

NO. 34
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Redd Boggs'
SPIROOONEGG

ON THE BART TRAIN

When you're reading as the BART train goes from the elevated in El Cerrito into the tunnel beneath Berkeley the page darkens under your eyes. You look up to adjust yourself to the relative gloom and see your fellow passengers sitting stolidly as the cars hurtle down into the subway with a great squeal and clatter. So must the passengers of the descending jet liner in Dallas have sat a moment before the crash on the runway that killed nearly all of them.

You wonder if you and the others will ever see sunshine again. Lamps on the walls of the tunnel flash by like meteors on the last night of the world. Nobody else seems to notice, or care. The passengers regard vaguely the empty distance and the grey interiors of their minds. Their heads sway in unison to the joggle of the coach. If I were Kafka I would clap both hands to my forehead and break into a scream. It's all so terrifying, like a journey into the black hole of the galaxy.

As it is, I sit as solemnly and silently as everybody else, and return to my newspaper to read of calming upbeat things like the Calaveras murders and the Night Stalker. Then magically the train pulls smoothly into the North Berkeley station. I lift my eyes and peer out at the platform where daylight filters down from above in dusty glimmers and see a young woman in red slacks, her long hair falling forward about her face, walking on her hands toward the escalator.

THE REPRODUCTIVE APPARATUS *

"...the best thing to do with a mimeograph is to drop it
from a five story window, on the head of a cop."

-- Diane di Prima,
Revolutionary Letters

It isn't quite the thing one likes to admit in this day of high tech, but I once owned a pan hektograph. A similar one, but not the same one, was exhibited at the Corflu con in February 1984. (This one had belonged to Gretchen.) Of course in the days of my early fanhood, pre-world war 2, many fans were born as fan publishers in the primordial goo, but imagine the fans of today starting out that way. Modern day fans must feel themselves ill-used if they have to begin with anything less than a Morrow MD-3 and a Transtar 140 printer.

Having to use a hekto to duplicate their fanzines might have a good effect on aspiring fan publishers -- they might be less ready to inflict their half-baked word-processed maunderings on us -- but I would be the last to suggest that everybody ought to start out in the goo, especially since I had little luck with my hek-

* This article was written, in a far different form, about 1958. An intermediate version was written on 16 September 1973, intended as part of my series for Bete Noire called "Frolic Footnotes to a Life." Now, considerably revised, it appears for the first time in any form.

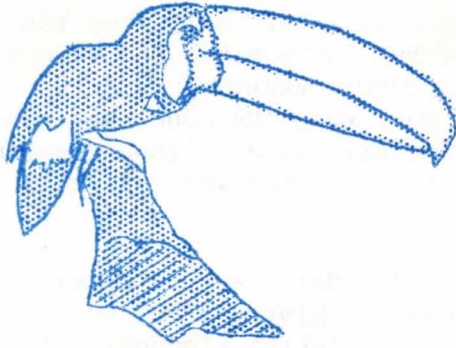
tograph. I remember that Harry Warner once reported that a hekto he experimented with and then relegated to the closet was found months or years later with a remarkable crop of mold sprouting from the gelatin. Mine never suffered such a fate, but on the other hand I never managed to get anything legible to appear out of the goo, at least in sufficient numbers to publish a fanzine. The technique needed to coax 50, let alone 100, copies from a hektograph has probably been cold forgotten by now, and I didn't know it 40-odd years ago.

A good five or six years passed before I launched my own fanzine. That was early in 1947. The long delay was not entirely due to the limitations of the hekto medium, for in mid-1942 I was drafted into the air force and spent three and a half years in the armed services before I returned to fandom. When I published at last it was on a mimeograph, certainly a far cry from a hektograph, though an equally far cry from the sophisticated equipment used in later years by Ted White and others. Technically my machine wasn't a mimeograph at all, but rather a "stencil duplicator," for in those days the A. B. Dick company still owned and jealously controlled all rights to the name Mimeograph (trademark registered U. S. patent office). The original Gafia press duper (although it wasn't Gafia press, then, either) was bought by mail order from Montgomery Ward in March 1947 for \$19.75. Made by Heyer of Chicago, this little machine was a solid drum affair inked from the outside. On runs longer than about 40 or 50 copies you had to lift the stencil to "paint" another oozing brushful of ink onto the inkpad. It was altogether a messy, bedabbling operation. Another big disadvantage was that it had no automatic paper feed. Each sheet -- lettersize only -- had to be positioned, one at a time, on the feed tray. Nor was there a counting device on the machine, though this was not a fatal drawback, since runs on this mimeo were usually quite limited. With care and patience the machine could be persuaded to work well indeed, even if it was slow and hard to use.

This machine turned out Tympani and all other fanzines I published from the beginning till August 1948, including the early issues of Sky Hook. Then it was banished to the basement for a while before being sold to Art Rapp -- I think this was in the summer of 1949 -- to serve the laudable purpose of publishing Spacewarp. Partly dismantled the machine fit neatly into a paper carton and I shipped it off to Saginaw, Michigan, where Art then lived. It became one of the most remarkable duplicators in fan history for Art toted it around in his duffle bag during most of his army career, stored it away for a while, revived it, and at this writing is still using it to publish Warp in SAPS, a good 36 years after acquiring it. Few other mimeographs of any sort can boast of such long and distinguished service.

But that's another story. Meantime, in 1948, I was planning a "major" fanzine, to be called Chronoscope (which not long afterward was subsumed into Sky Hook), and decided I needed a bigger mimeo for the job, one with a paper feed and a counter. After some search I found a suitable machine at an affordable price in a typewriter store in downtown Minneapolis. I no longer remember the name of the store, but it occupied part of the street floor of the Times Annex building on Marquette avenue. The machine, which cost about \$30, as I remember, was a Model L Speed-O-Print, and was supposed to be either a demonstrator model or a used machine. I seem to recall that it was called the former but was more probably the latter.

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"The toucan's profile is prognathous,
Its person is a thing of bathos.
If even I can tell a toucan
I'm reasonably sure that you can."
-- Ogden Nash

Drawn for Spirochete #1, 19 November
1964, by Gretchen Schwenn, and re-
printed once again in her memory.

From the first, it proved to be an inadequate duper, largely because of the paper feed. After the precision, though non-automatic, registry on the Heyer, the Speed-O-Print was infuriating. I remember wasting at least a ream of paper trying to adjust the paper feed properly. Not only did it shove the paper through in an erratic fashion, but it was badly engineered, and the rubber-disk arm that pushed the paper forward, sheet by sheet, thereafter dragged back across the stack of paper awaiting print, stirring up a streak of powdery pulp that gradually adhered to the stencil and clogged a section down the middle. It was an open drum mimeo, however, inked on the inside with a paint brush, and I found this handy.

The Speed-O-Print duplicated all the Gafia press publications till December 1951. I had become FAPA official editor with the autumn 1951 mailing, and decided that I needed, and even deserved, a better

mimeograph for this task. During the holiday season of 1951 I discovered an ancient A. B. Dick Model 77-B for sale at Defore and Company in Minneapolis and bought it for, I think, about \$90. It was not delivered till sometime after the first of the year 1952, but afterward this huge and cumbersome mimeo turned out my fanzines for nearly five years. It was a closed drum duplicator, with automatic inking and an automatic feed that really worked, and I was quite happy with it.

During the last year or so, however, it needed a number of repairs and adjustments which I was unable or unwilling to afford. The impression roller needed replacement, and a new one cost \$15 or \$20, even in those days, about as much as my original Montgomery Ward duplicator cost entire. Burbee came to my rescue by mailing me a piece of plastic tubing which could be slipped over the roller, and this worked for a time, but this and other factors eventually put the elderly machine on the disabled list. In February 1957 I went into Farnham's at 301 South Fifth street in Minneapolis (a store that Ruth Berman tells me has since gone bankrupt and disappeared) to buy some mimeo supplies, and paused to admire their newest display, a bright new line of Gestetner duplicators.

The British-made Gestetner had been kept off the U. S. market till sometime in the 1950s because of some hanky-panky between Gestetner and A. B. Dick -- or so I was told -- and perhaps the earliest example of Gestetner reproduction in fandom was seen in the excellently done issues of Canadian Fandom, published by Beak Taylor in the late 1940s. I had been highly impressed with the Gestetner 120 that Dean A. Grennell used for Grue, which I had the opportunity of seeing, and even cranking, during my visit to Fond du Lac in March 1956, when DAG, Dick Eney, and I published a memorable one-shot. Thus the salesman who wandered over while I was admiring the Gestetners didn't have to do much of a sales job. I promptly plunked down a handful of bills, and went away rejoicing that at last I had acquired a duplicator that would Do The Job. The Gestetner 120 is a small handcranked machine, now considered obsolete by the Gestetner company, but it has indeed done the job. I toted it west in the trunk of my car in 1962, and up to the Bay area in 1965, and have used it ever since. It is the same machine that, nearly 29 years later, I will use to publish this article.

FOLLOWUP

I am sitting here, chilly and cranky, spooning some vile (but hot) soup into my system. It's a concoction called Cup o' Noodles, made by Nissin Foods (I wonder if it was formerly called Datsin Foods?). KKHI-FM just played a stirring rendition (is there any other?) of Ravel's "Bolero," and the music more than the soup has warmed me up. At the end of the music the announcer, Lou Sinclair, said, without explanation, "Thank you, George Raft and Carole Lombard!" I felt a renewed stirring of spirit, and grumped aloud, "But what about Sally Rand?"

Sometimes I'm never satisfied. I have to make a rejoinder, even to myself, or to you, about something ever so trivial. I don't suppose you give a damn, but Robert Louis Stevenson's description of the surf at Monterey was slightly misquoted in the last issue. That's what comes from trusting an intermediate source rather than referring to a volume of his letters. And the correct title of H. Allen Smith's book, also mentioned last issue, is Low Man on a Totem Pole, not ...the Totem Pole. In the article "Flexing Their Muscles" last issue I complained about the words "bicep" and "tricep" in the San Francisco Chronicle's sports pages, and remarked that only on "one memorable occasion" did they ever refer to a "quadricep." Now wouldn't you know! Before the ink was dry on my fanzine, they used the word at least twice, in close succession: on 12 August, referring to 49er defensive back Jeff Fuller's "pulled quadricep (thigh)," and on 20 August, to a similar injury of the "quadricep" suffered by wide receiver Keith Baker. Illiteracy advances inexorably!

Bob Silverberg, in Snickersnee, Ausepoc 1985, commented on "The Key," in Spirochete #32, as follows: "First thing that occurred to me, reading your strange little story of Gretchen and that key she found in the Dwinelle parking lot, was that it would have been better if she'd just left the key where she spotted it -- so that the owner might have had a chance of coming back and finding it -- rather than taking it...and finally dumping it down a sewer." Unfortunately, to fit the article on that page -- the "RIGHT" way to produce a fanzine, according to Yhos #33: "Oh Ghod, how'm I gonna boil this down so it'll fit the space I've got left" -- I had to cut out a description of the key, which was old and corroded, although for some reason I said it was a "glittering object," and was found among the foliage at the east end of the lot, not on the pavement. It must have been there for months or years. The omission of this description also removed the touch of irony I had intended, and I wondered later why I was so foolish as to make a cut there. Then I realized the answer: I was begotten in Minnesota. No less an authority than Garrison Keillor says of Minnesota, "Everybody in America hears jokes before we do. Minnesota humor is far behind that of other states. In the use of irony, for example, we rank 48th."

At the end of "A Woman's a Woman" (Spirochete #28), in which I described how I picked up a crackaloo hitchhiker named Debbie on University avenue and brought her home for hamburgers and a shower, I speculated sadly on her probable fate after I returned her to the same corner where I had found her. I must report that nearly two years later I encountered the same girl once again, hitchhiking on University avenue, though not at the same corner as before. I didn't recognize her at first. She was neatly dressed, clean and well-scrubbed, and best of all, in contrast with the other time, she talked rationally and responded pleasantly to my comments. I drove her to Ledger's liquor store, as I did the other time, and left her there. Of course she didn't recognize me, and I didn't identify myself as someone who had met her before. But I was glad she was doing better, and wished her well. After writing all this, I feel better myself. Maybe I can finish my soup.

Football: a demonstration of how tough, and how fragile, the human body is.
