



May 2016



Robots and Ruins

When I first started Vibrator I joked about it being a focal point fanzine. That was a *joke*, right? I didn't even really know what the term meant. Was it a fanzine that focussed people's opinions upon important and relevant topics? Was it something that simply became a focus for people's attention regardless on any issues about its content? Or was it simply a fanzine that gave you a headache when you read it because you need to update the prescription on your lenses? I still don't know, but if anybody has got any answers I'd be pleased to hear them

So, another issue, another text box to fill. Well, what has happened since the last issue? I won the FAAn award for best personal fanzine again. Getting a bit embarrassing really. Look, do not vote for me next year. Vote for Taral Wayne, he obviously needs some attention judging from how he has been recently intimating about being unrepresented. Some of you may not believe this but I honestly do not do this fanzine with the thought of garnering honours. It just is and exists and I do it because not to do it is not an option. Yes, it's the equivalent of a nervous tic. The end of the month comes round and I must write something, anything. Unlike Jim Linwood I don't have much of a real life which involves me swanning off to exotic locations and photographing them. So I am stuck in my little room and in my own little mind trying to scrape together something meaningful from internalized obsessions and preoccupations. So kill me now.

SPECIAL CHICAGO CHIFLU REPORT **SUPPLEMENT**

JUST GOT HOME FROM ILLINOIS **Sandra Bond**

THURSDAY: Arty Farty threw a party

Ted White was looking tired and drawn when I sat down alongside him, nine flights above the Chicago loop. He'd driven for two days to be there, with Frank Lunney at his side, and had endured a sleepless night in some no-mark burg just off the interstate in Ohio. I did not yet know this, or I might not have challenged him to name the artist of a

semi-abstract painting on the wall above us. "It's an artist you published a lot, Ted," I hinted, but weary as he was, no amount of hints from me enabled him to guess Mike Hinge's name.

Its presence was appropriate, since its owner, like Mike Hinge, was an expat New Zealander in the US. Three blocks away, the Corflu hotel awaited the convention to begin; but for now it was Thursday night and the early arrivals -- probably the majority of the convention -- had assembled in Nigel Rowe's apartment for a curtain-up party.

Not only is Nigel's apartment delightful, with a westward view through big windows enabling the fans to see the sun sink in pink glory between the Chicago skyscrapers; it was also the perfect venue for a party, with neither too few people nor too many, and with just the right amount of books, music and art without being cluttered or even untidy. Opposite Mike Hinge, an Arthur Thomson original looked down at us; next door an Evening Standard billboard warned of an asteroid's close approach to Earth. Both rooms had doorways leading onto the hallway, and were also linked direct to each other, enabling fans to go round and round in a social whirlpool like circulating decimals. I'd already met Doug Bell and Christina Lake the day before, in Reykjavik airport while waiting for my connecting flight; Icelandair is popular among fannish tourists since it gives you two free checked bags rather than one. Mark Plummer and Claire Brialey, too, I had already met, having joined them and Nigel in collecting supplies for the party and con suite. My role in this expedition was confined mainly to pointing out interesting beer names or label designs while Nigel and Claire chose what to actually buy, though I did persuade Nigel to pick up a variety pack of cider, which I later saw Bill Burns quaffing cheerfully.

I well recall how, in my young days, American beer was a running joke in British fanzines. We would repeat the old joke about making love in a canoe, and feel smug as we sipped our CAMRA-approved pints. It was a pleasant shock to find, when I finally made it Stateside, that the beer there had advanced from the stone age, and now every little town has its own craft brewery, even those little breadcrumbs on the map whose sole other purpose is to provide motels for travellers like Ted not to sleep in.

Fans kept turning up. Geri Sullivan was even more ebullient than usual, and Frank Lunney little less so. The resident cat played well with fans, allowing petting while remaining fractionally aloof. Andy Hooper was the thinnest I've ever seen him; Ian Sorensen was, umm, not. I complimented Pat Meara on a stylish blouse; she revealed it to be an especial favourite, decades old and worn only for big occasions. Ron Salomon lurked around taking photographs, as he was to continue doing most of the weekend. Colin Hinz showed up clean shaven and scarcely recognisable.

Rob Jackson disappeared part way through to meet another new arrival at the hotel and guide his steps to the party, with whom he returned shortly: Grant Canfield. Frank Lunney pounced upon his old buddy and led him round the party, introducing the revenant Grant to fans by first name and fanzine edited, a system which only broke down when he got to Hope Leibowitz.

It really was one of the best fannish parties I have ever attended. “Gentlefen in England now abed,” I mumbled to Geri, “will think themselves accursed they were not here.” But eventually people started to trickle back to the hotel, since the old farts we now are tend to find late night partying more wearisome than we did back in the day. When Mark and Claire decided to call it a night I tagged along, to find that Frank and Grant were also quitting. In the elevator I tried to compliment Grant on his fan art and an article he’d once done for MOTA; as often I laid it on too thick and, I fear, embarrassed him.

“Are you the youngest fan here?” Frank asked. Claire volunteered that she is six months younger than I (which I knew) and that Doug Bell is six months younger still (which I didn’t). None of us knew that Doug was shortly to be dethroned from his position of Littlest Fan...

FRIDAY: All the farts were there

British Corflus tend to be run by large committees (because we all enjoy doing it) and to be heavily programmed. Chiflu was the reverse; it was very much a case of “l’etat, c’est Nigel”, and programming was definitely on the light side. Neither of these approaches is better than the other, of course, and since the con hotel was in the heart of a large US city, many fans spent much of Friday playing tourist. Lazy as ever, the only tourism I did was the little museum inside the Federal Reserve Bank one block away, which was interesting to compare to the Bank of England’s museum. Not only was it free to get in, but I had \$374 in notes pressed upon me, which would have made the rather pricey hotel more bearable if only it hadn't been in the form of confetti.

I had expressed vague interest in a wine tasting event with Tom Becker, Spike, Mark and Claire, but missed their departure while grabbing lunch from a food van round the corner. As I reached for my tablet to hook into the hotel wi-fi and find out how I could catch them up, I bumped into Ted emerging from the hotel’s supposedly British style pub. My interest in the wine tasting had mainly been for the company, rather than the wine, so Ted didn't have to exercise much persuasion to join him in a parallel event instead.

“Are you doing a con report?” he asked as we headed off.

“Hell, no. I haven’t taken a single note or a solitary photo so far.”

I expect it shows...

Eventually it was opening ceremony time. Several fanzines had been distributed in advance of the con (I put CHUNGA and RANDOM JOTTINGS in my case to read on the way to instil the fannish spirit in me; I’ve still to open either...) but more showed up now. Steve Stiles had a SAM with a Doonesbury pastiche (Ted swore he knew the original Steve had worked from), while Grant astonished everyone with XENOTECT, a delightfully

produced compilation of his own work, personalised for each member, and with a file copy upon which he was collecting his recipients' signatures.

The point was made that with the passing of time, there are nearly as many fans whose names don't go into the draw for GOH due to already having had that honour, as do. Rob Jackson looked worried as he always does at this point, despite having had his speech drafted ready "just in case" since 2009. Claire's fingers dipped in and pulled out the name of... Nigel Rowe.

"Goddamn it, Nigel, didn't you have the common sense not to put your own name in?!"

Evidently not. He was offered a mulligan by popular acclaim, but nobly declined it, and so Nigel Rowe became the first ever Corflu chair to be his own Guest of Honor. Generations down the line will look at the lists and think him very conceited, just as they will for the Glasgow con where the chair was Bob Shaw and the guest the other Bob Shaw.

I had a panel after dinner -- Desert Island Fanzines -- so wanted to dine quickly, especially as I had just found out that, rather than a philosophical discussion on the topic, it was just a fanzine reading panel, and I hadn't brought along anything to read.

A clump of us -- Grant, Frank, Ted, Rob, Michael Dobson and myself -- blobbed up to go hunting Chicago deep dish pizza, which Ted claimed not to have eaten since the 1982 worldcon. We set out in high spirits for what we were assured was a short walk. Several blocks later, it had started to rain on our parade, and our spirits were dampened further when we finally found the restaurant to discover it bulging with happy diners. We would have to wait an hour. Outside. In the rain.

Hell with that, we decided, and made for another pizza joint down the street. It was what they call a neighbourhood hang-out; loud, brassy and plasticky simultaneously, and full of young urban locals. Ted and Michael decided to brave it anyway; the remaining quartet trudged onward and eventually found a restaurant attached to another hotel. Where we waited, and waited... The time for my panel was drawing close. I frantically searched online for something I could read aloud. I hope the editor of Vibrator appreciates the coincidence inherent in my lighting on a Dave Langford article written for precocious 1970s teen fan Richard McMahon, who once upon a time excoriated Graham for using naughty words in his fanzine (a habit which the silly fucker has proven unable to break, I fear).

I dashed into the panel fifteen minutes late and very much discombobulated. Apart from the Langford piece, my only other real contribution to proceedings was searching the audience in vain for Christina Lake, who had run a forum on this very subject in THIS NEVER HAPPENS back in the day, only to be witheringly informed that she was sitting at the other end of the panel...

I sought the haven of the con suite, two not particularly large rooms one floor above the con hall. The bath was full of the traditional beverages; I got to “make a BNF very happy” by fetching Ted a Diet Pepsi, and tucked into a Spare Tyre beer. I felt I’d earned it. Party time!

SATURDAY: Tooty Frooty done a beauty

It seems a shame to miss programming at a Corflu, especially when there’s not much of it anyway, but I was very slow to get started on Saturday. At least I wasn’t missing anything I was actually on; that would come later.

When I arrived in the programme room, a black and white video was showing, courtesy of Geri Sullivan; a 1976 Big Mac (MidAmeriCon) panel on mimeograph techniques. Having just missed the introductions, I spent some time trying to figure out who was who from context. Let’s see, if that woman chairing it is called Linda, and obviously isn’t Linda Krawecke (she looked more like Jenny Glover), it must be... Linda Bushyager. Patrick Nielsen (no Hayden yet) and Moshe Feder exchanged quips on screen, little knowing that forty years on they’d be colleagues at Tor Books. And can that shaggy-haired youngfan, full of enthusiasm if not of years, brimming over with promise and sharp as a knife, really be Gary Farber? Time is kinder to some people than others.

Ted bemoaned aloud that he hadn’t been at the 1976 panel to correct various items of misinformation. “Gestetner wax doesn’t clog up your mimeograph!” he scornfully told Jon Singer, who (being marooned in 1976) had no reply to make.

The auction was coming up. No matter how many years pass, there always seems to be no shortage of interesting artifacts donated, nor of people to bid on them; but Corflu never learns, and the time dedicated to the auction is always too short. Andy Hooper and I tried to crack along as best we could, but Nigel was less nippy, and there were inevitable delays due to bids coming in from the live Internet chat room, relayed dutifully by Rob Jackson. One of these years a Corflu will actually give the auction enough time, and sod’s law says that will also be the Corflu without enough donations to fill it...

After Friday night I’d had a bellyful, so to speak, of large dinner parties, and was glad to dine tete a tete with Ken Forman and catch up with his news. Aileen Forman is back in Vegas, dealing cards once again, and rallying round the Katzes following Joyce’s stroke. During the con, some very welcome updates came in regarding her progress back to health.

I had vowed not to enter the fan quiz which followed, but Rich Coad descended on me with a purposefulness not to be denied. I never did quite follow the framework of the quiz; each team contained three people who were all supposed to have different roles based on baseball, but in practice, the questions all seemed to be pitched at me. There was some time-wasting system of drawing numbers which did nothing to enhance the affair, since all the questions resided with quizmaster Rowe, and the rule about when you could answer the other team’s questions seemed to boil down to ‘only when you don’t

know the answer either’.

But the audience seemed to enjoy it. Among them was the pretender to Doug Bell’s throne as youngest member, a Texan chap whose name tag read simply ‘Pablo’. His surname turned out to be, thankfully not Lennis as I first suggested, but Vazquez, and despite his youth and the fact that his previous fanzines have barely connected with the Corflu subculture, he seemed an excellent fit and his face is definitely both fannish and sensitive. He even did a single-sheet one-shot for the con, which is more than many people could claim, and is going to have words with Chris Garcia who told him (I don’t know how seriously) that he wouldn’t enjoy a Corflu. He very plainly did, and is going to tell his friends. Can this be the link between Corflu and today’s newer fans which will ensure the survival of the species? On such slender chains depend so much.

SUNDAY: And they all went out for air

Pablo Vazquez wasn’t the only first timer to visibly be delighted in Corflu. Grant Canfield seemed to be wearing a broader smile every time I saw him throughout the weekend. I wound up on the same table as him at the banquet, and when (as expected) Los Angeles in the form of Milt Stevens requested next year’s and was unopposed, I was beaten to the membership line not only by Ted, first as always, but by Grant. I got to hang with him a few times during the con and found him a thoroughly good guy. If this presages a return to fanac from Grant, even if only as a Corflu attender rather than a cartoonist and writer, I shall consider the Corflu Fifty concept thoroughly vindicated (as if it weren't so already).

And if you’re reading this, Grant, I meant every word I said about a poker game in California next year. (We could make it a proper event and call it the Glicksohn Memorial Tournament or something, even...)

Nigel’s GOH speech was one of the better examples of such despite all the other demands on his time; he ran over several highlights of his personal history of Corflu attendance with panache, and avoided both the Scylla of Avedonish brevity and the Charybdis of Trendian longeur. Claire Brialey, too, who is a much better public speaker than she thinks she is, kept the FAAN awards from any risk of tedium, and nobody (at the con, at least) seemed displeased with the winners. “Is there anybody here from Oregon?” a would-be wit (all right, me) remarked as Dan Steffan scooped #1 Fan Face.

And then it was all over. Officially, at least. Some of those who had been disappointed on Friday finally got their Chicago pizza on Sunday night; I maintained a fannish tradition by ordering a sharing dish of mixed starters with Frank Lunney... And the con suite was still open. I sat chilling in there, watching Pablo soaking up the atmosphere as though he’d been one of us forever. Hope Leibowitz paid homage to Ted White’s eyebrows, an oblique compliment which Ted accepted graciously. Across the room, Mike Meara chatted to Bill Burns; “Do you realise,” I warned Pat Meara, “that your husband is saying ‘Hello, cheeky’ to another man?” Sadly for my career as a gossip columnist, it transpired

that they were talking about vintage radio comedies.

And finally Sunday, and the convention, drew to a close. I entered the elevator to the top floor for the last time, and yet again found myself sharing it with Frank Lunney who was down the corridor from me. Any time I went to my room and didn't share the lift with Frank, it seemed I bumped into him as I emerged, or saw his tall figure striding along the corridor ahead of me.

"Do you know, Frank," I said as we stepped out, "I've had a fair few stressed moments this convention...but I actually think it's the first Corflu for me where I haven't had to struggle with depression, not even once."

And upon digging through my mental files for this report, I still can't find any instances of the black dog among them. I don't know whether this says more about the convention, the company, or me myself, but the net result was that this was, for me at least, one hell of a good Corflu.

TAKE THE EI TRAIN

BY Murray Moore

So I turn to my right and tell Doug Bell that I am going to share with him my easy-to-implement idea to make baseball more interesting.

Doug and myself (Section 527, Row 5, Seat 107) and six other Corflu Chiflu members, and thousands of non-Corflu Chiflu members, are sitting under the roof in the Upper Deck of Wrigley Field, home of the Chicago Cubs of Major League Baseball's National League. We look down, down, down to the basepath between home plate and first base, and to the pitcher's mound beyond. Looking up, right, left, all of Wrigley Field is spread before us on a warmish May afternoon.

Doug might be the only fan of the San Francisco Giants of the National League who lives in Cornwall, England. On an earlier U.S. visit Doug attended a Giants' game and became a Giants' fan.

[Interlineation, like what used to be printed in fanzines: "What is truly chilling is that there are a lot of smart people interested in sports. That just gives you no hope for the human race." Fran Lebowitz]

In 2016 Major League Baseball consists of 30 teams, fifteen in the National League and fifteen in the newer American League. Wrigley Field is one of baseball's two ancient parks, little changed since opening, thereby charming and fun. Wrigley Field is the baseball park with its outfield wall covered with ivy; the side of the wall inside the park, that is. Adventure can ensue if a baseball disappears into that ivy.

So I explain my idea to Doug. "The right-handed batter and the left-handed batter, both run to first base and second base and third base and to home plate, counter-clockwise. The right-handed batter is facing first base and his momentum is toward first base. The left-handed batter is facing third base but he is closer to first base. The left-handed batter should run the bases clock-wise, to third base to second base to first base to home plate."

[Interlineation: Sports makes people "even more stupid than they are." Maxim Gorky]

Doug (maybe) still is considering my idea.

The Cubs bested the Pittsburgh Pirates. Geri Sullivan and Pat Virzi joined with Cubs fans in a victory dance in the stands, a slow twist/ shimmy in place.

This visit to Chicago I rode the El train a first time and a second time. The first time was to and from Wrigley Field. El as in elevated, the train track second story height above downtown streets when not underground.

Leaving the stadium station, I am standing in the aisle of a crowded car. My left hand is holding the bottom end of a vertical strap which is six inches left from the round steel vertical pole to which is attached the horizontal pole from which the strap hangs, the strap designed to keep me upright, upright until the first lurch of the car sends me, without warning, as lurches do, leftward, until the round steel vertical pole arrests my tilt, resulting in the skin breaking beside and slightly below my left eye, releasing minimal blood, but! blood!, somehow the left arm of my eye glasses, bending but not breaking, except my skin, with the result that I felt, as you do, reading the final, thank god, end of this sentence, dazed, confused, and disoriented.

On the street I share news of my injury.

Pat V. "I have band aids." Me: "With you?"

Silly, foolish question. Pat's purse OK backpack - I was dazed, confused, and disoriented- is a tardis of stuff, everything Pat knows that she might need, in every conceivable situation.

I refuse her nurturing.

i announce 'I am a man.'

Geri S. "I am going into a CVS drug store. I can get you antibiotic cream."

I deflect this second offer of Red Cross, St. John Ambulance, Girl Scout first aid, doubling down: "I am a manly man."

Pat to Geri: "You know what that means. Mary Ellen has band aids."

True.

The El train also is a feature in our Sunday evening dinner expedition. We leave the Dead Doggers listening to Michael Dobson's story telling and walk -- five minutes says the info in the program book-- to Plymouth Rooftop Bar and Grill. Into a small elevator we crowd and rise and walk into a rectangular roofed patio, open on one long side. Beyond the roof of a parking structure, parallel to us, in the near distance and slightly lower than us, is a section of the El train and the wall of Chicago's new main public library, the (former mayor) Harold Washington Library. The library has its own El station.

Most of the tables are unoccupied. We sit at a windowless-window seat table. Above us a heater radiates heat. Time passes. We watch trains come and go, as one would observe part of a model train set. Time passes. We talk about the decorative facade of the library. Too much time has passed. Our order has not been taken. We walk back to Club Quarters and eat in the Elephant and Castle.

In other food news, Leah Zeldes Smith, who knows about food, being a restaurant reviewer, told me that, yes, bacon still is a thing but kale is not. Leah and Dick Smith were Saturday members, as were Bill Bodden and Tracey Benton. On seeing each couple, separately, I greeted them "Welcome to Corflu. It's nice to see new people. I will be happy to introduce you to people." Saturday evening Dick and Alan Rosenthal and myself went by El train, and Leah and Hope Leibowitz and Mary Ellen by taxi, to an excellent deli, where I asked Leah about bacon's popularity.

Presumption, assumption, both are bad. I thought unlikely that a post office would be near the Club Quarters. On our drive to Chicago we slept in East Lansing, Michigan. We drove to a post office there, mostly through the rural part of Michigan State University, to mail U.S. copies of my Chifluzine. The next day, in Chicago, looking out the window of our Club Quarters room, the closest building was United States Post Office Loop Station.

I prepared a speech about my Chiflu zine, expecting the fanzine launch would be as it was in Newcastle. It wasn't. Newcastle: fanzine launch in the program room with an audience. Chicago: launch in the two adjacent and full-of-talking-bodies bedrooms which served as the con suite.

-clearing throat, looking at fanzine launch audience-

My Chifluzine is sixteen sheets, printed on both sides. The paper is twenty pound weight. The sheets are held together by two shiny staples.

Who did the design?, the layout? carl juarez? -pointing- Pat Virzi? Geri Sullivan? -not pointing- Dan Steffan? Nooo. Twas me; all me.

Choice of fonts, leading, kerning, white space, size of type, surely -pointing- John D. Berry. Surely not. Twas me; all me.

The writing? All me.

But not the art. I can't draw. The art is by Rotsler Award winner; prolific, and popular, contributor to fanzines; multiple Hugo Fan Artist nominee -pointing to Steve Stiles- slump, Steve, or lean to the side; the art in my Chifluzine is by Corflu 50 guest and Xenotect editor and publisher -pointing at Grant Canfield- Crant Ganfield.

Grant, you now have joined the exclusive club of fans who have had their name mispronounced on a big stage. Another club member, here among us, is -pointing at Claire Brialey- Claire Brie... Claire Briar... Claire.

Lastly, the title of my Chifluzine.

Common practice in naming a fanzine is two words -pointing at audience members- SAM, Banana Wings, Random Jottings, Inca, Chunga, Beabohema, Skug, Lightning Bug, Idea, Waste Paper, that thing Ian Sorenson did, Hitchhike, aMfO, -pointing at Rob Jackson's iPad- Raucous Caucus, Vibrator, Beam, Trap Door, Motorway Dreamer, Holier Than Thou, Fugghead.

A subset of fanzine titles are sound effects -pointing at Ted White- Pong, Blat!

My Chifluzine's title is HuBBub: the background noise of a Corflu.

Monday evening, after an afternoon in Dearborn, Michigan, exploring Greenfield Village -Thomas Edison's workshop, the Wright Brothers' bicycle shop, etc.- we rendezvoused at a Buddy's Pizza with Gregg and Audrey Trend and Cy Chauvin. Gregg has Parkinson's. He shuffles -very slowly- holding the arms of a walker. The next time that Pope Francis calls me, I will tell him, 'Frank, make a note; next in line for sainthood, Audrey Trend.' Note to self: be nicer to Mary Ellen.

LETTER COLUMN

TARAL WAYNE

I'm not sure this is so much a letter of comment as just a summary of observations about the last issue.

For instance, Ted White is quite correct about the original meaning of "punk," which does not surprise me. I only mention it because a scene in one of my favourite movies, *The Maltese Falcon*, took on a somewhat different meaning when I discovered what a "punk" was. You likely remember that Sam Spade (Humphrey Bogart) was being escorted to an interview with Gutman by the villain's associate, Wilmer. Spade overcomes the young hoodlum but meets with Gutman anyway. Before he leaves, though, he warns Gutman that if he wants to lean on Spade in future, he had better send

someone tougher than *this* young punk! The first few times I saw *The Maltese Falcon*, I thought nothing of it. But then I experienced a sudden change in perception – Spade was in fact not only accusing Wilmer of being a small time toughie, but of being homosexual, and indirectly accusing Gutman of being his gay lover. Naturally, I was left shaking my head over the question of whether they were or not...

About Elvis. Lichtman nailed it. He was terrific ... for about two years. Maybe a little longer, but it was clearly rock 'n roll that made him good. When he went all soft and mushy with his love ballads, he was little better than Perry Como. Ironically, the love ballads were what lifted him out of a genre and into the mainstream, making him the glamorous, wealthy and frankly corrupt popular icon of the 1960s. Worse, it was the crooner rather than the rocker that he set out to be in the first place. Although he was a big fan of the R&B stations that many young people in Texas listened to in the early 1950s (read *black* radio stations), his real ambition at the time was to become a gospel singer. Later in his career, his clever-stupid manager, the Dutch-born "Colonel Parker," steered Elvis toward the money with unerring precision. With a voice like warm honey spiked with hickory smoke, Parker knew Elvis could mesmerize the young ladies far more successfully, and hold them far longer than he could compete for the attention of the guys with other up-and-coming rockers. Besides ... everyone knew in 1959 that rock was a fad. Wasn't Buddy Holly dead? The Everly Brothers would never last. The next big thing was expected to be Calypso ... I kid you not!

I tried to build a balsa model one time. I must have been six. Incidentally, I have clear memories of hearing "Hound Dog," my first Elvis song on the radio at the same age. I have far fewer memories of that model plane, since it was nothing but a mess of plans, pins, strips and sheets of easily broken balsa wood and no clue as how to put it all together. It was never finished and barely begun. I do have quite fond memories of building a Lindberg model of a space wheel, however, and a full-scale model of a Luger pistol that had a magazine with bullets and everything. It seemed enormous in my six-year-old hands, and I had quite a shock when I discovered years later that the German P-08 Parabellum (Luger) is actually a rather trim and compact hand weapon. I remember swinging on a rubber tire and listening to a distant train whistle, seeing Sputnik cross the night sky, a French 5-Franc coin, a dead cat and many, many other things. But I have as far as I'm able put that impossible balsa wood mess out of my mind!

We all have our own approach to our own music stash. While I see the logic of storing my music on a hard drive, I prefer to keep the original CDs. For one thing, they are less vulnerable. No virus can harm them or steal personal data from them. I also don't have a hard drive so huge that I want to fill it gratuitously. By and large I only keep music on the hard drive if I have no other copy of it. Does keeping hundreds of CDs around the house take up space? Yes it does. But altogether I doubt I could fill two banker's boxes with them. The main problem is storing them in a form that allows me to browse them conveniently. What I've done is bought a cheap plastic three-drawer bin, the sort usually used in bathrooms or basements for loose articles. It happens that they are just about

the right size for two rows of CDs, with very little wasted space. Pull a drawer out and the titles are easy to read.

But I see no good coming of the “cloud” future. Many “millennials” seem pleased to embrace a non-materialistic future, one that enhances their ability to be on the move and yet leave nothing of important behind. Even while having dinner with the girlfriend, or hanging out at the mall, everything is at your finger-and-thumb tips. You could move to the other side of the country carrying all you really need in a backpack – your tablet, your smart phone, your game box, two pairs of socks and a change of underwear, maybe a thumb drive or two. Everything else is dross, man, a material encumbrance that weighs you down.

Meanwhile, the wealthy are busy acquiring ownership of EVERYTHING.

I foresee the cloud future as one in which the common man has the appearance of everything – and is kept content with virtual vacations to the Bermudas, a steady stream of entertainment it has no control over and plenty of social distractions to prevent anyone from noticing that they share a 400-square-foot, environmentally-friendly apartment with another person. A central program decides how much power you can have, how much water, when the lights are on, whether you can use the air conditioning or ask for heat, etc, etc, etc. But that’s okay if you’re only at home when you have nowhere to dance, see a movie, jog, play virtual tennis, hang out or aren’t at your job.

Meanwhile, you can have all the Elvis you want – at 47-cents a listen. Or at least you can as long as the state doesn’t think Elvis is subversive or immoral, and as long as the lawyers can agree how to split your 47-cents up. But don’t be surprised if tomorrow your Iggy Pop or Suzanne Vega is no longer available. Maybe the property wasn’t making enough for the copyright holders to keep it on their catalog. Or maybe the lawyers couldn’t agree on who actually owns the property and it’s held up in litigation. Or maybe the president of the music company just doesn’t *like* Iggy Pop. It’s not as though it’s the customer’s choice. What do you think this is, a free market?

I too discovered jazz late – but although I have the middle drawer of my plastic bin nearly full of jazz, I will never be a real jazz cat. There’s far too much, and, to be honest, I can enjoy but not really untangle the complexities of the more abstruse stuff. I’m neither a musician nor a musicologist, so it doesn’t matter to me how diminished a fourth is, or how hard to finger a certain chord.

Skel’s concerns about autonomous vehicles are very much on the minds of insurance companies. In the particular case Skel cited, I believe the liable party would be the one who owns the vehicle. However, if he thought the software controlling his car was to blame, he would then try to sue the manufacturer for selling him a faulty car. But that’s only the surface of the problem. Suppose a situation arises in which the car can stay on its course, and run over a mother with her baby carriage, or it can turn sharply to avoid them, but probably crash into on-coming traffic, or a solid wall, killing you and whatever passengers are with you. Whichever choice is made, somebody is killed. Who is liable? The insurers of the mother and child, or the insurers of the car? And what choice should

the programmer of the self-driving car make? As a driver (or passenger) would you be happy to ride in a car you knew was programmed to kill you to save a pedestrian? As a pedestrian, would you feel safe walking outdoors when you know there are vehicles that will run you over rather than risk their occupants?

In answer to Skel's final question, though, I think it safe to assume that a licensed driver will be required behind the wheel of autonomous vehicles long after we are certain that nothing will go wrong. In the event someone hacks into all the vehicular traffic while you are en route to Leeds, wouldn't you prefer that someone aboard could take over the wheel?

I love real fish and chips, but have no idea where to get them anymore. Sure the batter has a purpose! It's there to soak up melted lard from the frying, and lard is full of nutritious *fat!* Possibly a vitamin or two and some minerals, but fat is an important part of a healthy diet in itself. Mainly, though, it is the taste that accounts for the popularity of battering fish. When I was ten, we moved into a neighborhood that had an old-fashioned fish and chip shop run by an English couple. It actually had fish, winkles and mussels and stuff like that on ice in the window. The fryer was an enormous, stainless steel contraption that looked as though it could have fed the crew of a battleship, with several deep vats full of bubbling, amber fluid. Fish would be submerged in a basket and brought out, done to a golden brown a minute later. There was also an ice cooler full of bottled soft drinks! They served halibut, cod or other fish, as you liked. The smell of hot oil, vinegar and salt caused my mouth to salivate the moment I stepped into the place. I loved going there with my parents, but we didn't go remotely often enough to suit me ... a few years later, we moved again. I've occasionally had *real* fish and chips since then, but rarely, and none with the palpable atmosphere of that place from my youth. Normally I make do with Captain Highliner ... whatever is actually in that.

Somewhere in the issue, I remember someone spoke about a train. Given that it takes about a mile to stop a long train at full speed, it's seems likely that in the event the engineer realizes he is going to hit something on the track, he is probably instructed to a) close his eyes, b) do nothing more whatever, c) make a note of the time and place after the event, so that the pieces can be picked up.

It's a little hard to vote for anybody without a Worldcon membership. I'm not going, though. Under the circumstances that presently rule my life, I don't expect to go to another unless its in Toronto or perhaps Montreal. I also can't persuade myself to pay forty or fifty dollars for a supporting membership. That's a lot of jack, Jack! If I thought 300 other fans would also vote for Steve, my supporting money would go to a worthy cause ... but then my vote wouldn't really be needed.

What we need is an amendment that anyone who voted more than, say, three times before 1990, gets a permanent supporting membership and can vote in every Worldcon!

PS – As I've only just now seen issue 26, for some reason, I was unable to respond to Allison Scott until now. "iCrap" – as I call it – is no particular digital device, it is more the state of mind that drives consumers to buy a new smart phone, tablet, GPS or MP3

player every six months, just because the new one is fractionally smaller, comes with a trendy new ap, or has a tantalizing new “look.” It also leads consumers to buying \$40 covers for their device, and then a \$25 cushioned tote bag to carry the covered device. Not to mention adding 134 unnecessary aps – from a quick field guide to the distribution of North American hummingbirds, to one that locates the nearest Frank Lloyd Wright home and plots a route to it. Most of this sort of thing is patently unnecessary, but can cost quite a lot of money in the long run.

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PAUL SKELTON

I see in your opening comments the play on footwear-related words, going from ‘cobble’ via ‘clog’ to ‘sabot’ and ‘saboteur’, to boot. Walt Willis did something similar in *Hyphen 1*, back in May 1952. So, you may be 54 years late with your ‘cobbling’, but I think you did it better. Walt limited himself to ‘heel’ and ‘sole’ and ‘sabotage’, though he did use ‘wooden shoes’ in place of ‘wouldn’t choose’ at one point.

What has always puzzled me though is how we get ‘sabotage’ and ‘saboteur’ from the root word ‘sabot’, which my handy *Chambers English Dictionary* (1988) defines as “a wooden shoe, as worn by the French peasantry”. The thing is that sabotage is generally considered something that is basically sneaky and a saboteur is basically a sneaky person doing something sneakily. It’s a good thing the French are a sneaky nation as if we English had been sufficiently sneaky as to need to invent the word, ‘sabotage’ would now be ‘clogage’. Even so, how is sneakiness in any way associated with clogs? Clogs are the least sneaky footwear imaginable. When committing sabotage you will either have to sneak away afterwards or, if spotted, run like buggery. Try to do either of these whilst wearing wooden clogs and I’m afraid you’ve had your chips; which, by an amazing coincidence, brings me to your question “Fish in batter. Why?” Then, almost immediately, “Batter exists to provide an envelope for the fish to be steamed in.”

Earth to Graham – You have just answered your own question. Personally I’m not particularly keen on batter, unless it’s gone a bit soggy by being kept, well vinegared and wrapped-up with hot chips inside the wrapping paper. Crisp batter though, yes, take it off and throw it away. Of course, by the time you’ve gotten rid of it all your fish has gone stone cold. Chips too. That’s why, even though the fish is better when cooked in batter, more succulent, I personally prefer it in breadcrumbs. I can eat fried breadcrumbs.

Mind you, there are some as like crispy batter. Cas does. Both she and I can recall, from separate childhoods, standing in the chippy and hearing people ask for a helping of scraps, which was just some free extra batter scrapings that had come off the fish and would otherwise be thrown away. I can recall it, hearing, with a shudder, other voices asking for it. Cas can recall it too, mainly in her own voice. Yes, that’s Cas, begging for scraps. Actually, before we met, whilst still married to her first husband, she worked

part-time in a chippy and can confirm the North West's fondness for eating huge handfuls of crispy batter flakes. Ugh!

Not of course that I frequented chip shops much as a lad, given that it was even cheaper to cook the fish and chips at home. After we moved to Stockport money was a little less tight but the problem then was that, on this side of the Pennines the fish sold in chip shops was invariably cod, whereas over in Yorkshire it was usually haddock, which is a bit like cod except with some flavour, so home-made fish and chips continued to predominate.

Of course the only really satisfactory way to eat fish and chips from the chippy is out of the paper as you walk homeward. Sadly we can no longer do this as it requires the use of both hands, whereas one is also required for the dog-lead back-office function.

In closing I would like to congratulate both you and Pat on winning matching FAAn awards. As I understand it these come, at least partly, in the form of self-assembly models of the Sears Tower, which means you will be the only house in your area with Twin Towers. Obviously this could be a little scary if word got out, given terrorists' propensity to attack such targets. Let's just hope that nobody mentions it.

(EDITOR: I think sabotage came from when people with lots of excess sabots, or wooden boots, used to throw them into Jaquet Looms in an attempt to, well, sabotage them. Of course this never worked, and the loom workers just collected the boots and took them home to use as decoration on their Christmas trees.

Oh and meanwhile Congrats to you for nailing the Best Locwriter FAAn award. I knew you had it in you. I must admit I'm disturbed by the fact that having once being married, Cas elected to make the same mistake with you.)

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STEVE JEFFERY

You had an old tin bath int' parlor? Luxury. We had to roll about in gravel in back yard until dirt was scrubbed off.

(You had a back yard?)

Who is this Steve Jeffrey by the way, who has his name attached to my loc. Is he a friend of Claire Brierley perhaps?

I remember Alperton and Perivale (just). My first job was in 1977 with Associated Lead in Perivale. All I can remember of Perivale was that it had a tube station, an industrial estate, a small parade of shops on the A40, the splendid art deco Hoover factory (which I believe is now a Tesco Superstore), the Vanguard removals building, which would often have something strange like a helicopter or a tank hoisted on top of its roof to distract

passing motorists on the A40, and next to that the pub where a group of us would get totally wrecked on birthdays on an insane concoction we invented from barley wine and Imperial Russian Stout.

I remember Alperton being divertingly multicultural even then, with lots of unfamiliar and intriguing vegetables in the greengrocer's, and Greek and Polish delis where I could indulge my newly found cosmopolitan appetite for houmous, dark rye bread, baklava and halva.

We also used to drink at the Bridge Hotel in Greenford because it was roughly in the middle of a circle drawn round where we all variously lived, from South Ealing to Wembley, Hayes and Hanwell. At least I think that's why. It had no other distinguishing features that I can recall.

My libraries were Ealing Central, Northfields and Brentford Library, all roughly equidistant from where I lived in South Ealing just round the corner (though I didn't realize it at the time) from Greg and Linda Pickersgill. At the time I was busy falling in love with a young part-time librarian at Northfields, and spending a lot of time there, although it took her to make the first move before we became an item for the next few years.

Re John Neilsen Hall's loc in V25, what is it with this endless need to upgrade all the time, from Vinyl to CD and then to downloads and streaming (and now it seems, back to vinyl again). Having three gazillion bits of music all instantly accessible and searchable is dandy but it loses all the fun of serendipity when you look for something and end up finding something else you'd forgotten about.

I've held on to much of my original stuff, from vinyl and an old Garrard turntable to a Teac 4 track reel-to-reel, to the point where it sometimes looks like we could be contenders for a new TV reality program: *The 1980s Family*.

How financial markets work. Imagine a game of football between two teams of eight year olds. The ball goes to one end and everybody chases it in mad rush and kick it around a bit before it heads off in the other direction and they all run after it . It's sort of like suicidal lemmings but without the advantage of seeing the traders plunge over the edge of a cliff. Meanwhile they wipe a third off your pension pot in three hours panic which will take you two more years of working to recover.

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PHILIP TURNER

As previously reported, I had a look at the latest Vib on efanazines.com and that left me wondering why Dave Cockfield thinks I'm interested in the architectural features of pissoirs and what have people been saying to him. The next day, a paper copy of the mag arrived on my doormat. Bearing in mind all the work you'd put in to making sure the

pages were in the right order and get the envelope addressed to 10½ Carlton Avenue, I took another look. And this happened:

Your front cover is very colourful and it suggests that Steve Stiles needs help. Urgently. As for battered fush; the batter, dear boy is to hold together fish products made with the equivalent of fish sawdust. Not what you get in a chip shop, of course, but what's on offer on the cheap shelves of a supermarket. Think of it as fish mince in a shell.

I had a spot of bother with my broadband earlier this month. When I phoned Mr. Virgin about it, his wife had recorded a message telling me that she knew there was a problem in (pause) SK6 (pause) and an engineer was on the way to fix it (from India?) and the problem would be solved by 5:40 pm that day. So I did some stuff on my internetless PC and then shut it down; only to be told that it had found 2 updates to install. But I had no internet. So where did they come from? Outer space?

I was interested to learn that there is a corpulent element to BFFD. So that's going from Big Fat Disaster to Bloody Fantastically Fat Disaster? Yep. Works for me.

I'm not sure punks were ever garage bands, which rehearsed there. From what I remember of the genre, it was a 1970s counterblast to bands like ELP and Yes, which had vast stage shows performed by musicians. The whole point of punk was that you didn't need talent, and you didn't have to be able to play an instrument or sing. You just needed the affrontery to get up on a stage and make noises and spit at the audience. And when punk became fashionable, there were bands like the Stranglers, who could actually do music, pretending to be punks to cash in.

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JIM LINWOOD

It's still an all-male issue and now, with the pieces by Earl and Nic, a genzine rather than a perzine but still one of the best as the recent FAAn awards proved.

I can understand your dislike of fish in batter. When I grew up in Nottingham, fish and chips were almost a staple daily diet and I loved them. Back then the batter was tasty, crisp and delicious, often much better than the fish. The batter today (well, in London anyway) is a soggy, tasteless mess and the fish hasn't improved either.

Your piece on punk rock reminded me that I have been erroneously calling our daughter Eleanor's publication, Baby Bites Back, a "punk rock fanzine". In the 70's you describe, she was a child and BBB wasn't published until the 80's when I suppose it was dedicated to what I believe is called "indie rock." As well as a long interview with John Peel there were interviews and gig reviews of bands with names like Red Guitars, The Satellites, The Woodentops and Safe Houses (whom Eleanor recorded and circulated a flexi-disc with issue #5) although I'm not sure where they fit in the punk/indie spectrum.

One ish featured Attila the Stockbroker (John Baine) who has described himself as a punk poet and a folk punk singer. In the zine he wrote "I have enough money to live on

from giggling and then some. Earn more than I used to in the Stock Exchange. That's enough for me" and "Punk changed a lot for me, now it's a shadow of its former self." He also contributed a page long poem called "Every time I Eat Vegetables" which ended:

*You're a cabbage in a pickle and your brain has sprung a leak
so lettuce keep your distance 'cos I vomit when you speak
I'll always do a runner so I'm going where you've been
'cos to see you chills my marrow and turns my tomatoes green
You're an eighteen carrot cretin with a dandelion whine –
So stick to your herbaceous border and I'll stick to mine
and although this verse is corny, it's amazing but it's true
and every time I eat vegetables it makes me think of you!*

Pity Eleanor never got in touch with you and the Burlingtons asking for an article.

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LLOYD PENNEY

Well, done gone done it again. I missed an issue somewhere, and didn't realize it until the next issue came along. So, that means that I have issues 2.0.26 and 2.0.27 of Vibrator here, and you're going to get another double loc. Henceforth...

2.0.26...Yeah, squeaky clean Vibrator. Doesn't mean to say it's never been used... A number of my first loves were in high school, and were very unrequited. If they ever found out how I felt, they were usually revolted by the prospect. I met my first girlfriend in Victoria, British Columbia while I was taking a series of university transfer courses at the local community college, and let's say that was mostly unrequited, too. When I eventually got to Toronto to go to university here, I met up with local fandom, and met Yvonne Robert. And, we will be married 33 years as of May 28.

Just recently, I took my Windows 7-laden CPU in to our regular computer guru for a good cleaning, and an updating to Windows 10, for it looked like we were going to have to do it, anyway. It took two weeks to get it into shape, but we have the computer back. It was tweaked at the guru's shop, and tweaked again by our ISP, Bell Canada, but even with that, the computer is much slower than it was, and I seem to have less bandwidth, being unable to run more than two programmes, or even have more than two windows up at any given time. I cannot play videos, or operate internet radio, like the BBC. I am not sure what to do about this, but I guess I have to blame Windows 10 about it, and a message to the offices of Microsoft Canada has gone unanswered at this time. (And just for the record, driverless cars will be tested in Toronto within the next month or so. From what I've seen Robert Heinlein may have been overly optimistic when he wrote that the roads must roll.)

I remember that I was in Scotland with my mother and one brother, visiting her parents, in Ayr in 1968. We also visited her brother John in Kilmarnock, and while we were ushered in to meet John and his wife Ann, she ushered me and my brother right back out again into the front garden, where we spent the rest of the visit. I remember a glimpse of their front room... everything covered in plastic sheet, and in some places, the plastic sheet covered in more plastic sheet. I always figured that living rooms were covered in plastic to prevent dust and dirt from settling, and to keep family out of the room. I thought we were company, but turns out we were family, and out we went. My mother was not happy with what Ann had done, and I don't recall if they ever spoke again.

Congrats to Paul Skelton on this year's Harry Warner Best Letterhack award! Accrue it over six months, Paul. The CERN captain might say to the Higgs bosun that the beam was leaning to port, and to compensate. Definitely, he who dies with the most money wins, even if it starts to get up into the billions of \$ or £ or € or Pts or whatever. Overall, a most splendid lettercol.

2.0.27...The front cover is an image that'll take a while to fade. Excellent artwork, Steve, and I have to think that it reminds me of some of the girls I went to high school with...all their beauty was on the outside, and inside, they were pretty nasty. If I'd had the Hugo vote, Steve, it would have gone to you. I didn't have the vote, but I did look at the ballot, and I recognized few of the nominees, and almost none of the titles.

Earl Kemp! Hello! It has been a long time, and good to see you here. I've had my own dalliances with the publishing world, and while it is only too easy to fall out of it, it is nearly impossible to get back into it. I have made some living over the years as a proofreader, but right now, finding such a job is tough, and any job that does appear will get hundreds of resumes.

The local... on our local telly, we have Space, which is a science fiction channel, plus any number of specialty channels who run SF series on a regular basis. Plus, there lots of channels I could subscribe to which could provide me with all the SF programming I could ever want to watch. And, I watch none of it, and these days, rarely read any of the myriad SF books left unread on my shelves. My, I have changed. Might have been part of my personal mid-life crisis, dunno...

I get lots of calls from customer service in India. However, it's hilarious when they try affect an accent not their own, and give me a call to have my eavestrough cleaned out. I live in an apartment... And sometimes, a mysterious customer service man will call to tell me there's something wrong with my computer, and he'd be willing to have a look at it. Nope...

Ta for all of this, it's been great. And, best of all, I am caught up with the two issues outstanding, and I think you are currently preparing 2.0.28. We will see you when it arrives.

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FRED SMITH

(EDITOR: Fred Smith sent me a loc on V26, the infamous badly collated missing pages issue, so it was an incomplete loc, or at least a loc on an incomplete issue. I sent him a revised copy hoping it might stir him to some additional thoughts, but it didn't, and so I passed over the loc he had sent me. I shouldn't have and here it is now.)

Well, I guess I'll just have to live without those missing pages! No doubt they contained all the best stuff, too!

Anyway, very much enjoyed the rest of the zine, especially your own pieces like what you did when the Internet went down. It is a deprived feeling you get when you can't get your "fix" but does open up the possibility of doing something else - maybe all the things you've been putting aside.

Regarding driverless cars or, rather, cars driven by robots, it might be fun if we could have a real robot like the taxi driver that Big Arnie destroys in "Total Recall". Apart from that our esteemed government hastening to declare that no, they won't be allowed to drive us home when we've had a few is a typical nanny ruling, even before the things are here. And, as you say, there will probably still be accidents; computers are not infallible and people who depend on them slavishly (such as some airline pilots) can become even worse when faced with an emergency.

Thanks for "grabbing" Curt Phillip's article on his record collecting. Interesting since I have well over a hundred LPs and, of course, it's nice to see the sales of vinyl rising as recently reported. I do believe the sound quality is better than on CDs, probably a better frequency range but also because generally played on proper high fidelity equipment. There's also the benefits of the exercise from getting up to turn the record over! I know all the big band jazz and swing musicians that Curt mentions and it's nice to hear about Andy Kirk and his Twelve Clouds of Joy who had a very good lady pianist, Mary lou Williams. She also wrote and arranged some numbers for the band. Roy Eldridge (who was an inspiration for Dizzy Gillespie) played for a time with Artie Shaw and is featured on Shaw's "Little Jazz" (He was a small guy!) I don't have the end of Curt's article since it's on one of the missing pages (9)

Enjoyed all the locs too but no particular comment this time.

(EDITOR: And so Fred moves on to Vibrator 27)

That's some scary cover Steve has done this time. Man's worst nightmare? Actually, it reminds me of a pulp magazine cover I once happened to see in a newsagent's window when I was a small boy. It portrayed a large bat lifting a woman's severed head by the hair out of a fiery pit. In addition to the blood dripping from her neck there was (most horribly!) a drop of blood coming like a tear from one eye. The picture haunted me for years. Never knew what magazine it was from until seeing it for sale at a convention a while back. It turned out to be a 1939 issue of *Strange Stories*, a short-lived competitor for

Weird Tales published by Better Publications. If you're interested you can learn all about it on ISFDB but don't blame me if that cover gives you sleepless nights!

Lots of revelations this time about "first loves" so here goes my three! (Three? Well, more or less.) Unlike those who can't remember the names of their inamorata, I do remember mine. First was Thelma; I was aged about five or six and she would have been the same. I can't recall what she looked like (except cute!) but I did promise that when I grew up and became a pilot I would fly to her house and take her away from all that! My second "love" was more "first lust" in fact. Her name was Florence, we were both fourteen and met in High School. I could hardly speak to her, of course, and worried that any of the boys might discover how much I fancied "Big Flossie" (as they called her). She had long black hair and gleaming white thighs, revealed when she was cycling and her skirt blew back! Nothing happened but I could have been arrested for what I was thinking! My third love was pure and unsullied by such carnal thoughts. Like the film star her name was Doris and she was a blonde ("Doris Day! I knew her before she was a virgin!" -Groucho Marx) but better looking, seventeen years old (I was sixteen) and real. She lived in Rothesay with her mother, who had a very pleasant boarding house. I had heard about them, and the house from some of the pupils at my third High School and as a result spent all my holidays there. Doris had a large hut in the back garden where we could go to listen to records and smoke (she taught me how!). Ideal for some hanky-panky but only two chaste kisses were my reward. Ten years later I was back in Rothesay to play a six-week summer season with the band at the Pavilion and stayed with Doris and her husband (!) at the boarding house. He was a pupil I knew at the same High School but a year above me. His name was also Smith.

More revelations from various folk about the poverty and hard living conditions they were brought up in. I can see that from that standpoint I had a relatively privileged and comfortable life as a small boy. My earliest memories are of the house we had, a three bedroom new (I think) mid-terrace council house which had a living room, kitchen and bathroom on the ground floor with the three bedrooms upstairs. The living room and at least two of the bedrooms had open coal fires, the one on the ground floor heating a back boiler which gave us hot water for baths etc. Living in the house were my grandmother, an uncle and myself, my mother (who was a widow) living in the hotels where she worked. We were very much working class but, being an only child, I was probably rather spoiled so unaware of any shortage of cash, or anything else for that matter. Since this was Clydebank the house was badly damaged in the Blitz and we evacuated to Kintyre for two years, hence the reason I attended four different High Schools. After I got married, however, my wife and I lived in a bedsit in Glasgow for a while and made use of a **tin bath** in front of the fire, as there was a toilet but no bath, so I have experienced the boiling of kettles and all that .

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DAVID REDD

Music music music. (Cue for a Teresa Brewer song – and its sequel-by-another-hand from Melanie?) As that proves, I'm with Steve Jeffrey in hanging on to old vinyl – and cassettes even – and still buying it, the old stuff that is. (As with sf, but that's another story.) Virtually no overlap of artists though – oh, Gerry Mulligan? I did pick up an album collecting many of his early-Fifties sessions with Chet Baker, but the relatively modern packaging lacks the atmosphere of those old Vogue 10" lps, and the collection remains unplayed. On the turntable currently is *Das Goldene Schlager Archiv 1976* – pleasant enough on Side 1 which starts with Father Abraham's best composition, but Side 2 demonstrates that 1976 was the year it all started going wrong with Boney M and Silver Convention. I can forget about checking out any later German pop.

Nothing in common with Randy Byers either over Prince, who like Nirvana was for me simply some of the sound you had to wait through between the good stuff. (I still remember the shock of hearing a radio DJ playing two Good Stuff items in a row – Talking Heads' "Once in a Lifetime" and Kate Bush's "Cloudbustin'." But they were only the final two of his playlist, sneaked in quickly before he went off-shift.) Ah memories ... after the interesting early-80s indie scene the going-wrong went critical, with CDs, rap and U2 etc – can't blame Margaret Thatcher for *everything* disastrous about the 80s.

UK punk? The leaders either weren't for me or mutated into something else as you say. Poly Styrene had her moments. USA punk? I vaguely recalled it being the garage bands grinding out "Louie Louie" and "Season of the Witch", so on encountering the later version I thought it lacked the gormless enthusiasm of garage rock and smelt wrong. You can guess that the more modern "music" of Justin B, Pitbull and Lady Gaga (or whoever the *really* modern equivalent is) smells even worse to me.

Converting from vinyl to modern technology? Not me. John Nielsen-Hall is clearly more sensible and techno-savvy than what I am. Interesting. Yes, I have a separate phone, separate camera, separate PC, TV, vinyl (etc) player (s) ... when I should have all that on one decent tablet. Hey-ho.

So apart from John the only one living in today's real world is Nic Farey? Good grief, the skills and arcane people-smarts Nic needs to be a taxi-driver, never mind the actual driving. Always an eye-opener.

Robert Lichtman actually *walked* to school? And he's an *American*? The USA must have been very different in those days.

I was going to write what trailblazers the Spotnicks were, since you inexplicably didn't, but I'll save it for another time.

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MILT STEVENS

In Vibrator #27, you comment that traditionally Americans drink too little. If you people hadn't kicked the Puritans out of your country, they might not have ended up in the United States, and things might have been much different. Not that I blame you for kicking the Puritans out. I wish we'd kicked them out also.

Strangely enough, the hippies contributed to the anti-drinking sentiment in the United States. They were all for doping but quite contemptuous of drinking. I've never thought about there being any class difference between British fandom and US fandom. It seems like middle class people drink differently than lower class people but not necessarily less. Theoretically, there aren't any social classes in the United States. I don't know where the idea came from, but the government and school system have adopted it 100%. Many programs fail because the government won't consider that people in different social classes react differently to things. I first became aware of social classes by reading a book titled "Emtown Youth." It described the high school population of a mid-western town in about 1940. I understand it's a classic in its field.

I think I still have a couple of issues of the Spicy magazines around the house. They impressed me as being quite mild by current standards. As part of strange collectorish lore, I learned there never was a magazine titles Spicy Horror. However, there really was a magazine titled Spicy Zeppelin Stories. You can drop those two factoids into almost any conversation if you want to bring things to a complete halt.

The first house I lived in was in Hollywood. You may have heard of the place. Tradition said that D. W. Griffith had given the house to one of his humorous mistresses. My maternal grandmother acquired it later. She lived there for quite a few years with her lover, Thomas Hussey. He was a proto fan of sorts. I inherited his complete H. G. Wells short stories. He also had books on Esperanto, technocracy, and eugenics. I don't really remember him, since he died in 1944 when I was two. The first school I attended was Selma Avenue Elementary in Hollywood. Years later, Selma Avenue became quite famous for male prostitution.

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ROBERT LICHTMAN

In your opening comments in *Vibrator* 2.0.27, without knowing it you cut me to the quick (whatever that is) in writing that you "seem to have spent my lifetime buying half pints for visiting US fans. I mean, come on, what is that about? I put it down to class. English fandom came out of a working class where working men weren't ashamed to go down to the pub every evening and fry their brains with ten pints so they could forget the tediousness of their upbringing and everyday lives. Whilst US fandom probably derived from a middle-class brought up on sipping their martinis when they returned home every evening after work. Mad Men contrasted with Andy Capp, perhaps." If you'd been active

in 1989 when I had my TAFF trip, you might have been one of those who bought me a half-pint after I had some unsuccessful efforts to drink a full pint (which wasn't cold enough for my palate) in the early stages of my travels. I suspected before I left that this might be a problem since I'd grown up, so to speak, reading many British fanzines in which getting thoroughly pissed was, well, part of life.

But saying it's all due to class is an oversimplification. Certainly British fandom didn't evolve entirely out of working class drinkers – many of whom probably barely read anything at all other than perhaps the racing tip sheets, much less science fiction – and conversely American fandom wasn't all middle-class martini-sippers, especially as it sprung into being just as the Great Depression hit. The truth would be that both fandoms had participants of both working- and middle-class origins.

In my own case, my background is working class aspiring to be middle class – my parents were accomplished at the “as if” lifestyle, but my father's entire working life was in machine shops, never behind a desk in an office. I was maybe ten years old when I first got involved with alcohol, and my experience with drink at that point was largely confined to occasional sips (courtesy of my parents) of Jewish-style fruit wines from producers like Mogen David and Manischewitz – and, later, the furtive sips of beer that my high school friends plied me with. But well before I reached legal drinking age I'd experienced falling-down-drunk moments with the strong home-brewed beers of Charles Burbee and Bill Donaho. The latter also made very strong fruit wine, and I recall partying at his house in Berkeley when I was nineteen, drinking a glass of peach wine (so smooth!), and (here I go by reports the next morning since I have no direct memory) taking off all my clothes, climbing into my sleeping bag, and being out while the party raged on around me.

This set me up for a handful of years of fairly heavy drinking, where I got thoroughly familiar with major hangovers, explored the world of liquor and cocktails (yes, including sipping the occasional Martini), and then fairly abruptly (and coinciding with the surfacing of “the '60s”) giving it up for the most part in favor of smoking marijuana, which produced a high more to my liking.

Like Earl Kemp, I was in my early teens when first exposed to female nudity. But unlike the illos in the Spicy magazines that were his introduction, mine was with early “skin” magazines and with publications aimed at nudists that some of my friends had in well-thumbed and sometimes interestingly stained copies. The women in the latter were of all ages and shapes, including prepubescent teenagers, and perhaps because they weren't posed some were more of a turn-on to me than those in the “men's” magazines. Of course, in that time all genitals were either neatly airbrushed or hidden by the woman's position (or by a banner) so I didn't know until later and my first sexual experience that women had pubic hair, too.

Thanks for writing more about your childhood. Your mention of rolling down hills reminded me of the opportunities for same in the area where we moved into our new house in 1951 (as mentioned in my last letter). There weren't hills that one could

actually roll down with one's body, but our house was at the bottom of the neighborhood, where three streets converged into a wide spot of pavement in front of our house, which was on a corner lot. I had a Flexi Flyer like this one...



...as did some of my friends, and we loved walking or riding them up to the top of one of the streets and then racing down to the bottom, achieving considerable speed. None of the streets carried “through” traffic, so encountering a car on the move was a rare event and we felt quite safe.

Although I was never into models very much, like you the ones I did build were simple balsa wood airplanes that could actually fly. They came with a hook-like attachment that allowed me to launch them at a good speed using a device resembling a slingshot, and once airborne they would often go very far unless...something happened to cause them to veer at the apex of their flight and crash to the ground. If I was lucky, all that would happen was that the plane would disassemble itself and have to be put back together again. If not, some part or parts would break and that would be the end of that plane. I always bought the same plane as a replacement, and saved the usable bits from the damaged ones as spare parts.

Congratulations to Nic on landing a shift! But unless I missed it in the highly detailed paragraphs about how a driver's worth is measured so that he might be awarded a shift, Nic didn't reveal just what his shift is. I hope for his sake it spans whatever the prime hours are for getting lots of fares. He *did* say when he'll be eligible for bonus payment, though, and with any luck – which seems to be on his side, what with getting a shift so much quicker than other drivers – those bonus payments will be healthy.

And yes, Nic, I'm well aware of what “deadheading” means. In fact, I seem to recall using it in a sentence in some comments on an earlier installment of his column.

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DAVE COCKFIELD

It was with horror this morning that as I sat on the loo rereading Vibrator 2.0.27 I discovered a recommended deadline date for locs of May 27th 2016. Tomorrow!

This hit me more like one of Mr Beeching's “dead lines” with my final destination in jeopardy.

What was my addled brain to do? Nothing!

Consequently this is now not so much a loc as a thank you for the pleasure that your vibrator afforded me on an otherwise boring standard class train trip oop North to Newcastle Upon Tyne.

The occasion was unfortunately the funeral and cremation of my Uncle John in Hebburn, the town of my birth.

He was my favourite uncle and although he was in pain for much of his life with infirmities affecting one leg and his back he was always upbeat and jovial and had time to take his nephew to his allotment on sunny Saturday afternoons. When I was about ten years old he taught me three important skills. They have stayed with me all of my life, even if they are no longer used.

1). How to piss on leeks to make them grow bigger, the roots are where it's at.

2). How to kill a chicken by wringing its neck. If that doesn't work chop off its head and watch it run around the garden spurting blood like an extra from a Japanese Samurai movie.

Not recommended for vegetarians.

3). How to care for, groom, and race pigeons with the emphasis on the illegal betting that accompanied every race. It was unfortunately unscrupulously fair because of the tamper free racing clocks that you logged your pigeon's tag into when it finally returned.

The funeral was suitably sombre but the Wake afterwards was a traditional family gathering where relatives, unseen for many years, exchanged greetings and stories to commemorate John. Lots of alcohol was naturally consumed and I had great fun at the expense of the extended family, Newcastle supporters all, cheerfully regaling how Sunderland escaped relegation from the Premier League unlike poor Newcastle who were relegated.

Your Vibrator took a back seat on my journey back to London courtesy of copious amounts of alcohol served in First Class by a Virgin stewardess/waiter.

Yet another great cover by Steve Stiles. His fanzines covers are rapidly appearing all over so I can only assume that the Newcastle air at Corflu has rejuvenated him. Or was it the Newky Brown that has just been rechristened Newcastle Down Ale?

It was great to read that David Redd also experienced the joys of a tin bath in front of the fireplace. Youngsters today don't know what they are missing.

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HEALTH NOTES

Another fascinating four hours in A&E at the Whittington Hospital. Pat had a bad cold over a weekend which left her very run down and without any appetite at all. Then one

evening she had a massive asthma attack. She rang for an ambulance and waited for an hour for one to arrive before being told no ambulance was available.

So we bundled her, Dan and I, into a minicab and off to the A&E. There was a notice posted saying people could expect a two hour wait just to be seen by triage. Pat was getting steadily worse, struggling for breath, and she told me she needed help. So I banged on the door of the triage unit and demanded in a very nice way that they see her immediately. We had only been there half an hour and I could imagine the other patients who had been waiting much longer than us cursing me for a queue jumper, when they were still waiting to be seen for their blistered heel or whatnot. But it was plain to me and Dan that her life was really in imminent danger at that stage.

I was surprised they let me get away with it, but with so many people just turning up, the reception staff had no way of prioritizing that stage of the process. Mostly I think people are phlegmatic and expect long waits in such circumstances. They can also be relied to self-police to a degree and decide their own priorities. It was painfully obvious to all the other patients in the waiting room around her that Pat was in considerable difficulties and on the verge of collapse so I didn't feel so bad about it.

The triage nurse immediately had her taken through to the A&E unit itself, by which time she was near collapse and needed a wheelchair. They were quick to give her oxygen, some prophylactic drugs and a nebulizer, all of which stabilized her somewhat but not before she had taken to crying out "I can't go now! I can't go now!" She claimed afterwards this should have had irony hashtags but at the time I believed she believed she was on the brink of death.

Then began the tortuously slow parade of tests, blood, bp, oxygen level and x-ray. I spent some time sitting out in the main reception watching the ebb and flow around me. A porter said that this wasn't really very busy compared with some days when patients were racked up on trolleys waiting even to enter into diagnostic cubicles. And indeed it did seem less busy than on the last occasion Pat had been there with food poisoning. There is always a lot to see in an A&E Dept, if not always a lot to amuse. There was the obligatory shouty man, without whom no emergency department is complete, who screamed obscenities if he was kept waiting any time at all. The ambulance teams who regularly turned up with patients, usually old women. The most notable thing about them, and the hospital porters, was their standard issue footwear, huge heavy duty boots with toecaps like bottle-nosed dolphins. The ambulance staff of course, not the old women. And there was the guy the police bought in. I thought at first his arms had been bizarrely tattooed but on closer inspection they were cut and shredded and scratched with rivulets of dried blood, as if he had launched himself through a plate glass window. All in all though he didn't seem that bothered by his condition, more bothered in fact by having left his joints at home and having nothing to smoke. He didn't want to hang around, but the police assured him it wouldn't be that long. Hah!

Eventually Pat was prodded and poked and xrayed to their convenience and a real doctor appeared to confirm the diagnosis of asthma. She had a minor lung infection which showed up on her xray but which was considered by the doctor to be insignificant. Her gas exchange and lung function had improved thanks to the steroids, and her blood tests were all okay, apart from logging the infection. The doctor felt it was safe to send her home with a bunch of drugs, mostly the magic steroids, and so we bundled her into a taxi and went home at two o'clock in the morning to meet a very neglected and hard-done-by Dougal who had not been fed.

I guess I felt fortunate it was not a day when junior doctors had been on strike, because those were the only doctors there to help us and they already looked stressed enough. I hope Jeremy Hunt ends up in an A&E dept somewhere sometime gasping for breath his tight Tory lungs can't deliver.

It was always going to hard when Dougal was diagnosed recently with an aggressive mouth cancer, and in the end it was. But now he has gone, given peaceful relief by the vet. In his final days he was a pale shadow of his former self, was not interested in treats, or anything much. He slept a lot and his mouth was obviously causing him a lot of discomfort, choking up with continual drool. Goodbye old friend

Meanwhile did I mention my bursitis? Sometimes it is so bad I can hardly lift a pint.

TALES OF AN LAS VEGAS TAXI DRIVER BY NIC FAREY

"WHAT ABOUT THE FUCKING ACKERS, THEN?"

The title quote comes from Oscar Beuselinck, who died in 1997 but was a legendary figure in entertainment litigation. He was, for a time, the personal solicitor for Peter Cook, who took him along to a lunch meeting with a couple of characters who were supposedly interested in buying *Private Eye*, back when that organ was still in its relative infancy. After a lot of verbal dancing around, an increasingly impatient Beuselinck, wanting to get their offer on the table, succinctly elucidated the above question. That of itself has nothing to do with taxis and the price of a rub & tug, but I've always remembered that quote, and liked it.

So what about the fucking ackers? I hear increasingly embittered drivers (usually at one of the airport pits) bemoaning the fact that it's harder to make a living driving a cab than it's ever been. Ten years ago (they say) there were around 500 cabs on the streets, and as long as you were actually plying your trade and not off sleeping, it was apparently pretty much a given that you'd be making a steady \$100 grand a year or better. I've written, perhaps *ad nauseam cont'd p94* for some (M Meara, J Purcell) about the arrival of the rideshare companies, about which there's been a lot of gloom and doom. A clear-eyed look at the statistics, however, (especially overall number of rides, among several stats published monthly by the Taxicab Authority), suggests that the bite they've taken is

somewhere between ten and fifteen percent of our business. Year-on-year numbers for March (traditionally the busiest month of the year) show around 2.1 million rides in 2016 vs about 2.5 million in 2015. These are still bogglingly large numbers, of course, translating to an average of a bit under 68,000 rides per 24-hour period (in the taxis).

At the risk of driving away (ahem) all readers except the reliably number-oriented Unc (J), let's delve a bit more into that. All numbers have been rounded somewhat. At this time last year there were 2200 cabs on the road, so if they're working the usual 12-hour shift, each cab in March 2015 would have an expectation of about 18 rides per shift, or one ride every 40 minutes (which isn't exactly gangbusters). The average ride is \$15, so that's a \$270 book, and to spare you a bunch of intermediate sums, that works out to \$9.60 an hour (before tax), not including tips and commissions.

A much bigger gripe than the rideshare vultures has been the fact that the companies' response has been to put more cabs on the streets, in rather ridiculous numbers. For March 2016 we have 3,500 cabs out there, which reduces the expectation to 10 rides per shift (less than one per hour), \$150 book, \$6.25 per hour, in other words less than the minimum wage.

J (Unc), the only person still reading, may not be totally surprised to learn that I'll outperform that expectation fairly consistently, and do it honestly without a lot of twice-round-the-beltway long-hauling which some (if not many) drivers delight in. Certain companies still pressure drivers to come up with high(er) book, which means they pretty much *have* to long-haul or engage in other sharp practises. Most others now will simply look at the number of rides you got (and the spread of the timing) to determine whether or not the driver is (a) crap or (b) dicking around.

I heard a very apposite comment from one driver while staging at the airport a couple of weeks ago. I'd remembered a conversation with one of our long-serving Lucky drivers that his given target on any day was 20 rides and/or \$300 book. The more recent comment was that "\$200 is the new \$300", meaning that our earnings expectations are substantially reduced.

It's incumbent on any driver, therefore, to be really savvy about what's going on around town, where to be and when, and more and more importantly to have strategies for both your shift times *and* how to maximize your tips, which as our book gets sketchier become a much more relevant proportion of our income. Also, when we get a potentially good week with a sizeable business convention in town (like this last week's RECon) to try to be where the action is in terms of clubs and restaurants, as well as knowing how to circumnavigate the inevitable horrible traffic to get faster turnarounds. I still target at least 20 rides per shift, and more than usually get that, but then again you can end up with a lot of hotel-to-nearby-hotel short rides which make it hard to put up the numbers. As a good example, this last Sunday (usually the best booking day of the week), I did 25 rides for an actually slightly disappointing book of \$390 (wanted that \$400, bad), whereas on the Monday I clocked 24 rides for a mere \$270. So it goes. Of course, 24 rides = 24 tips (at least in theory, some fares stiff you), so bringing home money in hand helps a lot in

paying the bills. The newer cabs allow me to pair my phone with the car radio so I can crank my Pandora (ooh that sounds rude) and I've actually got a lot of appreciation from all sorts for the music, which consists of a lot of classic reggae & rocksteady (eg Toots & the Maytals) as well as the clutch of bands from the California ska-revival scene of years past (eg Stick Figure, Slightly Stoopid, NOFX et al). That and a clean (and roomy) cab, good conversation and solid, honest and confident driving usually gets a good tip. I'm more than happy to brag about getting passenger comments like "You're the *best* cab driver we've had!", and (to me, an important one) "Thank you for getting us here safely!". 7 or 8 times out of 10 that's reflected in the tip.

So, am I coining it? Well, I'm making a living and the bills are getting paid, although there aren't any savings lying around. My paycheck right now runs about \$700 clear every two weeks. That's a net of about \$5.80 per hour for the 60-hour weeks we do. That should tell you how important the extras such as tips are. This last week or two has been decent, but I'll conservatively estimate an average of around \$65 per shift, so \$650 per pay period (a good bit of which will ultimately be taxable), so that brings my effective hourly rate up to about \$11. Which is not really a fuck of a lot, but in Las Vegas, about enough to live on.

THE LICHTMAN/SKELTON HIATUS SHORT-FORM GLOSSARY

LONG-HAULING : We've had this before, but: the default route for a Clark County taxicab is the shortest distance. The meter rates are configured so that waiting time (basically when the vehicle is stationary, or moving at less than about 8mph) is much less lucrative than distance. For a practical example, Treasure Island to the airport would be about \$18-20 by the shortest route (Sands/Paradise Road), which might take up to 20 minutes in street traffic (depending on the time of day), but \$28-30 via the freeway (longer distance) which would, however, take maybe 10-12 minutes. Brainlessly, it's much better for the cabbie to get the ride that makes more money in less time. Some customers specifically ask to get there quicker, and are often regular visitors who know it will cost more. My usual spiel is that if I *know* traffic is going to be shitty on the streets, I'll offer the customer the option, making sure they know that it comes out more expensive. Most will take the quicker ride, with the added advantage that if they pay by credit card and put in the standard minimum 20% tip, that's more dosh in the trouser for me. The business conventions are good for this, since they're mostly on expenses anyway. It's often about the salesmanship, but I'll cheerfully take the customer by whichever route they want to go. One of our drivers had a fare, Oriental bloke who was a regular visitor, but had his teenaged kids with him for the first time. He actually asked to go out from the airport through the tunnel and go all the way up the Strip (long, and slow), so he could let them sightsee. Even though that wasn't a great-booking ride for the 40 minutes it took, the tip was apparently well worth it.

VIBRATOR : Multiple award-winning fanzine wot I write for, until Grah gets bored.

VIBRATOR BACKSIDE

Gosh, to think this started life as a personal zine. Now it is almost a real grown-up fanzine with contributors and all. Personally I don't think this will change its status. It is personal in that it very much justifies its existence to me at least as a sort of personal monthly diary, which other people are invited to jump into occasionally and shake their contemporaneous booty. I acknowledge my debt also to my correspondents who are a singularly dedicated and reliable bunch and can always be relied upon to provide entertaining conversation. Is this happenstance or my cunning recognition and nurturing of native talent? Who knows? Maybe it is simply that I present people with a regular format and enough hooks to get stuff off their chests. I am not going to over-analyse why this fanzine has received three peer awards in the last two years. I am simply grateful and will go on with it until other people grow tired. If I haven't said it before, thanks to everybody who voted Vibrator Best Perzine in the annual FAAn awards. Rob Jackson picked up our awards for us (Pat was joint winner of Best Genzine with Raucous Caucus) and mailed them to us when he got back to the country (thanks Rob). The award consists of a cardboard DIY model of the Sears Tower (in Chicago, of course) which when completed is almost half a metre high, surely the tallest ever peer award in history. No glue is required, the pieces being interlocking, and the only tool needed is a spudger, which I have learnt is a small spatula-like stick enabling you to punch out blanks in the cardboard. If Pat ever completes hers, I will post photos of it here. Mine is staying in the box. (Worth more on ebay).

This has been Vibrator 28 from Graham Charnock, dated May 2016. My email is graham@cartiledgeworld.co.uk. Send me a letter by the end of June and you too can be part of this magical phantasmagorical process.

If Pat proofread this issue it will be obvious by the absence of errors.