

SPENT BRASS

The fanzine of automotive miseries, published by Andy Hooper and Carol Root, of 315 N. Ingersoll, Madison, WI 53703, and available for the usual, 29 cent stamps, or \$1.00/2 copies. This is Drag Bunt Press Production #110, 3/1/91, member fwa. Contributing this time are Jeanne Gomoll and Ted White. Art credits: Spent Brass logo by Craig Smith, pages 4, 6 by Jeanne Gomoll, Page 1 by Sheryl Birkhead.

; Forward in all directions!

PREFERRED CUSTOMER:



I should have been prepared. There had been ominous events over the past few months: A loss of power for two blocks in September, an engine-rattle in October that went away as soon as I pulled into the dealer's lot, and the paying off of the "Brighton" loan in November. And after all, even my baby Toyota might show signs of wear after eight years of Wisconsin driving. (Technically only seven, because of the year it spent in the garage while I was in Seattle. But I understand that Richard Russell took my request seriously that he "drive it around the block every so often," and drove it soooo often....)

So, early in February, when the car completely lost power AND started rattling like a gravel sorter, I just had it towed out to the dealer. "A little clutch problem," I thought, "or a loose doohickey." Then came the bad news -- the rattle was definitely in the engine, and they'd have to remove the engine from the car and take it apart into little bitty pieces in order to find out more. At a minimum cost of \$1050. (Yeah, yeah, don't tell me, I could have had it done for less. This was the dealer. And besides, I'd just paid thirty-five bucks to have the baby towed out to the edge of the universe, and was not inclined to tow it back in.)

Do you want the long or short version of this? I could tell about a week of walking all over Madison, bumming rides, of being grateful for the belated January thaw, and for the sensible choice we'd made in living only a mile from my job.

Or, I could go right to the bottom line...in less than two weeks, we spent over two thousand dollars on a series of problems. The engine problem was a worn piston wrist pin, caused by a faulty valve preventing oil from doing its thing. So of course it only made sense to replace ALL the pistons, valves, rings, etc., etc. And after picking the car up from the dealer, I decided to get a wash and a new muffler (after all, if the engine was like new, it was only fair that the car look and sound like new, too). Well, the Octopus Car Wash was apparently a little enthusiastic: When I got to my parking slot the next day, there was big puddle of coolant waiting for me. Back to the dealer, this had to be related to the engine overhaul.

Nope. When the mechanic put a little pressurizer on the radiator, the bottom looked like a watering can. No way this was caused by a loose clamp. This time the dealer had pity on me...he not only paid for my taxi to work and back that evening, but also paid for the labor pulling the radiator.

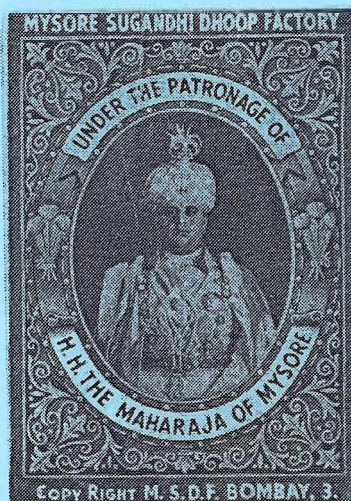
But it still wasn't over. The day after the radiator fiasco, I decided to roll down my window to clear a little snow off of it, rather than get all the way out of the car and use the brush. CLUNK!, the window falls off its track and won't roll back up. Folks, the thaw was over now. It was ten degrees F., and snowing. And, although I had fixed a similar problem before, that was in May. We don't have a heated garage. No one we know has a heated garage. In fact, the only person I know that even has a garage you can put your car into (rather than old mimeos, boxes of books and the bricks and boards to put them on real soon now) is Diane Martin.

The next Saturday (after walking the rest of the week ...walking in sub-zero weather is such good exercise), I was squatting on Diane's garage floor, trying to take apart the door panel without freezing my fingers off. And, while I was at it, I'd replace the burned-out headlight, and maybe the windshield wiper blades. Maybe. Of course, I broke the wiper doohickey while I was trying to prove that the replacement blades I'd gotten were the right size....

You know, we had really intended to get a new car this year. Maybe drive it to Corflu. Now, I think we'll take the train. -- cr

"and there's one more thing -- I got the pink slip, daddy!"

UFFISH THOTS by Ted White



Every Saturday night, I drive over to rich brown's house -- which is to say, the house in which rich rents the room under the porch -- and return with him to my house for a riotous night of cards, Double-Deck Pinochle to be precise. We were both introduced to this game a few years ago by Linda Blanchard, and it has pretty much replaced Spades as our favorite card game.

Rich lives only ten minutes away, and we use those ten minutes to check out each other's week in fanac. "Get anything good in the mail?" is how the conversation usually starts, and, depending on what has in fact arrived in the mail that week, it progresses from there.

This, and whatever conversation spills over as we enter the house, is usually pretty close to the sum total of my fanac, these days.

Last Saturday, we talked about Rick Sneary, whose death we'd recently heard about.

"You know," I said, "Sneary was a legend to me before I'd even gotten into fandom."

"How was that?" rich asked, or maybe he just queried with a simple "?" I forget.

"Well," I said, "you know I got into prozines first -- not just the thirty or forty titles coming out right then, but back issues too." I used to take the bus into D.C. and browse the used book stores for old pulps, then going for 10 cents each, or three for a quarter. Each week I'd buy maybe five bucks worth of old prozines -- a shopping-bag full. Although I read everything in every issue of the new magazines, I didn't try to read all of the stories in the back issues. But I did read thoroughly the features -- the editorials, the letters, book and fanzine reviews. And I discovered the best of these were to be found in

STARTLING STORIES, THRILLING WONDER STORIES and PLANET STORIES in the 1946 - 50 period. (This was in 1951, after all.) The letter columns in those three magazines were lengthy -- probably between five and ten thousand words; maybe more -- and set in tiny type. And they were like a modern-day apa: the same letter-writers appeared in them, their comments divided between the stories and topics raised in previous letters. It was here, in these letter columns, that I learned the argot of fandom, the fanspeak of "BNFs" and "fmz" and "egoboo."

As I mentioned, many of the same letter-writers -- letterhacks -- appeared regularly in those columns, and one whose name caught my eye was Rick Sneary.

"Of course," said rich. "He was a a mainstay in those letter columns." Or maybe rich just said, "He was a regular letterhack in those days." I forget.

Sneary was not just another letterhack. His bedridden childhood had forced self-education upon him, and his spelling, to his occasional embarrassment, was individual and unique, albeit not hard to read. "Snearyisms" were as celebrated in those forties prozine lettercols as they were in fanzine fandom itself. That unique spelling (which Rick never objected to having corrected) was initially -- for me and I assume for most other fans -- a way to pick Rick out of the crowd, a tag, a distinction. But what one noticed when one read Sneary was a basic sweetness of nature, coupled with most of the more fannish traits, like the willingness to express an opinion on any story and nearly any topic.

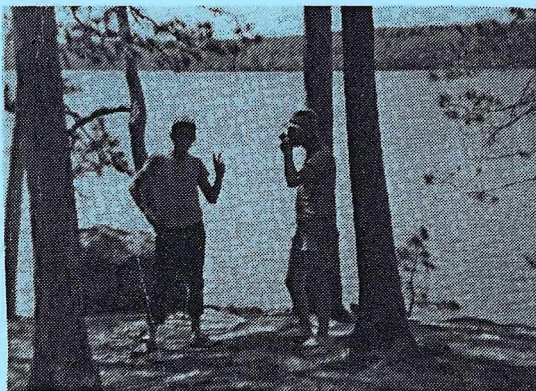
In the course of forty years I have progressed from a 13-year-old neofan to a 53-year-oldphart (ret.), but for all of that time I have held the same opinion of Rick Sneary, who grew older at the same rate but never seemed to change, his spelling and his sweetness of nature facts of life, it seemed. I sent him a copy of my first fanzine back in 1953, and he was still on my mailing list the last time I pubbed my ish.

"I met him when I started going to LASFS meetings," rich said. "I was just a kid, but he was nice to me. He let me go through his fanzine collection. He answered my endless questions." Or maybe what rich said was, "Other people at LASFS used to take me aside and tell me, "Rick isn't in good health," warning me, you know, to be easy on him, saying "He probably doesn't have much longer." And they were right, I guess. Only thirty-odd years." I was driving; I forget.

"He was one of the Good Guys," I said.

"Yeah," rich said. I remember that. -- Ted White

"All this time, the river flowed, endlessly, to the sea...."



CAMPAIGN NEWS:

The mayoral primary has come and activist/fan candidate Don Helley expressed satisfaction with his third place finish. Don did well on the near-east side of the Isthmus, with its population of alternative families and aging radicals, but still ran 1600 votes short of 2nd. place suit Rich Bogovich, with 1003 votes. The candidate (shown left, on a fact-finding canoe trip to Northern Minnesota) said that he was glad to have raised some ideas and had had his eyes

opened by the experience. It is worth pointing out that Don's whole campaign cost less than a hundred dollars, and that finishing third leaves him free to enjoy Wiscon 15. -- aph

"AUNTIE EM! AUNTIE EM!" by Jeanne Gomoll



Mom, dad and I get along much better than we used to. There weren't too many topics -- political, moral, or personal -- about which we failed to argue when I was in high school and college. But now -- although we still frequently stand on opposite sides of quite a few fences, things have improved quite a lot. I like to think that my parents have mellowed out, but maybe it's been more the case that they were finally worn down by my younger brothers and sister and me....

One more sibling, and who knows, dad might have eventually have voted Democrat.

The original plan was for three kids with a daughter first -- as a potential babysitter -- at least that's how I remember the plan described. But one afternoon 25 years ago, dad called us all into the living room for what he termed a "family conference." This was fairly weird, since we'd never had a family conference, not being what you'd call a democratically governed household. We all tramped into the living room to see what was up, Rick, Steve and me. Mom was already sitting there looking a little nervous, but happy, and when we'd scattered ourselves on the floor and sofa, Dad announced that mom was pregnant. We talked about the changes that the new baby would make in our house, mostly economic as I recall. Dad got very serious as he warned us that things would be a little crowded. Thus I hoped for a boy so he would have to share Rick and Steve's room; Rick and Steve were in favor of a girl for the opposite reason. Eventually we got down to talking about naming the new kid, and sabotaged several names that mom and dad had been thinking of by demonstrating how easily they could be made fun of by other, less sensitive children.

For seven years we had no more family conferences, until early in 1969, when dad once again called us into the living room for a family conference. "Family conference," he shouted. "everyone into the living room!" Once again, with the addition of Julie, we all tramped into the living room. None of us suspected that there was any possibility whatsoever that dad would once again announce a new family member. We all assumed that Julie had been the one and only "surprise." So I was only joking when I stopped at mom's chair and grinned at her and said with fake exasperation, "Not again, mom!?"

Mom wasn't very amused. In October of that year, Dan was born.

Dad hasn't called another family conference since then.

Another phrase that has taken on many layers of meaning is "dad's shortcuts." Dad has a usually incredible ability to navigate in strange cities and is more adept than most people I know when it comes to driving in a new city and striking out blindly in the direction he assumes is downtown, or a good restaurant, or the airport. Most of the time his guesses are correct.

I still have a fond memory of dad imparting Arcane Suburban Survival Lore to me while he was teaching me to drive. He demonstrated the secret method of finding the way out of suburb street mazes by examining the pattern of gravel tracks at intersections.

In the summer of 1968, our family took a trip to Washington D.C. -- Two factors contributed to the choice of that city for our vacation,

Rick's and my interest in U.S. history, and a suggestion mom made the winter before, no doubt when we kids had been getting on her nerves in those days when severe winters used to keep kids indoors. Rick and I yearned to receive mail (fans in the making, I guess) -- and mom suggested that we write to state tourism boards and ask for information about their states. We did, and were inundated with stuff that I now would call junk mail, but which in those days was simply wonderful mail, addressed to us and very exciting. Rick and I proposed that the family travel to D.C. for a vacation, and when to our surprise, our parents agreed, we wrote even more letters asking for information about the Capital. We wrote to tourism agencies; we wrote to the tourist attractions themselves; we wrote to congressional representatives, and by the time we were through collecting information and scheduling our week's time in Washington, we'd filled every moment of every waking hour of the trip. Mom and dad were pretty good about it though and went along with our plans.

We rented a camper which attached to the back of the car and reserved space at a private campground outside of the city in Maryland. It was a warm, sunny day when we arrived, and mom kept us driving around the campground until we had located the perfect tree to park under. It was an enormous tree, and provided plenty of shade. I remember mom being very picky about the exact placement of the camper beneath the tree to take advantage of the most shade to keep the interior of the camper cool during the day.

Dad found Washington a challenging city in which to drive. He became disoriented only a couple times. Once he asked a cop to direct him and the officer led him in a clearly illegal but sanctioned U-turn in the middle of a boulevard. But the biggest wrong turn came at the end of the trip.

It was the last day of a very, very hot week, made even hotter by the fact that we'd spent the most of it with the sun reflecting onto us off big, white, stone buildings. Without too much argument, mom convinced the rest of us to abandon the last scheduled stop on our itinerary -- the Jefferson Memorial -- and return to the campground for a swim and some laying around. We piled in the car and dad took out the map to check out an idea.

"I think I know how to get back to the campground faster," he said. "I think I know a shortcut." We rolled our eyes but kept quiet. Dad was in full-blown explore mode.

"You see we can get on the Dulles Airport Freeway here," he said, and stabbed the much-folded DC map, "and then get off on the very next exit and we miss having to go all the way around here!" With a flourish, he stuffed the map back into the glove compartment and we were off.

Only later, when it was too late, did we look at the map again. But dad swears to this day that there was nothing on that map which indicated that the Dulles Airport Freeway doesn't have any exits on the Dulles-bound half of the road. Apparently it was constructed to provide efficient service for airport users in a way that didn't encourage its clogging and use by other travellers. In any case, once we drove up the on-ramp, we found ourselves committed to an unexpectedly long drive -- 20 miles out of our way. The urban planners responsible for the Dulles freeway would have been gratified to know that the traffic was light.

While we drove out to the airport, we noticed a storm brewing to north of us. It looked like quite a violent thunderstorm and the sky



darkened rapidly. A huge squall line advanced toward us and we realized that it was probably raining on our campground as we drove. And drove....

As it turned out, more than rain had hit the campground. Violent winds had wreaked havoc among the trees and tents, and most of the people had run for high ground during the storm and were huddled up in the shelter building on top of a hill. We saw a huge tree that had fallen down and crushed a camper. The tree creased the vehicle lengthwise, utterly

destroying it. "Oh, those poor people!" we moaned as dad cruised by the shambles left by what some people told us had been a tornado.

But then we couldn't find our campsite. We couldn't find that tree that mom had so carefully chosen as the place to park our camper. And we realized suddenly that the downed tree had been our tree and the creased camper was our camper.

Dad's proposals of shortcuts still provoke rolled eyeballs, but we don't complain at all. Who knows what disaster this shortcut might be saving us from? -- Jeanne Gomoll

HOT OFF THE WIRES:

Spike Parsons and Tom Becker are getting married! Along with 2" square cartoons, Jeanne Gomoll brought news that Spike and Tom are to be married this coming summer, 'about a week before worldcon, maybe in the Masonic Temple.' Word is that a small wedding is planned, with a guest-list composed mostly of family; perhaps a small reception in their honor at ChiCon might be in order? Keep your calendars open.

Many people don't know that Spike and Scott Custis, Jeanne's SO, are first cousins. And even fewer outside of the Turbo-Charged Party-Animal Apa know what an interesting writer Scott is. Perhaps with his family connection, Scott would prove the ultimate insider columnist for Spent Brass. We're even now are checking what's left in the SB Special Investigations Fund. -- aph

COAs:

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"Till then Ile sweare, and seeke about for eases;
And at that time bequeathe you my diseases. "

--The tragedie of Troylus and Cresida.

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