

THE WOLLONGONG PIG-BREEDERS' GAZETTE 6

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1996 - A FANNISH YEAR (or Flimsy Notes Towards a Trip Report)

I will have to put down 1996 as one of the most fannishly active years I can remember since Irwin Hirsh and I produced a monthly fanzine, by the name of Larrikin, back in 1987/88. The year started with me becoming actively involved with the Melbourne bid for the 1999 World Science Fiction Convention, continued through the middle of the year when I was voted the Down Under Fan Fund (DUFF) winner for the year and attended LACon III in Los Angeles in August, and finished with me as Chair of the organising committee for the 1999 Worldcon. It was an interesting time. A year that may set me up for a lot more work than I care to think about at the moment, but it was also a year that re-acquainted me with a lot of friends I hadn't seen in quite some time, and which introduced me to a lot of people whom I suspect will remain my friends for a long time to come.

I always have difficulty explaining my involvement with science fiction fandom to people who have little or no knowledge of it. The whole thing seems strange enough to me so I don't doubt others might find it almost incomprehensible. DUFF is definitely a case in point.

The aim of DUFF is to promote contact between fans in North America and fans in Australasia. Each year one fan is chosen by ballot from a field of nominated candidates to represent the fandom of their native area in the continent of the other. Only one candidate is sent each year and the direction of travel alternates between the countries. DUFF started back in 1972 and has been run every year since with the single exception of 1973. It is the second oldest such fan fund after TAFF, the Trans-Atlantic Fan Fund between North America and Europe. Both fan funds are financed by donations from various fans throughout the world who see value in the continued contacts. John Foyster, the Australian fan who initiated DUFF with Fred Patten and who won the first GUFF (Get-Up-and-over-Fan-Fund), believes that the fan funds are quite possibly the highest achievement of that strange beast known as fandom. In general, the fans who vote, who donate items for sale, who buy such items at auction, and who donate money in order for the fund to continue will receive little for their money other than the chance to meet someone from the other side of the world, and with only a faint chance of that. The fan funds have been referred to more than once in the past as a charity, which captures part of the spirit of the thing but not the total essence. When I came to describe the fan fund to various non-fans it always seemed to come across as me winning a free trip to the US, and then the next question implied that they wanted to know how they could win it as well. Just saying "err, no it doesn't quite work that way" never seemed to carry much weight.

Just deciding to stand as a candidate for the fan fund took a lot of thought. It would mean five to six weeks away from home and family, and while a lot of people might think that not such a bad thing to experience, it does leave you with feelings of guilt as you take off on holiday and leave the rest of the tribe back home stuck in the same old routine. It wasn't going to be possible to take Robyn and three-year-old Catherine around the US with me as one of the basic aims of any fan fund trip is to travel to various cities and to stay with fans in their homes, and to get out and meet as many fans as possible. Catherine would have made that practically impossible. So I was left with travelling on my own and suffering the guilt. But both Robyn and I were due a holiday as we hadn't taken anything longer than a week in over two years so we compromised by deciding that if I won, I was to take five weeks off on my own and then to meet up with Catherine, Robyn and her mother in California for another two weeks. The others would have three weeks off and I'd have a total of seven. At the time I thought I'd be able to fit it all in. But it didn't work out that way.

The first shock came when Alan Stewart (the previous winner and therefore current administrator) informed me that I had won with an absolute majority, of votes cast, from the other two candidates. Robyn had been very worried leading up the outcome of the count as she figured that Stephen Dedman would pick up all the votes from his home state of Western Australia which she understood to be a fair chunk of active Australian fandom, and that Danny Heap would pick up the bulk of the rest, especially covering the fans in Melbourne. I was reasonably confident without being arrogant about it. You never know with these things.

But I won and three months later was flying into the US for the first time. I'd timed my arrival to coincide with Toner a small fannish convention being held in Las Vegas a week before the main event of the worldcon in Los Angeles. This meant a bit of a layover in LA airport as I waited for the connection I needed to get me from California to Nevada. Needless to say I was accosted almost before I'd figured out where I was by a Hare Krishna who tried to sell me a book with a cover that looked like a disgustingly bad 1950s science fiction novel. I was almost tempted just to keep the incident running a little longer but refused when he attempted a very bad Australian accent as a form of familial greeting.

If LA airport was strange enough then the arrival in Las Vegas was something else again. It was hot, damn hot. And there were poker machines everywhere, including the area surrounding the baggage claim in the airport. I think I sat around for the bulk of the next few days totally dumbfounded by the surroundings, trying to get used to the constant clatter of machinery and coins, the weird effect of walking from a heavily air-conditioned hotel into the broiling sun, and then late at night to the huge crowds walking down the strip wandering in and out of the casinos. I feel quite safe in saying that there is no place on Earth quite like Las Vegas and, to be frank, I'm quite glad of it. The fans put on a wonderful little convention with little program and no pretensions. It worked a treat. The only problem being that the air-conditioning started to play havoc with my sinuses and the cold I thought I'd shaken off began to re-emerge. By the time I got back to Los Angeles my voice had started to pack up and I was feeling more than a little jaded.

LACon III was something of a blur. Late nights helping to run the Australia in '99 bidding parties, little sleep, not seeing as much of the con as I would have liked, but meeting heaps of new people in the parties and the fan lounge. If you handle it properly even a large convention of six thousand people can seem quite small so long as you stay in the corners, and don't try to do everything every day. My worst moment of the trip arrived on the Sunday night of the convention. The voting for the Site Selection for the 1999 Worldcon had ended and we were all hanging around waiting for the result and I had to present two fannish Hugo awards in front of three or four thousand people. It wouldn't have been so bad if it hadn't been so bloody hot and if it hadn't taken so bloody long between sitting down in the auditorium and making my way to

the platform. I made it through without too many problems though Charlie Brown tried to look straight through me as I presented his Best Semi-Prozine Hugo to him after referring to his magazine as "Loc-us" - the crowd thought it amusing but he didn't.

We won the right to hold the 1999 Worldcon and everyone who came along afterwards gave us their condolences, and then complained about the membership rates - a theme echoed throughout the rest of my US trip. I got slightly drunk party-hopping with Spike Parsons and collapsed at about 3:00am, my earliest night of the convention. The next morning it was up early for a committee breakfast with Greg Benford (our Professional Guest-of-Honor) and his wife, and it was there that I started to feel a little under the weather. I put it down to a slight hangover and tried to ingest enough coffee, carbohydrates and orange juice to get me over it. It worked for a while but two days staying in San Francisco with Spike Parsons and Tom Becker along with Martin Tudor and his wife Helena knocked me completely rotten. I made it through to Seattle and John Berry's house and collapsed for a day in his spare room.

After that cities came and went in a blur as I climbed on and off planes for a total of 17 flights in the time I was away. I made it to Minneapolis and Joyce Scrivner's place with her psychotic black cat and , to Pat and Roger Sims's house on what appeared to be the rural outskirts of Cincinnati, to New York and my first rain of the trip as I stayed in Brooklyn with some non-fannish friends and got to stare into Normal Mailer's window, to Washington and Dick and Nicki Lynch's where Dick took me to meet Harry Warner Jr where I realised that is quite possible to be as nervous about appearing in front of one person as three thousand, and back to Los Angeles and Disneyland and my daughter's pure joy at being seduced by the power of the American entertainment industry.

It's a weird place America. And travelling through it meeting fans is a weird experience. I reckon I'll have to write about it someday. Otherwise I'll never believe I was actually there.

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The next item is a bit of departure for me with this fanzine. I'm actually printing something written by someone else for a change. I can't say as it's too far off the point though as the subject of the article is a small convention that I organised and I do seem to get mentioned quite a lot.

CON SYMMETRY by Irwin Hirsh

I entered fandom by joining ANZAPA. And sixteen years later my three-year-old-son's first convention was ANZAPACon Two. At some point on the second day Adrian told Wendy and me that he likes conventions. "Do you want to go to more?" I asked. Adrian gave a very definite yes, and so I promised that he'll go to another convention.

The first ANZAPACon was held at John Foyster's home in 1978 and more than once since then John has been heard to claim that it was the world's first fanzine convention. As it happens he's wrong. For one thing, three Autoclaves had been held by the time we gathered together to celebrate ANZAPA's tenth annish. That rules a line through the 'world's first'. And it could be argued that he is also wrong about the 'fanzine' bit because ANZAPACons have been celebrations of an apa, not fanzines. The second ANZAPACon sprang forth in the mind of Perry Middlemiss in early 1993 - at the time he wasn't even a member of the apa. Held in a couple of rooms hired from the Prahra City Council it had a program but no Program Book. There was, however, a Souvenir Handbook, which was distributed at the end of the con in the guise of the 385 page 154th mailing of the apa.

In preparing for the con Kim Huett and Perry attempted to contact every past member of the apa, to invite them to the con and to contribute something to the mailing. As a long-standing former ANZAPAn I received both invites, and went about producing my first ANZAPazine in more than a dozen years. Kim told me something of how he has attempted to contact some long-lost ex-members: "I've even resorted to sending flyers to everyone with the correct surname and first initial in the phone book. Well, truth be told, I skipped a few like S.Campbell (70), M.Fraser (62), and M.Cameron (60). The most I sent out was K.Ford (22), which is about my limit. Before you laugh I should point out that I have already had success with this method. Only yesterday a letter arrived from Ken Bull to say that he would be delighted to be part and a contribution would arrive...."

To read the words "Ken Bull" in that letter, in that context, made me wonder about who would be at ANZAPACon. Not that Kim had indicated that Ken would be at the con, mind you. It is just that Ken Bull was a very former ANZAPAn (and fan) even in the days when I was in the apa. If Kim was contacting, and getting a response from, the Ken Bulls of this world, just who would be at the con? And the best way to find an answer to that question was to go along, and so at about 3 o'clock on the 2nd of October, 1993, that is what Wendy, Adrian, and I did.

In the main room we found Marc Ortlieb leading a discussion about apas. A minute later we discovered that we'd caught the tail end of the discussion. Marc and Perry came over to say hi. "You missed a good panel," Perry said.

"We managed to come up with seventeen." Marc added.

"Seventeen what?" I asked.

"Australian apas."

"I take it Silly Point was one of those," I said.

"Make that eighteen," Marc said, as he added another name to his list.

"How could I have forgotten Silly Point?" Perry began asking himself.

"Yes, Perry," I said, "How could you forget Silly Point? You contributed to every mailing, didn't you?"

Marc, who was never a member of SP, was curious about the apa. "How many mailings did it have?"

"Only two," Perry said, "But that is no reason why I should have forgotten it." And so it became a bit of a three way joke between us that I could arrive at a con and straight away make a contribution to a panel I'd missed.

The first long-lost soul I saw was John Rowley. We began by deciding that we hadn't seen each other since the previous ANZAPACon. It's probably not true but not too far wrong, and besides, it sounded good. From there we went on to fill out a decade-and-a-half of personal details. I pointed out Wendy and Adrian, we traded details about our various career changes, and what-not. John mentioned that he began to get more and more involved in amateur theatre, and one day realised that he had no connection with fandom. At which point I asked how was it that Kim Huett was able to track him down. "It was easy. Back in my uni, and fandom, days I was living with my mother, and she's still at the same address."

Gary Mason was also at the convention, and when I suggested that we last saw each other at Aussiecon Two I received a wide-eyed surprise as response. "I didn't think anyone saw me at Aussiecon Two. I was only there half-an-hour."

"Did you have something else on that weekend?"

"No."

"So you came to Melbourne for just half an hour of a convention?"

"Yes."

I was more amazed by this than Gary had been by my remembering seeing him at the con. "But... but... why?"

"I felt I didn't belong. I looked around and saw all these different people, doing their own thing, going about their own idea of fannishness and I felt it wasn't for me. So I just left."

"And you've been out of fandom ever since?"

"More or less."

"Till now."

Wendy and Adrian wondered over and I introduced them to Gary. Then Sue Grigg came over to say hi. she started off the timebinding, remembering that it a bit over three years since we saw each other. "It was at Carey Handfield's 40th birthday, and Carey and David are the same age, and David's 43, so...."

Then it was time for my GUFF slide trip report. Preparing for this presented me with all sorts of problems as a few things have changed since 1987. People have changed name, married, divorced, moved city, gaffiated, or died. Do I talk about Arthur Thomson in the present or past tense? Is it Linda Pickersgill or Krawecke? and so on. A different sort of timebinding, you could say. I eventually decided to talk in the '87 context and mention any changes as I felt appropriate. It all went well, despite having to compete with a rather loud air conditioning unit. Certainly I met my two objectives: people laughed in the right places, and I managed to head off any comments about how much weight I've put on by being the first to refer to that six year change. After the show Jean Weber came up and thanked me for the report. "Oh yes, the fan fund trip you lost!" I said, and we had a bit of a chuckle.

Following that came the event which answered a query most had about the convention. John Bangsund turned up. As he got mobbed by a bunch of us saying things like "Good to see you after all these years" Sally Yeoland stood to the side proud of her achievement. She'd been at the convention earlier, partly, I suspect, on a reconnaissance mission. Undoubtedly she'd gone home and reported that we were a friendly bunch of people, and that ANZAPACon Two was a nice friendly little convention. John and I had recently gotten back into contact and I thanked him for the fanzines he'd sent. He responded by thanking me for my letters. "It's always good getting fine fanzines," was the way I put it. "It's always nice to receive a Letter of Comment," he replied. Then he laughed about the coincidence of me telling him about Tati's film "Parade" one week, and it appearing on tv the next week. "And there's another one of his films on tomorrow afternoon."

"Which one?" I asked. I hadn't noticed any such thing in the tv guide.

"No, no, no. It's not one he's directed. It an early one from before he began directing." I made a mental note to make sure the VCR was set for that one.

At the appropriate point it was dinner time. Perry asked Wendy and I, us being locals of the area, for our recommendation. "Depends on what you want to eat," we said, and after some discussion we settled on Ging Wah. Without this being a convention banquet or anything the whole convention, for some reason and almost lemming-like, decided that eat wherever Perry would eat. As we wandered down the road my mind was spinning with the idea that I'd done something wrong. The Hirsh family has been eating at the Ging Wah for twenty years, and would like to continue eating there for another twenty. A restaurant full of fans and the havoc that would cause was presented the horrific image that we'd persona(s) non gratia for years to come.

As it turned out I needn't have worried. Everything went well, with this bunch of fans being on their best behaviour. Su, our favourite waitress, was concerned that they wouldn't be able to serve a large group on such short notice. But Wendy reassured her that we weren't after a 50-person-seated-at-one-table-type banquet, and serving each table in turn would be fine. At the end of the meal Wendy remarked that we'd been pretty good to Su and her family, providing them with an almost full restaurant on an otherwise quiet early-Saturday evening. We wondered if we should ask for a free meal in return.

Back at the convention it was time for another panel. Alan Stewart, Bruce Gillespie, Cath Ortlieb, Eric Lindsay, and Perry Middlemiss discussing ANZAPA's history and controversies. It was a good panel, though the selection of panellists was wrong. When not organising ANZAPACon Two Perry had been planning the publication of his Best of ANZAPA fanthologies. For the past year he'd been rereading ANZAPA mailings, and had been picking up on various themes and patterns. Everything was fresh in Perry's mind, while his fellow-panellists' contributions to the panel were based on long-term memory. This imbalance resulted in Perry dominating, saying more than the other four combined. Cath added her personal perspective on the Great Foyster Purge of 82, Bruce talked about the Steph Campbell Controversy of 69, but it was without Perry's vigour. From the floor Gary Mason was adding in more than just his two-cents worth and it was he who should have been up there sharing the stage with Perry. When not actually causing controversies, during the first decade or more Gary had been there hopping into the centre of the things. He reminded us that as OE he decided to take page credits for the pages he produced in his role as OE. "I was only a member of the apa when I was its OE." Having that day joined the apa's waiting list he wondered if there was any rule against a wait-lister being the OE. It was an idea which had the Gary Mason style about it, but it wouldn't have been a cause for great controversy. As a wait-lister Gary doesn't have to worry about page credits, so from his perspective all the benefits of being OE don't actually exist.

Donna Heenan, high-up honcho of the 1994 NationalCon, was at the ANZAPACon and I tried introducing her to Adrian. "If you want to go to another convention you'll have to ask Donna if you are allowed." But Adrian refused, sticking his chin to his chest. Donna had with her a photo album, full of photos from her first days in fandom, which she'd brought along as part of her own private timebinding project. There were faces in the photos to whom she wanted to put names. But I was no help, mostly seeing photos of faces I recognised but whose names I probably never knew - instead of Donna asking me if I knew who that person was I was the one doing the asking. One photo was of Gary Mason, providing evidence that he hasn't changed much. Gary was sitting close-by and Donna said that she was very glad to have finally been able to put a name to that face. "I really enjoyed your company at that Swanson. We had a good time

together." Gary went wide-eyed and was taken aback at that one. "No, don't worry," Donna added reassuringly, "We didn't do anything like that."

Later on Gary came rushing up to me, waving a fanzine in my general direction. "I didn't know you'd stopped putting out Thyme."

"Yea. Years ago."

"I picked up a copy at the front desk and I thought 'I must give Irwin some money for this.' Then I noticed that you're not the editor."

"Oh yes, Andrew and I stopped publishing it in 1982."

"1982? Oh!"

"It's passed through many hands since then."

But before Gary could get too maudlin about an eleven year gap in his fannish knowledge I thanked him for remembering. Most people think Thyme began with Roger Weddall.

An auction was held the Sunday afternoon. I took along a few spares of my own fanzines to be sold off for the benefit of GUFF. A couple of Larrikins gathered in a few dollars. Then it was time to go through the Sikanders. I held up the eighth issue. "This is the big one, with Ted White's famous 44 page review of Aussie fanzines." No bids were offered. I picked up the ninth issue, described the contents, flashed the Atom covers, but that brought in no bids. Marc Ortlieb and I decided not to worry about the rest of the stack. I resumed my seat not-too-happy with the market price set for my fanzines. Later on a couple of copies of Keith Walker's famed crudzine Fanzine Fanatique went for 20c a piece, which made me feel *real* good.

I had intended not buying a thing but when Clive Newall held up a stack of Fanthology '89s and offered them at \$2 a piece I couldn't resist. Flicking through my purchase I scanned the contents page and the 'for further review' listing, where I received a rush of delayed egoboo. Three of the recommended articles were items I'd first published. After sharing the egoboo with Perry - my former co-editor in crime - I took a closer look at the list of the 40 articles which took Andy Hooper's fancy. Once again I found little correlation between the fanthology editor and the Ditmar voter. Two articles were by Aussies, neither of whom were nominated for the Best Fanwriter Ditmar for that particular year. Similarly, Larrikin, the only Aussie fanzine to have published articles in Andy's lists, didn't make it as a nominee for Best Fanzine.

The last official part of the weekend was the collation of the mighty 25th anniversary mailing. Perry's recent collating experience consists of pressing the 'Collate' button of the work photocopier. Prior to this he used to collate 8 page Larrikins. So when he suggested that one table would be sufficient I knew he wasn't speaking from a wealth of experience. As we added a second, a third, and then a fourth table Perry received an education in old-style collating.

Things started slowly and from my vantage point as part of the conga line I wasn't able to determine the cause of this. Later on Wendy told me that it was all Gary Mason's fault. Rather than picking up a contribution and moving on, Gary felt the need to stop and read a paragraph or two of each fanzine before moving on. It was only after he'd left the line that the pace picked up. Adrian was rather taken with all the activity and after a quick lesson he proved quite adept at collation. This was a bit too much to take. First he tells me he likes conventions, then he shows a keen ability to collate fanzines.

The end of the convention was approaching; it was time to round out the weekend. Farewells were made, the convention dissected, the health of the apa was toasted, and, in a reference to one past ANZAPA controversy, Kim Huett told John Rowley that he was glad that John's contribution to the mailing hadn't been on foolscap. Someone told me that for the first time in years ANZAPA has a mailing list, and with about 20 of us ex-members managing to contribute something to the 25th anniversary mailing Perry and Kim's efforts had not been a waste. Even never-members John and Eve Harvey got into the swing of things. All that remained to be seen was if ex-members will see any of the mailing comments made on our contributions.

The convention closed off at 5.00 and a bunch of us went to the College Lawn, a nice little pub down the road. Kim Huett and I gossiped fanzines, Perry and Wendy talked about a friend, and Gary Mason was overheard remarking to John Bangsund that he thought he'd "found an error in Philosophical Gas, but then I noticed it was in quotemarks and it was from me."

But the best line of the weekend came later that night. Wendy and I were listening to Radio Free Sex - a radio program discussing sex and relationships. A listener had written in saying that she's had 42 orgasms in 45 minutes of sex. The chap who read out the letter asked his fellow panellists if they had any comments. "Yes," came the quickest response "I want to know how she knows she had 42? Did she lie there and count them on her fingers, or what?"

March, 1994

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