

# Wild Heirs

#15.5



# Wild Heirs 15.5

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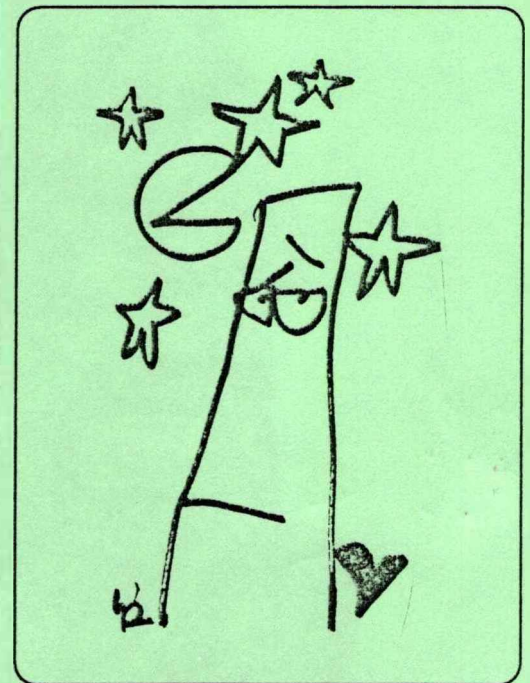
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In Memorium  
Charles Burbee



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All Art by William Rotsler

# CHARLES BURBEE

## AN APPRECIATION

By BILL ROTSLER

Charles Burbee died today, Memorial Day, 1996, and I don't think it out of line to say a great man has passed. I loved him. Only last night I was writing the dedication to a book which was to include mention of all those I thought had contributed to the way I was, and Burbee was the first name I put down. (Of course, Adolf Hitler was on that list, too.)

I started art school in Los Angeles in 1947 and since I really knew no one in the Big City except some slight acquaintance with fans, I started going to Los Angeles Science Fantasy Society at the old, original Bixel Street clubhouse. It was a small, dark, narrow room with seats on the long sides. Someone started reading the minutes and someone I couldn't see was inserting "Amazing!" and "Fantastic!" and "Astounding!" in a way I found very funny.

It was, of course, Charles Edward Burbee. LASFS was kind of dull, to be frank, with a lot of Serious Constructive fans. Burb was a breath of fresh air. I started following Burbee...and I guess I still am.

A bit later my mother got a letter from Sheriff Eugene Biscaluiz (L.A. County) suggesting that perhaps I shouldn't attend LASFS meetings because there were members who were Communists. Why the personal touch? Apparently he read a list of members and I had virtually the same name as my grandfather and he had given Biscaluiz his first job. Of course, I ignored the warning.

But I did drift away from the club, mainly to follow Mr. Burbee. I used to go to his house on Normandie Avenue several nights a week and I'm sure I abused the privilege. But I was young (21-22) and he was so much fun! I used to go home in the wee hours with a throat sore as hell—from laughing.

I was there when he created many of the Burbee Classics which are so often reprinted. I was there for the First Telling of many great stories. (I don't think his wife, Isobel, appreciated him.) "What happened today?" I'd ask, priming him for the latest Al Ashley or F. Towner Laney story...and sometimes, later, a story about Cora, who he married years later.

I badgered him for articles and started a fanzine,

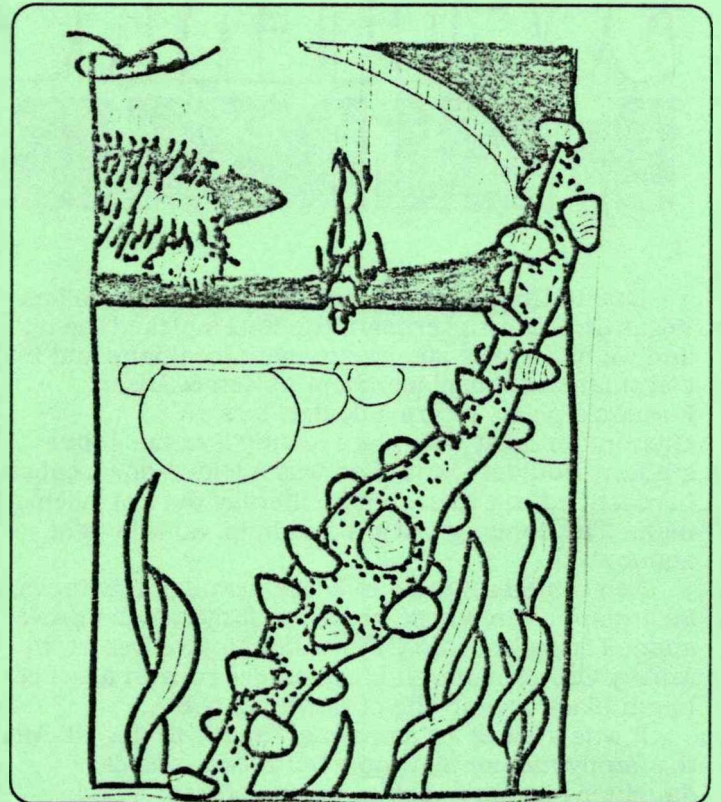
Masque, to publish them. I was also a great audience, I realize in retrospect.

I'd be stencilling artwork for Shangri-L-Affairs or Burblings or a one-shot and he'd be banging away, doing an editorial (he was editor of the LASFS house mag, "Shaggy," and it was top of the heap fan-wise) and he'd come to the end of the page, and sit there a minute, thinking, then go "Hah!" or chuckle and type the last line or two.

He'd whip out the stencil and hand it to me and I'd read it and—inevitably, effortlessly—laugh. But then I fell in love and didn't spend so much time with Burb.

An indelible image is Burb, slouched in a chair with a coffee can on his chest to catch the ash from his hand-rolled cigarettes (no, not that kind), and laughing at the foibles of man.

In 1948 & 1949 I would often go with him on



excursions to look for piano rolls, and to used book stores looking for science fiction magazines...and Pogo comics. Burbee had three children so young they couldn't read yet, so he'd read comic books to them. Among many he found Animal Comics which had Pogo. The kids would bring him comics but he kept wanting to re-read Pogo. "Rainy days is furst rate for visitin' yo' friends," he'd quote. So we'd look for back issues and in other magazines of that time because Walt Kelly was very prolific. Then they published the first all-Pogo Pogo and it took off.

When he moved to Whittier in later years I used to go to parties at his house. At first I'd take a girl friend. I soon stopped doing that. My girl friends were attractive women and you must remember that there were few women of any kind in fandom in those days. Fans did not then (and to some extent today, too) know how to talk to a beautiful woman. (Burbee was always fine and the women all liked him.)

I remember taking actress Gloria Saunders to one party and the only reason a certain fan wasn't picked up and thrown through the window behind him was that I was in Burbee's house. His words, demeanor and actions were unacceptable on any level. That was the last woman I took to Burb's.

I met Al Ashley and F. Towner Laney through Burb and can certify they were living, wheezing human beings, and that Burb's articles were word-perfect regarding their dialogue, though edited for length. Ashley was a small, busy, vague man. Towner was tall, gangly and frenetic.

I went to Towner somewhere and we stopped at his house in downtown L.A. He immediately put on an old, gray, worn 78 jazz record of, I think, Tail Gate Ramble, and went about the house humming and jazzing. The only trouble was I heard nothing but surface noise. Not a trace of music could be heard: nothing.

As I became more involved in art school, then as a sculptor, and in freelance fornication, I saw less of C.E.B. He did come to my Place once and later wrote 51 Steps.

Much of my attitude toward life was strongly influenced by Burbee—and I am not the only one. He influenced people who never saw him in the flesh, or only as a very old man. He was the funniest man ever in fandom. He was, I think, the greatest person fandom has ever produced.

He was unique. He was Burbee.

# THE SCATTERING BY BILL ROTSLER

Due to the generosity of Vegas fans I flew to Las Vegas on Friday afternoon, the Katz's picked me up and we had a nice small party with local fans and Bob Lichtman at their place. Slept at Ken & Aileen Forman's place. (She's a dealer, he's an environmentalist who just recently became a tour guide at Boulder Dam). Bed was a folded-down couch, hardest bed in Christendom, literally did not sleep all night. The bonging clock didn't help. So I thought about stuff.

Ken rented a Ford van & the next day the Katz's, Lichtman, a fan whose name I've forgotten & I drove about 150 miles, into California's Mojave Desert, to Amboy Crater, a harsh black cinder cone in a sea of harsh black lava in the of Nowhere, U.S.A.

It was a bit of an emotional "Send Off" for all. After the family members (widow Cora, two sons & a daughter I haven't seen in maybe 40 years) had

spoken, Ed Burbee asked me to speak. I said, "I don't think I can." Reason: I think I would have burst into tears & not been able to speak anyway. I left a cartoon among the roses Cora had put down and the gray ashes scattered across the black lava.

It was a comfortable trip both ways. The van had air conditioning vents in the back! It's a thoughtfully designed vehicle. We took a long cut going back, going over a piece of Old Route 66.

Big party at the Katz's. Very nice. The best part was a long conversation that happened to be about 6

One kind of special gift  
is to find the special gifts of others.

Her deepest philosophical question of  
self-examination was, "Is it possible to  
have too many shoes?"

women & moi in which Aileen Forman gave a graphic demonstration of her dog, who accidentally had not been let out of the house for 24 hours. Very funny. Stayed at the Forman's. (I like them both, you understand, they are interesting people, but buy hard furniture.)

Next morning a very nice lady took me to the aeroport. Sandy Cohen delivered & picked me up. Waiting for the airport lift I turned on TV and found Harlan, on a Politically Incorrect re-run! The Katz's & the Formen bought me food. I thank you.

All diaries are secret until the diarists come clean and boast, beat their breasts or look for headlines. You can never say Southwest Airlines is a No Frills airline: These are peanuts.



Maybe a few Rotslertoons and a couple of trenchant epigrams.

When Ed Burbee e-mailed the date for the scattering, June 15th, I knew we had the party wired. The monthly Social was scheduled to begin at 4:30 on that Saturday.

Bill Rotsler and Robert Lichtman decided to join Joyce, Ben Wilson, Ken Forman and me on the trip from Las Vegas to the appointed place, Amboy Crater. This beauty spot is located several hours away between Barstow (well-known as a source of virile truckers to fans of Sheryl Crowe) and Needles, CA.

Joyce orchestrated Bill and Robert's arrival on separate planes for about 4:00 pm on Friday afternoon. Despite delays, her arrangements were perfect. We'd just popped the trunk to stow Rotsler's bag when Lichtman emerged from the terminal and ambled in our direction.

Bill and Robert are among my favorite fan friends, but it was especially good to see them. I didn't trust myself to keep to the spirit of Charlie's instructions without their help. And when that help failed, as I suspected it

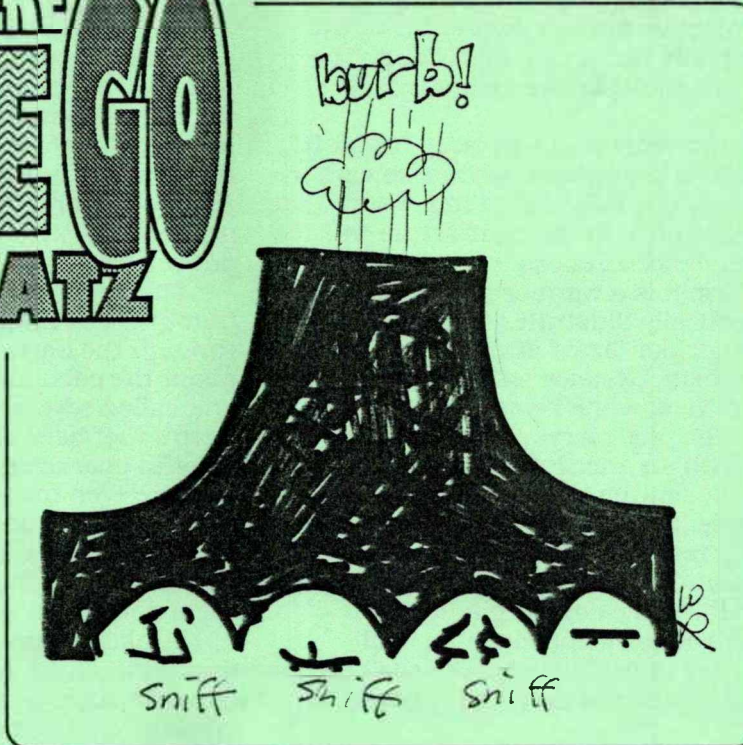
would, I wouldn't be the only one getting emotional.

Their presence reminded me that even the tragic loss of Bob Shaw, Redd Boggs Charles Burbee and

# TO YOUR SCATTERED BURBEE GO BY ARNIE KATZ

Before Charles Burbee died, he gave specific instructions to his family and friends. He wanted his ashes scattered in the desert near Amboy Crater. Never religious, Charlie made it clear that he didn't want any form of ceremony or a lot of hand-wringing histrionics. He told his son Ed that he wanted those close to him to throw the ashes and then go have a party. No weeping and wailing.

No weeping and wailing.



Ethel Lindsay in so short a time doesn't destroy the continuity of fandom. Fandom is losing its pioneers, but there are still many prolific and talented fans with decades of fanac ahead of them. And behind them is another generation of talented fans and so on and so on right to the relatively new group here in Las Vegas. Apart from the after-effects of a little flight turbulence, both

seemed reasonably sturdy. Bill has been sick, but his energy is still tremendous, and Robert Lichtman remains his impeccably easy-going self.

The trip back from the airport cracked with good cheer as Bill told us several pretty funny stories about his adventures in Hollywood. Though he's done a few articles on this subject in the past, and I gather he writes about similar material in a Certain Private Apa, I wish we could induce him to cull a few stories and ship them over to **Wild Heirs** like a good co-editor.

"Artists draw," Rotsler said, summing up his credo in a single phrase. "Sergio Argones told me about some Mexican artists who don't draw anything that doesn't have payment attached to it," Bill said. He went on to make it clear that he has a different philosophy.

I'd say that Rotsler sees art as a processes. He explores a theme the way a musician improvises around the basic tune. He indicated that it might be his preference, at times, to see only a few examples of each series published, but that he'd hate to turn down the requests for art from fanzine editors.

At the risk of my future art supply, I can't entirely agree with WR. I enjoy seeing many examples of a Rotsler series, even if a few stand out as superior. In the **Wild Heirs** annish, Rotsler did dozens of cartoons on the theme: "Vegas Fandom is" which we ran in the letter column. One of the cartoons has become Las Vegrants' unofficial semi-official slogan: "Las Vegas Fandom has the strength of 10 because we are 20."

We love this cartoon and quote it to each other at appropriate moments. It will live in Las Vegas fanhistory. It may even avert a future catastrophe, like a worldcon bid.

Yet I wouldn't want to give up the other 20 or so cartoons about LV Fandom, many of them quite humorous and perceptive in their own right, in the name of publishing only the series' high point. The group of cartoons is a multi-facded artistic statement.

This gave me a convenient opportunity to ask Bill about a set of illos he'd sent about two weeks earlier. They were very funny, but I wanted to make sure that he still wanted them to run in the near future in light of some recent fannsh occurrences.

The cartoons' format is a word or phrase and then a drawing that symbolically illustrates the copy. The phrases are all things like "heart attack" and "stroke."

"Definitely run them," Rotsler responded immediately. "I did them while I was having a heart attack," he added. That got everyone's attention.

He elaborated with an anecdote. While visiting a mall with a friend, he felt the imminent onset of a small cardiac episode. (He evidently gets them occasionally to no ggreat lingering effect).

Rotsler told his buddy not to worry and sat down on the nearest bench. While contemplating the progress of this intra-Rotsler phenomenon, Bill decided he ought to try to draw. Under the spell of this spell, he turned out this series and sent it to me.

Once Ken Forman, Ben Wilson and Tom Springer arrived, we went off to the reborn New York Deli. Once located 'way over on the east side, it recently re-opened near Toner Hall in the Northwest. Despite a three-year absense, it appears to have the same owners, workers and menu. I think they had the booths and tables mothballed, because it also looks like the original restaurant.

It wasn't long after we finished dinner that Tom had to head for the airport. He and Tammy had scheduled a trip to San Francisco to see Tom's ailing sister, and it was impossible to change plans by the time the family set the date.

The evening broke up fairly early, despite the appeal of the company, because we had to get moving early the next morning to reach Amboy Crater by the appointed time.

So Saturday we went to the desert to scatter the ashes of **Wild Heirs** co-editor, seminal insurgent -- he'd like that term -- Charles Burbee. He was a great friend to Las Vegas Fandom, a great personal friend to me and an inspiration to every fanwriter and publisher.

Since I'm one of the frequent complainers about tardy Vegas fans, I should report that Ben and Ken didn't arrive on time with the van. They showed up early. So when we dawdled a few extra minutes being sociable, it didn't prevent us from hitting the highway at 7:30 as planned. This unprecedented promptness is the ultimate compliment to Burb. Nothing else has ever evoked comparable time-consciousness.

The van was spacious and comfortable, except for the second row seatbelts. Mine fit like a garotte, which was bad noose to someone starting a three-hour car trip.

The problem was that the chest strap was anchored about a foot behind the seat. An extra fitting, over the window and parallel to the seat, might've alleviated the problem. I sat for awhile with the strap tight under my chin, but soon threw caution to the winds and shucked the belt. Ken's driving to Amboy Crater (and Ben's homeward piloting) gave us a smooth trip, so it wasn't as though I need lashed down tightly.

The trip unfolded without incident. Ken, who's a tour guide at Hoover Dam, narrated our passage through the barren land. He spoke knowledgeably about the cacti and rocks as we whizzed past them and called several of them by name. Rotsler, a frosty Barq's root beer in hand, told stories about many colorful characters, including the Notorious Thea and the even more notorious Harlan Ellison.

Joyce had gone out about 7:00 am and gotten a dozen assorted bagels. We munched these, with or without cream cheese accompaniment and washed them down with cold sodas.

"Amboy, Population 20," Robert read off the sign that announced our arrival. The crater isn't exactly a tourist mecca, so when this stretch of old Route 66 lost out to a bypass, Amboy shrank to little more than

a widening in the road. It's little more than a combination gas station and cafe, a post office and the Atchison, Topeka & Santa Fe tracks.

I briefly considered the possibility of all of us becoming residents. We could run this place with six votes. We could conquer Amboy for Fandom and remake the place in the image of fandom. The only hitch is that we'd have to live there, and it might be tough to import necessities, like bagels, toner and XXX videos.

By 11:00, everyone was ready for the short ride-and-walk to the site. Cora, his three kids, their cousins the Bouchards,

and as assortment of grandchildren trekked a little deeper into the desert to the lava flow from the Crater. (Ben and Ken could barely be restrained from scaling the black crater walls, but the frailer participants wouldn't've survived the climb.)

After Cora and Ed spoke, they asked me to say a few words. I didn't speak long. My voice was husky, and it was hard to get the words out. I don't remember the exact words, so you're spared the complete official text. My final line went something like: "He will live as long as we, his heirs in fandom, are inspired by his example and work in the tradition he established."

Burbee looked down on us from the big semi-circular bar at the Enchanted Convention and shook his head. "That Arnie," he said, nudging Terry Carr, "he sure is one serious and constructive fan."

"There's still hope, meyer," Terry says loyally.

"There is? Glad to hear it." Burbee always did like me.

"Yeah, Victor Gonzalez has given up on him."

"It's a start."

After we scattered the ashes in defiance of federal and local statute, which is the way Burb would have wanted it, Ben and Ken gave a unique tribute. "We want to share a beer with Burbee," they said as they opened a Bud and each took a sip. Then they poured the rest of it out on the same lava flow where we'd tossed what Rotsler called "The Incomplete Burbee." What a sensitive tribute!

After the ceremony, we returned to the restaurant to have lunch together. I ordered the Route 66 burger, proudly billed as "the greatest hamburger on earth."

That's an impressive boast. As I waited, expectantly, I wondered if I needed to revive my idea of taking over Amboy. If they had "the greatest hamburger on earth," I'd have to bring noted critic and



hamburger expert Walt Willis, here, and it would have to be fixed up nice to welcome him.

The actual Route 66 burger disappointed me. It wasn't the best hamburger on earth. The only way in which it could validate itself as "the greatest hamburger on earth" is if they served it on a bed of dirt.

In fairness to the establishment's reputation, I must admit that Rotsler rated it much higher than I did. "Of course, I had a 'Rout 66' burger," he observed, referring to my pronunciation of the item as a "root" 66 burger.

"You probably had yours with 'to-mah-toe,' too," I sneered.

Cora promised to visit in July, I hugged her good-bye, and Ben wheeled us back onto the highway. Ben and Ken chose a slightly different route, "for variety." Even this surefire plot complication failed. We drove back from the crater without approaching anything remotely reminiscent of an anecdote.

The Social proved an odd postscript. I guess my thin veneer of insurgentism isn't strong enough to let me carry on like "The Man Who Came to Dinner" a few hours after saying good-bye to a friend. More than a friend, a father figure.

I'd just gone to the living room after finishing my chores when a guy I'd never seen before sat down next to me and struck up a conversation. He let me know he'd done a little pro work, including some stuff for "Logan's Run," and that he'd been a fan for a decade or two. He's a former LA fan who has moved to Las Vegas and was checking out the Social on the encouragement of Alan and DeeDee White.

Passing reference to the Amboy Crater trip piqued his curiosity. "Is it that good a crater?" he asked.

"No, it isn't much," I admitted. "We went there, to scatter the ashes of Charles Burbee."

"Who is Charles Burbee?" asked the LASFS veteran.

"Besides being a friend of most of the people in this room, Charles Burbee is arguably the greatest American fan of all time."

"Oh? I never heard of him," said my new acquaintance. "What cons did he put on?"

He never heard of you, Burb.

"Charles Burbee" I repeated more slowly and distinctly. Maybe my elocution, after a long, hard day, wasn't all it should be. No light of comprehension disturbed his lineless, deeply tanned face.

He still didn't know you, Burb.

"Charles Burbee is arguably the greatest US fan of all time," I told him. "He wrote and published many fine articles and fanzines. He edited Shangri-l'Affaire," I offered. Unfortunately, as a late 20th Century LASFSan, he had apparently never heard of this fanzine. "He's nominated for two retro Hugos," I said with a certain amount of exasperation. "Charles Burbee!"

Later in the same conversation he referred to being active "in fandom and also on the creative side."

That told me everything, including why he didn't know you, Burb.

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# SENDING BURBEE OFF By JOYCE KATZ

## Friday Afternoon

The Friday afternoon sun blazed across the hood of the car; I looked longingly at the shady spot under the canopy at the pick-up entrance of the Las Vegas Airport; but it was a handicap space, and there's no way I could get away with it. I left the car motor on for a few more minutes of cool air, then reluctantly turned it off. Arnie glanced at his watch, and slid out the door into the brightness, then began a slow stroll up and down the platform, keeping himself visible for Bill Rotsler and Robert Lichtman. He'd made a half-dozen passes when Bill showed up; the three of us were still standing by the car making our hellos when Robert came out the nearest exit.

Once the luggage was stowed, we steered for our house; I took my hometown's shortcuts through backstreets to avoid much of the rush of weekenders arriving. If you stay off the main drags, like The Strip or Fremont Street, you miss most of the tourists. Vegas traffic used to be polite, almost gentle, with people gently waving the tourists ahead when they made wrong turns. Now, the city's grown so (and most of us blame the Californians), driving is the same kind of rude rivalry here that you'd see in any other town, and especially on Friday afternoon when everyone is jockeying to get to a party.

As I drove, Arnie and I brought Bill and Robert up to date on the plans Ed Burbee had sent. Charlie's oldest son was taking care of the final arrangements, and had ironed out the details with me online during

the two weeks since Burb's passing. "We want to honor his last wishes, and keep it as simple as possible; he didn't want us to make a fuss." We'd sliced the attendance list of his Vegas friends; several fans who wanted to be there volunteered to step aside to keep the numbers low.

"It will be the four of us, plus Ken Forman and Ben Wilson," I explained. Ken had rented a van so we all could travel together, rather than taking two cars. I think we were finding comfort in clustering together; being all in one vehicle would give us some kind of mutual support.

We'd not much more than reached home and unloaded the luggage, when Ken, Tom Springer, Ben and Cathi showed up. Tom had to go to San Francisco to visit his sick sister, so Friday was his only chance to see our California guests. "Some kind of fannish karma," muttered Arnie. "We get Robert Lichtman here from the Bay area, but we have to send one of ours there to keep fandom in balance."

## Friday Night

Arnie and I talked about dinner, and decided to give the Lichtman test to the newly opened New York Deli. This sumptuous repastery of cornbeef and chicken soup just returned to us after years of absence. When we first moved to Vegas in 1989, our first choice in eateries was the New York Deli. Located on the other side of town, it still drew us almost weekly for our feasts of Kosher-style sandwiches and nostalgia. One afternoon, only a few months after we'd first located the spot and attached our home-sick hearts to it, we found it locked and barred, never to reopen. But, we never forgot it, and actually never stopped looking for it. "They will return," I promised Arnie as passionately as if I were discussing MacArthur or the Messiah. But years had passed...

Then one day this Spring, lo and behold! in a location formerly occupied by The Culturati Cafe (I think it had something to do with yogurt and sprouts), there it was, bright, bold and beautiful, sporting the same red and black motif as the original. The waitress was thrilled that we were returnees, and proud of the heritage of the old place as she welcomed us into this



brand new palace of pastrami.

Arnie, Robert and I discussed the merits of the New York Deli, as compared to other delis we have known. This is a topic of great concern to the three of us. Robert is an ardent supporter of Kanters in Hollywood, and despite a sentimental affection for the 2nd Avenue Deli on the Lower East Side, I've been won over. Arnie used to hold out for the Carnegie in New York, but now we're in the West, his loyalty for that spot has faded. We can, and sometimes do have long meaningful conversations on this topic, for after all, what could be more important than remembering the exact spot on which you ate the world's best corn beef.

Well, no loyalties transferred on the basis of this meal, though we all agreed it was credible. "The kreplach was good," Robert pronounced, "but the matsoh ball was disagreeable." Arnie announced his verdict that the pastrami wasn't quite proper. By such awesome judgments are restaurateur's fortunes made and lost.

We made an early night of it; Tom had to catch his plane, and the rest of us agreed to meet at 7:00 a.m., and to be on the road by 7:30. We estimated the trip would take almost three hours, and we were committed to rendezvousing with the Burbee family in Amboy between 10:30 and 11:00 at Amboy's one-and-only retail business, Bob's Coffee Shop & Filling Station. At 11:00 we'd convoy to the spot Ed and his sister Linda had picked, for the scattering.

### Saturday Morning

It's not hard to get up early in Nevada's summer. Mornings are beautiful, clear-aired, filled with songbirds and visits to the backdoor from the neighborhood cats. Hard to tell whether they come for the food they coax from me, or for the birds; probably a bit of both, to judge from the occasional feathers flying around the felines.

The morning passed in the almost poetic slow-motion of well-oiled routine. I fed the cats, made the bed while Arnie showered, and made my own preparations for the trip. By 6:30, I was in the kitchen, starting crockpot beef for the evening's dinner, and loading the ice chest with sodas. I also filled a eight gallon server with water. Not that any of us expected



trouble, but if we broke down in the Mojave, we sure weren't going to lack for liquid.

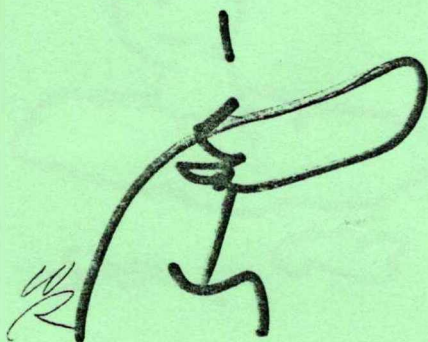
Ken and Ben pulled up at 5 till 7. They, too, mentioned the strange sense of moving through syrup, combined with an urgency to be punctual. Ben and I went to the Chesapeake Bagelry for a baker's dozen; twenty-five hundred miles away from the Atlantic Ocean, and it's named for the Chesapeake; who can figure. We decided to buy more ice for the chest so dropped by a Circle K; with all of that we were still back at the house before 7:20. A flurry of last-minute activity; "don't forget a knife for the bagels"; "remember to wear a hat"; "make sure the alarm is set".

I felt like there was a hiccup in time; the world slowed, and every motion seemed etched in the air, leaving a departing circle of wavelets, like a hand trailing through water. But the illusion shattered when the six of us loaded into the car. On time, on schedule; we were proud of ourselves for holding to our plan.

Ben took the driver's seat; he and Ken were our good guides for the trip. I grabbed the front passenger seat; I knew better than to risk motion sickness. Arnie and Robert sat in the middle row, with Ken and Bill in the third section. The van was full, but not uncomfortably so, as Ben rolled her out onto I-95 South, heading straight into the mouth of the Mojave Desert.

Within minutes we passed the southern-most tip of the city and into territory I'd never seen before. The vista was unbelievable; coming over the ridge of the Las Vegas valley, the desert stretched ahead and on

SAY, DIDN'T  
I MEET YOU  
AT BURBEE'S  
SENDOFF?



both sides for what looked like a thousand miles to the distant peaks. Within those stony boundaries lay a kingdom of the damned, made beautiful by a soft spectrum of pastel colors. Staying just ahead of us was a shimmering mirage of water; a long low lake that lapped the horizon and flowed across the highway, always just ahead, like the shadow of faith blurring our mind's appraisal of reality.

The near horizon was covered with scruffy plants, mostly low scratchy sagebrush, but a few cacti and broom shrubs were still holding onto their spring blooms. The terrain was rough, raggedy, like someone had plowed it a hundred years ago, then left the furrows to dry in twisted ridges and pits. This is a dry year; the desert hasn't had the soaking rains that usually come in Winter and Spring, and the whole area is like tinder.

The desert does catch fire from time to time; less dramatic than the flaming forests, it nonetheless spreads rapidly from dry bush to tumbleweed, taking with it the lives of the wild things that populate the dry terrain. I saw a television segment once about desert fire; before I wrenched away, the camera panned over a snake, caught in the edge of the moving flames, writhing in its agony. For these years since, I've thought about it: why didn't the person holding the camera save the snake, instead of just recording the event?

Perhaps the camera person feared the snake, or felt efforts to save it would be a waste. Who knows, perhaps moving the snake out of the fire would have actually prolonged its pain. Once, outside our garage door, I found a worm, writhing and turning as it was attacked by a army of ants. Sobbing, I ran into the

kitchen and grabbed the can of Raid -- I sprayed the ants; they died immediately, but so did the worm, poisoned. I worry about this: did I cause even more pain and agony in the world by my action?

As we drove through the desert, the terrain gradually changed. Joshua trees raised their arms to the sky, helplessly begging for water but finding only grace.

Bill was entertaining Ken and Arnie with stories about women he had photographed. Many were familiar names; his career coincided with some of the dancers who were famous when I used to know such arcane facts as the names of prominent strippers.

Ben and I, with Robert leaning forward to join our conversation, discussed fandom in general, and **TrapDoor** in specific. Robert has the issue almost ready to go again; poor guy, he had it finished before, then tore it up and remade the issue in order to pay tribute to lost friends.

We spotted a hawk, stately throbbing its way across the sky. Ben and Ken estimated its wing spread as four to five feet. Every feather was etched, and tipped

with white. Beautiful... wheeling in graceful circles. So far from home...so alone. A hundred miles from water; at least that far from any mountain ledge or treetop. How hard it must work, so far to fly, to find something to eat, and how sparsely populated its hunting ground. Does it long for its nest; does it worry about its family; does it loose its long scream in mourning for the lives it consumes?

We skirted the edge, and eventually drove across an arm of the completely barren wasteland. The ground was bleached with not a sprig of grass nor any other living thing to shade its awful whiteness. Ken said it was an ancient shallow lake that evaporated a thousand years, or perhaps ten thousand years ago, leaving the level, alkali desert, so dead that not even a worm could live in its soil.

At last we turned onto the old Route 66, and the last miles of the journey. It seemed to end quickly; suddenly we were pulling into Bob's Cafe, and piling out of the van in a weary leg-cramped tumble of fannish arrival.

Amboy, California must have seen its finest hours fifty years or so ago, when it was the only inhabited spot for miles in any direction. Travelers on the desert crossing must have thought the tiny lunch counter and filling station were a mirage. "I've been here before," I thought, not because I recognized it, but because I knew I must have stopped for a cup and a burger when I was hitching Route 66 in 1961.

I suspect everyone must have stopped there, back in those times when folks used to drive the desert only at night. The cafe's yellow lights provided a beacon when the radiators were boiling forth their demands to stop, to cool, to take on water, to relieve the

darkness in the travelers' suffering hours.

But now the town seems left over; a railroad track, a post office, a few scattered houses, and only twenty souls to call it home. Bypassed by newer roads, Bob's place is a leftover, too.

Entering, we found part of Burbee's family waiting, sipping ice tea, cooling off, waiting for the last ones to arrive. There was time to shake hands all around, slurp down some soda, and eye the pathetic collection of souvenirs of better days: coffee mugs and gold-stamped tee-shirts that urged us to "Get Your Kicks On Route 66".

Ed arrived, carefully driving off the highway, then spewing gravel when he hit the unpaved parking lot. He told us his mother Isabelle was unable to make the trip and wouldn't join us. Next Cora arrived with her sister Maria; our party was complete a few minutes before eleven o'clock, and we were still on schedule.

### **Saturday Mid-Day**

There were the four of us from Las Vegas plus Bill and Robert; Cora and Maria, Burb's cousins the Bouchards, his two sons, Ed and John, his daughter Linda, her husband Don, and their children. We waited until the cars with the family members passed, then pulled into the cortege. Ed lead the way; we drove about a mile west of Amboy into the lava field, and pulled off the highway onto a dirt trail that led toward the silent volcano.

The spewing lava and rock made carnival of the desert for a thousand yards in every direction. Black stones, in sizes ranging from baseballs to boulders, were strewn across the landscape, in silent testimony to the ferocity of the ancient cataclysm.

We parked the cars, then picked our way among the rock for a hundred feet into the lava field. The Amboy Crater sits about 500 yards off the highway; a mound of black stones pushed three hundred feet into the air. Its steep banks looked like they could be climbed without too much difficulty; Ken and Ben looked longingly at it, and I knew they would have liked to reach its top to peer into the mysterious core. But they held back, keeping close to the rest of the party. Ed and Linda had wisely decided that some of the group wouldn't be up to such an arduous ascent, and chose a spot that required little effort to reach.

Cora carried the gold canister and a bunch of roses. We came to a sort of clearing amidst the volcanic debris; the last between us and the cone, and the group stood together, almost touching, in a semi-circle facing the ruined landscape.

Ed spoke first, words from the heart. He told us things we knew: that Burb was a good father, a good man. He told us things we needed to know: that Burb didn't have to suffer much, and didn't complain much when he did; that he was ready to go, had talked about it, and was prepared.

Cora spoke of love, and that she'd miss him. She scattered the bouquet of roses, his favorites from their own garden, across the stones, and read her final

eulogy: "Therefore a chapter completed, a page turned, a life well-lived, a rest well earned."

Ben and Ken said they wanted to share a last beer with Burb. They each took a sip of a fresh Budweiser, then poured the rest of the can over the roses and the stones. Their tender gesture was appreciated; Ed nodded his approval, and some of the others murmured that Burb would like that.

Arnie spoke briefly, of how Burb would never be forgotten, and I spoke of how much his friendship had meant to Las Vegas fans in his final years.

The time was then. Cora and Ed removed the lid of the canister, and with a spoon-shaped scoop, threw sandy ashes over the flowers and rocks. Cora asked for everyone else to help; when it came our turn, Arnie and I joined hands and threw a scoop into the volcanic rock.

A breeze caught the sand, and it glistened for a moment in the air, then settled like a sheer skiff of snow over the blackness.

As we made our way back toward the cars, Ed, John, Linda and the grandchildren climbed higher into the volcanic rubble, to scatter the last ashes among the desolation.

Thus passed Burbee, made one with Earth.

### **Saturday Afternoon**

Bob, who not only was the chief cook and bottle-washer but also the Honorable Mayor of Amboy, was waiting for us when we reached the cafe again. We'd all agreed to stop there before we went our separate ways, to keep in spirit Burb's last request that we make a good time of his send-off.

The family hosted us all for lunch; it must have been Bob's busiest noon hour for many many years. Bob's Cafe has a menu full of bold promises: "the best hamburger on Earth", and "genuine homemade chili...it's hot-hot-hot". I tried something called "chili size", a term I'd never heard before that turned out to mean an open-faced burger with chili over it. Arnie had the Route 66 Burger; he wasn't all that surprised that it wasn't actually the best in the world.

I gave Cora and Ed each an envelope of letters received online or downloaded off the Web, from fans expressing sorrow at Burb's passing. I'd marked each one with the city or country of the writer's home; I heard Linda and her children exclaiming "Why, here's one from England...and Canada...and this one is from Australia," as they rifled through the messages.

Then, hugs and come-to-see-me's and promises of visits, and it was time to leave.

Driving with the sun to our backs, the trip passed pleasantly, and quickly. We skirted close to a mountain range; Ken told us that the Colorado River was just on the other side.

We spotted several mines along the route; gaping holes in the mountainside, with rotting boards and rusted equipment. Sometimes I forget that Nevada's real history is not the story of Las Vegas, but of the mineral-rich hills that made this territory into a State.

Lincoln needed money to fight the Civil War, and Nevada had silver... a historic wagon train of ore was sent east to buy the way to Statehood.

For a hundred miles or so, I eyed the gas gauge as it dropped closer and closer to empty: "We should have bought gas at Bob's," I murmured to Ken, but he assured me we'd make it to the next stop. A better judge of distance than I am, he was right, though the indicator showed nearly empty when we pulled into Searchlight to fill up.

Searchlight boasts one casino/saloon, cheerfully smiling at the highway, but the place is really a mining town. Every dwelling is a trailer; they're parked, each on its own lot carved out of the side of the mountain. They look fragile and precarious, like even the tiniest tremble would cause them to tumble down the hill. As Ken pumped gas, I wondered about life in Searchlight. I saw a General Store; the casino, but little else in the way of human comforts or social opportunities. I suppose Searchlighters are reclusive types; that would also explain the separateness of each trailer from its neighbor.

Nodding, I drifted off... and when I awoke, we were approaching Vegas. We reached home before 4 o'clock, in plenty of time to prepare for the Social.

### Saturday Night

During the swimming months, we start the monthly Social early to give people a chance to use the pool. By 4:30 the first fans started arriving. We expected a pretty good turnout since everyone knew we had special guests for the evening, and we weren't disappointed. Virtually all the Vegrants showed up; even those who were working drifted in later. There were also a handful of the club members, and a few outsiders who like to attend the open-door parties.

Several fans gathered with me in the kitchen, to pitch in and finish up our supper. Belle and Laurie cut up lettuce and tomatoes for salad, while Marcy sliced cheese for a tray of nibblies. Ken carved the watermelon, and made a good job of it. I finished up the crockpot-roast and gravy, and made a quick vegetable stirfry, then arranged deli meats on trays for sandwiches. There was also a pot of ham and bean soup that I'd been working on for a couple of days, trying to match Cathi's, with questionable success. I make a pretty fair broth, but Cathi Wilson is the best soup-maker I know. She's planning to show off her skills at Toner; she's got quite a list of specialties planned to serve the fans at the con.

After one sweltering trip to the garage to chat with the smokers who usually retreat there, I moved them to the guest bedroom. Arnie took in a couple of resin chairs; this arrangement is so satisfactory that I plan to continue it through the summer.

There was feverish crifanac among the fanzine crew; plans for perzines, special publications, fan novels and parodies were offered up at a furious pace. Robert will have **TrapDoor** ready in no time, and hopes to have a second issue later this year. Arnie's **Vegas Fan Diary** is motivating him toward daily fan

writing. Rotsler was turning out cartoons all night (after the weekend, we found cartoons tucked in inconspicuous places, under a lamp, atop a mantle, in the freezer, as delightful surprises; the Formans reported the same phenomena in the room where Bill slept.) A separate group gathered in Arnie's office around the one-shot, urging each other on.

I returned to the living room, but found the group there embroiled in animated feminist conversation running a little heavily toward childbirth; I retreated to the smokers to involve myself in fans' plans.

The eager immersion into the future was a drumbeat for the parade of fandom. It comforted us that the parade marched on, and the voices once heard echo on forever, though they've passed beyond the place we stand. Because they were here, they'll always be here; I see them in the eyes of my friends.

It wasn't a bad Social. The six travelers wore out; the Formans took Bill back to their house for the night, and promised to get him to the plane on time the next morning. We made our goodbyes, waved goodnight to the rest of the departing fen, then Robert, Arnie and I settled down for a chat. In no time our eyelids were drooping.

### Sunday Morning

The house was in turmoil, so while Robert packed, I started digging out of the party remains. Usually, by the end of the Social, the Vegrants have put away the folding chairs, packed up most of the food, and started the dishwasher. This time, weariness caused us to postpone, and the house was in shambles. Arnie drained the bathtub of its load of melted ice, then packed up the remaining beer and soda while I sorted out the kitchen. By the time Robert was ready, some semblance of order was beginning to reassert itself, and I was glad to postpone the rest until after breakfast.

We decided to visit the Celebrity Deli; timed the trip so we could finish eating and make the brief drive to the airport to put Robert among the first to board the plane.

Driving to the Deli, I told them about a letter just received from my oldest fan friend; in fact, the person who was my First Contact. In his letter, he reproached me for wasting my time with fandom; told me **Wild Heirs** sucks; told me I should do something meaningful, like Saving Science Fiction, and said this fannish crap was beneath me.

(Recounting the story, I was so abstracted I ran a red light, while Arnie and Robert yelled for me to watch it. This was the first time I ever did that, and it shocked me how easily one can be distracted from what's really important.)

I couldn't even be angry with my old pal; just sorry he lost his way and forgot that fandom is, after all, mostly about friendship.

When we said goodbye to Robert at the airport, we made plans to meet again soon, to go to Cora's for a visit, to be at Toner, to see each other in the fanzines.

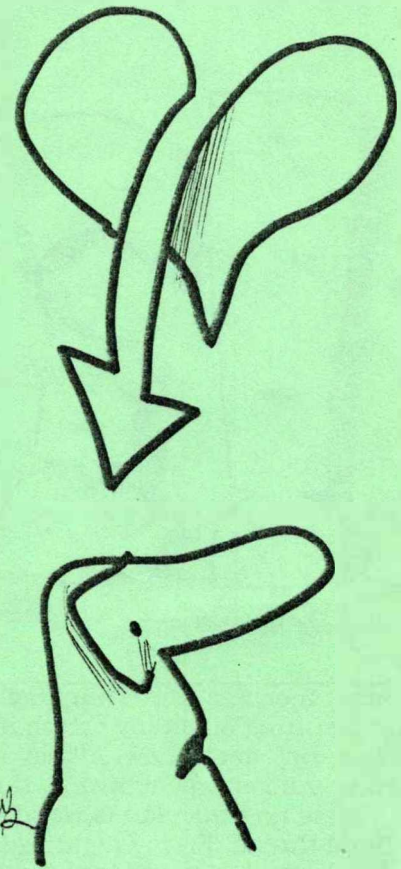
-- Joyce Katz

"They tell me I have gonorrhoea."

I said to the 18-year-old Chinese beauty behind the desk. She had asked me what my trouble was. This is a true story. I haven't bothered to change the names; let the innocent suffer along with the rest of us. I used to tell this story at the drop of a hat. It always went well during drinking parties, especially after the more prudish people had loosened up a bit so they wouldn't flinch too much at the four-letter words. The other night, though, I tried to tell it and got no attention at all. I had a brand new audience, too, and everybody was on the fourth or fifth can of Coors. But nobody listened to me. I knew then that the story had no more shock value. Worse, it seemed to have lost its entertainment value, too. Society's mores had caught up with and passed my little anecdote. After all, when anyone can go to a theater and see deep-throated young ladies making out in color and stereo sound on a gigantic screen, a little cocktail hour yarn can scarcely compete. Our society has outgrown a casual story about a penis the size of a 12-ounce beer can. Yes, a cock the size of a beer can. I had one like that once, not too long ago. I'll tell you about it now.

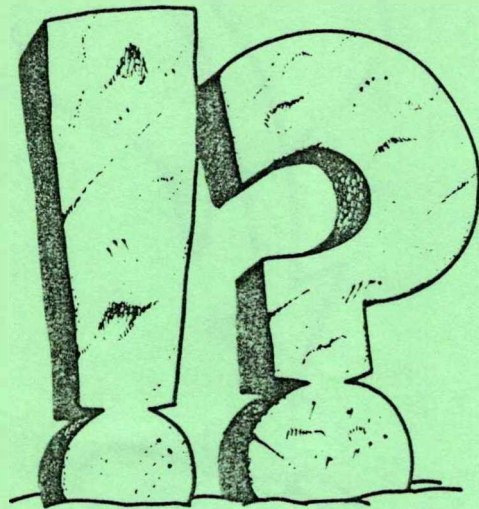
I woke that fine Saturday morning in April and the world looked like a wonderful place indeed. I wasn't hung over, I think I mean. Yes, the world looked like a wonderful place till I got out of bed and felt this monster going swoop—bang, swoop—bang, between my legs as I ambled somewhat sleepily toward the bathroom. I snapped awake swiftly when I took the monster in hand for aiming purposes. I want to make it clear at this point that ordinarily my penis is not anywhere near the size of a 12-ounce beer can.

Oh it may vary in size as the day wears on, depending on such stimuli as it may be subjected to. Good God, I said. What in hell has happened to me? Now, for sure, I am going to the doctor, I said. I had intended to go this Saturday morning anyway, to find out why the cut in my finger hadn't healed for some weeks. Saturday was a good day for it because I wouldn't lose any time off work. A small matter like an unhealing finger didn't seem to call for lost work time. It seems that I'd cut four fingers at my machine at work by foolishly picking up a long metal-turned strip, only to have it caught in a whirling chuck and jerked from my hand, leaving four gashed fingers. I washed them and bandaged them, and when I got home I put on some anti-biotic, called Furacin. In a few days, three fingers healed nicely, but the fourth one would not heal. It would seem to heal over, but the next day it would be open and raw again. Each time I would carefully clean it and put more Furacin on it and bandage it up again. Next day, open and raw. I probed for splinters of metal or whatever but couldn't locate anything. So it appeared that a visit to my insurance group's offices was in order. I belonged to a medical insurance group that had a 12-story building teeming with doctors, lots of them specialists. Since I was a premium paying member I could get the services of one of these specialists for something like \$1.80. Fine. I planned



## LOVE STRIKES

I HAD  
INTERCOURSE  
WITH A GLASS OF  
WATER  
BY CHARLES BURBEE



SOME EVENTS ARE SURPRISING - ROSSLEY '73

to go Saturday morning. But Thursday I spilled a can of the thread-cutting oil on my crotch. I sound like a bad insurance risk about now. All day long my crotch was bathed in pungent, penetrating, thread-cutting lubricant. I hope no comedian is wondering if it gave me a left-hand thread. Friday night as I bathed I noticed a small stinging crack in the skin of my penis. I put some Furacin on it. Next AM, as noted, penis the size of a beer can . . . swoop—bang, swoop—bang . . . totally forgotten was the unhealing finger . . . this was critical. I yearned mightily for the instant services of the best specialist in California, or even west of the Mississippi. I reasoned it out . . . the cutting oil had irritated the delicate skin, cause. A sensible diagnosis. Every man a doctor.

I got to the medical building. Ground floor receptionists were two pretty 18 or 19 year old girls. "I want to see a dermatologist," I said to the one who smiled at me. "What is your trouble?" that blue eyed maiden asked.

I looked into those pretty eyes. For some reason I got reluctant to say, "My penis is swollen to the size of a 12-ounce beer can." This reluctance, mind you, from a man who later told this story in loud clear tones to one and all. Instead, I said, "I have a strange skin condition." The dermatologist was all booked up, she said, unless I had an appointment. I didn't have an appointment. Well, then, wouldn't a GP do. I said I supposed so. So up a flight or so I went. Again the receptionist was beautiful. Over 18, this time, but lovely. When she asked me my trouble, "I have a

strange skin condition," I said. A few minutes later I was asked to enter the office of a venerable man in a white coat. He asked me to have a seat and tell him my troubles. No need for sitting down, I told him, here was my trouble: I pulled out my beer can. He leaned over, scanned it. His eye brows rose. He stepped back (recoiled?) putting his hands behind him—touch that classic?—and gasped, "You have gonorrhoea!" My jaw must have dropped a little. This was incredible news. But it had to be true. The man wore a white coat. He was a doctor who worked for a famous medical group. He sent me to the top floor to see Dr. Reagan.

I didn't go in the elevator. That would have been too fast and I wanted time to think this out. How in the world did I get gonorrhoea? I asked myself. The infection must have occurred fifteen days ago, or nine days ago . . . dammit, what is the incubation period of the gonococcus . . . actually, the only acceptable way to get gonorrhoea is to have sexual intercourse with a woman who has it. OK, but I was a married man; I hadn't had intercourse for six or eight weeks or longer. Ah, then, I didn't have gonorrhoea. Relief. But wait, the doctor said I did, so I did. How, though, had I contracted it? The best way is to have intercourse with an infected woman. But I hadn't had recent copulation with anything in the animal kingdom, much less a woman . . . therefore, I didn't have it. But the doctor said I did. He wore a white coat. His words had to be true words, so I did have it. But the only way to get it . . . I went through that routine a dozen times. I almost got taped onto it forever. Well, I mused, as I slogged up those stairs and the monster kept going swoop—bang, swoop—bang, I can't tell him I got it off a doorknob or a toilet seat. This is a story Dr. Reagan must hear fifty times a week. The actual incidence of infection from these sources must be like one in ten



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thousand. Yet it must happen sometimes. In my case, right now, for example. Yet no intelligent and experienced medical man such as Dr. Reagan will believe it. I couldn't expect him to. So I will invent a story for him, I said. Let's see, two weeks ago—dammit what is the incubation period of the gonococcus? I wished I'd listened more carefully to the lectures and looked more closely at the movies when the Army was indoctrinating me with anti-sex propaganda. Anyhow, a few weeks ago, I stopped for a drink in the Orbit Room, the cocktail lounge of the Mercury Bowl . . . by the way, this is a real place; their restaurant is The Space Kitchen . . . science-fictional, eh? Yes, I stopped in the Orbit Room for a drink and got the redheaded cocktail waitress out into the parking lot for a quickie during her break . . . good story. I'll tell him that one . . . no, wait a minute. There really is a redheaded cocktail waitress in the Orbit Room—suppose the County Health Department people come around to her and say, "Lady, we understand you're giving gonorrhea to your more lovable customers," . . . no, that story is no good; it's a damned lie.

All right. New story. How's this. I stopped for a drink in the Orbit Room of the Mercury Bowl and got real friendly with one of the lady bowlers. She was a slender maiden, with golden hair (I'll see if I can get a bit misty-eyed when I describe her) and long lovely legs. After awhile we went to her apartment . . . that's better.

Her name? Gee, I don't think I ever knew it. Her address? I didn't really notice. You see, this isn't a common occurrence with me; I just figured her for a one-night stand. Yes, that's what I'll tell him. I got to his office and there was this 18-year-old Chinese edible at the reception desk. She asked me my trouble. "They tell me I have gonorrhea," I said. I'd lost my reluctance. I didn't care any more. Pretty soon I went into the doctor's office. Tall, good-looking fellow. Warm, friendly smile. "Well, having a little peter trouble? Where'd you get it? From a woman? Sit down and tell me about it."

He put me so much at ease I forgot my Orbit Room story. (Good-bye, lady bowler with the long lovely legs and the golden hair. Sorry your existence was so brief.) "About two days ago I spilled a can of cutting oil on my crotch," I began. His face fell a little. I think he was a little disappointed in me. On the other hand, he might have been pleased to hear a brand-new variant. Who knows? Perhaps he took this job because he collected seduction stories. I never did ask him.

I pulled out the star of this piece and he examined it. "My God!" he grunted. This cock specialist saying that? My spirits sank. "Got any leaking problems?" "No." "You haven't got gonorrhea," he said, straightening up. My spirits soared to the stratosphere. "At least I don't think you have." My spirits came down a ways. He ran some tests, got a urine sample; shoved a rubber-gloved finger up my ass—yike!—probed at my prostate. I gasped in pain. He told me that if my prostate had been infected I'd have screamed in agony.

A little later the lab report came back. Negative. My spirits shot up once more. He got on the phone. Spoke to another doctor in the building. "Sam, I'm sending a man down to you. Would you check him over, please?" He hung up and turned to me. "I'm sending you down to the dermatologist. You've got a strange skin condition." Down I went. In the elevator, this time. The dermatologist took me at once. He showed no alarm or astonishment at my beer can. I felt a little let down at that. He listened silently to my story, the true one about the cutting oil on the crotch, until I mentioned putting Furacin on the break in the skin.

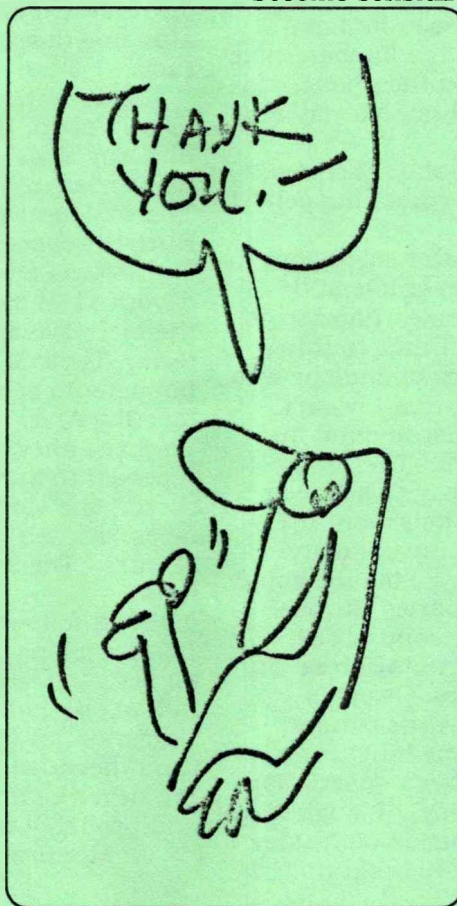
"That did it," he said. "I'll write you some prescriptions." He began to write. "You mean the Furacin caused that swelling?" "Yes. Had you used it previous to this?" I told him about the gashed fingers, showed him the unhealing one. He nodded. "You've become sensitized to Furacin. I suggest that you take

that jar or tube of Furacin and throw it as far as you can, preferably into deep water." I went downstairs, got the prescriptions filled, and went home. One of the bottles contained capsules. I took one according to directions. The bigger bottle contained a liquid that had to be mixed with hot water and used to make a hot compress to be wrapped around my beer can.

The whole danger, the dermatologist had said, was that my urethra might swell shut and I would be unable to urinate and would need emergency catheterization. The capsules and hot compresses were supposed to stop that. Well, I got the solution made up in a fat glass and then I thought how much better it would be to have the liquid itself in contact with the troubled area. Better than a wet cloth.

I put the glass on the floor, stretched out at full length over it, and mounted the glass. I mean, lowered my beer can into its warm wetness. That's where the title of this article came from.

-- Charles Burbee



SAY, AIN'T YOU THE  
SAGE OF 7TH  
FANDOM



"Burbee died this morning, Tom," Arnie said to me over the phone before I made my way to work.

The air in my lungs pushed out an "uh." After a moment Arnie and I talked a bit more about what had happened and we hung up. I'd just seen him at ManureCon not so long ago. I sat at the kitchen table for several minutes before I picked up the phone and called Tammy. The news didn't brighten her day any either.

"Are you gonna be okay, honey?" she asked me.

"Yeah, I'm okay. We knew it was gonna happen," I told her.

I just didn't want it to happen. After saying our goodbyes I set the phone back into its cradle and heaved myself up from the kitchen table. I had to go to work. Since then I've had plenty of time to think about Burbee. I know from what Cora told me he was more than ready for the end, it's just that I wasn't.

Charles Burbee's writings were instrumental in gaining my interest in fanzine fandom. **The Incomplete Burbee** was the first fanzine I had ever read, given to me by Arnie at one of their monthly socials. I went home that night with my curiosity piqued after listening to Arnie and Joyce tell me about this fan they knew by the name of Charles Burbee. I flopped into bed and flipped open my copy of TIB, bypassed his "Editorials from **Shangri-L'Affaires**" and soon found myself engrossed with Mrs. Qwerty's problems concerning her attitude towards canine intercourse in "Not in Sin." It made me laugh.

On the next page I dove into Burbee's description of Stanley Stibbard in "Stibbard the Gay". I laughed at that too, even while devouring the illusion of Stanley that Burbee had "striven so manfully to build up." I

# I TOUCHED HIS PIANO

By TOM SPRINGER

didn't have to know any of the fans Burbee mentioned for me to hugely enjoy his sense of humor, style of writing, and grasp of dialogue.

"Stibbard the Gay" had warmed me up so I read "Downward Slanting Eyes" despite the bold type signaling to me I was going to come across fanzine titles I'd never heard before. With only momentary trepidation I submerged myself in Laney and Burb's conversation about a poem called "The Bixel" sent to them by the two aspiring Evans-baiters Don Wilson and Howard Miller. This too I found entertaining and amusing despite being 44 years old, way past my time.

Later in the fanzine that very night I came across "Don Wilson, Humorist" which brought "Downward Slanting Eyes" full circle and clued me and the rest of his readers in to what he thought about Don Wilson, "the #1 Humorist in Fapa", and Howard Miller whom Burbee suspects to be one in the same.

Before I came across "Don Wilson, Humorist", I devoured "What Kind of Kings", "Gas Jet Annex", and the piece I've always thought of as the originator of the term, "Their Sensitive Fannish Faces" which also happens to be the title. Where Burbee writes of first meeting Andy Anderson, James Kepner, and F. Towner Laney on his front porch after his wife Isabelle reported to him that "There are three people down there," she said. "They have funny wild looks on their faces. I think they're fans." The ending was complete closure. The quintessential identification for fannish fans.

Next followed "Jesus in the Ditch" and then "Watermelons and Cable Cars". I could go on listing all his great works that I've read and reread and still talk about with Arnie and Joyce and the rest of the Vegrants but I'm stopping at "Watermelons and Cable Cars" because it truly reminds me of fandom's loss. I've never heard the famous WATERMELON STORY and probably never will.

At ManureCon Burbee was incapable of surviving



his legendary story and Bob Tucker who used to ask him to tell it countless times (sixteen times in one day), and heard it, couldn't remember it. This makes me realize that by losing Burbee we've lost more fan history than we'll ever know. Everybody in fandom has heard of THE WATERMELON STORY but how many fans remember it? And how many could tell that legendary saga Burbee thought really wasn't much good. . . thinking his 45-minute buildup being far better? No one I talked to at ManureCon could.

It's strange how quickly I fastened on to this man through his writings. He was so good I felt I could know him (I can't be so presumptuous as to say I did). Eventually I'd meet him. After several short visits I felt I was getting to know him but we both knew it would never really happen. It was too late. He was going, fighting all the way, but it was inevitable and nothing could be done but to accept.

I remember the first time I met Burbee. It was over at the Katz's. Burbee and Cora had come to Vegas for some gambling and visiting. I remember very clearly stumbling through the door to see Charles Burbee in all his fannish grandeur plopped amidst the gabbling Vegrants, couched in his wheelchair with a Budweiser clutched in one hand. He would raise a finger to make a point as he spoke while everyone would lean close so they could hear. Every Burbish pronouncement would end in laughter and reminiscing between Cora, Burbee, Arnie, and Joyce while the rest of the Vegrants gathered round pitched in their two cents when they could. It looked like a cosy, comfy little party.

I approached as someone jumped up to run an errand and took their seat. Arnie helped me. "Burb, I want you to meet a friend of mine, Tom Springer."

Burbee looked up at me, his blue eyes thinking back and remembering. He gave me his hand and nodded to me. "You're Tom Springer, I've heard about you." I had Arnie to thank for that. A brief firm shake sealed our introductions. "I want to talk to you later," he informed me. "Right now I have a story to write." And with that Peggy Kurilla wheeled him off to Joyce's office where he would dictate an article to her. With Arnie and Joyce to help the conversation along Cora and I were soon chatting away and eventually ended up at the kitchen table filling our plates with food for dinner. I fetched Burbee a cold one and we sat in the living room after his dictation session and had our dinner while I quizzed him about Laney, Perdue, Rotsler, Stanley Stibbard, Dirty Old Kepner, Ackerman, EEEvans and all the characters he'd written about throughout the years that I'd found in TIB.

"You'll come help me with this next article?" he asked me, wiping some mayonaise from his upper lip. I nodded, my mouth full of food. "Good! Let's go." He held our beers as I pushed him down the Katz's hallway to Joyce's office where a Macintosh sat with an already completed article. Together we would write "Note Bene", one of his machine shop stories about Burbee and Laney's superior intellects. We spent

three hours going back and forth about this and that throughout the dictation. The first thing that got us was the title. He'd already had the damn thing written in his head, but unlike Al Ashley he was committing it to paper. I knew he had the whole thing in his head when the first words out of his mouth were, "Note Bene".

I typed that in then turned to him. "Latin, right?" He nodded and sipped his beer.

"That's the title," he informed me.

"Okay, what's it mean?"

With that one question I embarked on a fascinating wild ride with the classically educated Burbee who I had no trouble at all speaking with. Jesus, we got along like gangbusters writing that damn thing! That's when I knew my instincts were right, I did want to know this man. Throughout the entire article we would shoot off in some other direction eventually looping back around to continue the story only to run across something else I didn't know that he'd patiently inform me about. This was after his first stroke, before the second, and while he still had a bit of a stutter, once he got going he was what I imagined him to be like in his house in Whittier drinking homebrew and talking fannish. He was the Burb.

It was a magic three hours I wouldn't trade for a complete set of "-s". Later visits revealed his gradually degenerative condition and all of us knew Burbee was not long for this world. He sure hung in there, though. We managed more visits and in the early summer of '95 Bill Rotsler, Robert Lichtman, Ken Forman, Tammy Funk, myself and the Katz's cruised down to the Pechanga reservation for BurbeeCon 1. It was a fine visit to a beautiful home hosted by the warm, loving, and caring Cora who's gift to fandom is unfathomable. If she didn't stand by her man in his declining years, who would have?

That visit will be with me for a long time to come. Walking the gardened path around their house beneath the towering oaks of the region, Tammy and I held hands and spoke of our love. We sat with Burbee in his living room and listened to Rotsler and Burbee reminisce long into the evening. Before we left Cora took Tammy and I on a walk around the house to the back guest house where many of Burbee's things were stored. She showed me the stack of shoebox-like piano rolls Burbee had collected over the years, then, wiping the dust off with an old rag she showed us his player piano. I ran my hand along it thinking I could join the ranks of stefnal characters who had preceded me and "had touched it with fantasy."

I smoothed my hand along the old faded wood longing for what I only knew in the pages of Burbee's writings but desperately wished to experience for real. It felt good though, knowing my hands rested where Burbee's once had, and Perdue's, Grennell's, Lee Jacob's, Gordon Dewey's, and Max Dancey's, and though I missed the grand times in which Charles Burbee brewed his own beer and wrote about the LASFS, I didn't miss him. But I do now.

I WUZ  
DOWNWIND

