
N U L L - F Feb., '72

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ANOTHER YEAR, ANOTHER ISSUE: Time does fly, doesn't it? It's funny, but in FAPA an annual schedule seems almost indecently frequent. *Sigh*. I feel the rigor mortus of gafia slipping almost silently over me. Mailings I contributed to in 1957 seem almost more recent than last November's. What has happened? Where have all the oldfen gone? Where is the spirit which once drove FAPA? Is SAPS still alive?

You know, I don't really feel all that much out of touch with fandom these days--I get most of the better fanzines, write letters to or contribute to more than my share, and even manage to co-produce an EGOBOO or two every year or so.

But FAPA? Once upon a time FAPA stood for all that was glorious in fandom--to me, anyway. When I was in my teens and pouring over old FAPA mailings (borrowed from people like Bob Pavlat or Bill Evans), it seemed to me that the FAPA of the forties and early fifties was a special place, where the BNFs all congregated to outdo themselves with wit and wisdom. I tell you, I used to take old FAPAzines by people like Speer, Burbee, Laney, Boggs, Stanley, McCain, Warner and all the rest of those guys to my highschool and read them in the back of most of my classes. And when I joined in 1955, I felt I was joining the Inner Circle (picture me if you can bashfully pushing my toe in the dust). In those days FAPA originated the fads that swept fandom. And many a FAPAzine was regarded, outside the organization, as a top zine. SKYHOOK, for example, and GRUE: to the non-FAPAn they were an enticement to join.

Even as recently as the early sixties, FAPA was a mover in fandom. FAPA noticed fandom. But LIGHTHOUSE was probably the last FAPAzine to get a Hugo nomination, and--in all likelihood, if things keep going in their present direction--the last that ever will.

Maybe that six-year waiting list is the joker in the deck. In six years a fan can rise from obscurity to fame and then wither into gafia. Whatever it is, FAPA no longer has much--if any--contact with fandom. The last event FAPA shared with fandom was the Boondoggle, and that was eight years ago and best forgotten.

Last year Greg Benford decided to shake FAPA up a little. He told me about all his plans for reform. "Why, I'm going to run a letters column in the FA!" he told me. "And I'm going to get New Blood into the group. You wait and see, Ted."

I waited, and I saw. No letters column because he never told OE Calkins about it. New blood? The DIFFERENT affair may have shed a little, but it was all in the cause of torpor and insularity. A sort of "Old Boy" routine, you know: Sure, if Joe Kschnutz had run a photo-offset reprint of a Frozen Foods magazine through FAPA, he'd have gone out on his ears. But Sam's in the Club--hell, you wouldn't want to break his collection of mailings would you?

FAPA is no longer where old fans go to die; FAPA is dead. It's just that its nerves work so slowly that it hasn't yet realized the fact.

ELECTRONICS: An awful long time ago I decided that I had no aptitude for the soldering iron. Although I've fixed business machines, done professional carpentry, and generally messed about with my hands from time to time, my early experiences with soldering irons taught me in an indelible fashion that soldering was not for me. It was, I became convinced, an arcane field best left to those whose hidden inborn abilities allowed them to master the secret rituals. As for me, I was best off avoiding anything which involved (whisper the word) 'soldering'.

Well, that conviction remained with me until late last year, when I decided to put it to the test. I decided to buy two new pieces of stereo equipment--in kit form. And both required extensive soldering.

"I am a grown man," I told myself. "And it is time I learned to master this skill. Besides which, the kits are a lot cheaper."

I ordered two pieces of equipment, as I said. One was Dynaco's Quadaptor, which is a small "black box" which synthesizes four-channel sound from normal stereo records, and requires only an additional two speakers (no extra amplification). It is described as "very easy" to build, since all that is required is to connect the terminal strips in back with two switch controls in front. The other item I ordered was Dynaco's FM-5 tuner. It is not "easy" and requires a lot more work.

"I'll do the Quadaptor first," I told Robin. "That will give me experience for the tuner. Besides, the quadaptor costs five dollars less in kit form." (It cost me $14.60, wholesale.) I also went to my local Allied Radio Shack and purchased a soldering gun, which was about the smartest thing I did in 1971.

The Quadaptor arrived first, and I built it the morning it came. It really was easy, although I was nervous about it for about the first half of the job. The instructions for assembly were explicit and I followed them exactly. They told me how to do a proper solder and, by damn, I did a proper solder. Wow.

I should digress here and tell you about four-channel sound.

Quadrasonics (as they're calling it now) had been around for several years now, mostly as a development-in-the-offing, the way stereo was in the mid-fifties. It is potentially a bigger breakthrough, in terms of sound, than stereo was, because quadrasonics are capable of recreating almost any acoustical environment, and the actual difference, when heard, is unbelievable.

Ordinary stereo paints sound on a flat wall. Sound exists on a plane with the speakers, and seems to remain "flat", never advancing into the room. Sounds can be located on a right-to-left basis, but not on a fore-and-aft axis--nor, of course, can they envelope the listener.

In 1969 experimenters with four-channel tape began working with a speaker setup in which speakers occupied each of the four corners of a room (or, in one case, a diamond-pattern with a speaker in the middle of each wall). Originally the expressed desire was to "capture the concert hall ambiance"--to put the listener into a front-row seat at the concert hall, with all the acoustical life associated with that hall. This means being surrounded with applause, but hearing the music from in front, with only reverberations from the sides and behind.

In practice, the four-speaker setup allows the recreation of all the special effects composers like Varese, Brant, Bartok and others have specified for performances in which musicians (say) are positioned in all corners of the room. And, in rock music, any number of other effects, including "pan-potting" a sound in a circular sweep around the listener. In practice, I've found, even music which still comes predominantly from up front, now projects into the room as it never did before. Musicians seems to be standing well in front of the front

speakers.

The big problem--as it was in the fifties, with stereo--was How do we do this on records? On tape it was easy: just subdivide the tape into four discrete channels; since modern quarter-track tape is already used for four separate recorded tracks (two each way), what could be simpler than using four, all going the same way? (This was the original way they did stereo tapes--half-tracks, each track occupying half the tape width. Of course, you can only play the tape one way...) And in stereo cartridge tapes (the kind used mostly in cars), where eight tracks were available all along, well, what could be simpler?

But records are another matter--especially since there exists an industry-wide understanding that any step forward should not obsolete existing stereo and mono records and playback equipment. That is, a four-channel record should play back on ordinary stereo equipment as stereo, with no loss of information--and should also be playable on mono equipment, again, with all information intact. This is a tough requirement, and every researcher who has tackled it thus far--with one significant exception--has done so through what is called matrixing.

Basically, a matrixed record is one in which the additional two tracks of information are encoded in the recording process (in the tape mix-down, actually) electronically, and are decoded by a decoder added to your playback system.

The matter of how this encoding is to be done is complicated, and breaks down into phasing differences. A recent issue of AUDIO magazine devoted itself to this problem, with technical articles authored by researchers representing the three present (competing) matrixing systems. I read them all and feel I understand them moderately well, but I'm not about to try to explain it here. Instead I'll give you a rough description of the differences in the three systems (one of which will probably become the industry standard).

One of the first was the Dynaco system. I have great faith in Dyna equipment (I have Dyna preamps, amplifiers and--soon--a tuner), and I think the Dyna Quadaptor system is damned ingenious, but I doubt very much it will become the industry standard. In fact, I regard it as a better decoder of existing stereo records than I do a good matrix encoding system.

The Dyna system is simplicity itself. If you have one extra speaker and some wire you can do it yourself with no additional expense--and I urge you to because you'll appreciate it a lot. Here's what you do: attach one terminal of your back speaker to a wire which goes to the hot (non-ground) terminal of one of your front speakers. Now attach the other rear-speaker terminal to a wire to the hot terminal of the other front speaker. (If you want two rear speakers, connect them in series.) This connection gives the back speaker(s) what is called the "difference" signal--the speaker receives the difference between the voltages going to the two front speakers. In effect this means that if the same signal is going to both front speakers (if, for instance, the source is monophonic), you should hear nothing (or very little) from the rear speaker. If the signal going to the front speakers is the same, but out of phase, it will come full-strength from the rear speaker. So, to a greater or lesser extent, will any signal going to just one of the front speakers.

Dyna's literature points out that under normal recording circumstances microphones pick up a lot of stray, out-of-phase signals (bouncing from nearby walls, etc.) which are recorded but seldom heard, since stronger signals cover them up on playback through common speakers. By separating out these out-of-phase signals and feeding them to a rear speaker, one recreates in part the original room ambiance, and one hears

reflected as well as direct signals.

I tried this system out last summer, by the simple expedient of hooking up a rear speaker (I had only one, and only one convenient place for it in the temporary living-room we're using until our remodling is finished) I found myself listening to old records in a totally fresh way. Almost all stereo records sound better in Dynaquad--and even "reprocessed" stereo records (the ones with all the highs filtered into one channel and all the lows into the other) sound better. In fact, mono records played with the tone controls adjusted to send the highs into one channel and the lows into the other sound much better and more alive, with greater room presence. We noticed this particularly when we left the room. The kitchen forms an L-arm off the present living room, and before we found the music pretty muffled when we were in the kitchen. Now it sounds much cleaner and clearer. I've also noticed that you can sit anywhere in the room and notice the "stereo"--whereas before your listening position was restricted to points equa-distant between right and left speakers. (Well, the perfect spot is now actually even more limited, if you want optimum effects. But since the back speaker doubles for the front speaker furthest away from you when you sit to one side of the room, the effect of stereo is still enhanced over what it was before.)

The first night after I hooked up the rear speaker, I put a mattress down on the floor in the middle of the room and Robin and I lay there, somewhat zonked, chemically, and listened to our records with awe and astonishment. It was easy to close your eyes and picture the musicians standing about in various spots in the room, surrounding you. One record works quite well for this--an obscure rock record called Wazoo, on the (ahem) Zig-Zag label. It was so full of presense that it almost freaked Robin out, in fact.

The Dyna Quadaptor is a device designed to do the same thing that the simple wire hookup does, with more controlled flexibility. It allows you to adjust the volume level of the rear speaker (but only by diminishing it--you can't boost it higher since there's no additional amplification), and to turn off the rear speaker if you wish (which, when playing a Firesign Theatre album is a good idea, since Dynaquad messes up the directionality of the sounds in ways the producers never intended). There's also a "null" position for balancing the system, which is nice to have and hard to do without unless you go to a lot of work each time you change the volume level. The Quadaptor is a passive piece of equipment which doesn't distort the signal at all, but just switches it for the additional speaker(s). It lists at just under $30.00, retail, or $20.00 in kit form. And since it doesn't require additional amplifiers, it's about the cheapest form of quadrasonics available right now, and is marvelous for breathing new life into old stereo records. But very few new albums have been recorded especially to take advantage of Dynaquad (the only ones I know of are by the Beach Boys and a group they produced, the Flame) by deliberately mixing down some out-of-phase material, and I don't see it as the ultimate form for quadrasonics.

The first alternative was Electro-Voice's Stereo-4--in which a couple dozen albums have been recorded. This system requires a decoder which is attached to the preamplifier and in turn feeds two stereo amplifiers (or four channels of amplification), which in turn drive four speakers. This means a separate stereo amp for your rear speakers, which is true for all other forms of four-channel stereo at present. (Well, I have an extra Dyna amp, so that doesn't bother me.) The decoder costs between $50 and $60 (depending on who you buy it from, and under which brand-name), and it would appear that the four channels are more distinct than

with the Dyna system. I haven't heard it, but those who have say that there's more actual separation--more sense of locating separate signals from separate speakers. This is good. The ultimate goal is to be able to make (for instance) a man's voice come from any one of the four speakers without it being audible on the other three.

There's a trick involved here, since in point of fact the other three speakers are not silent--they simply operate at a sufficiently reduced volume level that you hear only the loudest speaker (the others reinforcing the apparent volume without actually affecting the directionality of the sound). This is a psycho-acoustical trick which works because of the way we hear sounds.

The third matrix system is Columbia & Sony's SQ system. It works in the same way the E-V Stereo-4 system works, with added modifications which, reporters say, add even greater clarity and directionality to the signals. Additionally, the decoder comes in two forms. The cheaper form --like the E-V decoder--is passive and simply divides and reroutes the signals from two channels into four, according to pre-set perameters. The more expensive (over $100) adds logic circuits which "ride the gain," boosting the signals which go into one channel, while cutting back on what goes from the same signal into the other three. This reduces cross-talk even further and those who have heard demonstrations say it sounds as good as four-channel tape in direct comparison tests. I would say Columbia has the edge with SQ. Apparently Electro-Voice agrees: they've come out with a "universal decoder" which will decode either system and has its own logic circuits to do what the SQ logic circuits do. About the only real difference is in the actual pre-set coding. That is, an SQ record played through an E-V decoder would have four-channel sound, but what was intended to come from, say, the right rear might come from the left front instead.

Both systems can be used to play regular stereo records; enhancing them just as the Dynaquad system does. From all I can tell, they are no better than Dynaquad at doing this, which I why I'm still waiting for the dust to settle before getting another decoder. The bulk of my collection is mono or stereo, and I can't see spending more than $15.00 until an industry standard is agreed upon.

I mentioned an exception to the matrixed system. This is the JVC --and now RCA-Victor--system, which adds two channels recorded at 30,000 cycles and above, essentially to multiplex the present two channels into four, just as in FM broadcasting a higher channel multiplexes one mono signal into stereo. The objection to this system is that it is non-compatible with present equipment--especially low-priced equipment of the non-hi-fi kind, and the high-frequency channels are subject to erase through use, just as all high-frequency signals are suject to loss through wear. (Thus a JVC 4-channel record might lose its rear-channel signals in time--and might on the first play if played on a cheap "stereo" unit.) The record is more fragile, the demands on the needle and cartridge are much greater (they must track at 30,000 to 40,000 cycles!) and the need for quality control in stamping records is infinitely greater. (Considering the lousy quality of RCA pressings, that makes the system laughable on the face of it!)

RCA's decision to join JVC seems to me motivated by the old Columbia -vs.-RCA rivalry. The same thing happened when Columbia introduced the lp and RCA tried to trump it with the 45--do you remember when RCA was releasing everything, including long symphonies, on 45's?--and again when RCA beat out the CBS color television system (which, in retrospect, was a Good Thing). RCA claims the JVC system is totally discrete--which of course it is not--but it is, technically, the most discrete system

offered for records. However, in addition to its other drawbacks, it is not, under present FCC rules, broadcastable on FM radio--which the other systems are. All in all, I don't expect the RCA system to be adopted by the industry.

So much for my lengthy digression.

Now when I put together my Quadaptor, I experienced a great joy in actually doing a decent job at what had previously seemed to me an unattainable skill. The soldering gun made most of the difference; the remainder was my growing experience and confidence in myself. When I finished the little devil, I didn't want to stop.

So I didn't. The tuner hadn't arrived yet (it still hasn't; apparently Dyna was late in shipping it out), but I analyzed my system and decided I needed a sophisticated switchbox for the eventuality of another, different, decoder.

I analyzed it this way:

I have well over two thousand albums right now, of which an unknown percentage (probably 50%) are stereo. These albums contain a lot of music which I am very fond of, and I'm not going to stop listening to them when I start buying genuine four-channel records. For these albums the present hookup with the Dyna Quadaptor is quite acceptable.

However, once the industry decides on a matrixing system--which I am 90% certain will be Columbia's SQ--and records begin taking advantage of this system, I shall want such a decoder and wish to use it in my system.

I can see no sense in using it, however, on my mono and stereo records, since it cannot enhance them to a much greater extent than the Quadaptor can, and will require two additional channels of amplification --with a hefty wattage for each.

Therefore, I need a system which allows me to switch back and forth between Quadaptor and the other decoder. This will not be simple, because the two decoders don't go into the same parts of the system. That is, the matrix decoder will go between the preamp and two separate stereo power amps, while the Quadaptor goes after the first power amp, and a second is not required. I need to switch from the preamp either to the decoder or to the first power amp; with a provision for the front signals from the decoder to go back to that amp. Then I need a switch which will switch the Dyna decoder in or out after that power amp, and I need a switch which will control the source from which front and rear speakers get their signals, as well as a switch to turn on the second power amp when needed for the rear speakers. These switches must be in tandem for right and left channels.

Well, I sat down and designed it. It took ten double-pole, double-throw switches and one single-pole, single-throw switch, and about 120 soldering connections between these switches and the multitude of terminal strips on the back of the box. I did a complete wiring diagram and them sat down and programmed the wiring instructions after the style of the instructions furnished with the Dynakits.

It was sort of exciting, pouring over catelogues from Radio Shack and Lafayette (both have stores near here), picking out the hardwear. I wanted a box to assemble the works in, and I wanted it correctly proportioned so that I could use a Dyna front plate over it (I have an extra Dyna preamp which came with the second power amp I bought, second-hand, and I'm using its front plate and knobs for both the switch box and an earphone junction box --this will make for a nice set of matching front ends when everything is lined up).

It took several evenings of work, and I found the metal-working the hardest, since I hadn't the proper tools for cut-outs in aluminum.

However, in due time I had the whole thing put together. Its interior is a neat maze of red-colored wires, but with the cover on you would hardly imagine there's anything to it at all. I designed it so that all the switches point up when the (SQ) decoder is in use and down when the Dyna Quadaptor is on. That makes its use quite simple. I immediately hooked it up (although at present it's quite redundant, since I haven't the alternate system to switch to), and it works exactly as it should.

You can't imagine what a breakthrough that was. Now, full of new self-confidence, I am sitting, waiting, chewing my nails a lot, wondering when the tuner will arrive.

SCIENCE FICTION: I hate to keep talking about AMAZING and FANTASTIC--especially so since so few of you guys seems to read sf magazines any more--but I can't help feeling proud of the fact that I've finally gotten the magazines to turn the last big corner in the direction of respectability.

Those ghod-damned reprints are finally gone. All gone.

You may remember (he whispered, wondering if anyone in these hallowed halls really does) that just three years ago AMAZING and FANTASTIC were devoted largely to reprints. The actual ratio was something like 70% reprint. The reprinted stories weren't too hot, especially since the best had been used up during the previous three years or by one of Mr. Cohen's many-titled all-reprint magazines. Most people regarded AMAZING and FANTASTIC as lost causes, and at least one former editor (whose name will not sully these pages) was going about predicting either another boycott or an early demise for the magazines, or both. He also told everyone who would listen that Sol Cohen could not be worked with.

Well, three years is but the twinkling of an eye in this organization--or, to put it another way, only three or so issues of NULL-F--but it's thirty-six issues of AMAZING and FANTASTIC, a fact which mildly boggles me when I consider that I edited all those issues, and stuns me when I note the changes they've undergone.

Well, beginning with the February 1972 FANTASTIC and the March AMAZING, the new material is 100% and the reprints are out, zilch, 0%. Also, in the last three years AMAZING has twice been nominated for a Hugo, and twice placed third (behind F&SF and ANALOG). The appearance of the magazines has upgraded from scruffy to attractive (the publisher still insists that every story be listed on the cover, but at least I've found ways to do it attractively), and a lot of people tell me they find more to read and enjoy in my magazines than in any of the competition.

Of course, we still pay the poorest rates, but that's a fact of life I've learned to live with.

You know, twenty years ago I wanted to edit a sf magazine, and I thought it was an impossible dream. In fact, just five years ago I regarded it as an unlikely event--unless I could start a new magazine somehow. Now that the fact is reality I still find myself wondering how it happened, and howcome I was so lucky.

It's not unalloyed luck, of course. I make a tiny pittance compared with the salary ANALOG's editor gets, and the work eats up too much of my writing time. But I have a certain freedom which I might not have anywhere else: I can shape the personality of these two magazines exactly as I desire. And, to the extent that I've succeeded, I've been quite happy.

If you enjoyed the magazines of the early fifties--remember them,

Greg Calkins?--with their features and full letter columns, you might pick up on AMAZING or FANTASTIC or even both. Ten or fifteen page letter columns, chatty editorials, the works--just as you liked it before. Just as I liked it before.

It seems to be working, at long last--we've reversed the downward circulation trend and we're starting back up (although this isn't really reflected in the circulation figures just published; they lag a good six months behind)--amid rumors that everyone else is falling off.

So again I'm reminding you: the magazines aren't what they were just a few years ago, so why don't you go out and buy a copy and see what you think of it now.

And, like it or not, write me a letter of comment--the only thing wrong with those big lettercols is that they lack the old letterhacks. Sneary, Calkins, all youse guys, come on! Get with it! Your golden opportunity awaits!

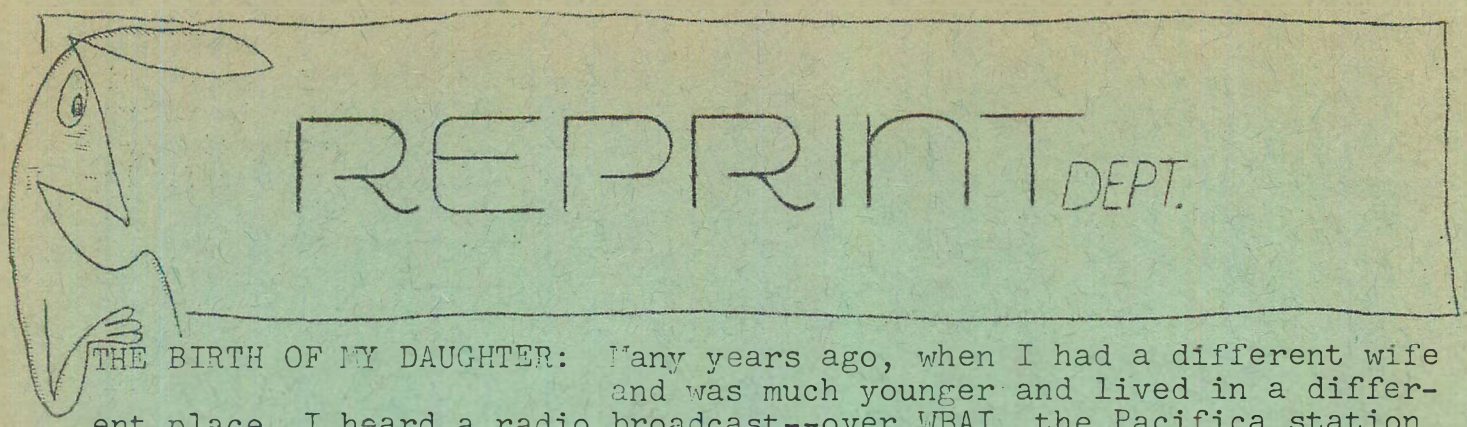
FATHERHOOD: A PROGRESS REPORT: At the end of this month (February) our daughter will be a year and a half old. When I think about that, I am astonished. Astonished at how quickly the time has gone (has it been over a year already?) and astonished at how fast Kitten has grown and changed. She's no longer a baby but a little girl who walks, jabbers incessantly (with a few words of English thrown into her baby-talk polyglot), is very athletic, has long blonde hair, and is of course the apple of my eye.

On the next page is a reprint of my column from EGOBOO describing her birth--I mentioned it in passing last issue. A slightly edited version appeared recently in BULLFROG, an Oregon quasi-underground magazine, in a section dealing with Lamaze childbirth. (No--no credit for the next five pages, please!) I wanted to reprint it here since I suspect the mailing list of EGOBOO doesn't much overlap the FAPA membership. And it's an experience which still excites me when I remember it and one I wanted to share with you all.

We've followed a vague philosophy of child-rearing which we boiled down from our own attitudes, what we know of anthropology, what we've read about the great apes' childraising, and current thinking on sensory environments for infants. It comes down to what I guess I might call "organic childraising"--and it seems to work. We don't push the kid at all, but at ten months she began walking and she is now, just under a year and a half, very sophisticated about her toy mamipulation (putting things on top of things, into things, etc., arranging things in pairs, rows, etc., etc.) and feeds herself with spoon or fork from her own dish in her highchair. (Her highchair is the same one I had as a baby, and before that was used by my uncles...the patina of time and old food lies heavily upon it.) She loves music of all sorts, but especially music with a brisk tempo or a heavy beat. She adores funky blues and rock. She likes to dance and is starting to sing identifiable melodies. (She also talks to the cats in their own language--it is probably easier to learn than ours.) And of course she is beautiful.

I haven't yet started carrying a folio of photos of her in my wallet, but it's just a matter of time.

A SPECIAL MESSAGE FOR DEAN A. GRENNELL: What's pissing you, Dean? The fact that somebody suggested you were less than perfect? Have you at any time considered the substance of my criticisms of your decision--or is half-assed invective your limit these days? Time was, I thought you were a pretty neat guy. Who changed--you, or me?



THE BIRTH OF MY DAUGHTER: Many years ago, when I had a different wife and was much younger and lived in a different place, I heard a radio broadcast--over WBAI, the Pacifica station --about something called "Natural Childbirth." It spoke glowingly of reconditioning pain signals into pleasure signals, and I sopped up a pretty distorted notion of what it was all about. But it seemed to me then, as it still does, that a system which incorporates the husband into the birth process was a good idea and had at least that much to recommend it.

Years passed, and I was living with another woman and we spoke, none-too-seriously, about having a baby, and I said that I thought that breast feeding was better than bottle feeding. At that time I wasn't aware of its physical advantages--like conferring some of the mother's immunities--but I was raised on the bottle, and my earliest memory (within two or three weeks of my birth) was that of my mother trying to breast feed me, failing, and of my own anger and resentment. It seemed to me that this was one trauma that needn't be passed on to our child. (My mother had been given shots--without her permission--to dry up her milk. 1938 was a year in which bottle feeding was The Thing.) The woman to whom I suggested this was not awfully receptive to the idea. In fact, her reply was "No!" As it turned out, we didn't stay together that much longer, and we didn't have a baby, and that, as it turned out, was Just As Well.

In the five years I've known Robin we've discussed both notions to a considerable extent, both of us agreeing upon them in principle. But of course neither of us knew that much about either subject. This year we found out.

Robin conceived in November, 1969, discovered she was pregnant in early January ("So that's why I felt so lousy all Christmas!"), and suddenly these were no longer abstract questions to discuss and agree upon. They were concrete possibilities and it was time to find out about them.

Robin's aunt loaned her a copy of a book called Thank You, Dr. Lamaze, which is something of a bible in natural childbirth circles. Robin's aunt had had both her children by the "Lamaze method." We began talking with other couples of our acquaintance. Denny O'Neil's wife, Ann, had used the Lamaze method and swore fervently by it. So had Hilary Benford. And Anne Goodwin. We bought Elizabeth Bing's book on the method, and began shopping around for an obstretrician and a hospital who would go along with the method.

And immediately encountered hostility. Robin's H.I.P. doctor--paid for in easy quarterly instalments and the only one available--told her "Natural childbirth is for animals." Since he treated her--and all his patients--like so many cattle, I don't see why that should have been a valid objection, but it was. I told Robin to use him for her monthly checkups (he was, after all, already paid for), and we'd see who we could find to deliver the baby.

Ultimately our inquiries all focussed upon the New York Hospital, its obstretrics clinic, and its Lamaze classes. At an unghodly hour

early in the morning of June 23rd, we appeared at the clinic and signed in. It was the antithesis of the H.I.P. clinic in Bay Ridge in every respect. The Bay Ridge Medical Center is new, clean, attractively decorated, and air conditioned. The New York Hospital clinic is located in the basement of an old building which is undergoing rebuilding and consists of a series of halls and rooms with broken walls, open ceilings, bare pipes and dangling wires. I took one look around and wished I'd stayed in bed. However, the personnel at Bay Ridge are boredand efficient in exactly the same way the Nazis were efficient: they route their patients on "traffic" plans and treat them all like faceless units. It is galling and dehumanizing. At the New York Hospital clinic, on the other hand, the personnel had time to smile in silent apology for the heat and the mess, and to give us each an opportunity to behave like intelligent adults. It was refreshing, and we left feeling far better than we had on arriving.

In addition to biweekly visits to the clinic, we began a six-week course conducted for two hours every Thursday evening by Polly Sites at the hospital. This was the classic Lamaze course. Its function was two-fold: to educate us about the birth process, and to teach us specific exercises for dealing with the actual labor. These exercises were divided into the physical exercises the women learned to tone up their muscles (which Robin, trained as a dancer, took easily in her stride) and breathing exercises which would be used to cope with the actual labor. The course also included tours of the nursery floors to look at recent newborns, and to the labor and delivery rooms to see where we would be carrying out our Lamaze program. One of the theories behind this is that fear of the unknown only magnifies the pains of labor--and that learning beforehand the facts and locale would do much to put our minds at ease.

During the course--and about a month before the baby was "due"--Robin had her first false labor--a four-hour series of contractions which simply died away without progressing into the frequent contractions of real labor. But they shook us up. From then on, Robin had occasional "twinges," back cramps, etc., several of which had us timing and wondering, but to no consequence. Finally, when the "due" date came and passed, we began to feel as if the boy had cried Wolf! just once too often.

Then, on Monday, the 24th of August, a doctor at the clinic suggested that inasmuch as Robin's cycle was longer than most, a fairer estimate of the due date would be the 27th. Further, her cervex was already between one and two centimeters dilated (a dilation of ten centimeters is required for birth). He predicted the baby would come within forty-eight hours. And that night, sure enough, the contractions began again...only to subside around six in the morning after we'd both spent a sleepless night in anticipation. (You're advised to sleep through early labor if you can, since you need a lot of energy for later. But we simply couldn't. Sheer nervous anticipation, I guess.)

Tuesday night I took Robin out to a Chinese dinner. Each day we took long walks together. Both of us felt the whole thing was pending, like a storm cloud on the horizon and the heaviness of the air, but still nothing was happening. "I don't believe I'll ever have this thing," Robin said more'n once. And I remembered how I used to cope with stage fright when I was in my highschool dramatics club--by pretending each night was simply another dress rehearsal. I had the feeling I'd walk through my part and speak my lines in the same way whenever we had the baby--if we didn't have too many dress-rehearsals (false alarms) beforehand.

Then it finally happened. Thursday, around 2:30 pm, Robin was looking at the three-week-old kittens in their box, felt something wet running down her legs, and discovered that the amnionic sack had broken. We looked at each other in wild surmise. Was it really at last happening? "But--I don't feel any contractions," she said. "Should we wait for contractions?" We reread the sheet of instructions from the hospital. If the "waters" broke, we were to call at once, it said, and not wait for the other "signs" of labor. I called the hospital, gave them Robin's clinic number, and was told to bring her in.

"I feel foolish," she said. "What if they just tell us to go home again?" But I was pretty certain they would not. In our class we'd been told that if labor didn't occur within twenty-four hours after the waters broke, it would be induced, which is now easily done. We were both tired of waiting and wanted to get on with it. One way or the other, I assured her, we'd have a baby within 24 hours.

We took the subway into Manhattan, but rather than change to a crowded uptown line I suggested a taxi for the rest of the trip. It may or may not have been a mistake--I didn't want to see Robin forced to stand, packed in among rush hour crowds (nobody offers a seat to pregnant women on the subways any more--least of all women who've had children themselves!)--but the taxi ride was something of an experience and Robin felt unpleasantly jolted by it. Nonetheless, we got to the hospital safely.

Then began a comedy of errors. I was sent out while Robin was examined and prepared, so I went to a phone booth to call her mother. The phone was one of those new, "one slot" phones. It allowed me to exchange perhaps twenty-seconds' worth of conversation and then cut me off, collected my dime, and pretended to be dead again. Annoyed, I called the operator. It rang and rang. And rang. And rang. For well over half an hour, that bloody phone rang and no operator answered. I called information and they couldn't get an operator either. I finally gave up, wasted a second dime and resumed the conversation--45 minutes later. I was pretty pissed when I got back to Robin.

She was moved to a labor room on the top floor, where we spent the next seven hours reading books, talking, yawning, and waiting for something to happen. Nothing did, until about five minutes before midnight. Then she yelped. "It felt like a rubber band twanging inside of me," she said.

"What's that mean?" I asked. "I don't know," she said. "I never felt anything like that before." But within less than a minute she had her first real, serious contraction--one which forced her to begin using her breathing techniques. And they came every few minutes thereafter, averaging every two or three minutes. The real labor had begun.

But it was nothing like the way we'd been taught to expect it. Not only had we bypassed the entire first stage of labor (the contractions every half hour and gradually less), but these contractions lasted unequal lengths of time, were spaced irregularly, and had very little indeed to do with the "clockwork" timing we'd been told about. And they lasted seventy to ninety seconds, too.

At the beginning I checked my watch and counted off the seconds by tens as taught, but after an hour or so I stopped. It was too intellectual an approach and really divorced me from Robin, centering my attention too much on the watch. Later I held it for her to watch, since she required an object to concentrate upon (we also had a Mike Hinge poster which we'd put up, and some Art Decco and Peter Max stuff Mike had given us), while I concentrated on her, giving her a cloth

to suck when her mouth was dry, reapplying chapstick to her lips (the second breathing exercise is a rapid panting through the mouth), occasionally some mouthwash, wiping her face with a wet cloth, etc. And coaching her. This was part of what we'd been taught: that the husband is there to coach, to provide both moral and physical assistance. Bound up in the middle of a contraction, a woman loses track of things. She may forget what she's doing. If she did, I was there to say "Keep your eyes focussed. Watch the second hand. I want you to tell me how long it took." (This motivates the attention to something outside the contraction.) Or, "Don't stop--keep panting," or, if she was still panting after the contraction had subsided, "breathe through your nose now." By taking responsibility for this, for calling the signals, I left her free to concentrate on the things she needed to concentrate upon. Later, when the contractions were rougher, I held up my hands, fists with thumbs up, and she grabbed my thumbs and I had her grip them as tightly as she could. (As long as you return the grip, nothing will break or sprain.)

The time passed amazingly quickly. A nurse would pop in every half or three quarters of an hour to listen to the baby's heartbeats, check everything, and offer some encouragement. All the nurses on that floor seemed familiar with "Lamazing it," as they called it, and seemed to prefer Lamaze method patients. (One of the doctors told me his own wife had both her two children by the Lamaze method.) There were several changes of nurses during the twelve hours or so we were there, but they were all warm and helpful. By four in the morning, things were getting pretty rough, and Robin said she kept having urges to push. Pushing before the dilation is complete is a major cause of pain and laceration. The Lamaze method teaches a breathing technique ("blowing") for coping with this urge, and as Robin would start to cry out, I'd say, "Blow! Blow-blow-blow-blow!" panting right along with her. It wasn't until afterwards that I realized that these urges to push were coming three to a contraction--the so-called "three peaks" of the "transitional stage" of labor that preceeds delivery. Actually, I was feeling rather discouraged by how rough the labor was for her. I'd heard of women all but loafing their way through a Lamaze labor, and this was a far cry from it. Robin was tired and almost tearful and I felt the frustration of someone who has put his wife in a position which is turning out to be too much for her--and who could no longer do anything about it to help her except to persist as before. I was also tired. The more traditional form of waiting quietly with a book began to appeal to me. I expected we had another three to five hours to go, and I wondered if either of us would make it.

At that point--about five o'clock--a nurse came in to check Robin, did so, and then announced, grinning, "You're going to have your baby in ten minutes!"

We were astonished. Adrenalin poured through me, wiping out my exhaustion as though it had never been. I laughed, squeezed Robin's hand, and said, "Hey, do you hear that? Ten minutes!"

"I don't believe it!" she said, and for the first time in hours, she too was smiling.

The nurse pulled the buzzer and I ran down the hall to put on a scrub suit--white pants and shirt--and then be fitted with a mask, hat, and paper bootlets over my boots. Then I was running down to the delivery room where Robin was already waiting, legs in stirrups, draped in white. She was blowing--holding off another contraction and waiting for me. I moved in next to her and looked down at her. The doctor was ready. "On the next contraction, you may push," he said. It came, she pushed, and once again the teachings were confounded. I had

expected it would require several pushes--up to ten minutes' worth--to bring the baby out. To my surprise, the nurse gestured for me to watch, and I saw that already the baby's head was out! One push--and that was all it had taken. (Robin told me later that it had not even been a difficult push; "I knew exactly what to do, I did it, and it wasn't hard at all!") What I saw was a purplish doughy mass which I made out to be the baby's face, its features all there, but hardly in any order. Then, as the doctor eased out first one shoulder and then the other, I gave a running account to Robin in a rather breathless voice. The baby was quite purple, and covered with a yellow cheesy substance (which protects its skin during its period in the womb). The doctor eased the baby out, Robin asked, "What is it?" and the doctor turned it around. "A girl," he said. "It's Arielle," I said, feeling very strange and joyful, as if announcing a visitor at our door. We'd picked names for both girl and boy, and it seemed at that moment as if they both existed--somewhere--and the girl had simply come first.

I don't remember what Robin said to that, but I shall never forget the expression on her face. Her eyes were wide and glowing and she was smiling deeply. "I'm so glad," she said, "it's so good." And later she said, "The only word I can use to describe the way I felt is 'sublime'. It was all worth it." Her hand groped out from under the drape and found mine. I held it, and stroked her face. A few moments later the nurse brought me the baby, well wrapped in a blanket, and asked if I wished to hold her. I took her and held her for Robin to see. She had her eyes open--and in fact we were told later she'd opened them before being fully delivered.

One of the many advantages of the Lamaze method is that the child emerges into the world undrugged. Lamaze babies don't need to be slapped to start them breathing, and they are often quite alert immediately after birth. Arielle was.

They brought her down to the third floor while I was downstairs phoning both sets of grandparents. When I went up, I found her already in the four-baby nursury adjoining the room where Robin would be. She was next to the window, and her eyes were open and tracking. I stared back at her and began talking to her, babbling almost, cooing, feeling almost transcendentally in love with her, with Robin, and indeed with the whole world. It made a good beginning for fatherhood, one I hope I shall never forget.

Officially, Arielle Broneta White weighed in as seven pounds, nine ounces. People who know babies assure me she is beautiful--and I am fully willing to accept their judgement. She was born at 5:18 on August 28th, early Friday morning. She began nursing at her mother's breast (trained by advance preparation for nursing) at ten that morning and took immediately to the task. No problems there, either.

Robin had "rooming in," which means she was allowed to have the baby with her and take care of her herself, throughout the day. Fathers had their own visiting hours, 7 to 9 each evening, and on each day I held my daughter with pride and pleasure. Very quickly I discovered her nickname, Kitten. It's a good name to grow up with, and her 'real' name (Hebrew for Lion of God) will await her pleasure.

So how do I feel, now that the first part is all over? Triumphant, I guess. Vindicated in my beliefs. More than that, proud and pleased to be a father at long last, with a daughter of my own. Proud also to know that I played an integral part in my daughter's birth.

Perhaps some day she'll find this brittle old fanzine and read these pages. If so, I can only hope that she too will find the experience of giving birth with her man as sublime.

WRAPPING IT UP: One of the weirder aspects of moving back into the house I grew up in is the discovery at odd moments of various stuff left behind when I first moved out. These items are tucked away in odd corners of the house, mostly the attic and the basement. They include most of the toys I had as a kid--those which weren't thrown out, passed on to relatives, or lost, anyway--boxes of old fanzines, intermixed with magazines of the period (lots of old COLLIERS with sf stories) and letters of comment on ZIP, etc. Around here nothing was ever thrown away, and periodically I pull out a box and sit down and leaf through it and get all wrapped up in nostalgia. It's a little mind-bending to go through a box filled with old (broken) cap pistols, some celeal box backs (remember the ones with WW2 plane silhouettes?), Japanese occupation currency from the Philipines, and all sorts of other stuff which once meant something to me, and to try to remember where it all came from, what I did with it, and all that childhood sort of thing. Visions of sunlit rooms and people much bigger than I, of eating all my cereal first and then the brown sugar that sunk under the cream (yes, real 100% cream, every morning!) all the while reading the adventures of Snap, Crackle and Pop the Rice Krispies cartoon characters... Who says you can't go home again?

But of course these are just fragments; bits and pieces which jar me for a moment with the accute memory of who I was and what I was. And, taken on the whole, I'm not awfully impressed by who and what I was. Not, at least, after I started setting it all down on paper and--worse--stencilling and mimeoing it for all the world to see. The other day I found a copy of NULL-F #12, for instance. It dates from 1958, and it reads to me now as an embarrassingly strident document. Most embarrassing was the long section in which I replied to G.M.Carr on a variety of topics. I all but frothed at the mouth! Astonishing, in retrospect; there was nothing wrong with the point of view I was pushing, nor even with my logic, when I bothered with any, but the tone...ah, *sigh*...

Well, at least it was better-written than my highschool compositions of only slightly earlier. Those are a total embarrassment to me now.

I'm astonished that I attained an even mildly positive reputation in fandom those days when I reread my juvenile blather. It's sobering, I'll tell you.

A NOTE TO JIM CAUGHRAN: You asked Harry what "Dolby" means--or is. Perhaps his answer will be in this mailing. On the chance that it is not, I'll tell you: Dolby is the name of the man who invented a noise-reduction system for recording music. Basically, it boosts the weak signals to a uniformly high minimum level, so that when on playback those signals are reduced to their proper level the background noise is greatly diminished. This improves the signal/noise ratio, cutting down on tape hiss and other background noise. It's very handy in tape recording, both professional and amateur, and is being used a little in FM broadcasting. High fidelity cassetts are possible with the Dolby system and chromium-dioxide tape formations (major companies are now releasing Dolby-recorded cassetts which require a Dolby playback circuit in the cassett deck). There are two types of Dolby circuits: A-type for professional use (very expensive, covers the whole frequency range) and B-type for "home" use (cheaper--around $100 for a unit--and works only on the upper frequencies where noise is most noticeable).

I know what you mean about using FAPA to keep in touch with people, and the sense of regret when someone like Lupoff drops out. Yes. And here I thought you were still in Lexington...

--Ted White (Feb., 1972)