COLONIAL EXCURSION

RON BENNETT

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Dedication

To Bob Pavlat

Prologue

Once upon a time there was a fan called Rick Sneary and he said that the 1958 World Science Fiction Convention should be held at South Gate, California, and, children, that's the way things worked out. However, some fans decided that there should be *something* third rate about what was to be the best convention ever and so they sent me. They told me that I was a TAFF delegate, but they fooled nobody. America's loss was Britain's gain... for a month.

The following few pages have printed on them a series of words which when read in sequence comprises my account of that round trip, thirteen thousand miles, give or take a little, by sea, land and air. I cannot hope to reflect in this bulk of substandard wordage the pleasure I had on that journey, but nevertheless I do hope that *you* gain some degree of pleasure from this report.

Originally, the idea was to spread the report around different fanzines so that as many fan editors and fan readers as possible managed to share at least a little of my experiences. This experiment misfired for reasons for which I apologise, and I must also apologise for the delay in producing this promised booklet, the report in its complete gory. The chapters which first saw print in *Aporrheta*, *Perihelion*, *Yandro*, *Oopsla*, *Spectre*, *Space Diversions*, *Ploy*, *Void*, *Triode*, *Innuendo* and *Shangri-L'Affaires* have been revised and are reproduced here by permission of the author.

1. TAFFirmation

The discovery that one has been elected TAFF representative is a formidable affair in itself. I looked at the telegram, framed it and sat up half the night reading *Inside USA*, Ernie Pyle's *Home Country* and *The Harp Stateside*. By the morning I was ready to admit to myself that it was a hoax and that if anyone deserved such a trick playing on him, that anyone was Bennett.

It turned out to be true, though, and during the next few weeks I found out what fame does for one, seeing myself leering out of the *Yorkshire Evening Post*. The write-up in the paper included the magic words, "I publish my own amateur magazine called *Ploy*, which contains articles about science fiction writing."

I also discovered exactly what is meant by red tape. Unlike Walt Willis when he journeyed into the unknown, I didn't have to book my own passage. That Rock of Dependability of the Liverpool Group, Norman Shorrock, very kindly took this matter in hand. I myself had to get vaccinated against smallpox in order to obtain a visa.

I went down to Thomas Cook's in Leeds and asked for an international vaccination form, but was told that I could have one only if I were booking the passage through Cook's. In Harrogate, I tried another travel agent and was immediately handed the required form, a courtesy that two years later was to gain for the firm the business of Eric Bentcliffe's TAFF ticket. A couple of visits to the doctor then saw everything fixed up.

Obtaining the visa itself necessitated a trip over to the American Consulate in Manchester. I spent a pleasant half hour explaining to the Consul the intricacies of science fiction fandom and the Trans-Atlantic Fan Fund. I told him that although I probably wouldn't be in the US for more than a month, I'd like to be on the safe side and I asked for a three month coverage. He gave me a visa good for four years and told me that his home was in Los Angeles and that he would probably be there at the same time as the Solacon, so I invited him to drop in and see us, but he never did. After I left the Consulate I noticed that the street on which the building stands is called Southgate, which seemed an excellent omen. I met Sid Birchby and Harry Turner and we retired to the Shambles Inn – aptly named – to discuss the newly formed British Science Fiction Association.

There was also the slight matter of obtaining leave of absence from the Leeds Education Committee who employed me to stand and talk in front of one of their classes. Leeds schools returned to work after the summer vacation on 9th September, the week after the Solacon. I had asked for leave to cover the whole of September or whatever part of that month proved necessary. My employers were very kind about the whole matter. I hadn't exactly expected to be wined and dined at the Leeds Civic Hall, and I wasn't, either. I had kept the Committee informed of the possibility of my being elected and when I finally told them the good news, it turned the matter over in its collective mind for just over a month, and a little over a week before I was ready to set out gave its wide smile of official approval with a terse note that I was granted leave of absence until September 23rd, with lapse of salary. The Committee's kindness was overwhelming. Notwithstanding the fact that had I waited for this permission before consolidating my plans, I would not have had time in which to obtain a visa, I was disappointed at the lack of enterprise shown by my employers. Here was a teacher in their employ about to travel across America and yet they lacked the foresight to put this personal experience of mine to a use which might benefit in some small way the education of the children in their charge. To balance this lack of imagination, however, my Headmaster, Ron Hardy, jumped in to champion my cause. Whilst he did not pretend to understand why people interested in science fiction should want to send me to Los Angeles, he could see that the trip would broaden my experiences from which to teach and he tried to obtain for me a 35mm camera from school supplies. This was not forthcoming so he *bought* me a Finetta camera, the idea being that I could show the children slides of the journey on my return. He also bought four rolls of film for me and kindly said that this money would come out of school supplies, unless I later wanted to buy the film myself.

A week before sailing from Southampton I went down to London and threw myself on the hospitality of the Clarkes. I looked up the man in charge of the Fund, Ken Bulmer, and talked to him for fifteen minutes before I realised that he had shaved off his beard. This was good going for Bennett. It usually takes half an hour for anything to sink in. In the Bennett family there is a private joke that I lived in Harrogate for three years before noticing that there are eight houses on the opposite side of the road and not six. I also looked up the editor of the Nova magazines, Ted Carnell, who had risked the reputation of *New Worlds* by asking me to airmail a report on the Solacon.

We discussed the slant of the report and Ted was telling me what I could expect from American conventions – things like iced water which would probably cause stomach cramp – when the phone rang from the reception office downstairs and a Mr. Tingleton was announced. It turned out to be Bill Temple of *Four Sided Triangle* fame and for the next hour I listened to a happy discourse on how difficult it is to write science fiction when one's daughter brings round a boyfriend.

During the time I wasn't actually looking up fans in London, I wandered round the city, taking in the sights like the good little tourist I had become, and using up a roll of film on subjects like the Tower of London, St. Paul's, Piccadilly and the *Yorkshire Evening Post* offices in Fleet Street.

I also managed to visit the Globe, the traditional meeting place of science fiction fans in London. Sandy Cutrell, the New York fan who had already been landed with the job of driving me from New York to meet up with the Michigan fans who were driving to Los Angeles, was a welcome visitor. He was in London for a couple of days on a flying visit with his parents. It was interesting to hear a middle line viewpoint on the then current New York feuds. That night at the Globe there were four Sandys present: Sandfield, Sanderson, Cutrell and Sandra Hall. I spent a couple of hours the following day with Sandy Cutrell and Mike Moorcock at a Soho coffee bar which was frequented by folk song enthusiasts and is today a favourite haunt of the London beatniks. There's probably a moral there, somewhere.

I spent an afternoon at the home of Ivor Mayne, then an up and coming young London fan, enjoying Ivor's quiet, downbeat humour which is in accordance with the best traditions of fandom. We played chess and an improvised type of table tennis and in the evening went to the National Film Theatre to see Jean Cocteau's classic film, *Le Sang d'un poète*, a film which somehow got itself mixed up with extracts from another French film which was supposedly shown on the same programme.

Inchmery fandom was meanwhile going through a busy period. Vin¢ was drawing up a leaflet to circulate London fandom about the possibility of obtaining clubrooms and Sandy was putting out the second issue of his fanzine *Aporrheta*, which was then a monthly. When the day's work had been done and fanning had been suspended around midnight, we'd sit around playing brag. For money we substituted screws and nuts which Vin¢ had brought home from work at Nettlefold's. Vin¢ spread a tinful across the floor and said, "If the people downstairs want to know why I was making so much

noise, I'll tell them I was counting my money and had it spread all over the floor."

I found the time, too, to look up my old colleagues at the Gray's Inn architects where I'd been employed as a typist the previous summer. They're fannish types and I once took them down to the Globe. After analysing the structure of the building they left, never to return. That day we had a drink in the Dolphin on Red Lion Street, almost opposite the Freedom Book Shop. We looked at the plaque which states that a zeppelin had dropped a bomb which destroyed the original inn. We spoke of the tremendous height those airships reached – "all of four feet" – and the formidability of such terrible weapons as the machine guns which fired between propellor blades.

A couple of days before I was due to go and line up for my turn at being seasick, I went along to the BBC TV studio at Hammersmith. Ella Parker had kindly given me a ticket for the quiz programme, *Ask Me Another*, and I was interested to discover how the BBC ran things on its home ground. Anyone who was at the King's Court hotel for the 1957 London Worldcon had seen BBC cameramen take six hours to shoot a ten minute spot. After queueing for five or six minutes past the advertised time for the opening of the doors a long line of would be audience members filed in past "No Smoking" signs which killed my enthusiasm immediately.

We sat on canvas chairs for a while, looking at the "stage" which was set for the panel game. Technicians wheeled three large cameras in front of us and blocked our view. The upshot was that we saw the show twice – at once. We kept being honoured with snippets of the show, live, and we saw at the same time the whole show on a flickering monitor set. Technicians stood around with that bored expression which comes from long practice and one told the compere, Franklin Engelmann, that he wasn't coming through very clearly. Engelmann cracked, "You should have a better camera," a remark which was immediately topped by a stage whisper from the audience, "You should have a better face."

The show itself wasn't too bad, though. I was tickled pink when David Keys, the BBC 1958 "Brain of Britain" was asked, "What is a ploy?"

He got it wrong, too.

The London part of my trip quickly drew to a close. On my last day, Wednesday 13th August 1958, I went up into the City of London and booked a room near Waterloo Station. I had to catch the Cunard boat train to Southampton at seven the following morning, and gee! if I'd have missed

that...!

After parking part of my luggage at the hotel, I tried to look up the Swedish fan, Alvar Appeltofft, who was in town, but he was out. I took some colour shots of Piccadilly Circus at night and went dancing at the Café de Paris on Coventry Street, which just shows how the place has come down in the world....

I got back to the hotel around one and even got a little sleep before being dragged out of bed at six by the night porter with whom I'd left instructions to call me. I had breakfast and crossed Waterloo Bridge Road into the Station. Two hours later I was in Southampton. I got off the train, bought a couple of sets of graphite-backed stamps, moved into line for passport checking and told the kindly faced customs officer that I had nothing to declare.

I began to walk up the gangplank but changed my mind and came back again. I left my two cases beside the feet of the officer who was marshalling people aboard, stepped over a boundary rope and walked along the quay so that I could take a couple of pictures of the ship. I then walked back and picked up my luggage again. And walked on board the *Queen Mary*....

2. Five Days Before the Funnel

The cabin with which they landed me was a little overcrowded, being on the small side and having to cater for four persons. I was reminded of the Marx Brothers in *A Night at the Opera*. The three who shared my excellent company during the journey were a Mr. Roberts and a Mr. Freedman, two gentlemen in their seventies who loved my party trick of coming to bed at 3:30 a.m., and one Fritz, a Swiss American of whom not much was seen after he met a Swiss girl on the first day out.

The first passengers I met were an Ohio college professor and his wife with whom I had lunch somewhere in the Channel between Southampton and Cherbourg. Until then I'd been busy taking pictures of the Isle of Wight and its pleasure boats which came out to see us glide past. The professor had a friend in the First Class part of the ship and we wangled an invitation to go along to the First Class cinema, vastly superior in comfort to the Tourist Class projection room, to see the Sinatra-Curtis film, *Kings Go Forth*. It came along a day or so later to the Tourist Class where the showings were packed out. I didn't have a lot of luck with the pictures, or movies, as I was learning to call them; with one exception I'd seen all the films. This was the Ingrid Bergman-Cary Grant film, *Indiscreet*, which was quite good and even enjoyed, considering that the facilities in the Tourist Class were strictly small screen, ultra lo-fi.

Besides the cinema, passengers were continuously kept amused by ship dances and competitions. There was a daily anagram and name competition and every evening there was bingo or a horse racing game being played. By backing all horses in the early races I won nicely (!) but lost heavily at that typical American game of Bingo. Give me housey-housey any day.

The most popular game on board, when the smoke room poker session was not in progress, was table tennis, which most Americans call ping pong and play as such. The Tourist Class table was in cramped surroundings, but the First Class tables were superb, with a good standard Halex ball provided free. I played on the First Class deck quite a bit. My usual opponent was a teacher from Holt High School in Liverpool who had emigrated to Santa Barbara a year before and who had been home for a short visit. Apart from warning me against visiting Tijuana he was quite disappointed with the

service and atmosphere on the boat, which he considered very inferior to that on board a German ship belonging to the Greek Line we have come to associate with Walt Willis.

It turned out that he was probably right. The atmosphere on board the *Queen Mary* is staid and stately. If you can imagine walking round Buckingham Palace while Queen Elizabeth is in residence, and doing it for five days, then you may have some idea about the *Queen Mary*. I'm sure, though, that the people we'd observe across the smoke room, thinking "look at those stuffed shirts over there", were thinking the same thing about us. Norman, the Liverpool teacher, tried to whip up some life into the evening dances and we gathered about us a few stalwart hardies. Two of these were English girls returning to their GI husbands after holidays in Europe. Another was an engineer who read some SF and who had a good bass voice. We tried invading the First Class dance, but although we had spent an amount of time wandering around the First Class Promenade Deck and shopping centre, we weren't allowed in and had to be satisfied with the Cabin (second) Class dances. These were far superior to the Tourist Class gatherings which were conducted in a confined space on a very poor floor. I was interested in trying the American type of ballroom dancing for the first time. This is definitely conducted with a limited floor space in mind and very little movement takes place. I should add that the floor itself did a little moving during the spell of bad weather on the Saturday evening, but this wouldn't be quite the same thing.

The service was generally poor. The food was excellent, but one had to wait for one's order, whilst to buy a drink one had to be seated, waiting again being the order of the day. Of course, by serving table in the smoke room bar the waiters did rate a tip, but should this clipjoint practice be revered on the *Mary*? Tipping was obviously expected, but the staff's half of the transaction was often absent. I was refused tea one afternoon because I hadn't spoken up at the right time, whilst when I tried to buy a bottle of whiskey to take ashore I ran into a private piece of red tape that would make an income tax refund seem simple to obtain. I was told at the bar that to make the purchase I would have to see my deck steward. I did so and was told that the ship's regulations demanded that he took a signed chit to the Purser who sent a counter chit to the Accountant. Eventually, after the chit had been manhandled by everyone from Captain to stowaway, I could pay everyone the expected gratuity and collect my booze. I passed and went dry.

The five days passed, though. It was a leisurely trip, with long talks on educational systems with American schoolteachers returning to work after Labor Day, and one didn't realise how fast the ship was travelling until one would go out on deck. It was a little breezy there. The ship's speed was also apparent when we (we – ha! – just picture Bennett up there giving the Captain advice) passed the *Coronia*. The day before we docked the S.S. *United States* passed us, however, and National Pride suffered an unquestionable blow.

One thing that did dawn on me, after much reflection and tranquil recall à la Wordsworth, was how much life on board ship is limited to its horizons. This may sound somewhat trite, for one doesn't expect the passengers to take a sudden side trip to see the Eiffel Tower, but life soon falls into an easy pattern with its own artificial and unimportant problems being magnified out of normal proportion. Walt Willis, in *The Harp Stateside*, mentioned the feeling of awe and mystery when gazing out to sea. For myself, I was terrified. The sea simply went on for ever and it was obviously impossible that there was any land anywhere on Earth. My sympathy was wholly for Columbus. I did go out on deck during a stormy night and could picture all too well that if I was blown overboard nobody would be any the wiser; I beat a hasty retreat to the bar. One other point was that the voyage was a continuous self-instigated game of tag with the First Class stewards, for most Tourist passengers soon found ways and means of getting past and through the locked doors which led to the First Class portion of the ship. The lowest deck of all has a corridor which runs the length of the ship and at night we'd stroll past the poor night steward who would sit reading a western and look as though he wanted something to happen. *We'd* look as though we had every right to be there.

On the Monday night our little gang invaded the Cabin Class dance for the last time and I left instructions for Mr. Roberts, who slept very little, to wake me at 6:30 a.m. so that I could go on deck and see the Statue of Liberty steam by at seven. He forgot to put back his watch the required hour and woke me at 5:30. I got up anyway, and went on deck to see the sun come up. More and more passengers joined the small group in which I stood. While there wasn't the singing Walt Willis described – what! On the *Mary*! Gad, Sir! – we did have the returning Americans excitedly pointing out landmarks like the Coney Island Parachute Jump and various buildings on the skyline. We were infected with their enthusiasm and America seemed already a

wonderful place.

We docked around nine and after breakfast began to line up for the US Immigration Officers to set themselves up in the First Class lounge. It was the old, old story. A long wait, cracking time-passing and time-worn jokes with the Western Union messengers, a few brisk questions, a stamped card and on to the next desk. After a short delay while the puzzled official attempted to sort out why he had down on his lists Bob Madle's address and why on mine I had Bob Pavlat's address, I picked up my luggage and joined the crowd trying to leave the boat by the Third Class gangplank. Things were a little disorderly, so I followed a couple of would-be adventurers and we left by the First Class gangplank. In character to the very end.

I put down my luggage under my initial sign and looked around. I was about to walk over to the line of people queueing for the customs officials, a line of some hundred and fifty to two hundred people, when I saw Belle Dietz coming towards me. We shook hands and she introduced me to two fans whose names I didn't quite catch, fans of assorted sexes. I figured that they were probably some New York fringe fans and it wasn't until much later that I found out that they were Pat Ellington and Bill Rickhardt.

3. First Contact

Once I was off the ship the atmosphere of the occasion began to catch up with me and I stood confused, saying idiotic things as Belle, Pat and Bill showered me with an embarrassing show of interest about the voyage. It was later to dawn on me that Belle and Pat were fundamentally on different sides of the then current New York feud, and it says one thing for TAFF that they were able to sink their differences to show me the hospitality they did. Bill at that time had just moved from Detroit to pick up some cash working at Cushman's Bakery in New York, and although he has since shown a certain irresponsibility with Berry Fund accounts he was at all times during the subsequent trip to the Solacon a rock of dependability. Bill and I picked up my two cases and took them over to the long line for customs inspection. I was immediately told to take the cases back to the sign marked with my surname initial. I did so while the others marked my place in line. We then settled down to a long wait. Pat told me that Dick was waiting outside the customs sheds with Marie-Louise, their two month old daughter who is known to everyone as "Poops". Evidently Dick hadn't been able to get hold of a pass to the sheds. Time passed and Pat was suddenly paged over the loudspeaker system and she went off to the gate to find that Dick was wanting to get off to work. Pat returned with Poops, a fortuitous move which should be Standard Procedure For Fans Visiting the USA. After a short while Pat's arms began to ache from holding the baby, and after poor Poops had been handed over to Bill and back to Pat a kindly police guard took us out of line and to the head of the queue. I didn't think that this was cricket of course, but then I'm used to playing rugby, a game which one plays not only against the opposing team but against the referee also. And in any case, this was America where cricket isn't quite the religion it is in Yorkshire. I've often wondered since whether I'd ever have got to the front of that line if that cop hadn't come along, though perhaps the questions I kept asking him, like "Is your revolver really loaded?" had something to do with it. Having kept my mouth closed at the right time, however, I found myself ushering a portly customs official over to my waiting cases.

I told him I had a camera and a typewriter for personal use and that I wasn't bringing into the country any women for immoral purposes, a gag

which tickled him so much that he told me to hurry and get the hell out of there. I picked up my cases and walked out through the gates. Then I turned round to look for Belle, Pat and Bill. They were nowhere to be seen.

I put my cases down again and waited. After a long time during which I watched Americans chew chewing gum in America and talk with American accents – all the genuine article – I thought of paging them, when they showed up intent on paging me. I never did discover just what had happened. We hugged one another and danced around for a while like long lost brothers and then took the lift down to the ground floor and street level, crossed under the elevated highway by Pier 90 and looked back on the *Queen Mary*. This was an American sidewalk on an American street and my first impressions were that it was sunny, that it was warm, and that the sunshine intensified the colours of the American scene. Not only that but the scene itself was definitely more colourful than at home. Clothes struck me as being so, and where in England does one see yellow and red taxis? Pat asked me whether I fully realised the fact that I'd arrived and was in America and when I shook my head told me that it would hit me suddenly when I didn't expect it. So of course I half expected it happening during my entire stay, and it didn't really dawn that I'd been to America until some six months after I'd got back home.

We went into a diner opposite the pier and had a round of coffee of the type Fredric Brown describes as muddy liquid. I was still feeling a little dazed and looking back can't understand why I didn't try some apple pie, pizza or even a hamburger. Belle left us in order to do some shopping and Bill and Pat pushed my cases and me into a taxi which drove past the Empire State Building and out to the Ellingtons' apartment on the East Side. Here I met Sandy Ritter, the young lady whose apartment shared the fifth floor with that of Dick and Pat. She served us up coffee and we sat around smoking and comparing English and American cigarettes waiting for something to happen. We didn't have to wait very long.

Fans began to drop in and out with monotonous regularity and though I was having a whale of a time, meeting more fans than I normally meet in an entire year at home, I'm not too sure I got them all sorted out and the correct names tagged on to the correct faces. Sandy Cutrell came along to see whether I'd survived the trip over and was in any shape to be driven out to Cleveland on the Friday morning, three days later. We showed Bill and Pat the copy of *Tarzan Adventures* that Mike Moorcock had given Sandy in London, the issue where the Jungle Lord meets Jim Caughran, Lee Shaw and

Dick Ellington. Shel Deretchin dropped in to renew memories of the London Worldcon the year before and I met for the first time such New York stalwarts as Danny Curran, Ian Macauley (then the only one in fandom), Bill Donaho and Roger Sims. I never did find out what part Roger, from Detroit, was playing in the New York scene, but he fitted in well. Danny and Bill Donaho were then the occupants of the Bowery apartment known to fandom as "The Nunnery", which had taken over the role of the vacated "Riverside Dive" in holding parties. I never really got to know Danny, who struck me as being an easy going personality who should be known. Still, these sentiments were probably true of practically everyone I came into contact with briefly during the trip. I'd be getting on well with them and would suddenly find myself whisked away to meet someone else.

That's probably the most regretful thing about a rushed tour like a TAFF trip. Things have often to be done by halves or not at all. It's a pity where places are concerned, and with people it's just plain tragedy.

Besides Danny, I never really got to know Ian, who I bumped into frequently at one time or another when either one of us was moving somewhere else. We did have one brief chat before he had to duck out on some errand, as had other fans. Bill Rickhardt had to go off to work at Cushman's, and at one time I was left with Bill Donaho, a frightful prospect for any newcomer to New York. I later christened Bill "Wee Willie" to try and bring his tremendous build down to manageable size. He stands some six foot four, weighs close on twenty stones, and every cubic inch of him is fabulous, as others have since discovered. Later Bill was to become much more active in fandom and publish his own giant fanzine, *Habakkuk*.

In the afternoon I went out shopping with Pat, trying vainly to compare prices of such assorted amenities as soap powder and gramophone records so that I'd be able to dazzle my parents with acquired knowledge when I returned home. We bought some duplicating paper, had a look round a supermarket where I ran a trolley into a passer-by, and looked in on Steve Takacs, the bookseller on Third Avenue who has attended several conventions and who is known in New York as possessing the ability to underemphasise his business successes. Around this time, I was beginning to feel as though I'd been playing rugby for two or three hours and I asked Pat what the temperature was. "About eighty-three," she replied, carefully adding that it was cool in New York for that time of the year. I tried to think that she was showing me that it was really just like home in England, but when my

mind went back to the dazzling sixties we experience on rare sunny days, I felt hotter than ever. When we got back to the apartment, I took off my vest, or my undershirt as I was learning to call it, and I didn't wear one again until I arrived back in England. Since then, I've never been without one!

Larry Shaw later dropped in, complete with pipe. I'd met Larry and the pipe in Kettering in 1956 when he'd been quickly manhandled from group to group and I hadn't had much time to speak with him there. I sat watching him blow smoke at the ceiling, feeling the distrust that a fan feels for a professional who is trying, somewhat condescendingly, to be a fan. But it soon dawned on me that Larry's enthusiasm wasn't pseudo-eagerness; this was the real thing. We started insulting one another in a friendly fashion, calling *Infinity* and OMPA Presidents lots of nasty things, and Larry quickly became one of my favourite American fan personalities. And as though it wasn't enough for me to be sitting in New York swapping yarns with Larry Shaw, Dick Ellington came home from work. For years people had been telling me that Dick is a Good Man, a Great Guy and like that. Now I was to find out for myself. While the TAFF polling was still in progress, Dick had written to me saying that although he was supporting John Berry, if I made the grade he'd be glad to have me stay with him. And now here he was, stuck, and having to eat his words.

Dick told me about his fanzine, *Fijagh*, and what the Detroit group had lined up in the way of a touring schedule (it later turned out that they changed the programme several times between that stage of the planning and the actual operation), about New York and what it was like living there, how the sewers of the city were crawling with monstrous alligators, and of some of the conventions he'd attended. Before we knew where we were we'd had dinner and other fans had begun to roll in for a party which Dick insisted was just a get together. Dave Kyle showed up wearing an army uniform with major's insignia. He was leaving early the next morning to hitch a ride over to the west coast in an army plane, a procedure which is the done thing with American military. It struck me as strange that I should have met Belle the same morning and have got on as well with her as I was now doing with Dave. It wasn't that either side in the lawsuit feud was taking pains to conceal antagonism from me. I'd already stated that I was neutral and I was extremely pleased to see that neither side held this against me. Dave asked me about Sandy Sanderson and when I told him that Sandy had lent me one of my two cases, he insisted on picking it up. "Don't forget to tell him that Dave Kyle

carried this around with him," he cracked. I didn't and Sandy even thought it funny.

After a while Larry and I found that we had a mutual interest in gin and we went out for some. Larry kindly let me watch him purchase a bottle. We returned to the flat after a brief brush with a couple of Bowery drunks who tried to touch us for some money and found that Pat was going to bed. A group of hardies stayed up getting slowly but steadily drunker – Bill Donaho, Dave, Dick, Larry and myself, as well as Russell Blackwell who had materialised from nowhere – and discussing, dammit! science fiction! We sat up until four, only the second time in my life that I'd stayed up so late discussing anything discussable with fans, and the previous time Norman Shorrock and I had worked our way through SF, too. There must be something about science fiction, after all. With Dave the last to leave, I crawled into a bed kept warm for me by a cat with an unprintable name and despite my wandering through the day's crowded events, from getting up at 5:30 to seeing Larry Shaw wander home in a zombie-like trance, I fell asleep.

4. Every Street a Boulevard

It was well after midday that I awoke on Wednesday 20th August. After the hectic night before this wasn't surprising. Dick had already gone to work but Pat was still around, looking after Poops, and now she had two helpless children on her hands. I was still in my daze and sat around listening to the New York radio stations, which are just like commercial television without the interference, and drinking coffee. I tried some Wheaties, a minor ambition I'd had since the war years when I was an avid Superman fan. The American troops used to bring comic books into England and in those days I had a collection to match Ted White's.

Sandy Cutrell came round and together we walked on to Fourth Avenue and up to Union Square. I saw a snack bar advertising hamburgers and went inside to sample my first. Like a fool I ordered French fries with the thing and found myself paying through the nose for chipped potatoes that in England would cost me sixpence. A further disappointment was due: the highly rated malted milks turned out to be nothing but milk shakes at twice the price I would have to pay at home. Still, I enjoyed the experience of ordering my first American hamburger. It tasted much nicer than the weak imitations they sell on Coventry Street in London's West End. And in a warped and twisted way I also enjoyed paying out my first dollar bill.

Sandy and I then took the subway downtown. The New York subway didn't set any rivers afire with me. Compared with the London Underground its directional signs are poor and do not attract attention, whilst the lack of paint and colour makes the system dirty. To a Briton who is constantly criticising the hygienic standards of British life in comparison with the American (particularly where food matters are concerned), this was a disappointment. Do Americans save their larger than life signposts and their colourful dress, their brighter outer coating, as it were, for the upper levels? I'd hate to think so, but the New York subway could certainly learn from London. We emerged to that upper level, with its bright sunlight and cleancut colours, at 34th Street. And that is where an afternoon of kicks for me began. Looking back, now, I find it hard to believe that such little things pleased me as much as the bigger aspects of the trip, silly little things like seeing the latest *Mad* on sale at a street corner newsstand. I took a couple of colour

shots of Macy's and we walked over to the store.

I'd heard a lot about Macy's, of course, from reading, but apart from the reputation this too was something of a disappointment, being just like any department store at home except that it's bigger and except that smoking was not permitted and I had to stub my cigarette. It's surprising just how these greatly cracked up places, especially stores, do disappoint, though. In London there are both Foyle's and Gamage's, both of which are overrated.

From Macy's we looked across at the Empire State Building and I took some more shots. We walked over to this, this... well, how do you describe it? We walked over to it, anyway. And we went in, too. I was a little surprised to find that one had to pay to go to the top of the Building. The price was a dollar thirty, just over nine shillings. Sandy told me that there are 102 floors and that there was an excellent observatory on the eighty-sixth. We took an express elevator. The lifts at home are nothing like this. I don't suppose they have the room to get really started on a fast trip. This car took a few seconds over a minute to make the 86 floors.

The operator, or lift man as we'd call him, suddenly began to chant in a monotone something about a plane crashing into the side of the building, coming through two elevator shafts. The pilot and navigator had fallen to their deaths down the very shaft we were then travelling. I'd heard better hi-fi records but at least this recording could answer questions. I asked how high up this had occurred and was told that the plane crashed through the 72nd floor. Need I add that at that moment we were at the 72nd floor?

The observatory has all the usual tourist attractions, with recording machines, a post-box and souvenir counters. We ignored all these and stepped outside on to the paved walk. I'm normally not a person to get wildly enthusiastic about the man-made wonders I'm obviously supposed to get enthusiastic about, but if there ever has been an exception in my life then the Empire State Building is indeed that exception. The view is breathtaking. I really enjoyed taking pictures of the different landmarks... the Chrysler Building, Radio City, the famous "Skyline" and the rest. Even I picked out the United Nations Building and I got a kick out of pointing out the *Queen Mary* which was to sail back to Southampton the following day, and the S.S. *United States* which was docked close by. I imagined that the children at school back home would be quite pleased with the films I was taking and I regretted that I would not have Sandy alongside me when showing them. He made an excellent guide, a walking encyclopaedia. At the time I did half

think of coming back up to the top of the Building the following morning to get some shots of the *Mary* sailing by but, needless to say, I never carried this through.

Sandy and I had promised Pat that we would get back for dinner so we traversed our route. Afterwards Shel Deretchin, the London Worldcon's "Boy Ugh", dropped in and by indulging in some brilliant mathematical calculation he and Sandy decided to show me Greenwich Village. We drove down in Sandy's car. The Village is a weird place. I have heard of areas having their own decisive personalities, but I've never felt that such a personality could be as tangible as that of Greenwich Village.

The atmosphere is wholly one of informality. When Shel and Sandy parked the car and took me past the higher priced tourist traps, I was amazed to find crowds of people standing about on the street corners, not looking sinister as one is led to believe street corner crowds look, but just talking. Some greeted Sandy and Shel as we strolled past. People sat around on the steps of shops and apartment houses; some sat on the fenders or bonnets of parked cars. I discovered that these cars probably didn't even belong to those who were sitting on them. Strange indeed is Life in Other Lands.

Shel told Sandy that I should be taken to MacDougal, which name I assumed belonged to a friend of theirs, but the name turned out to be that of a street in the Village. Here we looked in a music shop called the Folklore Center and swapped a couple of words with the proprietor, Izzy Young. I noticed that the store carried various paperbacks on folk music and amongst them was the Lee Hoffman Shaw-edited *Caravan*, no longer the mimeographed fringe-fanzine it had begun as, but already a semi-professional photo-offset job, boasting a press run of 2,000. Fandom certainly was never like that.

We went into a little coffee bar in which two or three characters were playing chess. One of these was introduced as Dave MacDonald, then the editor of *Metrofan*, the fanzine which had become involved in the Kyle-Dietz lawsuit war. Dave asked what I thought of it all and I told him that I was not taking sides in the matter. Probably this was just as well for much later I was told that Dave asks probing questions in order to obtain material for his zines. I don't know how much truth there is in this, but I'm glad that I *wasn't* involved.

Whilst talking to Dave I found another character looking over my shoulder. He was introduced as Tom Condit, whose name always reminds me

of a cocktail. He's a friendly, informal type with whom I unfortunately only managed to exchange a few words before being dragged away from the coffee bar (the Caricature, which regulars call "The Cari".). We wandered down the street to investigate a bookshop which was installed in a cellar. Here we found a couple of cartons of paperbacks at the back of the store and looked through them, each making purchases. Then we crossed the street to a second coffee shop which was as near to a typical Soho meeting place as anything I saw in the Village. This was Figaro's, where the folk music fans gather, and the walls were covered with esoteric inspirations appertaining to their Way of Life.

Shel and Sandy marched in with me in tow and they enthusiastically greeted a young lady sitting amongst a group by the window. I didn't recognise her and was a little ashamed of myself when they introduced Lee Shaw, for I had met her at Kettering in 1956. I passed on the regards of various British fans but she didn't seem too interested. We sat down at her table and Shel bought me a glass of iced coffee. I felt that it should have been one of those fannish occasions which Go Down in History but it fell flat.

We sat and stared at each other, nobody quite succeeding in breaking the ice. Lee is the listening kind of fan, I understand, and although I'm reputed to be the talking type, I do need some spark of conversation to start me off. It did strike me as a sad thing that someone who had been such a part of Willis's Stateside trip and who herself had been elected as a TAFF delegate should have become so out of touch with things. It might have been plain selfishness on my part because Lee wasn't wildly enthusiastic at meeting me on home territory. It seemed all so very futile at the time and it did strike me that the sense of futility was part and parcel of the Village scene, as is its informality. Perhaps, indeed, the two go hand in hand.

I don't remember Lee as much as smiling during that meeting. Admittedly, she was faced with Bennett, a formidable imposition at the best of times, but the only spark of the Lee I knew and loved as a fan came when she telling me that these days she was completely out of touch with fandom. "The only fanzine I'm editing these days," she said, "is *Science-Fiction Five-Yearly*." She told Shel and Sandy that they should show me something of the Village that O. Henry made famous in "The Last Leaf". This interested me greatly as I've always been a short story fan and of course "The Last Leaf" is a classic. Lee was referring to the street which doubled back and looped past and through itself and I looked forward to seeing this. I did remember seeing

a film years and years before which had opened with a shot of that part of the Village (I think that it was called *Greenwich Village*, too, and that it starred Don Ameche).

We therefore left Figaro's and walked back along MacDougal, looking in again at the Cari to find Dave MacDonald challenging us to a game of cards. I tried to get everyone interested in brag, but Sandy has too much sense to be a gambler so we settled for their teaching me to play "Hearts", a game I had heard of but had never played. It was the old story of beginner's luck when I realised the rules seemed familiar. I've often played the game in England, but under a different name. Yuk.

Shel had to leave about this time and Sandy took me to see where 4th Street crosses 11th Street, this being a seeming impossibility as in New York City the streets run from East to West and the avenues from north to south. We wandered through Washington Square, the Village's Hyde Park Corner, which boasted its own tables marked out with chess boards, and Sandy also showed me a street which joined itself halfway down (Waverly Place) and a building which is on two streets on one side and one street on two sides! It was all very confusing and by the time Sandy took me back to the Ellingtons' for supper and a last chat before going to bed in the early hours, I was a bigger nervous wreck than before.

5. Out and About

It was becoming a habit. The following day, Thursday 21st August, saw me springing out of bed at the crack of noon. I was hardly up and trying different cereals for breakfast before Sandy Cutrell was phoning Pat and telling her that he'd like to show me more of New York, this time showing me further afield. He left directions for me to meet him somewhere way out in the wilds, after a subway ride to the end of the line, and after making a change somewhere underneath the Empire State Building.

Sandy had taken me to the first subway station I was to pass through during the previous afternoon's wanderings so I found this without difficulty. I paid my 15 cents and put the token I got in exchange – the kind that is the same size as a German pfennig – in the turnstile. Then I was on my own to try and find my way to the other end of the maze. I've already said that the New York system is not as well posted with directional signs as is that of London, and as Forry Ackerman will tell you, I've gone wrong in London before today. I finally picked up enough courage to board one of the dowdy looking trains and settled back with a nerve-soothing Player to read the adverts. I was soon thoroughly absorbed with them.

"Say, bud, got a light?" The voice cut across my far away world of thoughts.

I looked up, pulling out my lighter as I did so. A uniformed guard glared down at me. "Put out that so-and-so cigarette!" he yelled. "Don't you know there's no smoking on the subway."

I shrank down to three inches and was grateful when I reached 34th St., where I made my change. After a boring ride lasting almost three-quarters of an hour, a ride which was however darn good value for the 15 cents I had paid (in New York, every ride costs the same 15¢ irrespective of distance; in London the price varies depending on distance travelled), I emerged in the light and saw Sandy waiting for me. He guided me out to his car and we drove off. Sandy showed me my first taste of American highway, complete with complicated cloverleaf intersections. I'd already seen speed highways in Germany, but three-layer cloverleafs are something even Germany hasn't got. Britain at that time had neither. As I was to find out, the cities in the States are further apart than those in Britain and the cars are built to travel the roads

between them. The roads are wider and don't bend as much as ours, and accordingly the cars are bigger, wider and more powerful than those at home. At least we can get more miles to the gallon, which is something.

Sandy parked the car near the cloverleaf and I took some shots for the children back at school. At Idlewild, I took more shots. These proved to be expensive for when we returned to the car, a 1950 Ford, a beefy and silent cop was writing out a parking ticket. We drove across Queens and out to Nassau, to Sandy's home at Roslyn Heights. Here I met Sandy's mother, a delightful person possessing an extensive collection of my favourite non-science fiction authors. We sat out on the screened porch, drinking lemonade and comparing the hasty impressions the Cutrell family had formed of London a fortnight before with the hasty impressions I'd formed of New York.

Afterwards, Sandy drove me out to Manhasset Bay, a beautiful stretch of water where the most influential New Yorkers come to relax by sailing. Here we looked up some friends of Sandy, Vanda and Nina Pelican, both of whom read some SF. There was a good chance, Nina said, that she'd be able to get to the Solacon, but to my knowledge she didn't make it. Probably went off with the American Vice-Consul from Manchester.

It was all very leisurely and luxurious, but eventually we had to get back into the City. Sandy drove me down Wall Street, where I was disappointed to find that the sidewalks are not paved with silver dollars, and we drove round to the intersection of 4th and 11th Streets so that I could get a shot of what had so intrigued me the previous day.

We then drove over to Cooper Square, where Third Avenue runs into Fourth Avenue and they continue as the Bowery. Here was the Nunnery, then New York's party house. The residents, Danny Curran and Bill Donaho, were throwing a party for me. I was naturally honoured, but later I discovered that Bill and Danny only needed an excuse like a drunk passing them on the street without asking for a dime in order to celebrate.

Candles were the order of the day, to save on electricity. There was some talk of the dark being more conducive toward a party atmosphere, but I stuck out that if this were so you wouldn't be able to see what you were drinking.

I was greeted by Will Jenkins, the Will *J.* Jenkins, who had driven up specially from Philadelphia. I'd met Will at the London Worldcon and he had been a great hit there. The Liverpool fans had made him the Chairman of the

Philadelphia Chapter of the Liverpool Science Fiction Society, and I later learned that Will had torn a pound note in half, giving one half to Lyn Berman, Ted Carnell's secretary, and keeping the other half with the excuse that one day he was going to return and they'd spend it together. Shel was there too and so was John "Sean" Hitchcock who had driven up from Baltimore to tell me that Bob Pavlat, who had been half expected, couldn't make it after all. Bob was, however, to travel out to South Gate, and he'd be meeting up with me in Springfield. I'd heard that every state had some centre called Springfield so this news was really enlightening.

Sean himself is a quiet type, to say the least, seemingly completely lacking the sparkling personality shown in print and letters during the days when he was publishing *Umbra*. Frank and Belle Dietz were there, too. I hadn't seen Frank since the London Con and we exchanged hearty greetings. In much of what he says and the way he says it Frank reminds me of Norman Shorrock, which is a Good Thing. Belle had brought me an iced cake specially labelled with a very nice welcoming message, so nice in fact that it hurt me to think of cutting it, and I didn't have to be asked twice when Will suggested playing brag. This was my first brag session in the States. I won.

Bill Donaho took me out on to the two-storey roof and showed me the iron girder which had been left out when the place had been built, thus causing a sag in the apartment's ceiling. He also demonstrated his hi-fi equipment to me. Bill believes in playing a record, especially the 1812, at maximum volume, plus. I can still hear those bells and cannons. Larry Shaw accused me of being a fake fan because I didn't speak with a cockney accent and told me, "We used to write Ken and Pam Bulmer notes, but we can understand you." He seemed very hurt about it. I took the pipe out of his mouth and sampled it. I liked it so much that I stuck with it half the evening. Belle eventually managed to corner me and I cut and sampled the cake. I enjoyed it, as I did the different American beers I was trying. At this time, someone told me that Nick and Noreen Falasca were on the phone from Cleveland and that they wanted to speak to me. It was an intriguing conversation. "Hello, Noreen," I yelled into the phone. Fans were milling round, engaged in fannish pursuits and conversation. "Mumble, mumble," came the reply over the wire. I thought fast. "I'm fine, thanks, and I'm having a fine time. How are you out there in the wilds?" More mumbling. I asked the voice to speak up and it turned out to be Pat Ellington on the extension in the other room.

It was quite a party. There were people there like Ruth Kyle (who I had seen very briefly that morning before rushing out to meet Sandy) and Lee Shaw who I didn't see, and there were people there, too, who had nothing to do with fandom. I had a fine time. Before Pat and Dick dragged me off about three in the morning, Pat took me out on to the roof and stuffed a pile of bills and coins into the palm of my hand. The gang had had a whip round. It was a very nice gesture and the money later proved to be useful.

Pat and Dick took me over to an all-night restaurant, the first I'd ever seen, and we had a quick snack. It seemed fitting that as Dick and I were both Jan Jansen's agents in foreign countries, I should have a rollmop. Rosa, Jan's wife, was working in an Antwerp café called the Rolmops.

We walked back to Eleventh Street and the Ellingtons' apartment, Dick being indignantly firm with a drunk who threatened to set the police on him for not parting with a dime.

It had been another fabulous day, and in preparation of my long drive the next day – or rather, later the same day – we all went straight to bed.

6. The Turnpike to Cleveland

It was just after noon when Sandy called for me and when we finally drove off, with Dick, Pat, Poops, the cats and various neighbours waving to us from sundry windows, we had Sandy driving, Russell Blackwell's son, "A.H.", sitting next to him, myself with luggage in the back and Bill Donaho taking up the half of the front seat not occupied by the other two. I asked Bill, who was out of work at that time, how he could afford to travel to the West Coast in order to attend the Solacon. It seemed that Danny Curran was then working and repaying the money Bill had lent him when *he* was out of work.

We drove through Central Park and parked on the edge of the Harlem district. A pair of street urchins begged a quarter from softhearted Sandy and were highly delighted when I gave them a ha'penny. Shows how even children appreciate the value of *real* money. I hope they were as pleased with me when they tried to spend it. The apartment we were calling on was shared by Bill Rickhardt and Roger "Teddy Bear" Sims. They piled their cases in the back of the car next to me and squeezed up to me, one sitting on the other's lap. It was quite a drive.

We drove out of New York along the New Jersey Turnpike, the first time I'd seen a tolled highway. After skirting Newark, this highway cuts south almost as far as Philadelphia. Here it becomes the Pennsylvania Turnpike, and a fresh toll, about a cent a mile travelled, has to be paid. We passed Valley Forge and crossed the Susquehanna River at Harrisburg and then drove through a really scenic stretch of countryside, the Blue and Allegheny Mountains. When we stopped for petrol, I managed to take a few colour pictures. I'd always wondered whether the blue grass one sees in films is real. It is. I also took some shots of cars zooming along the turnpike by kneeling on the road shoulder, thereby risking my neck. Other shots I took included a line of parked cars which each sported a different state's number plate and the restaurant itself. These roadside houses combine a garage or "service station" and a restaurant, which also sells souvenirs, sweets, cigarettes, magazines and newspapers. They are operated by a large monopoly called Howard Johnson's, which is nationally famous for its 56 flavours of ice cream and its red-bricked buildings with green roofs. At a second stop later in the day I invested a dollar in a pair of clip-on sunglasses

which combatted the bright glare I'd been experiencing since hitting New York and which really turned me into a typical tourist.

We were suddenly surprised to find ourselves passing a prewar English car, probably a Singer, which looked small even by English standards. Sandy was quite taken with its English number plate and we all waved and whistled as we went past. A tubby cigar-smoking American army sergeant waved back with mild interest. Sandy was telling me that the Pennsylvania Turnpike was probably the fastest road in the world with the fewest holdups, when we rounded a bend between the mountains to find a long line of cars ahead of us. We were stuck there for quite a while and took the opportunity to get out and stretch our legs by walking down the hill to the obstruction causing the holdup. A car had burnt out. "Imagine," said Sandy, using that tone of disgust a favourite uncle uses when his card trick has misfired, "here we are, miles and miles away from New York, right out in the open country, and what do we find? A traffic jam!"

Roger told me of the time he had been driving in Missouri with Harlan Ellison, who had that time just written a book whilst on basic training in the army. The book was *Rumble*, and I'd bought a copy from Will Jenkins the previous evening, a dime's worth of brag winnings. Harlan, evidently, had been driving along the highway when he crossed the yellow line which is painted down the centre of the road to warn that it is illegal to cross into the next lane. Harlan had overtaken a car which turned out to be a police car. The occupants had hurriedly indicated that Harlan pull over to the side of the road. He did so and then whispered to Roger, who was sitting next to him, "I haven't got a licence." Roger suggested that they should change places, which they did. This left Roger in the lurch, for a burly cop came up and stuck his head in the window, saying "Don't you know what that yellow line means?" Harlan nudged Roger and whispered, "Tell him that in Michigan they have white lines." Roger repeated the words parrot fashion and Harlan's party trick had worked.

Eventually, the Pennsylvania Turnpike petered out and gave way to the Ohio Turnpike, which meant a further payment. By this time it was getting dark and though we passed through Youngstown, where I had been led to believe John Koning would be waiting at the roadside, we didn't even see the side of the road. Bill Rickhardt told me of the time he had been stranded out in Youngstown with a crowd of friends. He'd phoned the Falascas for help and though it was in the early hours of the morning, Nick had driven out to

help them back to civilisation. And so we left the turnpike on the outskirts of Cleveland and found Warwick Drive where I was introduced to Nick and Noreen Falasca. I'd heard from various sources that they'd turn out to be two of the finest people I'd meet in the States and I was grateful that I had the opportunity of finding out for myself. Nick is somewhat excitable in his dialogue, illustrating this point or that by gesticulation, but this is no fault, for he has a fine head on his shoulders. Noreen is slim and fine featured, and has the enviable quality of being able to remain calm when considering a problem. Whereas at the time I felt that their personalities complemented each other very well, it may have been that the reverse was true and that they actually conflicted. Since the terrific times I had with them in 1958, Nick and Noreen have been divorced, Noreen having since remarried, to New York's wildman Larry Shaw.

7. Cleveland to Chicago Convention Country

On arrival at the Falascas', Noreen prepared a meal for us and afterwards we sorted out who should sleep where. As a guest to the country – cough – I rated a place in the guestroom's double bed, though I did offer to stay up all night and teach Nick how to play brag. Noreen sensibly countered this wild suggestion by telling me that I wouldn't be sleeping at all the following night, as we would be driving the whole time. I went off to bed but when I came across my photo album in my case, I took it along to show Nick shots of some of the British fans we'd been talking about. Roger and Bill Rickhardt, who had bedded down on the floor of the living room, heard us talking in the bedroom and came along to look at the photos too. We were still sitting there swapping fannish stories at five. Noreen finally chased us off to bed. I climbed into bed, alongside Sandy. When I woke up around eleven the next morning, I turned over and found a snoring Bill Donaho alongside me. It was, I suppose, that kind of visit.

I later discovered that Sandy had got up about nine and Bill had deserted his pallet to take his place. He didn't even say good morning when I got up, and indeed Bill's only contribution to the entire happenings that day was that he stayed in bed until evening. I had an excellent breakfast and at Noreen's invitation got on the phone to John Koning in Youngstown. John and I had been playing postal chess for some fifteen months at that time and we'd managed to progress as far as the thirteen move. John later wrote me that he'd had a phone call from someone with a German accent who claimed to be me. Naturally, I denied all knowledge of the call. Afterwards, I tried to explain to Bill and Nick the intricacies of playing cricket and we played through Nick's LP record collection.

It was at about this time that Greg and Pat really came into my life. I'd been warned that I'd be meeting a pair of fringe fans at the Falascas' although they had dropped in briefly to see Dick and Pat Ellington whilst I was in New York. Dick had told me that although he didn't know how, Greg and Pat would be meeting up with us in Cleveland and going on one of the trips to Springfield from there. From Cleveland, Nick and Noreen would be driving

to Chicago and Sandy would be going down to Indianapolis; we'd all be meeting in Springfield. I had been told to note carefully which route Greg and Pat would be taking and to take the *other* one. Greg himself, a wild youth of 19 or 20, was "all right", I'd been told, but Pat has evidently the reputation for continual empty chatter.

When I met and spoke with them at the Falascas' I didn't have any trouble, though. Pat asked a few questions about how I was liking the States and perhaps because I had been forewarned I managed not to prolong the interview. Sometime during the morning they left with Sandy and, though I would have liked to have looked up Bob Madle who at that time was living in Indianapolis, I was booked for Chicago.

In the afternoon, Nick, Noreen, Roger and Bill Rickhardt took me down into Cleveland and we drove around the city centre, looking at the civic building which had appeared in the 1955 Clevention programme booklets. We also stopped on the Lake Erie shore. This was my first sight of the Great Lakes, and actually my last. A large ship was unloading passengers nearby and a sea plane obliged by coming in to land, so that I could take a colour shot. Otherwise, the sight was disappointing. I hadn't expected to be able to see Canada, as many tourists evidently do. It's about fifty miles over to the Canadian shore and the best part of a day's trip. The water, however, was a dirty slate and Noreen told me that the Lake was used as a sewage outlet, which didn't make the prospect of bathing sound too attractive.

Cleveland itself disappointed me too. It's hard to judge any place on the acquaintance of an hour or so, but this was a Saturday afternoon. Practically any other centre I've ever been in would show more life at such a time than did Cleveland on that day. It appeared not only lifeless, but dowdy, and very, very dull.

We strolled around the town, looking at a drugstore's magazine racks and we paid a visit to a downtown secondhand book store. Here I picked out a couple of Fredric Brown mysteries that I hadn't read and managed to beat the others to two of the *Mad* series of paperbacks. Whilst I was looking at some of the old Dime/Mystery Magazines in the hope of picking up a rarish Bradbury story, the store's owner, a character called Kay, complained that the others were making too much noise, and that "this isn't a bar-room". I took my books over to him and was a little surprised that he wanted the cover price of 35 cents for the two *Mad* pbs; they were a little battered. I turned these down but bought the two Brown pbs at a dime apiece. No sooner had I

made the purchase than Kay tore down one of the gangways between the bookshelves. “Give me that,” he yelled, tearing a copy of Ellison’s *Rumble* from Nick’s hand. “You can’t show books like that to minors!” He indicated Bill Rickhardt. Nick protested that we knew the author but this only brought a fresh outburst from this epitome of logical salesmanship. “You’re not customers,” Kay raved. “You’re just in here making a nuisance of yourselves. Get out of my store.” I asked him, seeing as we weren’t customers, if I could have my money back on the two Brown books, but the reply was “No, you’ve bought those.” We still evidently weren’t customers, though, and we left this sour character to his self-appointed profession of balancing the kindnesses other Americans are only too pleased to show to visitors.

Back at Warwick Drive we had another meal before shooting off into the wilderness and just before nine, with a bouncing Bill Donaho awake and refreshed, we prepared to depart. No sooner had we piled into the car than Nick’s parents, who occupied the neighbouring house, called us in for a parting drink. I made the acquaintance of the American highball, a smooth drink which certainly demands further investigation.

And then we were off again. We followed the Ohio Turnpike west until we stopped at a Howard Johnson’s at Maumee, just outside Toledo. It was here that we met the Detroit contribution to the cross-country caravan and I transferred to their car, actually Fred Prophet’s. Fred had been over to the London Convention the previous year but I hadn’t seen a lot of him then and I have to confess that I was a little put out at the time I moved into his car. I’d grown very attached to the Falascas and didn’t particularly want them to foist me off on someone who was a virtual stranger. Also, I always used to have a sneaking suspicion that fans who aren’t active in the fanzine world are not all they should be. This is just plain ridiculous and it sank into my typically idiotic mind that Fred was doing me a great favour, as he had previously agreed to drive the TAFF delegate across country. This, naturally, as any sane person can see, was a wonderful gesture and Fred’s personality soon showed me what a great travelling companion he is. He’s an enthusiastic and entertaining conversationalist, and his informal manner, combined with an amount of common sense, meant that he put up with my more difficult moods with fortitude. He was instructive throughout the trip. It was never too much trouble to explain anything to me and he stopped in some darned awkward places so that I could take pictures. Whenever he put forward a suggestion it was that suggestion to which we adhered. There was no question of

dictatorship. It was simply that his suggestions were the most practicable and the most sensible.

Dean McLaughlin had driven down to Maumee to have a word with Nick before returning to Detroit. He later flew out to the Convention. Jim Broderick and his cousin Doug, a non-fan, were my other companions in the car. Jim struck me as being another in the Prophet ilk. They seem to breed 'em mature round Detroit way. Doug was a little wilder. When he stopped acting the part of a free and easy youth with a chip on his shoulder, though, he was quite a nice guy. Unfortunately, I didn't have the chance of getting to know him really well as he was only travelling with us to Chicago, where he'd get a connection to his home further south. By the time we had reached Los Angeles, though, I was thoroughly ashamed of the selfish initial impressions I'd formed of Fred and Jim. Walt Willis had said that I would be meeting a lot of nice people and they were two of the nicest.

Before too long the Ohio Turnpike gave way to the Indiana East-West Toll Road, so that I could chalk up my fifth American state. I was sorry that we didn't stop anywhere near South Bend, which we practically skirted, so missing the chance of looking up Betty Kujawa who has become a sort of personal guardian angel to several British fans, but that's the way things turned out. Fred and Jim wanted to press on for Chicago and as might be expected they had good reason for wanting to do so.

Actually, I had always wanted to see Indiana, which I'd been told was as close to English countryside as I'd find anywhere in the USA, but it was dark during the entire ride. I slept much of the time. It was a warm evening and both Fred and Jim kept dozing off too. Even Doug, who was driving, let his eyelids drop at one time sufficiently for us to slide over on to the shoulder of the road. A monotonous ride.

Eventually we reached Chicago, following close behind the Falascas' car, which Bill Donaho was driving. As we drove along the famous "Outer Drive", it was weird to realise that on our left were most of Chicago's skyscrapers and on our right was Lake Michigan... and not to be able to see either.

Bill indicated that he intended turning left and moved over to the innermost line of the six-lane highway. We followed. Bill turned just as the lights changed colour against us. We followed. We suddenly found ourselves driving across the six lanes of traffic travelling in the opposite direction. This traffic had of course begun to move with the light change and it wasn't until

later that it dawned on us that we had had a lucky escape. I can still hear the squealing of brakes.

Bill and the Falascas roared off into the night to let the waiting Kemps, Earl and Nancy, know we were on our way. We turned off to drop Doug at Union Station. It was then 2:15 a.m., local time, and we put our watches accordingly. The Station was deserted, except for a pair of beefy cops who directed us to a window where Doug was able to purchase his ticket and enquire the time of his train. We left him with our sympathies and a three hour wait ahead of him, and we went off to find the Kemps' home. Here the caravan was to pick up the Chicago contingent. It seemed completely strange that the Detroit and Chicago groups, both of whom were to bid at the Solacon for the 1959 Worldcon, should travel together, and with such a co-operative spirit. That, I suppose, is American fandom.

At the Kemps' we found a miniature convention awaiting us. Several fans had driven up from all over the place in order to wave the caravan farewell. I was a little bewildered to find Juanita Coulson pushing a cup of coffee into my welcoming hand. Buck was there, too, not looking too unlike his photographs. Gene and Juanita DeWeese were also in evidence, as were Bill and Maxine Beard. I'd been exchanging magazines and pbs with Bill for some time but don't think I was in a state to discuss business with him in any coherent manner. We didn't stay long enough for the conversation to touch on more than superficialities, which was disappointing. Buck Coulson and I, for example, have been exchanging letters and fanzines for some years, and I suspect that he drove up from Wabash especially to see for himself what a British fan looks like. I'd like to have tried my hand, too, at chess against Gene DeWeese, but there it was – no sooner had we all got together than someone made the fool suggestion that we all leave again, and only a percentage was travelling out towards Los Angeles. Accordingly, we flowed out into the street, where I did manage to get in a few words with Juanita Coulson about teaching and with Buck about *Yandro*. Jerry DeMuth, with his flourishing beard, passed us and got into a car. I looked into the window and found myself talking to Frances Light with whom I'd exchanged letters on the strength of an appeal in *Imagination*.

8. The Tucker Hunters

Fred and Jim called me and I climbed in beside them, full of a sense of wonder that it is possible to meet fans en route across America and at a time approaching four in the morning. The intention was to move off to Springfield where we would be meeting up with Bob Pavlat and Ted White from Washington, and with Sandy Cutrell once again. We roared off through Chicago's deserted streets. As we pulled up for a red light, Nick's car drew up alongside and Roger leaned out to ask us why we'd driven through all those red lights previously and then stopped at this one. It was a good question. Nick and Noreen waved at us gaily and we grinned back as though we shared the joke. We didn't, though. After the non-stop drive from Cleveland we felt tired and even stale.

We drove out of Chicago on to the Alternate Highway 66, which met the main Highway at Gardner. This was the Will Rogers Highway which was to take us all the way to Los Angeles, the famous road immortalised in song ("Get Your Kicks on Route 66") and in Steinbeck's *Grapes of Wrath*. Even lighted only by our headlamps this stretch of the Highway reminded me greatly, once we were out of the metropolis, of the Canterbury-Dover road in England. It was a monotonous and tiring drive. I put my head down on the pillow Fred had thoughtfully provided for the back seat and went to sleep. I half woke a couple of times to find that we were still moving, and at speed. Once I had the impression that it was raining.

When the car started bouncing about, I woke and sat up sharply. It was light and my head ached somewhat. Gradually, I became aware of the surroundings. The car was jogging along across a patch of waste ground, towards a roadside restaurant set well back from the Highway. "Where are we?" I asked brightly, shielding my eyes from the glare of the early morning sun.

"McLean," Fred answered.

"McLean?" I echoed. "And where is McLean?"

"It's a little place fifteen, twenty miles south of Bloomington," Fred told me. "We're stopping here for breakfast."

"Bloomington? You mean you let me sleep while I passed through Bloomington? You actually let up a chance of seeing Bob Tucker?"

“Don’t think you were doing us any favours, sleeping,” said Jim. “Your snores were shaking the car.”

“And anyway,” Fred put in, “we didn’t go through Bloomington. We went round it.”

We pulled up outside the restaurant and went inside. “Ten after seven,”said Fred, “And he’s not here.”

I blinked at the half dozen or so clocks on the wall behind the counter, showing the different times in various zones and cities round the world. Harrogate wasn’t shown so I asked, “Who’s not here? Nick?”

“Oh, we lost the rest of the gang way back,” said Jim. “We hit ninety-eight just after the rain stopped. No, this is where Tucker’s meeting us.”

It was true, even if I didn’t believe it there and then. Bob Tucker had arranged to meet the caravan and wave madly at us as we went by on our way west. I was a little overwhelmed. Still, there was no one there who could conceivably look like Tuck. “Perhaps he’s died,” I remarked, thinking of the Tucker death hoaxes. I drew the scornful looks I deserved.

We had a couple of coffees and were just leaving to look for the others when Nick walked in, followed by Bill Donaho, Bill Rickhardt and Roger. “He’s not here,” Fred told them as Noreen came up in the rear. “Are you sure this is the right place?”

Nick admitted that he wasn’t sure. This was the Dixie Truckers Home, which boasts a continuous day and night service since 1928, but we hadn’t checked on the name and decided to look around McLean for a possible second restaurant. We piled back into the cars. We followed Nick into McLean, going twice round the triangular “square” which looked like an English village green. We followed Nick up a couple of side streets, but each time we drew a blank, and we followed Nick back to the square. Nick leaned out at us and admitted that he was lost. We scornfully took over the lead, drove around a little and after getting ourselves just as lost, managed by good fortune to arrive back at the restaurant. “Perhaps there’s another place further down the Highway,” we suggested to Nick, and drove off south with Nick bringing up the rear.

We hadn’t gone half a mile when we realised that we were not being followed, so drove until we came to the next break in the green which divides the Highway’s dual carriageway, made a U-turn and drove back up to the restaurant. We got there just in time to see the gang, which had been reinforced by Martha Beck, Fran Light and Jerry DeMuth, crowding round a

station wagon which seemed to have just drawn up. We drew up there, too, and got out to join the gang. Leaning against the station wagon was a fan if I ever saw one... medium height, hair which stuck straight up, glasses, a whimsical look, and a black and blue checked sports shirt-cum-windcheater. He shook hands with Fred and Jim and then pushed everyone out of the way. "I haven't come here to meet you lot," he said. "This is the guy I want to meet." He took my limp hand and pumped it madly. I had met Bob Tucker.

He led me back inside the Dixie café and with an out-of-the-corner-of-the-mouth remark about, "Fancy letting yourself get mixed up with a crowd like this," he ushered me to one of the booths and sat down beside me. The others crowded round us and overflowed into the next booth, too.

I opened my mouth to thank him for the copy of his book, *The Man in My Grave*, that he had sent me a month or so previously. He pulled a couple of books out of his pocket and handed them to me. One was a German edition of *The Long Loud Silence*, and the other was a copy of his latest novel, *The Lincoln Hunters*, which he autographed on the fly leaf, thus:

"Ron Bennett – we meet in the traditional manner – two skulking figures surrounded by gibbering idiots (Fans), on a dismal Sunday morning (24 Aug 58) at a lonely place on the moors (McLean, Ill.). Speak of it warmly in your memoirs. Wilson Tucker." Which struck me as being a very nice thing to do. I appreciated the gift of the book, but the inscription overshadowed it, greatly.

Bob told us how *The Lincoln Hunters* was really a straight historical novel, with the time travel background on which to hang the plot. I asked him about *The Long Loud Silence* and the original ending Bob had written me had been cut out of the published version. He told me that the logical ending brought in cannibalism. This was nothing compared with the grisly material he has had published. We got talking about *The Man in My Grave*, and grave digging. Bob told me that undertakers have the tightest union in the world, and that he intended featuring this occupation in his next novel. He outlined the plot for me and we talked about a good starting off point for the story. This was the first time I'd ever discussed an author's forthcoming plot with him and it gave me quite a kick.

Bob went on to tell us how it was possible to smuggle an atom bomb into the US. The F.B.I. had admitted that his theory is practicable. Even if the conversation was a little macabre, it was fascinating talk. We hung on Bob's every word. The tone of the discussion changed eventually, and we moved on

to talk about films and how different versions are released in different parts of the country. This naturally led us to talk about Brigitte Bardot and the different versions of her then current film, *And Woman Was Created*.

At last, it was time to move on. I never did find out exactly why we had to move on. I'd thoroughly enjoyed the previous hour or so and didn't think it at all fair that we had to pile back into respective cars and go on our way. We went outside, Bob having shown further kindness by picking up my breakfast bill. He took a camera from his car and shot a few pictures of the group. I could kick myself now that I didn't take any shots of him. I was still taking pictures which would primarily be of interest to the children at school. It wouldn't have mattered really, though. The roll didn't come out.

With a parting aside that I had to keep it dark from Nick, Bob slipped a Falasca Fandom membership card into my hand and waved at us cheerily as we drove out on to the highway.

He later wrote a letter to *Yandro* describing our arrival at the Dixie:

"So, at the appointed time, I sat in the restaurant parking lot and watched the faaanish cars whiz by me in all the wrong directions; as one of them turned about and whizzed back, I even got out of my car and waved at them, but still I was ignored. I felt like a proud and lonely thing, believe me. Of course, they hadn't followed the by-pass and so missed the pre-arranged signal. But eventually, after about thirty minutes of charging hither and yon, the miracle happened, all the cars and all the occupants managed to find themselves at the restaurant at the same time, and we had breakfast. Bennett was dead on his feet, and I expect he slept through the entire con...."

Indeed, I might have been, but at that time I felt my early morning weariness slip away from me and certainly felt that Bob Tucker scores over Aspro for anyone who is one degree under.

A year later, incidentally, Jean and Andy Young and Dick Eney stopped off at the Dixie café and sent me a card which bore the message: "We looked for elephant footprints, but couldn't find any" – a nice touch.

After leaving McLean our trip across country began in earnest. There was no more sidetracking or stopping over to visit fannish centres. Indeed, where were there any more fannish centres to visit? The Highway is a good road and we made good time on the journey. We by-passed Springfield, Illinois, and travelled on to St. Louis, which we also by-passed, crossing the Mississippi by a toll bridge. The heavy traffic precluded our stopping to take pictures. We were now in Missouri, another state for my collection. As the

highway cut through different small settlements, I saw for the first time the typical small towns I'd become accustomed to in second feature Hollywood films, which are almost always shot on location. I found them quite fascinating. My main recollections are that they were flat and that, because of the glare, I was glad of the sunglasses I'd bought in Ohio. Gasoline, we saw, was cheaper in Missouri than anywhere else we'd travelled. Priced at twenty-five and nine-tenths cents a gallon it certainly did seem a bargain. Fred told of a gas "war" in the region which meant that different companies were trying to undercut one another.

We skirted the Ozarks as far as Springfield, Missouri, resisting the pressure of roadside billboards advertising various caves in the mountains. And here we managed to find the pre-arranged rendezvous without too much delay: the Red Rooster Motel.

9. Where the Wind Comes Sweeping Down the Plain

The Red Rooster was my first experience of motel life, with the lack of eating facilities and the complicated system of wheeling beds in and out of rooms, as and when desired. After the virtually non-stop ride from Cleveland we were each pleased to take baths. I had quite a talk with the motel manager who cashed the first of my traveller's cheques. Surprisingly, I found that he taught at the local school and we compared methods of teaching uninterested pupils the intricacies of mathematics. The Leeds Education Authority missed a trick somewhere along the line, I thought.

The Red Rooster afforded quite a reunion. We met up with the Falascas, Bill Donaho and Bill Rickhardt, Roger and A.H. Blackwell. Frances Light and Martha Beck drove in soon after we arrived and gave me a welcome cup of coffee. I sat drinking it while they seared my eyeballs with flashbulbs. Jerry DeMuth was there and Sandy Cutrell drove in after a while, fresh from his side trip to Indianapolis with Greg and Pat. Later this couple became known to us simply as "The People" because they got up to the weirdest tricks. While we were gathered together talking in the Detroit room another car drove up and from photographs I recognised Bob Pavlat and Ted White. Ted had his best beard with him.

Of all the fans I'd looked forward to meeting in the States, Bob Pavlat headed the list. Three years before he'd stepped out of the blue and had offered to act as *Ploy*'s Stateside representative and since that date he had (and has) worked unflaggingly, writing letters to me, collecting and acknowledging subscriptions, paying my FAPA subs and going out of his way to hunt up for me outré records and out of print books. I'd heard from the Bulmers and from the Americans who had invaded London for the 1957 Worldcon nothing but praise for Bob. It's a rare state of affairs when one hears nothing but good about someone and the upshot may be summarised in the sincere phrase that "Bob Pavlat is a Good Man". We stood around talking and trading cigarettes and, after going into town for a dinner that Nick stood me, we turned in about eight thirty.

Bill Rickhardt called us at 4 a.m., and was called some nasty names for

his trouble. The idea was that we got in as many daylight travelling hours as possible, whilst the early start also meant that we avoided a good part of the day's heavy traffic.

At Tulsa I saw my first oil pumps which weren't as numerous or as big as I'd expected. It was quite a sight, though, to see them seesawing away steadily in someone's front garden. Soon we were approaching Oklahoma City and naturally the songs from my favourite Rogers and Hammerstein musical rang through my ears. The state seemed to have a personality of its own. I saw my first corn and had my first real sight of the Great Plains. If western Missouri had seemed flat, Oklahoma made it appear mountainous by comparison. Just before we were due to arrive in the state capital, Fred, Jim and Roger (who had joined us for a spell at the wheel) spotted billboards advertising a real live ranch. The big draw was that there was no charge for entry, or for leaving the turnpike.

This was the Buffalo Ranch, which turned out to be authentically ramshackle, with a dirt yard, the soil well ground down and tightly packed. There were some stuffed buffalo, saddled up and ready for the ranch photographer to take dude pictures. Huddling together pathetically inside a wired enclosure were some real *living* buffalo as well as a few donkeys or mules or whathaveyou, and oddly enough there was a zebra, too. I went over to have a look at an odd wooded structure, picketed as being an Indian house. A hoary Oklahoman, tanned, rugged and well weather-beaten, told me to stick around as the Indians would start their dancing at the house in about an hour. I had just known there would be a tourist trap angle around the place somewhere. I looked around for the others, wondering whether they were ready to beat a hasty retreat but they were taking pictures of the animals and watching a ranch hand stick an advertising label on the can fender. I asked the Oklahoman about the gum and sweet wrappers he was picking up and stuffing into a sack. We agreed that tourists were generally untidy and unmindful of the beauties of the countryside. Learning that I was English, he told me that he'd been on the Continent during the First World War, and told me something of the way the state had been opened up by the coming of the railroad. I felt like a regular Ernie Pyle. "In the old days," he said, "one could ride for days without seeing another person. Travelling was slow and a person took in what he saw. These days everyone's in too much of a hurry to get from here to there and he doesn't bother about what's in between." It's an old argument, of course, and one which applies in America perhaps even

more so than in England, where both roads and cars aren't built for the same speed.

We drove into Oklahoma City. As the car slowed up at a corner, I took a couple of shots of the first Indians I'd seen. Some wore modern dress while others sported traditional garb of blanket and leather jacket. Faces of both Red and White were weather-beaten and heavily tanned. The glare was most noticeable. The time was getting on well towards noon. We parked the car and fed a pile of nickels into a parking meter and went to meet Jim Caughran at the bus station.

First of all, we had to find the bus station. We hit on a likely place, a busy terminal, at the second attempt and after checking that Jim would likely be arriving shortly after noon, we strolled around the immediate area. We kept dodging back to the car to feed the parking meter and found a bookshop which had various SF magazines in stock. Jim went to stand guard at the terminal and Fred and I looked round for a record store. I thought that buying the LP of *Oklahoma* would be a fine thing to do, but I shied away from the $5.95 price tag.

We strolled back to the bus station to find that Caughran still hadn't arrived and were surprised when Fred was paged over the loudspeaker system. It was Noreen, ringing through to inform us that Nick had had a spot of bother with the car and had stopped to have things put right. Fred took me down the street and bought me a hamburger and a piece of apple pie and a cup of coffee. Then we went back again to the terminal. Jim Broderick was there with a tall gangling youth who turned out to be the long awaited Jim Caughran. We loaded his luggage into the car and drove out of the city. Jim told us that he had so much luggage because he wasn't returning home to Lincoln, Nebraska after the Solacon but instead was moving up to the Bay Area to join the other fans, Terry Carr, Ron Ellik, Carl Brandon and Pete Graham at the University of California.

We made up sandwiches and ate lunch as we travelled. We did stop for gas just before we reached Texas and found that the attendant was an SF reader who was most interested in the fact that we were going to Los Angeles for a convention. It was practically all we could do to prevent him hopping into the car and coming along with us.

We met up with the others again in Amarillo, Texas, where we stayed over at the Ranch 66 Motel, slap on the Highway. It's a most pleasant place and can be recommended to any future fannish travellers. It has an inviting

swimming pool and while the group went splashing about after the hard day's drive, A.H. and I tried to borrow a ball from the office so that I could show him something of English soccer. We had no luck and after I'd taken a couple of shots of the cars whizzing by on the highway and of the tumbleweed drifting across the road in gathering tussles, we wandered back to the pool.

Nick and Noreen still hadn't turned up and Fred phoned through to Oklahoma. The service station told him that they'd left and were on their way. I took some shots of the gang at the pool, being particularly pleased to get some action pictures of Jim Broderick diving. He's extremely good and a pleasure to watch. After a while we drove back along the highway to an eating house called "Cecil's Steak House". Naturally, we couldn't let that one pass. We were busy munching when Nick's car passed by and we knew that they'd made it safely. Bill Donaho was a little upset because I ate steak chicken fried, and in his native state. He made nasty remarks about Englishmen being reared on fish and chips.

We had the Prophet car checked for oil at the service station next door, the "Circle Service" at the junction of 66 and Bell Avenue, which boasts a "Fast Wash". Jim Broderick had a battle with an inquisitive locust, and I picked up a pile of Gulf maps. The attendant loaded me with a pile of combined bottle-and-can openers which made me feel thoroughly convention equipped and which have come in handy at Liverpool parties since. Back at the motel we found out what had happened to Nick and Noreen and prepared to turn in for the night. Jim Caughran and I were put in with Bob and Ted. We immediately moved into the kitchen and used the table for a friendly brag game, pooling our coinage (British and American) as counters with which to play. We all had poker faces after the long day but we lacked the sustenance to brag at any length. We sorted out who owned what and looked up the motel's coke machine for a last refreshment, which we drank while standing by the pool and looking up at the stars. It was a wonderfully clear evening and everything was right with the world. Then we turned in.

10. The Holbrook Affair

On Tuesday 26th August that hateful Bill Rickhardt again woke us just after four. It must have been five by the time we staggered out of our respective beds. Jim Caughran went in Bob's car to help share the driving. I loyally went back to Fred's car and we drove out westwards towards New Mexico. We stopped at a small, flat town for breakfast, drawing up at the roadside restaurant just as Bob, Ted, Jim Caughran and Bill Donaho were leaving. Bill eyed the pancakes and sausages we ordered and helped me clear half my meal. The sun was coming up and I took a couple of shots, using my sunglasses as a filter. Across the road grain elevators stood with a polished formality, reaching up into the reddening sky. The horizon stretched away in the distance, probably further than I'd ever seen before. This was Texas, nay, this was TEXAS, the Texas of the super James Dean epic, Edna Ferber's *Giant*, the Texas of those Gary Cooper films I'd seen as a boy, the Texas of the superlative stories I'd read in *Reader's Digest*. And from that moment, I knew, I'd believe any story I'd ever hear of Texas.

We drove on and were soon in New Mexico. The road winds its way through passes cut into the plateau which comprises the territory. The overall effect is that one is continually driving in a basin. To the north and south red-brown mountains laze past; the mountains ahead and behind you never seem to move.

John D. MacDonald gave a pretty good description of the terrain in *Planet of the Dreamers*, and his account of the road appearing to slip beneath the wheels of a moving car, while the countryside stands still, is very real. The hills are bare and somewhat frightening. This is the type of near-alien countryside where you feel that *anything* might be over the nearest range of hills. It's Indian country and I'm loathe to consider the feelings of the first white men who travelled through New Mexico.

The Indians today offer souvenirs at every opportunity. Moccasins, blankets and leather goods are on sale at every small village or Navajo-owned roadside restaurant. We sailed comfortably into Albuquerque, which seemed to stretch on and on. As far as we could make out the town is about four streets wide and ten miles long. It seems a most pleasant, tree-lined city, however. We passed the Spanish-styled University of New Mexico and

continued along the Highway 66. We suddenly found ourselves up to a cream and blue Ford and while passing it noticed Ted White's beard waving at us from the driver's seat. Jim Broderick immediately got out his cine camera and while we drove along Bob Pavlat's car we took pictures of Bob taking pictures of us.

We drove through what the map told us was an Indian reservation and through Gallup, soon entering Arizona, which seemed even redder and barer than New Mexico had been. Here, though, we saw something of the Painted Desert from the road, but our view wasn't impressive. Noreen had told us that she wanted to see the Painted Desert and the Petrified Forest but we roared through the Navajo reservation which comprises the area, along a stretch of highway that was still under construction and into Holbrook. Here we drove off the Highway and into the court of the Holbrook Motel, our arranged rendezvous. Nick, Fred, Jim and Bob went into a huddle over finances while I settled down to typing a letter home. These conferences were becoming a regular part of each night's stop over, and as I was a guest of the caravan, which was kindly paying my motel expenses, I figured that this was no business of mine. The conference evidently decided that the motel's rates were a little exorbitant and that we should book in as but two to a room, whilst in fact there were the usual four. Ted, Jim Caughran and I joined Bob on a short trip into the town centre. Bob looked over some rock specimens which were on sale and I bought a packet of cactus seed which I immediately posted home. The kindly lady who ran the souvenir shop accused us of being scientists from Los Alamos as we were examining the particles of uranium and other rocks so intently....

Back at the motel another conference took place, while I finished off my letter. It seemed that originally we had intended getting to Los Angeles around the time the convention would be starting on the Friday morning. It was now Tuesday evening and we appeared to have a day in hand. Should we spend it sidetracking to Las Vegas, or should we press on and get into Los Angeles a day early? The schedule had to be set so that we travelled through the Mojave Desert at night. Having missed the Painted Desert we decided to make an early start the following morning and try to fit the Las Vegas sidetrip in. Having settled that point, we all went out to dinner.

Bill Donaho looked a little hurt when I ordered a deep fried steak and after the waitress had taken our orders told me that this new dish was the same as the old chicken fried steak. There were more mutterings about

Englishmen and fish and chips. The waitress intrigued us. She was fair but spoke with a marked accent which stood out from the other southerners we'd met. Even Bill Donaho couldn't place it. When this part of the report was published in Ted White's *Void*, Ted added a footnote to the effect that she was Spanish but spoke with a "cultivated" accent.

Back at the motel we turned in just after nine in readiness for the hectic day ahead. We didn't know at the time of the send-off we'd get! In Pavlat's room Bob shared a bed with Ted and I shared the other with Jim Caughran, the same arrangement as that of the night before in Amarillo.

A loud knocking on the door woke me up. Bob was struggling into his clothes and through bleary eyes I saw him go over to the door. I half thought that it was Bill Rickhardt doing his four ayem wakey wakey act but it turned out to be the motel manager. He had a large dog with him. The manager seemed upset. He asked whether we were trying to break our way into jail, which at the time I thought rather good dialogue on his part, but I don't really think he was joking. Bob paid the four dollars he demanded and he left. I turned over and went back to sleep. It was 11:30.

Bill Rickhardt did do his little act, and exactly at four o'clock, too. As we were comparing notes of the manager's rounds the night before and were learning that he had discovered someone hiding in the shower of another room the man himself came up, complete with dog and irate manner. I can't say that I blame him completely. He told us that in all his years of motel managing he'd never had anything like this happen to him, to which Bill Donaho, who was passing with a couple of suitcases, answered, "Well, you can't have had much experience." Mr. Motel Manager immediately pulled out a gun and prodded it into Bill's stomach. He had probably thought that Bill, and remember Bill's build, was going to hit him. He accompanied the prodding with a few choice epithets.

We managed to get away, each of us in one piece. Whilst I'm basically a fairly honest fan, I don't mind playing fannish games and attempting to get away with hotel fees. But after all, we *did* pay up eventually. I feel that either the manager should have thrown us out or having taken our money should have left us alone. Probably he wanted to make sure that such a bunch got off his premises without taking his furniture along. Still, I don't suppose many future fannish caravans will stop over in Holbrook.

11. The Canyon and Vegas

We half pictured the motel manager shooting up the countryside after us and so didn't stop for breakfast until we reached Hobson, when we were almost in Winslow. Soon after we took a dust road off the highway, travelling six miles south to the Meteor Crater. I remember that as a seven year old I'd had a book with a picture of this phenomenon in it and it had really intrigued me. As we arrived, we passed Bob and Ted just leaving and once we were actually on the Crater rim, looking across its two mile diameter, I found Sandy Cutrell staring into the crater depths, six hundred feet below. I ribbed Bill Donaho that he must have tripped and fallen whilst rushing away from the Holbrook motel, but in all seriousness, it was quite a sight, a little awe-inspiring. With the sides of the crater rising steeply above the level of the surrounding countryside, this must make the Crater as near a resemblance of the moon's surface as anything to be found on Earth. I used my fourth roll of film and bought another after signing the Crater's visitors' book. It had quite a fannish collection that day, for as we were leaving we found Nick and Noreen just driving up. I wonder who they met as *they* were leaving.

We drove back to the 66, but didn't travel along it into Flagstaff, cutting off the highway again instead. This time we made a detour north, a side trip of a couple of hundred miles to see the Grand Canyon. Fred paid our National Park entry fee, we were given a most interesting brochure/leaflet and we drove to the Canyon rim, parking the car behind a screen of junipers. We got out of the car and looked.

It needs a better description than anyone in fandom would be able to afford it, that breathtaking sight. Keats might have captured its rugged grandeur. Leconte de Lisle, the French poet, might have managed to give some impression of the scene's rugged grandeur. From where we stood we could see the strata of rock on the northern rim, easily discernible. The mind, though, just can't take in that the northern rim is some twelve to fifteen miles away from the southern lip. We were indeed infused with a sense of wonder, and while we stood looking over the canyon, open-mouthed, an electric storm tried to bring some cloud effect into the clear blue sky. This was a mere thirty to forty miles away, we were told. Jim Broderick and I tried to throw stones over one of the nearest peaks which rise out of the Canyon's gorge, but we

didn’t succeed, although the peak looked within reach. We looked over the Canyon’s souvenir shop and I picked up a polythene packet containing a “miracle plant”. This was a dried-up greyish looking lumpy mess. The inscription promised wondrous results if one soaked the supposed plant in water.

I’ve an idea I was the one who was soaked. I bought the thing. As I paid for it the salesgirl told me that she’d taken one of the things home the previous evening and after she had left it in water overnight it was already sprouting quite happily and showing lots of green. “Oh, come now,” I said. “You’ve made the sale. You don’t have to make up stories about it.”

“No, it’s the truth,” she told me. “I took it home only last night, didn’t I, girls?” The other salesgirls chorused their assent.

“I suppose,” I said, “that if I come here tomorrow, it would have been tonight that you had taken it home?” This seemed a little complicated for her and, after assuring me for the third time that it was a marvellous shrub because she’d taken one home herself only the previous evening, she wrapped it up for me and handed me the package. “All right,” I said, “but if what you say is wrong, I’m coming back to change it.”

We left the Observation Tower and drove over to Yaki Point, where we took photos and had a sandwich lunch. I chased a squirrel along the rim but he didn’t remain still long enough for a photo. After that, I climbed down the rim’s bank a few feet and sat down on a half ledge and... I just drank in the scene. It would take more drinking in than I could manage with limited time, of course, but I tried. I gave it ten minutes or so and then the others called. We climbed back into the car and drove off. There didn’t seem to be a lot to say, so we didn’t say anything.

It was now well past noon and somewhat hot. I slept on the road from the Canyon back to the 66 and only woke up when we stopped for petrol at Williams. We had cokes and cigarettes and then we were back on the road. We noticed that the road looked as though it had been raining shortly before, but the sky was blue. At Kingman, we left the 66 and drove through a semi-desert along Highway 93. We were all pretty sleepy, half dozing intermittently. The sun shone, the car’s metal burned and the glare was blinding. When we pulled up at Lake Mead, I’d discarded my shirt, a most un-British thing to do. The temperature was reported to be 104° in the shade, and we were certainly not in the shade. It was probably well over 120°, over twice a “normal” temperature in Britain. I got a couple of good shots of the

lake and tried to add to my collection of moving pictures as I chased a lizard along the wall overlooking the man-made lake. When we'd driven over the Hoover Dam, I found that I'd left my precious sunglasses on the wall and, though Fred kindly turned back for them, they were gone when we returned. I was therefore seeing the glare in full colour. I got a couple of pictures of the Dam from the western side, looking down from the highway, which was now in Nevada, and taking the shots from through the car's rear window. The Dam looked much as it did in the film *Hollywood or Bust*, slightly fabulous, but after the natural and breathtaking Crater and Canyon it fell a little flat as a spectacle.

What did take our fancies were the scenes which met our eyes as the road turned left into Boulder City.

Obviously drawing irrigation waters from the Dam, this city has none of the thirsty and parched appearance we had become accustomed to seeing in that part of the country. Grass grew here, and what is more it was green, a very pleasant sight. We drove through this oasis and soon saw the brown and arid countryside again. The main feature of this part of the drive were the giant billboards advertising the gambling casinos which comprise Las Vegas.

We drove into Las Vegas, marvelling not a little at the neon art. At the Golden Gate I took a couple of shots from the rear window of The Strip, the same shot I was later surprised to find is a Hollywood stock location setter, as witness *Ocean's 11*. We drove around until we found our night's rendezvous, the Montmartre Motel. We parked and sought the Kemps' room. Nancy told us that Earl had gone into town to have the car checked and that we could use the room as headquarters for the while. The Detroit gang made for the colourful motel pool and began splashing around. I walked down the road to look for another pair of sunglasses. I didn't find any but did manage to pick up a couple of maps and at one point I was intrigued to find the pavement swarming with small black ants. I tried a couple of one-armed bandit fruit machines in a small store, without luck of course. I had a couple of cokes and walked slowly back to the Motel. I'd been interested all along at the slow way the Americans have of walking around, and with their oven baking temperatures, I know why.

Bob, Ted and Jim Caughran had arrived by the time I got back to the Mo'mart. Bob and I took over the motel's pool table and he narrowly beat me. When I demanded my revenge we played again and this time he murdered me.

We washed, shaved and went into town for dinner. At the Lucky Horseshoe we found a couple of tables which could take a half dozen each and split into two parties. It was quite a meal. I satisfied Bill Donaho by ordering a steak that was properly cooked by his standards. We ordered drinks and Jim Broderick bought a couple of bottles of wine; after the long and dusty drive we *were* thirsty. Bob bought me a nuclear fizz which he had specially made up, but I didn't care for it and after it had circled the table and had been drunk dry, Ted, who is the expert on these things, told me that it wasn't up to the standard of the fizzes made by Washington fans. When the time came round to pay the bill, it dawned on me that I had no money. It looked as though I'd have to wash the dishes, for when I tried to cash a traveller's cheque the cashier told me she'd never seen any like it before (it had been issued by Martin's Bank in Harrogate). A beefy under-manager was hurriedly called and he paid out, fourteen silver dollars. I'd heard about these being used still at ball games as come-on gimmicks, but I hadn't known that they were still used as actual currency.

We strolled across the street to the Horseshoe's gambling rooms where I spent a couple of dollars on the nickel machines. Jim Broderick came up holding a handful of quarters after hitting a jackpot and Jim Caughran was kindly asked to leave as he was under 21 and too young to gamble.

We left and went across the main road, the famous Strip, to the Golden Nugget. Jim Broderick made a dive at the one-armed bandits and Bill Donaho and I watched a game of stud poker.

This wasn't Liverpool brag. It was the real thing. Hard, unsmiling faces. Cards flicking across the table. Small piles of multi-coloured chips. *Maverick* couldn't have done it better. I walked away and found myself by the Wheel of Fortune, where one could bet on different denomination notes coming to rest against a rubber pointer. The odds paid off as against the value of each bill. I placed a quarter, the minimum bet, against the one dollar bill and it came up. I kept placing this bet every couple of turns and it won every time. After that I grew bolder and occasionally doubling up on my bet, tried this bill on every turn of the wheel. I won *eleven times* on the run, and when the others finally tore me away from the wheel, I was over three dollars up on the evening.

We drove out to the famous Sands club. We couldn't get in to see Louis Armstrong who was playing there, and had to be content with the second floor show, where Red Norvo was grinning at all and sundry. At the table

nearest the bandstand, Nick and Noreen, Bill Rickhardt and Roger waited for Jackie and Roy to come on. Jim Broderick made another dive for the fruit machines and was soon back to tell us that he had hit another jackpot. When I went over to see how he was doing he was playing a double jackpot machine which cost two separate quarters to pull the handle. He won again, too. I changed a silver dollar into nickels and became Jim's poor relation, playing the cheapest range of machines. It's a fascinating pastime. After a while, one forgets that it is money with which one is playing. The little pieces of metal in one's hand become merely counters. It's all too easy to feed them into the provided slots. Suddenly, two bars fell into place and I watched with indrawn breath as the third bar clicked into place. I hadn't even time to realise that this meant I had won before a shower of one hundred and forty nickels came pouring out at me. Rolling all over the floor. I packed them all up, had them changed into seven silver cartwheels and quit while I was ahead. A thought struck me and I went over to the souvenir counter and bought myself a second pair of sunglasses to replace those I'd lost.

I got back to the table in time to catch the last number from Red Norvo. This turncoat from traditional jazz was followed by the husband and wife team called Jackie and Roy who are popular in the States and have had a long-player released over here. Noreen had been keen to hear them and their smooth performance must have pleased her. The pair specialise in well timed bop choruses, yet I feel that without them and with an emphasis on the everlasting romantic ballads they would really go places. Jackie has long blond hair and the correct figure to match. Roy looks like a slightly haggard Dave Jenrette and can both sing and play the piano.

After leaving the Sands Nick and Noreen drove off to see Wingy Manon's at the other end of town. We tried to follow but lost them. We returned to the motel and packed.

And when everyone had got together again we left. It was around 2 a.m. We stopped at a restaurant for a last coffee in a city which had so pleased us. A perfect leisure centre for the travel weary, we felt. Fred and Bill Donaho shared the driving seat and with Jim Broderick and I taking turns with Fred's cine camera to shoot the colourful neon signs out of the side windows as we drove past, we shot out of Las Vegas and into the rapidly cooling desert.

12. Trial Run

Fred drove through the Mojave while the rest of us slept. I woke about seven to find that we were entering what seemed to be a sizeable town. It turned out to be Los Angeles. We parked the car and had breakfast. Bill did his party trick of eating everyone else's. Around nine we staggered into the Hotel Alexandria, where the Solacon was due to start the next day. We were somewhat haggard, stub-bearded and very tired. The others left me to book in and then went off to their rooms. I saw Nick and Noreen talking to a quietly smiling beanpole, a kind of even more youthful Wally Weber, and I went over to join them. The beanpole turned out to be Terry Carr whom I thanked for supporting me in the TAFF campaign. He told me that the beercan tower to the moon project was hoping for a boost that weekend and that the other Berkeleyites would be at the con. I told him I was looking forward to meeting Carl Brandon and Noreen looked sad. "Tell him, Terry," she said. And so I learned that Carl didn't exist. I had to admit it had been quite a hoax, but having experienced the loss of Joan Carr in the same way, it didn't hit me quite so hard. We went into the coffee shop for a second breakfast.

Back in the lobby I found Ruth Kyle talking to a second beanpole, this one a little older than the rest. I stuck out a hand and introduced myself to Bob Bloch. Bob shook my hand and said, "Ghod... it speaks English," and introduced me to a non-fan business associate who told us some smutty jokes, all of which were corny. It amazed me that Bob could show such polite enthusiasm at them, laughing at them all and looking as though he'd come to Los Angeles especially to hear them.

It dawned on me that Fred, Bill and Jim Broderick had gone off to bed, which left me in a fix as my cases were still in their car. This meant I couldn't shave. Anyway, I didn't have a room and had to stick around in the lobby hoping to catch them when they finally did appear. Some young woman kept fluttering round us and was introduced as Miriam Dyches, the same young lady who was shortly afterwards to marry Terry Carr. I took her for a cup of coffee. Quite a girl. She seemed to have a fixation about the old joke, the cult of the BNF, for Miri was convinced that she was either a BNF or soon would be. It only needed an odd word that she was a Russian Princess when Walt Liebscher came up and joined us. Belle Dietz appeared and offered me the

loan of her and Frank's room if I wanted to sleep, but I thought about missing the Detroit boys if they should come downstairs. Anyway, who could sleep with all these new fan faces around?

Out in the lobby once again two stalwarts of the London Worldcon, Wally Weber and Will Jenkins, pulled my leg about English currency. I suggested a quiet game of brag but Will sneaked off leaving me to Boyd Raeburn who wanted to know all about the trip across country. A kindly little lady came up and shook hands, asking how I liked being Alan Dodd. I immediately recognised G.M. Carr and passed on Cecil's regards to Mr. Carr. Len Moffatt came up and asked whether I'd seen either Rick Sneary or Anna, who was both Len's wife and the Convention Chairwoman. At that moment Anna herself appeared and, after a quick word with the reception clerk and the hotel manager in his office (they breed 'em much nicer in LA than in Holbrook), fixed me up with a room, 839. I got a word in with Rick Sneary in the N3F showroom and was introduced to Anne Chamberlain, one of the Federation's officials. I wandered back down to the lobby, which looked comfortable enough, but I now had a room and my eyelids were really drooping. I went up to bed for a couple of hours. I woke up at six and took a quick bath, having trouble with the complicated faucet system. Boiling hot water kept streaming out of the shower every time I tried to turn it off.

I went downstairs to find George Raybin and Max and Elaine Phillips ready to go over to Forry Ackerman's. The three of them had got in from New York earlier in the week along with Belle and Frank Dietz. Their idea had been to make time to look up Disneyland. They were even kind enough to reserve a place on the tour for me in case the Motorcade had reached LA in time. I'd heard that Forry was hoping to throw a party (combined with the usual LASFS meeting) that evening and I'd looked forward to going. However, I still had not found my luggage which was still, presumably, in the hands of the Detroit boys. For all I knew they were sleeping and wouldn't care to be disturbed. Will Jenkins said something about seeing Fred Prophet leaving with a case under his arm. "He was looking for a pawn shop," said Will, seriously.

Max dragged me into a car, which turned out to be Wally Weber's though Wally didn't drive. There were three femme fans in the front seat and eight crowded men in the back. Frank Dietz and George kept singing the British National Anthem so that I kept standing up and banging my head on the car roof each time. I was glad when we finally pulled up outside Forry's. I

still have the bruises.

The place was already rather crowded when we arrived and as the evening progressed it got more and more crowded. The Berkeley boys were there in force. Pete Graham seemed rather shy and I had quite a talk with Ron Ellik who told me his name is pronounced “Eel-lick”. He struck me as being an extremely nice guy, a lot of fun, thoroughly sensible, and it was a pleasure meeting him.

Barbara Silverberg and I traded travelling experiences and Bob, complete with beard, showed me over the Ackerman household. Every room is lined with bookshelves and there is one room in which the walls are just plain dummy books, it being traditional for visiting fans to title the books themselves. I wrote something about “How I Cried For Fandom”, which was more unkind than funny as I put Wally Gillings as the author, but I did get a laugh out of some of the other titles.

Bob went hunting through screeds of magazines for foreign editions of his stories which have appeared under pen-names. He told me that he had used around two dozen different pseudonyms. I decided that it was about time I sought out Forry and did so. He was showing a pile of books to a group of fans. I took his shoulder and sidled up to him. “Look,” I said, “this isn’t much of a party. Let’s slip away, you and me, and find ourselves a bit of fun, have a few drinks and find a couple of women. The host here will never miss us in this crowd.” Forry turned round with a puzzled look, shook hands as though he recognised me from the London Convention and said, “Well, well, you made it. And after all the money I’d given the Detroit fans to lose you on the way. Say, that might be an idea about slipping away. We’ll go and see if the car works.” I muttered something about not really being interested in cars but Forry insisted that I saw his and he went out and opened up the garage for me. There was no car there; instead, this double parking lot was crowded out with magazines, magazines and even more magazines. Bookshelves packed close together made a little maze of the passages that ran between them, and at one time when I tried to get out I bumped into A.E. van Vogt talking enthusiastically about some old pulps to John W. Campbell.

The Los Angeles Science Fantasy Society held its business meeting and a local fan showed some colour slides of SF artwork and table top moonscapes. I found myself sitting on the floor next to George Metzger whom I recognised from photographs. We slipped out into another room for a chat. George introduced me to a fair and young femmefan. Surprise, surprise!

This turned out to be Sylvia Dees, the editress of *Flafan* from Florida. She looked very much like the pin-up photo she'd sent me, except that her complexion was probably fairer. I had a little difficulty understanding her accent as she kept slurring her words. I wasn't sure whether this was local dialect or merely teenage awkwardness; it turned out to be a combination of both.

Ron Ellik and Sylvia asked me whether I ever drank tea and got me to make some for them. Sylvia seemed to think that tea prepared in the English manner would be quite something. In Forry's kitchen, however, I couldn't find any tea so made do with instant coffee. Gem Carr came in to help me but neither of us could find any sugar. I decided to go and ask Forry. I found him in a corner listening to someone who was talking enthusiastically. Forry introduced me to Ray Bradbury. I picked myself up from the floor, shook hands and said something appropriate to the look on my face. I'd been reading and collecting Bradbury stories for some years. I suppose that if it hadn't have been for Ray's stories I would never have become interested in SF and, logically, wouldn't have been there in Los Angeles, either. Ray told me that he liked London and was hoping to go over to England the following year.

I staggered back to the kitchen and drank my coffee. Bob Pavlat popped up from nowhere to tell me that there was present half of the FAPA membership. "There are the Berkeley boys," he said, "Ted, myself, you, Silverberg, Burbee..." "Burbee?" I echoed, "I didn't know *he* was here." "Haven't you met him?"Bob asked. "Come with me." He led me out into the yard in front of the garage. A pair of well built and stocky men were standing before someone who was neither stocky nor well built and who had a very closely cropped hair style.

Bob introduced me to Gus Willmorth and Lee Jacobs and then said to the smaller member of the gang, "Burb, have you met Ron Bennett?" Burbee shook hands and asked Bob, "Is he in FAPA?" "Sure he is," Bob answered, to which Burb pulled out a bottle and said, "Welcome to the club. Have a drink." Bill Donaho came up and was introduced to Burbee as "one of your biggest admirers". We stood around chatting about the Motorcade. Sylvia came up and accused me of being a fake Englishman as I hadn't drunk any tea. I showed her the Ackerman collection of magazines and we found Bradbury wandering around inside the maze looking at some of the pulps. Suddenly, I came across Fred Prophet and Jim Broderick in the crowd. They

told me that they had put my cases in their room and presented me with a duplicate key. A local femme fan came up to me and told me that she was from the local club and wasn't I from out of town? I said that I was and she told me what a marvellous club the LASFS was.

I went back inside the kitchen and found Bob Silverberg talking plots with Doc Evans and E.E. Smith. A jovial, balding man came into the group and was introduced as Tony Boucher. He asked me about my trip and asked Bob about Randy Garrett, who had, it appeared, gone off into some wilderness to study religion. Eventually, Bob Pavlat suggested going off for a drink, but although I had developed a thirst, Wally Weber was going back to the hotel and was looking for anyone interested in sharing the ride with him. I figured that I'd prefer the sleep to the drink and so after a last look round, saying goodnight to everyone – I heard later that there were a hundred and fifty present – I left with Wally. I went along to the Detroit rooms and, using the key Jim had given me, picked up my cases. I took these upstairs and went to bed. I'd no sooner closed my eyes when the phone rang. It was Jim Caughran, looking for a place to sleep. I told him to come on up.

13. South Gate in ’58

The Solacon had a reasonably uneventful beginning. When I woke up it was mid-morning on Friday 29th August, and I was glad to be able to shave and brush my teeth, now that I had my luggage back again. I had breakfast with Will Jenkins and went to look round a few blocks near the hotel. A.H. Blackwell came with me while I bought postcards, had a look round a stamp and coin shop, and had a shoeshine from a small, friendly Mexican who showed me colour pictures of his large family.

I wrote the postcards up at the hotel and went out again to post them back to fans in England. Back at the hotel I went up to the balcony overlooking the convention hall, a convenient situation. Here I registered, Honey Wood and Roger Phillips giving me a nicely printed registration card. I asked Honey why she doesn’t like quote cards but before she could answer, Rory Faulkner came up. We shook hands and exchanged experiences of the London Worldcon. Rory was most taken with the reception she’d had in Liverpool. “We were sitting in a Chinese restaurant,” she said, “and Dave Newman said, ‘This is hardly the place for Rory,’ so they took me to a pub.”

Bill Rickhardt asked if he could borrow my typewriter and I took it up to the Detroit suite, where Noreen used it to type up a petition to dissolve the corporation of the World Science Fiction Society. I wasn’t too interested in all this so wandered back downstairs to the mezzanine floor (which Americans call the first floor, and we in Britain would call the second) and had a look at some of the displays. Morris Scott Dollens was showing some of his paintings and the Chicago boys had a good line in propaganda for their 1959 Worldcon bid. Here I met F.M. (Buz) and Elinor Busby, the GDA’s West Coast Operatives.* We flashed cards at one another and talked about John Berry and *Retribution*. At the registration desk I met Ellis Mills, looking a little broader than I remembered him and sporting a large brimmed Texan hat. The Detroit gang came up and mentioned going out for lunch, so Ellis and I joined them.

** Goon Defective Agency, a joke fannish private-eye outfit created by John Berry and Arthur Thomson. Various GDA exploits are recorded in the TAFF ebook* The Goon Omnibus *by John Berry. [Ed.]*

Back at the hotel I found Sylvia Dees wandering around on her own so

took her in for coffee. She ordered iced tea, which the heathens served in a glass which trailed string all over the place. Definitely non-U. Bob Shaw, whom I hadn't seen since the 1954 Supermancon in Manchester, came up and reminded me that I was taking part in the tea drinking contest which was about to start any minute and said that *he'd* been practising by not having anything to drink all day.

At four o'clock, Ellis, who had evidently appointed himself as my keeper, came to drag me along to the contest. I escaped twice, but he managed to catch me each time and eventually I was dragged into a room where Gem Carr stood with a huge kettle. Bob Bloch made a speech saying that for all he was concerned he was judging women, "Miss Tea Bag 1958". He and Poul Anderson, the two judges, announced the contestants (I entered in the name of The Queen and St. Fantony) and immediately pulled out bottles of beer.

The rules demanded that a minimum of ten cups of tea be drunk in the first hour. I'd never drunk more than four cups of tea at a sitting in my life and so had taken the fannish precaution of bringing a salt cellar along with me. Djinn Faine, representing Catalina Island, was a little shocked as she saw me dig into my pocket and pour salt into my hand, so I let her have a shake to keep her quiet. I wonder if this is what pulp detective stories call a shakedown? It was great fun, though. People kept objecting as I insisted on drinking my tea half milk (it tasted lousy, but it went down quicker). Someone objected when I "accidentally" poured half my cup of tea into the giant ashtray I'd placed there for the purpose, and Will Jenkins was kind enough to help me work up a thirst by going out and buying me a packet of cigars. One fan quit after an hour with eighteen cups to his credit. Bob Shaw disappointed his followers by not fulfilling the required ten cups in the first hour, and after an hour and ten minutes, I packed in with 13½ cups to my credit. It had been a valiant effort for a first try, I decided, and if I felt anything I felt sick. I went up to my room, stuck my head in some cold water and went to bed for an hour.

At seven o'clock I wandered down in the lift to the convention hall. Ah, those lifts were fiendish things. At one time I waited eight minutes for one to show. The gathering in the hall marked the official opening of the Convention. South Gate in '58 had actually come to pass! Rick drew some wild applause when he spoke of the realisation of his dream of a convention at South Gate and explained how the slogan was first used as a joke, but as it

was taken up on all sides the dream became a serious venture. He introduced the Mayor of South Gate, who was an epitome of an American mayor, beefy and smiling. He spoke of the disadvantages of large cities for conventions and mentioned a forty storey hotel where the builders had forgotten to provide rest rooms. “It was uncanny,” he said. He declared the Alexandria within the city limits of South Gate. He declared the Convention open and handed back to Rick who introduced the Convention Chairwoman, Anna Sinclare Moffatt. Anna read the rules of the Convention and silenced one or two questions from the floor with a reminder that business would be conducted at the Official Business Session, on the Sunday afternoon.

Tony Boucher was then introduced. He made the point that this was probably the purest convention in the history of fandom for there were fewer professional editors present than ever before. Indeed, he said, there was only one *real* editor present, John W. Campbell, Jr. Boucher himself was at that time taking time off from editing *F&SF* for medical reasons. He said that there was a tendency for editors to buy publishable stories rather than what he termed “excitable” stories. If an editor waited to buy only personally excitable stories there would be no magazines, he went on. He also mentioned that pbs were selling better than magazines.

Anna introduced the Guest of Honour, the author of *The Shrinking Man*, *I Am Legend*, “Born of Man and Woman”, etc., Richard Matheson, who said a few brief words to the effect that we’d be hearing from him later during the weekend. Then John Campbell was introduced. He told of the days when he worked for Tremaine, 21 years before. He had asked, “What does an editor do when he doesn’t get enough stories?” Tremaine had answered, “An editor does!” Campbell spoke about prophecy being an inherent part of SF writing. Up to the Forties writers had done a good job, with many prophecies coming true, but “what have they done lately?” Today, there is not enough imagination. Writers, he said, are not willing to stick their necks out. “I want some prophets today,” he said and mentioned the possibilities of psi, which we’d more than half expected. He then sidetracked to discuss his idea of emotion in SF. He spoke of Cortez who had disobeyed orders to take 350 men and defeat 40,000. “An impossible hero, a superman,” said Campbell. While he went on to ask why he could not get stories with such impossible heroes, Charles Hornig, who was sitting next to me, pointed out that Campbell was confusing the issue, linking right with success.

Campbell was now talking about his pet, the psi phenomenon. He held

up two copper rods with which, he claimed, it was possible to dowse for water, pipes, gas pipes, electricity cables or any man-made pipes. They'd been used with outstanding success, Campbell claimed, by city authorities in Flint, Michigan and by someone called French in Manchester, England. Half the audience looked to me, evidently with the idea that I should stand up and either refute the claim, or add further details. Campbell went on to tell us that the copper rods were home-made. "*You* make them work," he said, "but how do you imagine the right answer *every* time?" He spoke of the laws of subjective reality, the laws of psychology and of the psionics machine, mentioning the two models Eric Jones had built and had had on show at the London Worldcon. At this point, a young fan called David Bresser stepped up with a model he'd built himself and got into a private conversation with Campbell on the machine's gobbledegookish working. Campbell asked the audience, "Why is successful investigation suppressed?" and went back to his private conversation. The meeting broke up.

Sam Moskowitz boomed hello at me from the length of the hall, which I thought a nice gesture on his part. He came over and was enthusiastic in his handshake. Jim Broderick came up and told me I was invited out to Bjo's for dinner. I went along with the Detroit gang and had an excellent meal of spaghetti and sundry other delicacies which were snapped up by Bill Donaho as soon as they appeared on the table. I met Zeke Leppin who appears to be one of LASFS's leading background figures. He's one of the rare variety of fans everyone says fine things about, and I'd like to have had more of a chance to talk with him further.

When we got back to the hotel the crowds were just streaming out of the con hall. I was supposed to be writing reports of the convention, so tackled Forry about the part of the programme I'd missed. Forry had spoken about the deaths of writers Kuttner and Kornbluth and had mentioned the rise in popularity among the general public of the monster film. Forry had given a rundown of different animalistic monsters featured in various SF films, and mentioned his magazine *Famous Monsters of Filmland*, adding that John Campbell was soon bringing out a magazine called *Giraffe Science Fiction*, so that his authors could stick their necks out. Every time I'd see Forry after that, he'd make some further pun on this title. Quite a guy.

Ellis Mills came up with a strange face and introduced me to Bob Leman, the up and coming editor of *The Vinegar Worm*. We'd intended looking up Bob in Denver on the return run east, but he'd staved off the

invasion by attending the con. We went up to the Detroit rooms. They had a suite of two rooms on the fifth floor, tucked well out of the way in a cosy and fannish corner. I told Miriam Dyches to stand up and when she did so I stole her chair. She got it back a minute later when someone told me that Bill Rotsler was down in the bar and I went down to look for him.

I found him talking to Bob Pavlat, Gus Willmorth and Lee Jacobs. I tried a couple of locally brewed beers, found them nothing like brown ale, and had a chat with Rotsler about Freeberg and captioning his cartoons in *Ploy*. He had various pieces of paper in front of him and dashed off a few appropriate cartoons. After a while I went back up to the Detroit suite where I was served alternatively with wine and vodka. Will Jenkins gave me a pack of cards with Finlay illustrated backs, a pack which had been bought at the 1955 Clevention. A very nice gesture. Someone told me that Djinn Faine had won the tea-drinking contest with 23 cups. Evidently, Art Hayes had also drunk 23 cups but in a slightly longer time and was unable to down another cup. Most of the group drifted up to the Chicago room on the floor above. Most of the Motorcade's personnel were here and the party continued until after three. I tried to get a game of brag going, but that group had more sense. Eventually Dave Kyle squatted on the floor beside me and we played a game with theoretical dollars, with the stakes altering every time Dave got a winning hand. As he insisted on dealing, and choosing his cards, while quoting continuously from theoretical rules, it wasn't long before I owed him two million dollars. He even came over to London in 1960 to collect! After the game I wandered downstairs in the hope of getting some coffee and ran into Steve Tolliver and Bjo who were on the same errand. We teamed up and left the hotel. We walked a couple of blocks, towards Pershing Square, where we found a place, Googles, that was still open. We sat and talked idly until about four and then strolled back to the hotel. It was the middle of the night and it was still warm. Home was never like this!

14. South Gate Saturday

Needless to say, it was latish when I got up on the Saturday morning. I made up a couple of packages of printed matter that I wanted to send home but when I got round to the post office it was closed. To make matters worse it was also closed on the Monday, that day being Labor Day, when, paradoxically, everyone takes the day off. I carried the packets back to the hotel, running into Dave Kyle en route. Dave asked for the two million bucks I owed him, saying that I was obviously out looking for a place he knew of in the Mexican quarter which changed lousy American dollars for real wooden nickels and that he'd be only too pleased to arrange the exchange for me. I knew that I'd be making some sort of speech during the convention and as my trousers were showing a great deal of wear, I picked up a pair of light ducks and took them back to the hotel. I ran into Ellis Mills and the pair of us went into the con hall. It was close on 1:30 and Ray Bradbury was due to present his featured speech. I picked a good seat a couple of rows from the front, next to Charles Hornig. Naturally, the talk turned to Campbell's speech of the previous evening. A fan who turned out to be *Yandro*'s convention reporter, George Scithers, turned round in front of us and joined in the conversation, making very intelligent observations on Cortez and American Indian cultures à la Chad Oliver, all of which I found very stimulating.

When Bradbury appeared at 1:45, banks of lights were turned on and those interested in recording the scene in cine did so. It dawned on me that I should have my camera ready and, asking Ellis to save my seat, I dashed up to my room to pick up the instrument. When I got back, Ray had just started his talk and I couldn't get back to the seat. I edged in at the front, just by the door, sitting between Belle Dietz and Wally Cole. Belle kindly turned on Frank's spotlights for me to get a couple of shots of typical enthusiastic gestures.

Enthusiasm is the key word with Bradbury. He possesses a verve of spirit which oozes from him. For a writer who has said to be a cynic, this is quite a thing. His vitality is reminiscent of Danny Kaye, and he was most enthusiastic on the future of science-fiction. "Most readers want to be writers" was his initial point and he went on to discuss the reasons for writing, and the different types of writers. There are hacks and there are

imitators. Supposing, he said, a writer would be like Kafka or Hemingway, then he might attempt to imitate his favourite's style of writing, which would be a bad thing, for the imitator "never gets his true self on paper".

He spoke of the technicalities of writing, stressing *work*. Too many writers, said Bradbury, are not willing to put in the foundation. He spoke of the writer attaining a relaxation through writing. After writing for nineteen years, he said, he had reached the point where he could relax at a typewriter. "Don't think my characters write my stories for me," he said. The point was that nowadays he could relax while writing and live the experience of the characters in his stories, letting the words flow of their own accord. The struggle of writing is in the apprenticeship, which was why practice in writing is a necessity.

He went on to discuss different plots, mentioning in a typical poetic manner that plotting "is recording people running by and leaving their footprints in the snow". He mentioned emotions in stories, obviously referring to Campbell's idea of emotion. To Bradbury, emotion means passion. He mentioned the passion of obsession, giving as an example Ahab's obsession for hunting the white whale. A 30,000 word novel could be written, he said, about a man crossing a street, his reasons for wanting to cross the street, the man's reactions to the obstacles the writer places in his way. He spoke of his own alleged prejudice against science, and immediately denied the allegation, mentioning the uses machines have been put to. Bradbury went on to discuss a person's individuality. Each person is many people, it is as though each one of us wears many masks. Which character behind the masks are we really?

Altogether, it was a most stimulating talk. Questions were asked afterwards. One concerned a plagiarism of a Bradbury story on television, and Ed Wood, a bouncy and cheery fan from Chicago, challenged Bradbury on several points. Ray made the point that to a writer mediocrity is necessary, so that one can get "a million bad words" out of one's system, then one can really get down to writing. He mentioned the weeds on a writer's lawn, which had to be destroyed. Ed was quick to seize on this, asking, "Ray, what do you do with the weeds on your lawn?" Bradbury was even quicker to reply, "Why, Ed, I make dandelion wine." Applause.

After the talk, Len Moffatt collared me and with Bradbury led us off to meet the press. They didn't show up so I went out to lunch with Elaine and Max Phillips, Frank Dietz and Wally Cole. Wally told me about his stay in

London at the time of Queen Elizabeth's coronation, when he was perched on the roof of some building near Admiralty Arch in Trafalgar Square, so that he had a peach of a view of the entire procession. Bill Broody came up and asked if I was interested in having a walk round, so we went up to Pershing Square, two blocks from the hotel. This is the Washington Square of Los Angeles, and something like Hyde Park Corner in London. Speakers on a hundred different and obtuse topics pour forth their words to a few dozen moving listeners. I was struck by the palm trees which surround the Square. Bill told me that a couple of years before the Square had been dug up and a two tier parking lot built beneath it, the grass and walks then being relaid. One thing that did strike me was the music in the air. Literally. Loudspeakers poured forth a constant stream of semi-popular classics and semi-classical pops. This piped music is relayed by a firm called Muzak, I found.

I later realised that this invasion of an individual's privacy existed in many garish and artificial centres. The Rockefeller Center has it, and, as though it's an acquisition of which to be proud, hotels have the Muzak relayed to them, too. The Alexandria suffered Muzak in its much abused elevators, and these days we even have it in London.

Bill Broody is a quiet science fiction reader (as different from a faan) who knows his stuff, is generous without limitation and is an interesting, intelligent and informative conversationalist. He offered to show me round some of Los Angeles the following morning and, when we returned to the hotel, fixed nine o'clock as a suitable time to tour round before the convention got into its day's stride.

I went up to the display room where I talked with Bob Silverberg about different manuscripts on show for pre-auction bids. Ed Wood, in passing, said that if he didn't have a chance of talking to me later on, he hoped I was enjoying myself, which I certainly was, and immediately afterwards I bumped into a group where George Metzger was being ribbed about his interest in Sylvia Dees, and vice versa. As we had an hour or so to kill, brag was suggested and the crowd moved up to my room. We sat round the bed and I explained the game to them. There was John Trimble, Jim Caughran, Ron Ellik, Sylvia and George. I lost about 70 cents and Sylvia won $2 on a prial of sixes and declared that she would never play again. "Gambling is evil," she said as she pocketed her loot, and she stuck to her guns.

We got down to the con hall just in time to see Sam Moskowitz begin to auction off the professional authors who were present. This idea, the

"Auction Bloch", provided quite an amount of fun. The audience bid for an hour of the time of its favourite pro. The money was to go to TAFF, and as I was TAFF at that time (it had been agreed that I'd get whatever cash TAFF might raise while I was in the States, this in view of the six thousand miles trip I'd have Stateside), I felt that, though I was naturally very grateful for the money – quite honestly, I don't know what I'd have done without it – I felt the audience was nuts at the high rates it bid. The entire auction raised the fabulous amount of $95.73.

Tony Boucher was the first to go, Sam making him show his teeth (there were the expected cries of "Take them out for us"), and he raised $13.50. Fritz Leiber obliged by quoting Shakespeare and went for $13.23. Bob Bloch raised a few laughs by baring his chest and went for a record seventeen bucks. E.E. Evans went to Ellis Mills for a bargain five dollars and Charles Beaumont was asked by Mari Wolf if he would take her out on his hour and someone else asked if he could sing soprano, about the only virtue which hadn't been attributed to the previous – er – lots. Beaumont opened his mouth for a moment. Sam said he couldn't hear anything. "Of course not," Chuck said, "I just sang soprano, but it was so high, only dogs could hear!"

Mari Wolf took him for ten bucks. Doc Smith showed what a favourite he is with American convention audiences by being sold for twenty-one dollars and finally Dick Matheson went to a syndicate of girls for sixteen dollars.

Arch Oboler spoke on science fiction in films and TV, and mentioned that there is no mature SF in either medium. To film producers, he said, echoing Forry Ackerman, science fiction means monsters. He then showed a short film he had made himself, for television sale as the pilot film of a series.

Charles Hornig and I went down to the bar where I tried further samples of local brew and we discussed his part on the SF scene. It was most interesting to have the chance to hear slices of SF history from the horse's mouth, as it were. A very nice chap, Charlie, and probably the youngest old timer in the field. He was working as an income tax consultant, paying fairly regular visits to Mexico. We had a couple of bottles of Schlitz and then it was time for Charlie to go off home. I wandered up to the Detroit suite on the fifth floor to see how their non-stop party was getting on.

It was going in fine style, though eyes were looking a little ragged round the edges. There was suddenly a call for me on the phone. Belle Dietz was rounding up a few fans to show films of the London Worldcon to interested

parties, which I certainly was. It's quite a thing when you're full of convention weariness to see pictures of yourself when you were living it up in a similar manner. Strange, but things look almost normal.

Afterwards, we all went up to Googles for some coffee and a bite to eat. I got very involved in a discussion on rock 'n' roll with a nice young girl who was with Alex Bratmon. Alex acted the part of quiz master very well, putting in a few words against the last point raised whenever the conversation lagged. In the end we were all arguing against the points we'd started out with, but I don't think we minded.

George Raybin and Belle outlined the latest developments in their part of the WSFS Inc deal and we had quite a ball walking back to the hotel and arguing hypothetical legal points about the legality of the London convention and whether the London committee was still in control of convention affairs. The outcome was quite a farce, with everyone agreeing that the logical – sic – explanation of affairs was that I was the only Solacon attendee with the right to do anything as I'd been on the London committee.

George Fields generously gave me his Solacon Committee lapel badge, a smart yellow silk tab, and when we got back to the Alexandria I strutted around welcoming everyone I bumped into to "my" convention.

Robin Wood and I wandered up to Ron Ellik's room where there were some of the younger fans like Lars Bourne, Sylvia Dees and George Metzger making a tape to Mervyn Barrett in New Zealand. I'd love to know what I said amongst the shrieks and jokes in the background. Some members of the party kept disappearing out of the window, wandering round to corridors and perhaps even other rooms by means of the window ledge and when we'd all tired of this Ron and I went up to the Chicago party and played brag with Jim Caughran. I picked up around eleven cents and sloped off to bed at 4:30.

15. South Gate Sunday

Bill Broody gave me a tinkle just about nine and woke me up to say that he was waiting downstairs and if I was interested he'd still be willing to show me round the town. I went down to a light and welcome breakfast Bill had kindly ordered for me and was introduced to a friend of his, Charles Nuetzel. They suggested routes and places of interest and so forth and after I'd eaten Bill took me out to Hollywood in his car.

We cut off along the Freeway which gave me quite a kick. I'd heard about this motor highway, of course, mainly from snide remarks on the *Bob Hope Show*, and there's been talk of trying the same sort of thing in England. Watching the cars travel by on the opposite lanes, silently and swiftly, reminded me, especially on the curves, of highly coloured snowflakes drifting by. We had a fantastic morning's drive, a brief kaleidoscope of American West Coast Society life. We drove up into the hills behind LA and high along the valley, in and around the mountains, along roads where it is illegal to smoke in case a butt flicked from a car starts a fire, and down into Hollywood. I used up a half roll of film just shooting some of the houses out there. We snaked around Wilshire and along the Sunset Strip, past Grauman's and Dino's and back to the hotel. I'll unhesitatingly recommend Bill as a wonderful guide who points out everything worth seeing, with a few notes of general interest, followed often by some personal anecdote. I was breathless, wide awake and yes, almost sober by the time we returned to the Alexandria a couple of hours later.

Here I attended the meeting of the Cult, the offshoot amateur publishing association which has a highly integrated clique of members, never more than thirteen in number. For some reason I'd managed to get into the Cult two years previously and had been struggling to keep up with the fortnightly circulating magazine ever since. It was a nice and informal meeting with many sidetracks and much personal conversation. The main discussion centred round who would act as Official Arbiter, the Cult's head, now that Carl Brandon had been revealed as a hoax. Anne Chamberlain cornered me when this was over and showed me the N3F room where she piled me high with N3F fanzines and propaganda literature. I signed some form but refused point blank to join the Federation itself. I've nothing against the N3F except

lack of time and burning enthusiasm. I had previously considered the Federation's members to be a bunch of stuffed shirts but those members I met at the Solacon showed me that such a generalisation is certainly ridiculous.

I went down to the con Hall where Rog Phillips was moderating a fan panel composed of Roger Sims and Dean McLaughlin of Detroit and Ed Wood and Sid Coleman of Chicago. On the whole the speakers seemed to be speaking to other panellists rather than to the audience. This was immediately followed by the convention's main attraction, the Business Meeting. As practically every fan knows, there had been much controversy during the year as to the standing of the World Science Fiction Society and its incorporation. There had been disagreement among its directors and there had been lawsuits bandied about like cards at a Kettering convention. Some fans had been looking forward to the Business Meeting as sorting out the various disagreements, whilst other fans argued that things were all too far gone on all sides to ever get any agreement anywhere and they had only looked forward to the fracas into which they were sure the meeting would degenerate.

First, Anna Moffatt announced that the election for the siting of the 1959 convention would take place. Bids and seconding speeches were made for Detroit and Chicago. Dean McLaughlin made the bid for Detroit, mentioning the group's plans for their programme and adding that Detroit was all for dissolving the Incorporated Society. He was seconded by Bjo who said that she was prejudiced as the Detroit boys were such a fine bunch. Earl Kemp nominated Chicago, mentioning that his group also favoured the dissolution of the corporation. Bob Bloch mentioned a "minor point", that Chicago had experience behind them, and Rog Phillips noted the cost for the west coasters but said that his heart was for Chicago. Anna then called for counters for the ballot, "one from each side". Roger Sims got up from the far side of the hall and for a moment no one else moved. Thinking that Anna must have meant one counter from each side of the room and that it was about time I did something worthwhile for the convention, I went out and stood beside Roger. This was a bad thing to do for some of the Detroit supporters with whom I'd travelled to the convention were a little annoyed at the way I'd evidently sold out to Chicago. Anna had meant "One counter from each of the opposing cities". My misunderstanding.

Roger and I gave out the blank pieces of paper which were to serve as ballot forms and then collected them in and placed them in a large bag Rick

Sneary had dug up for the purpose. Rick opened up the ballots and called out what was written on them. Roger and I checked them, talked about the publicity Detroit had given their campaign over the past year, about the daily news-sheet the Chicago fans had been putting out at the convention, and made remarks to Rick on the lines of “Tierra del Fuego – how did that get in here?” The result was one blank form, one labelled “no comment”, one abstention (cough) and an overwhelming majority for Detroit by 125-45.

Soon after, the “fun” started. Belle Dietz rose to say that this business session might not be legal under the auspices of WSFS Inc as the siting for the convention had been voted at what some fans claimed had been an illegal site itself, i.e. London in 1957. This was the point we’d jokingly made amongst ourselves the night before.

Evidently, Belle meant to continue and enlarge on this point, but Anna quickly made the point, “This is the Business Meeting of the Sixteenth World Science Fiction Convention,” thus casting out all WSFS Incorporated business in one fell swoop. There was wild applause and indeed this move, a brilliant coup in itself, deserved it. My own opinions of Anna rose several thousand percent. What a gambit. What a woman! Whatever may be held against Anna in the light that the convention’s advertising had been under the name of the WSFS Inc, she had a convention to run, she had three hundred or more people to entertain (in the manner of a hostess) and obviously the longer she could keep an irrevocable situation which concerned lawsuits at arm’s length the better things would be for her convention. No good could possibly have come from thrashing out – or rather, attempting to thrash out – the sordid details at that time.

Most fans are not interested in fannish lawsuits and their wild applause showed that they thoroughly approved of Anna’s decision to brush aside any business appertaining to the blackened name of the WSFS Inc. It could be argued, of course, that the Solacon Business Meeting was the time and the place to thrash out all that needed it, but what with all the thousands of words which had been written about the affair in many, many fanzines during the year before the Solacon, I can see that if the meeting had gone along these planned lines, we’d still all be there listening to lengthy and analytical legal debates. I wouldn’t mind too much, myself; Los Angeles is warmer than Harrogate.

There were one or two other minor points. George Raybin resigned as Legal Director of WSFS Inc and Bill Donaho read a petition calling for the

dissolution of the corporation. Immediately, Don Day called for a vote which appeared to be practically unanimous and was certainly in the majority. The meeting was then closed and attendees went off to dress up for the banquet. Len Moffatt collared me and led me into the banquet hall ahead of the line. He must have been in touch with the New York customs. He sat me at the front end of a table, near the platform. When everyone got sorted out I was in good company. Ruth Matheson and Rory Faulkner were sitting opposite me and next to me along the table were Charles Hornig and Ellis Mills.

Rick Sneary handed me a letter addressed to me in his care. It bore a Canadian stamp and was from a doctor who had promised Ken Bulmer he would send the successful TAFF delegate $5 if indeed a delegate travelled to the Solacon from Britain. Ken had written the doctor, a J.N. Baxter, but surprise! the good doctor turned out to be no other than Nevil Baxter, an Australian who had taken his degree at Leeds and who had become a personal friend of Mike Rosenblum during his stay in the city. He had been a regular attendee at the Leeds SFA meetings over two or three years and had left for Canada about the time I was leaving Liverpool for Harrogate, in July 1956. Truly a small world.

The toastmaster at the banquet was Tony Boucher and after throwing out skits at psionics and Campbell, and Esperanto and Ackerman, he introduced Forry who said that Bob Bloch had written a story called, “I Was a Prenatal Sex Maniac – With a Jet Propelled Crouch”. He threw out a few more puns, most of which were not up to his usual standard, and, strangely, he felt most ill at ease. Boucher introduced the Solacon Committee one by one, in turn. The ovation afforded Rick Sneary was tremendous, every fan present rising to his feet to applaud this paragon of modern fandom, the man whose ten year old dream was the reason for the Solacon’s very being.

Boucher then introduced Bob Bloch with the words, “Bob can remember when *ASF* approved of science.” Bloch was warmly received and his wry humour went down well. He spoke of early conventions. “In those days twelve fans formed a club. Now they form a jury.” Boucher then introduced the TAFF delegate from Britain and I found myself on the platform. It was a strangely touching and almost emotional moment for me. Even though I stand up all day and talk to a captive audience of children, I find that I have to steel myself when talking to an adult audience. My hands shook, literally. I put down the notes I’d written and gripped the table hard with both hands, stuttering a few words about the absolutely wonderful time which fandom

had given me. I tried a few weak jokes about Bill Donaho's bulk and the size of the country which I noted as small (one con report later covered this as being a straight comment) but the only laugh I got was when I put on sunglasses as a friendly protest against the banks of lights from cine cameras. Having seen Don Ford come over and keep us in stitches since that day, I'm only sorry that I didn't merely waffle on about British fandom and some of the friends over here the Solacon audience must have made through correspondence. Altogether, I doubt whether I spoke for more than three minutes.

Mike Hinge, from New Zealand, followed with a friendly and informal speech about NZ fandom and the difficulty he was having understanding these wild Americans and their accents. Boucher, before presenting the Hugo awards for the best SF of the year, proposed a toast to the memory of two fine writers who had died during 1958, Kuttner and Kornbluth. Amongst the awards presented, Fritz Leiber took a Hugo for his novel, *The Big Time*, in *Galaxy*, Jack Arnold won one for his direction on the film *The Incredible Shrinking Man*, and Bob Shaw stepped up to take custody of the Hugo to Walt Willis for the year's outstanding fan. Boucher then presented himself with a Hugo for the best promag of the year, *F&SF*.

Following the awards, Boucher introduced the Convention's Guest of Honour, Dick Matheson. I have always considered that Matheson is greatly underrated as a writer. Some of his short stories have decided literary qualities and I've seen only one of his which was decidedly bad, now happily lost away in the unread files of expired pulps. Boucher himself said in the Solacon programme booklet that Matheson has the "power to take a reader inside a character or situation". Matheson spoke about the psychological aspect of SF and about how there was so much about the working of the mind of which man had no knowledge. It was, frankly, a disappointing speech. After the humour of Bloch, Ackerman and Boucher, the lack of humour in this speech created a cold atmosphere and as Matheson delivered the speech in a droning and softly spoken monotone, you'll forgive me for not reporting the speech in detail. I was virtually asleep.

The banquet gave way to the masquerade ball. This was a wow, with characters popping up from all over the place in weird costumes. For instance, Karen Anderson was playing vampire and Martha Cohen, who had flown out from New York, was painted a scaly green. Bob Shaw is reported to have said that there were people there who had evidently come along

solely for the purpose of attending the masquerade ball. The ball part, however, wasn't. The music was provided by a meagre selection of LP records and Walt Liebscher had to fill in with tinkling on a handy piano. Unfortunately, this just wasn't *dance* music.

In any case, what most Americans know about ballroom dancing would fill the margin of a postage stamp. Boyd Raeburn has since pointed out that space is needed to dance in a ballroom manner rather than shuffle, and the floor at the Solacon was certainly spacious. I shuffled around with Sylvia Dees and Martha Cohen and found that Sadie Shaw could follow my clumsy steps. The only American who knew how to dance with that easy gliding movement I myself certainly envy was Ben Stark, whom I had met in the elevator on the way down to the ball. We discussed a deal we'd done about three years before – thirty cents worth of high-powered finance.

In the middle of the dancing there occurred a really fantastic piece of fannish gimmickry. Jon Lackey, a twenty year old student from Glendale, burst in from the French windows leading on to the balcony overlooking the street. His face was painted white and he sported a bald-pate wig with outlandishly frizzy sideboards. He wore black, a black tight fitting robe and a flowing black cape. He was close to seven feet tall without elevator shoes. As if this weren't enough, Lackey held a brazier from which a thick black smoke poured continuously. He stormed around, taking long strides up and down the hall, brushing out of his path the fans who were brave enough to stand in his path, and holding the smudge pot aloft he kept up a stream of gibberish in some unknown tongue. It *sounded* logical and authentic, with just the right differences in intonation. This, we felt, was surely the way the Martians would have chosen to invade us had they picked on the Solacon for their arrival on this planet.

Later, Lackey got hold of some sheets of paper and a paint brush and filled up page after page with a weird scrawl, sitting all the while cross-legged on a table at the top end of the hall. What a performance! Lackey won first prize. It wasn't only his costume which won this, I feel sure, but also his supporting performance in the part of a fanatic. In keeping with this label he even went so far as to march out of the hotel, in full costume. Followed by interested fans he stormed up to Pershing Square where he quickly collected a crowd round himself. He then marched down the street back to the hotel, with the crowd, reported to be in the region of a couple of hundred, following him. The first that I knew about all this was when the police showed up in the

convention rooms, and when I looked out of the window, there was quite a crowd collected in the street below. It appeared that the crowd had first expected Lackey to make an appearance on the balcony, whilst reports also stated that the crowd expected him to jump out of one of the windows. I don't suppose that we'll ever find out the full story of the entire business but it appears that, as chance would have it, it was around this time that "The People", Greg and Pat, had got themselves involved in sordid personal affairs. I heard that Greg had threatened to jump out of a window. A further report stated that he even went so far as to hang out of the window, presumably at the very time the crowd was waiting for some such event in the street below. Which certainly would account for the presence of the police.

Lackey himself, I understand, went to his room and quickly cleaned off his makeup and Len Moffatt was left to deny all knowledge of anything while the police toured the hotel. I don't think anyone felt like telling them that the hotel was not at that time in LA at all but was in South Gate, and that they were out of their limits. Anyway, Len later said that he hated to spoil this punchline but he actually *wanted* the police, for the mob outside was threatening to come right into the hotel. The police, Len said, actually seemed to know something about the South Gate deal and they were evidently amused by the whole thing. Eventually, everything quietened down and the judges awarded the prizes. I remember Eleanor Turner taking the prize for the most sexy costume, which included of all things a real pony tail. And Belle and Frank Dietz, accompanied by Roger Sims, all in panda costume, also carried off prizes.

I was talking to Sylvia Dees and Bill Rotsler when Walt Liebscher came up and asked whether we'd like to come along to a party at his house. He mentioned several drool-worthy names of fans and professionals who would be there and also said that his house was something I should evidently see while I had the chance. Apparently, it's a Hollywood house in the expected tradition. Naturally, I jumped at the chance. Several fans who had been invited grouped together to await other fans who had been invited and eventually Bill Rotsler, Sylvia, Alex Bratmon, Miriam Dyches and Terry Carr went off in Bill's car, while a second group of us waited for Martha Cohen to change out of her green costume into something more normal.

There was Robin Wood, George Metzger, Lars Bourne, Martha, Anne Lubell and someone called Jimmy who was repeatedly taken for Carl

Brandon – he was the only negro at the convention – and who had occupied one of the lounges all evening with a number of bongo drums, which he and other fans had been playing incessantly. I remember seeing Jerry Bixby batting away at one time and as I turned away I bumped into a man who was wearing the lapel card, “Al Ashley”. Strange that one who was once so active in fandom should now only be remembered for two words.

When the group of us had herded ourselves into the car, we drove off, only to find that no one actually *knew* where Walt Liebscher lived and so after a drive out to someone’s house to look at the swimming pool we came back to the hotel. Robin, Martha, George and I went out for a hamburger up at dear old Googles and when we got back to the hotel we visited a party in Bob Leman’s room and then the non-stop riot in the Detroit suite. In Leman’s room, Bill Donaho was sitting on the bed across which were lying a sleeping couple bearing the lapel labels “Art and Trina Castillo”. They were Ron and Cindy Smith of *Inside* fame. Leman himself was arguing politics on the floor with Greg, who hadn’t jumped from the window after all. Sandy Cutrell was there singing some of his work songs and Bill Donaho was analysing aloud the characters of the femme fans present. The Detroit party seemed to be running down at last, although the group had somehow got the house detective drunk, and there he was, asleep in a corner. I went to bed. It was close on 7 a.m.

16. South Gate Monday

Once again I was up at nine. I had breakfast with Ellis Mills and Charlie Hornig who had kindly offered to show me the Pacific. We walked up to Pershing Square where we caught a bus which took a long, slow and boiling ride out to Santa Monica. I had a little trouble when the winding mechanism in my camera snagged and I felt that I'd ruined a roll of film. I put in another roll and clicked away with that. We walked along by the famous beach and took a ride on one of the seafront trams. We walked out along the pier and saw the fishing boats and the various restaurants which advertised all sorts of exotic seafoods. We ate pizza and drank cokes in an Italian restaurant. This was my first taste of pizza; I dare say it grows on you. Altogether, the time passed all too quickly. It was a peaceful and even fannishly uneventful trip out, but it was a change from the hectic pace of the convention and it was certainly thoroughly enjoyable. I finally fell victim to the combination of heat and lack of sleep, and dozed off on the journey back to the hotel.

The Convention was by this time winding up. John Campbell did step up on the platform to discuss some modern equivalent of an inventors' club he was thinking of running, and he mentioned also that he'd been maligned at the convention by others who had misunderstood his remark about Cortez being a "heroic" figure. Cortez, he pointed out, was heroic in the classical sense of the word in that he was larger than life. This cleared up that point very nicely, tying up the loose string. I marvelled at what a larger-than-life man Campbell is himself, with even an interest in the classics. Altogether, I'd say that in his making that particular point, I understood what he was talking about for the first time!

It was about this time that Anna Moffatt showed me a letter she'd just received from Dave Newman which had as a detachable postscript this cryptic message for my eyes: COME HOME RON BENNETT ALL IS FORGIVEN.

In the evening, Charlie Hornig and Ellis Mills took Sylvia Dees, Ron Ellik, Rory Faulkner and myself out to the Mexican quarter of the city where, after a bus ride and a walk through a maze of shops sporting Japanese names – even the cinema posters were in Japanese – we ended up at a French restaurant called The Taix which offered a rather novel menu. There was no

choice of dishes, just a speciality of the house, as it were. This set dish, consisting of a highly flavoured soup and a main course of spaghetti, evidently proved very popular. The food was good, and the price was low.

Rory remembered The Taix from her previous visit to Los Angeles several years before, and Charlie told us that it used to be a favourite rendezvous for himself, Forry and other West Coasters.... Afterwards, we walked round the district, seeing the City Hall with its top floor courthouse, and a building which looked so much like a Spanish-styled church that I bought a colour postcard of it – a really beautiful structure which turned out to be the railway station! Charlie led us down a narrow street which housed a long line of stalls selling Mexican wares.

This was Olvera Street which is, according to a plaque, the oldest in Los Angeles, dating back to the early nineteenth century. The old Avila Adobe house which stands on the street and which is one of the oldest homes in the city was built in 1818. I was really impressed with this slice out of American history, until Ron Ellik pointed out that coming from Britain, where history really is historical, all this would mean nothing to me. It then dawned on me that he was probably right. Most likely it was the atmosphere of the street. The mood there was really infectious, something really out of the ordinary. To use a cliché, it was like stepping into another world... from high-powered America to picturesque Mexico, in one short stride. It was a tourist trap in many respects, true, with many shoddy and high priced Mexican souvenirs, but it was colourful, gay and completely lacking in that garish quality – or lack of it – which seems to go hand in hand with so many places of interest to any tourist in any part of our very commercially minded world. I thought it all wonderful. There were glass blowers, fashioning their tiny characters in a bunsen flame, and suddenly I found a stall which sold English cigarettes. At home Players Bachelors were then selling at 3/4d, about 47 cents. In LA they were priced at 60 cents as they had to be imported. I eventually bought 20 Players Medium for 30 cents (two shillings) as against the British price of 3/11d, or close to twice the price. True, these Players were manufactured in America by the Philip Morris Company, but they were near enough to the British blend to please me. The proprietor of the stall spoke but little English and, as I know no Spanish whatever, we had quite a time. Actually, by sign language we got in quite a bit of price comparisons of various brands of cigarettes at home and in the States. I'd like to have a tape recording of that conversation!

Sylvia, too, obviously enjoyed herself, for at the time she was a foreign language major at college and her practical knowledge of Spanish astounded us. She wandered around talking at her usual rapid-fire pace to various stall owners and even went so far as to buy some Spanish books and magazines, light reading matter, at one stall.

We walked back to the hotel by way of what proved to be Los Angeles' skid row. There were Mexican strip theatres, and from the way people turned round to look at us, it was obvious that we were tourists. I expected to be lured into a dark alley and robbed at every turn. It was here too that I saw a tabloid newspaper's headline referring to Peter Townsend leaving England to tour the world: "Maggie's lover leaves forever!"

When we got back to the hotel the others drifted off to various parties and I decided it was about time I got down to the report I was supposed to be writing to Ted Carnell for *New Worlds*.

Ted and I had already arranged that the report should have been sent airmail to London earlier that day. I went up to my room, took out the typewriter, put a sheet of paper into the machine, lit a cigarette, typed the title and the phone rang. It was Anna Moffatt, inviting me to the convention suite on the top floor. There was quite a crowd gathered when I arrived and Rick Sneary and Anna took me on one side to present me with the money raised by the Auction Bloch. I stayed to watch TV. There had been promises of part of a programme to be given over to the convention and although just about every attendee gathered to watch the entire half hour show, there was not even a mention of the convention.

Feeling nice and rich, I felt that the least I could do was to invite the Detroit group along to the bar for a drink. When we had all settled there, one of the waitresses challenged the ages of Sylvia and Noreen, so that we had the drinks sent up to the Detroit suite. As soon as they had been sorted out, I took mine back to my room in order to get back to the report. As soon as I had really got going there was a knock on my door which turned out to belong to Alex Bratmon. The previous day I'd mentioned in passing to Bob Pavlat that we might throw a *Ploy* party in my room that Monday evening and Alex had not only come along for the party but had kindly brought his own drink – in abundance. The *Ploy* party never came off. For one thing, I hadn't seen Bob since talking about the party (he was out, I believe, at Burbee's for dinner) and for another I was exiled, surrounded in my room on the eighth floor by several elderly non-fans. It just didn't seem right to hold a

fannish party in their midst. Alex was very nice about it and stayed a while to give me moral support while I wrote the report. I was great company for him. I can't have looked up from the typewriter in over an hour. During that time I wrote the report out twice and tore the first draft into shreds. I decided that it could still do with a rewrite, put everything away and went up to the Detroit rooms.

Here the party which had threatened to die had revived itself and was in full swing. Here the main brag session of the convention took place, continuing for some time, with players joining and leaving at will. I remember Will Jenkins, Fred Prophet, Jim Broderick (before he fell asleep) and Bob Pavlat sitting in at some time or other. I cleared over $2 in penny stakes. It was altogether a profitable day. When the brag session broke up, we sat around talking. Nick Falasca and I squatted on the bed amongst a horde of reclining figures and he told me that he thought the convention had been a fabulous affair, an opinion with which I could easily agree. Bill Donaho came in and sat on the bed, which promptly collapsed. It was the type of wild gathering, fun and friendly, it's all too easy to exaggerate about, and it compared favourably in standard to anything Kettering has ever had to offer. We agreed that Bill had found the perfect climax to any convention and, amid discussion as to whether he should repeat his trick at future gatherings, we went off to our respective rooms. It was 5:30.

I got four hours sleep and got up to rewrite the report, which I mailed off at the post office annexe round the corner. It was actually open and I took the opportunity of posting home all the bundles I'd meant to send the previous Saturday. Belle Dietz was there, mailing her resignation as a Director of WSFS. She asked me to witness this notification and I did so.

I stayed around the hotel until two, having brunch with Sylvia. Fans were drifting off continuously and it was sad having to live through a chain of goodbyes, parting with friends so recently made. Even though it's sad saying goodbye at the end of any convention, it was harder to realise that these friends would probably never be seen again. At least, I had the knowledge that I *had* met them, and that in many cases my life was so much richer for those meetings. Bob and Sadie Shaw went off to start their long trip back to Ireland after two years in Canada and Buz and Elinor Busby departed too, an extremely nice couple I'd like to have seen more of during the weekend. Somehow, whenever we met one or the other of us was on his way to somewhere or other. Eventually it was my own turn to go. Bob Pavlat, a

man of rare courage, was driving me back east and was taking Ted White and Sylvia Dees along as protection. We loaded up Bob's '57 Ford in the basement garage, at more or less the same time Bob Bloch, Nick and Noreen and Sandy Cutrell were also leaving.

Something involved my having to go back upstairs and I bumped into Gem Carr who kindly invited me along for a cup of coffee. "I've been meaning to talk to you all the weekend about this Willis business," she said. She and Walt had been at crossed typewriters in the FAPA mailings of the day. This was a conversation I would have loved to have had, a discussion with Gem on a controversial topic and without the so easily misinterpreted printed word. Time, however, was against me. The others were looking round for me. There was, then, a last quick round of goodbyes and we were away, riding through the streets of Los Angeles, *away* from the convention. "South Gate in '58" was already a part of fannish history and our journey east had begun.

A note, though, on the Solacon itself. First, it is hard for me to compare this convention with others I have attended, for the majority of faces at the Solacon were not those I normally see at British conventions. True, there were the fans who had travelled to London in 1957 and there was the redoubtable Ellis Mills who had popped up at all sorts of places – Kettering, London, Antwerp, Frankfurt – in my life, including Harrogate. But faces like Archie Mercer and Norman Shorrock were sadly missing. I would begin to think at some odd time, "Oh, Archie must hear this," and would half look round for him or whoever the fan I thought of actually was, but of course these fans just were not there. When I told Bruce Burn of this, he said it gave him an insight into the convention itself, so I include it here for what it's worth. Even so, though, the Solacon lacked nothing in spirit for their absence. Which seems to prove that fans are basically the same the world over. It was a small and intimate convention. The Solacon Committee, which worked quietly and efficiently, a grand bunch, had deliberately not advertised the gathering locally, so that in the main the attendees were hard-bitten enthusiasts. Everyone met practically everyone else. What had looked like causing the one major upset of the convention, an out of hand business meeting, had been squashed, and the goodwill, the warm friendliness, exuded at every moment of the convention. Everyone was on his best behaviour towards everyone else and, if I may borrow a word from Dick Ellington, it was a "gas" of an affair, a real swinging ball. My seconds will be round at

dawn to anyone who says otherwise.

17. The Last Link

Bob first drove over to Zeke Leppin's on West 12th to pick up Bjo and the rest of the gang. No one seemed to know *exactly* why we were going out there, except that it was expected of us. No sooner had we pulled up outside the large house where half of LA fandom seemed to be living in those days, than the doors opened and fans burst forth, Bjo, Steve Tolliver, Nick and Noreen and Ron Ellik amongst them. Detroit fans seemed to outnumber everyone else, and nobody, of course, complains about that.

It appeared that everyone was going swimming. Bjo led Sylvia indoors to change and most of the male population disappeared off the street. I sat on the kerb, adjusted my sunglasses against the intense glare, lit up a Players, and contemplated on a rule book for future TAFF delegates in which the first rule was "pack a pair of swimming trunks". In the event of a femme fan being elected, the rule will have to be amended.

Eventually, the party got together again and we started off in our respective cars. Fred Prophet's Lincoln took the lead and Nick Falasca followed. Bob took up the rear. Sylvia amused us by commenting on everything in a cross of Spanish and pigeon Spanish for the benefit of the heathens with her. We hadn't travelled very many miles before the party was split up by an inconsiderate traffic light, but happily we caught up the cars in front again. The second time this happened, we weren't so lucky. We managed to catch up Nick and Noreen, but there was no sign of Fred, who happened to have Bjo with him. It seemed that we were going to a certain Corona del Mar. We stopped and pooled what little knowledge of the route that we had. Nick had instructions and Ron Ellik, who had got himself landed with the rearguard party, had been part of the way to Corona quite a while before. As a last resort, he told us, we could take the coast road through his home town of Long Beach, but there was a quicker way. Nick outlined what he thought was the route and we drove off, Nick in the lead. I'd like to report that we soon found ourselves in New York, but I'd hate to exaggerate. Certainly, however, Corona del Mar didn't appear over the horizon and eventually we stopped playing Donald Lam and pulled into a gas station to ask the way. We were put on to a road which led to the Alternate 101 and we finally reached Corona. The drive had been hot and dusty, through terrain

which looked more like semi-desert than it had any right to be, and we stopped to pick up a coffee and ice cream before finding our way down to the beach. Sylvia went wild to find that she could buy some Mexican food and invested in some enchiladas.

We did find the beach. We approached it from the overlooking cliffs, which we had to walk down, very much like Folkestone on the English south coast, but here the bay was more sweeping, the cliffs were sandier, the beach was yellow and the sea was that blue which one normally associates with Dorothy Lamour epics. Corona itself is some twenty-five or thirty miles south east of Los Angeles, which means that it is still on the coast. It has that leisurely air about it which to folk in England means California, before the tales of Los Angeles' smog causes them to revise their ideas and ideals. In a nutshell, it is – or was the day we were there – a sunny paradise. It is one of the nicest places I've ever been to and if I ever come into a fortune, Corona's the place I'll retire to.

Bob and Ted spotted the main party and we wended our way down the cliff path to the thick rich sandy beach. There was some speedy peeling off of clothes before the main body went splashing about in the Pacific. Staid and stolid Englishman that I was, I paddled my hand around in the water for a while but didn't go about wading with the others. The thought of getting wet through overrode the spirit of adventure I once had, and of course, I've been kicking myself ever since. Bob Pavlat and I busied ourselves walking around the beach and taking shots of the breakers rolling into shore, spilling themselves caressingly over the laughing forms of the more daring fans. We took shots of the cliffs, we took shots of each other, and we took shots of one another taking shots of the rest of the group. There was a good deal of friendly ducking and racing around. Ted and I had a run along the shore and I'm sorry to say that Britain didn't discover a surprise choice for their 1960 Olympic team. I was licked hollow. I staggered back to the main group and was helped up to the waiting cars, parked outside residents' homes – how they must have loved us – and everyone sat on the car bonnets and the kerb and dried out.

We drove along to the home of a relative of Bjo's and everyone changed. We weren't there long, which seemed a pity to me for the little I saw of the people whose home we were usurping left a pleasant taste in the mouth and there were a lot of questions about Corona I'd have liked to have asked them. On the way over Ron Ellik and I played brag in the back seat of

the car and we continued the game when we drove off once again. As I remember it, he ended up owing me a fortune: two cents.

Our next stopping place was a small restaurant. This, the Casa Grande, specialises in Mexican dishes. It wasn't until much later that I discovered that it's situated in Santa Ana, the home of Rick Sneary. The Casa Grande worked things on a combination basis so that if everyone takes the same dinner, the resultant price is cheaper. We took a combination dinner. I wish I could remember what it was.

There was something that was dipped into something else, a very *very* hot soup and altogether the food was entirely new to me. I know that there were Tacos and Tamales but goodness knows what the remaining food was. I don't even remember what the tacos or tamales were, but the meal was a nice spicy change. I liked the note on the menu that the management would prepare any special dish the way a customer wanted it. I thought of asking for Yorkshire pudding, but I'm not sure how its taste would blend with the tamales. It was a very gay meal, in keeping with the entire day. Steve and Bjo told me how the dishes are eaten (yes, I know it's with the mouth, but there's more to it than that). My throat was thoroughly raw by the time we'd finished and I can well understand English cooking being tasteless to the American palate.

The Detroit gang started a riddle session about their liking apples but not pears, trees but not bushes and so on. I think I was the last in the group to cotton on to the idea that they liked everything whose name contained a double letter. Eventually, of course, the meal came to an end and we walked out to the cars. I'd been stringing along the whole day without knowing exactly what was to happen next and it came as a shock to realise that as we stood around in the gathering dusk we were saying goodbye. We left Steve, Bjo and Ron Ellik on the sidewalk and drove off. That was my last direct link with the Solacon, and I was indeed sorry to break it. I'd not only had such a whale of a good time but I'd only just begun to *know* these people, and yet they were already fading out of my life. Steve is tall and quiet, so quiet that I didn't have a lot of contact with him the whole time in Los Angeles. Bjo is a bundle of energy and vitality who is constantly on the go, so much so that I didn't get the chance to corner her for a talk, either. I've been regretting ever since that I didn't have her draw one of her cartoons on my Solacon lapel tag. She was drawing them on every card offered her, but my warped way of thinking suggested that at the time I'd prefer my tag unsullied. Mad, Bennett,

mad! I wouldn't be too surprised, though, to find that Bjo's "bounce" is a cover for a more latent shyness, which is, after all, a nice mixture. And Ron. Ellik... well, I did have quite a bit to do with Ron, and I found him to be one of the nicest people, if not *the* nicest person, I met on the West Coast. I understand that his nickname of "Squirrel" implies that he's not as logical as he might be, but throughout the weekend I found him to be a very mature young man with some surprisingly sensible ideas. He's modest and quick-witted, too. A thoroughly nice guy.

After leaving these locals behind we drove around for a while, pausing after about quarter of an hour for the usual conference on routes and how the heck we were to get on to a road which led anywhere at all. Noreen was suffering from a headache and Nick decided to have a look round for a drug store. We lost track of Fred Prophet about this time and we waved goodbye to Nick and Noreen and Bills Donaho and Rickhardt. This left Bob Pavlat's lone car to suffer the presence of Bennett. Leaving this second group was a pang, too. I'd travelled quite some way with them. I settled in the back seat, leaving Bob driving and Ted and Sylvia alongside him in the front seat, and went to sleep.

We had been discussing the possibility of travelling up to San Francisco. We were all rather keen to do so. Bob regards the city as his favourite, I believe, and there was the Berkeley group to be seen in natural habitat. I was also rather keen on the chance of hearing Kid Ory and seeing the giant sequoias. The trip was not to be, however. Mental juggling with accounts and finances showed that this side trip couldn't be managed. Accordingly, when I awoke we were en route to Las Vegas.

I felt a wild wind blowing round me as I half woke up and I asked Ted to close the car window. Nothing changed, so this time I told him to close the window in no uncertain terms. Ted's reply that it was too hot was just as certain. I sat up and it *was* hot. Like walking into an oven. We were in the heart of the Mojave Desert and the burning sand had not had time to cool down from its daytime broiling. We opened *all* the windows and shed as much clothing as decently possible. At the first chance we pulled into a roadhouse for a coke. I asked the waitress whether she knew what the temperature was and I was astonished to hear her immortal reply, that it would be "down to about ninety-eight around now". I've never known a sunny day in Britain to get into the nineties, and here it was eleven in the evening. The cokes we ordered and drank were welcome. We also indulged

in hamburgers. Having been a lover of pickled cucumber since I was so high, I opened my English mouth and the assembly seemed startled to hear me order “cucumber” with the hamburger. It appears that the Americans call this particular side order “pickles” and leave it at that. I became quite a hamburger and coke addict on that trip back east. Coca Cola has never been a particular liking of mine at home, possibly because of a difference in temperatures, but in the US I found that it was a perfect thirst quencher. Even so, with all the cokes I drank and all the hamburgers I ate, I still couldn’t help wondering, when I said “pickles” whether I might not get a mixture of cucumber, cauliflower and onions.

We drove on through the burning Mojave. I’d have liked to have had some photos of the area as this was the only *real* desert I’ve been across, but it wasn’t possible, of course. The journey bored on, in more than one sense, with sheer blackness around us until... something came waving out of the dark ahead to bounce along the road and disappear by us. Whatever it was was moving at speed and yet sprang along the road under a nightmarish projection of its own. Bob slowed the car as it moved out of our headlights past us. It was soundless and ghostly. Even while we were discussing this, another shape swept towards and past us. It appeared to be a board, a plank, of some size. After a while tail lights showed up ahead and we passed a huge truck that was shedding its load. Dangerous. We were glad to see the lights of Las Vegas ahead.

18. Vegas Revisited

We pulled into one of those gambling dens, the Sahara, as a break and after we'd put our watches on from two something to three something we split up for a time. Ted and Sylvia went to watch Louis Prima's modernistic jazz band, which seemed poor even to me. Bob and I played the bandits for a while and then we all piled back in the car and drove into the city centre. On the Strip once again we parked the car and went into the Horseshoe. For those who want a progress report, Ted and Sylvia were holding hands by this time. The visit to the Horseshoe was amusing. On our journey out we'd all dressed up before going on the town. At our elegant best, we'd dined at the Horseshoe, but now... we looked the bedraggled travellers we were. It was four in the morning. We'd driven all night without sleep, and without the usual niceties like washing and shaving. Stale, I think, is the word to describe us. This was Las Vegas shorn of its golden glister, a tired and weary city as arid as the desert around it. Superficial veneer being absent, Las Vegas did not appear at all like the green and pleasant haven it had been on our first visit.

We were surprised, while dabbling at our breakfasts – breakfast is served 24 hours a day at the Horseshoe – to be greeted by friendly voices. Nick and Noreen, Bill Donaho and Bill Rickhardt strode up to us. They joined us and Bill Donaho ate all the food in sight and then they departed to more goodbyes. This was definitely anti-climactic. I'd said goodbye to them once and it hurt even more to say goodbye again. I resolved there and then that I wouldn't say goodbye to anyone again. Sweet sorrow, phooey! It hurt.

We then thought about putting up somewhere for a little sleep and, remembering our happy time at the Montmartre, drove out there again. Any place would have suited us but the Mo'Mart is worthy of recommendation and we were all in favour of going out there. We were out of luck, though, for we found the prices too exorbitant for the rooms available. We were later to find the same problem confronting us throughout the trip east, for most motels seem to reserve rooms in powers of two and of course Sylvia had to have a room of her own, leaving three of us to either barter for a room for three or pay the price of a room for four. We drove back into town and eventually found a motel on the Strip which boasted vacancy signs. This was

the Hi, Pardner, which wasn't a patch on the Montmartre. We stopped there for the "night". There was a double bed and a single rollaway. We tossed for the single and Bob won. Ted and I shared the double.

Because of our late bedtime, Wednesday 3rd September didn't begin for us until 2:30 in the afternoon. The proprietress was keen to see that we honoured our contract to stay only twelve hours and she practically stood over us as we dressed and got ready to move on. In the finish, Ted, Bob and I were virtually thrown out of our room and we sat outside on the stone walk and waited for Sylvia. The glare was terrific, possibly the most intense I'd experienced, and the heat sapped our potential even as far as standing up was concerned, even though there were no chairs on which to sit. Talk moved on to Noel Coward in Las Vegas and Englishmen going out in the sun.

When Sylvia was ready we drove out of town on the northern route, Highway 91, which leads to Salt Lake City. A snarling cop on point duty gritted his teeth as we roared past him and yelled at us to take it easy. Immediately before the city limits were reached we stopped at a post office set well back from the road in its own dusty grounds, parked the car, started it up again and reparked it in the shade. We all posted letters home.

Outside once again, we took colour shots of the mountains around us. The bare and arid peaks were imposing and majestic and were a preview of the entire day's drive. The road to Salt Lake City cuts through canyon country and the mountains through which the road winds are scarred by ravines and gullies. Denudation is complete and it was not until we reached Utah that we saw any sparsely scattered trees.

At one point we stopped the car on the shoulder of the road and had a stroll into the semi-desert and mesquite for a couple of hundred yards. Considering that I was wearing only tennis shoes, this was not wholly wise. We took pictures of one another standing up against various tall xerophytes and made sure that we did not tread on any antifannish snakes or lizards which might have been present.

Somewhere between Cedar City and Beaver City we found that the sun was beginning to set with surprising rapidity, so much so that from realising that here was a sunset worth conserving to pointing the camera, the sun was practically down. I've since been told that such clear, dry zones experience no twilight as we know it in Britain and this sunset certainly verified the fact. A short while later we parked the car on the shoulder of the road once again and in the cooling night we looked up at the stars. This was the poetic climax

of the entire trip. Volumes of poetry have been written with far less to inspire them than we had then. Two years before I'd walked down a German autobahn at midnight helping Ellis Mills to search for a gas station and every possible star was on view. Here in Utah, the galactic panorama was even more vivid for, again, the air is far more clear. Bob, who is something of an amateur astronomer on the side, pointed out different constellations and we four travelling giants felt that all was right with the world. With that aura of peace around us it could hardly be otherwise. Next time there is an international summit conference, I'd suggest that the parties concerned are taken out to Utah. And shown the night sky.

We stopped in Beaver City, a town which struck us as strange in having what appeared to be open drains running down the roadway gutters. We had a look round a drugstore and criticised the SF titles on show at the bookstand, while Ted and I bought candy bars and compared the home prices of each. I found a couple of bars of Milky Way at a dime apiece and Ted favoured Rowntrees. He seemed somewhat surprised to learn that initially this brand is a Yorkshire product. We walked across the road, taking care to stride over the local river system, and bought cokes at a milk bar, thereby announcing to all and sundry that we were out of state visitors. Drinks containing caffeine are not wholly approved in Utah.

Later, we moved north again, past Big Rock Candy Mountain, through York (yes, York!), Provo, past Utah Lake and on into Salt Lake City which, as we were all well aware, is Calkins country; but as the time was once again past midnight when we made landfall, we merely put up at a motel and turned in. It was my turn to have the single bed and I made the most of it.

19. Calkins County

The sound of rain and thunder startled me into waking. It was one o'clock in the afternoon. I looked in the apartment's main room and saw that both Bob and Ted were still sleeping, so moved back into my own room which had the washing department attached. I took my first American shower, which is an event in itself. I have a blind prejudice against showers which means I must lose one of the pleasures in life. I'm almost sightless without my glasses and can't wear them under the stream of water, so that I lose either way. After the long drive the previous day, however, I needed that shower. I looked out of the window while dressing and noticed that the puddles of rain water were already drying up. Evidently we had caught only the edge of the storm, which conserved the record of good weather for the entire trip.

I'd just dressed when Sylvia knocked on the door and Bob and Ted woke up. Sylv and I left them and went for a walk around. We got as far as the milk bar across the road and had coffee and breakfast. Afterwards we returned to the motel and loaded up the car to drive into the city centre. Bob and I were surprised at the trim standard of the local femininity. Salt Lake City appeared to be a continual parade of pretty girls and beautiful women. We talked of the Washington fans' Society of American Girl Watchers and Letchers and I was immediately signed up for membership. The SAGWAL was to form an important part of the trip east. We rated every town, city and village we passed through but none ever came up to the standard of Salt Lake City. I was highly delighted on returning home to reread Ernie Pyle's *Home Country* and to find there the assessment, "The prettiest girls are in Salt Lake City."

It was here that we first discovered what a meticulous driver Bob Pavlat is. Rather than make a left hand turn across intersection traffic, he'll circle the block. We circled one block a couple of times before coming in to land in front of a restaurant. I remembered that neither Ted nor Bob had eaten that day and, as they parked the car in that easy diagonal way which seems an epitome of the American Way of Life, I nipped across the road to the post office. Amongst the notices of banknote forgeries there was a locally printed item of interest to philatelists, which I found intriguing. This sheet was a nicely written column on the history of the postage stamp, which went back,

according to the notice, to “Rowland Hill’s 1 cent stamp of 1840”.

I managed to find my way back to the restaurant without asking anyone the directions and here I found that Sylvia had created a new art form in doodling in salt on the formica table top. Some of her fake Rotsler illustrations were worthy of preservation in a more permanent state. If I hadn’t foreseen trouble at the customs, I’d probably have taken that table top with me.

Bob came up with the decision that we should ring Gregg Calkins, which was a move highly favoured by all. Not one of us could remember his new address and we had to unload one of my cases on to the sidewalk while I searched through my luggage for the address book I’d brought with me. We got through to the exchange and were eventually connected with Gregg. Bob told him that he was travelling back east from the Solacon with a small party of fans and the words were hardly out of his mouth before we were invited over. We noted down directions and were off in the car, with Bob of course encircling the block to give us a good powered start.

We were practically bearing down on the unsuspecting Calkinses’ household when we passed a college playing field on which the college team was practising football moves. This, of course, was gridiron, which is a slightly less civilised form of rugby. We stopped the car and I took some shots of them running about. They weren’t a very intelligent bunch, though, for they just didn’t seem impressed that they had a Real Life Rugby Player in their midst, but they did at least let me have a look at one of their laceless footballs, which are a little smaller than our standard size rugby balls. Bob and Ted showed that fans are superior beings by being suitably heedful of my prowess in punting the ball while wearing canvas shoes. My feet still ache. We passed the ball around for a while and then went on our way to Gregg’s. I began to change the film in the camera and once again ran into trouble with the winding mechanism. I decided to leave it until I got to Gregg’s.

We found the Calkinses’ home without difficulty and went up to ring the doorbell.

Gregg answered, a tall beefy guy who looks as calm and mature as his writing. We sat around, discussing the Solacon and Ron Ellik’s recent visit. The outside door opened and two young women came in and sat down. Gregg introduced us to Joanne and Gail, his two wives, which rather shook us. We were in the heart of Mormon country after all and we tried to take the news calmly, but I don’t think that we succeeded too well. It later transpired

that Gregg was pulling our legs in a neat deadpan fashion, for while Joanne is certainly his wife, Gail turned out to be the next door neighbour. Gregg gave us his opinions on life with the Mormons, the Latter Day Saints, who virtually make the state a religious closed shop. Gregg evidently objects to the way his life is ruled and ordered but is loath to move as he likes the country. This viewpoint was very understandable. Gregg objects to organised religion, and the religion in Utah is *very* organised. He introduced us to his cats and took me into the cellar study he'd made for himself so that I could try and fix the camera. I loaded new film into the thing and Gregg showed us a few of his fanzines. We moved upstairs for dinner and then went back downstairs to inspect the fanzines more closely. Gregg and Bob began to take duplicators and typewriters to pieces and Ted, Sylvia and I looked over the neatly piled magazines on the home-made shelves. Ted and Sylvia picked up a stack of zines that Gregg was about to dispense with and I sneaked a preview reading of the Bob Bloch scream of an article that was to appear in the next *Oopsla*. We discussed coffee and tea drinking and Gregg modestly announced that he thought that he could give John Berry a run for his money. He immediately sat down and typed out a challenge to John that I was to deliver by hand when I next met John. I've had the sheet of paper by me ever since and have taken it along to every convention, but I hadn't met John at that time, and I *still* haven't. It's about time the BSFA sorted the situation out. However, the challenge reads in the main; "Having delivered a challenge to you not less than twice, by personal letter, and having both times been ignored, either through cowardice or ill-manners (I decline to specify which) I herewith take this further opportunity to offer to you a CHALLENGE to a tea-drinking contest, time, place and judges to be specified by yourself, and may the best man win." It was signed on the 4th September 1958 by the challenger, three witnesses and the bearer. Of such things is fandom made!

We finally drifted off to bed, after a thoroughly enjoyable evening. Sylvia was housed upstairs and mattresses and cushions were spread out to form a bed on the front room floor. It was the wildest night I spent trying to sleep in the States. Bob and Ted slept on the outside and I slipped in the centre of the improvised bed. The bed itself was most comfortable. The trouble was that when either Bob or Ted turned outwards, the sheets across us became taut and there was a six to nine inch gap between the sheets and Bennett. I tell you, it was draughty! I clutched at the sheets, Bob clutched at the sheets and Ted clutched at the sheets. In the morning, Ted's first words to

me were, “I’m not sleeping with you again, Ron Bennett.” We were up at six and after a breakfast of something called raisin bran we left Gregg and Joanne to suffer their fannish oasis in the wilderness and we drove off on our first stage of the long cross country drive.

20. The Great Fannish Wilderness

We spent much of the morning looking at the raw Wyoming Rockies and playing word games like fannish 20 Questions and Ghosts. We crossed the Continental Divide near Wamsutter and pulled into Laramie for a late, late lunch of hamburger and coffee. In the early evening we drove into Cheyenne. We put up at the Big Horn Motel and laughed at the Ackerman pun about Cheyenne's fiction. Sylvia retired early after dinner and Bob and I left Ted sitting in bed reading while we made a trip into the town centre. We left the car at a garage opposite a cinema which was showing *The Fiend Who Walked the West* and we had a look at a couple of bookstands in corner drug stores, finally ending up in a bar where we sampled the local beer. One thing that did take our notice about Cheyenne is that it must be the location for the old joke about the man who lived out his life on the block where he was born as he was unable to get past the constant stream of traffic. We had indeed an extremely hard time trying to get across any road in the town, for as soon as we stepped off the kerb, the lights would change against us with devilish timing. It was a nerve-wracking experience and my toes still bear the tread marks of several Cheyenne autos.

The next day we were up at five to greet a cold, fresh morning which was an exhilarating pleasure. The sun came up sharply and we stopped for breakfast. I picked up a couple more Milky Ways, but these later melted under the back window and it is obviously a lesson that in the US one buys chocolate and eats it immediately. We crossed into Nebraska and eventually drove into a small township called Sunol. Here we were due for a surprise, for Bob, who was driving, made a few comments about this building looking the same or that building having altered and it transpired that he had been born in Sunol but hadn't been near the place for something like fifteen years. He pulled up to ask someone whether they knew Dick Pavlat and shortly afterwards we had driven off the main highway and were visiting the home of Bob's Uncle Dick, a fabulous personality who had not only built his own home and its wonderful furniture but was at that time planning to build an extension on to the main part of the house. After Bob had looked up another

relative, we had lunch and went on our way. I'm willing to wager that the next time Bob visits Sunol his Uncle Dick will have built a minor Empire State Building. Not only was he an industrious person but the end part of his labours was really worth seeing.

Shortly after leaving Sunol, Bob decided that I did, after all, talk like a runaway tape recorder. He'd been disappointed in me until then, he said, and practically considered me a fake. So much for TAFF platforms!

And shortly after that came the great train chase. The road on which we were driving, US Highway 30, was running parallel to a railway track, and coming up in the distance way behind us was a train. This was the first real American train I'd seen from any reasonably close distance and I asked Bob if he would pull up so that I could get a couple of pictures for the children at school. I ran over to the track through the long coarse prairie grass, so that I not only afforded myself a good vantage point but covered my trousers in sticky burrs from the knee down. I got four fast shots as the double engines pulled past at some tremendous speed. By the time I got back to the car the train had all but disappeared and I was asked whether I'd taken any shots of the large size box cars which bear all sorts of publicity slogans like "Ship It On The 'Frisco". I hadn't and so we began to chase the train. We eventually caught it up and I got some shots of the different box cars as Bob held the car in a steady matching speed. We were doing over eighty.

We didn't go up to Oshkosh, but made a note of the roadsign directing us there and instead drove straight ahead to cross the North Platte River at, surprisingly enough, North Platte. I'm ashamed to say that I was asleep when we crossed the Missouri into Iowa, at Omaha. At Council Bluffs we pulled in for dinner and went out on the town by trying our hands at miniature golf, of the crazy novelty type usually found at seaside resorts in England. I dare say that Coney Island has a course, too. It was a wild, swinging affair in which the scores would not have frightened any golf pro. Although Bob was well in the lead at the halfway stage, I pulled up through sheer good fortune and a typical politeness on his part to draw with him at the last hole. We eventually drove off again, to put up for the night at the M-B motel at Corning. We went to sleep at 11:30 after a day of varying experiences and got up on the Sunday morning at 5:30.

The main point on the agenda for discussion that day seemed to be Alan Dodd and whether or not he existed and whether when Dave Jenrette and I had claimed to be Alan we were pulling a double or even a treble cross. Ted

had some wonderful theories on the whole business and I was sorry that Dave was not present to hear what his original idea had let me in for.

We pulled in for gas at Mount Pleasant. Here a gallon of the car juice cost only twenty and nine-tenths cents, about 1/6d. Petrol was definitely cheaper in the north where it was comparatively nearer to the large refineries. The gas station attendant was a character straight out of any Ernie Pyle column, giving us an extremely interesting rundown on the history of the town of which he was obviously very proud. The attitude was certainly understandable. Mount Pleasant was clean and fresh, a mid-western township that was practically typical of that pictured in the mind's eye. I'm subsequently reluctant to admit that when I read *Peyton Place* I placed the action in Mount Pleasant. Such a well-named town deserved better treatment.

Across the road from the gas station was a small garden park, like many of the more quiet London squares. An inscription on the clock tower in the corner of the garden quoted Voltaire's "I wholly disapprove of what you say but will defend to the death your right to say it." At that time I'd been having some correspondence with Mal Ashworth on this theme, arising from an article in *Ploy*, and I looked round in vain for a postcard to send him.

Shortly after we crossed the Mississippi at Burlington and I'm glad to say that I was awake. So much so that I walked back across the bridge, with the permission of a guard, so that I could take a few shots both of the bridge's grid walk and of the river itself. I've often wondered, since, when I've shown these slides to any audience, whether that bridge was the structure immortalised in Bob Tucker's *The Long Loud Silence*.

We had lunch in Peoria, after searching the suburbs for a suitable eating establishment and finally ending up in the city centre. This city was surprisingly shabby, sporting well-littered streets. Here we thought of looking up Bob Tucker once again, so that we could introduce him to Sylvia, and we were all in favour of the idea. Unfortunately, we fell victims to Bob's desire for seclusion. His phone number is an unlisted one. "Wait a minute," said Bob Pavlat, "I have the Falascas' number and they're sure to know Tucker's." While Ted, Sylv and I looked over the bookstands (for once we actually bought some, too), Bob dived into a call box and tried to get through to Nick and Noreen, but there was no reply. So our grand idea came to nothing and Tuck was spared a return visit from Bennett.

We decided to make Indianapolis and Bob Madle our next port of call and drove along the US 24 to Kentland in Indiana, having crossed the well-

worn Route 66 at Chenoa. I looked fondly and sadly at the Chicago-Los Angeles road as we crossed it and even pictured my shade on the westward trip, asleep as Jim Broderick drove south to that meeting at McLean. We crossed the Wabash at Lafayette and stopped for coffee at a roadside restaurant where a softball team was on its way either to or from a match. And eventually, in the early evening, we drove into Indianapolis. We stopped at a gas station where I used a pay phone for the first time. I'd travelled over 5,000 miles in the States by that time without using one, which just proves, in a roundabout fashion, how well I was looked after. I got through, with Bob Pavlat standing behind me, to Billie, Bob Madle's wife, who told us that the American TAFF Administrator was out at the local drug store. She gave us instructions on how to get there and we swooped down on the district. We were back in Fan Country.

21. All Night Long Through Frederick Streets

We found the drug store, parked the car and looked in at the glass frontage to see whether Madle was there. He was browsing through a book at a rotating stand and we walked into the store. Bob Pavlat, Ted and Sylvia held back and I casually strolled over and also picked up a book. I glanced through it and then said, casually also, “They just don’t write science fiction the way they used to.” Bob Madle looked up, the bewilderment on his face turning to a look of horror as he realised who was confronting him. My three fellow travelling giants came up and hands were shaken all round. We drove over to his home on Caroline Avenue in a two car convoy and were introduced to Billie Madle who turned out to be a very level-headed and hospitable fanwife. I mentioned that the call I’d made from the gas station had been my first in the States and Sylvia asked innocently, “*How* many calls did you manage to make from the coke machine, Ron?” We had dinner, sat around listening to the crickets, talking and drinking beer and finally we went to bed, Bob and Ted on the floor and myself on the sofa.

We were up at nine and after breakfast I had a lone walk down to the nearest shopping centre, where I mailed letters home, sent a postcard to Don Ford to tell him we hoped to look in on him, and bought a long playing record of “White Christmas” at a sale. It was here I also bought a checked sports shirt which has been judged as loud by English standards and quiet by American. I walked back to Caroline in brilliant sunshine and was delighted when a grey squirrel decided to sun itself on the pavement a few feet away from me. During the afternoon we played through the Madle record selection and I danced round in the front room with Sylvia. Later we played hearts and I lost heavily and we looked at the children’s swing in the back garden, using it as an improvised gym apparatus for chinning contests.

After a chicken dinner in the evening, Madle drove us over to the local fan centre at the home of Lee Anne Tremper. Some time before I had been nominated for TAFF, Lee Anne had been pursued by an ardent male fan and had refused his advances on the grounds that there was no one to vouch for him. The young man, who is still present on the outer fringes of fandom, had

immediately got the Coulsons to write out a testimonial for him and the story goes that Lee had honoured this piece of fannish ingenuity. I had thought it might be a gag if I got the Coulsons to vouch for me, too, and in due time, the glowing testimonial was sent to Lee Anne to cover the eventuality of our ever meeting. At that time I had little idea that I would actually visit the States and now here I was at Lee Anne's home!

Ray and Susie Beam were also present and we had a pleasant round of chitchat about our trip to and from the Solacon. Bob Madle had brought along a carload of colour slides and I was especially pleased to see the excellent shots he had taken the previous year at the London Worldcon on his own TAFF trip. Lee Anne played folk songs on the piano and Ray asked what kind of drink I preferred and went out to pick up some gin. Lee Anne also professed a preference for gin and Ray mixed her a large drink which was made up of about eleven-tenths gin. I sampled it before passing it on to our hostess. It was decidedly good, and I invited Bob Pavlat to try it, too. Between us, we polished off the entire bottle before Lee Anne had even had a taste, so Ray went out for a second bottle and we worked through the better part of that, too, before allowing Lee Anne in on the act. The evening broke up well after midnight with Bob Pavlat and Ted putting me, despite my protests, to bed and then going off home with Madle. They eventually had a dose of conscience about the matter and called back for me about 1:30 while Lee Anne complained bitterly about her reputation as a schoolteacher (she had to be at school the following morning too, and I don't envy her the hangover). I finally got to bed at Madle's shortly after two. It was 9 a.m. in England and in Leeds the schools were just beginning a new autumn term.

The following morning Bob Madle and I locked ourselves in the spare bedroom and got down to business on our TAFF policies. I'd honestly been dreading this part of the trip, for I had felt that we would disagree on all sorts of points, but we agreed readily on all points. Perhaps our respective trips across the Atlantic had made us realise various basic differences between the two fandoms in America and Britain. Indeed, as things turned out, we worked quite well together and in the main what criticisms were forthcoming were penned by fans who obviously were not awake to these basic differences, whilst on three or four occasions when I later wrote to Madle giving my opinion on some point and asking his, he had written me with the same opinion and our letters crossed in the mails. Madle spoke about his plans for writing his TAFF trip report and was a little amazed when I told him I'd

already written two chapters. Now that over two years have passed, I can understand his surprise.

We left the Madles shortly after noon to make our way over to the Ford homestead near Cincinnati. We felt hungry after a while, although we had been well fed by Billie (consistent driving plays the devil with one's appetite), so we kept a lookout for a place to pick up a hamburger and I finally spotted a place which looked a little tired and worn out. Bob was all for driving on, but we had the prospect of a long drive without a meal, so turned round and drove back to what we all agreed was the best hamburger of our long drive east. We British have a nose for picking out quality in the most unlikely places.

Shortly afterwards we were pulled up by a police roadblock where an Atomic Energy Commission car blinked its red light at us. We were told we would have to detour round the next town as a gas truck had exploded on the road. We detoured and discussed what might really have happened, the A.E.C. car being in evidence. We were soon to find out.

As we drove through the last town on the detour, to pick up our route once again, Sylvia noticed a group of people down one of the side roads, so we parked the car and walked along to the knot of gathered spectators. We had obviously been mis-detoured for here the road was blocked by a massive piece of construction equipment of which the driving truck had hit the edge of a bridge and had flipped over, setting itself on fire and killing its driver. It seemed obvious that the road block had only just been set up when we got there, especially in view of the wrong directions and the incorrect data about the gas truck, and the A.E.C. car was probably merely the first car possessing a blinking light that the police had been able to rush to the scene.

We skirted Cincinnati and found Ward's Corner Road near Loveland, way out in the sticks. I'm not well up on the terminology of the woods used to build so many American midwestern homes and therefore I can only say that Don's home is made of wood, a neat and compact building in picturesque surroundings. I'd heard that Don was tall, but that was the first time I'd suffered a ricked neck during initial introductions. Don's wife, Margaret, fed us and Don stuck some traditional jazz records on the record player and then took us down in his basement where we could view the famed Ford collection, apple boxes and all. As we soon discovered, Don has an even bigger collection than Michael Rosenblum's and one which will not suffer badly in comparison with that of Forry Ackerman. We were looking

over various items which appealed to our individual tastes (like early *ASF* for Ted and early *Captain Marvel*s for me) when Stan Skirvin and Dale Tarr rolled in to make the Cincinnati group's representation a formidable one. We went back upstairs and met Stan's wife, Joan, and then Oscar Mueller, another local fan, showed up with his wife, so that we had a pretty well-balanced gathering. Don showed us a colourful selection of two- and three-dimensional slides. These were undoubtedly the best I'd seen, for Don is a keen photographer and has won many prizes for his colour work. Eventually, Sylvia and Ted went off with the Skirvins and Bob; Don and I talked until three. Don has a fund of stories, most of which seem to concern Bob Tucker or Harlan Ellison, so that the talk rounded off a most enjoyable evening. We discussed TAFF, past conventions, stamps, British fanzines and just about every topic it was possible to discuss. Don told us how Ken Bulmer had been almost pulled in by the police... as a vagrant. Oh, a great evening. We were up at eight the next morning and, with the return of Ted and Sylvia after breakfast, we drove off again. We talked about the possibility of my exchanging my return ticket for a *Queen Mary* passage for a flight home. By this time, we had virtually stopped changing seats in the car every so often, and Bob was driving all the time. We'd decided that his driving deserved some recognition and named him a Hero Racing Driver. Sylv topped this by declaring that it would be better were he a Boy Hero Racing Driver, but as Bob can hardly be called a boy, he ended up with the title of Honorary Boy Hero Racing Driver.

Ted and Sylvia were sitting in the back seats and they ribbed me constantly about things English, and especially, after Indianapolis, about the party there. As I told them that I couldn't remember what had happened they had a wonderful inventive time with some of the details. They were obviously very bound up with one another, as my notes on dialogue ("Not until Ron puts away his camera") show.

Don had told us to look out for a pretty good book store in Zanesville and we pulled in when we passed what looked at first sight to be this establishment. It turned out to be a fairly general store which sold a few paperbacks and comic books and its owner turned out to be a little whacky to our way of thinking. It might have been that after the long, fast drive....

We eventually found ourselves on the West Virginia Turnpike and stopped for a hamburger at a Howard Johnson's, which almost looked like a sign from home to me. Ted, Sylvia and Bob got places at the counter at one

end and I had to move up to the other end where I sat in on a political discussion between a couple of truck drivers. We'd seen some of these trucks racing through the night. They can be seen for miles for they are completely outlined in glaring lights, a definite recommendation to British transport.

Leaving the Turnpike we entered Maryland to the stares of the toll keepers. Sylvia was sitting on Ted's lap and Bob said drily that we would probably be pulled in on Mann Act violations, though it was hardly that bad. It was now around midnight and Bob was eager to get home as soon as possible. Accordingly we roared through East Hagerstown and Hagerstown itself without looking up Harry Warner. Eventually we hit Frederick where Francis Scott Key is buried. Here we drove off the main highway to look round for a gas station, getting ourselves tangled up with a one way street and a dozen or so service stations that had closed up for the night. We were finally in luck and, in addition to filling up with petrol, Bob phoned home to tell everyone there that the traveller was within striking distance of his own bed.

We took Highway 240 in the nation's capital as Bob told me that 200 feet on either side of this road belongs to the state of Maryland and no commercial billboards may be erected there. Indeed, the only extraordinary road signs I saw announced that in the event of national emergency that particular highway would be closed to all but official traffic. As we rode into Washington itself Bob told me that the city's inhabitants had taxation without representation, for the residents do not possess the right to vote. We skirted the city centre so that we could drive into Virginia and drop Ted and Sylvia at his parents' home in Falls Church. It was some time after one o'clock and Ted was coming home with a strange young girl. Bob and I could only speculate on their reception as we drove away through the tree-lined suburban streets. Falls Church is a pleasant little place I'd like to have seen more of.

Tired though Bob was, he drove me into the centre of Washington to show me something of the lighted city, the Lincoln Monument, the White House and the Capitol. It was shortly after two when we got to Hyattsville's 43rd Avenue. Bob let us into the house quietly. He need not have worried about not making a noise. The family got up to greet us.

22. Washington and Ron Swing

Bob's brother, Frank (who is always called "Tink"), his sister Toni and his mother got out of their warm beds to say hello and Toni sat up with us until four, talking of the trip and the convention. I read a few letters which had arrived for me and opened the boxes containing the first two rolls of Kodak colour slides, covering part of my stay in London, voyage on the *Queen Mary* and stay in New York. Only the first roll had come out and the second was disappointingly blank. I couldn't understand how an entire roll had failed to come out and looked forward with a mixture of eagerness and apprehension to the arrival of a third roll which I'd sent to Rochester for processing and which should have been ready before I left for home.

Bob took me up to his room where a bed had been made up for me and we sat around looking over part of his extensive fanzine collection until a quarter to five. I didn't see the fine Maryland morning that followed, for I slept until 1:30 p.m. I was glad to take the opportunity of having a wallow in the bath-tub after breakfast and following this I sat at Bob's typewriter and wrote letters back home and to fans in England. A boy of some thirteen or fourteen years came in and introduced himself as Bob's nephew, Eddie. He turned out to be an American teenager whose life story will never be featured on the cinema screen, for he's extremely nice – the highest compliment I can pay him is that he's as nice as the other members of the Pavlat family – and possesses a terrific fiendish and mature sense of humour. I wish some of the children I teach were as wide awake to life.

In the late afternoon Bob drove me down to the local Hyattsville shopping centre, a long parade of shops pretty much like those in Harrogate, London, Leeds or any English suburban district. We looked round the supermarket and I asked the girl at the cigarette counter whether she had any Players in stock. She had, and I bought a pack of 200. These were the first I'd seen since Los Angeles and during the drive east I'd tried various American brands. However, as Bob smoked only Philip Morris and wouldn't accept any other brand when they were offered round, I'd got into the habit of buying only Philip Morris too. The king size PM, I might add. As soon as we got out of the store, I ripped open a packet of Players and lit up in the best Ted Tubb tradition. Bob was disappointed in me, he said. "I thought we were making an

American of you," he told me. "You're wearing American pants, an American shirt and American sunglasses. True, you don't have an American accent, but I've been holding high hopes for you. And now this!" I laughed and said something about Englishmen being for ever so, and then drew hard on the cigarette. And almost choked at the keen Virginia flavour. Bob almost collapsed laughing.

After dinner, Bob drove me out to the District Heights district where Juanita and Chick Derry had recently moved in. We found their apartment at the second attempt. Bob had asked me whether I'd ever seen a picture of Chick and when I said, truthfully, that I hadn't, he said that I might be in for a surprise. I was; Chick turned out to be a ringer for Ken Bulmer. The likeness is remarkable, though Chick himself denies it. There may be something in this Tentacles Across the Ocean after all, for Andy Young looks very much like John Brunner. Chick is quite a fabulous type of person with the type of humour that sneaks up on one from behind. Very much like Dave Vendelmans, who emigrated from Belgium to Canada, Chick throws out humorous remarks in a continuous stream. Half of these are just straight corn, so that when a really funny remark comes along, one has not expected it and the remark's humour is intensified. When we arrived, Chick was mending a typewriter for a neighbour or non-fannish friend, and when he had taken it apart he dug out of the machine a dead moth and an American penny. I've heard of typewriters making money, but never in this fashion.

We talked about the idea of my changing my ticket for my trip back home. I was supposed to be back in Leeds, teaching, on Tuesday 23rd September, and the voyage arranged for me on the *Queen Mary* would get me into Southampton sometime late during the evening before. This would mean an overnight rail journey to Leeds and an immediate return to teaching after the 13,000 mile journey and six week stay away from home. Bob was willing to lend me the money to pay the additional cost of the plane ticket and we resolved to look into the possibilities the next day. Bob and Chick were working on getting Harry Warner to drop into Bob's on the Saturday evening in order to surprise Dick Eney, who was also expected. We compared the education systems of our respective countries, talked fandom, drank a lot of beer, smoked a lot of cigarettes, went through the run of sick jokes that were circulating at the time and finally left around one in the morning. During the evening I'd seen Eisenhower speak on television and had met Chick and Juanita's children. It was altogether an extremely pleasant visit and I was

sorry to leave. Once again I had met people I'd like to see more of and had met them only briefly.

The next morning I was up a little before eleven and left Bob still asleep while I had breakfast. Several of Tink's friends from the University of Maryland dropped in and I went off with them, a terrific bunch of mature young men, down to the local church hall to play table tennis. I'd like to relate that, following my successes on the *Queen Mary*, I swept all before me here but, alas, I was murdered again and again. It must be that I can only play the game when the table is moving about. The gang murmured their sympathy in a manner which is traditionally expected of the British and bought me a coke at the hall's own machine before driving me back to 6001. Great people.

In the afternoon Bob, who eventually did get out of bed, took me into the centre of Washington to do some quick shopping. We parked the car at one of these super-organised places which check in one's car and then drive it off up a ramp several hundred storeys into the sky. Such car parks run a validation arrangement with nearby stores. The more one spends at these stores, the less the fee for parking the car. We looked up both Cunard and BOAC to transfer my voyage to a flight and made a reservation on a flight leaving two days later on the Sunday evening from New York. This actually would cut down my time in the States by five days, but of course it would get me back to England well in time to get back to school by the last date allowed by the Leeds Education Committee.

Back at 6001, a large wooden house set back from a quiet avenue and possessing a porch and a wealth of trees, Dick Eney and Doc Evans rang up and I had a few words with them. Bob decided that the Saturday affair with Harry Warner would probably have to go by the board if I were to get up to New York, and phoned the Ellingtons to see whether they could put us both up on Saturday night if he drove me up. Pat answered and told us that there was a party arranged at the Nunnery on the Saturday night and sure, if we came, she could fix us both up with somewhere to sleep. Bob said that we'd be there and asked Pat to keep it quiet so that we could walk in unannounced. Shortly after, the phone rang again and the quiet voice I spoke to turned out to belong to Ron Parker, the young Tulsa fan who was just beginning a service training period in the D.C. area.

Eventually, Dick Eney arrived, carrying a giant tape recorder and several million feet of tapes. Dick has long been a favourite with many English fans,

most of whom had supported him wholeheartedly the previous year during his TAFF candidacy, and I'd naturally looked forward to meeting this fan whose fanzine writings are always a source of delight. Dot Cole, another Washington fan, and Sylvia and Ted also came along. We had a quiet but very pleasant evening, talking fandom and playing chess with Eddie (Bob, who was eager to see me in action, walked away in disgust when Eddie trapped my queen) and drinking pepsis and sloe gin.

The whole of my stay in Washington was in this quiet mood, deliberately planned by the considerate Pavlat family who, at obvious inconvenience to themselves, allowed me to lounge around and catch up on much lost sleep. After the hectic time I'd had, such a chance for relaxation was definitely appreciated and I'd recommend such a "quiet period" for any future trans-continental TAFF traveller. It saves one from returning home a *complete* wreck.

On Saturday 13th September, Bob and I were up about ten. We rushed down into the town centre to pick up my flight ticket. Bob took me around the sights so that I could take some shots and we also did some shopping. I picked up a copy of the *Oklahoma* sound track LP at a considerable reduction over the price charged in Oklahoma City, and the capital authorities kindly provided a thrill for us with a specially laid on store fire.

As we passed a line of stores, fire engines roared to a stop by us and police cleared the block so that the firemen could tackle the fire. We walked past both police and firemen and I unslung my camera and took a few shots. One of the firemen was kind enough to offer to move his fire tender if it was restricting the angled view I had of the smoke pouring from the store's upper half.

One thing that I did rather take to, perhaps as a novelty, in the centre of Washington is the practice of "monkey walking". Traffic lights at the block corners change to red to stop the traffic in every direction and one is allowed to walk diagonally across the road square.

Back at 6001, I had a last meal (and the wording is intentional) and took my mail with me as we set off. I was leaving behind, apart from sentimental attachments, much of my luggage for Bob to forward by sea, for I was limited to something round 40 lbs on the flight home. Amongst my mail was a letter from Bob Madle which outlined our working policy for TAFF and the second roll of slides from Kodak. This had also turned out completely blank, and it was then that I had some misgivings about how the other films I had

taken might turn out. When I got home I discovered that the camera had a shutter fault and of the dozen rolls taken on the trip five were ruined completely.

On the drive from Washington we skirted Baltimore by cutting through the Harbour Tunnel and my only contact with the city was a distant view of smokey chimneys. On the US 1 we were warned that the police had radar checks at work and we were in fact asked to pull over by a waving cop who told us that we had topped the limit by five miles. I have to confess that I was extremely surprised at the polite manner in which the cop handled us. We in England, are always being told that "your British policemen are wonderful", usually by American visitors, and we are constantly being given to understand that the American cops are rough, tough and unapproachable, to say the least. *This* cop was a *nice* guy, telling us to be careful for the sake of our own safety and letting it go at that. I was extremely impressed with the glittering white Delaware Memorial Bridge over which we drove. I tried to get an angled shot on this gigantic structure as the road wound to and from it, but was unlucky.

Shortly before we hit New York, Bob pulled in for dinner and said, quietly, "Before we even go in this place, I want it understood that we're going to have a *big* meal and that I *insist* on paying." It was a darn good meal, too, with one of those little bowls of "have a sample of what's to come" salad that are served in the States, corn on the cob, clam chowder and Beefeater gin. I collected a pile of toothpicks and wondered for the thousandth time, why the use of these tiny implements is not accepted in polite society. They *are* useful.

Eventually we rode into New York through one of the tunnels, after having passed Elizabeth (which was to suffer its tragic train mishap the following day) and Newark. We crossed The Avenue of the Americas and Broadway and drove over to the Ellingtons' apartment on Eleventh Street. We parked the car, Bob taking care to lock it for perhaps the first time during our trip from Los Angeles, and we walked up to see Pat and Dick. They were out, but Sandy Ritter, who was minding the place for them, told us that they were over at the Nunnery party. We walked over to Cooper Square.

23. Final Fling

We were naturally not surprised to find a typical Nunnery party in full swing and to be greeted enthusiastically by Pat and Dick, but we were very, very surprised to find in attendance Nick and Noreen Falasca, Roger Sims and Bill Rickhardt, those four very good Summer Soldiers I had last seen in Las Vegas. Larry Shaw let me smoke his pipe and Bill Donaho poured drinks into me and introduced me to all the young ladies present, as a gesture towards Anglo-American relations, he said. Dick Ellington told me that the Liverpool gang had sent over drink money for me and that this had been chasing me round the country. Finally, Rick Sneary had sent it to Dick and he was now going to make sure that I was going to get my dues. This sounded sinister, but he continued by asking what my favourite drink was. Right then I could have done with a brown ale, and said so. Dick said I was going to have Jack Daniels and like it. I don't normally enjoy whisky, but I did enjoy that shot, for it has body without the rough edge that normally leaves a whisky drinker throatless. I was introduced to all types of New York fans and beat generation followers and one young New York fan accused me of trying to seduce his girlfriend at the Solacon. Before I could even protest, he made it clear that this was fine by him and eventually after much discussion we agreed terms on a straight swap: my air ticket for his girl. I sometimes wonder whether I made a correct choice by insisting that the trade was only theoretical. Anne Lubell, who I had met in Los Angeles, was present and turned out, surprisingly, to be a New York native. Bill and I had a little mean fun at her expense by hiding her shoes. Someone said that I should meet the fabulous Fred Washington and were obviously hurt that I'd not heard of him. I was introduced and we swapped a couple of odd words, but I still don't know who he is or why he's supposed to be fabulous. Perhaps it's that, to me, he could hardly be fabulous in such company. Finally, I said goodbye to everyone once again and Larry Shaw, who had been told of Sylvia's pet phrase that everything is evil, complained that TAFF is evil, too. From the point of view of having to say goodbye to so many fine people during that entire trip across the States, I'll agree with him. Thoroughly. Pat and Dick picked up Poops, who had been asleep in another room throughout the entire evening, and we picked up Bob too, for he had fallen victim to the recent hectic life he had

been leading and was also asleep. Then we made our way back to the Ellingtons' apartment. It was four in the morning and my last day in America had begun.

I was up about ten and, following breakfast, I rang the airport to check on the flight and was told that I could pick up a bus to the airport from the East Side terminal. I also rang Belle Dietz who constantly seemed to be having a rough deal on account of my travels. Belle had originally offered to put me up as I passed through New York, and of course Pat and Dick had done the same. It was more or less agreed that I'd stay with the Ellingtons on my trip to the Solacon and that I'd stay with Belle and Frank on the return passage through the City. Also, Belle had invited me to attend a meeting of the Lunarians for that very weekend and I'd turned it down because I hadn't known exactly where on the journey from Los Angeles to New York I might be. Accordingly, I missed meeting such friends as Belle, Frank and George and such SF personalities as Hans Santesson. Also, because of the departure time being brought forward some days, I wasn't able to stay with the Dietzes at all. I could have kicked myself that things had to turn out that way, for it must have looked at the time as though I was favouring one side of the New York feud in which I had no interest. And when I think of that cake Belle baked for my first Nunnery party, I could kick myself all over again.

After lunch Sandy Ritter offered to show me something of New York and Bob drove us both down to the East Side terminal where I checked in my cases and raincoat, filled in forms and generally wasted about an hour and a half. Bob then drove us to the Empire State Building and there he left us to go back to the Ellingtons', pick up his stuff and drive back to Washington. We shook hands, said so long and he drove off, and what words can one use to describe the saying goodbye to friend after friend and now the best friend of them all? Springfield to Los Angeles, Los Angeles to Washington and Washington to New York, and now Bob was sailing into the distance, his blue and cream Ford merging with the rest of the impersonal New York traffic. Larry was right; TAFF *is* evil.

I went up the Empire State Building for the second time with Sandy and played around with the camera, taking shots to replace those which had been lost because of the shutter fault. I finished off the roll of Kodachrome and began to wind back, making sure that there was no light filtering into the lens this time. I began to take the back off the camera and stopped short when I realised that the film had not wound back into the cassette. I went over to one

of the armed guards and told him that my camera had developed a fault and was there a dark room anywhere where I could change films? He led me down a couple of flights of stairs to a broom closet and locked me in. I changed films in the dark and knocked on the door to be released and the guard let me out. Hand on unfastened holster, he had a look round the closet but then, evidently satisfied that I hadn't planted a bomb there, he took me back upstairs, exchanged a little chitchat and said that my request was all in a day's work and I should hear some of the things he had to attend to.

Once at ground level again, Sandy took me over to St. Patrick's Cathedral and then over to the Rockefeller Center. We sat amongst the tables on what in winter is made into an ice rink, surrounded by the flags of many nations, and listened to the piped Muzak. We had a quick meal and I ran into tipping trouble for the first time when one of the waiters decided that the tip I'd left him wasn't enough and came running after me to give it me back. In the normal run of events, the tip probably wasn't a fair percentage of the bill, but the bill itself was high enough and the Rockefeller Center is the sort of place waiters fight over to be taken on. Also what few dollars I had were running out.

When we left the Rockefeller Center, we went over to the Village to look at the artists' stalls off Washington Square. At that time it was intended to pull down the Square and to build a highway straight through it. There was a movement afoot to prevent this and almost everyone was wearing a button which declared, "Save the Square". I believe that the Village eventually won its fight against City Hall.

We walked back to the Ellingtons' apartment for a last meal in the States, a turkey dinner with all the trimmings, nicely prepared by Pat. We sat around for a while and then I made my way over to the air terminal. I walked over to First Avenue with a strange unidentifiable feeling growing inside me. I looked round at the apartment houses and wondered whether I'd ever return. I took my first bus ride alone along First Avenue and wound up at the terminal in good time to catch the bus out to Idlewild. I bought a dollar's worth of flight insurance and when the bus came along I didn't pass it up, as I felt like doing, but climbed aboard and watched the lights of New York fade away as we drove out into the night. I'm surprised to find just how vivid the memory of that drive remains, for I can't remember thinking of *anything* during the journey. Indeed, it was now that I was beginning to identify the feeling within as sheer emptiness.

At the airport I looked at the souvenir counter but decided that everything that I might possibly want to buy was just too highly priced. I sat around reading and had quite a chat with the girl at the insurance counter. There was someone with a real fannish deadpan sense of humour. Eventually I went along and had a last cup of American coffee, for which I was charged a record fifteen cents, and then my flight number was announced and I followed a group of fellow passengers down a long ramp and, moving like an automaton, I walked across the open ground to the plane.

Remembering what Bob had told me about taking pictures from plane windows, I picked a seat overlooking the wing. When the plane, a Qantas SuperConstellation, began to taxi around I was a little alarmed at the manner in which the wings began to flap steadily at their tips as though they were warming up to some birdlike motion. We ran along the ground, became airborne and at the same moment I had begun my first flight and had left the USA behind me. Once in the air, I unfastened my safety belt and began to chat to my fellow economy class passengers. There was an elderly lady who had left Texas for the first time and was going to visit her son in Germany and their was a young woman with a baby who was going to visit her husband, also in Germany. The only other passenger was a young guy who looked a little like Ron Ellik. And come to think of it a little like Audie Murphy, too, though this may have been because of his Quiet American mood. The lady from Texas admitted that she was scared stiff of air travel and quoted the Dutch plane on the same run which had only a couple of days previously gone into the Atlantic off Ireland. I told her of my many flights all over the place and how it was *the* way to travel and the Audie Murphy/Ron Ellik character also mentioned casually that he had flown before and that there was nothing to it.

The cabin hostess was Australian and sat with us, telling of her travels round the world. A co-pilot came along and asked how we were enjoying the trip and the Quiet American got into a technical conversation with him, mentioning that he guessed our speed and altitude to be this and that, and later it turned out that he was near enough accurate to make no difference (he wasn’t flying the plane). He told me that he was an air force navigator on leave and that he’d made over 400 flights! We sat up talking with the hostess and co-pilot half the night and then turned in. I unfastened the arm rests across the triple seat I was occupying by the wing and stretched out full length. When I woke breakfast was ready and we were above a carpet of

cloud which opened occasionally for us to see the silver Atlantic Ocean some 19,000 feet below. We swept over Ireland, over Wales, angled down through the clouds and in no time were coming into land at London airport. I got a speedy customs clearance to make up for the delay in New York and caught an airport bus to Victoria where I picked up my luggage and went round to Inchmery. I rang home to let my parents know that I'd arrived safely, which surprised them, for I hadn't mentioned the fact that I was flying home, and following a couple of pleasant days relaxing around the London fan scene, I caught the train back to Harrogate. Gradually my life steadied itself back into its normal programme and I sometimes wonder at the entire trip. I'm not at all convinced, you know, that that wild 13,000 mile journey, to Los Angeles and back, actually happened and moreover that it happened to me.

I've been asked all sorts of questions since I returned, about American fandom and about America itself, but in many, many cases I must plead that the one eyed man is not king and that whilst I learnt a little about a lot I most certainly did not even begin to scratch the surface of What Is America. The whole fabulous journey was more than an enjoyment; it was an experience. I covered so much ground in so short a time that I reached the state where my mind, and you know what my mind is like, was simply unable to absorb even a percentage of what my eyes saw. One can only reach saturation point, after all, and it must be obvious from the above account that I reached mine far sooner than I had any right to do. If the journey from west to east seems a little vague and lacking in detail, then I must apologise and note that many of the townships through which we passed are merely names to me and that I can remember but little of them. If one can criticise the trip east for a lack of detail, I can but plead that this is my account and that the lack of detail is perhaps intentional in that I simply don't remember that detail!

This is not to say that I did not enjoy the trip. Nothing could be further from the truth. I've not had such a whale of a time before or since that summer of 1958. When some of the instalments of this report first appeared in *Oopsla* I was accused by one reader of being two-faced in that I confessed to having enjoyed myself but made several unfavourable comparisons between the poor old USA and the far superior United Kingdom, but I must defend myself on this point. At whatever point I may have played down any facet of American life (such as the New York subway), it should be noted that such a point is (a) relatively unimportant and (b) a personal opinion. As Ken Bulmer, TAFF traveller Number One, pointed out in *Orion* 26, "...the

whole TAFF trip was so big an experience, so gigantic an impact that ... you just can’t keep up an air of wide-eyed wonder all the time in the report.” I don’t think that I need add to that point, but I must stress what I said at the Solacon itself, that the journey was my “trip of a lifetime”, that TAFF is fandom’s most superlative achievement, and that I can never be grateful enough for being afforded such a travelling and such a fannish experience.

Devastated Areas (map)

Ron Bennett's hand-drawn map of his US travels, a two-page spread, couldn't easily be reproduced and has instead been approximately recreated. Key below. His own typed annotation at top right of the original reads: "Perhaps this map would be a good basis for a fannish snakes and ladders game, with the following suggested hazards: the desert heat, Manhattan cockroaches, MiSFit vodka and mix, and one certain motel manager."

- **A** New York
- **B** Cleveland, Ohio
- **C** Chicago, Illinois
- **D** McLean, Illinois
- **E** St Louis, Missouri
- **F** Springfield, Missouri
- **G** Oklahoma City, Oklahoma
- **M** Boulder Dam, Arizona/Nevada
- **N** Las Vegas, Nevada
- **O** SOUTH GATE AND LOS ANGELES, California
- **P** *Beaver City, Utah
- **Q** Salt Lake City, Utah
- **R** Cheyenne, Wyoming
- **S** Sunol, Nebraska

- **H** Amarillo, Texas
- **I** Albuquerque, New Mexico
- **J** *Gallup, New Mexico
- **K** Holbrook, Arizona
- **L** Grand Canyon, Arizona
- **T** Council Bluffs, Iowa
- **U** Indianapolis, Indiana
- **V** Cincinnati, Ohio
- **W** Washington DC

** Marked only as an uncaptioned dot between arrows on the original map. Ed.]*

Original Title Page

COLONIAL EXCURSION

by ron bennett

Illustrations and headings by ARTHUR THOMSON

additional materials: the Rotsler illustration on page 53 is reprinted from *Ploy* and was cut on to stencil by ron bennett.

[list of internal photos omitted]

cover photograph by Ron Bennett, lettering by Arthur Thomson.

map by ron bennett.

stencils and paper by Gestetner, ink by Swallow and Gestetner, photostencils by Roneo.

Apologies are due to Gus Willmorth whose name is constantly misspelled throughout this report.*

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* *Corrected in this ebook. [Ed.]*

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PLOY press.

Ebook Note

Apart from a couple of footnotes, *Colonial Excursion* seems to need little annotation. The eccentric mix of all-caps, all-lower-case and normally capitalized proper names in the “Original Title Page” faithfully echoes the original.

Many thanks to Ron Bennett’s son Andrew Bennett for permission to publish this ebook reissue of *Colonial Excursion*; to Claire Brialey for heroic proofreading; to Fanac.org for making the original 1961 version available in PDF form; and to Rob Hansen for providing the cover photograph of Ron Bennett from his fannish picture archive.

David Langford
February 2023

Links

- *Colonial Excursion* at Fanac.org
- Ron Bennett at *Fancyclopedia 3*

The End

This free ebook is exclusive to the unofficial TAFF website at taff.org.uk. If you enjoy reading it, a donation to TAFF is a fine way to express your appreciation.

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