The Essayist

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CONTENTS

Nic Farey Introduction · 3
Wm. Breiding Intro Two · 5
John D. Berry Third Intro's the Charm · 7
Steve Swartz Writing in the Later Days of a Fading Nation · 9
Jae Leslie Adams Artists without Borders, or, Semiotics of Lettering · 13
Kat Templeton Dreaming of Rockets · 19
Alva Svoboda The Mirror and the Trap: Roth, Projection, and the Unescapable Self · 23
Steven Bryan Bieler When Irving Comes Marching Home · 27
Christina Lake Champagne and Chicken Shit · 31
Cy Chauvin 1,200 Plastic Bag Years: Imprisoned in a Thrift Store · 39
Sandra Bond Gilbert and Sullivan News Channel · 43
Curt Phillips Veterans Day · 47
Terry Floyd Report from Weirdcon IV · 53

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NIC FAREY *Introduction*

In which Mr. Farey regales us with the origin story of THE ESSAYIST.

THE GENESIS of this project arose as a result of Wm. Breiding commenting (or complaining, if you like) that a lot of excellent fanwriting wasn't being seen by most fanzine fans since it was hidden away in apas, despite a somewhat recent mini-trend of people distributing their apazines more widely than within their original apa home.

Not ever having been much of an apahack myself, it nevertheless occurred to me that writers might be approached to inquire whether they'd written something for an apa that they considered particularly fine and would allow it to be reprinted for a wider audience. This became the main tent-pole which holds up the canopy of *The Essayist*.

A secondary source would be fanzine essays which had not necessarily been responded to as much as their writers (or editors) would have liked or expected, or are simply exemplary and deserving of a re-read.

There's also a tertiary component of original material, represented here by Steve Swartz's opening essay.

I took the opportunity at Corflu Pickled to figuratively shackle Breiding to a chair and explain the concept which, I stressed, would only be viable if he was involved in it, and refused to let him go until he agreed, enabling me to tell other people about the idea.

John D Berry, suitably fueled by Bulleit bourbon that evening, clearly had a significant rush of blood and declared, "I *have* to be in on this!", finalizing our editorial triumvirate, at the same time adding his design skills to the mix, honestly to my relief that I wouldn't be on the hook for that.

The Essayist is not intended to be a one-off collection. We'll already have begun soliciting contributions for issue #2 by the time you're reading this, and we hope that what we're offering here will encourage at least some of you to say yes to our entreaties.

At this time we don't have a fixed publishing schedule, although a timeline of every six to eight months or so has been floated. In proper fanzine tradition, the next issue will be published when it's ready.

You'll also notice a lack of accompanying illustrations. With all due respect to our fine fanartists, this is all about the unembellished words within and will likely continue to be so.

We hope you like it.

WM. BREIDING *Intro Two*

In which Mr. Breiding sings the praises of the amateur press association.

NIC STARTED NAGGING about this project a few months prior to Corflu 43. So sometime in late 2025 he was getting down on my case. My initial reaction to coediting a zine was pretty much a big fat NO! (or at least skepticism). Though I didn't say that out loud. That March weekend at Corflu it became clear exactly how persistent Nic can be. Every time we ran into each other he'd say, "We gotta talk about the zine" or some such until we finally did. He delineated his above editorial orally and I agreed to participate with some disguised hesitancy. By the end of the convention he pulled me aside and whispered, "I snagged John D. Berry for coediting and design!" I have to say. I was impressed.

I know from experience that really good writing exists in a limbo where all but a few will see it: **A**mateur **P**ress **A**ssociations. I was a founding member of Apa-50 back in 1974 and participated through three very distinct golden ages in the 70s, 80s and 90s. The writing was phenomenal at times and it was exciting to get those mailings every other month to see what was happening and what the previous mailing might have inspired. (I dropped sometime in the early Aughts and haven't been back. There may have been other golden ages.)

Occasionally those of us not in these apas get to see some of that great writing when an apazine is shared with the outside world. Or a particularly tasty essay is allowed to be reprinted in a general circulation fanzine. Otherwise nada, nothing, zilch. The writing dies in old mailings and is buried deep on that hard drive in your closet (if one is lucky).

It wasn't me that started this conversation about apas depleting talent from general circulation fanzines. It's an age old gripe. Claire Brialey actually started this round when she mentioned it in passing in her and Mark Plummer's zine *Banana Wings*. I took the bull by the horns and wrote letters of comment to not only the Fishlifters but other zines as well about this "problem." And this caused Nic to have his light bulb moment: actively seeking reprints from apas (and other obscure or older sources).

When I wrote to invite Steve Swartz to contribute to this Premiere Issue of *The Essayist* he mentioned in strong terms

that one of the reasons apas can elicit top form writing is their sense of community and trust built mailing by mailing among its members. No one would argue that point. That's what apas are all about or should be about. But from time immemorial all fanzine fans have craved good writing. Couldn't the wealth be shared by inviting writers to a larger audience to entertain, inform and move us?

These specific issue's pieces come from several apas, a podcast, an obscure webzine, an early issue of Nic's genzine and one piece original to us. If you like what you see and like what you read, and more importantly like the concept, consider dusting off those old files containing your favorite writing. We'd love to present them to another audience. That's the goal of *The Essayist*. As the man said, we hope you like it.

JOHN D. BERRY *Third Intro's the Charm*

In which Mr. Berry explicates the typography of THE ESSAYIST.

WHEN NIC ASKED ME at the Santa Rosa Corflu if I would participate in this brilliant plan that he had hatched with Wm. Breiding, I was all ears. I'm not sure I expressed my interest in quite the emphatic way that Nic describes, but there was a certain amount of bourbon involved. Anyway, I said yes.

My part in the editorial side of this endeavor has been minimal, but the design fell to me. At first I tried out a very sober page layout: two columns, with a larger introductory paragraph spanning them both (and in a much larger type size, to keep the line length within reason), using a typeface with a long history as a text face. All very much in keeping with Nic's idea of a 19th-century intellectual journal. But then, encouraged by my co-editors, I decided to rethink it and use something more in tune with my usual styles of editorial design. What you're reading reflects that rethink.

The font hasn't changed: it's Adobe Kis, a recent revival by Robert Slimbach of the types often called "Janson," and in its Linotype form used extensively in books in the first half of the 20th century. (The typeface got the name Janson because it was believed to be the work of Anton Janson, a Dutch punch-cutter in 17th-century Amsterdam. Later research proved that the types had actually been cut by Hungarian punch-cutter Niklaus Kis, who was working in Amsterdam but later returned to his native Hungary to print Protestant Bibles. The typeface is arguably a brilliant example of 17th-century Dutch type design, despite its designer not actually being Dutch.)

What did change was the page layout. After the typeface, the most important single element in making a paragraph or a page readable is the length of the line: how many characters fit, on average, in each line. Too short, and the text has a staccato rhythm and feels broken up; too long, and the eye gets fatigued and loses its place, even if there's plenty of space between lines. What you're reading is a text block that seems comfortably readable to me, with an empty sidebar column for elements like the intro text or the footnotes (sidenotes, here) in Christina's essay. In a nod to older tradition, the text is justified; more often I would set it ragged-right. Hyphens are

employed judiciously to keep the spacing along the lines from getting out of control.

If I've done this right, you won't notice anything unusual except the placement of the text block. Unless you read this intro first, where I've drawn your attention to it.

STEVE SWARTZ *Writing in the Later Days of a Fading Nation*

When Steve Swartz discovered fandom I was pretty much a gafiate by then so our paths never crossed. Over the last few years his writing has trickled my way through various serendipitous means – never directly. I knew that here was a man of great heart and mind through that writing. When this project was vetted Steve was the first person on my list to invite. He did not fail me in this brief but powerful piece.
– WM. BREIDING

(I OWE A LOT of these thoughts to things I learned in conversations in the Turbo APA, especially with Jeanne Gomoll and Andy Hooper. The stubborn insistence on my own confused point of view is, of course, all my own.)

There's a song by the English folk-rock band Oysterband that has a refrain I've carried around in my head for coming up on forty years: *Work like you were living in the early days of a better nation.* It's a call to arms dressed as a love song, urging its listeners – the Irish for Oysterband, though the sentiment originated with Alasdair Gray in Scotland, and it travels well – to rise above the evidence of the world around them and behave as if more were possible. I've always admired the willful optimism of it. The defiant present tense.

I've been thinking about that line lately because I've found myself doing something that feels like its inversion. I'm enjoying writing creative faanish nonfiction, the mode of discourse of my once and former community, a community of people who love science fiction and one another enough to write about it on paper, for decades – long before anyone thought to call that sort of thing a lifestyle. I'm writing in the later days of a fading nation. And I find, somewhat to my surprise, that I mean that with more affection than grief.

Let me take a crack at some fan history, with the caveat that I'm quite an unreliable narrator of it. Many of you reading this piece know far more fan history than I ever have or will. I trust you to correct me gently. Take this as the view from my particular window: I arrived late, I left the window shuttered for long stretches, and it certainly accumulated some grime.

Science fiction fandom began, roughly, in the letter columns of the pulp magazines of the late 1920s and 1930s. A small, scattered, idiosyncratic group of readers discovered each other there, began corresponding directly, formed clubs, organized conventions. They were young, mostly, and many of them wanted to become professional writers themselves. The community had a productive relationship with the professional field for at least half a century: fans became pros, pros

remembered being fans, the boundary was porous and generative.

Along the way something interesting happened. The people who remained fans without becoming professionals discovered that they could write about the community itself, and about anything else that interested them. Convention reports gave way to criticism, criticism gave way to personal essays, personal essays gave way to something that didn't have a clean name but felt, at its best, like its own sort of literature. Fanzines multiplied. APAs developed their own culture of response and conversation. When we hit peak fandom in the 1980s and 1990s, there were 125ish active APAs with real waitlists, 150ish conventions annually, and a fanzine ecosystem too large for any one person to fully map.

Then several things happened more or less simultaneously. The new wave transformed professional science fiction into something the broader culture could no longer ignore. Bestseller lists acquired science fiction novels. Genre ceased to be a ghetto. At the same time, paper and postage got more expensive, and the internet arrived with its promise of broader reach at lower cost. The community did what communities do: it adapted, migrated, and spread across blogs and message boards and eventually social media. The reach expanded. The depth contracted. If you tell a thoughtful 25-year-old today (as I have several times) about the experience of receiving a fat envelope every month containing the assembled writings of twenty people who'd read each other's work and were now responding to it, well, the look on their face is not contempt, exactly. It's something closer to archaeological curiosity.

I found fandom in the early 1980s, which was its Golden Age (entirely coincidentally, of course). I didn't know that at the time. It just seemed like the world. I grew into it through the decade, found my way to the Madison community – as lively and talented a local fan scene as existed anywhere – and spent the 1990s more active than I had any right to be given that I also had a job. Then I gafiated. In the unlikely event that you are new to fandom, reader, gafiation is letting the mundane world colonize the time and energy you used to give to fandom. Microsoft will do that to a person. I gafiated thoroughly and for a long, long time.

I came back in the early 2020s, newly returned to the United States after several years abroad, slowing down, ready to retire, and looking, I think, for something that had been good before. What I found was a community I recognized,

populated by people I remembered or knew of, doing more or less what they had always done, but smaller, and older, and quieter.

The statistics of diminishment are real. There are a few dozen APAs now, most with a handful of members and an open waiting list. There are also a few dozen conventions, and most of the large ones are no longer fan-run in any meaningful sense. The age distribution at any fan gathering skews heavily toward people who remember the Apollo program firsthand. Young fans exist – they always exist – but they are not flowing into the community the way they once did, and the reasons for that are not mysterious. The conditions that created this community were specific to a particular era: a small audience for a stigmatized genre, limited means of finding each other, a resulting intensity of connection when they did. Those conditions are gone. The genre is everywhere. The stigma has largely lifted. There are ten thousand ways to find your people online. The miracle is not that fandom shrank. The miracle is that it persists.

What persists, in my experience, is better than you might expect. Turbo, the APA I rejoined, is probably the most active APA in the country. The writing is good. The conversation is real. There's something about the APA form – the regular rhythm, the obligation to respond, the fact that twenty people are living parallel lives and talking about them together – that produces a quality of engagement that blogs never managed and social media actively destroys. People wonder why the best fan writing is now appearing in APAs rather than fanzines. I think it's because APAs still deliver the two things fandom always ran on: feedback and community. Fanzines, in a diminished ecosystem, can deliver the writing but struggle to deliver the conversation.

If you had a nighttime photograph of Fan-Land taken thirty-five years ago, it would look like a settled country: lights concentrated in bright clusters, smaller lights scattered across a wide territory, the sense of something alive across a broad expanse. The photograph today would show a few smaller cities, some isolated outposts, lots of darkness. I look at that photograph with my mind's eye, and I feel something, but it is not quite grief. It's the feeling you get when you return to a place you loved and find it changed. Not destroyed, just quieted, the way places get when the particular energy that animated them has moved on to wherever energy goes.

I am older now too. I write more slowly and more carefully than I did. I am content with a smaller circle and a longer conversation. The later days of a fading nation suit me, it turns out, better than the early days did. I write, not out of defiance, not out of nostalgia, but because the work itself is still good, and the people still doing it are worth writing for.

JAE LESLIE ADAMS *Artists without Borders, or, Semiotics of Lettering*

Jae Leslie Adams is a long time fan from the Madison area. She has been associated with WisCon, Corflu 20, The Tiptree Awards (now Otherwise Awards), and the fanzine WABE. *She is a calligrapher, mail artist and fine writer. Jae has been a notable contributor to a number of apas. The following piece was originally published in her zine* FUGITIVE PARTICULATE MATTER *for the apa Acnestis in 2004, a very apropos venue for this piece to have appeared.*
– WM. BREIDING

BACK IN THE EARLY AUGHTS, 2003 or so, I was taking notes at a WisCon panel discussion. Genre Anxiety, or How Interstitial Is It? Delia Sherman stated that interstitiality is a continuum, but distinct from separate genres bolted together, and Ellen Kushner admitted that it is a response to over-categorization. Gavin Grant asked if "fiction" doesn't cover the term already.

Then Delia pointed to an online discussion of Heinz Insu Fenkl's memoir as an example of interstitiality not just in content, but in structure, presentation and marketing. Heinz Insu Fenkl's *Memoir of My Ghost Brother* was written as memoir, that is, nonfiction, but the publisher was uncomfortable with the fantastic elements contributed by the author's childhood immersion in Korean culture and released it as a novel.

Then the panel audience got to suggesting a whole long list of works (memoirs, fantasies, graphic novels) and discussing whether they fit on this new shelf. Someone said something about developing a critical vocabulary for observable phenomena, which at least includes enough syllables to be a stab in that direction. I am rather more interested in the psychological intersections of fiction and fact than in the divisions of bookstore shelving, and tried to get a question in on the continuum of realities presented to us now by the television, but had to satisfy myself with making a list of all the phenomena that began buzzing in my head.

I was disappointed that the discussion was stuck on literary categories.

But at least hearing the word *interstices* pronounced aloud is curiously thrilling to me, so it wasn't a complete loss.

Afterwards I read the essay on the Endicott Studios/Interstitial Arts website, by Heinz Insu Fenkl, about what is this Interstitiality thing anyway. Which as soon as I heard about it at that WisCon I knew is where I have been living like my whole life.

I was explaining this to my husband and son by using the common terminology of family relations. How many siblings does Jon have? One, his brother. How many siblings does my

mother have? One, her sister. Very simple. How many siblings do I have? As I have explained before, this question does not necessarily have a short answer. For a long time, I would have said I was an only child. Sometimes I still do. The reaction of other six-year-olds to my mention of a "half-brother" (who was my stepdad's child from a previous marriage) did not encourage me to challenge that boundary. Then the arrival of my brother Geoff (half-brother, in biological terms) made it clear I was some kind of sister. As an adult I have found that category of "sibling" can open out into pretty strange territory. We enumerated the various kinds of uncles Matt has, Matt who is plainly an only child, and then I asked him, what about Joseph who lives next door? They have known each other and been the best of friends for their whole lives, since before they could speak – even before they could walk. "We're like brothers," Matt says. Exactly, and they will always have that relation, but our culture doesn't give us any word for it. It is outside the conventional category of family and recognizing that reality is where I live.

In a similar way, I am a writer. Correspondent, diarist, poet, essayist. Sometimes, as a calligrapher, one letter at a time, or in the words of others, or in short term media like chalk or body paint, and frequently unpublished.

Fenkl distinguishes "interstitial" from "liminal", which to anthropologists at least is the doorway or pause at the passage to a new state. (For instance, childbirth labor is the liminal state in becoming a mother.) Interstitial does not proceed one way or another. Be here now.

What especially excited me was the extra-literary interstices. For instance, if I write a poem and submit it for publication in some journal or twelve, that is the usual procedure, but given the scant rewards of such publication (even should it be accepted), I have found I would rather read it to my friends, and then maybe paint it in a one-of-a-kind manuscript book. These are unmarketable activities, but to me at least far more interesting, and I appreciate having the "interstitial" address for my location on the cultural map.

When I read the Karen Joy Fowler story "What I Didn't See" (which was on our long Tiptree Recommended list), I didn't read it as SF but didn't feel it was necessary to challenge its inclusion as a text of interest to Tiptree readers. (For that matter I never read *Sarah Canary* as SF, although I realize this is in some circles an unpopular view, and the author herself has more than once made clear that she wrote it in a fantastic

mode, but I am quite basically uninterested in defending any genre boundaries at all. Although maybe we could talk about it.) On the other hand I did read Fowler's story in reference to Tarzan stories, which fall outside any canon of SF, as does much of Edgar Rice Burroughs' work, predating Gernsback by decades. I will be interested in what historical revisionism occurs in the field when ERB's Mars adventures, or scientific romances, are finally filmed, which is long overdue. (As terrible books, they might make excellent movies.)

Now that I think about it, there is some ancient faan history of the Burroughs fans taking over the worldcon, and hijacking the Hugos, back in the early sixties when the ERB reissues were published, to the great indignation of the True Fans. But then all that hoo-hah disappeared under the very first tide of Trekkies. High and far-off times, o best beloved. But I digress.

Back at the interstitiality discussion, "the sort of thing I like" is not exactly it. (Novels on clay slabs? Or wax tablets? I think to myself.) It is useless to conflate interstitiality with slipstream, which is already a serviceable term. "Interstitial" might be more helpful in discussing what, for instance, makes SF poetry the odd little genre-pocket it is; or working out how and why "Ziggy Stardust and the Spiders from Mars" related more to mainstream culture than to SF literary interests (the entire works of David Bowie actually); how graphic novels work; Is Poetry Nonfiction? Is Rap Music? And so forth. Advertising copy as poetry, video as fine art, graffiti as painting, electrical masts as monumental sculpture (pure Constructivism if you ask me). Naturally enough, the turf warriors on all sides will rage.

Interstitialism seems to me a concept of some power, which leads naturally to the question, surely we can use this force for good? I think Maureen Kincaid Speller's observation that the interstitialists "want to sell books too and feel hampered by the fact that their works are not easily categorisable" has a great deal of truth in it, and there is nothing wrong with that, unless it doesn't work. I've noticed academics like to have jobs too, and that gives an edge to a particular interstice. But it's too bad the word is so long and hard to pronounce. This ought to make it appealing to academics, but unlikely to catch on to the mass market.

This all leads me somewhat obscurely to describe further my territory between the moving slabs of several different art worlds. Calligraphy is rather looked down on by the fine arts

market in the US, as a craft like pottery or quilting. (I should point out that art pottery in the tradition of Bernard Leach does not have the cachet here that it does in Britain, although art glass thanks to Dale Chihuly and his workshop is much more popular in the US than Britain.) The US does not have nearly as much demand for hand lettered public-inscriptions as one finds in the UK. Here calligraphy is thought to be all fancy envelopes, or signs next to the office coffee pot. But from the point of view of the fine arts folk, I spoil my nice colorful abstract paintings by putting legible words on them. If they are illegible, that is much more arty.

The big division among calligraphers, which might be looked on as political, certainly philosophical & aesthetic, is whether lettering need always be legible. Label designs and text that is meant to be read clearly require legible letters, but the question is less clear with logo design, as logos need to be recognizable but may be composed of initials or abbreviations that may be fairly abstracted. Many practicing calligraphers are deeply disturbed by the abstract-expressionist style of scribbled lettering, which is often used now as a design element in painting and graphic design. (I should point out that what some people call scribbling may require great control and expertise, or not.) The calligraphic problem in painting is that legibility leads viewers to read the text and ignore any other aspects of the composition that don't whap them upside the head, like vivid color. This leads us to the tactic of lettering in a foreign language or alphabet (cyrillic or kanji system) so that the expressive nature of the strokes becomes more visible. One of my friends invented a code or secret lettering style in which to make marks that have the appearance of legibility. I just scribble, but I work pretty hard to control it in various ways: another expressive practice is to develop the personal characteristics of handwriting.

And I like to be on the fence with this issue. One of my favorite teachers (Leana Fay) made a point of painting abstractly with large legible letters amongst collage and wild color. Legible text is undoubtedly more accessible to people who are not particularly interested in abstract art.

But I am bemused by the question of how letters can be abstract forms and at the same time align themselves aesthetically with the most highly representational art, which clearly and unambiguously describes its content.

It seems to have become somehow associated with political conservatism to use traditional letter forms that don't chal-

lenge naïve or common or folk sensibilities of what constitutes beautiful writing. Since just 1970 the American public has come to expect "calligraphy" is a particular popular italic style based on the Arts & Crafts revival work of Edward Johnston (here widely purveyed by the Speedball nib company). But the home-grown American writing masters of the 19th century practiced a highly developed technique with a pointed metal nib, entirely different from italic calligraphy, and much more difficult. It was the basis of much modern signwriting style as well as the Spencerian or copperplate writing of my grandparents' day, from which the Palmer method taught in American schools throughout the 20th century developed. Handwriting such as my mother's, tiny and neat and perfectly stylized, has become illegible to my son's generation (but he can type 100 wpm).

Learning to use a pointed pen is hard even for an adult. I've tried it. Writing before the invention of the ballpoint pen was in fact tortuously difficult, and the widespread use of the steel pen occurred very quickly to ameliorate some of the difficulties of cutting quills. (In *Tom Sawyer* there are references to penknives, wielded by teachers, which were in common use as long as quills needed to be sharpened). This meant that literacy was more difficult on the frontier than we now might give credence.

All by way of explaining that there is also some interesting historical animosity between the American Penman advocates of pointed-pen techniques of Beautiful Writing, which were superseded a hundred-some years ago by typewriters and ballpoint pens, and the comparatively recent British import of the Arts & Crafts Johnstonian broad-pen method, based on the revival of defunct medieval, gothic and renaissance lettering styles. The pointed-pen technique transfers usefully to the pointed brush, and these calligraphic practices are now being reconciled in American script styles by yet another technological development, the Japanese brush-markers, which were developed for writing kanji characters with proper nuance in preference to the monoline produced by ballpoint pens.

The question we now explore is how pure line operates as a communicative force, distinct from color or size, or explicit text. (One interesting artist for instance is working in both English and Japanese simultaneously.) Are letters abstract? do they resemble an ideal? or only themselves? How can forms so various as hand scrawling and typefaces signify the same thing?

The interstitial is the place between the boundaries of clear categories, the borderlands, but with no implication of direction or progression from one state to another. Yes you can camp there in the border country. Put up a tent. Dig a hole, haul in cement and pour a foundation, collect sticks, straw, mud and stones… but you can't call a contractor. There aren't any. And phone service is still lousy.

KAT TEMPLETON *Dreaming of Rockets*

Kat Templeton has a most engaging personal and emotional writing style which rarely fails to draw in the reader. One of the reasons I liked this piece, first published in BEAM 10 *(August 2016) was, perhaps paradoxically, that her views on awards are quite antithetical to my own. Full disclosure: the FAAn Award voting "friend" she refers to was me...*
– NIC FAREY

IT'S CONFESSION TIME. One of my life goals is to win a Hugo. It has been since I was in high school and first stumbled across the idea in an author's introduction the *Foundation* series by Isaac Asimov.

It was a dream that got lost in everything else going on in my life, and it didn't resurface until I found my way into fandom.

When I went to my first general science fiction convention, I learned that I could nominate and vote on the Hugo. More than that, there were categories, and three of them were specifically designed so that any old fan could win! The old dream came flaring back to life. I had discovered these mysterious things called fanzines at that same convention. It was something that appealed to the frustrated writer in me – a chance to write and make my own magazine, and some day make my way onto the longlist, and then the finalist's list.

Then, one day, when the stars aligned and the heavens opened, maybe, just maybe I would take a rocket home myself.

Alas, I picked a horrible time to enter fandom, as there was a shift under my feet. When I cast my first ballot in 2007, the contest between best fan writer came down basically to Dave Langford vs. John Scalzi. (There were three other people on the ballot: Chris Garcia, Stephen Silver, and John Hertz, all people I've come to know in fandom, but at the time, I only barely knew Chris as this whirling dervish all over the place at Baycon and Westercon.)

This clash of titans was a problem. Best Fan Writer had become, in a joking sort of way, as "Best Dave Langford," as he'd won the category, at that point, a crazy 17 times in a row (and 20 wins overall). He could make a picket fence with that many Hugos. He didn't really need another one.

Across the ring was a guy named John Scalzi, an up and coming author, who had won the Campbell the year prior. I'd enjoyed *Old Man's War*, and he had an amusing and fun blog, but it didn't seem right to me that pro writers, who have five categories open to them, should be allowed to compete in the fan categories. I don't recall anything about how I voted that year except that I placed Scalzi behind Langford, which

turned out to be the deciding factor. If I had placed Scalzi ahead of Langford, as I almost did, we'd be in a totally different timeline, with Langford's streak coming to a dead halt, and Scalzi bowing out as he would do after he won in 2008. It would be different. I wonder if there would be Puppies there.

Of course things got derailed. My cunning plan to eventually raise myself to a point where I'd get notice from the nominating body of Worldcon crashed hard with two factors — the rise of blogs and fancasts as well as the related fact that pros were getting nominated in the fan awards. More importantly, my own demons came out to play. I'd end up semi-gafiating and not being very enamored of fandom in general. The breaking point came in 2013, with a completely different award.

Fanzine fandom recognizes its own with the Fanzine Activity Achievement Awards (FAAns), and I'd hoped a particular issue of my fanzine *Rhyme and Paradox* that I'd poured my heart into might have a chance at "Best Issue." A friend of mine said he was voting for it, and I hesitantly voted for it myself (which was allowed), hoping in some way that it would end up with some recognition. It didn't, and the award was won by somebody well-known in fandom for a typical issue of his (once a year) fanzine.

The blow really came when I read the full results and found how many votes my zine had gotten. It had gotten two, one (presumably) from my friend and one from me. It stung like hell. Here I had poured my heart out writing that zine (I still think it's some of my best writing ever) and it had sailed quietly into the night. I know, it's just an award, and all these things are popularity contests, but even now, I feel the hurt in that moment.

I wonder if it's the same hurt that has fueled the slates. The influence of failing to get an award did somewhat lead Larry Correia to start making slates. As I've said before, the Hugos were vulnerable to this kind of attack, but it was explained to me pretty early in fandom that making slates was anathema, a policy only practiced by Scientologists. Everybody knows where the rest of this story goes.

I still dream of rockets, but I've come to a certain resignation that it'll never happen. Not anymore. What vague chance I had is gone unless I get slated, and if I got slated, I'd know in my heart that my nomination was tainted – that people didn't believe in me, didn't think my work was one of the five best of the year, and … well, that it'd be another joke turned at me. I don't know what I'd do in that situation. I hope I'd have the courage to decline the nomination, but I know temptation, and that temptation would be strong.

It feels stupid to care about an award, and to care about it so deeply that you ache to see somebody set out to destroy it, like that bully on the playground that stole the four-square ball and held it just out of reach, laughing like a fool at the poor victim jumping at it. You feel so bad for the poor kid trying to get the ball back, but what can you do about it?

The bully's bigger than you are too.

I don't know who started it. Frankly, in some ways I don't care. Should David Gerrold have given out the asterisks? Maybe not, but the oddity of the year – the fact that a set of complementary slates had set All Fandom to War – had people questioning whether these were truly the best five works in each category, and there'd been jokes about asterisks since the finalists were announced. Was it handled well? Not particularly. Should fans have applauded at No Award? That's harder to say. I know that I felt some relief in some categories (and some sadness – I had voted for some slated things above the No Award line that I'd idly hoped might have had some chance) and I was well aware of that old hurt over the FAAns.

I don't know how to fix it. I don't know how to make the bully give the ball back. By the time it's done, recess will be over, and we'll all mourn what we lost: Dreams of rockets.

ALVA SVOBODA

The Mirror and the Trap: Roth, Projection, and the Unescapable Self

Alva Svoboda went to school one day and found no one home. At twelve he locced a fanzine and found the playground open. Now he nears the precipice of death haunted by three lovely women. He currently spends a lot of time reading and talking about it on his genuinely fascinating podcast, "My Mind Is My Own."
https://open.spotify.com/show/0yWzOlJP9NwSWRIx1rw5FN
– WM. BREIDING

THERE IS A PARTICULAR KIND of rereading that functions less like literary revisitation than like archaeology – you are excavating not the book but the person who first read it. Returning to Philip Roth's *Portnoy's Complaint* after decades compounds the archaeological complexities: it reveals how little I actually read it the first time, and how much the intervening years have changed what I see.

I first encountered the novel in a college-level literature course taught on the Simi Valley High School campus through Moorpark College – an advanced placement arrangement before that term had currency. The teacher, along with Roth and Sylvia Plath, brought Norman Mailer's *Why Are We in Vietnam?* into the suburban classroom without ceremony or apology, which should tell you something about the intellectual temperature of the room and of 1974, when Watergate had put all forms of cultural conservatism more on the defensive than they had ever been or perhaps ever would be after. What I cannot recover now is how *Portnoy* actually landed on me then. The sexual content that feels so overwhelming when I open the book today seemed not to register with the same force at seventeen. Perhaps we were guided through it so analytically that the shock dissipated in interpretation. Or perhaps I read it the way as a teenager I read most things – with the attention span of a moth that lands briefly on whatever catches the light and ignores everything else.

What genuinely changed my relationship to Roth came later, through *American Pastoral* and *The Human Stain*. Those books made him indispensable to me. The connective tissue is the prose itself — the torrential intelligence, the sensation that each sentence is a living thing pacing back and forth inside its own cage. And the themes that appear juvenile or merely transgressive in *Portnoy* turned out to be early signals of the deeper preoccupations Roth would spend a career refining: identity, inheritance, self-invention, the permanent war between the private self and the demands of the public world.

What gets me now, returning to the novel's opening pages, is the sheer brilliance of its first paragraphs. Young Portnoy, convinced during his first year of school that each of his teachers

is his mother in disguise, rushes home to catch her mid-transformation – only to find her already there in the kitchen with milk and cookies. And this, crucially, only deepens his respect for her powers. The joke is perfectly constructed, but the mechanism it describes is genuinely unsettling. The child doesn't interpret the coincidence as evidence against his theory; he interprets it as confirmation. Her omnipresence becomes proof of her omnipotence. He has created a supernatural explanation for an overwhelming psychological reality.

His mother isn't literally shapeshifting. She is simply so thoroughly embedded in his consciousness that he cannot perceive the world except through her. Every external authority becomes her in disguise – not because she is everywhere, but because he is everywhere, projecting her onto whatever he encounters.

There is a literary texture to this opening that feels like a deliberate inheritance – or at least a deep family resemblance. The household in I. B. Singer's fiction operates by similar rules: ordinary objects and figures take on preternatural weight, the boundary between the natural and the supernatural is genuinely porous, and the mother-figure in particular radiates an authority that exceeds rational explanation. Roth's Portnoy believes his mother can be in two places at once; Singer's characters half-believe their mothers can reach them from beyond the grave. I don't claim any great insight into what this means for Jewish postwar American culture, or into the specific way Roth positions himself in relation to the Eastern European world his parents' generation carried with them and then, in America, survived. But I notice the texture. The fabulation at the opening of *Portnoy* – the mother who is everywhere, whose powers exceed explanation – reads like a secular American descendant of that older imaginative world, transposed into a Newark kitchen and played, at first, for comedy.

This is where Roth turns out to be, unexpectedly, a contemporary writer. We are living through a moment in which people form intense, sometimes consuming relationships with AI systems, attributing to them agency, intention, insight, even love. When someone becomes convinced that a chatbot understands them in a way no person ever has – or that it wants things from them, or that it possesses some form of sentience – they are doing something structurally identical to what young Portnoy does. They are taking their own internal psychological reality and projecting it onto an external object, then experiencing that projection as if it were a supernatural power residing in the object itself. The chatbot, like Portnoy's mother-as-teacher, gains its authority not from what it actu-

ally is but from how deeply it has been embedded in the user's own consciousness. It is always already there when you arrive. It responds with uncanny accuracy because, in a meaningful sense, it has been trained on you.

The danger Roth identifies is not the power of the other. It is the power of our own projections, which we mistake for a force coming from outside us.

The novel invites comparison with very different kinds of writing – such as Michael Mertz's *Schattenfroh*, a monumental post–Cold War, post-digital meditation I've been reading alongside *Portnoy*, in which identity dissolves into language and language becomes a character unto itself, pacing the borders of the narrative like a restless guard. On the surface, Roth and Mertz could not occupy more distant literary territories: one is comic American confessional, loud and bodily and impossible to ignore; the other is a philosophical labyrinth left over from a country that no longer exists. But early in *Schattenfroh*, I came across a passage that stopped me – not because I went looking for a parallel to Roth, but because the parallel was simply there, constructed by the coincidence of reading the two books together:

"And so, just as I can be surprised at a rediscovery that frightened me as a child, I am now frightened in view of the images, the objects of which drove me into an unceasing rapture as a child until my mother took them to a secret place, to which all of my attention from then on was directed, until I recognized hiding as a rule of the game – even the prohibition on looking for something was a rule belonging to this game."

The echo is almost uncanny. Both passages are about a child who discovers that a powerful maternal figure has a secret jurisdiction – a hidden space, a capacity for concealment – and rather than this discovery diminishing her authority, it expands it. In Roth, the mother's omnipresence becomes proof of supernatural power. In Mertz, the mother's act of hiding becomes the origin of an entire epistemology: hiding is a rule of the game, and even the prohibition on searching is itself a rule. The child doesn't resist the structure; he internalizes it as the governing logic of the world. What Mertz adds that Roth only implies is the temporal dimension – the way prohibition doesn't end desire but redirects and immortalizes it. Roth's Portnoy spends the whole novel still trying to escape a consciousness shaped by his mother; Mertz's narrator seems to have accepted that the search itself, conducted under prohibition, is the permanent condition.

Both books circle the same existential drain. What parts of ourselves do we inherit? What parts do we invent? And

how much of the self is simply the residue of the words we deploy to explain ourselves – to our parents, to our lovers, to the state, to our own uneasy minds? Portnoy shouts these questions through comedy and shame. Mertz whispers them through fractured syntax and the detritus of global history. Both insist that the self is not a stable object but a performance conducted under pressure.

Which leads to *Portnoy*'s deepest insight, the one that outlasts the scandal and the shock. Roth wasn't writing about sexual neurosis, or not only about that. He was writing about the impossibility of escaping yourself – even through confession. Perhaps especially through confession. Every word you speak in an attempt to explain yourself only digs you further into the character you were trying to transcend. Language is simultaneously the tool for self-understanding and the mechanism that guarantees self-entrapment. The mirror and the trap are the same object.

Returning to *Portnoy's Complaint* now, the scandal has faded to background noise. What remains is something more durable: an early, ferocious demonstration of what Roth would spend the rest of his career perfecting. And the act of rereading it reveals something the first reading couldn't – that I was never really reading the book. I was reading myself, and the book was simply patient enough to wait until I was ready to notice that reading itself might be even more my métier than other forms of self-gratification.

STEVEN BRYAN BIELER

When Irving Comes Marching Home

Steven Bryan Bieler discovered fandom in 1973. His first fanzine publication was likely MAINSTREAM *edited by Kaufman & Tomkins. He published a personalzine called* ON COMPANY TIME. *It was composed and reproduced at work. Steve's first professional sale was to* UNEARTH *in 1978. They paid him the time-honored pulp rate of a half-cent per word. He recently completed a novel,* LAST TRAIN FROM RUNAWAY RIVER. *This piece was originally published in an obscure webzine called* NERVOUS BREAKDOWN *on Father's Day 2012 in slightly different form.* NERVOUS BREAKDOWN *published ten of Steve's essays. He is a lifelong mail art freak.*
– WM. BREIDING

IN THE LATE 1990S, my Dad, who had just turned 70, was interviewed by a very young nurse. She read in his record that he was a veteran. She asked which war he had served in: "Desert Storm?" No, Dad said. Guess again. "Vietnam?" No. "Well, then, which one?" Dad told her that he had served in the Civil War. "I've never met a Civil War veteran!" she exclaimed. Later, my Mom overheard this nurse telling her colleagues, "Did you know that Mr. Bieler was in the Civil War?"

Naturally, I never let my father forget this, and being my father he enjoyed his status as a veteran of the Grand Army of the Republic. When I found a postcard of a cave wall in Virginia in which Union and Confederate soldiers had carved their names, I added IRVING and drew a Star of David beside it and mailed it to him. Dad told me later that he was reading the names on the cave wall when he came to this Irving guy and thought how about that, some poor bastard back then had the same stupid name as me.... Wait a minute!

I can make jokes about my father's military history now, just as he always did, but it was a different story in my childhood. My friend Tommy's father was the captain of a PT boat in World War II, just like John F. Kennedy. One day Tommy showed me his medals, which lay jumbled in Mr. Monahan's sock drawer. That night, when Dad came home from work, I demanded to see his medals. I'd heard Dad's stories about the war, but they were all about goofing off, being a Jew in Texas, and how bad the chow was. What had he really done?

It turned out that my father wasn't holding anything back. Dad wasn't Sgt. Rock, Sgt. Saunders, or Sgt. York. All he wanted to do was follow his older brothers, my uncles Morry and Eddie, into the Army Air Corps. He tried to enlist toward the end of 1944 but was turned away for having flat feet. (The boys from his school who were accepted disappeared that December in the Battle of the Bulge.) He was drafted in March of 1945 and sent to basic training with the exact same feet.

When Hitler got word that he was now facing all three Bieler boys, he committed suicide. Dad proceeded through his training, first in Colorado, then in Texas, reached the

rank of corporal, and in classic Army fashion was ordered to hurry up and wait for his deployment overseas. He was never deployed, and then Japan surrendered. The only danger Dad faced on a regular basis was from the rickety Indian motorcycle he drove in his duties as messenger on an air base, and he always claimed that was fun. No combat, no medals except the one they handed out for behaving yourself and the one he claimed to have for goldbricking.

This is a tough truth to accept when you're a small boy in the 1960s and World War II is being re-fought every night on television and your friend up the street has a war hero for a father, though even I could see that Mr. Monahan was not a very warm person and was rarely around and in fact the Monahans got divorced a few years later and they all moved away. My Dad was usually available on weekends to play ball or skip rocks or just drive around and look at stuff.

I'm not judging Mr. Monahan as a father. I don't know what hell he went through in the middle of the Pacific in a plywood boat in which he was supposed to attack the Imperial Japanese Navy. My Dad had his flaws like all Dads and you could say he led a largely boring life, but I can't claim that my life has been significantly less flawed or more exciting. I was just happy to have my father around so I could ask him if they used hardtack instead of matzo during those Civil War seders.

Brothers in arms

Somewhere around the time Dad tangled with his poorly educated nurse, and maybe because of it, he put on his first WWII VETERAN baseball cap. I think that over time, the World War II vets began to appreciate that their war had been the biggest thing they'd ever been involved in. It was the biggest thing that anyone in the history of humanity had been involved in. No one was thinking this in the war's immediate aftermath. When I was a Cub Scout marching in our little town's Memorial Day parade in 1965, we didn't have many WWII veterans in formation with us. Why would they bother? They were everywhere, still young and too busy with their boats and their barbecues and their televised ballgames to dress up and play soldier again.

I remember marching in that parade behind a group of quiet, black-suited men in their 60s and 70s. These were the World War I guys. Ahead of them was a white convertible with a man in it who looked old enough to have fallen out of a bible. We had borrowed him from the next town over. He had served in Cuba in the Spanish-American War. I didn't connect

any of these gentlemen to my Dad. I'm sure the WWII vets didn't connect themselves to these old-timers, either.

Things happened when my elderly father wore one of his veteran caps. He originally wore them to remind people about the war. Wearing the cap became a mission, especially after he found out that he and Mom got better service in restaurants and airports. In this new century, when the men and women who won WWII are disappearing and we send more men and women to fight in wars that never seem to end, people want to make a connection. They want to talk to someone from that time and place. They want to see the man in the white convertible and know that there's continuity in our chaotic lives.

And so strangers stopped Dad and thanked him for his service. Vietnam veterans saluted him. Middle-aged women hugged him. A woman in the supermarket cried when she saw Dad and his cap and explained that her grandfather had served in WWII and how much she missed him. (Then she looked at Dad and asked, "How old are you?!")

I called my folks on one of their last Memorial Day weekends. Dad related his latest encounter, this time with one of his fellow WWII veterans at the flea market where Mom and Dad had their own table. When WWII vets see the hat they stop to talk, though they're unfailingly modest about what they accomplished. This gentleman (I'll call him Ike) had gone ashore at Salerno in 1943 and spent a year fighting his way up the mountainous spine of Italy. When Ike's wife showed up, the couple left, but as they did she asked him, "Do you know that man?"

"No," Ike told her. "But he's my brother."

My father, as he approached 90, told me he wanted to be the WWII equivalent of Frank Buckles, the last U.S. veteran of WWI. Buckles lived to be 110. I was rooting for Dad to pull this off; it would've given me something to write about in 2037. But Dad died in 2019, at 92.

"Thank you for your service," I once told him, "as my father." I don't care that you don't have any medals. I'm just glad you voted to reelect Lincoln in 1864.

CHRISTINA LAKE *Champagne and Chicken Shit*

I've always admired Christina Lake as unquestionably one of the finest fanwriters it's been my privilege to have encountered in my lifetime. While her perzine NOWHERE FAN *and genzine* HEAD!*, the latter co-edited with her partner Doug Bell, have been sadly infrequent in recent years, excellent work continues to appear in apas. Here is an earlier example of high quality narrative writing.*
– NIC FAREY

THE WATER INDUSTRY has been in the news lately in the UK following a Channel 4 docudrama highlighting failures of privatisation resulting in neglected infrastructure, high levels of river pollution and dangerous viruses lurking in the sea. This article was written in 1990 not long after privatisation when I was working for Wessex Water and found myself on a couple of trips to Europe as interpreter in a speculative venture on converting sludge to fertiliser. I don't know if this account shows that privatisation was a corrupt gravy train right from the start, or that for a while at least, there was actually a desire to innovate and find alternative solutions to the dirty problem of sewage disposal. A bit of both, I suspect. This two-parter appeared in *TWP* 62 January 1991 in a zine called "Apa Contributions in Ten Minutes a Day", though whether I wrote it in ten-minute chunks remains lost to posterity. My excitement at being allowed out of the office on a business trip might seem somewhat naïve now, but such things as all-expenses-paid foreign travel simply didn't happen to me back then in my largely desk-bound existence as a librarian. Also, this remains one of the few times when I actually got a free trip out of knowing a bit of French.

Part 1 | My Brilliant Career

It all began when Martin came rushing down to the library and greeted me with a huge smile. "Chrissie!" he said, throwing open his arms. "Hello, Martin," I returned sourly. I knew he was after something. The something in question this time turned out to be a phone call to France. Martin has just hit the language barrier: his contact could speak no English and he, naturally, could manage no French. I made the call for him – after all, it made a change from getting British Standards off the shelf for people – and helped Martin to fix up a meeting in Paris. At the end of the call, Martin, pleased with the success of it all, suggested that I better go to Paris with him. Many's the time I've joked about people taking me abroad as interpreter, but it had never come to anything, and I didn't expect this one to either. "Yes, please," I agreed with enthusiasm and

thought I'd hear no more about it. All the same I was serious. And, so it turned out, was Martin.

I had to arrange cover for the library as my job share partner was on holiday, get permission from my boss as Martin was in a totally different department, and pick up a few francs of spending money in case I had time to buy some *bandes dessinées*. All the rest was taken care of by Martin (or rather Martin's put-upon secretary, Jo).

On the way up to the airport in Martin's car, between making calls on his car phone,[1] Martin filled me in on the project. Wessex Water has a great deal of sewage sludge which at present it dumps at sea. But with increasing pressure from environmentalists and tighter EEC directives,[2] this option was not going to be available much longer.[3] The man we were going to meet in France was involved in a company using sludge pellets as fertilisers. Martin wanted to find out how it was done and check that our man finally sold the stuff and didn't just dump it in a hole in the ground somewhere. You could see by the glint in his eye that Martin was imagining himself single-handedly turning our sludge from a liability into a gold mine.

We arrived at Heathrow in good time, but panic set in as Martin realised that we were flying out from Terminal 4 and he'd arranged to meet Mervyn, the sewage treatment manager who was coming with us, in Terminal 1. Martin tried desperately to raise Mervyn on the car phone, then gave in and decided we had time to look for him at Terminal 1. I accompanied Martin to the rendez-vous point, wondering if I would recognise Mervyn (I knew the name, but didn't think we'd met), and hoping that he wouldn't be too fat, boring and pompous (my image of senior management). I stood by the shuttle check-in desk with my shoulder bag, reflecting on the strangeness of it all. Not so long ago I'd been there, waiting to fly out to Amsterdam for the Worldcon,[4] and now here I was, in the middle of an ordinary working day, wearing my office clothes, flying off to Paris with two strangers at someone else's expense. It didn't seem quite real.

Martin returned with Mervyn who turned out to be suitably thin and not obviously either boring or pompous. He did look rather startled to see me though. I think Martin had failed to mention there was going to be an interpreter and Mervyn was trying to size up the situation. Was I Martin's fancy woman? Would we slope off to bed early and leave him to spend a morose evening with only half a dozen prostitutes for company? I decided to let him work it out for himself.

1 There weren't many mobile phones around in 1990, so car phones seemed the height of hi-tech sophistication to me.

2 The EEC (or EU as we now call it) had much higher water quality standards than Britain.

3 Dumping sewage sludge at sea was finally banned in the UK in 1998

4 ConFiction in Den Haag, August 1990

On the aeroplane we ordered little bottles of champagne from the trolley, and soon we were all having a rather loud and merry time. Mervyn was given a different brand of champagne from Martin and me, so Martin decided to ask if we could each try a bottle of the one that Mervyn had, and Mervyn, recognising a good ploy, asked for a bottle of ours. Martin tried to ingratiate himself with the woman across the aisle from us. Mervyn confessed to reading science fiction. I discovered that champagne on aeroplanes makes your ears hurt a lot. Martin handed his empty bottle back to the steward and joked that another bottle would see us all through nicely to touchdown in Paris. Much to my surprise – and slight dismay – the steward took him seriously and returned with another three bottles for us. You have to remember that flights to Paris take under an hour.

Fortunately, there was an exceedingly long taxi drive through the Parisian traffic to sober us up. Mervyn and Martin realised with alarm that they'd been wearing their Wessex Water ties throughout and that perhaps our rather rowdy behaviour in flight would not redound entirely to the company's credit. "We should have reversible ties with Anglian Water on the other side," joked Mervyn, "just for occasions like this." Or maybe we should just drink less champagne, I reflected.

Clearly our hotel had been warned about us – they told us there was no room and they'd booked us into another hotel round the corner. One of their porters picked up our luggage and hurried us out into the street. The alternative hotel, bizarrely, was Dutch, and the receptionist told us in perfect English that unfortunately they only had suites left. "Take them! Take them!" I urged. My suite consisted of a sitting room, kitchen, bathroom and bedroom, complete with triple bed. There was even a microwave. All in all, it seemed a shame we would only be there the one evening, and that we would be spending most of that evening out eating. It was already 8 o'clock as I established by turning on TFI news, so I got ready for the evening, and went to meet the others in the foyer.

True to type (i.e. married businessmen abroad), Martin and Mervyn wanted to head straight for the red light district. I thought it would do as well as any other, so we took the metro to the Pigalle, where I managed to talk them out of going into the sex clubs, and into eating. We ended up in a North African restaurant next to one of the prostitute bars, which meant that interestingly dressed women would keep popping in for a few minutes rest between their rounds – so I reckon Martin and Mervyn had their money's worth, after all. Anyhow it was a

good place, that served us more fizzy wine and did an excellent couscous with several different kinds of meat and plenty of sauce. Predictably I came nowhere near to finishing mine.[5] By the time we left, the performances at the sex club were nearly over (even the lesbian show), so we went into a different club where they were playing loud music, circa about 1979, and my body in a last desperate attempt at saving itself from a hangover, knocked over the malibu and pineapple I'd just ordered (on Martin's Wessex Water money, of course[6]). At some point we crawled out of the club, took a taxi back, and I tried to get a few hours' sleep, remembering suddenly what I'd been drinking to forget – that the next day I was going to have to justify my place on the trip by parading my rather rusty French in front of a no doubt critical native.

The original idea had been to stay in the same hotel as M. Clement, the man we were seeing. However, after telling us which hotel to book, M. Clement suddenly found he was booked into a completely different one. This meant that not only did we have to negotiate getting downstairs for breakfast but actually find our way across Paris to another hotel. Clearly none of us had our wits about us, as instead of ordering a taxi from the hotel we wandered out into the streets where all the taxis were full and the taxi ranks empty and wasted at least a quarter of an hour looking for one.

At the hotel I asked for M. Clement at reception, then spent a gripping few minutes trying to work out which of the people emerging from the lifts might be him. I also had to get Mervyn an aspirin. Only Martin looked bright enough to deal with the meeting. As for me, I felt like there was a thick layer of cotton wool between me and the rest of the world and that my body was functioning on remote control at a great distance from my brain. I couldn't see how I was going to be of any use at all to anybody. Nevertheless, I soon found myself seated between Martin and this rather dapper-looking French man in his fifties, doing my best to talk about the nitrogen content of our sludge. Miraculously it all went pretty well. It soon became apparent that they really did need me. M. Clement could only understand a tiny bit of English and Martin and Mervyn none of his replies. Soon I stopped feeling a fraud and began to enjoy myself. There was a sticky moment when I couldn't for the life of me think of the French for 'seed', but otherwise it all seemed to make sense.

After the meeting, Martin and Mervyn caught a taxi to the airport to fly on to Zurich and I had a couple of hours to wander round Paris before going home. I felt too tired to do much more than go into a supermarket and buy some wine

5 I must have had a much smaller appetite back in 1990!

6 Apparently before the advent of company credit cards for charging back expenses.

and cheese to take home.[7] I flew back to Heathrow on my own, caught the coach to Bristol, and arrived back just in time to try and impress the Bristol SF group with the story of my jet-setting new career.

Part 2 | My Career Goes Bung

The second trip was much longer than the first. Martin insisted on going overland in the company Range Rover, mainly so that he could bring back as much cheese and wine and other pre-Christmas goodies as possible. This time Mervyn gave me a lift down to Heathrow, where we were due to meet up with Martin and the Range Rover. By the time we'd parked we were running slightly late, so we tried to raise Martin on the car phone to get him to pick us up. Characteristically enough, Martin's phone was engaged. So, we were forced to revert to Plan A and wait for the airport bus to take us over to Arrivals at Terminal 1 where we'd arranged to meet.[8] It took a while to establish that Martin was in fact waiting for us at Departures, where it was a relief to finally spot the Range Rover and the familiar sandy-headed figure of Martin.

After all this messing about we were well behind schedule for catching our ferry. We drove through the rain to Dover, sucking wine gums and trying to raise the port authorities on the car phone to see if they would save a place for us. We got there about twenty minutes before sailing time, and amazingly they let us on board. The weather on land had looked pretty nasty and Martin had mumbled darkly about gales. Fortunately, the crossing was only mildly rough and we arrived in Calais in good enough spirits to head on down to Reims before stopping to find our hotel for the night.

Martin was payrolling the expedition once again, and mindful of group tradition and the fact that we were in the centre of France's champagne growing region we headed out to the bar and ordered a bottle of champagne. This act caused a certain amount of interest as the locals sized Martin up and the girls flashed their eyes (and other parts of their anatomy) at him. Martin managed to escape, wallet still intact, and we headed on to a restaurant for more champagne, beef fondue, and at Mervyn's insistence, a glass of Poire William. The William, which was an extremely strong spirit of some kind, proved to be a mistake, but the rest was gorgeous. Martin, possibly hoping some of the girls would still be around, took us back to the original bar, and ordered more champagne.

The next morning, Mervyn had a headache again, but Martin was in fine spirits. In between pointing out buzzards, he enumerated his favourite female actresses ("Damn fine

7 Which I could just take on board the plane in my carry-on luggage. Happy days!

8 Had we learned nothing from the previous trip? Evidently not.

women," he kept repeating) and drove us crazy by trying to remember the lead woman from the 1970s comedy series 'My Wife Next Door'. At one point it occurred to him to wonder if perhaps he was still drunk. All the same, he and Mervyn took it in turns to drive while I navigated and we made it safely to our destination of Chalon-sur-Saône by mid-afternoon.

Chalon seemed to consist of outlying industrial estates, a murky river and a standard French city centre. We all went out shopping, and I bought the number one single in France at the time which I jokingly referred to as a lesbian song because it was called 'Une femme avec une femme'. In fact, when I read the lyrics on the sleeve I realised that actually it was. [9]

At dinner in the evening, we were due to meet M. Mauméjean from Swiss Combi and our friend M. Clement. M. Clement, it turned out, wouldn't be there till later, so we were left to entertain M. Mauméjean who had nothing wrong with him, except that he had no stomach and spoke perfect English. The lack of stomach was due to cancer; the perfect English came from weeks of eating mashed potato with an English family in his youth, and spelt disaster for my career as interpreter.

"This will be our treat," said Martin to the man with no stomach as he ushered him into the dining room. For some reason, Martin couldn't leave the subject of stomachs alone and kept inquiring into the poor man's internal arrangements. Fortunately, the French like nothing better than to talk about their health, and even though a Basque, M. Mauméjean answered all of Martin's questions with perfect equanimity. Meanwhile a waiter took pity on Mervyn who was making no headway with the menu and gave him the English translation. The hotel cuisine was so haute that it was hard to order anything that did not contain an assortment of snails, quail eggs or little birds in aspic. Mervyn thought he was safe with Mercurey Beef [10] until it arrived with a neat pile of brown stuff on it that turned out to be tripe.[11] In between courses the waiters would come round and serve us other little courses, just to make sure we wouldn't eat everything in front of us, and doggedly refused to pour the wrong colour wine for the course in progress, whatever your preference.

Halfway through the meal, M. Clement arrived. Unfortunately, I was at the wrong end of the table to rescue my career by making sophisticated conversation with him. However, I did catch on when Clement was telling Mauméjean that he had totally forgotten to book into the hotel, and was able to admire the photo of his yacht on the Mediterranean, covered

9 Mecano 'Une femme avec une femme' *https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nG1f-WSxSqBI*. I obviously didn't expect lesbianism to be so mainstream in France at the start of the '90s.

10 Beef cooked in the local red wine.

11 This would be Doug's worst nightmare too.

in bikini clad women. M Clement, we decided, was something of a playboy.

At dessert time, Mervyn got his revenge on the waiters by demanding they let him have syrup on his fresh pineapple.

At the end of this extravaganza, despite all Martin's efforts, the man with no stomach managed to pay, then went off to recover from the strains of eating.

The next morning we were up in good time to look round the sludge pelleting plant with M. Clement and M. Mauméjean. It was a cold desolate morning to be visiting what turned out to be a collection of yards and sheds housing piles of chicken shit and other dung. The smells weren't all that appetizing either. I thought my feet would freeze as I stood on the edge of the circle straining to hear what M. Clement was saying to M. Mauméjean. Naturally M. Mauméjean did all the interpreting. He and M. Clement had known each other for years. It wasn't till we were back in a nice quiet office that I noticed that M. Mauméjean did not necessarily translate everything M. Clement said in its entirety and frequently added his own observations to what they were saying. I began to feel slightly useful after all.

Martin spent some time admiring M. Clement's fast flashy sports car. You could see the thought going through his head that there was a lot of money to be made in this shit business.

After saying goodbye to M. Clement and M. Mauméjean, we set out on the last leg of the journey across the mountains into Switzerland to see the Swiss Combi sludge drying machine in action on Wessex Water sludge (driven by tanker from Bristol to Switzerland). The mountains were covered with a sprinkling of snow though it wasn't snowing at the time, and some of the buildings, perched up on sheer rocks, were so spectacular that I navigated us the wrong way (which meant we had to turn back and see them again – what a shame). Switzerland itself, or rather the town we were in, totally fazed me. Biel/Bienne, as its dual name suggests, is part French and part German, and I could never work out for the life of me which of the two languages to use. In the restaurant we went to in the evening, the waiter spoked to us in French and woman in charge used German. One woman we asked directions from spoke something incomprehensible that may well have been a local dialect.[12] Most of them summed us up straight away and spoke English. All the same I hated approaching anyone to speak because I was convinced that whichever language I started on would be the wrong one – and you never knew if it was your accent that was at fault or simply that they didn't speak the language. I was so confused that by the time I

12 Or simply Swiss German, which is quite hard to understand even if you know some standard German.

reached Zurich to fly back I'd forgotten that Zurich was safely German and I tried talking to the newspaper seller in French (which he didn't understand at all).

The sludge dryer was much less smelly than M. Clement's pelletizing plant, and you could watch it all on a television screen, churning round and round, like food digesting in M. Mauméjean's non-existent stomach. No-one needed me to interpret anything as they all spoke English (even the group of visiting Australians). When the first dried granules came out Mervyn took a sample and we headed back for the train to Zurich and the plane back London. I had a rare meeting in London the next day and Mervyn was needed back in the office so poor old Martin had to drive the Range Rover back across France on his own, no doubt burbling to himself all the way about stomachs, buzzards and damn fine women.

THAT WAS IT for my short career as interpreter. Wessex Water went on to buy one of Swiss Combi's sludge dryers, and then in 1996 to buy the whole company. But apparently the process was very energy intensive and the product rather smelly, so maybe Martin never made his millions after all. Reusing sludge as fertiliser should be the perfect example of what we now call the circular economy, but only if the water companies can make the sludge safe. Heavy metals used to be the big problem and sewage products were regulated accordingly, but now it's micro-plastics, and there are no easy tests or regulation for that. Wessex Water have since gone on to use their waste as biofuel for buses, which sounds like a good idea, assuming there are no hidden environmental costs. Back in 1990 the idea of converting sludge into agricultural compost seemed too good to be true, and perhaps it was. After all, there was a whole load of chicken shit involved.

CY CHAUVIN *1,200 Plastic Bag Years: Imprisoned in a Thrift Store*

Cy Chauvin discovered fanzines through John D. Berry's "Clubhouse" column in AMAZING STORIES. *He never questioned the concept of fanzines or fan terminology. Cy was a born fan! His first apa was a newly created one, Apa-50, founded by Chris Sherman in 1974. With Leah Zeldes he later founded Mishap (Michigan Society of Amateur Publishers – silent fannish "H.") Much later Cy joined Stipple-Apa, based in Minneapolis, where he is still a member, and where this article originally appeared, in a couple of different forms. For much of Cy's career as a fan he has been hypersercon but he has always had a lighter more personable touch. He does both very well. For many years Cy lived in inner urban Detroit. In retirement he returned to the ancestral manse in Roseville, Michigan.*
– WM. BREIDING

HOW DID IT HAPPEN that I, the most unlikely person possible, become the 'manager' of a thrift store in the basement of a church? I've never desired to be the manager of anything! I never went to garage sales. I was actually too shy. I thought I might disturb the sellers from some more profitable activity (such as sleeping).

I hated the idea of being watched as I shopped. I would have felt obligated to buy something – such as that electric hot dog toaster shaped like the head of Mickey Mouse, or the homemade cookie jar molded to resemble a Calico Cat. There are, after all, only so many strange presents I can ship to Jeanne Mealy to bribe her when I miss a Stipple-Apa deadline, or to fulfill the predictions of her soothsayer at the Minnesota State Fair.

And really, I just wanted books, and garage sales are not the best place to find them.

I did go to the Salvation Army store when I worked downtown. It was just a block from work, and there were no other retail places within easy walking distance. This Salvation Army store had a very well organized book section, although the inventory didn't change much. I used to deliberate a great deal on what I bought.

And I bought other things there. A typewriter, a mimeograph, an antique wooden table, and endless coffee mugs and cat toys. It was especially helpful when I didn't have a car.

But I never wanted to work there, or in any thrift store.

Like many other undesirable things, the job just crept up on me. First, I volunteered in the community garden, which was located next to the church with the thrift store in the basement. I went there on my way home from work, listening to the church bells ring, and weeded and planted in a sort of meditational bliss. Time would pass without my awareness.

Then someone suggested I should do the gardening on Saturday mornings, to a regular schedule, so others could volunteer with me. So it could be an activity that could be recorded and pointed to – 'this happens then.'

Saturdays mornings were also the time the thrift store was open.

So I did this. No one ever came to help weed. (Were they expecting miracles?) Not that I minded in my vegetable bliss. Sometimes the women who worked in the thrift store asked me to carry donations inside or help customers take large purchases to their car.

I noticed that no one was putting the sign advertising when the store was open to the curb so passerby's could see it, so I started doing that. Well, most of the workers were 80 plus, and deaf, blind, or crippled. I exaggerate (none were *legally* blind).

There was talk and talk about advertising some items on Craigslist, but no one could ever seem to get it together to do this, so I did. (Since besides being over eighty, deaf, and illegally blind, all were computer illiterate.)

Then I helped during the winter when the garden was no longer active, for something to do that got me out of the house. Something that didn't seem to involve a real commitment. Fool that I was!

Perhaps I saw something of my grandmother in Dolores, the 80 plus woman in charge. She was unfailingly kind and helpful to her customers, and everyone in the church. In time, I suppose, I became the responsible one, without meaning to; it's what happens, when you give too much of yourself.

There are never many customers in the store (except at Apple Harvest Festival time), but some buy regularly. Some regulars buy $50 or more at one time, which in our low priced store, amounts to several boxes of stuff. We have few clothes compared to other thrift stores, but lots of stuff. Sheets and kitchenware, games and puzzles, adult diapers, greeting cards, baby items, tennis rackets, golf clubs, bowling balls, a whole jewelry case, pickle pluckers, lamps & light bulbs, baskets, glassware, coffee pot carafes, a room filled with fabric, yarn, and sewing & craft items (Dolores was a quilter). Another room is filled with books, toys and records. I donated a large number of duplicate copies of *Analog* from the 1970's and was gratified to see some sold the day I brought them in, and the rest a month later. Most books sit there for years.

We even have some tubes of colored ink (sealed in plastic) for your mimeograph machine (Gestetner brand, the best!).

Sometimes we get donated items whose purpose is a mystery, so volunteers confer. I didn't know what a "grabber" was when I first saw one, but it is used by someone with limited mobility to reach something below their normal arm's length. How about a pineapple corer? A metal grater (still sealed in plastic) that I thought was to be used to shred cabbage to make sour kraut turned out to be a pierogi roller.

Some items remain a mystery, but are put out for sale anyway, and bought by mysterious customers for mysterious purposes.

I am disappointed when customers leave and buy nothing. It seems a personal failure. Of course, for many it is the *hunt* that is the thrill. The fact that we have twelve coffee makers (with or without matching carafes) is not impressive if you are just out for the hunt. ("What are you looking for?" "I'll know when I see it!").

Volunteer workers at the store make the best customers. After all, they are stuck there among our brimming bargains all Saturday morning, and get first look when new donations come in.

Among the more colorful volunteers has been one I will call 'Animal Rescue Roscoe.' She lives in a house near the church that is filled with rescued cats and dogs, downstairs and up. She wanted a television from the thrift store, but needed someone to carry it inside her house, so I volunteered. I struggled to get it inside, my way blocked by so many balloon-like bags of plastic grocery sacks that billowed and constricted the entry way that I felt I was bursting through an airlock. Inside the living room, a tiny Chihuahua was sitting in a kennel cage atop a pile of newspapers and broken furniture. The front porch of the house was sheathed in tattered strips of clear plastic, waving like the plastic banners in the breeze.. The backyard is a barren, weed lined dog-yard.

Roscoe also has a condo in a wealthy suburb, which had as its sole inhabitants two cats; otherwise, it was a warehouse filled with boxes, floor to ceiling.

Is there a scientific connection between those who hoard animals and those who hoard things? Pets seem completely different, but this affliction seems to occur in pairs. Perhaps it is people who become sentimentally attached to objects as well as animals. As I told my sister, some people have as many pets in their house as light bulbs.

I do wonder – how does one get the hoarding disease? Might the germs be passed on from old furniture and detritus? Is it lurking in my very thrift store? Might I get it? (I have felt this need now for some months to save rubber bands and plastic sacks.)

Animal Rescue Roscoe has, however, been a great help in the store, perhaps taking its mission more seriously than I. At least, for her, its mission is to recycle stuff, as much or more than to make some money for the church, or to help people.

This mission of recycling has at times been taken to an extreme, such as when she told me off after I slit open a bag of

donations, since I could not untie it. After all, I had destroyed a perfectly useful plastic bag!

I calmed her by saying that just as one of our years is seven years in the life of a dog, it is also 1,200 years in the life of a bag, so this bag was already well past its prime! … It had been stuffed and stretched, overloaded with donations – perhaps it was kinder that I put it to sleep.

The thrift store can bring some odd satisfactions. I've found I enjoy making simple repairs on broken items (replacing missing or loose screws) and matching up incomplete donations to make a 'marriage' – such as a lid to a pot. My most extensive work has been recovering and repairing dining room chairs. This gives great satisfaction, and we have lots of fabric to spare, but I'm not sure how much sense it makes. Certainly the time spent earns vastly less than minimum wage.

When I went away to Canada for my ill-fated trip to Winnipeg, I had to leave the thrift store in charge of a group of these women, among them Animal Rescue Roscoe. My absence was ill fated for them as well: now none are talking to the others. "Oh, how could you leave me Cy, with that awful woman!" said one.

I've been afraid to ask the details. It will be two years this July, and still no one is talking.

If one of our years is seven years in the life of a dog, and one of our years is 1,200 in the life of a bag, how many years is that in the life of a volunteer manager?

I hope my end as a manager comes quickly and painlessly.

SANDRA BOND *Gilbert and Sullivan News Channel*

Sandra Bond, a friend since my earlier days in fandom, contains multitudes. Poet, novelist and activist, she has added convention co-chair and TAFF winner to her extensively admirable fannish resume. Not to mention her perennial hosting of the fannish Corflu panel game "Just A Minac".

Her own words at the beginning of this piece serve to divulge the provenance of a foray into sketch comedy.

– NIC FAREY

I'VE WRITTEN EVERYTHING, ME. Before I came to realise my limitations and stick to being a barely perceptible footnote in the annals of science fiction and fantasy, I tried writing mainstream fiction, magazine articles (general), magazine articles (political), magazine articles (travel – that one ended up in *Banana Wings*), radio sit-coms (I still think mine was better than some of the tosh Radio 4 pumps out nowadays), and... sketch comedy. This one did the rounds of every sketch show I could find which would accept submissions over the transom from the unwashed and unagented, and duly came back from every one of them without so much as a single personalised rejection. Nic Farey, rot him, put his finger on the nub when I sent it to him for his new project: "It seems unfinished." Well, Rik Mayall and Ade Edmondson could get away with concluding a sketch with "Saturday. Sunday." "What's that?" "A weak end." I am evidently not Mayall and Edmondson, and so this sketch wound up being shovelled into my FAPAzine *Fourth Age Lembas* #3, February 2012, when I found myself in need of verbiage to make minac in a tearing hurry.

A TELEVISION NEWS ROOM. Two anchorpeople sit at the newsdesk, in shadow so that we can't see them initially other than their outlines. News-channel theme music plays; it's the Major-General's song from PIRATES OF PENZANCE, but arranged in such a way that it's not initially obvious. The music drops as the lights rise and we see that the newscasters are dressed as a Victorian lady and a Beefeater:

HE: Good evening. I'm Leonard Meryll.

SHE: And I'm Aline Sangazure. You're watching the Gilbert and Sullivan News Channel.

Theme music up to conclusion.

MERYLL: Tonight's main story. The HMS Pinafore enquiry enters its third week and Ralph Rackstraw's allegations against Captain Corcoran continue.

PHOTO INSERT *of* RACKSTRAW, *dressed in Victorian naval togs.*

VOICE OVER: Well… Captain Corcoran used to… Uh… We used to have to go to his cabin at night. Just one of us at a time. And… and…

VOICE OVER (2): Take your time, Petty Officer.

VOICE OVER: He used to make us… you know…

VOICE OVER (2): Please tell the court martial in full.

VOICE OVER: We had to… play the mandolin. And sometimes he'd…. oh god… he'd sing.

Cut back to the newsroom. Meryll and Sangazure look suitably solemn.

SANGAZURE: And it's expected to be at least another week before the enquiry comes to a conclusion regarding the shocking collision in the English Channel in which six hundred sailors and members of the public lost their lives. Leonard.

MERYLL: Parliamentary news. There was drama in the House of Lords today where the Earl of Mountararat was scheduled to give his controversial speech on the proposed Fairies and Supernatural Nuisances Bill. The Earl is well known for his robust opinions on the question of immigrants from the seelie kingdom. As he was about to speak, six fairies invaded the House of Lords, and scuffles broke out. Adam Goodheart is outside Parliament:

Cut to outside Parliament. Adam Goodheart, dressed as a BBC interviewer (but with a hunched back and eyepatch), is interviewing the Earl of Mountararat, in full ermine robes and coronet. The Earl has a black eye.

GOODHEART: If it please your Lordship. Some have hailed you as a have-a-go hero for your actions in the House today.

MOUNTARARAT: That's very pleasing to know, but I merely did what any true British man would have done in such a situation. These fairies come to our shores, they take up jobs that British-born people should be doing, and then to add insult to injury, they perform them by magic rather than by good

honest toil. It's very disheartening to British workers to find foreign fairies, half of whom don't even speak English, assembling cars or moving furniture just by waving magic wands at them.

I am not a racialist; I respect these fay, as I believe they call themselves. But their culture is not ours and they are refusing to adapt to our way of life as they should. If you give them a bath, they just put pixie dust in it.

GOODHEART: What exactly happened inside the Chamber?

MOUNTARARAT: Well, I rose to speak, and as I did so a bunch of extremely loud and raucous fairies, dressed in dungarees, flew down into the house on those so-called wings they use, and scattered glitter all over the place. Of course I couldn't stand for this, so I punched the nearest one, and –

Sudden cut back to newsroom.

SANGAZURE: Sorry to interrupt that interview, but we are now able to bring you live pictures from Penzance, where the siege of the pirates' base is now entering its third day. It has now been confirmed that the pirates do indeed have hostages, and that they have threatened to execute one of Major-General Stanley's daughters every hour unless their demands are met.

CURT PHILLIPS *Veterans Day*

First appeared in TIME AND AFAIN *#7, edited by the late Dave Locke, November 2008.*
– CURT PHILLIPS

HERE IN THE UNITED STATES we will very shortly be commemorating Veterans Day on November 11th; the anniversary of the end of the First World War. Originally called "Armistice Day" the name was changed many years ago to encompass the veterans of all wars – since it eventually became clear that the "War to End All War" – as WWI was referred to at the time – wasn't going to live up to its billing. And so each Nov. 11 – or sometimes the closest Saturday morning – many towns and cities all across America hold parades and other events to celebrate the veterans who've served in the military and to remember those who died in our wars. Every kid loves a parade, and when I was very young my dad – a Korean War veteran of the US Air Force – used to take me to Bristol for the annual parade. This was back during the Vietnam War and I suppose that there was more open support for the military in those years than there would be just a few years later, but then my part of the country is very conservative and has a long tradition of supporting our people in the armed services, regardless of where they stood on the war at hand. Those parades of my childhood were impressive affairs with whole companies of uniformed soldiers from the local reserve and National Guard units; tanks and military vehicles, high school marching bands, floats, and other attractions. Could you but look back in time to Veterans Day in Bristol in 1966, you might spot the 6-year-old Curt standing with his dad on State Street wearing his father's old Air Force dog tags around his neck and waving his small American flag as the local soldiers marched by. The oldest veterans in our community would often ride in open convertibles or on the backs of flatbed trucks, and many of these were veterans of the First World War with signs that identified them as members of "The 30th Infantry Division," or even "Veterans of the Argonne" or of other WWI battles. One of my uncles always used to drive a car with my elderly great-uncle Luther Maynes in the parade. Uncle Luke was Bristol's last surviving Spanish-American War veteran and he became such a local institution that when he died a few weeks before Veterans Day in 1969, my uncle drove his empty car in the parade with signs edged in black crepe that read "In Memory

of Pvt. Luther Maynes – Spanish-American War". Folks on the sidewalks stood and placed their hands over their hearts and soldiers saluted when my uncle's car drove by that day.

Americans of a certain age will remember the change in the spirit of our country in the early to mid 1970's as it slowly and very painfully became clear that the War in Vietnam had gone terribly wrong, and that the patriotic high we'd all been enjoying since WWII had contributed to leading us down a road that most of us realized far too late that we'd never wanted to travel. Apparently by 1974, folks around these parts didn't feel like holding parades much anymore, and Bristol stopped having the Veterans Day parade for the next several years. I was older by then and had other things to do anyway, and just didn't think about all that anymore. Time – instead of parades – marched by...

By 1989 I was married and was working as an electronic tech at a local company. The mood of America had gradually changed again and Bristol woke from its patriotic slumber and decided to start holding a parade on Veterans Day again. Out of, perhaps, a feeling of nostalgia I attended and saw something I'd never expected to see; a whole company of Confederate soldiers marching through Bristol. They were the first Civil War reenactors I'd ever seen and I followed them to the end of the parade, talked with a few of the fellows and made some contacts. A few months later I entered that hobby myself, as a Union soldier. (I'll tell you why I chose the blue over the gray someday in another article...). A few years later that hobby led to another; WWII reenacting, and one nifty thing about that hobby is that a great many WWII veterans are still around and can talk with us about the days when they were young men who went off to fight their war. WWII reenacting was a very inexpensive hobby in those days since the local flea markets and junk shops were full of cast off WWII uniforms and equipment so we WWII reenactors could outfit ourselves very cheaply. Being compulsive by nature I picked up such stuff whenever I could find it and stored it away for trading or other possible use.

Have I ever mentioned that my wife Lizbeth is a middle school teacher? I'm in awe of people who can be a teacher to teenagers. It's a task that I know would utterly defeat me. Anyway, I sometimes visit Liz's school and have given talks to her classes about Civil War history and have gotten to know many of her students over the years. One fall a few years ago while visiting her classroom I was talking with some of the kids about *why* I enjoyed the reenacting hobby. "I've never had to fight in a war," I told them, "but I'm very much aware

that a lot of Americans have had to leave home to go and fight in wars to protect us. Reenacting old battles helps me understand that those soldiers of our country's past weren't just fighting for their own interests or the political ideas of their day; they were fighting to try and build the future that we live in today." The kids had a tough time with that concept. It may have been the first time anyone had ever shown them the idea of timebinding. I asked them if they had grandparents or parents who'd been in the military. A fellow named Micah immediately spoke up. "My grandfather was in WWII," he said. I happened to know Micah's grandfather. He was a former mayor of Bristol and a well known local car dealer. "Have you ever asked him to tell you about his experiences?" I asked. "No, not really," replied Micah. "I've heard him talking with other old men about the war, but that just seems like stuff that only old people talk about. Old folks never talk to us about the old days." *Well, of course not,* I thought to myself. *And they won't until you guys start asking some questions.* I was beginning to feel one of my Ideas start to bloom in the back of my mind.

After checking out a few things I went back to Liz's class at the end of school a week or so later and gathered three of the kids I'd been talking with earlier including Micah. "How would you guys like to dress up in complete WWII uniforms and march in the Bristol Veterans Day parade in a couple of weeks?" I asked. Well, they were up for it – only they didn't know then all that I had planned for them.

Comes the next Veterans Day at 0600 and the three young men, their parents and I all gather at the fire station where I was a volunteer firefighter at the time. I'd hauled in about a dozen sets of uniforms the evening before and we spent nearly two hours fitting three excited teenagers into the proper size uniforms, getting the right size shoes on each, and making sure that each had the proper insignia and decorations to represent local infantry soldiers of WWII. Much of the time was spent teaching the boys what each of the ribbons and the other parts of their uniforms *meant*. I had two of them wearing the shoulder patch of the Army's 80th Division since many veterans of that infantry unit still lived in the region, while Micah and I wore the "Old Hickory" insignia of the Army's 30th Infantry Division. The National Guard unit that had been based in Bristol before WWII was part of that Division and though he didn't know it that morning, Micah's grandfather had been a member of it.

We were all outfitted and looking sharp. The boys were obviously very excited but were trying their best to act cool and professional about the whole thing. I led them to the fire

truck bay and spent the next half hour teaching them the rudiments of military formation and military courtesy. To my delight they all knew how to march already and were pretty good at it thanks to the middle school band experience they had. It was actually much harder for them to learn how to salute, but they were keen to learn the art and to get it exactly right. I'm afraid I had earlier impressed on them that the key to being a military reenactor is to take it seriously and to get the details right and they took my words to heart. As we finished our drill I was proud to tell them that if we were suddenly to fall back in time to 1941, they would all pass for real soldiers. (At least until they had to show their Army ID somewhere…).

We loaded up in my car and drove into Bristol to the parade assembly area which by 0930 was a miasma of VFW types, military trucks, high school band kids running to find their groups, Civil War reenactors running to find a cup of coffee and a sausage biscuit, Shriners dressed as parade clowns (that might be a local thing…), color guard units from all the various services, local politicians, and all the other things that go into making a big, noisy hometown parade. Into the middle of this marched – with perfect military precision – our small unit of 4 "WWII soldiers" to the admiring looks of bystanders and the grins of gray-haired veterans. We still had a good bit of time before we were to start, just as I had planned, and I used that time by taking my guys up to some of the Veterans groups and making them talk with some actual WWII veterans. I say "making" them talk, only because up to that moment these boys – all of them 15 years old – had very little experience in talking with people of their grandparents' generation *as social equals*. I was thinking of how I might explain this to the boys when one of them – Josh – asked a question and gave me the opening I needed.

"Why are they looking at us like that?" he asked. "Why are they grinning and not saying anything?" I turned and caught the gaze of all three of my time-travelers. "It's because right at this moment, they're not seeing three middle school kids. They're seeing three young soldiers from 1941. Right now, just for this moment, they've gone back in time 60 years to when *they* were teenagers in uniform going off to fight for their country. They've gone back in time for a moment and *you* guys made that possible for them." I grinned and stepped back. "A few weeks ago you guys asked me what it is that reenactors really do and why I do it. *This* is why we do it, and each of you has just done it yourselves. You've made a connection with people from an earlier time. And you've done it very,

very well." And then we went over and said hello to the kids of 1941.

I took them first to a group of guys I knew well, the marching unit of the local Korean War Veterans Association. These fellows are a lively bunch, most of them WWII veterans as well as Korean War veterans. My guys got to practice their salutes which were all returned with grins and more importantly, they got treated as though they were doing something very cool and very special by those 70-something men. They were getting the kind of respect that adults usually accord each other, and added to that, they were getting a little of the "esprit de corps" that soldiers everywhere accord each other. Of course, those veterans understood exactly who my kids were and what they were doing, but they were reacting to the respect that my boys had shown in putting on those uniforms and in conducting themselves in a proper military fashion, and to the respect that my boys were showing *them* by trying to literally march a mile in their shoes. As I had hoped, those old uniforms were bridging a gap. After that I took my guys over to a float from the local VA hospital and introduced them to a few fellows I knew. There was Paul – who lost his right leg in the attack at Hickham Field on December 7th, 1941. Next to him was Jim, who had a foot amputated after it froze during the Battle of the Bulge. And Jim introduced us all to a new resident of the VA, Clifton, who was an Army paratrooper in the Pacific who lost the use of both legs on his last combat jump. There were several other folks I knew in the assembly area, like Mrs. Williamson, who called us over to her car – she was riding with the parade marshal – to admire our uniforms. She was a Navy nurse during WWII and Korea. And a very tall elderly man came over to talk briefly with us. He was Dempsey W. Morgan and in WWII he'd been a 2nd Lt. in the Army Air Forces and flew a P-51 Mustang fighter plane against the Luftwaffe as a member of the famed "Tuskeegee Airmen". Later after the parade was over I managed to get a photo of Lt. Morgan with my guys. We took up our position about then and began our part of the march.

Rather than just march I'd brought a large 48 star American flag (which was the correct number of stars during the WWII years) and the four of us carried it flat in the parade, one at each corner, much as I've seen large groups carry larger flags at football games on TV. There actually isn't anything in the Army's Drill and Ceremonies Manual that authorizes that sort of carry – I looked – but it looked good and seemed to impress the parade audience. As we proceeded at a slow march, groups of people along the route broke out in applause all along the

way, and the guys all stood a little straighter and marched a little tighter each time that happened. There were dozens of current soldiers, sailors, airmen and Marines in uniform all along the route. To a man – and two women – they all came to attention and saluted us as we passed. So did the police officers and Firefighters spaced along the route. So did the Boy Scouts – and there were hundreds of them – and the older veterans in their VFW caps and "WWII Veteran" ball caps. So did a group of Vietnam veterans in their biker colors with their "Rolling Thunder" emblems. So did an elderly man in a wheelchair, who with the assistance of a younger man with him, insisted on standing up from his chair to salute as we passed. And so did a 6-year-old boy with a small American flag who was standing with his dad in just about the exact same spot on the sidewalk where I used to stand about 40 years earlier.

And so did a group of older men, veterans all, standing together in the heart of downtown under the marquee of the Paramount Theater where I'd asked them to wait for us. Front and center of that group was Micah's grandfather, wearing his VFW Post Commander's cap and flanked by his VFW buddies and the parents of my three young comrades. As we approached, he caught sight of his grandson who – thanks to a photograph I'd borrowed earlier that week – was wearing the same kind of uniform with the exact same division patch, rank chevrons, and decorations that he'd worn in WWII. It wasn't a proper thing to do since we were carrying the colors, but just as we passed, I called, "Detail, Eyes Right!" just to make sure that Micah and his grandfather crossed that last generation gap together.

A few days later I got a call from Micah's grandfather. He thanked me for putting the boys in the parade and told me that his grandson and he had been talking every day since the parade, not just about his Army days but about his childhood – and Micah's – the post-war years when he was establishing his business and political career, and other family matters. In fact, he was taking Micah and his two fellow marchers from the parade to lunch the next day. It seems the other boys wanted to hear some of the stories too. I guess we all had had a very good Veterans Day.

TERRY FLOYD *Report From WeirdCon IV*

Terry Floyd is one of fandom's best kept secrets, as well as one of fandom's best writers. He's nicest guy you'll ever meet inside or outside of a fanzine. The following piece was written for the 45th (XLV) *issue of his Apa-50 zine* APAHELION, *in 1990. Apa-50 is still thriving and Terry is currently the* OG *(Official Gargoyle).*
– WM. BREIDING

ALL TWELVE MONTHS have at one time or another been called the cruelest. April was given that honor yesterday in Glen Ellen California. Steven Black had called on Friday night to ask if Alex and I would be interested in heading out into the Wine Country on Saturday for WeirdCon, an irregular gathering of notables in the mystery/horror literature field. Don Herron was hosting it this year at the "We B Dudes Ranch" where he lives with Jeanne Bowman, their kids Nick, Jesse and Jaime, various chickens, cats, dogs and the holy shrine of the Doggie Diner, a huge icon of an era in fast food now gone forever that stands out by their shed and would look not out of place on Easter Island.

The morning had dawned gray and uninviting, but Steven assured me that the weather in Sonoma County would certainly be different. Indeed, by the time we crossed the Golden Gate into Marin, the sun was shining brightly and it had become a beautiful Saturday afternoon. I had not been to the region for quite some time, and had never visited the Ranch, but Steven had made a number of treks there and had a very good set of directions. Just north of Novato, our instructions advised us to turn off on Highway 37 toward Sonoma and Napa Counties.

Our conversation on the road had revolved primarily around family matters. Alex had fallen asleep early on and I'd taken the opportunity to break the news of Pam's pregnancy. We discussed the ramifications of this new development. Steven reminded me how fortunate we are to have the privilege of raising two children; were we Chinese, we would both be charged as criminals for violating the one child per family law. Fortunate or not, I still felt guilt enough to qualify me for a life of crime. After all, I had been the one who'd put off the vasectomy a bit too long. The conversation turned to real criminals as we turned left onto Highway 121. Less than a mile further, I pulled off to the shoulder to allow a police car, lights ablaze and headlights flashing, to pass us in the other direction. Another came soon after. We both knew about their mission. They were manhunting.

Friday, April 14, had seen the beginning of the worse mass murder case in the county's history. In less than three hours' time, a deranged winery worker in Boyes Hot Springs had seriously injured a co-worker, killed his boss, his wife, her two sisters and his mother-in-law and his own three children were missing. Since he hadn't been apprehended by today, Steven and I had surmised that he'd probably fled the area by this time and wouldn't necessarily affect our enjoyment of the "Con." The news reports said the police were expecting him to be heading toward Fresno, where an ex-wife resided, or to his native Mexico. We found the "We B Dudes Ranch" on Hill Road, just past the Jack London Book Store. We parked near the chickens, under the shadow of the Doggie Diner Doggie, and walked up the hill to the house. A group of people were lounging about under the trees near a barbeque grill fashioned from a fifty-gallon barrel. I knew only Don and Jeanne, but Steven was acquainted with several of the other attendees; I recognized only a few faces I'd glimpsed at various other cons. We introduced ourselves and sat down. Alex immediately struck up a conversation with Nick, Don and Jeanne's two-year-old son, and before long they were sitting on the porch exploring a box of toys Jeanne had provided for their amusement. Soon, Fritz Leiber walked down to the trees from the house.

Steven had brought copies of his two recent publications, *The Man Who Sold America*, a collection of essays on the writings of Robert Heinlein by people who, like many of his readers, both loved and hated him, and *Necklace of Blood*, a collection of dark poetry by G. Sutton Breiding. Other books were available for sale or trade, and deals began to be struck. We took a stroll down to Don's workroom, where he keeps his own collections. He produced a small spiral notebook which was to serve as the Weirdcon attendance log, and asked everyone to sign in.

Before I got a chance to do so, I heard a small voice calling "Daddy! Where are you?" So I trudged up the pathway back to the house. "Oh, there you are," said Alex as I came into view, then he turned back to Nick and continued playing. Jeanne was emerging with foil-wrapped potatoes and I asked if I could help her. She told me to go into the kitchen and find a plastic squirt bottle. I did so and returned. We tossed the spuds on the glowing coals and closed the lid of the grill. "In about twenty minutes," she said, "we'll throw the chicken on to cook." Presently, the telephone rang and Jeanne went inside to get it.

I sat down and reclined in the shade. Jaime, the oldest of Jeanne's boys, was lying in the hammock. One of his friends sat nearby. Jeanne had introduced the other boy as Chris. She said she'd traded kids with Chris's mother, who was keeping Jesse for the weekend.

Both boys were unusually quiet and brooding for twelve-year-olds, I thought. I popped open a beer and sat down. A few minutes later, Jeanne came back from the house. "They found the girls," she said. The boys immediately became animated.

"Are they okay?" Jaime's friend asked anxiously.

Jeanne cleared her throat and sat down. "No, Chris, not really. Two of them are dead. One is in the hospital."

"Where were they? Which one is still alive?" he asked.

"We don't know," she answered. "All we know is that two of them are dead and one is badly hurt. They found them lying in the dump."

Jaime did not meet his mother's gaze. "What'd he do to 'em, Mom?" he asked, almost in a whisper, staring at his hands.

"He cut their throats, Jaime, just like the others."

The boys were silent for a while as the news impressed itself upon them.

Jeanne explained that the boys were friends of Ruth and Marie Ann Richards, the two girls (aged 12 and 8, respectively) who were sodomized and murdered the day before by their sister's husband, Ramon Salcido, the deranged winery worker. Chris said that his best friend had lived next door to them in Cotati, and he'd played with Ruth for several years.

I now understood the boys' brooding silence. They were in shock. The girls who'd just been found were Salcido's three daughters, a four-year-old, a three-year-old and a one-year-old.

I cast a cautious glance to my right. Alex and Nick were still playing contentedly on the porch.

Jeanne was clearly finding it difficult to discuss this with the boys, but it was impossible to avoid it. Their friends had been brutally raped and murdered by a man they knew. Some reports even claimed that he'd decapitated one of them. This man had now killed his own children and was still free to kill others. They were scared and angry and full of questions. It was far better that she attempt to answer them than have all their hysterical sixth grade schoolmates attempt to do so.

"That makes seven then, huh?" the boy asked. "Seven people."

"Yes," Jeanne answered weakly. She lifted her eyes and gazed out toward the hills. I hadn't noticed before how tired she looked. She must have been on the phone with neighbors

off and on since the horror began. I suspected that sleep had been hard to come by the previous night.

"Why'd he do it, Mom?" Jaime asked.

"He's demented, Jaime. He doesn't have any mind left to control his actions." There was no other answer. How does one explain madness to a twelve-year-old? Children are the most vulnerable minority, completely at the mercy of adults. They have no choice but to trust grown-ups to be competent and rational. I'm sure that many actions of adults must seem strange to a child, but this horror was completely beyond the comprehension even of adults.

For all the violence and death depicted on television and in movies, the media really does a poor job of teaching children about it. They have images of death which they can mimic with their G.I. Joe and He-man dolls, but they have no notion of what it feels like to have one of their friends die. I had some vague memories of going to my grandfather's funeral when I was six, but as a child, I never had to deal with the death of someone my own age. I could see that these boys were having a very hard time trying to imagine what Ruth must have felt when her throat was cut. And they were certainly wondering if it was Ruth or Marie who'd had her head chopped off.

"I hope they kill him," said Chris, seething. "I hope they shoot him eighty million times. I hope they rip his head off and shove it up his butthole. I hope they cut off his dick and stuff it in his mouth. I hope…"

"Don't worry," Jeanne reassured him. "No man's balls in this state are in as much danger as his are. I doubt he'll be taken alive. He'd better hope the police catch him first. He has more to fear from us than he does from the cops."

"A single bullet in the brain is all that's necessary," said Don, who had just returned from the shed with some other guests. "He's already made enough of a mess. His death should be as quick and clean and final as possible. One bullet in his brain. That's all."

"They found the girls, Don," Jeanne announced. "He left them for dead at the dump off Highway 116. One is still alive."

"I want to tear his face off," the boy continued. "I want to take a machete and a pair of pliers and peel his skin off like an orange."

"I'd like to take twenty razor blades," Jaime interjected, "and cut him all over, and then pour a gallon of lemon juice on him."

"Come on, Jaime," Jeanne said as she stood up. "'We need to talk. Come help me get the chicken ready to go on the grill." Jaime got up and followed his mother inside. Chris folded his arms and leaned forward but did not get up.

Most of the WeirdCon guests were aware of the murderous rampage of the previous day, but Don had to explain how close the tragedy came to Glen Ellen and the relationship the boys had with the young victims.

Steven voiced a concern that had been at the back of my mind since Jeanne had told us of the latest grisly discovery. "I guess that means he's probably still in the area."

"That's about the size of it. I would have thought he'd left the country pronto," Don said. "But it sounds like he's still hanging around. Man, he really is crazy."

"Why doesn't he just kill himself?" asked Chris.

"It takes courage to live," Steven said. "But it takes even more courage to die. This man is a pathetic coward."

I attempted to change the course of the boy's vengeful plotting. "Death would also put an end to his grief. Someone like this does not deserve death," I said. "Perhaps the most effective punishment would be for him to regain his senses and be forced to live with the knowledge and memory of what he's done. He will have many ghosts to haunt him."

Jeanne and Jaime returned with the chicken. Alex followed them down from the porch and climbed on my lap.

"Daddy!" he shouted. "I want to swing!" I hugged him, somewhat self-consciously, and carried him over to the tire which was suspended by a long rope from one of the trees. The ground fell sharply past the trees to a line of fence posts between the house and the sheds. Alex swung out over the side of the hill and squealed with delight as he peered past his feet at the grass far below.

As a gentle breeze carried the aroma of the chicken over the quiet valley, two dogs came bounding over to the table. Don introduced the large, frisky black dog as Rascal. The other dog – older, slower and much heavier – was Christine. I sat down on a bench beside the hammock and scratched Rascal behind his ears.

Don said, "Terry, Jaime told me that that dog you're petting was given a bone last week by the maniac." He pointed to the hill behind the house. "Right up there."

"You're kidding," I said.

"No," he replied. "Jaime knew Salcido. Everybody knew who he was. Last week, he said he saw him up on the hill giving a bone to Rascal."

I gave the dog another pat and stood up. The tire swing had lost momentum, so I gave it another push. Alex giggled again.

The chicken came off the grill soon after, and I filled my plate. I felt a pang of guilt when I realized I'd taken the last sweet potato before Fritz had been served, but he declined it

when I offered it to him, taking a regular Idaho spud instead. Steven asked if I'd consider splitting the sweet potato with him and I agreed. I also had to give a lump of it to Nick, who pounced on it as soon as I set it down. "I'm sorry, Terry. I should have warned you. Nick loves sweet potatoes," Jeanne said.

I cut off small pieces of chicken and fed them to Alex at intervals between swings. He ate what was offered to him but refused to leave the tire for something as trivial as food. I popped open a bottle of Anchor Steam and took a long, cold drink.

There had been plans to hike out to the ruins of the Jack London Mansion nearby, but with the maniac still loose, it was deemed not to be a very good idea. It was a grisly topic for a picnic, but the conversation about the murders continued as we ate. It seems that Salcido had been served papers on Thursday, the day before the carnage, notifying him that his ex-wife in Fresno was suing him for non-payment of child support for his four-year-old daughter from that marriage. Angela Salcido, his second wife, apparently had no knowledge that her husband had been married before, and when she learned of it, decided to have their marriage annulled. The authorities hypothesized that this had triggered his murderous rampage. Salcido was well known to be fiercely possessive of his wife, who had recently tried to embark on a modeling career. Sonoma County is a rural area with an agricultural economic base. It has no large cities. Santa Rosa is the major metropolitan area, but most towns in the region, such as Rohnert Park and Cotati, are about the size of Glen Ellen. Consequently people in these towns know their neighbors well and know many people in the nearby towns. Salcido was apparently a familiar local figure, particularly among patrons of the neighborhood honky-tonks. He'd been described as a heavy drinker and frequent drug abuser. Still, even people familiar with him found the savagery of his attack hard to believe.

Just across from me sat Fritz Leiber, whose creepy tales of witchcraft and murder – *Our Lady of Darkness*, *Conjure Wife*, and many others – had often sent chills through my spine. Yet nothing I'd read in his fiction had disturbed me quite the way the newspaper had the previous morning; and that had not even bothered me so much as when I learned the fate of the Salcido children and saw how the tragedy affected two boys who were closer to the horror than I could ever be. I know I wasn't the only one present to note the irony of our situation. Here we were, a group of people who read, write and collect horror fiction, sitting around a serene country land-

scape talking about horror reality. Perhaps it was the most appropriate topic for us; we who revel in imaginary horror are perhaps best equipped to deal with the real thing when it appears. Horror fiction, even that dealing with the supernatural world of ghosts, vampires and werewolves, must have at least a foot in reality to be effective at all. I believe such stories have a psychological purpose or they wouldn't be so popular. Of course we get an adrenaline rush when we're frightened, and that is part of the appeal of horror, but we also need to be reminded that the world is and always has been a rather dangerous place. The power of films like Hitchcock's *Shadow of a Doubt* and Lynch's *Blue Velvet* come from the voyeuristic urge to peek under the carpet of normal suburban life to show us the evil that has always been there, but which we prefer to believe doesn't exist.

I remember once a few months ago, having to defend slasher movies against someone who was militantly opposed to such things, someone who did not feel the First Amendment should protect the makers of horror films any more than it should protect pornographers. He didn't make any distinction between slasher movies and hardcore pornography – he felt that both exploited women and that slasher movies were "pornography for mass murderers." Both phenomena were, he believed, sicknesses that our society should make every effort to eradicate. I based my argument on the thesis that both sexual pornography and slasher movies were not diseases themselves, but merely symptoms of a much worse disease that afflicts society as a whole. When sex is a topic so stigmatized by puritan repression that it cannot be discussed and explored openly, it becomes something dirty and secret relegated to seedy nightclubs, coin-operated peep shows and dirty bookstores. While no studies have definitively linked pornography to violence against women, it's hard to deny that a great deal of pornography does exploit them. There are, of course, exceptions to this, and the line distinguishing pornography from erotica is never very clear. There's even a growing segment of the market created and controlled by women which produces pornography exclusively for women. Would this still be the case if sex were not such a forbidden subject?

When mental illness becomes likewise stigmatized so that it can't be dealt with rationally, it too is swept under the rug and ignored until someone – presumed sane by society – erupts into violence and kills his entire family or decides to mow down a playground full of schoolchildren with a semi-automatic rifle. Slasher movies, repugnant as many of them are, serve to remind us that senseless murder, madness and

inexplicable hate exists in the world we inhabit and is something that cannot be ignored. One of the most disturbing slasher movies I've ever seen is called *I Spit On Your Grave*, a film about a woman who is brutally gang raped by a group of good ol' country boys just having some fun. The latter half of the film chronicles her gruesome revenge on her attackers, but this is nowhere near as disturbing as the first half, which details the woman's ordeal as a victim. It is not an easy film to watch, but the effort was not wasted. None of the characters in the film could be considered insane; evil, yes, but not insane. Roger Ebert considered *I Spit On Your Grave* as the closest thing to pornography he'd seen with an R rating. On the contrary, I thought it was perhaps the closest thing to a "feminist" slasher film I'd ever seen.

Chris and Jaime continued to brood throughout the afternoon and eventually took a stroll out to the trees behind the house. Jeanne called after them, "Don't go wandering too far, fellas. I want you both to stay within earshot of the house." She turned back to the grill, where more chicken was broiling, but kept one eye focused on the trees where the boys had disappeared. She saw me watching her. "I have to keep them in line. They're talking about going out hunting for the maniac. With so many other folks doing the same thing, the snap of a twig could get them both a face full of buckshot."

I wouldn't have been at all surprised if several lynch mobs were out roaming the woods. It was not the best day to go fishing.

"I don't know how many hours I spent last night trying to figure out how to lock the doors and windows of the house," said Don. "We've never bothered to lock them before, but I thought it was justified this time."

Alex was still swinging happily in the tire. Steven had taken over swing duties so I could finish my chicken. It was such a beautiful scene that I had to pull out the camera and snap a picture. Then Jeanne, Don and Nick posed for a family portrait.

Eventually, people began to say goodbye and prepare to leave. All were cautioned to be careful on the road. The police may have been too preoccupied with the manhunt to ticket speeders, but there were so many of them about that you couldn't take any chances.

After about half an hour, the boys made their way back to the barbeque grill. Alex ran up to them and scampered around their legs chasing the two dogs who followed them. They didn't seem to be bothered by the three-year-old pipsqueak who trailed them; I was pleased to note that they actu-

ally seemed somewhat protective of him. Alex appeared oblivious to the anger and hate that charged the very air around the two boys. They were still discussing the further tortures they would inflict on Salcido if they were fortunate enough to capture him. I supposed that this was as good a way of dealing with grief as any other. I did note that, although they had come close when they heard the news about the three children, neither of them had yet shed any tears in public. I could tell, however, that they were struggling to hold them back.

Jeanne was appropriately excited when I told her that Pam was pregnant again. She hugged me and asked how long we'd known. "One week," I told her. She sensed my apprehension about it and tried to encourage me. She said her first two boys were three and a half years apart and assured me that that was a "good spread" for children – close enough in age to amuse each other, but far enough apart so that the older can help with raising the younger. She said she had some books she'd like to loan us and went to look for them.

Steven and I were almost the last to leave. I'd liked to have stayed and visited longer, but the sun was setting and I'd promised Pam that I wouldn't keep her child out too late. As we were preparing to leave, Steven sat down beside Alex under a tree near the porch. Jaime and Chris had fashioned a bow out of some twine and a strong stick. Steven picked up the crude weapon and examined it. "Are you going fishing?" asked Alex, who knew only one thing to do with a stick and some string (being a big fan of *Curious George*).

"No, Alex," said Steven. "This is a bow. Watch." With that, he picked up a small twig, seated it against the twine and pulled it back. He let it fly and it sailed out across the yard. Alex was visibly impressed. So was Steven. It didn't look like much, but with a decent projectile, this primitive bow could be a formidable weapon.

Just as we were bidding our farewells, two more people drove up. John Law, whom I had met once before at one of Steven's parties, and a woman unknown to me emerged from a white pickup truck.

Like Don Herron, John is a veteran of the old Suicide Club of San Francisco, a band of fearless pranksters whose exploits on the fringes of legality are today the stuff of urban legends. The last time I had seen John, he had led a group of us on an expedition similar to some of the Suicide Club's activities, exploring two abandoned and unguarded buildings in San Francisco, one a high-rise office building in the financial district in the first phase of demolition and the other a bankrupt

mortuary. This is, of course, an entirely different story, which I'll have to save for another time.

John and his friend were planning to stay overnight so Jeanne put more coals on the grill and we ignited them once again. Since the chicken had run out, John agreed to go pick up some more meat to barbeque as well as a videotape for the evening's entertainment. Various titles were discussed and even though Steven and I wouldn't be able to stay for the show, we voiced our opinions anyway, recommending John Carpenter's *They Live*.

Finally, with no small effort, we managed to talk Alex into leaving and piled into the car. Jeanne had been unable to locate the books she wanted to loan me, but I told her I'd like to bring Pam and Alex back to visit again sometime, and we could pick them up then. We waved goodbye to Don, Jeanne, John and his friend and drove out to the road.

I didn't see Jaime and Chris when we drove down the path toward the road. I thought they might have gone inside the house. I'm sure Jeanne would not have allowed them back into the woods so near to sunset.

It bothered me that they had so much rage boiling up inside them that they might just be angry enough and foolish enough to do the one thing they wanted to do most. I hoped they hadn't gone back into the woods. If they had, I hoped they'd taken at least the bow with them. And plenty of sharpened arrows.

Of course, if you've been paying attention to the news, you'll know that Salcido was arrested in Mexico the following week. After an extradition procedure that went far more smoothly than most people predicted (and a succession of stupid fuckups that could have resulted in his release on several occasions) he was flown back to Santa Rosa, where he was met by a lynch mob. It took an army of policemen and the tightest security possible to keep the community from stringing him up right there in front of the jail.

And on Monday, April 24, Carmina Salcido, the sole survivor of the rampage, celebrated her third birthday from her hospital bed in Petaluma, where she is recovering from a tracheostomy as a consequence of having her throat cut.

The worst of it may be over. Residents of the county may now be able to leave their doors unlocked at night. But this is by no means a happy ending.