

PowWow#35

PowWow #35 is by Joyce Worley Katz, created for the monthly assembly of Apa V, Sept. 7, 1996. Thanks to Arnie, for the onerous chores, and for being with me through the best and worst days of fandom, which happens to be our topic of the month, even though I mostly want to talk about Toner, very definitely up there among **My Best Days in Fandom**.

From the arrival of the first guests on Thursday afternoon, to the goodbyes on Wednesday night to the last ones heading on westward to the WorldCon, Toner was a pleasurable reunion of friends. One high spot blew into another, and if my memory of the week is hazy, then perhaps that's the best description of the week as well.

I had few responsibilities; the convention work was done mostly by Tom and Ben, Tammy and Cathi, Ken and Aileen and the others who pitched in when muscle was needed. The Friday kick-off party ended my heavy duties, so I was free to drift from one pleasant pastime to the next.

Therefore, it's no wonder that I floated into the con suite on Sunday afternoon, ready to co-chair a panel with Tom Springer.

Arnie had conducted a fine panel on Saturday, subjected "Can The Numbered Theory of Fandom be Revived?" He, Robert Lichtman and rich brown pretty well tore up the subject, along with lots of audience participation. The final decision was still under debate the next day when I came into the con suite; it had been a rousing discussion and everyone seemed anxious to have another round of high-toned fannish conversation.

Tom and I had discussed our approaches to the topic, "Should Fandom Proselytize?" We decided to do it SNAFFU style,

each of us making Strong Statements and taking Firm Stances. I had just written an article about recruitment a month or so before, and felt like a change, so I talked Tom into taking the pro side: he'd make a jolly, full-hearted statement on the affirmative, urging fandom to go out into the highways and byways as a missionary force to bring in the sheaves. I'd then pop up with my iconoclastic views and say the equivalent of "Hell NO!", and then we'd throw it to the round table to discuss.

Naturally, formally laid plans are unlikely to succeed in a free-form convention like Toner. The fans gathered in the con suite were raring to go, already chatting on the subject, and our orderly arrangements seemed inappropriate. Tom was there, but his leg had gone bad on him from the strain of pre-con arrangements, and his pain killers weren't taking; I believe it was a relief to him not to have to give a bombastic show.

There was a zig-zag ebb and flow to the conversation, defying the formatted debate. There was only one thing that everyone seemed to agree about: new blood is needed, wanted. The question is, whose, and how much.

I think it was Art Widner who pointed out how many years (20 or more) since the prozines had done the task for us. I think it was me who said that we must recognize

that the involvement of prozines in fandom is out of our control, so we shouldn't count on it any more.

Linda Bushyager (who's been a path toward fandom for neos in her part of the country) discussed the desirability of special fanzines, easily accessible and stripped of most inside references, to be passed out at conventions. We all tipped our hat to Barnaby Rappaport (wish you had been here, Barnaby!) who has tried this method.

Unfortunately, no one could think of any fan who came into fanzine fandom through that door.

After a round of the expected proposals (notices in bookstores, aggressive approaches to people seen reading s.f., outright kidnapping of potential fans to force them in to our ways), we all had to admit there were few new faces coming from those sources.

Not that we need that many. The finesse of recruitment is to find a few, not hundreds or thousands. "Look what happened to us before," I ranted. "First the Burroughs Bibliophiles, then the Trekkers, and next the Star Wars fans. And then when Arnie and I gafiated, you all really lost control of the situation, and see where we are now!"

I got the expected laugh, then the subject turned more serious again. "What we need is one or two good new fans a year, not hundreds of new fanzine fans."

No matter who said it first, that seemed to be the consensus of opinion.

I trotted out my own pet theory, that s.f. clubs are the most promising place to look for them. "They're already captive; we have repeated exposure to them; we can seduce them to our ways," I promised.

Linda spoke of her good luck in finding potential fanzine fans through her local group. Everyone seemed to agree that, although it wasn't necessarily true in the past when fandom was more focused and we did have the help of fanzine review columns in the prozines, now it takes a fan to make a fan. Befriending interested club members, and involving them in our ways will land us new fans...plus a lot of free collating.

Christine Lake talked about fandom in England, where it seems definitely to be on a person-to-person basis. (If you think of it as an Immortal Headcold, rather than an Immortal Storm, you'll get the picture of how fannishness is passed from one to another.)

The panel didn't exactly close, but broke down into small groups of twos and threes, discussing how fandom can be perpetuated, and how we can acquire the necessary new faces.

It was notable that this conversation took place in the bosom of the biggest group of new fanzine fans there's been for the last several years. I think I showed great Restraint in not pointing out that all the Vegrants came into fanzine fandom after being recruited from the local s.f. club.

It was an unusual conversation, in that by the end, everyone more or less was in agreement. We don't want hundreds of new fans; even dozens would be too many all at once. But we do need a few each year, and how wonderful it would be if each fan club or local group managed to scare up just one.

The discussion wound down, and Arnie, Ken, Martin Tutor and Perry Middlemass started setting up for the auction. The room was crowded and incredibly noisy from the many conversations; Arnie sidled up to me and said something had to be done to make the auction possible.

So in my best stentorian voice (betcha didn't know I could speak that loud) I told people to stay and enjoy the auction, but be quiet, or to join me in the Katz suite for conversation. I was sorry to miss the auction, but pulling a dozen or so bodies out of the suite seemed like a good idea.

And in fact, it worked out great. Ron and Raven, Bill Rotsler and Karl Kreider and a few more sat in comfort in 1231, and laughed at a series of hilarious tales from Bill and Karl about slaughter houses.

But, that's another story, for another day.