



**Elbra Lillian Wilstach Plott**  
Feb. 27, 1986 – Dec. 30, 2014

# SPORADIC 29

“You better learn to make a living with your head, Boy, because you’ll never do it with your hands.” – Charlie Plott to teenage son c. 1962

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### ILLOS:

Front cover: Photographs by Charles Cullen, Roanoke, VA independent filmmaker

Funny Times: 4, 9

Internet clip art; 5

As always, special thanks for proofreading this issue, Nancy Wilstach.

*Sporadic 29*, January 2015, is published by Bill Plott, 190 Crestview Circle, Montevallo, AL 35115 for Southern Fandom Press Alliance Mailing No. 302 This is Banshee Press publication No. 51. Email: [wjplott@aol.com](mailto:wjplott@aol.com). Cell: 205-908-8703.

# Our Hearts Are Broken

I don't know how much I will contribute this time. Much of the matter and reviews were done as I waited for the mailing to arrive so I could get started on mailing comments.

However, at 4 a.m. today (Dec. 30) we were awakened by a police officer with the news that our daughter, Lillian, 28, had been found in her apartment unresponsive. Efforts to bring her back were unsuccessful. We have gotten through the difficult situation of telling a four and half year old boy that his mother is dead, but we know there is much grief and hurt yet to come.

We have had many ups and downs with Lil over the past 15 years or so. The many "downs" are the reason we have custody of Atticus. There were a number of occasions when we anticipated that knock on the door because of drug abuse. Our deep sorrow today is because we were experiencing a positive period. She had been approved for Social Security disability, was moving into an apartment in Birmingham and seemed to be regaining some measure of control over her life.

Regardless of the autopsy report, I have my own theory of the cause of Lil's death. The many years of street drug abuse coupled with the crap that various psychiatrists kept pumping into her weakened her immune system and her heart. She lay down for a nap and just never woke up. This is a sad example of why we need universal health coverage in this country. Lil never got the help she needed. She got the McDonald's mental health treatment (get 'em and get 'em out as fast as you can), which was all the crummy insurance we could afford for her would cover. And we have not heard a word from any of damn doctors who were supposedly treating her. Alabama Psychiatric Services had an office worker call and offer condolences over the phone. I think I was judicious in the way I told her I consider them somewhat responsible for Lil's untimely death.

But she is at peace at long last.

Your prayers will be appreciated. Here is her obituary, the toughest writing assignment I have ever had:

Elbra Lillian "Lil" Wilstach Plott, 28, has found peace from the mental health issues that tormented her since adolescence. She passed away in her apartment in Birmingham on Dec. 30, 2014, just when it seemed she might be gaining control of her life again.

She is survived by her son, Atticus Judd Osborn Plott, Montevallo; her parents, Bill Plott and Nancy Wilstach, Montevallo; her brother, Charles Naivar, Collegeville, PA; her sisters, Mary Leach (Jamie), Tuscaloosa, and Margaret Davenport (Dustin), Deatsville; her nieces, Madison and Morgan Naivar, Phoenixville, PA., and Sydney Davenport, Deatsville; her nephews, Sam, Nick and Jack Leach, Tuscaloosa, and Asher Davenport, Deatsville.

A native of Montevallo, she was baptized and confirmed at St. Thomas the Apostle Catholic Church. She attended University Baptist Church Child Development Center, public schools in Montevallo and the Alabama School of Fine Arts in Birmingham. She spent a number of summers at The Cullowhee Experience, a camp for gifted students at the University of Western Carolina. She received a Batten Scholarship to Hollins University where she was graduated with a degree in film and photography in

2008. She has credits listed in the IMBD.com data base.

Lillian had a brilliant mind and a passion for writing. One of her poems, “Catching Kafka,” was published in *The Best Teen Writing of 2003*. She loved movies; she loved to read; and most of all she loved her son, Atticus. When she realized her mental health problems left her unable to properly care for him, she put him in her parents’ custody so he would be surrounded by care and love.

Her smile, her wit and her love of life made her many friends over the years.

Despite the troubles in her own life, she could step forward when needed. When her friends Steven Judd and Tony were dying of cancer, she was a constant caregiver. When her grandmother was dying in 2010 and the family was at loose ends, Lil took charge. She made her grandmother’s last days peaceful and helped the rest of the family get through that difficult time. They will be forever grateful for her strength at that time.

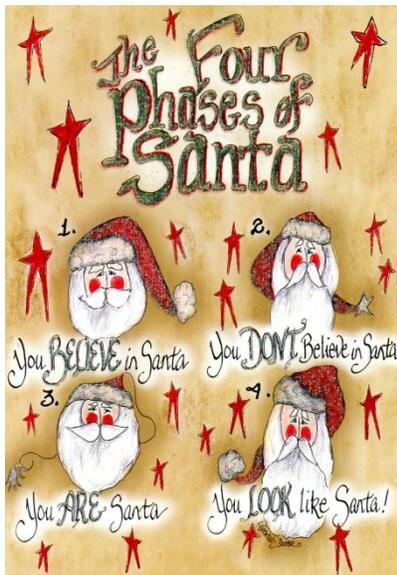
The funeral will be a private ceremony. Visitation will be 2-4- p.m., Jan. 2.

Memorials may be made to University Baptist Church Child Development Center, where Atticus has followed his mother and his Aunt Maggie in the pre-K program.

At this time, the likelihood of mailing comments is slim. I’m sure you will all understand. But taking your zines to the Y for my treadmill time has been therapeutic.

### **The Tribe Increaseth, also**

On Nov. 4 Dustin and Maggie (Daughter No. 2) Davenport welcomed a new addition to their family. Baby girl Sydney is our eighth grandchild, third of the female persuasion. Sydney arrived on election day just as Grandson No. 1 Sam Leach was casting his first ballot at the age of 18. Momentous events both, but we wish the election aspect had been more heartening. In Alabama, I am again at the point where I think it is just a waste of time and effort to go to the polls. Republican lock-step straight-ticket voting puts political hacks in office over qualified Democrats and independents with good qualifications over and over again.



On a more positive note, there has been great excitement for Atticus over Christmas this year. He entered pre-K in September and has been very full of himself in this more grown up environment. The school has a chart with 16 “jobs” posted, one for each student. They rotate weekly through such jobs as Handing Out Towels, Counting The Number Present, Table Wiping After Lunch, etc. His school, University Baptist Child Development Center, is the same one attended by his mother and his Aunt Maggie. Two of the same teachers are still there!

They had a float in the Montevallo Christmas parade this year with all of the little savages throwing candy to the people on the street. His friend Henry, who is a year older and in a Boys and Girls Club after-school program, decided he would not ride in their float. The reason? He would have to give away candy, rather than get it. Then, he hit upon the bright idea of assigning his parents positions along the parade route. He would throw them most of his

candy, which was to be saved for him. Was I that clever at 6? I don't think so.

The card above was our primary mailing this year (along with whatever was left over from last year). Beneath the signature on a number of cards, I wrote "Back in Phase 3!" But Nancy noted that I am actually in both Phases 3 and 4.

## **Bill's List of Observations, an ongoing series**

Things That Are Quite Annoying

1. Tosh.O tv show
2. Kit Kat candy bar commercials
3. Donald Trump's hair (also on my creepy list)
4. Donald Trump

## **Catching Up On Recent Films**

We rarely go to movie theaters any more, satisfied to just catch them on NetFlix although its streaming offerings can be pretty sparse at times. We do not subscribed to any of the premium channels like HBO so sometimes we have to wait a while. However, as a result of switching from DirecTV to Uverse we have found ourselves with HBO and Max this fall. I imagine this is a three-month free ride which will soon end. But I have taken advantage of it to see most of *Gravity* and the first two Hobbit films.

Having no science background, I was in no way disturbed by the flaws pointed out by several fans. The only flaw I saw was the crash in the ocean. The Astronaut was under water a bit longer than I thought was realistic. I found it good movie overall. I was particularly struck by the poignant scene in which the male Astronaut untethers himself and begins to drift off into space. Man, that put a whole new spin on the word lonely.

As for the Hobbit Parts 1 and 2, they were quite entertaining. I am not bothered by the additional material. What Peter Jackson has put together in LOR and now these two movies is awesome beyond belief. The sets and the actors are spectacular. If I have a complaint, it is only that the final scene with Smaug goes on a bit too long. I wonder if anyone else thought of Uncle Scrooge when Smaug emerged from the piles of coins? I had just been reading one of those comic books with Atticus the week I saw the film and the imagery was fresh.

I am quite looking forward to *Battle of the Five Armies*. *USA Today* had a couple of good pieces on Jackson, Ian McKellan, et al on Dec. 16. It can probably be picked up in their archives. Jackson talks about this hole that is about to be in his life after devoting so many years to this monumental project.

## **A Little More Information, Please**

*USA Today*, 12-1-2014 Rock Springs, Wyoming: Horse owners in rural Sweetwater County are posting a \$1,000 reward for information leading to the arrest of whoever might be cutting hair off the tails of their animals. Apparent thefts have occurred in the Jamestown and Farson areas in just the past week.

*USA Today*, 12-18-2014 Barnegat, New Jersey: Feral cats have received the right to live this week after the Township Committee approved a rule that authorizes feral cat colonies and requires them to be maintained, the Asbury Park Press reported.

## Bill's Beer List

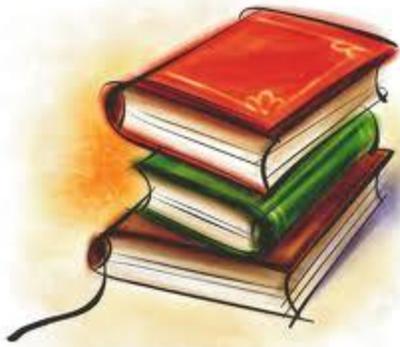
Going into the holiday season

7814. Seasonal Scotch Ale, Back Forty Beer Co., Gadsden, Ala. Winter seasonal. "From the fruity notes of Spring, to the roasted aromas of Winter, these beers are inspired by the Alabama Seasons. And just like the Seasons, these small batch offerings won't be around for long. So relax and let us guide you through the year....WITH BEER!" In The Den, Dec. 6, with sushi, Nancy and Carol Kehoe, watching Alabama's horrible first half play against Auburn. But as the beer warmed up, so did the Crimson Tide.

7815. Starlit Star Anise Porter, Magic Hat BC, South Burlington, Ver. 5.8%. Porter brewed with spice. The Den, 12-2-2014. Drinkable but nothing special

7816. Rolling Rock Extra Pale, Latrobe BC, Baldwinsville NY, Fairfield Cal, Ft. Collins, Co., Los Angeles, Newark. 4.4%. The Den, 12-2-2014. Thin, watery. I can't believe that this is something I used to consider a treat. Maybe the formula changed with the ownership.





## Reviews

**“I’ve never yet come out of a bookshop without purchasing something... Sometimes I half-heartedly determine not to buy any more books until I have read the ones I already have, but such madness soon passes.” – Al Andrews**

### **Trophy Hunt by C. J. Box (Berkley, 2005, pb, \$7.99)**

This is book four in the author’s mystery series featuring Wyoming game Warden Joe Pickett. Like the first three it is another gripping, page-turner.

Pickett is out fly fishing with his daughters, Sheridan and Lucy. As they prepare to head home he comes across the mutilated carcass of a bull moose. Its genitals and musk glands have been cut away with smooth, surgical-like incisions. Half of its face has been removed, also.

A few days later a rancher finds a dozen cattle mutilated in the same way. Pickett’s nemesis, Sheriff O.R. “Bud” Barnum, theorizes that the culprit is a reported grizzly bear that Pickett should be tracking down. His dim-witted deputy Kyle McLanahan babbles about alien invasions to the sheriff’s chagrin. Then, there are similar deaths of two men in locations about 50 miles apart.

There are almost supernatural overtones to some of the incidents as the story progresses. The story opens with Sheridan having a nightmare that foreshadows some kind of impending evil. Pickett’s eccentric friend Nate Romanowski puts a spiritual spin the wandering grizzly. On the more mundane front, Pickett begins to get the impression that there is something nefarious going on involving real estate transactions and mineral rights.

When it all shakes out, the human and bull moose mutilations are solved, but the cattle mutilations remain a mystery. And there is no explanation for what frightening experience turned the coat of Joe’s Labrador Maxine snowy white during the investigation of the mutilations. And it really doesn’t matter. Once again Box has put together a masterful story and things involving nature should have some element of awe and spirituality, perhaps.

Quotables:

--Lucy thought how old Jessica’s grandparents seemed to be, especially compared to Grandmother Missy, who was now out on that ranch. Grandmother Missy seemed years younger. Lucky sometimes wished she was more like a real grandmother, but Jessica’s grandparents took

being old a little too far, she thought.

--Marybeth felt a pang; the girls were growing up. They no longer wanted to share all of their secrets with her. It hurt to think that. Maybe if she didn't work so much, Marybeth thought, it would be different. Maybe if she was home when school was out, like she used to be, her girls would confide in her again. Sheridan, especially. Sheridan used to tell Marybeth everything, lay bare her feelings and concerns, bounce things off of her while Marybeth prepared dinner.. She didn't do that anymore, because of Marybeth's schedule, her work, her burgeoning new enterprise. Dinner was rushed, something she thawed in the microwave and gave Joe to grill, or takeout. While Marybeth still insisted on a family dinner together, it wasn't the same anymore. Everything was rushed. Dinner was for eating, not catching up and visiting, talking about everyone's day. Dinner now was a fuel stop that preceded homework, showers, and bed. God, she felt guilty.

**The Million Cities by J. T. McIntosh (Pyramid, 1963, pb, 40 cents when new, \$1 used, acceptable inflation)**

In the long distant future mankind lives completely in enclosed cities that penetrate deep into the earth. The planet's resources are largely depleted by the billions of people living in the cities. Child-bearing is controlled and limited. The obvious solution is to explore other worlds, but the government has outlawed space travel. The Chartists, a group of revolutionaries, has the ability to build a spaceship if only allowed to work with capable scientific minds.

A Reorganization Committee, trying to deal with the population problem, closes The Park, a major leisure spot. The reason given is that people are living too well. If their lifestyle is downgraded, then maybe they will pay more attention to government warnings.

The assassination of a major political figure, a senator, brings about a severe crackdown on the Chartists although the murderer was an artist upset over the loss of the park. McIntosh carries the story along at a good pace, leading to a totally unexpected conclusion. When the experimental rocket crashes, killing many people, we learn that the crash was deliberate. The Chartists are not a secret organization of revolutionaries trying to free mankind but just the opposite. Earthlings must not be allowed to leave the planet because most other planets and moons are occupied by other indigenous lifeforms. There would be no room or desire for Earth colonists on those worlds.

A good yarn and some interestingly prophetic views of the future. (But then we expect that from our SF authors, don't we?) I'm glad I found it.

Quotables:

--Small disasters cause anger, fury, blood lust. Men and women feel that someone must pay. Big disasters are met with a strange calm. Vengeance doesn't seem to matter.

-- If you put the bite on people gradually they left fighting over it until it was too late. If you made a big demand all at once, they rose up in arms and refused.

--"Whether we should stop wars is open to question, but I don't think man of us actually do question it. Wars are probably the natural way of removing excess population, and we may be unjustified in stopping them."

--As Lorna had once quite truly said, the Million Cities didn't have a government, it had only an administration.

--Look for saints among human beings and you find them. Look for beast among human beings and you find them too.

**Science Fiction Art, Illustrations by Chris Foss (Hart-Davis, McGibbon, London, 1976, 11.5x18.25” pb)**

My son-in-law, Dustin Davenport, has a good eye for unusual finds in yard sales and flea markets. This large book was part of a birthday package from him and daughter, Maggie. In keeping with our family tradition of late gifts, I didn't get the package until Boxing Day. Also in the bag were video packages of four “B” SF movies and two old movie serials. I spent part of Christmas night watching the first six episodes of “The Phantom Empire” with Gene Autry.

This peculiar book, with an introduction by Brian Aldiss, contains 10 Foss illustrations. I can see no theme or purpose to it except to present some of Foss's work in an available format. Aldiss notes in his introduction that all of the images are space and/or huge machine creations. The detail is extraordinary. Having admired them, I was pondering what to do with the book (it's fabric tape spine is disintegrating). Nancy suggested the images might be great for the walls of Atticus's room if he gets into SF like his PawPaw. And so the book will be set aside for that eventuality.

**The Phantom Empire, 12-episode serial from Mascot Films, 1935)**

This is referenced above as part of my birthday package from daughter Maggie and son-in-law Dustin Davenport. The serial starred Gene Autry, “singing radio cowboy”, and Frankie Darro. Champion trick rider Betsy King Ross gets a decidedly second billing as the sister to Darro's character. And if she did a trick on a horse in any of the 12 chapters, I missed it. The basic story is Autry's Radio Ranch radio show is constantly in danger of being cancelled because his do-gooding has him narrowly missing the show over and over. If he fails to appear they lose their contract. Meanwhile, a handful of nefarious scientists are in pursuit of radium which is located in the kingdom of Murania, 25,000 feet below the surface.

This was no doubt fun stuff for pre-pubescent in 1935. I readily admit I would have been enthralled by it at that age. Looking at it as a jaded adult I ponder such questions as: If they had ray guns, why were they always fighting with swords? (If they could invent robots and an elevator that fairly zipped up and down the 25,000-foot shaft, why were they riding horses instead of some mechanical marvel? The regal costumes of the Muranian soldiers makes them look like Ku Klux Klansmen going to a fancy dress ball.

But what the hell, I hadn't seen a serial in decades. It was a fun couple of hours over three nights, especially watching the progression of catch-up screens for each succeeding episode.

**Imprimatur, A Literary Quarterly for Bibliophiles, January 1947**

This is Vol. 1, No.1 of a publication that appears to have seen only one issue. The editor and publisher, Lloyd Emerson Siberell, was a Norfolk and Western Railwood executive whose primary interest in life was books. According to a web site he was an enthusiastic collector of Powysiana and published *A Bibliography of the first Editions of John Cowper Powys* in 1934. He published a number of other folios under the title *Imprimatur, A Folio of Personalities, Impresions and Observations* in the early 1940s. But this January 1947 issuance is the only one I found for the quarterly.

How I came about buying this publication online is an interesting story in itself. My wife, Nancy Wilstach, is the last person with that surname, as far we can determine. When son, Charles Naivar, was here over the Thanksgiving holidays, Nancy was showing him some family

photos and other memorabilia. Among them were books written by her distant uncle John Augustine Wilstach, a classical poet and scholar who translated the works of Dante, Virgil and Horace. Two of his sons were fairly well known writers in the late 1800s and early 1900s. Paul Wilstach was a successful theatrical promoter in New York and author of such works as *Mount Vernon, Washington's Home and the Nation's Shrine* and *Correspondence of Adams and Jefferson, 1812-1826*. Frank J. Wilstach had been a journalist and wrote *A Dictionary of Similes* (Boston: Little, Brown & Co., 1916). Annual updates with new similes were published in a New York newspaper. He also wrote a biographical novel of Wild Bill Hickock that was part of the inspiration for *The Plainsman* film of the 1930s. Finally, the third son, Claxton Wilstach, was a traveling theater manager and press agent. He died in Boston in 1915 while preparing to promote D.W. Griffith's film, *The Birth of a Nation*.

In passing she mentioned that there was another family writer about whom little was known. John Wilstach, she said, was reported to have gone to Sweden and become a science fiction writer. Immediately intrigued by such a notion, I went to the fictionmags.com forum, posting a request for any information on John Wilstach. As I expected, I was quickly rewarded with very useful postings by Chums Paul Di Filippo, John Espley and Sai Shankar. In addition, the fictionmags data base provided me with a list of some 70 short stories, novels and articles by him.

John Hudnall Wilstach, the son of Frank J. Wilstach, was born in 1890. He died in Clinton, NY in 1951. He was a friend of H.P. Lovecraft's and was reported to have written a piece on Lovecraft for *Esquire* magazine. Armed with this information, I decided to put together a Christmas present package for Nancy on John H. Wilstach. I compiled some biographical information, printed out the list of stories from the fictionmags webpage and purchased online three publications with his stories. *Argosy All-Story Weekly* for June 19, 1926, contained the short story "Important Underlings"; *Fantastic Adventures* for April 1945 contained the novel "Escape from Doom"; and the quarterly contained a nonfiction piece called "Army Post – Old Style."

The article resulted from John H. helping his father with research for the Wild Bill Hickock book. John H. interviewed Elizabeth Custer, the widow of the general. She shared information about an army post laundress and seamstress named Old Nash who was married to a soldier. When Old Nash became ill and died, it was discovered in the post-mortem that she was actually a man. It was not long after her death that Custer and his men died "in the Massacre of The Little Big Horn." Wilstach was perhaps ahead of his time when he penned, "It would have been a battle if the whites had won." The article is an extraordinary story with a lot of fascinating detail about military post life in the late 1800s.

As for the journal itself, there are other things of interest. The lead piece is a look at Thomas Frognall Dibdin, arguably the father of literary bibliography. Another piece titled "Bookplates" is a look at a printing and engraving process not adhesives proclaiming ownership. There is an intriguing piece on jewelry, gold and silver being used in the extravagant bindings of early publications. The author, Lawrence S. Thompson, quotes St. Jerome saying to an early Christian congregation, "Your books are covered with precious stones and Christ died naked before the gate of his temple." But then, Thompson adds, "But Christian or heathen, the bibliophile of antiquity loved de luxe books as do few of us who must live in this atomic vale of tears." He didn't know he was addressing Joe Moudry and other future book lovers.

In a lengthy column of short reviews and literary news, there is commentary on *Mrs.*

*Rasmussen's Book of One-Arm Cookery*. Author Mary Lasswell presents "a host of recipes for good things to eat that can be easily stirred up with only one arm, leaving the other free to manage a beer for the cook." The last item in that column is classified ad that reads:

"MANUSCRIPTS WANTED: *Crime Doctor Mystery Magazine* will consider original, well-written crime and mystery novels. No pulps..." Well, that cuts to the chase, doesn't it?

*Impramatur* was published in Winston-Salem, NC, but there is an insert announcing that Siberell is relocating to Cincinnati with a new address in Ohio. It is possible the journal did not survive the move.

### **The Pushcart War by Jean Merrill, illustrated by Ronni Solbert (The New York Review Children's Collection, 2014)**

This is the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary edition of Merrill's juvenile novel of 1964, depicting a conflict between pushcart vendors and very aggressive truckers in New York City. I guess it was essentially a young adult type book at the time and although it is dated, there is still a certain charm that lingers.

What it basically boils down to is a conflict between Little People and Big Guys. There is no question of who is right and who is wrong. Despite the datedness, there is a modern thread that can be connected. In cities across the country there are ongoing disputes between food trucks and brick-and-mortar restaurants with regulations flying left and right. There is a great deal of subdued humor that was perhaps uproarious 50 years ago.

Quotable:

--"The fact is, Solomon," he continued, as he roped the popcorn machine onto his cart, "to cause a little trouble now and then is maybe good for a man."

--Some of the truck drivers tried to laugh off the letters.. "What are a few letters to the newspapers?" they asked each other. "Everyone knows only crackpots write to the papers." Mayor Emmett P. Cudd, however, was not laughing. "Crackpots have a vote like everyone else," he told his wife, Ethel P. Cudd. "And enough crackpots could vote a mayor into office. Or out," he added.

