a fanzine collection without reading half of them? I don't think so. And I haven't even started on the books and comics yet. If I'm still here at Novacon, then you'll know I couldn't resist staying at home to perfect the ideal collection management tool for the seriously compulsive fanzine fan.

Art credits

Sue Mason - cover

Brad Foster - p. 15 & 22



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