

# AMERICAN TRIPS

## ROB HANSEN



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**Rob Hansen**

*Published by*

Ansible Editions  
94 London Road, Reading, England, RG1 5AU  
[ae.ansible.uk](http://ae.ansible.uk)

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This Ansible Editions ebook published July 2021.

Cover artwork by Rob Hansen for “Seven Days in May”.

Ebook ISBN 978-1-913451-81-3

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# Foreword

“The air tastes funny.”

“That’s because you’re breathing in dead people, Rob.”

It was October 2001. Patrick Nielsen Hayden and I had travelled in from his and Teresa’s apartment so that he could show me the TOR offices, then located in the famous Flatiron Building. Later we wandered down to where we now found ourselves, standing behind a police barrier and gazing down a street of tall buildings at a mass of rubble and twisted steel that equalled them in height. In 1984, I had stood at the base of one of the World Trade Center towers and craned my neck back, eyes following the sweep of that impossibly tall structure as it soared into the heavens. Though tempted I did not take an elevator up to the public observation deck on the 107th floor of the South Tower. Instead I had chosen to gaze out over the city from the deck of the Empire State Building, the once-and-future tallest structure in New York and to my mind far more iconic. Now both WTC towers were gone. Four weeks earlier hijacked airliners had been flown into the South Tower and its sibling, and all that remained of them was this sobering pile of wreckage.

My first ever visit to New York occurred during my TAFF trip in 1984, itself my first ever visit to the USA. I’ve returned to America many times since then, always to attend a convention and usually to visit Avedon’s family, as well. Since they live in the DC-adjacent part of Maryland this inevitably meant that most of the US conventions I’ve attended have been located in or near Washington DC and its surrounds, these being DISCLAVES, CAPCLAVES, and – when they happened to be in that area – CORFLUS. While I made most of those trips at my own expense, I’m fortunate enough to have had three paid for by fandom. First, obviously, was my TAFF trip. Next, as a result of my becoming Britain’s leading fan historian in the meantime – not a position there’s a lot of competition for – was so that I could be a special guest at FANHISTORICON in 1997, which was held that year as part of BOSKONE. And finally there was CORFLU in 2013, where I was the recipient of the CORFLU 50 fund, one that’s privately financed from contributions by CORFLU regulars to bring over someone they’d like to see who might not otherwise be there. This last con was run by a team led by Dan and Lynn Steffan, the third CORFLU they had helmed.

In the wake of the events of 2001, and even more so because of the ongoing reductions in legroom, flying has become a deeply unpleasant experience: something to be endured rather than enjoyed, and I used to *love* flying. That love is something the opening trip report in this volume leaves in no doubt. It's an account of my 1986 trip, the first after my TAFF win and the first since Avedon Carol and I became a married couple following her move to the UK the previous year. I didn't write a report on every visit I've made to the US over the past four decades, but that and the others in this volume form what is essentially a sequel to my TAFF report, particularly as they conclude with me finally getting to the Pacific Northwest. My thanks to all who helped make them the cherished memories they are.

*Rob Hansen, July 2021*

# **CORFLU 3 (1986)**

## **Trip 2**

When sultry Spike Parsons asked me if I had anything that might be suitable for her road-oriented fanzine I-94, I was foolish enough to tell her about the chapter of my TAFF report I'd written covering the journey from Los Angeles to San Francisco, a piece that had been in the possession of *Potsherd*'s editor for a mere two years. She smiled sweetly, flattered me outrageously, and before I knew it the piece was now promised to her. What would Stu think? I knew the reason that *Potsherd* hadn't appeared in so long was that its editor had spent the last two years labouring on his first novel, *Sherlock Holmes Meets Krypto the Superdog*, but I'd heard it was still a fair way from completion so it didn't look like he'd be pubbing his iish anytime soon. I was wrong. Rumours began to reach me that Stu had gone into one of his legendary rages\* on learning of my perfidy, since he planned to publish *Potsherd* in time for wISCON. I did the only thing I could. Abasing myself before him (by mail) I promised to replace the missing TAFF chapter not merely with another but with a report (albeit a condensed one) on a whole trip. In 1986, between 12th and 27th February, I made my second visit to the US, this time with Avedon, to attend CORFLU 3 which was being held in McLean, just outside Washington DC. We spent time in New York either side of the convention and some time in DC itself visiting Avedon's parents. This then is the story of that second visit:

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\* This is a gag. Stu was one of the most sweet-tempered people I've ever met.

### **Wednesday 12 February 1986**

Ted White left for the US yesterday, while I was at work and Avedon in bed. Today it was our turn to cross the Atlantic (with Jerry and Suzle following tomorrow) [All had flown over to attend last weekend's MEXICON]. This was only my second trip to the US and I wondered how different it would be now I wasn't visiting as the TAFF winner.

We made Gatwick Airport with plenty of time to spare, validated our tickets, rode out to "the satellite", where we sat around for a couple of hours.

Then came the flight....

“WHEEEEEE!” I yelled as the 747 lifted off, dragging itself into the sky in that way they do. Avedon gave me a pained look. “Do you realise,” she said, “that most accidents involving these things occur during take-off and landing?”

I did but I don’t care. I *love* flying and I’ll spend most of any flight with my face glued to the window, not wanting to miss a thing. Patrick and Teresa Nielsen Hayden understand. Like me they fly infrequently enough that even the view over the Atlantic – which always consists of sea and cloud – seems magical, and they keep careful track of whose turn it is to have the window seat.

There’s something about viewing the world from thousands of feet above its surface that can reactivate my jaded sensawonder in a way that little else can these days. Whether it’s sun-basking clouds over the Atlantic looking so much like a snowfield that you half expect to see a dog-team and sled come racing over them, deep desert canyons brought into sharp relief by the long shadows of late afternoon, snow-capped peaks seeming incongruous amid the rolling countryside of Ireland, the vast plains of the American midwest, or lightning flashing across the night-dark clouds above a storm over Spain, it strikes a chord somewhere deep within me. Unlike Avedon I don’t see flying as something to be endured but a joy in and of itself, and I’m deeply envious of someone like Vince Clarke, whose first flying experience involved taking off from an Icelandic fjord in an American flying boat during World War Two. I’ve been up in a glider yet somehow it doesn’t quite compare. But then again, he’s never been to the US....

New York appeared spread before us like countless sparkling gems scattered across a black velvet sheet, the greatest lightshow on Earth. As we came into land at snow-covered Newark Airport I began to get excited and Avedon reminded me that “...most accidents involving these things occur during take-off and landing”. I didn’t care, and only one response seemed appropriate.

“Wheeee!” I shouted, as America rushed up to greet us.

Unfortunately the bit that did was Newark Airport....

In my luggage was a pile of copies of Dave Langford’s TAFF report *The Transatlantic Hearing Aid* which I had brought over to sell for TAFF. It has a rather interesting cover. The customs guy seemed fascinated by it. My heart sank. We were passing through Newark Airport, that jewel of scenic New

Jersey, on our way into the Land of the Brave and the Home of the Squaw and – as would become a tradition whenever I visited the States – I was the one out of the hordes teeming into America who customs decided was worthy of a closer look. This was my second visit to the US and my second time of being thus singled out. It would not be the last. I didn't understand this. Did I fit some idiot profile of a typical drug-dealer, I wondered? Whatever the reason I'd been singled out again and I was none too happy with the way the customs guy was puzzling over the Jim Barker cover that graces Dave's report. This shows Dave and Hazel Langford being searched by a thug-like customs man while a suspicious-looking character laden down with contraband slips by unnoticed.

"Is this supposed to show that while the guy behind the desk is going through these folks' stuff he's too dumb to see the other guy sneaking stuff by him?" he asked.

I smiled a sickly smile and suddenly wished I hadn't agreed to carry over all those copies of Dave's trip report.

"What's all the stuff in their cases, anyhow?"

Avedon explained that it was hearing-aid batteries and wool and the customs man, clearly deciding this was too improbable to be untrue, stopped her from proceeding further with her dissertation, closed the cases, and waved us through.

Outside Patrick and Teresa Nielsen Hayden were waiting. Teresa leapt up and down, waving her arms when we emerged from customs while Patrick stood around looking cool. We talked animatedly while waiting for the bus to the Port Authority terminal, hopping from foot to foot all the time as we tried to keep warm in the sub-zero temperatures. We talked animatedly on the bus into Manhattan, talked animatedly as we rode the A-train to Washington Heights, and talked animatedly at P&T's Fairview Avenue apartment, deep into the night. It was one of those occasions. And also the first – we realised at one point – that P&T had ever seen Avedon and me together. All in all an enjoyable first night in the Big Apple, though not without at least one surprise. This came when I opened my bags and found that all my clothes were soaking wet. Maybe that guy at customs hadn't appreciated the joke after all.

## Thursday 13 February 1986

Our first full day in the US and it was overshadowed by teeth; more specifically one of Avedon's. This was the same one that had been giving her trouble a few weeks back, and it had decided to do so again on the flight, possibly being triggered by the change in air pressure. Whatever the reason, Patrick, Avedon and I (Teresa had gone off to work) began the day by popping around to the local "Medico-Dental Center" to have the tooth looked at. An X-ray confirmed Avedon's suspicion that it had abscessed, so afterwards she arranged an appointment with her own dentist in Maryland for when we got there tomorrow.

Dental emergency sorted, or at least postponed for the moment, we trooped over to the New York branch of Forbidden Planet to browse the latest books and comics. Afterwards we lunched in a pizza restaurant, and later still took tea in a Greenwich Village coffee shop. It was a very pleasant day of good conversation and good company, and I only wish I'd actually recorded some of that conversation.

In the evening, back at the apartment and with Teresa returned from work, we were joined by Stu Shiffman and several hours of lively conversation followed. Not as many as Avedon and I would've liked, however, because jet-lag kicked in and we retired early.

I was woken by Avedon around 5am, who told me she was feeling awful. She wasn't looking too hot either. I did what little I could to help, but in the end she decided to wake Teresa to ask for pharmacological assistance. Before this could be provided, she rushed to the toilet and was violently sick.

"Tetra," she said, when she emerged.

"Say what?"

"They gave me tetra for the pain from the abcess. I just remembered you're not supposed to eat cheese when you're taking tetra."

"The pizza...." I said.

"Yep."

Avedon had so been looking forward to visiting home and so far things weren't exactly going her way. I couldn't help feeling sorry for her.

Oh well, tomorrow: CORFLU!

## **Friday 14 February 1986**

Friday was the day for taking the train to DC, but first Patrick, Teresa, Avedon and I had to get to Penn Station. This, I soon discovered, involved

hailing an unlicensed, non-yellow cab (a “gypsy” cab, I think they’re called) right outside P&T’s apartment building. This was only the second time I’d seen a large chunk of New York above ground, most of my travelling about the city being on the subway both last time and this. I admit to feeling a certain frisson as we drove through Harlem, probably due to the films and cop shows I’d watched during the 1970s. Teresa had been wearing a heart-monitoring device for the past 24-hours and had to drop it off before leaving for the convention. This involved stopping at the kerb in an expensive parkside area while she ran into her doctor’s office to drop off a heart-monitoring device. It also involved Teresa attempting to converse with the driver in halting Spanish and him leaping out of the cab at one point to use a pay-phone. It’s a different world over there, I tell ya.

Despite me always urging her to eat before we set out on a journey Avedon seldom does, with the result she inevitably starts feeling hungry whenever we’re somewhere snacks are only available at rip-off prices. True to form she announced she needed food soon after we arrived at Penn station. Fortunately, there were places close by the station where food could be found at sensible prices so she and Teresa rushed off to find bagels while Patrick and I decided to treat ourselves to some slices of pizza. After yesterday’s debacle we made sure not to offer any to Avedon.

The Amtrak train – a great silver streak familiar to me from my TAFF trip – was unusually crowded, with pretty much every one of the airline-style seats occupied. It’s a relatively short ride down the East Coast from New York to Maryland, but a fairly picturesque one. Here’s how I described the same journey, taken two years earlier, in my TAFF report:

“The train passed through Newark and into the wilds of New Jersey proper, stopping at Trenton for some time before continuing south. Beyond the window vistas of suburban and rural America unfolded before my eyes, surprising me only by being so unsurprising. There was an occasional house whose architecture was uniquely American, particularly those with wooden slat facades, but most everything else – particularly the industrial buildings – seemed pretty much indistinguishable from what you’d see on a train journey between London and Newcastle. This was not true of the railroad carriage itself, however. On InterCity trains in Britain, pairs of seats face each other across a table; in America, train seats are not dissimilar to airline seats, but with more leg room and a leg

flap. Like airline seats, they had reclining backs and individual tables that folded down from the back of the seat in front. Our only stop in Pennsylvania was the 30th Street Station, then it was on to Wilmington (the train passes through the tip of Delaware – blink and you'd miss it). Beyond the town of Perryville we crossed the Susquehanna River, just above the point where it flowed into Chesapeake Bay, the bridge the train crossed running parallel to twin lines of pylons, jutting from the water like rows of tombstones. Once, they had supported a bridge of their own but all they now supported was seagull nests. Below us, flotillas of yachts were sailing out into the river from brightly coloured marinas.”

We alighted at New Carrollton and were met by Avedon's father Gary. As thin, grey-haired, and wild-eyed as ever he grinned his huge grin at us and hugged Avedon before bundling us into his car and driving us straight to the dentist. On the journey father and daughter exchanged family gossip while in the back the Nielsen Haydens and I listened with some concern to the reports coming in over the car radio that talked of a possible twelve inches of snow falling before midnight. Since today was the first day of CORFLU III this was not good news.

Apart from the huge sums they charge American dentists have much in common with ours, not least of which is the amount of waiting around they make you do. We first waited for Avedon to be seen, then waited while her abscess was drained. About two hours into our marathon waiting-around session, having long since given up on those boring magazines whose natural habitat is dentists' waiting rooms, we saw the first flakes began to fall. By the time we left we were driving in what was damn near a full-scale blizzard. The car ride to Avedon's parents' home in Kensington was pretty hair-raising. I couldn't help noticing how twitchy Avedon was the whole time, far more tense than usual. It took longer than it should have but fortunately we made the trip without incident. Avedon's mother, Queenie, was waiting for us with her delicious spaghetti and meatballs. It was a tasty and very welcome meal that should've relaxed us all, but unfortunately it didn't.

Though she now lived in the UK Avedon's old car – a Datsun Cherry – was still maintained by her father and kept at their house. The plan had been for us to all head over to McLean in this to join the convention. Avedon was almost bouncing off the walls and clearly in no fit state to drive, particularly in the atrocious weather conditions, so it was decided she and I would stay

with her parents that night. Not wanting to miss any of the convention, Patrick asked if he could borrow the car and come pick us up in the morning. Avedon got hysterical at this point, convinced he and Teresa would kill themselves if they set off in that weather. She started screaming at Patrick, all of it very unfair and wounding stuff, until he stormed off. It took a mighty effort on Teresa's part, with some assistance from me, to calm her down to the point she eventually relented and agreed to let them take her car.

This was weird behaviour, as Avedon herself later acknowledged, and it took a bit of investigation to figure out what was going on. Avedon is one of those people who require more shots than most to numb her teeth for dental procedures. This is not usually a problem, but the dentist she went to used not just xylocaine but xylocaine mixed in with adrenalin to speed up its taking effect. So the twitchiness I'd noticed in the car was her amped up on adrenalin, which had turned everything up to eleven. Thus her reasonable concern at P&T driving in bad weather had tipped over into hysteria.

## **Saturday 15 February 1986**

A gloriously sunny day greeted me when I awoke, but while the snow had stopped falling it still lay everywhere pretty damn deep and crisp and even. The roads had been cleared but door-to-road was the responsibility of individual householders. Gary and Queenie had one of those wide snow-shovels so after breakfast I used this to clear a path down to the street. The snow shovelling was something I couldn't resist. Oh sure, as a guest it was a nice gesture and all that, but I was entranced by the way the snow looked in the brilliant morning sunlight and couldn't wait to get out there. Over here snow is heavy and wet but over there it was light and fluffy and strangely dry. Everything looked sugar-coated in a way we seldom experience on this side of the pond and it's one of the things I regret most that I failed to photograph the scene while it was still in that condition.

Patrick and Teresa came by to pick us up around noon. On the trip to the convention hotel, Patrick regaled us with tales of how great the previous night's room parties had been and how it was shaping up to be a great convention. On the one hand this was good to know, but on the other I really resented having had to miss them. The one downside was that they'd had \$20 stolen from them and they were pretty sure they knew who the culprit was. This isn't the sort of thing you expect to happen at a CORFLU, but Ted had

reimbursed them.

“CORFLU can more easily afford the loss than you can,” he told them.

CORFLU 3 was held at the Tyson’s Corner Westpark (Best Western) Hotel on Westpark Drive, McLean, Virginia. One of a chain of identikit hotels, it was fairly non-descript but adequate for our purposes.

On entering the hotel I was immediately confronted by a mixture of people I knew and people I didn’t – mostly the latter. Ordinarily name badges help with this state of affairs but for some incomprehensible reason the badges we’d all been issued with read “Hello, My Name Is Richard Bergeron”, rendering them useless. This was even worse than those con badges where the logo takes up most of the available space. Name badges serve an actual important purpose, people. Please don’t fuck with them. The Bergeron thing might be amusing for a second or two but this was the badge you had to wear the whole con. Like many others, I immediately turned mine over and wrote my name on the rear.

Traditionally the GoH at CORFLU is chosen from the membership and on this occasion the name drawn out of the hat was... Teresa Nielsen Hayden! Apart from giving a speech after the banquet tomorrow, she was required to pose for the cover of “The Living Fanzine” by sticking her head through a hole in the large drawing done for this purpose by Dan Steffan. On the front of this was drawn a picture of Wally “The Snake” Mind, and as soon as Teresa stuck her head through Dan caught her with a cream pie. Unfortunately this pie consisted not of shaving foam as such pies are supposed to but *real* cream. The top she was wearing was ruined, much to her dismay.

The Living Fanzine, as its name implies, was a piece of “performance art” (for want of a better term) with each item being staged before the audience. Ted roped me into this to do a “think-piece”. After Ted’s own editorial and bits by Gary Hubbard and by Patrick and Teresa, it was my turn and I had to do a “Notions” column. This was cobbled together from a couple of the same from old issues of *Epsilon* and asked the question: “Where are all the new fans going to come from?” While I’m OK on stage being interviewed or as part of a panel, flying solo is not a skill I possess. I started shakily at first. However, after commenting that the extremely short preparation time had imposed a certain structure on my talk – short chunks of speech interspersed with periods of total panic – I grew more confident as I went on. I worried about how I was going to finish the thing, but I needn’t have. Every

time I started to flag Patrick and Teresa came to my rescue by leaping in with questions from the floor. Overall it went better than I'd feared and people seemed to like it.

As at most American conventions CORFLU had a con-suite. a room where people partied in the evening and where free booze flowed, or rather it had two – one a smoking room and one non-smoking. Avedon has often said that this arrangement usually ends up with everyone in the smoking room and the non-smoking room empty as the most interesting people at cons are usually smokers, but that was not my experience at CORFLU. I spent most of my time in the non-smoking room that first night and it had more people in it than the smoking room (regardless of the fact that that was the room with the booze in it) and during the course of the evening quite a few smokers drifted in, all of them observing the non-smoking status of the room except for Patrick, who blithely ignored it. Actually, the only other time I've been able to test this theory of Avedon's it also proved false. At a recent party at John and Eve Harvey's a few of us retired to the non-smoking front room to play Trivial Pursuit and in no time at all the rest of the party had joined us, the smokers deciding to ignore the status of the room. Anyway, I digress....

While Moshe Feder had been at the con since it started, Lise Eisenberg had been at BOSKONE, as had Dave Bischoff. Both flew in from Boston and joined us that evening. I'd attended cons on consecutive weekends before – as, indeed, I was doing now – but never two in one weekend. Such decadence!

Not caring for the beer on offer, I didn't drink but had a good time anyway. Jet-lag eventually got the better of us, and at 1.30am Avedon and I left for Kensington.

## **Sunday 16 February 1986**

On our way to the con hotel we first called in at the “Hole In The Wall” bookstore to stock up on books and comics. Ted plays poker with the owner and others every week and had secured CORFLU members a 20% discount. Following this we stopped off at Avedon's favourite local eaterie, “Taco Larry's” (real name Taco Laredo), where I had a chilli dog and a burrito. These were as delicious as usual but, as it turned out, a bad idea since the con banquet started shortly after we finally arrived at the hotel. We'd both assumed this was in the early evening, which will teach us to actually look at

the con programme next time. Fortunately, my waistline belies my capacity for food so I still was able to eat a fair amount, and very good it was too.

Terry Carr was Toastmaster, and made the usual sort of after-dinner remarks before introducing GoH Teresa Nielsen Hayden. Sadly, I recorded no details of her speech. Dan and Terry conducted a mock awards ceremony after this during which Avedon and I won the “Award for Coming So Far For So Little”. Remarkably, the auction that followed raised \$600 for TAFF and \$400 for Gary Farber, who was ill and temporarily (we were naive back then) found himself in dire financial straits. What made this remarkable is that the total was in the region of ten bucks per person for everyone at CORFLU!

Before that evening’s party, Patrick and Teresa, Lise, Moshe, and I all piled into Avedon’s car and headed out to Taco Larry’s – only to discover it was closed. Which is why I ended up feasting on McDonald’s with Patrick while the others made do with a Chinese takeaway.

Though the con was already thinning out due to the departure of those who had to be at work tomorrow, CORFLU still had enough people left for the dead dog party to go well. Trips to the US usually meant me going teetotal for the duration since the beer over there is so godawful undrinkable but on the final night, though not usually a spirits drinker, I succumbed to the attractions of a rather delicious Bloody Mary and got through rather more of them than was perhaps wise.

Somehow the committee had managed to acquire a bottle of Russian vodka flavoured with red peppers and Dan Steffan – acting as bartender at that particular con suite party – discovered that you could make these truly delightful Bloody Marys with the stuff. So truly delightful were they in fact that it was impossible to stop after only one. Or after only five or six.

The problem with this is that while I’ve been a beer-drinker long enough to be able to accurately gauge its effects on me, and to modify my intake accordingly as an evening progresses, I have no such ability when it comes to wines and spirits.

You can well imagine the rest of this sorry tale. There I was, an innocent young fan in a faraway land, somehow fallen in with drug-fiends and degenerates and plied with drink to excess. I woke up the next day in the basement of Avedon’s parents’ house with no memory of how I got there from the convention hotel, stared down at myself, and discovered to my horror that... but no, that revelation must wait.

“It was really amusing to watch you in that state”, Patrick later told me.

“You were standing at the bar, arguing in a friendly but very loud fashion with Ted White. Every time he came up with a logically irrefutable reply to one of your points you’d blithely ignore it and – metaphorically speaking – sort of circle around behind Ted and hit him over the head with a response that left him nonplussed.”

Sounds good; what a shame I don’t remember a thing about it. The barman did, however, and was deeply moved by my performance.

“I’m glad I saw you get drunk,” said Dan, “I feel like I’ve shared in a quintessentially Britfannish experience.”

It feels good to have helped in my small way to promote cross-cultural understanding but there was one point where I wondered if it hadn’t all gone too far. When I woke in the basement that morning and gazed down at myself I was shocked to discover that diverse hands had scrawled all over my forearms.

Look guys, I know you want to try out some of the fun traditions we’ve established at British conventions, but you got this one a little wrong. It’s only *truly* fannish when done to Joseph Nicholas. And if he ever gets over there I’m sure he’ll look forward to having you do it to him almost as much as you will.

## **Monday 17th February**

We had intended returning to the hotel this morning and taking Patrick and Teresa to the rail station, but Avedon had come down with a heavy bronchial cold and stayed in bed all day, so we didn’t. Thus ended our CORFLU.

## **Tuesday 18th February**

With Avedon still pathetic and bed-ridden I began to feel a little stir-crazy so I took a walk up to the local Kensington shopping area. This was just as an excuse to get out of the house, which was why I ended up doing nothing more interesting than buying some brownies and checking out a couple of 7-11s. It was a fifteen to twenty minute walk each way, and neither coming nor going did I see another person on foot. This really underlines how alien and car-centric a country the US actually is.

In the afternoon, Avedon’s father Gary drove us to the Greenbelt. Here, Avedon’s dentist checked her tooth and declared it OK for now but needing a

root canal as soon as we got home.

That evening Avedon's friends Bob and Applesusan, Andy Beekan, and Jack Heneghan and wife Elaine came over and we all sat and jawed for several hours.

## **Wednesday 19th February**

Gary drove us over to Darnstown this morning so that Avedon could renew her driving license. Leaving her to wait in a line, I trekked over to the nearby shopping centre and bought an atlas of the USA from Crown Books, one of those huge discount booksellers I envy the US for. When we got back home, since Avedon still wasn't feeling up to doing anything, I decided to walk up to head into town and have a look around. To this end I set off for Grosvenor, the local Metro station. This was no longer a walk than I think nothing of making in London, but I'd barely gone halfway when Gary pulled up beside me and told me he'd drive me the rest of the way. Whether he was trying to discourage such strange foreign behaviour or felt it was his duty as a host I have no idea.

I was much impressed by the Metro. Being much newer than London's essentially Victorian tube network it was clean, efficient, and had stations with huge, vaulted ceilings in contrast to our much pokier ones. I got off at DuPont Circle and popped into Ollsen Books for a browse. By the time I emerged it was pissing down so I ducked into a Roy Rogers for a coke and a bacon cheeseburger (which was surprisingly good) to wait out the cloudburst. I spent the rest of the afternoon exploring the area and chanced upon Farragut West Metro Center on 18th Street, which impressed me mightily. It had a huge atrium with a large star suspended in the middle of that space, and the concourse beneath boasted a wide range of eateries.

It the evening it was over to Rick and Maryanne's house for a meal. As always Avedon's brother and his wife were a delight, and they greeted us with the news that they were expecting a baby. Coincidentally, so was her sister Sally, who lived on the west coast and who Avedon had been on the phone to earlier in the evening.

## **Thursday 20th February**

The day started for me with a brief trip to the Smithsonian's National Air and

Space Museum, which had deeply impressed me when I first encountered it on my TAFF trip and which remained awesome, followed by a burrito at Farragut West before getting back on the Metro. Ted White met me at Ballston Station and drove me back to 1014 N. Tuckahoe. Here I met Ted's daughter Kitten, and listened to tapes of Ted's band.

## **Friday 21st February and beyond**

We took the train back up to New York to stay with P&T for a few more days prior to flying out on Wednesday's Virgin Atlantic flight, and those final few days were probably the most enjoyable I've ever spent in New York. I got to do a few touristy things I hadn't got around to during my TAFF trip, like strolling through Central. In the course of that particular stroll we came across something that P&T themselves hadn't encountered before, namely a pseudo-castle of sorts called Belvedere Tower that sits atop a rocky knoll overlooking a small lake. This being February, however, New York seemed to be encased in ice and the lake was frozen solid. Not that this had stopped Victor Gonzalez, P&T, Avedon, and me from venturing into the park.

After stumbling across a marvellous statue of Alice modelled from Tenniel's woodcuts by an Asian artist and donated to New York by one of its wealthier residents, we trekked up to the castle. It affords an excellent view of the buildings bordering the park, including the Dakota, former home of John Lennon (who we all miss) and Richard Bergeron. In the visitors book Patrick signed "Claude Degler – Muncie Mutants", while Teresa wrote "Hi Dick, we can see your house from here". I wonder if Bergeron ever saw it?

Tom Weber and Victor Gonzalez were both in town but though Victor was with us Tom was locked away in the offices of Chelsea House, slaving away over a hot typer at an article on children's literature that Patrick had commissioned him to do. In fact he stayed there that whole night working on it and we went over to the offices, in a dingy road off Christopher Street (New York's premier gay haunt, and quite visibly so), the next day. Tom was bleary-eyed but pleased with what he'd accomplished. I cheered him up no end by airily dismissing his article for not mentioning Raymond Briggs. He was too choked to thank me.

And that, really, was that. There was a visit one night to The Tap Room, a bar run by The Manhattan Brewing Company where the beer was brewed on the premises and was OK, nothing special, but the best I drank while in

the US; visits to numerous restaurants; and, of course, many evenings of talking late into the night. The only thing I regretted was that we'd gone over in February and I promised myself that the next time I visited the US it would be during a spring or summer.

As it turns out I was wrong. The following February, Avedon was a Guest of Honour at wiSCon and I got to attend the most enjoyable US convention I've yet been to. But that, as they say, is another story.(Greetings to all of you reading this at wiSCon – I wish I could be there with you.)

On the way to the airport a few days later, Avedon and I were going over all we'd done on the trip and I told her how much I was looking forward to the return flight. "Don't say it!" she warned me, but it was too late.

"Wheeeee!" I yelled as we arrived at the airport.

1986

# **CORFLU 6 (1989)**

## **A Corflu Diary**

**Thursday 27th April 1989**

My growing feeling that the omens were against us seemed to be confirmed when I found my assigned seat on the Northwest Airlines DC-9 taking Avedon and me from Washington DC's Dulles Airport to Minneapolis/St. Paul. At check-in I'd requested a window seat and been informed that the only one left was in the twenty-second row, at the rear of the plane. "Fine", I'd replied, "as long as I can see out I don't care." Imagine my surprise on discovering that the "window" serving the back row of a DC-9 is in fact a solid and opaque section of the fuselage. Coming on top of my earlier discovery that I'd left a bag containing my camera and the book I was reading back at Avedon's folks' place, this naturally put a downer on the journey for me and I spent most of the flight sunk in depression. Matters were not helped by us arriving three-quarters of an hour late through having to avoid a storm front. Nonetheless, by the time we eventually landed at the Twin Cities airport my spirits had lifted a little and I was beginning to look forward to what lay ahead.

Spike Parsons and Johan Schimanski met us at the airport then drove us to Geri Sullivan's house in South Minneapolis, where we'd be spending the night, before leaving for Luke McGuff's place. Chuck and Sue Harris were already at Geri's, having arrived from the UK an hour or so earlier, and we greeted them warmly, welcoming them to America. Geri was exactly as I'd imagined she would be from reading her letters and fanzines, a mass of energy and bubbling enthusiasm. I liked her immediately. After she had fed us, Geri drove the four of us over to the pre-con party at Fred Haskell and Susan Levy's place, dropping Avedon, Sue, and me off while she and Chuck continued on to the airport to pick up Patrick and Teresa Nielsen Hayden.

The Gillilands, Art Widner, Don Fitch, and Lenny Bailes were already there when we arrived, and we were soon joined by Moshe Feder, Lise Eisenberg, Luke McGuff, Spike, P&T, Chuck, newlyweds Jim and Kathryn (Craemer) Young, and various local MN-Stfers, not all of whose names I

caught, I'm afraid. Avedon asked if smoking was allowed and was informed by Fred Haskell that not only was it allowed but actively encouraged, in a tone that told me instantly that he was grateful for "allies" in what was probably a predominantly non-smoking local fandom. His fiancee, Susan Levy, was pretty striking and bore a remarkable resemblance (insofar as a human being *can* bear a resemblance to a cartoon character) to the title character of the *Omaha the Cat Dancer* comic produced by local fans Reed Waller and Kate Worley. Avedon and Chuck also noticed this – though I'm not sure any of my photos of her really caught it, alas – but we were assured the resemblance was accidental. (After they married, the September 1989 issue, no.13, was dedicated to Fred and Susan.)

Many of the people at the party were old friends, most of whom I hadn't seen since the 1987 UK Worldcon CONSPIRACY some eighteen months earlier, so we had a lot of catching up to do. As well as a number of the splendid pads produced for the con to aid in conversations with Chuck, who is deaf, Geri had also brought along the computer/word processor hired to enable him to fully participate in con panels. One useful consequence of this was that before the night was out he already had a couple of pages on disk towards a con report.

## **Friday 28th April 1989**

The first day of CORFLU 6, the fanzine fan's convention, and for some of us it got off to a spectacular start. Around midday, when it was time for us to leave for the con hotel, Geri announced: "Your limo awaits!" I smiled, imagining this to be an exaggeration born of enthusiasm and, hefting our absurdly heavy suitcases, struggled out to the perfectly ordinary auto that awaited. Only it wasn't an ordinary auto: it was a fucking honest-to-God full-grown limousine! "Jesus!", I whispered, as the suitcases slipped from my hands. Geri was outside already, enjoying hugely the expressions on the faces of Avedon, Sue, Chuck, and me as we each came out in turn and caught our first sight of the monster. With oldtime Minneapolitan Jim Young (now a DC-area resident) acting as guide and Kathryn Craemer as hostess (she was doling out the champagne, ale, and other liquid goodies that had been so thoughtfully provided), we were taken on a tour of Minneapolis and its suburbs, a truly scenic city, ending at Uncle Hugo's Science Fiction Book Store – where I bought a hardback of Delany's *The Motion of Light on Water* As a present for

Avedon, and was delighted to find a used copy of Damon Knight's *The Futurians* for \$2, a basic text for a fanhistorian such as myself and a book I'd been seeking for years. We stayed at Uncle Hugo's for maybe forty minutes before eventually piling back into the limo and being driven to the Normandy Inn, venue for CORFLU 6. Our transport had been a nice touch, and I was well-chuffed. After all, how many other fans can claim they've been driven to an SF bookstore in a limo?

"How did Chuck take the limo?" Patrick asked me afterwards.

"As his due," I replied.

Since the con proper wouldn't start until early evening Avedon and I spent most of the afternoon in the bar with Jim, Kathryn, George Flynn, Art Widner, and others, talking fandom, SF, absent friends and the like. As the afternoon wore on more and more people began to show up. Pat Mueller was "with child", as they say, but hers wasn't the only pregnancy at CORFLU. Dana Siegel went one better than Pat by actually giving birth during the con to a son, Zoltan.

Pat, Avedon, Jeanne Gomoll, Patrick Nielsen Hayden, and I had a meal in the hotel restaurant a little later. I had a steak and once again noticed, as I had been noticing all during this trip to the US, that the quality of restaurant and diner food had declined since I was last in America two years earlier. In fact, I would go so far as to say that these days the quality of food for those eating out in the UK is probably higher than for those eating out in the US. Britain has a reputation for bad food, one that was fully deserved up until as recently as six or seven years ago but isn't any longer. A number of those American fans who were at both the '79 and '87 Brighton Worldcons remarked to me that while they hadn't much enjoyed eating out at the former con it had been a pleasure at the latter. I agree with them, but the connection between Britain and bad food is so ingrained in many people's minds that it may never be broken.

By the time we left the restaurant CORFLU was up and running and still more people had shown up. Hope Kiefer gave me a hug, and I finally got to meet Andi Schechter, Stu's significant other and the person who finally got him out of women's underwear ("It was comfortable, but the time had come" explained Stu). I was introduced to Emma Bull (like many of those present I really enjoyed her book *War for the Oaks* and am sorry I wasn't in Minneapolis long enough to do the tour of those places that appear in it), renewed my acquaintance with Taral, greeted Nigel Rowe (who is this man

and why does he keep following me around, from country to country?), and retrieved my bag and camera from Ted White, who'd called in on Avedon's parents on my behalf and brought it along to the con with him. Andy Hooper was handing out fanzines, as were all manner of people (I was one of them, with *Pulp* #12 and *Then* #2), and I pulled in a fair crop. Here memory dissolves into a pleasant haze of conversation and laughter, none of which comes into focus until the point at which I crashed out (around 1.15am), and returned to our room, where I was dismayed to discover Avedon and Patrick and Teresa loudly and smokily discussing British fanpolitics. Though I was trying to sleep they carried on with this for another two hours, and I was in a foul mood when I eventually drifted off.

## **Saturday 29th April 1989**

At 8.15am we were all awoken by the phone ringing, a wake-up call apparently booked to the wrong room. None of us was able to get back to sleep but since, on my performance so far this trip, this was around the time I would've awoken anyway I wasn't too perturbed. Not so the others. Thinking thoughts of karmic justice I headed out for a breakfast of bacon double-cheeseburger at the local Burger King (and was deeply unimpressed by their service), leaving the others to their coffee and the long process of "coming to".

CORFLU's noon opening ceremony began sharply at 12.45pm with Fred Haskell impromptuing at the podium in lively and amusing fashion, and continued with Jon Singer performing strange incantations. Jeanne Gomoll followed this with a very funny reading of her fanzine article "Burning Barbie", which led to her con badge being "Shiffmanized" (a process of personalisation carried out by Stu on the badges of at least half those present) to read "Jeanne Gomoll – Barbie Burner" under a drawing depicting a match being applied to the unfortunate doll. Next was a "debate" on methods of fanzine duplication with the audience being divided into "traditional" and "modern" camps. Despite doing much of my actual writing using a word processing program (this, for instance) most of my duplication is done on the trusty Gestetner in my den so I naturally sided with the trads. It was of course an artificial debate, but since fans will argue about anything (it's one of their most endearing/infuriating qualities) a good-natured debate was soon in full flow. In no time we had been characterised by the mods as Luddites wedded

to the potato-cut and tray of hekto-jelly, and Lenny Bailes was soon referring to us as “the potato-peelers”, a name gleefully taken up by others on his side of the room. The main failing of the trads, I feel, was that we didn’t come back with a name for the mods for what, after all, is any debate without a healthy dose of name-calling?

The next two items were a panel on fan-funds (interesting, but I won’t go into the details here as you can probably supply most of the arguments yourselves) and one on the pro/fan divide and the awkwardness sometimes felt by those with a foot in both camps. Since this featured, among others, P&T, Emma Bull, and Kathryn Craemer, I was tempted to stay for it, but I was also hungry so when Jerry Kaufman and Suzle suggested a meal in the coffee shop I went with them.

I spent the rest of the afternoon sitting around chatting before going off for dinner in hotel restaurant with Chuck and Sue, Ted, Geri, and Jeff Schalles. Later, I spent a while talking fanship with Joe Siclari and Moshe Feder, two people particularly interested in the subject, and surprised them both with the link I’d uncovered between fandom and the Beatles (as I’d earlier surprised Ted with it when I visited him in Falls Church during the first part of our trip). In fact, Joe seemed to think I was pulling his leg at first but I wasn’t, and the full story appeared in the next issue of *Then*. The evening was rounded out by a long session around a table at the poolside, with Ted, Teresa, Moshe, Joe, Fred and Sue, Don Fitch, Lenny Bailes et al. Ted was holding court and regaling us with tales of his early days in New York fandom, stuff I’m a sucker for. As always, I was impressed by Ted’s stentorian tones, but his wasn’t the deepest voice I heard this trip. Having been brought up in a household whose father was almost deaf, Avedon developed a strong voice, as did her mother. These, however, are the women of the family. Her brother’s voice has to be heard to be believed. Rick’s voice is the deepest I’ve ever encountered. Though we’ve met before, this trip was the first time I noticed his voice was so deep that when he spoke to me *my chest-bone vibrated!* Ted really couldn’t compete. Bed beckoned some time around 3am, and I answered its seductive call.

## Sunday 30th April 1989

Muffins and coke, chips and ranch dip, turned out to be a surprisingly pleasant way to start the day and I was one of four or five hardy souls who

breakfasted thus in the con suite around 10.30am. Most everyone else was still abed but Susan Levy had gotten up and dashed about putting this repast together. It was, however, a mere appetizer....

The traditional CORFLU buffet/banquet was at noon. I managed to rouse my reluctant roomies in time for this, and the food wasn't bad. As usual at CORFLUS, the GoH was chosen by having his name pulled from a hat – and this time it was Stu Shiffman. The Madison group formed a human pyramid for him, and he got to listen as various people (Andi, Avedon, Jeanne Gomoll, Moshe, and Andy Hooper) came to the podium and delivered testimonials to him. There are people who have been honoured more by fandom but few, I think, held in such genuine affection by so many of us.

Jeanne Gomoll gave her Toastmaster's speech next, a stunningly good piece perfectly delivered, one at times clever and funny, moving and inspiring, that I will not spoil for those who have yet to read it by trying to excerpt from it here. Both Avedon and Chuck tried to get the typescript for publication immediately afterwards, and it ultimately saw print in *Pulp* #15.

The final “business” of this session was the auction. Conducted largely by Joe Siclari (with assistance from Jerry Kaufman) it raised money for TAFF, DUFF, the Harris Fund, and CORFLU variously. The prices were pretty impressive for the most part, a set of the first 44 issues of Terry Carr and Ron Ellik’s late-’50s newszine, *Fanac*, being knocked down for \$215, and Moshe Feder picking up five copies of *Novae Terrae* (circa 1937/8 and donated by Vince Clarke) for \$150.

Those who had to be in work tomorrow began leaving soon after this, and Avedon and I only just managed to catch Patrick and Teresa in time to say goodbye. Around 5.30pm or so, we went out to eat with Emma Bull, Will Shetterly, Jon Singer, and John M.Ford (known as “Mike” to friends) On the way we passed a turnoff to Cretin Avenue, a name which made me laugh, not surprisingly.

“Guess what the high school on that road is called.” said Will.

“Not... Cretin High?” I replied.

“That’s right. There are many other Cretin Highs in the US, but that’s the only one that cops to it. It’s a private school, too.”

“I can just see them supporting their school team on sports days: “Go Cretins, Go!”.”

We ate at a Tex-Mex joint called “La Cucuracha” (I know it’s a common name for Mexican restaurants but it still seems odd eating at a place whose

name translates as “The Cockroach”). Good food, good conversation, good time,’nuff said. Back at the Normandy it appeared that those fans who hadn’t gone home had gone out to eat and it was curiously depopulated, a situation remedied when the diners returned. By my estimate, we had some 60% of the convention staying over so another night of fun looked set. And so it was, the usual haze from which little can later be reconstructed followed and a good time was had by all. The evening ended with Art Widner showing slides of ’40s fandom and Jeff Schalles showing slides from the early-’70s. Hard to believe rich brown was ever so thin, which led me to ponder the possible lack of permanence of my own waistline.

## **Monday 1st May 1989**

I breakfasted with Spike at Le Peep and finally got the lowdown on the tensions in Madison fandom that I’d been hearing about. Fandom is much the same everywhere, it seems. Avedon and I checked out of the Normandy at noon and got a lift back to Geri’s with Canadian fans Catherine Crockett and Colin Hinz. CORFLU might be over so far as the hotel and most of its attendees were concerned, but for us it still had another day to run.

Byerly’s is a rather large and magnificent supermarket (it featured in Jonathan King’s piece on Minneapolis on his *Entertainment USA* show on British TV) and that afternoon it was visited by a contingent of fans consisting of Geri, Chuck and Sue, Moshe, Lise, Catherine, Art Widner, Avedon, and me. Working for a major UK grocery chain, I had a certain professional interest in the store. I bought some imported beer (Bass) and some dips (mainly jalapeno and that rather delicious ranch dip I’d had for breakfast the previous day) towards the party at Geri’s that night and, like the others, marvelled at one particular sculpture on sale in the gift store. There, among the Lalique and Waterford crystal was a bust of Ronald Reagan that its creator (clearly a sick man) wanted \$3000 for. That was too rich for my blood but seeing it had whetted my appetite and I decided that I wanted a souvenir of the great man for myself, something intimate yet inexpensive. I wondered idly whether Byerly’s stocked Ronald Reagan dartboards....

There were maybe 40 people at Geri’s in the evening, now familiar faces such as those of Fred and Susan, Will and Emma, Stu and Andi (but *not* Moshe and Lise, whom we’d had to say goodbye to at Byerly’s) mixed with those of MN-Stfers who hadn’t been at CORFLU, with the result that I hadn’t

met them. Denny Lien was one of these. The others all seemed to be large, bearded and named David – the men too. I chatted to Sue Harris for a fair bit and was delighted that she really seemed to have enjoyed the con. Never having been involved in our little sub-culture it was always on the cards that she wouldn't.

Towards the end of the evening, I got into a long conversation with Stu and Jeff Schalles about the preservation of old fanzines and photographs, a discussion occasioned by the slides Art Widner had shown at CORFLU, slides made from old photos. A lot of early fans have been dying off in recent years, and in some cases their collections of fanzines and early fannish memorabilia have gone with them. A systematic and organised programme of making slides is a good idea for photos (a large club/group funding or fund-raising for the project and agreeing to store the slides and make copies available at cost to those who want them), but I have another idea for fanzines. Not being a computer buff I'm not sure how feasible this idea is, but it strikes me that scanning old zines and storing them on floppy disks would be a good way of preserving them. Disks are easy to copy and hardcopy could presumably be made with most any dot-matrix or laser printer. What I don't know is the time such scanning would take, or how the zines would have to be filed on the disk to make page by page access easy.

I like the idea of anyone who wants a set of *Hyphen* being able to get a copy of them on disk, and I like even more the idea of the really early stuff being made available. I mean, a collection such as Vince Clarke's holds what may well be the only remaining copies of some early UK zines – and thanks to the trashy paper some of them were printed on they're deteriorating rapidly. I think some sort of preservation and access programme ought to be organised (a project for CORFLU to sponsor, maybe) and would like someone who knows more about computers than me to explain what it might entail.\*

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\* This was pre-internet, of course, and this project subsequently came to pass in the form of the fanac.org website.

## **Tuesday 2nd May 1989**

Yet again I was the first up, so I ambled over to Geri's neighbourhood Burger King and had a bacon double cheeseburger. It's not that I particularly like Burger King, more that it was all that was available. (When I want fast food why aren't there ever any Taco Bell's around, I wonder?) I dropped off the

remaining US copies of *Pulp* at the local post office, amusing myself while waiting in line by perusing the FBI wanted posters pinned up by the counters. They catalogued an amazing array of death and mayhem, making me profoundly grateful for British restrictions on public ownership of guns.

When Geri and Jeff eventually got up they, Chuck and Sue, and Avedon and I, looked at Geri's slides of last December's TROPICON in Florida, the one that Walt and Madeleine Willis were guests at. Walt's trip report *The Enchantment* had been on sale at CORFLU and I was carrying back a bundle to sell in the UK for TAFF. (I flogged them off at MEXICON III, raising £60 – and succeeded in selling Steve Green his copy twice.)

Shortly before 4pm we all set off for the airport, stopping briefly to take in Minnehaha Falls. At the airport we sat around until Avedon and I boarded our flight at 5.30pm (Jeff was also flying out today, leaving for New York about a half hour after our departure). Chuck was effusive with his goodbyes, Geri gave us both hugs, and then we were off – back to Britain and everyday life.

When I'd arranged our seats I'd asked for a window seat "Anywhere but over the wing". I imagine you're ahead of me at this point. Yes, to give our time in Minneapolis a certain symmetry those wonderful folks at Northworst had given me a seat right over the exact centre of the wing! Fortunately, the jumbo was more than half empty so I was able to get myself a choice seat before take-off and to watch wistfully as Minneapolis fell away beneath us. It had been a great con.

At some indeterminate point over the Atlantic it became...

## **Wednesday 3rd May 1989**

...and we landed at Gatwick around 8:45 local time, returning to a surprisingly hot and humid Britain and to climatic conditions more unpleasantly hot than any we'd encountered in America. Jet-lagged, we slept through a large part of the next 24 hours.

## **Sunday 7th May 1989**

Yep, that's the date as I write this report. This time last week I was at CORFLU. I wish I still was. It only remains to thank Fred, Susan, Geri, Jon Singer, and Ken Fletcher for putting on such a good con, and to especially thank Geri

Sullivan both for her hospitality and for being one of the main forces behind the fund that finally succeeded in getting Chuck Harris to an American convention, despite his worries. See, Chuck, I told you you'd have a good time.

*June 1989*

*Chuck Harris's long report on this US trip is collected in Creative Random Harris (2021), another TAFF library ebook which can be downloaded at <https://taff.org.uk/ebooks.php?x=CRH>.*

# **CORFLU 7 (1990)**

## **Corflu Diary II**

### **Wednesday 2nd May 1990**

The approach to Boston's Logan Airport was, as always, immensely impressive. You feel like you're about to land on water when – just in time – land appears beneath the plane. Boston looks amazing from the air – all that water – but I'd yet to properly visit the city having only ever transited through it.

There's the inevitable Logan panic about the connecting flight but, as has happened to us on all but one occasion, we made it with time to spare. In fact we had time to grab a slice of pizza each at the Sbarro concession (Sbarro – wasn't that the home planet of the Daleks?). Avedon was appalled that this cost \$1.39 a slice (\$1.46 with tax), and that she had to shell out 45¢ for a pack of gum, but that's inflation for you.

Our connecting flight to Washington was on an A320, the first Airbus – in fact the first non-American aircraft – I've ever flown on. It was new too, all spick and span and fresh smelling.

We were met at Washington National Airport by Avedon's father Gary, who drove us back to the family home in suburban Maryland. Our visit had officially begun!

### **Friday 4th May 1990**

New York was grubbier than I remembered it, the roads even more pitted than they were in 1986, but at least the subway trains were now free of graffiti. Why, you could actually see out of the windows! The Roosevelt Hotel, venue for CORFLU 7, exuded an atmosphere of shabby gentility, and despite small and ill-appointed rooms that wouldn't be out of place in a British boarding house it was an expensive place to stay. But then a hotel located on 42nd Street and Vanderbilt Avenue in downtown Manhattan was never going to be cheap. (An aside: a few weeks after flying back to the UK I happened to turn on the TV and catch an early-80s film, called *Hanky Panky*

and starring Gene Wilder. I was delighted to see that a major early scene takes place in the Roosevelt Hotel – watch for it.) Our room was in marked contrast to the one we'd had a few weeks earlier at Liverpool's Adelphi Hotel, venue for the 1990 Eastercon, Britain's annual national convention. That room had been astonishingly large, a full-scale suite equipped with chairs and sofas. Martin Smith was freeloading with us and had brought a sleeping-bag along, so you can imagine his delight on seeing the two sofas and realising that he wouldn't have to sleep on the floor. He was even more delighted when we discovered that one of the sofas contained a fold-out bed.

"This is fucking ridiculous!" I had said, gazing balefully at Martin, "What sort of hotel puts sofa-beds in its rooms, for chrissakes? You young fans today don't know you're born. When I was a freeloading neo we had to sleep on bare floors, and grateful we were for the opportunity, I can tell you. I've a good mind to make you sleep on the floor anyway, Martin. Think of it as a part of paying yer dues."

Martin was singularly unimpressed by this idea and merely laughed. I don't get no respect. He was supposed to be sharing a room with us at CORFLU – and paying this time – but with the size of these rooms it just didn't work out. In the event he shared with Gary Farber.

Avedon and I had set out for New York that morning on an Amtrak train from Washington DC, where we'd spent our first few days in the US, staying with her folks. We arrived at the Roosevelt shortly after 5pm and the first fans we encountered were our fellow transatlantic travellers Judith Hanna and Alan Dorey. CORFLU remains the convention par excellence for fanzine fans and the trickle of fans attending from the UK in recent years became a minor flood this time. Apart from Avedon and myself, there were Alan and Rochelle Dorey, Joseph Nicholas, Judith Hanna, Martin Smith, Geogre Bondar, and Julian Headlong.

In the con suite I was greeted by Gary Farber, hugged by Geri Sullivan, and soon fell into conversation, renewing old acquaintances and chatting about absent friends. Patrick and Teresa Nielsen Hayden were there too, but they didn't appear to be on talking terms with a large section of New York fandom. In fact, throughout the weekend other antagonisms became apparent and I realised that New York fandom is at least as fragmented as its London counterpart. In the course of my research into the history of fandom it's become clear to me that most fannish eras come to an end when the people they're composed of fall out, dissolving in acrimony as my fannish

generation now appears to be doing on both sides of the Atlantic. Those of us who survive will, I suspect, be little more than bit players in the fandom of the nineties when (maybe that should be “if”) it gets under way. A depressing thought, and this was hardly the time for depression because just then Martin Smith and Spike arrived in the con suite.

I received a very friendly and enthusiastic hug from Spike, which I returned in kind, and a dopey grin from Martin. This was Martin’s first trip to the USA and he seemed a little overwhelmed by the experience. My own first visit to the land of the brave and the home of the deficit lay only a few years in the past, so I knew what he was feeling. Nor had it taken that much effort to talk him into attending CORFLU this year. I see him every Thursday at the regular meetings of the Hatton Group and so had plenty of opportunity to work on him. With Martin, Avedon and I there, three-fifths of the Hatton regulars were at the con. I got to quiz Martin some more on his impressions early that evening when he, Gary Farber, Gary Mattingly, Patty Peters, Spike and I ate at the Trattoria in the Pan-Am building, which was a mere block from the hotel. What they amounted to was: “Goshwowboyoboy!!!!” I sighed. He *had* only flown in today so perhaps I ought to give him time to actually *form* a few impressions.

The night, as every night at CORFLU, was spent partying in the con-suite which, like those at most American conventions, was well-stocked with snacks, and soft drinks. Unusually, it also carried some remarkably drinkable beers from local microbreweries. (The beer situation in the US has improved dramatically since my 1984 TAFF trip first brought me to the States.) Those fans I got to meet for the first time included the American Ian McAuley, *Niekas* editor Ed Meskys – who is blind and had his seeing-eye dog with him – and Avedon’s co-editor on *Harlot*, Anne-Laurie Logan. Anne-Laurie told us about the deleterious effect lead-emissions had had on the IQs of Western youth since the 1950s and how those born during the 1960s had probably had the greatest exposure.

“This explains a lot about Martin” I said. He was unamused by this observation.

I also had a long conversation with Patrick Nielsen Hayden, who explained that he’s into a different sort of fanac these days, one of those electronic mailing things. Jet-lag being so much easier to handle when travelling east-west rather than west-east, I managed to keep going until around 1.45 am, and Avedon a full two hours longer.

## Saturday 5th May 1990

They say that New York is the city that never sleeps, and with the godawful racket going on outside our hotel room window all night I could see why. Still, all things considered I didn't sleep too badly even though lingering jet-lag meant that I was up and about before 8am. At such an hour a con-hotel is like a ghost town, haunted only by the spirits of the damned. I bumped into one of these lost souls in the lobby, and greeted him with the words:

“You are Geogre Bondar and I claim my five bucks.”

This was the first time we'd met at CORFLU, but Geo seemed no more surprised to see me than he would have been had we been at the Wellington, venue for London fandom's first-Thursday meetings. He droned a greeting, muttered something else, and wandered off, leaving me to stroll up to the con suite. This opened at 9am and I was one of its first customers, scarfing up a bagel with cream cheese and lox from among those so thoughtfully provided by con suite hosts Vijay Bowen and Mark Richards, before wolfing down a desultory half-dozen or so Oreos and washing the whole lot down with some sort of tea. Good stuff.

Spike was also up early so we strolled down to the United Nations Building to admire the statuary and to gaze at Brooklyn across the East River. It was cold and wet, our breath misting in front of us, and I smiled ruefully when I considered that the temperatures in the UK were currently up in the eighties. Usually, the US is a lot warmer than the UK in May but not this year it seemed.

The convention proper opened on Saturday afternoon with committee members Moshe Feder, Lise Eisenberg, Vijay Bowen, and Mark Richards, joined by a motley collection of local fans, singing a song from the Mimeo Man (a fannish musical first staged at a convention around a decade ago) in enthusiastic, if not always tuneful, fashion. This was immediately followed by a “time-binding” panel chaired by Ted White and featuring Sam Moskowitz, Julius Schwartz, and Art Widner reminiscing about fandom's distant past.

I was delighted to finally meet Schwartz and Moskowitz, two men who were there in the early days of both fandom and of science fiction. Schwartz is perhaps most familiar to many of you as the longtime editor of the *Superman* family of titles at DC comics, but he was also one of the first SF fans in the early 1930s and has a good claim to having edited the first ever

fanzine. Moskowitz was of course the first true fan historian with his book *The Immortal Storm* (and yes, I am aware that Jack Speer wrote some fanhistorical articles even earlier), and probably the first SF historian as well.

The British convention CORFLU is closest in character to is the old SILICON of happy memory, being mainly an excuse for fanzine fans to get together and have fun yet with just enough of a formal programme to prevent it from being merely a relaxacon. Virtually the entire programme was held on the Saturday, including a “surprise” item that turned out to be a videotaped interview with Harry Warner conducted with Harry in his Hagerstown home by Moshe.\* Now *that’s* the sort of imaginative idea that more cons could do with.

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\* This can be viewed at [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s-Rs7S\\_S4dw](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s-Rs7S_S4dw).

I got to speak on an item – along with Avedon, Ted White, Dan Steffan, and the Neilsen Haydens – in tribute to the late, great Arthur “Atom” Thomson, fanartist and friend. I dislike speaking in front of an audience, but this was one of those occasions on which such dislike was irrelevant and had to be put aside. I have no idea what people thought of my words, but I was glad for those the others spoke.

Fast forward to 9pm when Spike and I were accosted in a hotel corridor by Moshe. He needed help to carry drink back to the hotel and, since he hadn’t eaten a meal all day either – snacks in the hotel suite had been keeping us all going – he suggested we eat on the way. And so we did, at Wollensky’s Grill. We didn’t get away from here until 10.30pm. Unfortunately, the breeze outside got to me (having been primed by all the hotel windows Moshe had kept opening) and I started coughing and sneezing so much that the others insisted I return to the hotel.

The partying in the con-suite was in full swing when I got back. People such as Jon White and Lou Stathis along with a bunch of other New York fans I didn’t recognise had bought day memberships just to be at the party. After an hour or so I started to get worried the Spike and Moshe had not returned. Jerry Kaufman and I went out looking for them and walked for a block or so with no luck. Mark and Vijay were particularly irritated because they wanted to open the function space for the auction – and Moshe had the keys!

When, to my great relief, the errant duo eventually returned, the auction finally got underway at 12.30am, a mere three and a half hours late. I bid on a

few items including a copy of *A Sense of FAPA* which was knocked down to Moshe for \$110. I eventually secured an illo by Dan Steffan from his version of *The Enchanted Duplicator* for \$30, which he later signed for me. We raised around \$800 for the Arthur Thomson Memorial fund here, which is not bad when you consider that the auction was also used to raise money for DUFF, TAFF, and for CORFLU itself. Added to the money raised at “A Whiz For Atom” in London the previous weekend (named after the 1950s boys’ book *Whizz for Atomms*, by Geoffrey Willans and Ronald Searle), this made a pretty decent sum to pass on to Arthur’s family. There was some confusion at CORFLU about the reason for the fund-raising, and indeed it was assumed in the convention literature that the money was needed to pay medical bills. Not so. Arthur may have spent a fair part of his final years in and out of hospital, but there were no bills. We have free health care remember, a National Health Service based on the principle that medical attention is a basic human right that should be decided on need rather than on ability to pay. (And which, naturally, the Tories are doing all they can to undermine – though subtly, since they know they’d be thrown out of office if the public thought they were trying to abolish what remains probably the supreme life-enhancing achievement of post-war British governments.) No, the money we were raising was to help cushion the initial blow to Arthur’s family of having lost their major breadwinner.

After this it was party, party, party, a hugely enjoyable time about which I now recall absolutely nothing. According to my diary I crashed out at 3.30am, so I suppose I must have.

## Sunday 6th May 1990

Since we couldn’t afford three nights at the Roosevelt, Avedon and I checked out in the morning – and moved our bags to the con-suite, where we would be free-loading that night.

Most of any CORFLU’s membership fee goes towards the Sunday banquet, and this one was no exception so, at noon that day, we descended on the Sichuan Pavilion (Chinese food is to American fans what Indian food is to us). When the feeding frenzy was over, toastmaster Joseph Nicholas thanked the committee and introduced the speech by the Guest of Honour, Barnaby Rapoport. “Who?”, you may ask – I certainly did. At a CORFLU, the GoH is chosen from those present at a name draw. Barnaby’s name was

drawn from the hat, shortly after the opening ceremony, and he was given a bright orange baseball cap with the letters “GOH” emblazoned across the front. Since the sole duty of a CORFLU GoH is to make a speech after the banquet it’s not a position most fans relish, but Barnaby rose to the occasion and astonished us all with a performance that was both moving and very funny. He was imbued with the spirit of CORFLU, a spirit that seems to bring out the best in those who attend one. Richard Brandt gave a presentation on El Paso, which had been awarded next year’s CORFLU, and was given Fred Haskell’s whistle. Moshe had used this to great effect at the con, which not everyone had appreciated.

“They ought to shove it up Moshe’s ass!” Vijay later commented.

“But he could still blow it,” I observed. She and Mark laughed at this.

“OK, then up his urethra.” Ooh, savage!

Martin got to fulfil a longtime ambition when he took in a major league baseball game at Shea Stadium, home of the New York Mets, in the company of Spike, Andy Hooper, Carrie Root, and Janice Murray during the afternoon. (For those of you interested in such matters, the Mets were playing the Baltimore Orioles – who they beat – in a game that saw six home runs. I gather that this is considered good.)

For the rest of us, Sunday afternoon was a pretty mellow time spent sitting around chatting. Lise asked for help to carry the empty bottles from the previous night back to the supermarket to redeem them. Jerry Kaufman, Geogre Bondar and I volunteered, and spent the next hour or so tramping the streets of Manhattan. I was knackered when I got back, and slumped against a wall. Patrick and Teresa, seeing this, suggested we go off to a coffee shop for food. Lise had already suggested a Polish restaurant, but my body knew that it was stodge that I needed, so I went with P&T. The plate of egg and chips I had was *precisely* what I needed, and I felt invigorated afterwards. After the better part of a week consuming food I didn’t eat too often my body craved the familiar, and it restored some sort of balance.

Feeling much better than I had, I launched into the evening’s partying with enthusiasm. I had a long and fascinating conversation with Gary Farber and Bill Wagner about alternate history and dipped liberally into the rest of the free-floating conversation that swirled around. It was the best night of CORFLU, and Avedon and I stayed ’til the very end of the party – since we were sleeping in the con-suite we didn’t have much choice.

## **Epilogue**

Avedon and I stayed with Moshe Feder and his parents for a few days after the con, during which time we and Martin helped with the post-con clear up. As a consequence of this I got to see the magnificent view of the Pan Am and Chrysler Buildings from the 42nd floor office where Moshe works, and also to encounter a New York celebrity. This happened one afternoon when Moshe was leading a bunch of us off to a restaurant somewhere and, as is his wont, was regaling us with his knowledge of pretty much every building we passed.

“And right around this corner,” he intoned as we reached said corner, “is where Kurt Vonnegut lives.”

And who should be walking towards us as we rounded the corner but Kurt Vonnegut himself! No, really.

Later we took the train down to DC. Somehow we ran out of time and never touched base with all those we wanted to see in New York – and the same thing happened in Washington. Avedon’s mother had gotten us to commit to various family visits while we were in DC, something we’d been remiss in on previous trips, and when we tried to set up various meets we discovered that there was very little of our uncommitted time that overlapped the free time of those we wanted to see. I enjoyed CORFLU, and showing Martin around, but I was frustrated by our failure to touch base with so many people (hell, we didn’t even manage to get together with Ted White). Oh well, next time, I suppose.

*August 1990; expanded July 2021*

# **DISCLAVE 36 (1992)**

## **Hanging Out at the Hinckley Hilton**

How often have you read convention reports full of side-splittingly hilarious anecdotes about the antics of bunches of wacky, fun-loving fans and thought to yourself: “Who the hell are these people, anyway?” Recognising the problem, this piece includes, at no cost or use to the reader, a selective Dramatis Personae:

- Sarah Prince – Toothsome Bostonian. Likes chewy young Englishmen.
- Jack Heneghan – Irish ancestry. Velcro hair.
- Vicki Rosenzweig – Bubbly, bouncy, rarely without a smile. (Makes you sick, doesn’t it?)
- D. Potter – Tall.
- Denial – A river in Egypt.
- Mark Richards – Appears darkly brooding, even when he isn’t. Reputed to be a dead ringer for Elvis under all that hair. Maybe he is Elvis. Should be photographed behind a supermarket checkout, and made to sing “Heartbreak Hotel” at his next con, so we can decide for ourselves before calling *The Enquirer*.
- Vijay Bowen – Dark and slender. In certain situations is so energetic that she could, via the miracle of jump-leads, be used to power a number of major electrical appliances.
- Martin Smith – English. Chewy.
- Avedon Carol – Talented, dynamic, legendary, capable of doing dreadful things to the writer while he sleeps if she doesn’t like what he’s written.

I take my responsibilities as Martin Smith’s fannish mentor very seriously indeed but, being the ungrateful wretch he is, Martin is often woefully unappreciative of my efforts on his behalf, as anyone who has read my earlier accounts of his ongoing fannish education will know only too well. Still, we were at an American convention and, since I know American fandom better

than he does, I decided to give Martin the benefit of my knowledge.

"The best way for you to break the ice at a room party and get yourself noticed," I told him, "is for you to drop your trousers, bend over, and offer your services as a novelty bottle-opener."

Martin wasn't terribly enthusiastic about this idea, even after I assured him that the bottle-caps could be easily removed later by any competent proctologist, which just goes to show what a stick-in-the-mud he can be. I don't understand his attitude. At various points during the con I told other people about my suggestion for Martin and they all thought it was a good idea too, so what was his problem?

It was May 1992, Memorial Day Weekend, and we were at DISCLAVE. The hotel we were in was the Washington DC Hilton and Towers but known to all and sundry as the Hinckley Hilton, this being where John Hinckley Jr had failed to assassinate Ronald Reagan, noted amnesiac and President, a decade earlier, thus dooming the US economy. (One of my time-travel fantasies is to switch the guns used by Hinckley and by Mark Chapman.)

If the con had a definite starting point for me then it was out on the poolside patio where, despite the canopy, it was blisteringly hot. Here Avedon and I chewed the fat with Jack Heneghan, and Vol and Jay Haldeman, later being joined by Martin, Linda Bushyager, Moshe Feder, Lise Eisenberg, and Bill Wagner. Strange to see those New Yorkers and not see Stu Shiffman, but he and Andi have long since relocated to Seattle and couldn't be with us. We missed you, people.

Fish are fine if you're a seal, but I've never considered them fit for human consumption. So it was that when Avedon organised a dinner party to a sea "food" restaurant, Martin and I slipped out to sample the greasy delights of the nearby Hardee's burger emporium, which is where we bumped into local fan Walter Miles. Now Walter is, I'm sure, a splendid fellow, but be wary of accepting medical advice from this man. His ideas on the taking of medication are not merely odd but downright peculiar. I became aware of his unorthodox views a few days earlier when we played cards at Avedon's folks' house. In the middle of the game, I was suddenly stricken with a bout of wind that felt like a fatal heart attack. Avedon fetched a bottle of antacid and I quickly uncapped it, unaware that I was about to trip over a Cultural Difference. I upended the opaque plastic bottle in order to shake out a couple of antacid tablets... and watched stupidly as the contents of the bottle, the liquid contents, sloshed out into my hand and all over the table. Avedon did

just what you expect in such a situation from the person who has promised to honour and cherish you, and who respects and looks up to you: she collapsed in helpless giggles. Not wanting to dignify such unseemly behaviour with a response I turned to Walter, who'd sat calmly through the whole incident, and demanded to know why he hadn't stopped me.

"I thought," he said, adopting the sort of tone one uses when explaining something obvious to a small child, "that you were pouring it into your hand so that you could lap it up."

Avedon thinks Walter would have women all over him if he grew his hair out and lost his moustache, a strategy that would almost certainly have also worked for Martin Smith. If Martin didn't already have long hair, that is. And no moustache.

Tough luck, Martin.

With Walter in Hardee's was Joe Mayhew, organiser of the Disclub, a socialising area that was essentially a large con-suite with free soda on tap and, from eight 'til midnight every evening, free beer. As well as the obligatory lager, the Disclub also carried a different dark beer every night. On Friday night this was Old Dominion, which wasn't at all bad, and I quaffed my first glass of it with Alexis Gilliland shortly after the bar area opened. People were still arriving at DISCLAVE at this point, and two who turned up while I was in the Disclub were Vijay Bowen, who gave me a big hug, and Mark Richards. It was getting late now and the parties were starting, so we decided to check them out.

The most enjoyable of the parties was the one Moshe and Lise traditionally throw on the first night of a convention, so we hung out with them for a couple of hours. Martin had yet to loosen up, and seemed a little out of things.

"There's only one way you're going to get into the swing of things," I said.

"What's that?" he asked.

"Why, by offering your services as a novelty bottle-opener, of course."

"No way," said Martin.

He was determined to be difficult about this.

I breakfasted with Martin in Hardee's the following morning, after which I wandered into the Disclub. Here, to my great surprise, I encountered Hope Kiefer. She and husband Karl now live in nearby Philadelphia, having moved there from mythical Madison. They were here with another couple

(whose names I failed to record in my diary), and raising funds (for something I also forgot to record) by selling plates of food. Following a brief chat with Hope and Co., I spent a couple of hours discussing many things, but mainly World War II, with Mark Richards, and a couple more chatting to Ted and Linda White, rich brown, Dan and Lynn Steffan, Steve and Elaine Stiles, Lenny Bailes, and Walter Miles. Also, somewhere in there, I talked fanhistory with Dick Lynch, who was doing a lot of work on the long overdue book edition of Harry Warner's *A Wealth of Fable*. From this list you might assume that I was really getting into DISCLAVE, but in fact I felt oddly and inexplicably out of things most of Saturday, detached and dissatisfied. It wasn't until the evening's disco that I finally felt part of the convention again.

Dancing has always been one of life's great joys for me, and before discovering fandom I used to hit the discos of Cardiff, my home town, two or three nights a week with a friend who felt the same about dancing. If we met women, that was a bonus, but the dancing was always the main thing. Ten years ago I could dance all night, only missing those numbers I actively disliked, but no longer. Someone who still can, and who did at the DISCLAVE disco, is Vijay Bowen. We danced, but I could manage no more than five consecutive tracks at a time before needing a break. I was stiff as a board when I woke the next morning, but it was worth it. Thanks, Vijay.

By the time the disco was over, and it was time to party, I was drenched. Multiple rivulets of perspiration were running down my face, and I knew what that meant. I have "unfortunate" hair. It looks alright when I've just washed it, but within hours it starts getting wilder and wilder, gradually twisting into shapes that are, so I'm assured, highly amusing. Soaked with sweat after the disco my hair looked merely risible but within a few hours, as it dried, it would cause great laughter among Martin Smith. Or maybe not. At the tartan-laden Glasgow In '95 party (they even had on display, I swear, a tartan Rubik's Cube) he didn't seem to notice my hair, possibly because he was so intent on troughing down the snacks on offer. The party, though enjoyable, was pretty quiet, a situation I was sure Martin could change.

"What this party needs to liven it up...." I began.

"Forget it, Rob," said Martin, with uncharacteristic forcefulness, "I'm not being a novelty bottle-opener for anyone!"

"Not even," I coaxed, "if I get the ball rolling by producing a bottle of beer and saying: 'Get your farting gear around that'?"

“No, Rob, not even then.”

I woke the next morning as Martin was rising (Avedon was already up and about) and couldn’t quite believe what I was seeing. I tried rubbing the sleep from my eyes, but it made no difference. I would never have expected such a thing, such aberrant behaviour, of an adult human being, but there was no denying the evidence of my own eyes:

Martin was wearing pyjamas.

“Martin,” I told him, “you’re wearing pyjamas.” He was unshocked by this revelation, which destroyed my final faint hope that he’d been abducted by alien tailors while he slept.

“I always wear pyjamas,” he replied, not even slightly embarrassed. Of course, if alien tailors had abducted him they could also have worked on his brain. (I always thought it needed a little darning, and maybe a new hem.) But no; I was clutching at straws.

“God, Martin,” I said, disgustedly, “sometimes you can be so *English!*”

I was shaken. For all I knew Martin had other secret vices. Maybe *shudder* he plays golf.

Golf, I’m convinced, is just an excuse for usually sensible people to wear hideous trousers. In much the same way, SF conventions provide an excuse for people even more sensible than golfers (you never see a fan using a long stick and vast amounts of energy to send small clumps of earth a few feet, after all) to dress as warrior women, space troopers, barbarians, and otherwise prance around in leather. Though not usually one for costumes, at least not outside the bedroom, I decided to wear one on this Sunday: namely, a Green Lantern ring.

Green Lantern, I should explain for the culturally-deprived, is a comic book character responsible for policing the sector of space containing our solar system. Armed with a power ring, a wondrous device he recharges daily while reciting an oath composed by Alfred Bester (no kidding), he’s the nemesis of evildoers everywhere. The ring I was wearing was a promotional item from those canny people at DC Comics, who sure know their audience (the rings come in one size only and are sized for an adult male finger). The real joy in wearing the ring came from the way Moshe, another Green Lantern fan from way back, faunched after it. I saw him casting covetous glances at it all day until, able to stand it no longer, he announced that, by God, he was going to march into the offices of DC Comics when he got back to New York and demand they give him one. (These New Yorkers can be

sooooo macho when they're roused.) I allowed myself a smile, but it was a small victory. After a couple of years of practicing manipulation on Martin Smith this was no more than a finger exercise.

Sunday passed in a blur of the usual convention activities, including some that are None Of Your Damn Business, so I'll fast forward through the day until around 10.30 pm, when I was emerging from my hotel room and making my way to the Disclub. Which seems an appropriate point in this narrative to say a few words about one of the most pressing problems facing the modern world....

There is a dread scourge sweeping the globe today, one we've all been made aware of on TV and one every one of us should take all the steps we can to avoid, and yet it's something that any of might have to face one day. I'm talking, of course, about alcohol-free beer. Fortunately, the Disclub would have no truck with this foul abomination and was serving another perfectly acceptable dark beer. Unfortunately, I consumed two of these before remembering that booze plays havoc with my medication. I was taking one antihistamine pill a night, which I washed down with water (take that, Walter Miles!), and they were definitely less effective in the presence of alcohol so, regrettably, I switched to Coke.

Monday was the final morning of DISCLAVE, and I woke too late for breakfast at Hardee's. Avedon was also awake so we made our way down to the hotel's lounge area and left Martin to his snoring. We sat around talking with Mark, Vijay, Sarah Prince, D. Potter, Vicki Rosenzweig and Andy Hickmott, having conversations that were extended farewells to people we wouldn't be seeing again for a year or more, and discussing the foibles of absent friends. My casual revelation that Martin slept in pyjamas was greeted with incredulous laughter. Reactions ranged from "What?", "How?", and "Why?" to "Where?", "When?" and "Is he some sort of pervert?" Events then unfolded with regrettable inevitability.

"They didn't believe me when I told them about the pyjamas," I explained to the groggy figure sitting on the end of the bed, as cameras flashed all around us, "so I – ah – organised a private viewing."

"You bastard!" Martin Smith would normally have said at this point but, still sleepy and bemused, all he could manage was a sickly smile.

We all thought this was pretty funny except for Martin, who really has little reason for complaint. I only brought seven people to the room, and I doubt that the photos they took will be seen by more than a couple of hundred

people. And among those, after all, there probably won't be more than a handful of women he would otherwise have stood a chance with.

Later that morning, Martin was being sought by someone who wanted him to spend the night with her. Typically, he was nowhere to be found. Avedon was also off somewhere, but we remaining members of the pyjama party got treated to a floorshow back in the lounge area. It started when our conversation was interrupted by the thwack of leather on flesh. As one we turned, and watched while a young guy, who was stripped to the waist and stretched out over the back of a chair, was whipped by a young woman until his bare back glowed red. Conversation slowly died at the other tables in the lounge as everyone turned to watch the spectacle. Midway through this a second young woman joined in and both carried on whipping him until he groaned: "You'd better stop or I'll need a cold shower." At this point they put a collar and leash on him and led him around the room with one of them riding him and applying gentle strokes to his enflamed back. While watching these three we were distracted by another loud thwack, and turned to see a second bare-backed guy stretched out over a chair, with yet another woman whipping him. I could hardly believe it.

"You never see that at British cons," I commented.

"You don't usually see it at American cons either," said Vicki.

"Yeah... three female tops in one small group!"

The final, dying moments of a convention are an odd time to meet someone new, but this was when Avedon produced a Mysterious Person who just happened to have dropped in on the con, a desperado from her misspent pre-fannish youth whose name even she didn't recall. Of an earlier dwelling of his, Avedon said:

"I lost my virginity in a house full of bikers and Twinkies."

People sometimes speak in tongues, but this was the first time I'd heard anyone speak in interlineos. The bikers, it seemed, had ripped-off box after box of the Twinkies months earlier and these had subsequently been available to anyone who could keep them down. Twinkies, Avedon once explained to me, are these weird chemical-based things that bear a superficial resemblance to food and which keep forever. I ate one once, years ago. It felt really peculiar going down, and sat in my stomach like ballast. It's probably still there. The longevity of Twinkies is such that had they existed in ancient Egypt, a country on the banks of Denial, those left in the pyramids would be no more inedible today than when they were made. Isn't that amazing? Also,

and I am not making this up, the eating of Twinkies has been successfully used in America as a defense in a murder trial. Twinkies are Ronald Reagan's favourite food. This may explain a lot.

There was no denying that DISCLAVE was, finally, over. Filled with post-con melancholia, Sarah, Martin, the Mysterious Person, Jack Heneghan, Walter Miles, Avedon, and I made our way to the main entrance of the Hinckley Hilton and stood out on the sidewalk, waiting for Avedon's parents to turn up and whisk Avedon and I off to a restaurant and to probably the best meal I had the whole trip (chicken teriyaki, if you must know). It was a time for wistful goodbyes, for kisses from the women and manly hugs from the guys. Martin wasn't coming back to Avedon's folks' place with us but was setting off by himself, armed with little more than his toothbrush and a fresh pair of pyjamas, with a view to spending some time in New York.

"If you're lucky they might throw a party for you there," I told him, "and if they do, I know the perfect way for you to break the ice...."

*September 1992*

# **DISCLAVE 39 (1995)**

## **Depravity at Disclave**

The venue for the 1995 DISCLAVE, the Washington DC Renaissance, was a huge hotel, so huge in fact that we scientifictionalists weren't the only ones using it over Memorial Day weekend. No, we also shared it with Southern Baptists, some sort of high school prom and, on Friday evening, Pledge Keepers. For those of you 'til now happily unaware of their existence, Pledge Keepers are a Christian men's movement pledged to "traditional" values and to "taking back" their role as head of the family. Needless to say, they're also homophobic. Since DISCLAVE's most visible group of young fans, the Goths, have a casual attitude towards sexual ambiguity, what happened next was inevitable. The Goths suddenly started sporting T-shirts and jackets that they'd either brought with them or rushed home to get (most are DC locals) bearing slogans such as "Sodomize the Dead" and "Smoke Crack and Worship Satan". A particular favorite was one which read "Have you forgotten Jesus?" on the front and "Isn't it time you did?" on the back, though "Corpse Fucker" had a nicely in-your-face quality to it. Shortly before DISCLAVE, in the electronic forum of rec.arts.sf.fandom, a number of people made disparaging remarks about the Goths, accusing them of vandalism and the like, but I never saw any evidence of this and found them much more visually interesting than the predictable run of costume fans you usually find roaming the halls.

Thanks to Avedon's father paying our air fare, this was our fourth consecutive DISCLAVE, and we were delighted to encounter such familiar faces as those of Vijay Bowen, Mark Richards, Vicki Rosenzweig, Andy Hickmott, Dan and Lynn Steffan, Nevenah Smith, Moshe Feder, Lise Eisenberg, Alina Chu, drop-ins Ted and Lynda White, and fellow Brits John and Eve Harvey. Friday evening was the usual round of parties, but Saturday morning found me sitting in the bar talking politics with Mark Richards....

A source of continuing amazement to Avedon, me, and anyone else who actually remembers Watergate, is the miraculous transformation of Richard Nixon from scumbag to elder statesman, culminating in a national day of mourning on his death. All through his life, just when you thought you'd

finally seen the end of Richard Nixon, someone would pull the stake out and he'd rise again, as slimily malevolent as ever.

“You can’t lick our Dick!”, is a line Avedon had quoted more than once... only now you can. In an even more amazing development, the US Post Office has just issued a 32 cent Nixon postage stamp. On the Internet, just before we set out for the US, someone posted a message to the effect that his 60 year-old grandmother had refused vehemently to have anything to do with the stamp, declaring:

“No power on earth can make me lick Richard Nixon’s backside!”.

Having plumbed the depths, Mark and I then scaled the political heights, trying to find a modern world leader equal in stature to those of the past. The only one we both felt fit the bill was Nelson Mandela – but then, spending 28 years in prison for your beliefs gives you a *lot* of stature. In making this judgement we may have been a tad harsh, however, because we were forgetting someone else who'd been a truly remarkable leader. I refer, of course, to George Bush. Who among us doesn't go all misty-eyed and get a lump in their throats when they recall how, with no support from America's allies and heedless of the possible consequences, Bush took such a firm and fearless stand against broccoli? Here was a man who took an unusual, nay inspirational, approach to diplomatic niceties and political norms, a man with a highly individual style of leadership characterised by relentless innovation. First hinted at by his refreshingly cavalier treatment of English syntax, it found full expression in the radically unconventional manner in which he expressed to the Japanese Prime Minister just what American businessmen thought of his country:

“Mr Prime Minister... bleurrggghh!!”

Truly, only the hard-hearted could deny George Bush that fifth spot on Mt Rushmore.

It was that same evening that I checked out the a.s.b party with Mark and Vijay, strictly as a spectator. For those who don't know, a.s.b stands for “alt.sex.bondage” and is named after the Internet news group. Sensibly, the organisers required everyone attending to sign a release before allowing them in. Seeing the same manacles, frames, and whips as were used at last year's DISCLAVE gave me a warm glow, though probably not as warm a glow as on the asses of those being spanked.

Returning briefly to our room, I was astonished to find Avedon, Nevenah Smith, and Lynn Steffan squeezing themselves into tight-fitting

outfits designed to emphasise cleavage (Avedon was wearing a front-loading PVC zip-up halter). All are big-breasted women and any of them could have burst free at any moment, concussing those nearby. Earlier, in the bar, another woman had told them they looked like Valkyrie and taught them a song, sung to Wagner's "Ride of the Valkyrie" that they gave vent to loudly and lustily for the rest of the con at the slightest provocation, and frequently at none at all:

*We fly through the night skies  
Flashing our white thighs  
Picking up dead guys  
Until the dawn*  
*Don't pick up that one  
He isn't quite gone  
Wait for the next one  
Then we'll be done.*

"Look out DISCLAVE!" announced Nevenah, "There's a mass of seething female hormones coming your way!"

This certainly seemed to work for Nevenah, who was attracting, and revelling in, the attentions of young guys all weekend. (After DISCLAVE, I came across a book by Esther Friesner called *Chicks in Chainmail* and immediately decided there ought to be a Wagnerian companion volume called *Babes in Brass Bras*.) Later, I bumped into Ted White and John Harvey and decided to show them the a.s.b party. It seemed only fair.

Sunday afternoon I went for a walk around the neighbourhood with Vijay, who was desperate for chocolate-covered apricots (don't ask). The neighbourhood around the hotel was, um, eclectic. The Renaissance itself was slick and modern, as was the Convention Center and other nearby buildings, but they'd been built in an area that had obviously been heading downhill fast. Behind the hotel was a somewhat seedy Chinatown, and in front a rather down-at-heel, mostly black area, where, ever the tourist, I admired the scenic bricks supporting a tastefully windowless car, and the colourful syringes in the sidewalk grating. We ambled around the area, hand-in-hand, and got rained on. When I mentioned this to Avedon later, she was appalled.

"You must be crazy," she said. "That's not the sort of area where it's safe for a white man and a black woman to walk holding hands."

Since DC is her home town I assume she knows what she's talking about, but if true it's a sad comment on our species.

Fast forward to the evening and a bunch of us are sitting around in the bar with Dan, as ever, having tales to tell of the porn he'd seen in Amsterdam.

"The German stuff was the most amazing. There was this one picture that really brought tears to your eyes. It showed a guy with not one, not two, but *three* fists up his ass!"

"God," I said, as we contemplated the enormity of this, "we've all described someone as having their head up their ass, but here's someone who actually could! Well... someone else's head, anyway."

"Yeah," said Dan, "and I bet he never makes a noise when he farts, either."

"Y'know, you could do an EC-style comic about the guy and call it *Three-Fisted Tails*."

"If we did," laughed Dan, "they'd put us in jail for A Very Long Time."

We were distracted around then by the sight of one of the Goths in full drag – not that males in drag are an unusual sight at cons these days – and another guy, who may or may not have been a Goth, parading around in an expensive-looking and perfectly-fitted wedding dress, the effect of which was somewhat spoiled by his moustache. While we watched, he got onto the escalator and one of his friends, seeing the danger, quickly lifted the train of his dress before it got caught. As he descended thus, his friend holding the train, they were passed on the up escalator by some Southern Baptists who stared at them, goggle-eyed.

(I was greatly amused, though not at all surprised, to later learn that hotel security had no complaints with our group but thought the Christians were "sheer hell" to deal with, one piece of vandalism they were assumed to be responsible for being the mysterious disappearance of the number from the door of room 666...).

It was while we were sitting in the bar on the final morning that Andy, for reasons that are best known to himself and doubtless deeply sick and disturbed, presented me with a white rubber mouse. I was extremely grateful for it.

"Thanks, Andy," I said, "I'll treasure it always and never throw it away because, as every guy knows, you should never throw away anything that you might need one day."

“When the hell are you ever going to *need* a white rubber mouse?” demanded Avedon.

“I have no idea. In fact, I can’t even imagine any circumstances in which I could possibly need a white rubber mouse. But why take a chance?”

Andy and Mark nodded in agreement with the obvious good sense of this while Avedon, Vijay, and Vicki looked at us as if we were crazy. Women never understand this sort of impeccable logic. Andy then produced another white rubber mouse for Mark, who carefully tucked it away in his breast pocket against the day when he too might need one because you can never be too careful about these things. This raised a serious philosophical problem, however.

“That’s two white rubber mice you’ve now given away, Andy”, I said, “but how do you know that you won’t need them one day?”

“No problem,” he replied, airily, “I’ve got plenty more.”

“Maybe,” I persisted, “but what if you one day find yourself in a situation where you need multiple white rubber mice and you’re two short?”

“God,” he said, paling visibly, “you’re right!”

Mark nodded in agreement, and the women burst into laughter.

“It’s a guy-thing,” I told them, haughtily, “you wouldn’t understand.”

And y’know, they probably never will.

After Andy and Vicki had set off back to New York, Avedon and I drove Mark and Vijay over to Dan and Lynn Steffan’s place where they were linking up with Nevenah for their own lift back to the Big Apple. Concerned as always with the important issues of the day, there was a question I had no choice but to put to my companions:

“Have you ever wondered, I mean *really* wondered”, I asked them, “just why it’s spinach and not, say, zucchini that gives Popeye his strength?”

“Umm, because spinach contains iron?”, suggested Vijay.

“That’s too sensible to be plausible,” I said, smiling and shaking my head indulgently, “no, it was because of the power of the spinach lobby. Yep, knowing the effect the cartoon series was likely to have on the eating habits of the youth of America, Big Spinach used their huge financial clout to get congress to lean on the producers of Popeye to change to spinach from their original choice, rutabaga.”

Strangely, they didn’t believe me. In fact – and you may find this hard to credit – they actually had the nerve to *laugh* at my story!

“If you want proof,” I said, stung by their laughter, “I’ll give it to you.

So sensitive does the US government still find this affair to this very day that all records of it have been expunged. So,” I added, triumphantly, “try to use the Freedom of Information Act to get details and you’ll see that I’m right.”

Unable to deal with such logic – they appeared stunned by it – my companions said little more until we reached Dan and Lynn’s Arlington home. No sooner had we arrived, however, than it was decided we were going out to eat.

“I want a steak!” shouted Nevenah, “Take me to the nearest ‘Slab’o’Cow’.”

“Seafood!” wailed Avedon, “I need more seafood!”

“Taco Bell,” I cried, “let’s all eat at Taco Bell!”

As I fell back from the rain of insults and sharp objects that greeted my suggestion, Dan took charge. Moved by Nevenah’s increasingly plaintive wails of “‘Slab’o’cow, slab’o’cow’...” he announced that Avedon could get seafood at most of the local steakhouses and that that was where we were going. There was conspicuous lack of mention as to the availability of jalapeno-packed bean burritos in hot taco sauce and hold the onions, however. Poot.

The “slab’o’cow” we found was a pseudo-Australian restaurant called “The Outback Steakhouse”, where Nevenah was keen to have her steak done extremely rare.

“I want them to crack its horns off, wipe its ass, and serve it up!” she told us. My own requirements were somewhat different.

“And how would you like your steak, sir?” asked the waitress.

“Incinerated,” I replied.

As we were waiting for our meals to arrive, I said something that I can only blame on lingering jet-lag or an incipient brain tumour.

“I’m working on a book,” I told my companions, “a collection of mantras you can chant while cooking. I’m calling it *Omm On The Range!*”

Their groans were terrible to behold.\*

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\* This joke courtesy of Rob Holdstock.

“Actually,” chuckled Dan, “I do chant a mantra when I’m cooking. It goes: ‘oh shit, oh shit, oh shit!’.”

When Nevenah’s steak finally arrived she sent it back because, unbelievably, someone had clearly had the temerity to wave it in the general direction of an actual flame.

And so the day wound down amid excellent company, good food, and fine conversation and, for us, DISCLAVE finally ended. We returned to Dan and Lynn's place for more scientific fictional crifanac (Avedon wondered why SF writers so seldom created futures with genuinely life-enhancing advances – such as the antigravity bra), to bid farewell to the departing New Yorkers and, at last, to Dan and Lynn themselves. It was 28th May 1995. On May 29th 1985, Avedon had moved to Britain to begin our life together. Over the past few days we'd spent our time with good friends and enjoyed ourselves immensely. I doubt we could've found a better way to celebrate our tenth anniversary together.

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[The con hotel was also used by airline pilots on layover. Two years after this, during that year's DISCLAVE, one of those pilots and a companion used the sprinkler system pipework in the room for a purpose it was never designed for and it ruptured, causing a lot of damage. The hotel blamed DISCLAVE and thereafter it proved impossible to find another in the area that would accept their business. After a few years hiatus the con resurfaced, as CAPCLAVE – a wholly new entity as far as the hotels were concerned – which has been an annual event ever since.]

# **BOSKONE 34 (1997)**

## **Fanhistoricon**

Thursday 13th February 1997 – the Big Day, the day I set off on my first visit to the US in two years – had arrived. I kissed Avedon goodbye and set off for Heathrow Airport. I also kissed her goodbye two hours later, as she gave me a baleful look for making her rush across London with the credit card I'd forgotten. (No-one does baleful like Avedon).

My trip had come about as the result of email I'd received from Joe Siclari on 20th December:

“Fanhistoricon is being held this year at Boskone, Feb 14-16, 1997. This year we expect to have some excellent space for meetings and programs. And with Boskone’s help, a little something extra that we hope to be able to continue.

“On behalf of Fanhistoricon and Boskone, I’d like to ask you to come over as the first recipient of the Fanhistoricon Fan Fund.

“I know it’s only a couple of months notice but NESFA has agreed to cover the airfare portion and I will lead to raise about \$400 more to cover your room at the hotel and some miscellaneous expenses.

“Your British history, the new Who’s Who and your general fanhistorical interests make you a perfect choice. This will also give us an opportunity to broaden the view to focus on fandom internationally.

“What do you say?”

This was all incredibly flattering, and it had taken me all of half a second to decide to accept.

The British Airways plane I flew out on was a brand-new Boeing 777 with all manner of spiffy passenger accessories. Even though I was as usual flying Cattle Class, there was a TV screen in the back of every seat, controlled by a unit in the armrest. If you flipped the armrest cover open, the unit could be lifted out, flipped over, and used as a phone – complete with a slot for your credit card. According to the label this amazing device was a

“Tethered Digital Passenger Control Unit”. Well, I was certainly a passenger, but hardly digital, nor tethered (not my particular kink), but it was still impressive. Not being obscenely wealthy, I refrained from trying the phone. When we landed in Boston, I got to see First Class, which was incredible. First class passengers didn’t have seats as such, but opulent passenger-pampering units. Bath-shaped affairs, these were angled so as to allow the stewards to pop grapes into your mouth as you luxuriated in the unit , amusing yourself with an improbably diverse array of built-in electronic entertainments including hi-fi, TV, video games, and vibro-vagina. Truly, if they’d fitted a Gestetner to the unit I could happily have spent my entire vacation in First Class without ever leaving the plane.

Taking the shuttle bus from Logan Airport to Framingham, I got finally got to see a little of Boston from the ground – I’ve flown into and out of Logan any number of times, but always on my way elsewhere. In many ways the most interesting sight was the con hotel itself. The ads for the Sheraton Tara say: “Not just a hotel. Stay in a castle”. Despite the quality of the materials used in its construction, I’m afraid the main effect of the Tara’s fake castellations was to make it look tacky. It actually *is* just a hotel, though a perfectly adequate one. I could’ve done without the ersatz Irish (or “Oirish”, as it’s dismissively known as on this side of the Atlantic) decor of some of the internal areas, and am certainly glad I never got to see the beefeater costumes the staff were obliged to dress in in years past (a practice I assume they eventually rebelled against, probably saying the pay was bad enough and this was just adding insult to injury), but it was a fine convention venue.

The first person I encountered in the reception area was that ubiquitous nethead, Richard Dreyfuss lookalike, and famous typo, Gary Fraber. This was the first time I’d seen Gary since he’d stayed with Avedon and I during his 1996 UK trip, where he demonstrated his impressive mastery of kitchen equipment by brewing a pot of coffee in our kettle. Gary had travelled up from New York with Vijay Bowen and Ben Yallow in Ben’s car, a somewhat strained trip since he and Vijay haven’t really been on speaking terms for several years. I hadn’t seen Vijay since my last US trip so, after locating my room and dumping my bags, I set off to find her. She was sitting in the bar, having a snack, updating her journal, and looking wonderful. We hugged, kissed, and got down to the serious business of catching up on gossip. Gary joined us, as did Judy Bemis and – later – Chip Hitchcock and Mike Ford.

Mike was pro writer GoH and Chip's partner, Davey Snyder, was the con chair. Several hours of enjoyable conversation followed, after which I found myself in what would be the Art Show, where I finally made contact with Joe Siclari and with most of the rest of the BOSKONE 34 committee. This was where I'd spend the rest of Thursday.

Because Thursday was actually a "set-up" day rather than a con-day proper, we got to hang around with those hardy souls who'd turned up early and to help out with the art-show set-up. This was an operation of almost military precision, hordes of NESFAns unloading all the components for the art show (and all the other con equipment) from a hire truck, laying out the colour-coded tubes and clamps, and assembling them under the foremanship of Chip Hitchcock. Vijay and I pitched in and, since I quite enjoy this sort of handymannery, the hours flew by. NESFA put on a large buffet for those helping out, cooked by various members of the group (primarily the women, so far as I could tell) that was absurdly delicious and included chicken curry, spicy shredded beef, garlic chicken, cheese, ham, chicken teriyaki, cheesecake, pitta bread, brownies, dips, etc, etc. It was easily the best food I ate on my whole trip. (In fact, I've noticed a gradual deterioration in the quality of restaurant food in the US over the course of my visits, one that's paralleled a gradual improvement in the quality of food over here, to the point that I'd have to say that I now generally enjoy eating out in the UK more than I do in the US, something which would have been inconceivable a few years ago.)

I awoke at 3.30am the next morning, and again at 6am. Bowing to the inevitable, I got up, took a long, leisurely shower, and updated my diary. Later, I wandered down to breakfast where I discovered that Australian Eric Lindsay was the only other fan up and about. Obviously, we were the only two suffering from jet-lag. After breakfast, we made our way to the FANHISTORICON lounge to help Joe set up. I wasn't entirely clear on just how FANHISTORICON worked within the context of other conventions, but Joe explained that, essentially, it was an extra stream of programming within the parent con, the lounge being provided as both a social focus and programme room for it.

Since Friday was the first real day of the con, people were arriving all through the day, and I was delighted to see so many familiar faces. I had a couple of panel items, the first of which, at 6pm was "The Age of the Apa" with Elise Mattheson and Priscilla Olsen. Gary was in the audience, as was

Patrick Nielsen Hayden – my first sight of him during the weekend. The panel went OK, though I’m afraid I didn’t make any particularly profound observations. I’m in a couple of apas, but have no Deep Insights about them. Actually, with the number of panels I was on I’m afraid they’re going to take up a large part of this report. The next one, at 8pm, I was on “Forgotten Fans”, with Peggy Rae Pavlat, Joe Siclari, and Rusty Hevelin (who shot into the meeting halfway through, having only just arrived. According to the programme listing: “Forry Ackerman, Claude Degler, Bob Tucker, and Walt Willis are virtually household names to most fen. But who are John V.Baltadonis, Walt Liebscher, Jeffrey Smith, Francis Towner Laney, Sandy Sanderson, J.Michael Rosenblum, Maurice Hanson, and Joan Carr? Each of these fen had a major influence on the fandom of their time – find out why.” I explained who the last four were, though I never actually met any of them. In contrast, Rusty was able to tell of his personal experiences with those “forgotten” fen he covered. Needless to say, this was much more successful. So it goes.

My first panel on Saturday, at 10am, was “Fan Funds: What are they? Who are they for? What’s wrong with them now?”, with Teresa Nielsen Hayden, Jerry Kaufman, Joyce Scrivner, and Ben Yallow. This proved rather livelier than I’d anticipated, and there wasn’t the concentration on the recent TAFF scandal involving Abi Frost’s handling of TAFF funds that I’d expected. Instead, Ben complained about how TAFF doesn’t do enough outreach to conventions and the con-running community, about how – unlike the administrators of the other funds – TAFF administrators are even non-communicative when it comes to asking for free memberships or free rooms for the TAFF winner. There’s an expectation that these things will automatically be provided, argued Ben, and they usually are, but TAFF was doing itself no favours among conrunners. Goodwill requires maintenance. Ben is an intelligent and reasonable man, and his comments gave me a lot to think about. Mind you, the revelation this weekend that Ben is a Deadhead also gave me a lot to think about, much of it concerning tie-dyed bowties.

Following on immediately in the Fanhistoricon lounge was a round-table discussion on *Fancyclopedia III* and how to kick-start it. This is a project that has been stalled since at least 1984, when LASFS announced they were going to tackle it. Mark Olson and Joe Siclari led the discussion and a lot of positive ideas emerged. It was unanimously agreed that the best way to tackle the project was as a website with items being added as they came in and the

whole thing constantly evolving, with a print version possibly being published at some indeterminate later date. Needless to say, I volunteered to provide lots of entries on UK fandom. (And I'll start actually providing them RSN, Joe, honest!\*)

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\* While I've provided some corrections, my subsequent contribution has mainly consisted of scanning old fanzines.

At 4pm, I was on a panel about the Legion of Super-Heroes (don't ask), which was followed immediately by the fan funds auction. I'd brought over my last full set of issues of *Then*, a copy of *The Story So Far* (my first, single volume attempt at a history of UK fandom and the direct precursor to *Then*), and a copy of Dave Langford's TAFF report *The Transatlantic Hearing Aid*. Since US TAFF and US fans in general had helped out so much in the effort to replace the missing UK TAFF funds, I insisted that any proceeds from their sale go to US TAFF. I hoped to raise maybe \$20-\$30 for the lot, and was stunned by how much they actually raised. *The Story So Far* went for \$10, the Langford report for \$20, and Seth Breidbart bought the set of *Then*, after some spirited bidding, for \$50!! Great Ghu! While I was in the auction, Nigel Rowe was in the Fanhistoricon Lounge, conducting the IRC link-up with *Attitude*, which was being held in the UK the same weekend. In principle, this was a great idea, but when I saw the transcript later it all just seemed to be waffle, most of it techie waffle about changing names and the like at that. Oh well....

Saturday was the night of the banquet, and Vijay and I shared a table with Jerry and Suzle, Leslie Turek, Mark and Priscilla Olsen, and several other people whose names I failed to record. Vijay looked stunning in a golden, Indian (Asian, not NA) style gown (not a description that really does it justice or is even adequate, but like most non-TV straight guys I'm hopeless when it comes to describing stuff like this). We were stopped any number of times on our way to the buffet by people who wanted to ooh and ahh and tell her how great she looked.

After we'd all eaten, there was a humorous musical written and narrated by Mike Ford (looking splendid in conical wizards hat and gown à la Micky Mouse in *Fantasia*), and performed by the Sudbury Savoyards, called "Another Part of the Trilogy" which spoofed fantasy tropes and drew heavily on Gilbert and Sullivan – to the delight of Vijay who, unlike me, recognised most of the original source material. When this was over, the committee got the various guests (ie, Mike Ford, our table-mates Jerry and Suzle, Ron

Walotsky etc) up on the stage where they thanked everyone in uniformly witty and entertaining fashion. Though not a guest of BOSKONE proper, I'd been asked to get up, too, and I was dreading it. I'm OK on a panel in front of small numbers of people, but I always freeze when up there by myself in front of large groups of people. Fortunately Mark Olson, who told me this, had somewhat garbled the message, and all I was actually required to do was stand up and nod appreciatively. I like to think I managed this adequately.

Saturday was party night, Vijay and I eventually settling in at the Tor party where I got into a long conversation with Gary and Patrick about fan politics, fan history, computers, and the Nordic biker wars. Back in the 1980s, US and UK fans had watched in stunned amazement as the feuds in Swedish fandom escalated to unheard of levels, the participants seeming to have no sense of proportion whatsoever. Now, Nordic biker gangs were having rumbles where they were attacking each other with anti-tank missiles and other military ordnance. Seems that not only the fans over there are lacking in that sense of proportion.

My first panel on Sunday – at 11am with Joe Siclari and Fred Lerner – was “Fan Stuff: Where is it? How can we use it?”. Fred was visiting the UK with his family in the next few weeks and had emailed me asking for tourist info. I handed over a stack of stuff I'd brought with me to him before the panel, and he rewarded me with a copy of a SaM autobiography and a book he'd written – *Modern Science Fiction and the American Literary Community* – both of which were fascinating. Joe was videotaping the panel, and so captured me expounding at length on the methodology I employ when researching and writing fanhistory. Since I was for once reasonably confident and articulate, this was A Good Thing. I expect it to become required viewing when society is eventually reorganised along proper fannish lines. (I will, of course, be played by Brad Pitt in the movie, Avedon will be played by Cher, and Martin Smith will be played by Pee Wee Herman). Our audience was small, but involved.

At 1pm, I found myself on “Web Writing” with Kathryn Cramer, Daniel P.Dern. Don Sakers and Sharon Sbarsky. Since I've put together my own website (which you should all visit at [www.fiaawol.org.uk](http://www.fiaawol.org.uk)), I suppose I was an obvious choice for this one (though at the rate that fans are taking to the web, half the convention will be able to discourse on it by the time BOSKONE rolls around again). This went pretty well for the most part, and was by far the best-attended panel I was on, though it got a little bogged down in how to

make money from web content. The final point raised was about how easy it would be to set things up so that you could assemble your own SF anthology from a catalogue of short stories on the web, a sort of jukebox approach. Those professionally involved in the assembling and selling of anthologies weren't too keen on the idea for some reason.

"Fanhistory on the Internet" was a panel comprising me, Patrick, Gary, Ben Yalow, and Evelyn Leeper. I was moderator and had expressed my reservations about the panel to Joe beforehand convinced that, despite any efforts I might make to shepherd the discussion, fanhistory would inevitably fall by the wayside as everyone focused on online fandom in general. In the event the exact opposite happened, and in discussing fanhistory we all but forgot about the Internet, a strange and even heartening development in an era where the Internet often seems to sweep all other topics aside whenever fans gather. At one point, Ben was explaining about some web-resource or other that Evelyn had never encountered.

"That's OK," he said, "I've got a hardcopy of it in my room which I can show you later."

Patrick had been whispering something to me and missed this exchange.

"What was that?" he asked.

"That was Ben," I explained, "inviting a woman back to his room to see his hardcopy."

Collapse of audience.

One useful bit of fall-out from the panel was that Patrick ended up agreeing to write the Terry Carr entry for *Fancy III*. Afterwards, I hung out in the Fanhistoricon lounge for a while and got chatting to Edie Stern, who revealed that she and Joe had been planning to put out some even more special exhibits than those already on display.

"We were going to include things like an actual photo of Carl Brandon, a pair of Joan Carr's army knickers – stuff like that" she said.

"Good idea", I chuckled. "You could even have brought along the collar worn by the mad dog that kneed Harlan Ellison in the groin."

(And I wonder how many readers will know *all* the above references?)

Sunday was officially the last day of BOSKONE, and the day on which most people departed. In the evening, the committee and pretty much everyone who was still around went out to "John Harvard's Brew House", a pub/restaurant near the shuttle terminal at Framingham Mall. Everyone had been telling me how good the local microbrews were but, being unfamiliar

with them, I decided to order the five beer sampler. The first beer I tried was raspberry-flavoured.

“What do you think of it?” asked Chip hopefully, as I rolled it around my mouth in amazement.

“We don’t have a beer like this back home,” I said, smiling. “Anyone who brewed one would be taken out and horse-whipped.”

None of the five were that impressive, the least offensive being a rather watery version of Irish stout. I’ve had the occasional half-decent microbrewery beer in the US over the years, but overall I’d say they still have a ways to go yet. I didn’t fare much better with the food, choosing what turned out to be a very mediocre pizza from a menu which, to judge from the tasty-looking dishes my companions were tucking into, was actually quite good. Still, the company was excellent and that, ultimately, was what the whole trip was about. At one point, Mike Ford mentioned that his new book was called *Aspects* and I quipped that “aspect” is what you get if you bend over in an aviary. I don’t think he can have heard me properly, since he apologised for the title. Oh well.

Later, as we were leaving the place, artist GoH Ron Walotsky stopped to congratulate me.

“You were terrific!” he enthused.

“I was?” I replied, pleased but puzzled.

“Weren’t you the lead singer in the play last night?”

“Afraid not,” I laughed, “though it’s always nice to be told you were terrific. It sounds better coming from a woman, though.”

Back at the Tara, the FANHISTORICON and committee lounges were pressed into service for the dead dog party, with left over food and drink available in abundance. I tried to stay awake for this, I really did, but I nodded off during a reading by Mike Ford (no reflection on your performance, Mike) and so, when I eventually came to, bowed to the inevitable and groggily made my way back to my room.

Monday morning, around 10am, Vijay and I breakfasted with Ron and Gail Walotsky.

“How are you?” asked Ron, by way of greeting.

“Still terrific,” I replied. He laughed, then had to explain why to Gail.

BOSKONE was now well and truly over, but my trip still held one final fannish delight. Vijay and I were eating with various committee members prior to them finally getting back to Real Life, when someone asked if we’d

be interested in seeing the NESFA clubhouse. I immediately said yes. (For those who may wonder at my eagerness, I should point out that we don't have SF clubhouses in the UK and I've always wanted to see one of the US ones.) Sharon Sbarsky drove us there, through the snow-covered suburbs.

The NESFA clubhouse is owned by the club and is a large and spacious property that was once two separate stores that have since been knocked into one. It was very impressive, and everything that a clubhouse should be (other than looking like an upturned rocketship with its nose buried in the ground, of course). I took a whole roll of film trying to record it all. There were floor to ceiling bookshelves lining almost every wall, net-connected computers, lots of comfortable chairs, printing facilities and, in what would have been the storage areas of the original stores, metal racking holding the stock of the mighty NESFA Press publishing empire. This area was also where BOSKONE equipment was stored from one year to the next and, when Chip Hitchcock arrived with the truck containing this equipment – all neatly packed in numbered containers, of course – I helped with the unloading, which was conducted with the military precision I was coming to expect of the group. When this was done, the group ordered in pizza, cheese cake, and ice-cream to reward those who had laboured so hard. Talking with Davey Snyder later, I told her how impressed I'd been by BOSKONE, the clubhouse, and NESFA in general, and was disappointed to hear that they weren't very successful in recruiting younger members. "We're all getting older," She said, "and the club may have no more than another 15 years at the outside unless we do start pulling in fresh blood." I hope they do. It would be a real shame if they faded away.

I flew back to the UK the next day, after a trip that had been, in it's way, every bit as memorable and enjoyable as my TAFF trip. My deepest thanks and appreciation to everyone who chipped in, and particularly to Joe Siclari for setting the whole thing up in the first place. I had a ball.

# **CORFLU 30 (2013)**

## **Seven Days in May**

### **Day One: Wednesday 1st May 2013**

The way British Airways ticketing now works is that you can choose your seat from 24 hours before your flight without being charged. Choosing it prior to that will cost you 35 quid. This is an outrageous sum and is yet one more example of how the airlines are trying to chisel every last penny out of you they can. Needless to say, I prefer the old system where I would turn up early on the day of my flight and always get assigned a window seat. It was obvious I would need to get online as soon as the 24 hour window opened in order to choose any half-decent seat that might still be available by that point. Unfortunately, I somehow managed to screw this up and so arrived at Heathrow with no seat allocation at all. I explained my situation to the woman at the BA desk, she frowned at a screen and made a few phone calls, and I came away with an aisle seat. Result! And it was even better than I could have hoped. Once aboard it turned out my seat was one of those facing a bulkhead, so that meant more legroom and no seats in front of me. And it got better. When the guy who had the window seat arrived he asked if I'd mind switching with him. He was feeling out of sorts and expected to be using the toilet a lot. Which is how I ended up with pretty much the perfect seat.

What a shame my experience on the return flight would be almost the exact opposite of this.

On transatlantic flights the overland bits are worth looking out of the window for and the overwater bits are not. Draw a straight line between London and Seattle on a map and you might assume this would mean a lot of uninteresting time spent over the Atlantic ocean, but that's not how it works at all. First you head directly north, flying up pretty much the full length of Britain, then you turn west over the sea passing a little to the south of Iceland, cut across the tip of Greenland – easily the most spectacular views of the entire journey – down over northern Canada and the Canadian Rockies, and finally descend across the various mountain ranges to the north of the city

before coming in to land at Seattle. The journey takes nine-and-a-half hours, most of which I spent glued to my window.

The views were glorious; what happened as we landed was not. Two days before my flight I'd had my right ear syringed. It was blocked, and flying with a blocked ear is Not A Good Idea. Take off had been fine, and my ears had "popped" as they should. Unfortunately, landing was a different story. At some point during the flight the air-conditioning was turned on. Where I had been comfortable before I'd then started sniffling and felt my sinuses starting to fill. That landing *hurt* try as I might I couldn't get my ears to pop and I had a shooting pain between my eyes. When we did get down I could barely hear the guys in the adjacent seats talking. Fortunately, I was tired. This meant I was yawning a lot. Slowly, painfully, my ears gradually "popped" so that by the time I eventually found my native guide I could hear again.

Suzle was waiting for me on the far side of the baggage reclaim carousels. To my great relief I recognized her immediately.

"It's only been three years," she said. "No one changes much in that time."

Tell that to Chaz Bono.

Suzle had parked her car on the top deck of Sea-Tac's enormous parking garage "for the magnificent view."

And it was magnificent, an enormous, solitary snow-capped mountain dominating the distant skyline.

"Ah, Mount Shasta!" I said, confidently displaying my local knowledge.

"Mount Shasta is in California," said Suzle. "That's Mount Rainier."

"Ah, Mount Rainier!" I said, confidently displaying my local knowledge.

Suzle drove us several miles through the late afternoon traffic to the bus station where we would be picking up Jerry Kaufman, pointing out local landmarks on the way such as Boeing Field. Jerry's daily commute involves three buses and a ferry. Having heard Suzle describe it, I don't think I'll complain about my 35 minute door-to-door, single Underground train commute ever again. Parking near the oddly pagoda-like bus station, Suzle turned off the engine and we sat back and waited.

"Does Jerry still have a moustache?" I asked, remembering how his upper lip had gone au naturel back in 1984 and how an appalled Patrick Nielsen Hayden had apologised profusely on behalf of US fandom for me

having to witness such a thing.

“Sadly, no,” said Suzle. “It started to grow out unevenly and had gaps so he shaved it off a few years ago.”

I was glad she had warned me. Jerry appeared a couple of minutes later, the Kaufman under-nose area exposed to the world for all to see. I bore the sight manfully.

Jerry climbed in and we drove off comparing our experiences with customs officials over the years after I told them passing through Sea-Tac had been the most civilised entry to the US I’d ever experienced. Suzle mentioned that Jerry had been taken into a small room by customs when they visited Paris.

“They wanded me!” he whispered, a look of horror in his eyes. I sympathised with him.

“Those damn Harry Potter fans get everywhere,” I said, “and the French ones are the worst.”

Suzle revealed she and Jerry had first met in 1968.

“That’s 45 years ago,” I said, dazzling them with my basic math skills.

“Oh my God, it really is!” said Suzle. Now it was her turn to look horrified.

Suzle told Jerry about our sighting of Mount Rainier as we drove, diplomatically omitting my geographical faux pas.

“Ah, Rainier,” I said, “a prince among mountains!”

It took a second or so for the penny to drop, then Jerry chuckled, “It’s not named after him, y’know.”.

“I know, but it’d be cool if it was.”

As we got close to Andy and Carrie’s place Jerry pointed out a local school.

“That’s Nathan Hale High,” he said.

For once my encyclopedic local knowledge failed me.

“Who was Nathan Hale?” I asked.

“A young patriot, famous for uttering the line ‘I regret I have but one life to give for my country.’”

“Must be weird to be remembered primarily for a single line you once said,” I mused. “Still, better than the US civil war officer whose final words were ‘They couldn’t hit the side of a barn from...’”

The Hooper-Root residence is one of those split-level dwellings that to European eyes could not be more distinctly American. Carrie looked much as

I remembered, though a little greyer, while Andy was both greyer and thinner than when last I'd seen him. I was glad to see them both, and to have finally reached the end of my long journey.

We chatted, caught up a bit, and then moved down to the back garden where Andy toked up. He explained that marijuana was now legal in Seattle but as soon as we crossed into the badlands of Oregon he would become a criminal, a miscreant who would rightly be shunned by all decent, God fearin' folk.

He had an important question for me.

"Why the fuck did you send a link to a fourteen minute video of you talking?" he asked.

"Hey, it's the only one of me out there I know of," I said, "and it's been so long since some of us have seen each other I wasn't sure people would recognize me. I only expected them to watch the first minute or so."

"I watched eleven minutes," he said sadly, "it was interesting."

The plan had been that after I dropped off my bags and had a wash and brush-up we would head out to The Elliott Bay, a nearby brewpub where we would meet up with a bunch of local fans. Jerry and Suzle had gone on ahead and when we arrived they were there with Ulrika O'Brien and Randy Byers, waiting for a large enough table to come free. The bar was surprisingly popular. It was only 7pm local time yet it was already packed. It helped that as well as carrying 36 (!) listed beers, many of them brewed on the premises, they also served food. By the time we were seated Victor Gonzalez had joined us. I recognized him immediately. He seemed the least changed of any of us, but then it helps that he's also one of the youngest.

As the evening wore on we were joined by John D. Berry, Jack whose name I've forgotten, Sandra Bond, and – surprisingly – by Vicki Rosenzweig and Andy Hickmott, who had just moved to the area and were still unpacking. The final arrival was a beardless Hal O'Brien. He explained that unlike Ulrika, he wouldn't be making it to the con as he now worked on a job-by-job basis and one had come up he couldn't afford to turn down. I commiserated with him while at the same time feeling kinda guilty. I think my age cohort were the last for whom full-time salaried positions and affordable mortgages were the default. After we passed through them all the gates seem to have clanged shut behind us. I certainly know that if I was moving to London now on the (perfectly decent) salary I currently earn I couldn't afford to live there. Not only couldn't I afford to buy, I'm not even

sure I could afford to *rent* a London property these days.

Ulrika revealed she has taken up square-dancing, something she does with a gay male group. Fans' other interests are often surprising. Andy Hooper, for instance, is into wargaming and later showed me his cellar where there are drawer after drawer of tiny military figurines representing various armies from the past 3000 years or so.

"You can report this and open me up to the mockery of all," he intoned, "though I will point out that Mark Plummer used to faunchn after these very figurines and that every now and again I mail one to him."

Your secret's safe with me, Andy.

There was a large flatscreen TV on the wall of the bar showing a basketball game in progress.

"My spectator sport of choice is rugby," I told the group, before regaling them with my latest sports anecdote: Every year I follow the Six Nations competition (England, Wales, Scotland, Ireland, France, Italy). This year the match between Wales and England was the decider. Wales had to beat England by a minimum of eight points to take the title. As a Welshman living in England I naturally took a lot of stick from my work colleagues. One of them – Budd – said:

"You got no chance. We're gonna smash you."

The score was Wales 30 England 3. It was England's biggest loss to Wales in 132 years. I was ready to rub this in, but when I got into work on Monday Budd had been taken to hospital. As a means of avoiding my gloating this seemed a bit excessive. A get well soon card was purchased and everyone wrote messages of encouragement to Budd. I wrote: "Wales 30 England 3". It was the least I could do.

I intended to greet Budd on his return by wearing a T-shirt with the score printed on it, but sadly I never got round to having one made.

This being my first meal in America I opted for that signature American dish, the bacon cheeseburger. When it arrived it was at least twice the size of its British counterpart and accompanied by a plate piled high with chips – sorry, fries. I eyed these with great trepidation.

"You should all dive in and help yourselves to the fries," I said.

Afterwards, staring in dismay at my empty plate, I expressed my disappointment in Seattle fandom.

"I told you to help yourselves," I said, reproachfully. "You were supposed to prevent me from eating them all myself."

Clearly, I was going to get no help on the self-control front. This could be a problem.

The conversation ranged far and wide and I took no notes, but I do remember Andy explaining that one of the reasons he wanted to visit Seattle way back when was because of how it was depicted on an episode of *Kolchak – The Night Stalker*.

“You mean as a place where a murderous supernatural entity stalked the city?” I said.

“That was about the size of it, yeah.”

I mentioned I was hoping not to commit as big a howler this trip as I did when I visited San Francisco during my 1984 TAFF trip. Knowing the city had a big Chinese population I’d been impressed by the large signs in that language I’d been seeing everywhere, though I thought putting then on a yellow background was a little tasteless. When I’d asked Rich Coad what PED XING translated as he had laughed out loud.

“You asshole,” he’d explained. “That’s not Chinese; it’s an abbreviation for ‘pedestrian crossing’.”

Around 9pm – 5am London time – the evening came to a natural end and everyone split to their various homes. Carrie drove Andy and me back to their house, and soon after getting in I retired for the night. I still wasn’t particularly tired, but having been awake for more than 26 hours it would have been stupid to stay up longer. I might not be feeling the jet lag now, but I was pretty sure it would kick in tomorrow.

And so ended my first ever day in the Pacific Northwest.

## **Day Two: Thursday 2nd May 2013**

It was 2.30am when I woke, needing a pee. I slipped across the corridor to the bathroom to do so, hearing someone moving around down in the living area. Back in the bedroom I was too jazzed to get back to sleep, so I turned the light on and fired up my laptop. This seemed the perfect time to jot down some impressions of the previous day so I’d have something that I could expand into a full report later. Trouble is, I had taken no notes the previous day and was a bit fuzzy about the details. Starting at the beginning seemed a non-starter, so instead I jotted down what I could remember as it came to me, confident I could reassemble these fragments into something resembling the correct sequence later.

And it worked. I wrote for about an hour until I'd exhausted my memories, then turned off the laptop and settled back for more sleep. This never came. What did were more recollections, so I turned the light back on, fired up the laptop once again, and started typing. This sequence repeated itself a few more times until I actually had the outline of a decent opening chapter to my trip report.

Around 7am I heard someone get up and decided I should, too. It was Carrie, taking the opportunity to catch up on some newspaper reading while Andy was still abed. It had been him I'd heard moving around during the early hours, toiling away on some last-minute tasks for CORFLU.

"You fell asleep almost instantly after going to bed last night," said Carrie.

"I did?" I said. "How could you tell?"

"Oh, I could hear you," she said.

I couldn't believe what she was saying.

"Are you suggesting... I snore?" I said

Carrie laughed.

"Don't worry," she said, "you're not very loud – just loud enough to be heard through the door."

This is a foul calumny.

In a lifetime of sharing a bed with myself not once have I ever heard myself snore. Avedon sometimes makes this same absurd claim. Had she put Carrie up to this, I wondered? I wouldn't put it past her.

I had promised Avedon I'd Skype her when I was able to assure her I'd made it to America and hadn't plunged to a fiery death. As this was my first opportunity to do so I asked Carrie for the password to the guest account on their broadband. She happily provided this, but it wasn't recognised. So much for that idea.

Carrie was heading out to do some shopping, so I took the opportunity to go for a little walk around the community. Carrie suggested I should head down past Nathan Hale High and check out the creek beyond, so I did. It was sunny if slightly cold as I set out, but warmed up significantly as I walked. Andy and Carrie's neighbourhood is fairly hilly and as Andy later explained to me they live in a valley where there is fairly substantial run-off from the surrounding hills. The creek I was checking out was part of the drainage system and the park I found had been built as an overflow for this system, an anti-flooding measure that doubled as a nature reserve. It was actually pretty

impressive. The late Anna Vargo had apparently been on the work crew that built it.

When Andy eventually arose, he cooked us all bacon'n'eggs, though he had some difficulty eating it himself thanks to medication he was taking.

"I love the open layout of American houses," I said.

"Yeah, this is a really good party house," said Andy, "though that time we had over a hundred people here I did fear for the outside deck. If that had collapsed..."

Some years ago, in a house about a hundred and fifty yards from my own, they threw a party and crowded in more people on the upper floor than it could take. Several were killed when it gave way, so I understood Andy's concern.

After we had eaten we stepped out onto the outside deck so that Andy could sit on the stairs leading down to the garden and smoke weed to settle his stomach. This also let us take in the by now glorious sunshine and admire the long lawn spread out before us. It was going to be a hot day. As fans will, we talked about fandom and absent friends, during the course of which I mentioned I was now 58.

"You're only eight years older than me?" said Andy, in surprise.

"Jeez, I know I'm not the shining example of youth and vigour I used to be but I didn't think I'd gotten *that* decrepit," I said.

"Given how prominent and long-established you already were when I got into fandom I'd always assumed you must be older than that," he explained.

"Wait, so instead of a decrepit 58 year-old, you assumed I was a well-preserved older person? I'm not sure that's better."

It was sometime after 11.30am that absolutely positively everything that would be needed over the weekend was packed away in the hire car and we pulled away from the Hooper-Root residence, and something like twenty minutes later that we pulled back up outside it so that Andy could retrieve the camera he had forgotten.

Before getting out on the open road we had to pass through Tacoma. As we did so Andy briefly rolled down his window.

"Smell that?" said Andy. "That's the famous 'Tacoma Aroma'. They still have a couple of paper mills in town."

"Can't smell a thing," I had to admit. "My nose is still too clogged. Though whenever anyone mentions Tacoma I still chuckle at how, when they

first moved here back in the day, Patrick Nielsen Hayden was intrigued by this superhero who kept appearing in the headlines of Seattle newspapers: “Tacoman Rescues Child”; “Tacoman Captures Criminal”, etc. I love the whole idea of a superhero who names himself after a snack.”

The journey to Portland was as fascinating as American roadtrips always are to a Brit. As well as the roadsigns pointing to exotic places there was also the alien scenery. As we drove along we saw Mount Rainier, Mount St. Helens and Mount Hood to our left, each in their turn. The weather was brilliantly clear so all of them looked magnificent. You could see the gash in the side of Mount St. Helens where the eruption of May 1980 had blown out the side of the volcano. It was now a third of a century ago but Patrick had been in town on that day. Hearing the explosion, he had turned to see a mushroom cloud rising behind buildings in the distance, in the direction of Boeing field. I bet that was a brown-trouser moment.

Crossing the bridge over an extremely wide river I spotted an official sign that read (and I swear I’m not making this up):

LITTER AND IT WILL HURT.

Wow, hardcore! And yet, I couldn’t argue with how memorable and impactful it was. (Yes, I did just write “impactful”, sorry about that. In my defence, this is a report set in America.) I found myself wondering if other warnings might benefit from this approach:

LOOK BOTH WAYS BEFORE CROSSING ROAD OR DIE  
RAILROAD CROSSING AHEAD. TRAIN SMASH PUNY CAR  
PED XING: FISTS OF FURY

We stopped off twice on our journey, once at a gas station where I bought water and some delicious chocolate cupcakes, and once to eat a meal at a place called “Izzy’s”. Despite the name this didn’t appear to be Jewish. They offered an all-you-can-eat buffet, so I did.

When we arrived at the Red Lion hotel – a name that sounds like a pub to a Brit and so was instantly welcoming – we were confronted by a horde of fans milling around in the lobby, having nowhere to go. Despite falling earlier in the week and hurting his leg, Art Widner – in his mid-90s and still going strong – had driven up from California, a two day trip.

“Not one I think I’m ever gonna make again,” he said. “I need a drink. Let’s find a bar and I’ll buy you one.”

Nearby was the coffee shop and they were serving booze so in we went. Art had a Scotch and I had a Coke having (mistakenly) understood them to

have no beers other than Coors and Bud – I try to take a “when in Rome” attitude to travelling, but there are limits. Knowing my interest in the period Art started telling me about the 1930s.

“People moan about conditions now but, really, there’s no comparison,” he said. “Back then there were no jobs at all and if you couldn’t work you starved. I spent ages pounding the streets looking for work. If a burger-flipping job had existed I’d have been delighted to take it. There’s a joke they used to tell that illustrates how desperate things were. It’s about a guy looking for work who comes across another guy in a river. ‘Help, throw me a line,’ he says, ‘I’m starting a job today.’ So the first guy asks him where this job is. As soon as he tells him he runs off, leaving the guy in the river to his fate. Rushing into the manager’s office he says, ‘The guy supposed to start today is in the river so I’m here for his job.’ ‘You’re too late,’ says the manager, ‘we already gave it to the guy who pushed him in.’”

There’s an old saw about conventions that states that if you sit in one place long enough the rest of the convention will eventually come to you. This certainly proved true for us. First Frank Lunney and Gary Mattingly found us, soon to be followed by Clan Charnox (Pat, Graham, son James, daughter-in-law Shell, granddaughter Eloise), and then a veritable flood of people.

Rob Jackson handed out the latest issue of his fanzine *Inca*, which included photos he had taken during SunCon, the 1977 Worldcon. One guy in particular stood out in these, what with his luxuriant 1970s porno moustache, the disco-era pimpish strutwalk, and the laid back attitude that said “why yes, baby, I *am* wearing a medallion under my silk shirt. Why don’t you come over here and unbutton that shirt down to my belly-button for all the ladies to see?”

Yes, it was Jerry Kaufman.

In one photo Moshe Feder is holding Jerry’s fist, which is between Gary Farber’s legs. I do not judge, but I was shocked. I thought it was *much* later than this that ordinary people started dabbling in making their own gay porn.

Doug Bell and Christina Lake showed up accompanied by... Ian Sorensen? This was unexpected, and I reacted as anyone would.

“Why do people always groan when I appear?” asked Ian.

Getting up from the table I managed to knock my glass over. This had nothing to do with Ian’s arrival. Fortunately, I’d finished my drink. Unfortunately, this being America, my glass was still mostly full of ice.

Fortunately, only one leg got wet. Unfortunately, these were the only trousers I had with me. Fortunately, we've now reached the end of this paragraph.

Doug told me they had been touristing with Spike Parsons and that at a gift shop on one of the impressive local mountains she had bought a small model of a beaver.

“And, yes,” he assured me, “we did make all the obvious jokes.”

I'd have been shocked if he hadn't. It's good to see younger fans maintaining traditional standards.

Everyone moved up to con suite when it eventually opened its doors at 7.30pm. A three-room spread at the end of a fifth floor corridor, it looked as if it would be a fine space for partying. As we entered, so Dan Steffan announced the immortal words:

“The beer is in the jacuzzi!”

Isn't that wonderful? I want those words on a T-shirt. Nor was he kidding. The beer was indeed in the jacuzzi, and the jacuzzi was hard up against the bar. I don't know who would design a room like that, but I want to shake their hand. Next to the jacuzzi were two beer kegs. These contained a beer everyone simply referred to as “red”. As soon as I tried it it happily became my drink of choice for the remainder of the con. Had the con suite been open more often then I'd have drunk more of it.

I got a big hug from Lynn Steffan and a sweaty handshake from Dan. It was great to see them both again after so many years. Both now had longer hair, and Dan had acquired the long, shaggy beard of an old testament prophet, dark and shot through with grey.

Lynn was handing out badges to people, which was how I discovered I was number 060. They missed a trick there. Given the fund that brought me over they should've made me number 050. John and Eve Harvey arrived (006 and 007 respectively) and revealed they now live in France full time.

“Oh I can tell,” I said.

“How?” asked John, looking puzzled.

“It's the accents. I can barely make out a word you're saying anymore.”

“Oi, stop taking the piss,” said Eve.

“Sorry, could you repeat that?”

When we compared trip notes we realised we'd be on the same flight out of Seattle the following Tuesday.

“Great, we might be able to sit together!” I said.

“Fraid not,” said John, “you're cattle class and we're premium

economy.”

“So no associating with riff-raff like me, then? Quite right, too.”

John laughed, but did not disagree.

“We can’t get into those seats anymore,” Eve explained. “Unlike you we’re *fat!*”

I considered mentioning my diet here, the one I’ve followed all my life that consists of eating whatever I want in whatever quantities I feel like, but decided on the better part of valour.

As I predicted, this was the night when jetlag really bit me. I crashed at the ridiculously early time of 9.30pm. No sooner did I pull the sheet over me than I was asleep. Tomorrow was the official start of CORFLU. I was looking forward to it.

## **Day Three: Friday 3rd May 2013**

I woke about 3am, tried restlessly and unsuccessfully to get back to sleep, then rose and turned on my laptop to write up such notes on the previous day as I could. I took the Emmenthal cheese I’d packed for my flight then not eaten, and the remaining gas station chocolate cupcake from the fridge, snacking on them as I typed.

At 7.30am I decided it was a reasonable time to seek company and so headed downstairs. In the lobby I discovered Jerry Kaufman. With the hours he works he like me has of necessity become an early bird. We chatted for a while then decided it was time to go for breakfast.

“There’s this place I want to check out,” he said. “It’s a diner but they have great live music.”

“At breakfast time?!” I said, appalled/fascinated by the thought of such decadence.

“Well, no,” Jerry admitted, “but I’d still like to check it out anyway.”

This was fine by me so we set off, looking for Burnside Street.

“We go ten blocks down and three blocks to the left,” said Jerry.

This was a reasonably long walk but I didn’t care. It was warm and sunny but not yet so hot as to be uncomfortable. That would come later. As we walked we chatted about old friends and I took photos of anything that caught my eye. For example, the MLK freeway might be an ugly section of road, but it was ugly in ways that were fascinating to a non-American.

The further we walked the less salubrious the area became. As we turned

onto Burnside it also became more architecturally interesting.

“We’re now entering the historic district of Portland.”

“So built after 1920, then?”

“Yeah, that’s about the size of it,” chuckled Jerry.

The place we were going was called “Doug Fir” and turned out to be in the Jupiter Hotel, which looked to my eye to be a fine example of 1950s Americana. Inside it was decorated in cut-log style. Eating at one table were a mariachi band in the full matador-style black and silver gear. For a moment I thought we might get music with breakfast after all, but they were fellow customers and eating their own breakfasts. The outfits intrigued me. Had they just finished a gig, or were they heading to one? Surely they didn’t dress like that all the time? Or maybe they did, costumed avengers who went from city to city fighting crime. Perhaps they were colleagues of Tacoman. I have to admit that I’d find a comic titled *Tacoman and the Mariachi Squad* hard to resist.

The waitress took our order, and as she headed away from the table Jerry said: “The nice thing about places like this is they always have attractive waitresses.”

It was cheesy, like something ’70s disco pimpstrut Jerry Kaufman might have said, but the waitress smiled. Whether it got us better service I couldn’t say, but the food was fairly decent, if maybe a little greasier than I would’ve liked. Jerry had a bagel with lox while I feasted on a breakfast burrito – “a full breakfast in a burrito”. It was bigger than I expected – not an unusual experience in America – and also a different colour.

“It’s green,” observed Jerry, “which means it must be good for you.”

After we’d eaten Jerry kindly picked up the tab for both of us and we headed back to the hotel. On the way we passed a youngish guy shouting into a public phone.

“No, I’m in fucking Portland,” he yelled. “I just got out of the drunk tank. Why are you crying?”

It was a perfect little vignette, told in three sentences.

Back at the hotel people had started to emerge and were eating breakfast in the restaurant. We joined Doug Bell and Christina Lake who were tucking into delicious-looking plates of pancakes and eggs. Right then and there I knew what my breakfast would be tomorrow. I fired up my laptop intending to Skype Avedon, but she wasn’t online. On the table next to ours were Rob Jackson and Mike and Pat Meara. I somehow missed them getting up, but

spotted them outside a little later, climbing into a car with Nigel Rowe, who I hadn't known was at the con. As they took off for a wine-tasting – no, seriously – Nigel spotted me and waved. It had been at least a dozen years since we'd last seen each other. I was looking forward to catching up with him later.

Gordon Eklund, was keen to travel into town and check out Powell's, the huge and legendary local bookstore. Jerry and I had been discussing this very thing before going to breakfast, so the three of us decided to head out and do so before the day's activities got under weigh.

At the nearby local tram stop were ticket machines. You could either buy a two-hour pass for \$2.50 or a day pass for \$5.00. I opted for the former and slid three dollar bills into the relevant slot, whereupon a ticket was printed and change was given. Then it was Jerry's turn. He opted for the day pass, typed in the details it required, and tried to pay by credit card. The machine rejected this and deleted his details.

"You put your card in the slot," said Gordon. "Perhaps you have to press it to the touchpad instead."

This seemed plausible so Jerry typed in his details and tried again, whereupon the machine declared itself to be "Out Of Order".

"You broke it Jerry," I said, furtively checking to see if any transit staff were around and getting ready to declare I wasn't with this strangely unmoustached person vandalising valuable Portland Transit Authority equipment and had in fact never seen him before in my life.

Having destroyed one machine Jerry moved on to another. I followed of course, which meant anyone watching was unlikely to believe a claim of not knowing him. Drat. I watched nervously as Jerry approached the machine, already working on the story that I was but a poor, confused visitor from overseas who had fallen in with bad company. Amazingly, Jerry did not break this machine. After only a few minutes of pitiful fumbling he was able to hold his ticket triumphantly aloft.

Although someone watching might have erroneously perceived us as three old codgers unable to handle modern technology we were in fact fans and so of course Slans, superior beings whose mighty intellects could defeat any mere machine. Eventually. We had only missed half a dozen trams during our heroic battle with the ticket machines and so were able to enter the next one to come along with our heads held high.

The tram took us over a bridge across the river, its water sun-dappled

and inviting. I took a photo.

“Typically beautiful Portland view,” said the woman sitting opposite us. “You can walk across the bridge on its lower deck and see lots more.” This was tempting. Maybe tomorrow.

Powell’s was as huge and impressive as advertised. I was deeply envious and wished that London had something that compared to it. Unfortunately, London has been shedding bookstores for years and never had one to match this for choice anyway. Since we all had slightly different wants we decided to go our separate ways and meet back at the entrance later. In the event this didn’t actually happen. When I was ready to leave, I sought the guys out individually and told them I’d see them later. I had it in mind to check out a local comicbook shop and, following directions given me by the desk clerk, I headed out.

I obviously either misunderstood or misheard part of his directions because I totally failed to find any comics store. Footsore and weary, I climbed aboard a tram and headed back to the hotel. A few stops down Gordon Eklund got on. Was this man stalking me?

In the hotel lobby I spotted Michael Dobson. He was chatting to Rich Coad and Stacy Scott, who I hadn’t seen in far too many years – 29 in Stacy’s case. I joined them and Stacy and I bonded over shingles horror stories. This came about because of something Michael said:

“When you’re in pain, doctors always ask you to rate how bad it is on a scale of one-to-ten, but depending on the pain you’ve experienced in your life that’s going to be different for everyone.”

“That’s true,” I said. “What’s the most painful thing people here have experienced?”

After some conferring the consensus was: an abscessed tooth.

“Had one of them,” I said, “shingles is more painful.”

“I agree,” said Stacy. “I’ve had an abscessed tooth as well. Shingles was worse.”

“Two-and-a-half months of constant pain in my case,” I said, “with five minutes of excruciating agony.”

“Jeez, what happened?” asked Rich.

“The shingles was in my right leg,” I said, “and I got a cramp on top of it. That was pain turned up to eleven, a total whiteout of pain.”

Andy Hooper came through to tell us that the St. John suite, the room on the 6th floor we were using for programming, was now open and that we

could all relocate there. Since the seating area in the lobby was tiny this seemed like a good idea. On the way, I lost Rich and Stacy but bumped into Lucy Huntzinger. Like most of us (Andy excepted) there was more of her than when last we'd met but she was instantly recognizable. We seated ourselves in the rows and reminisced while Andy and Carrie Root worked on Andy's dramatic presentation script at the front. People gradually joined us and Lynn Steffan eventually set up registration in the corridor outside. This had a magnificent view over Portland but also acted like a greenhouse and it got very hot. How Lynn was able to sit there hour after hour in no apparent discomfort is a mystery.

With their panels about to happen, Mark Plummer and Claire Brialey finally showed up. They'd actually been at the hotel longer than anyone but this was the first time I'd seen them.

"Not *more* Brits?" I groaned. They laughed.

Mark had the sniffles. This was either highly significant or not, depending on whether he was to blame for the "lurgy" that struck down several of us after the con. I don't think he was, but for a while there it was being referred to as "the Plummer Plague".

Turning around I saw that Robert Lichtman and Carol Carr had arrived. I'd never met Carol before and was eager to do so but what with them chatting to others I didn't get the chance then. According to the Pocket Program there were two panels this afternoon. I watched or at least half-watched the first but have no memory of the second. This is because I was at the rear of the hall and new people kept showing up and either milled around near the tables there or outside where Lynn was sitting. One of these was Geri Sullivan who, like all too many people at CORFLU, I hadn't seen in years and wanted to catch up with. She was just as bubbly as always.

The first panel was "The Care and Feeding of the Modern Fanzine" and was led by Andy with contributions from Claire, Mark, Sandra Bond, and Rob Jackson, with Michael Dobson being invited up from the audience part-way through.. The main points of discussion were who your intended audience were (public or private) and how you generated participation. Knowing who your audience will be has always been an important part of publishing a fanzine but what does that mean in these days when we publish fanzines online and there could potentially be a faceless, silent audience of thousands reading them over and above the readership we're aiming at? Also, how do you get people to actually read your fanzine at all now that there are

so many other things competing for a reader's attention in this information-saturated internet age we find ourselves in? Good questions, but by their very nature not easily answered. Mark also revealed that because of recent, seriously outrageous increases in UK postal costs, particularly for mailing items overseas, an online version of *Banana Wings* was being made available for the first time, along with editions that could be read on Kindles and on smartphones. Given the proliferation of different devices on which stuff can now be read I imagine we'll be seeing more and more fanzines doing this in future. It's certainly something I need to consider for the updated *Then* when it eventually appears.\*

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\* The much expanded edition of *Then* was published in 2016, not only as a hardback and trade paperback but also in the three most popular ebook formats: see <https://ae.ansible.uk/?t=then>.

After the following panel came the sorting hat where we were all sorted into different houses such as Gryffindor, Ravenclaw, Gangapuff and... no, wait, sorry. Next came the drawing of the name of the Guest of Honour from the sorting fez, which was filled with the names of all those members of the con too cheap to pay to have their's left out. And the "winner" was Lucy Huntzinger. Despite Lucy's suspicions, this was not a fix.

We were not the only group in the hotel on Friday and we found ourselves sharing it with others.

"I hear a seniors' group is meeting here today," said Ulrika O'Brien.

"Yeah," I replied, "it's called CORFLU."

Ulrika laughed, but I was speaking only half in jest. James Charnock and family were here with his parents. So far as I'm aware they were the only people at the convention under 40. I think the majority of attendees were over 60 or will be in a year or two. These were my age cohort and people I was happy to be partying with, but given natural attrition, CORFLU may no longer exist a decade from now.

Come dinner time and I found myself heading out with Steve and Elaine Stiles, Gordon Eklund, Linda Deneroff, and Elinor Busby, pretty much an ideal number. Gathering larger groups of fans together for a meal makes herding cats look easy and can be both frustrating and very time consuming. Far better to my mind to latch onto a smaller group and take off quickly, which is what I did here. They were going for Japanese and, after being reassured this didn't just mean sushi, I happily tagged along. I began to have second thoughts about my decision twenty minutes or so into our long trek to

the restaurant.

Our journey was an extraordinary one. With Linda on point, we first rode the tram a couple of stops north, traversed a park where groups of furtive youths were (I later learned) dealing drugs, marched through Macy's, took the escalator up to the top deck of a multi-level parking garage, entered a mall, crossed a bridge over an ice rink where adorable little girls who were not much more than toddlers were being taught to skate, descended to ground level again and onto streets where the sun beat down on us mercilessly. By this point my right foot had started to throb and I was limping, said foot having been left with neuropathic damage following the bout of shingles I suffered in 2011. Though this isn't much of an impediment most of the time there are now limits on my mobility that weren't there before. Fortunately, there were only a couple more blocks to go before our magical mystery tour finally ended and I was able to gratefully collapse into a chair, split-infinitives be damned.

With the exception of Steve we all had the chicken teriyaki and it was delicious, as almost every meal I had in Portland was. Only Elinor did not enjoy her teriyaki. Elinor was part of an earlier, legendary generation of Seattle fans from half a century ago and while we ate I quizzed her about the Seattle Worldcon of 1961 that she had been involved with running, and Steve chimed in with amusing anecdotes of his own about the con, none of which I can now recall, alas. I don't know if modern Seattle fans have ever sat down with Elinor and interviewed her about those days, but if not they should do so. It's all too easy for that history to slip through our fingers and be lost.

Back at the hotel the others peeled off while Elinor and I looked for anyone else who might be around. There was no one. So with the con suite not open we took up residence at one of the tables in the lobby where, eventually, we were joined by Randy Byers and Carl Juarez who with Andy Hooper form the "Chungamvirote", the editors and publishers of that fine fanzine *Chunga*. Unless my memory is playing me false – always a possibility – this is the first time I've met Carl, who seems a bit quiet and reserved. We're joined in short order by Michael Dobson, and perhaps inevitably the conversation turned to fanzine publishing. Michael had been handing out copies of his zine *Random Jottings* #8, a handsome 112 page, square-bound and beautifully produced publication. It was the first issue to be published via Print On Demand and he was very enthusiastic about the process.

“They cost me \$2.62 each, which was a saving of \$1 per copy on the previous issue.”

“Fuck, that’s less than *Chunga* costs!” said Randy.

Given the size and production quality of *Random Jottings* #8, I can easily see others following Michael’s lead.

Frank Lunney and the Steffans returned from dinner and got in the elevator so Elinor and I followed them. We ended up in the St. John suite where a fair number of people had already gathered to see the next item. I took a seat in front of Rich and Stacy and was soon joined by Linda Deneroff and Ulrika, who sat themselves on either side of me. We were all there for Andy’s dramatic presentation of the history of COREFLU. This was read aloud from Andy’s scripts by Tami Vining, Jerry Kaufman, David Levine, unknown, Lucy Huntzinger, Dan Steffan, Ian Sorensen, Alan Rosenthal, and Andy himself. Andy had spent a lot of time working on the scripts, and most of those reading his words gave excellent performances.

Immediately after the panel we decanted to the con suite for the evening’s party, which was billed as “Margarita & 30th Birthday Party – Your Host: Lucy Huntzinger”. New arrivals who showed up here, who had either just got in to town or been somehow missed by me earlier included Tom Becker, and Spike Parsons. The large windows gave a good view out over Portland so when fireworks started bursting over a nearby stadium half the room stood there transfixed by the display. Personally, I didn’t find it that impressive so I used the time to catch up with Nigel Rowe, who filled me in on what he’d been up to over the past dozen or so years.

Someone whose name I don’t recall sought me out to ask me about fanhistory. He was apparently working on something to do with French fandom and wanted a few pointers. We agreed to get together at some point to discuss this but never managed to do so, though I did give him one of the small number of print copies of *Relapse* Pete Weston had sent me to hand out to people who didn’t get the pdf version and had never seen an issue before. Oddly, only a few months earlier I’d been contacted by a fan who was researching the history of German fandom and wanted me to point him in the right direction. Fortunately, I was able to do so. Though I suppose I am, I still haven’t got used to being regarded as an expert authority on, well, anything.

It’s a truism about conventions that while parties are often the most enjoyable part of the event they’re also often the part you recall the least about the next day, probably because alcohol. This was certainly true for me

for pretty much every night at CORFLU. Before leaving the party for my room around midnight, I recall sitting on the floor in the bedroom attached to the con suite surrounded by Ulrika, Suzle, and Carrie Root. This was a very agreeable position to be in, but what we talked about I haven't a clue.

## **Day Four: Saturday 4th May 2013**

My sleep was still all over the place, but that was hardly the fault of CORFLU since I've been insomniac for years; if I succeed in getting as much as five hours sleep I count that a good night. However, this morning's early rising was not caused by either jet-lag or insomnia but by a sudden muscle cramp in my left calf. Snapping awake, I gave a manly scream, and leapt out of bed, hopping/pacing up and down and chanting the usual mantra of "Ow! Ow! Ow!" in an attempt to get the knot out.

It was 5am and after abluting, I took out my laptop and began making notes on the previous day's activities. By 7.40ish I was written out so I headed down to the lobby to see who else was around. This turned out to be Karen Schaffer, who had a box of bizarre looking doughnuts on the table in front of her.

"Good morning, Rob," she said. "Would you like to sample some voodoo doughnuts."

"Of course I would," I said, sitting down and eyeing them dubiously.

The doughnuts came in all manner of alarming shapes and colours. One was in the form of a gingerbread man covered in chocolate, a stake driven through its heart. Another looked like a conventional cake topped with golden icing. What destroyed that appearance of normality were the two strips of bacon on top of the icing, real bacon and not some sort of doppelganger crafted from sugar. I am not making this up.

"Go ahead," said Karen, "it's really good."

Karen seemed too nice a person to have concocted such a thing purely to catch out innocent foreigners and laugh at their discomfit, so I accepted a piece of the bacon-maple doughnut. And it was delicious. Seeing the surprise on my face, Karen burst out laughing. We sat there discussing gardening of all things – I'm of the nuke'em and pave'em over school – until Geri Sullivan and Pat Virzi showed up. They were heading off to a pancake house for breakfast with David Levine and Kate Yule shortly, and so ate no more than a desultory half-dozen doughnuts while waiting for David and Kate. When they

set off I did so too, not for breakfast in my case but in an attempt at walking off the knot in my left calf. I took streets at random, at one point photographing a Buddhist temple bell for professional reasons, before circling back to the hotel in time to join Jerry, Suzle, Ulrika and Lucy for breakfast. I had pancakes with a ham steak and for once the meal was too big for me.

We mostly chatted about absent friends and how awkward it can be trying to maintain neutrality when they break up. As the meal ended and we were preparing to leave Bryan Barrett joined us. Ulrika and I stayed to chat with him while the others took off. Bryan now gets about with the aid of a wheeled walking frame. This is the man who on a visit to the UK once corrected Arthur Thomson when Atom said he'd always assumed the Republicans were like our Tories and the Democrats were like Labour.

"No," explained Bryan, "it's the Democrats who are like your Tories."

"Then what does that make the Republicans?" asked Atom, looking puzzled.

"Brownshirts."

Thanks to his illness Bryan had had to declare medical bankruptcy.

"Medical bankruptcy is a concept unknown in the UK," I told him.

"It should be unknown in *every* country," he replied, with feeling, "and certainly in any country that considers itself civilised."

Today was Free Comic Book Day. I only knew this because someone had asked about it during yesterday's opening session. I'd been intending to check out a local store anyway and pick up this week's arrivals, hence yesterdays abortive search, so I resolved to do so now while it was still early in the morning. Ulrika decided to join me so that we could each catch up with what the other had been up to lately. My calf was still throbbing so I figured the walk could only do me good. Based on Dan Steffan's description of the comics store as being within walking distance I also figured it couldn't be too far away. I figured wrong. As we trekked through mile after endless mile of insufficiently shaded street, a ferocious sun beating down on us, I started to feel really guilty about Ulrika being along with me. I'd promised her a brief walk and this was turning into anything but. It wasn't "walking distance" as that phrase is generally understood by most people. Indeed it was "walking distance" only in the sense of containing both "walking" and "distance", lots and lots of "walking" and "distance". Many and colourful were the muttered imprecations I heaped on the hairy head of Daniel J. Steffan.

Eventually we reached the comics store – Thing From Another World. We could tell we'd reached it even before we saw it. This was because of the pirates.

Standing outside the store, enthusiastically “arrrhing” and “shiver me timbering” away were several large men dressed as pirates and waving cutlasses around. There were still more inside the store. I have no idea what this had to do with Free Comic Book Day, or indeed things from another world, but who am I to deny others their simple pleasures? The shop was packed, with a long queue snaking around to the cash register. I picked up the couple of comics I'd actually come for and again felt guilty. This was going to take a while which meant Ulrika would have to hang around waiting for me.

I briefly looked at the shelves of action figures, but as usual they never have what you want. In my case this was “Seventies Disco Pimp-Strut Jerry Kaufman! Now With Kung-Fu Grip!” I would even have settled for the version that comes without the space hopper.

We caught a bus back to the top of the street the hotel was on, of course – I wouldn't have dared suggest we walk – but while waiting for it we saw even more pirates arriving at the comics store. What was going on? Perhaps when Thing From Another World was done with Free Comics Day they were all planning to sail away in it, to hoist the Jolly Roger and attack rival comics stores, boarding them and relieving them of their treasures. It seemed the only rational explanation.

The con suite had opened by the time we got back to the hotel. I poured myself some red from the keg and we sat chatting with Linda Deneroff, Bryan, and Milt Stevens until the first program item of the afternoon in the St. John suite. This was “The Class of 1970: A Fannish Tribal Reunion” featuring Jeff Schalles, Dan Steffan, John D. Berry, Frank Lunney, and “Bill Kunkel’s Ghost”. A fascinating panel, it covered an era of US fanhistory I know little about. Jay Kinney joined in from the audience and was quickly drafted onto the panel, as was – once again – Michael Dobson. Dan told the story of an early convention they were at where he was the only one who had a room so the others all slept on his floor.

“We all had our assigned spots on the floor,” explained Frank, “all except John D.Berry who announced that he would be sharing the bed with Dan. John didn’t do floors; he always took the bed.”

It would be interesting to see the group’s “rookie cards” from back then,

if such things existed, since the only person on the panel who still looked the same as when last I'd seen him was Jeff Schalles. He put this down to being meat-free for the past three decades, and if given the chance would happily bend your ear about the benefits of this and other dietary choices he had made down the years.

I was on the following panel "Ink Stained Memories: Fanartists Look Back" along with Jay Kinney, Dan Steffan, Steve Stiles and "Bill Rotsler's Ghost". We all talked about how we started drawing for fanzines and when it was my turn I mentioned the collaborative covers I did for my fanzine *Epsilon*, including one I worked on with Dan.

"It was a Will Eisner pastiche," I told the audience. "I laid it out and Dan turned in this note-perfect version of an Eisner drawing – well apart from the little cartoon guy peeing into the river."

"Yeah, and Eisner may have seen that cover," said Dan.

"Wait, what?!"

"Rob sent me a bunch of copies of the cover when he mailed me the fanzine, so I forwarded one to Eisner's assistant. He didn't get back to me, but you never know...."

"I was on a panel with Eisner at a convention once," said Steve, "and he turned to me and said 'I like your work.' It's one of the most treasured moments of my life."

"We've all met people whose work we admire," I said, "but those meetings don't always work out *quite* how we might've hoped. Alasdair Grey was GoH at the first MEXICON, a writer whose work I greatly admired. Included in the con's registration pack was a fanthology that reprinted an infamous, scurrilous, libellous conreport by Leroy Kettle. He read this. Which is why when highly-respected literary figure Alasdair Grey met me he peered at my name badge and said, 'Oh, you're the one who farts!'"

I was also on the following panel so when the others departed I remained seated. I was soon joined by Rich Coad, Graham Charnock, and Roy Kettle. Roy demanded beer.

"I can't do a panel without beer!" he said, as if the very suggestion was absurd. Which in the UK it would be. Beers were dutifully brought and placed in front of each of us.

"This is what a real British convention panel looks like," I told the audience, "breathe in that authenticity."

The title of the panel was the apparently generic "Lager, Lager, Lager &

UK Fanzines: a Ratrospective”, but that last word tells you what it really was. This was a panel about Ratfandom.

When Dan had first asked me about the panel it soon became clear he thought of me as a Rat. I explained that while flattering this was wrong. I also pointed out there was someone coming to the con who should be on any panel about Ratfandom: Rich Coad. Dan had originally been considering Sandra Bond as moderator, but Rich was obviously a much better fit. He opened by asking Roy about the origin of Ratfandom.

“There used to be this thing in British fandom called ‘Silly Animal Fandom’,” said Roy, “with groups naming themselves after animals. So you had wombatfandom, shrimp fandom....”

Shrimp fandom?

Roy continued in this vein – very entertainingly – for a while, then the mike was handed to me.

“To correct what Roy’s just told you...” I began (Much laughter. Roy buries his face in the table.) “...there was in fact never a shrimp fandom, but there was a kittenfandom. Also, at first the Rats were gonna be axolotl fandom. I am not making this up. Wombatfandom was the ‘brainchild’ of Dave Womack, editor of *Viridiana*. Greg Pickersgill’s review of *Viridiana* in *Foul* #3 may be one of the most famous – and most quoted – fanzine reviews of all time. A lot of British fanzine fans know it by heart.”

I then launched into it:

“Jesus Christ I’m reading this bloody thing right now and I can’t believe it. It’s worthless. It gets Brit fandom a bad name it hardly deserves, bad as it is. Every copy ought to be sought out and burned, with editor Womack securely roped down in the middle of them,” I said, finishing there.

“My fury knows no bounds,” added Mark, Claire, and Sandra Bond from the audience, in unison, supplying the closing line I’d forgotten and proving my point.

Roy went on to say it was all very different than legend would have it, and that he and Rob Holdstock actually bonded over shared laundry, though the pub they used to meet in did have the memorable name of “The Goat in Boots”. I prompted where, necessary and one by one the various characters were introduced.

“As well as Holdstock there was Peter Roberts,” I said, “the man who lived in a cupboard.”

“It really was a cupboard,” said Rich. “When I showed up at a Globe

meeting, Graham volunteered him as someone to crash with, so I did. For a while I slept on the floor next to his bed. Peter says he's never wanted to kill anyone more in his life. Great days. Ratfandom has this reputation for being nasty and unfriendly, but you took a visiting American you didn't know from Adam under your wing."

"That's because we thought you were a girl," said Roy, to laughter. "No, really, I know it's hard to believe looking at him now but he was slim and pretty and had long blonde hair."

"How did you first meet Malcolm Edwards?" I asked.

"Ah, that came about because we thought he was a girl," said Roy, revealing a disturbing inability to determine gender among the Rats. "There was this woman in British fandom at the time named Lisa Conesa and we thought this must be her. Sadly, it wasn't."

"You guys also ran an Eastercon," I said, thinking of SEACON '75.

"An Eastercon?!" said Graham. "We ran a *Worldcon*!"

And I suppose they did. Greg says Ratfandom existed from 1970 to 1974, but that's not necessarily how the other Rats see it. In terms of the majority of the group acting in concert, the 1979 Worldcon can be seen as their last hurrah. Ironic then that Peter Weston was the Con Chair given the not always cordial relations between him and Ratfandom.

Pat Charnock – the most prominent female Rat – was called up from the audience and joined us briefly.

"Pat is the only one of us ever to appear naked on the cover of a Ratzine," said Graham. "Well, her bottom did, anyway."

This is true, A photo of Pat's bum forms the cover of Peter Roberts' *Egg* #9 (Feb '75), but more importantly she also edited the legendary fanzine *Wrinkled Shrew*.

"The main Rat fanzines received limited distribution in the US," I said, "and there remains this perception of a disconnect between much of UK and US fandom through most of the 1970s. When Rich Coad sent his collection of Ratzines around in the early 1980s, Patrick Nielsen Hayden said they created this small series of explosions among them."

"Among us, too," chimed in Ted White from the audience. "Reading them a few years later it was clear the spirit of fandom had been extremely active in UK fanzines of that period and I was sorry we'd missed it. Wanting to connect with you guys was one of the main reasons Dan and I started *Pong*."

Afterwards, thinking about that *Egg* cover, I told James Charnock that I hoped he wasn't too shocked by these revelations about what his parents had got up to in their youth.

"It's not a problem," he explained. "Whenever they talk about that stuff I just stick my fingers in my ears and go 'la la la la'."

It was now time for dinner and I found myself heading out to a pie shop with the Harveys, Nigel Rowe, and Nigel's niece Calyx (pronounced "kay-lix"), who was passing through. Getting there was a bit of a trek, though nowhere near as long and convoluted as last night's epic journey to the Japanese restaurant. When we entered the pie shop it became clear why Nigel had chosen it. There on the back wall were a New Zealand flag and an Aussie one.

"I see the Australian flag is bigger," I said to Nigel, "which is only right."

I wasn't actually certain which is which – they both look like Britain after dark to me – but since Nigel didn't correct me I obviously got it right. He didn't rise to the bait, which impressed me. Back when he lived in London it was easy to wind him up.

"Hey Nigel," I remember saying to him on one occasion, "what's the world's shortest book?"

"I don't know," he'd replied, "what is the world's shortest book?"

"Who's Who in New Zealand."

"That's not true, there are loads of world famous people who come from New Zealand," he said, obviously stung. He then reeled off a list of names, each of which Martin Smith and I responded to with a shake of the head or a puzzled frown, which got Nigel more and more worked up. Ah, happy times!

The shop/restaurant served food Nigel presumably remembers from home. Fortunately this didn't include witchetty grubs or Vegemite. I had a chicken salad sandwich and, again, could only finish half of it. The half I didn't finish would be tomorrow's breakfast, something which was becoming a pattern with me. I sat opposite Calyx, who was very pretty, had long blonde hair, and was in her early twenties. She was currently making her way around the world in that enviably fearless fashion some youngsters have and had dropped in on the con during her travels to see her Uncle Nigel. She was bright, witty, and good company.

At the end of the meal the waiter presented the bill and asked if any of us qualified for the "honored citizen" discount. We had no idea what this was

until he explained it applied to the over-65s. An old fart discount, in other words. Only John qualified, so he took advantage of it because why not?

“How’s it feel to be an ‘honored citizen’?” I asked him as we were leaving.

“Bloody silly name,” he grumbled.

“Oh, I agree,” I said. “I hate that sort of thing. It always seems so condescending. I’m 58 years old, not 58 years young.”

Back at the convention there was an item in the St. John at 9pm led by Michael Dobson. Chairs were circled, and people reminisced about things from a list of topics that had been handed out. I dropped in on this but soon felt myself falling asleep so I returned to the con suite, clambering over a snoring Rob Jackson to do so.

In the con suite more Voodoo Doughnuts had been bought and multiple beers laid in for the beer tasting. Randy Byers and Andy Hooper were serving. Ulrika and I sampled many. Most were good but some were weird. One in particular was obviously nothing more than hot sauce. Try as I might, I couldn’t stay the course and I eventually fell asleep.

I was awoken by Andy Hooper gently bellowing in my ear.

“YOU’RE DONE, ROB, BUT YOU CAN’T TELL” he soothingly intoned. “GO TO BED!”

To placate Andy, and so that my eardrums would stop ringing, I did.

## **Day Five: Sunday 5th May 2013**

Up at 6pm. I ate the cold sandwich from last night and decided it was time I tried to make a cup of tea from the fixings in the room. I examined the tea-bags provided with suspicion. There was decaf – which I dismissed out of hand – and fully leaded, which at least *looked* and smelled decent enough. With some misgivings, I decided to proceed. There was no kettle only a coffee maker. Clearly you were supposed to use this for your hot water so I filled it with the requisite amount from the tap and placed my cup underneath. The device hissed and spluttered away, spitting hot water at the tea-bag until the cup was full. This was not a method I’d ever seen recommended for making even a semi-decent cup of tea, but the coup de grace was delivered when I realised no milk or cream had been provided, only powdered non-dairy creamer. Having no other alternatives I added this to the tea. The result was possibly the most disgusting cuppa I’ve ever tasted.

After a single sip, I poured it down the toilet.

Up and out by 8.30am, I nipped outside the hotel to take some exterior photos of it. Back in pre-digital days a roll of film would only take 36 shots and developing and printing was expensive so you tended to be both parsimonious and very selective in what you chose to photograph. Now that those costs no longer apply and a camera can hold 1000 shots you can snap away with total abandon, discarding any shots that are substandard when you come to review them later. The problem is that I have to keep reminding myself this is now the new paradigm when it comes to cameras and I still don't take as many snaps as I could and should.

Returning to the lobby I found Ulrika O'Brien and Jerry Kaufman. Ulrika gave me a flash drive containing a TV show she'd recommended and I copied this to my laptop for later viewing. As I was doing so we were joined by Robert Lichtman and Carol Carr, followed by Bryan Barrett. Christina Lake and Doug Bell arrived next with some startling news.

"This hotel is a member of OMPA," said Doug.

"Huh?" I replied.

"What's OMPA?" asked someone.

"Britain's first apa, now defunct," I said. "They put on the second Eastercon to be held in Bristol. The first was called BRISCON. Moshe Feder did a spit-take when I told him."

"I can see why," chuckled Carol.

"Yeah, well, I don't think anyone made the connection with a bris," I said. "I mean I can't see them *intentionally* naming our national convention for that year after a circumcision ceremony."

"Never mind that," said Bryan, "what's this about the hotel being in OMPA?"

"It's on the door as you come in," said Doug.

I went over and checked the various signs and logo transfers on the glass panel next to the main door and sure enough there it was: OMPA – Oregon Media Production Association. Naturally, I took a photo. They have a website for those of you interested in finding out more. When you put "OMPA" in your search engine do not be misled by links for the Orinda Moraga Pools Association and Oficina de Marques del Principat d'Andorra.

"We could hold OMPACON 2 here!" said Doug, getting carried away.

The conversation turned to convention reports and I outlined my conreport writing philosophy for them.

“D. West says they should be ‘the truth, the whole truth, and a few lies to make it interesting’. My reports are the truth,” I explained, “but *enhanced*. I give the truth a little nip and tuck, and maybe a nose job, but I never go as far as breast implants.”

The Buffet Brunch was at 11.15am so we all dutifully traipsed upstairs to the restaurant, where we milled around. This was when I realised I’d left my bag – containing my laptop – in the lobby. I rushed downstairs to retrieve it. When I got back everyone was seated and at first there didn’t appear to be spare places at any of the tables. Fortunately, I eventually found one next to Graham Charnock at the table occupied by Clan Charnox and others. Graham had set up his tablet to record us as we ate. Amazingly, according to viewing logs, there was actually someone online and watching the feed of us feeding. Somehow, I’d signed up for a reality TV show. Did Graham leave the feed on in their room while he and Pat were sleeping, I wondered? You might think no one would be interested in watching them slumber but in the days of the *Big Brother* TV show the cameras were on the housemates 24/7 and you could indeed watch them sleep if that was your thing. I don’t know who would want to watch Graham sleeping, his sonorous snoring broken by the occasional loud fart, but then it’s a funny old world.

As if reading my thoughts Graham turned the feed off, thus depriving our viewer of his entertainment. Good thing, too. He should have been using his computer to surf the web for porn like a normal person.

Someone pointed out that Mount St. Helens was visible from the restaurant windows and looking magnificent, and so it was. What a backdrop to our brunch an eruption would have made. I told Dan he’d missed a trick, and he promised to try and arrange one the next time a con is held in the Red Lion.

The food was pretty good and afterwards we were treated to the GoH speech. Or rather the GoH performance. Lucy read out a pirate drama she’d composed in old Norse – no, really. Ulrika O’Brien provided a “translation”, while Tami Vining and Jeanne Bowman played the parts of the pirates. Tami really got into this, whacking all around her with gusto, not just Jeanne but also those at nearby tables. It was just as well her sword was made of foam. Next came the awards. Bill Burns’ mighty “efanzines” won in the Best Website category, while my own site came in fourth. Not bad considering the competition.

I’d asked Dan to call me to the podium so that I could thank those who

contributed to the fund that brought me over to CORFLU XXX. He eventually remembered to do so and I found myself standing there, looking out over the assembled members of the convention. I began with a joke but was as stilted as I always am when speaking to an audience by myself and fumbled the whole thing, despite having notes in front of me, proving to myself yet again that this is an ability I just do not have. Put me on a panel and I'm fine, but I can't fly solo. If I ever have to do so again I think I'll record it beforehand, then when I go up to the podium I can just open my laptop, turn it towards the audience, and hit "play". Still, while I may have fumbled things on the day, writing this trip report gives me a second chance to say what I should have then, so here goes:

"I'm not sure why those of you who contributed to the CORFLU 50 fund chose me to be its beneficiary this year, but I'm glad that you did. This is only my second time on the West Coast. My first was 29 years ago and I was 29 years old, so it's been half my lifetime between visits. That first time was my TAFF trip, and I visited LA and San Francisco. I'd always intended to include Seattle and the Pacific Northwest as part of that trip but time and circumstances and my available vacation time conspired against me. So in many ways this feels like a coda to my TAFF trip, the bit I never got to take first time around especially since once again I find myself in the US thanks to the generosity of others. To all of those who contributed to the fund I say a heartfelt "thank you". I've had a great time at the convention and I only hope you've enjoyed having me here half as much as I've enjoyed being here. Thank you one and all."

This is what I should have said on the day. Please edit your memories of the event accordingly.

The Dead Dog Party began in the con suite shortly after the brunch concluded and it continued into the early hours of the morning with only a break for dinner. It was here, to much amusement, that Spike Parsons complained she'd lost her beaver.

"Was it furry?" asked Tami Vining, wagging a crooked finger, an action the other women listening to Spike all immediately copied.

"Yes," said Ulrika.

"Ah then that explains it," I said, "she lost it to a Brazilian."

No one laughs. It's not until we're in the corridor a little later that Ulrika finally let out a chuckle.

"You're just too damn subtle," she said.

I didn't think it was that subtle, but whatever.

It seems like only minutes ago since we ate but by 6.30pm a sizeable contingent of those present are ready to head out for food. John and Eve Harvey say they don't fancy going out into the sweltering heat and will eat in the restaurant instead. This sounded good to me, so soon afterward the Harveys, Nigel Rowe, and I headed upstairs. I ordered a turkey sandwich but barely touched it. I really was not very hungry. Oh well, that was tomorrow's breakfast sorted. Again.

Nigel decided to take a photo of me with John and Eve to send to Avedon to let her know I was still alive, our plans to stay in touch having all come to naught.

"Caption it 'Rob and two French people'," I suggested.

Steve and Elaine Stiles joined us and ordered food. Steve got very agitated by the waitress not seeming to know what white bread was and the failure of his increasingly detailed descriptions of same to get through to her. She assured him that whatever it was he was describing was something the hotel didn't carry. Shortly afterwards my sandwich was delivered – on white bread.

Nigel decided this was the perfect time to take a photo of me with Steve and Elaine to accompany the earlier one.

"Caption it 'Rob with elderly Americans'," I told him.

"Hey!" protested Elaine.

"OK, caption it 'Rob with honored citizens'."

Elaine was suitably mollified. Clearly, they hadn't been offered the discount when eating out in Portland.

Rich Coad then joined us, as did Robert Lichtman and Carol Carr. They started reminiscing about Dick and Pat Lupoff and how they went from being clean-cut Republicans to dope-smoking bohemians.

"I remember being asleep on the floor at one of their parties," said Steve, "and their dog walked over me and put one of his paws right in my mouth. There's nothing quite like being woken with a dog's foot in the back of your throat."

For some reason this image totally cracked me up. I laughed when Steve told the story, I laughed when I told it to others, and I laughed typing it out

just now.

Someone mentioned the YouTube video of me I had sent people a link to.

“On seeing it Ted White commented on how white my hair had gone except for the dark blob at the rear.”

Carol Carr hadn’t seen this so I dutifully turned my head so she could.

“It’s a real shame it doesn’t form an image of a guy with a beard,” I said, “because if it did people would proclaim it to be an image of Jesus and would come from miles around to see it. I’d then be able to say ‘No, it’s just a random bearded guy. For all we know it could be an image of Willie Nelson if it’s anyone. You’re just riddled with superstition.’ And the reply would come: ‘Is that any way to speak to your mother?’”

Returning to the con suite, we didn’t have to wait long before almost everyone who had gone out for dinner also returned. I chatted to Ted and Dan about various writers and publishing. Around us people were already leaving, departing the convention. I leapt up to give Spike a goodbye hug, then Jerry and Suzle, and several others too until it was Ulrika’s turn. She was travelling back to Seattle with Randy Byers and Carl Juarez and I helped carry stuff down to their car. I’d be seeing her there tomorrow, but we hugged anyway.

Back in the con suite Nigel had an app on his phone that let him take b&w photos and deliver them as a four-strip. Since the photobooth planned for the banquet brunch was a bust – it wouldn’t fit in the elevator – he insisted on taking photos of all of us. Lots of good conversation followed, none of which I recall of course. I do remember it was Jay Kinney I was talking with when I took a toilet break, saying I’d be right back, which I wasn’t. Sorry Jay, it’s nothing personal. In my room I used the toilet, realised just how tired I was, and crashed out. It was 11.15pm when I climbed into bed.

Then I started to itch. A lot.

Unable to sleep, I got up and discovered I was covered in hives. So I took an anti-histamine, got dressed, and headed back out. Better to be among others than in my room trying hard not to scratch. I had no idea what my body was reacting to this time but at least it was only hives and not also lips swelling up fit to burst and my eyes swelling shut – “the full elephant man”, as I tend to think of it.

The crowd in the con suite had thinned out considerably and was down to a dozen or so people. I got talking to John D Berry, Hope Liebowitz, and

Geri Sullivan. We discussed volcanoes, earthquakes, hurricanes, and their experiences of same.

“It’s odd listening to how casually you talk about this stuff, particularly as it’s something I’ve never experienced and never will and... wait!” I said, realisation dawning, “I’m here now. I will be until wheels-up on Tuesday. There are still two days in which things could go pear-shaped on me.”

It was a sobering thought. Not that I needed sobering – just the opposite, in fact. A few beers might have helped take the edge off the hive itching.

By this point I was the last Brit in the room, and in fairly quick order the surviving Americans also departed. I shook hands with Ted, got a hug from Frank, and soon found myself alone with Dan and Lynn. While Lynn bustled around putting bottles and cans into plastic sacks, Dan quizzed me on the Sixth fandom fans I’d known.

“You were lucky enough to know them as friends,” he said, “so what were Arthur Thomson and Chuck Harris really like?”

“They were like a comedy double act,” I told him. “Funny individually, but funnier together. Great guys, both of them. I still miss them enormously.”

“Yeah, and for a self-taught artist Atom had an amazing imagination. I wonder who inspired him? Did you ever talk to him about such things?”

“No, alas.”

“I know that he was always very self-effacing and humble in the letters I exchanged with him and disinclined to take my praise too seriously. Fandom was sure lucky to have him for as long as we did.”

We really were.

We chatted some more, but eventually, I told Dan and Lynn I needed to leave so that they could get to bed. I got hugs from both then headed for my room.

It was the first time I’d ever been last man standing at a room party. I felt oddly proud of myself, and kinda humble.

## **Day Six: Monday 6th May 2013**

After only two and a half hours sleep I woke up. I tried staying in bed, but it was no good so I got up and wrote up my notes on the previous day, tucking into last night’s left over turkey sandwich as I did so. By 8.30 am I was done, so I packed away all my stuff ready to check out. It wouldn’t be until I reached Seattle that I’d realise I’d left my computer power cable in the room.

I needed some more batteries for my camera so headed out to find a 7-11, meeting Linda Deneroff and Elinor Busby coming the other way, taking their morning constitutionals. When I was a young fan you'd be lucky to encounter many of your contemporaries before lunch, but age seems to make early risers of us all.

At the hotel I met the Mearas coming down in the lift and we checked out together. I hadn't really got to talk to either of them during the con so this was a chance to snatch a conversation, however brief. Having checked out it was then just a matter of waiting in the lobby for Andy and Carrie to appear. We'd agreed a departure time last night so I didn't get to chat too long with people before they showed up. After saying our goodbyes to those in the lobby we stowed our bags in their car and took off. I explained how little sleep I'd managed to get and warned them I'd almost certainly nod off, which I did. Unfortunately it was not very restful.

A few miles out from Portland we pulled off the highway and stopped in the small town of Centralia. Andy and Carrie wanted to look up a Mexican restaurant called La Tarasca that had been recommended to them, which was fine by me. It was now late morning and blisteringly hot outside so the cool interior of the restaurant was much appreciated.

The woman who took our orders was, I think, the owner. Certainly when Andy told her all the good things he'd heard about the place she kept saying: "The Lord has been good to us." I was a bit disconcerted by this since that level of open invoking of a deity isn't something I'm used to. I didn't say anything of course, because to do so under the circumstances would have made me a dick. This really wasn't one of those times when – in that famous, eye-watering phrase – it was appropriate to peel back the foreskin of superstition and apply the wire brush of reason.

The food was superb, but I couldn't finish mine – a delicious pork and bean dish called "carnitas" – due to feeling out of sorts. Fortunately what I left was put in a carton for me. It would make a fine breakfast tomorrow. Yeah, I know – yet again.

When we got back in the car, Carrie suggested I stretch out across the back seats. I did so gratefully and kept my eyes closed, semi-dozing, until we were about 20 miles from Seattle.

At the house, I tried grabbing some more zzz's while Andy and Carrie headed out to find food for the evening's barbecue. The first to arrive for this, some hours later, was Ulrika, who helped Carrie prepare the food.

Tables and chairs were set up out on the deck and Andy fired up the barbecue, tossing chicken portions and beefburgers onto the grill to sizzle and sear away as people started to show up. According to my notes the eventual roster included me, our hosts, Hal and Ulrika O'Brien, Leroy Kettle and Cath Mitchell, Victor and Tamara Gonzalez, Jerry and Suzle, Glenn Hackney and Kate Schaefer, Doug Bell and Christina Lake, Randy Byers, and John D. Berry.

I found myself sitting at a table with Ulrika and Tamara Gonzalez. Tamara had been at CORFLU but we hadn't talked. Dan had made a comment about her being in "oil futures" and I was about to ask her what this entailed when there was a sudden commotion behind me as John D. Berry's chair collapsed beneath him, leaving him sprawling on the deck. Fortunately he wasn't hurt.

It soon got dark enough and cool enough that we moved inside and split naturally into two groups. One group stood around down in the kitchen/dining area, while the other sat up in the TV/lounge area. Perhaps unwisely given how prone I'd been to nodding off all day, I was in the latter group. We talked music and Doug revealed he has similar tastes in music to the rest of us even though we're all a good ten to fifteen years older than him.

"It was going through my parents' record collection when I was a kid that did it," he explained (of course it was). "We had this thing at school where you had to bring in three tracks to play to the rest of the class. My three were the Bonzo Dog Doo Dah Band, Meatloaf, and Bananarama."

I laughed.

"That could well be the only time in human history those three have ever been played together," I said.

For some reason the talk turned to fanart and I told them about something surprising I learned I could do.

"I'm out of practice now, of course," I explained, "but back in the day I could draw the human form starting from any part of it you could name."

"The spleen," said John D. Berry.

"The spleen?" I said. "No-one in all of history has ever drawn a human body starting with the spleen."

"You said you could draw it starting from any part," said Doug Bell.

"Yeah, but I was thinking of things like a foot, or a shoulder, or maybe even a buttock, not an internal organ. I mean, come on! Most people don't know what a spleen looks like, or what it does, or even that they have one."

Shit, there are probably people out there who think The Spleen are an alien race who fought Captain Kirk.”

“The Spleen could also be the name of a Sixties pop-group,” mused John.

I could see this. They would have been the opening act for The Who during their early Mod days.

“Cool word, ‘spleen’,” said Doug. “I really like the sound of it.”

“Who doesn’t love ‘spleen’?” I agreed. Ulrika wandered over.

“What’re you guys talking about?” she asked.

“Spleens,” said John.

“Spleens?”

“Spleens,” I confirmed.

I had now said “spleen” more in five minutes than I usually do in five years.

As the evening wound down so people started to leave in their ones and twos and I got to say my final goodbyes to them. This was it. CORFLU really was over now. When the last of them had gone I immediately crashed out and was soon asleep. I have no memory of the last thing to pass through my mind as I drifted away. It was probably “spleen”.

## **Day Seven: Tuesday 7th May 2013**

As had now become my routine, I breakfasted on left-overs from the day before, and as expected my carnitas made a fine start to the day. What also made a fine start to the day was the walk I took through the neighbourhood with Andy. We climbed a hill on the opposite side of the valley that gave a good view across the whole area, talking all the way about its development. It was a pleasant, soothing way to pass the time after a full-on weekend with lots of people.

My flight back to the UK was at 6.55pm, which meant I had to be at the airport by around 4pm. Carrie had to work but the plan for the day for Andy and me was that Glenn Hackney and Kate Schaefer would pick us up around 11.30am and that we would then visit Stu Shiffman in the facility where he was being treated for the stroke he suffered last year. This would be followed by a visit to Linda Deneroff’s office for the views, before I was driven to the airport. It was a good plan, and several Brits had already done both visits prior to CORFLU. Unfortunately, Glenn’s longer than expected wait at a

doctor's appointment combined with a broken swing-bridge meant they were already running an hour late when they finally arrived at the house. Something would have to go. Sadly, it was the visit to Linda's office.

According to a sign on the wall, the hospital where Stu was being treated was wholly owned by its staff, an alien concept to someone who has spent his life in the bosom of the National Health Service. Stu shared his room with another patient, the two separated by a curtain. When we arrived his partner Andi Schechter was already there. Despite being wheelchair-bound herself, Andi visits Stu every day and has been his rock. Stu had a tube connected to his throat helping him breathe. This prevented normal speech but he could, with great effort, get a word or two out via the tube. When he couldn't do this he was reduced to gurning. That's when I discovered he has surprisingly expressive eyebrows, but I can only imagine how frustrating it must be when you want to communicate something but can't.

Stu's main neurological impairment was on his right side. Where his left arm was as strong as ever – as confirmed with a handshake when we were leaving – his right was enfeebled with no fine motor control. Since Stu is right-handed he was understandably worried that he might never draw again. The others with me hadn't seen Stu in a few months and expressed surprise and satisfaction at how much he had improved in that time, while Andi said the doctors had assured her that Stu would eventually walk out of there. All very encouraging and I hope it comes to pass.\*

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\* Sadly, it never did. Stu died there the following year, a few months after he and Andi finally tied the knot.

Andy Hooper thanked me for giving up a morning I could've spent sight-seeing in order to visit Stu, but he needn't have. It really wasn't any sort of sacrifice on my part. I like seeing a place when I find myself there, but that's never my primary reason for visiting somewhere – people are. London and Paris are only 214 miles apart, closer than DC and New York, yet despite the great travel links and having lived in London for a third of a century I've never visited Paris and may never do so. Since I know no one there I've never had any reason to visit. I've seen Paris often enough in films and on TV; I don't need to see it with my own eyes. This is how I feel about most places. Yes, I would like to have gone up the Space Needle if I'd had more time, but I didn't so c'est la vie.

Later, Glenn and Kate drove me to the airport, taking a route that enabled Andy to leap out of the car when we were in reasonable reach of his

home. My last sight of Andy was of him jogging across the traffic lane adjacent to ours then scrambling over a low concrete barrier to get to the sidewalk.

At the airport I met up with my Gallic friends John and Eve Harvey, and we stayed in the departure lounge, quietly drinking until it was time to board our plane.

My flight to the US had been delight. My return flight was anything but. Firstly, I had the middle seat between a married couple. They'd obviously figured that since middle seats are the least popular they might end up with that seat to spread into. This is a reasonable assumption so long as the plane isn't full. So they struck out, and when they wanted to communicate with each other they had to do so across me. It also turned out the guy was left-handed. I'm right-handed. Had we been sitting on the opposite side of the plane this would not have been a problem but as it was our arms were touching when we ate. This made meal-time... interesting.

Then there was the guy in front of me. No sooner were we airborne than he put his seat in maximum recline, thus stealing a chunk of my limited space and making it impossible to use my laptop. The recline option is there to help when you want to sleep; you're not supposed to leave it in that position the entire flight. This was about naked theft of space, of putting his comfort above any consideration of mine. I'm a pretty easy-going person, but I wanted to punch him in the head. I sat there fuming and radiating hatred at him, all to no effect. If there's one change I'd make to planes it would be to disable the recline control, which I've come to hate with a passion over the years.

I was beginning to get the sniffles before we boarded. By the time we were over the Atlantic it was full-blown coughing and sneezing. Tough luck married couple. I'm not sure whether it was the plane's a/c or if it was down to me developing a fever but I also started to get very hot. I kicked off my shoes and loosened my shirt but this barely helped. My breathing got very shallow, the effort required for more vigorous respiration now beyond me.

Everything ends eventually, even a flight as hellish as this had been, and after what seemed an eternity we finally touched down at Heathrow. As we were deplaning I saw John and Eve.

“Bonjour, Frenchies!” I said, never one to leave a joke be when I could hammer it into the ground. We talked for a couple of minutes on our way to Arrivals, then they peeled off to seek out their connection to Paris. I made my

way to the Underground and spent the ninety minutes or so to Upton Park in a semi-comatose stupor. A nutter started fiddling with my bag on the final leg of the journey but I was too out of it to care.

With great effort I climbed the stairs at Upton Park tube station and trudged across to the rolling acres of Plashet Grove, and on to Gross Manor. The temperature was a bit of a shock to the system. It had been in the 80s in Portland, the 70s in Seattle, but was barely 60 in London.

When I got in Avedon came over and gave me a big hug.

“I missed you,” she said, “but not as much as I thought I would.”

“Hah!”

“With you gone I was able to get the kitchen just the way I wanted it.”

It’s an article of faith with both of us that all the clutter and untidiness in our house is entirely the fault of the other. I am correct in this assessment. Avedon is delusional.

I checked out the kitchen and it was indeed tidier than usual, but her deception did not fool me. This was a Potemkin kitchen, one gussied up to score points and not a real reflection of how it would look in my absence.

Hugging over, I told Avedon I needed to fall into bed Right Now. The combination of jetlag and hacking, bone-rattling cough meant I was feeling wretched. Given the circumstances, climbing into my own bed felt almost orgasmically wonderful. Within five minutes of getting home I was asleep.

What I didn’t appreciate then was that the feeling wretched would last for over a week.

I suppose the only good thing about the situation was it meant I got the length of my trip exactly right. If I’d still been in the US then I’d have been moping around pathetically at the home of whoever I’d arranged to stay with at that point. This would not have been fun for any of us. Instead I got to mope around pathetically in my own home, to shiver away in my own bed, and to be ignored by my own wife, (I love Avedon dearly, but she has all the bedside manner of a Dalek.) My most fervent desire during this period, the little ray of hope that made me smile and helped me get through it, was that I might have given this to the bastard who sat in front of me on my return flight.

So that’s my trip report. Yes, events have been nipped and tucked a little here and there, some may even have been given a nose job, but I leave it to those of you who were there to decide whether I went as far as adding breast implants. I think I have on the whole been mostly truthful, but all writing is a

performance.

Looking back on my week in Portland and Seattle I can't help but feel I've closed a circle. During my TAFF trip in 1984 it had always been my intention to include a visit to the region, but it didn't come to pass. In a very real sense then, this was like the part of my TAFF trip I never got to take. Finally, I had made it to the beautiful Pacific Northwest.

And I loved it.

2013

# Original Appearances

- “Foreword” – first published in this ebook, July 2021.
- “CORFLU 3 (1986): Trip 2” – a combination of the original from *Potsherd #?, ?1986*, edited by Stu Shiffman, and the “Eighties Letters & Fan Diary” version added to my website in 2018.
- “CORFLU 6 (1989): A Corflu Diary” – *Born in the UK #1*, June 1989, edited by Rob Hansen; reprinted in *Eta #5*, Easter 1990, edited by Rob Hansen.
- “CORFLU 7 (1990): Corflu Diary II” – *Born in the UK #7*, August 1990, edited by Rob Hansen for the eighth mailing of APA OF THE DAMNED; expanded by Rob from his trip notes for this ebook.
- “DISCLAVE 36 (1992): Hanging Out at the Hinckley Hilton” – *Idea #6*, September 1992, edited by Geri Sullivan.
- “DISCLAVE 39 (1995): Depravity at Disclave” – original appearance (if any) not traced.
- “BOSKONE 34 (1997): Fanhistoricon” – original appearance (if any) not traced; long available at fiawol.org.uk.
- “CORFLU 30 (2013): Seven Days in May” – Days 1 and 2: *Chunga #22*, January 2014, edited by Andy Hooper, Randy Byers and Carl Juarez. Days 3 and 4: *Banana Wings #53*, August 2013, edited by Claire Brialey and Mark Plummer. Days 5 to 7: *Beam #7*, October 2013, edited by Nic Farey.

## The End

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

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