

**Letter Graded Mail
sent to Garcia@computerhistory.org
by my Loyal readers!
New LoC Header Art by Kurt
Erichsen!**

**Let us kick it off with an LoC on
issues 123 and 124 from Ted White!**

Dear Chris,

Another slow day at work – after a crushing couple of weeks – so I caught up on DRINK TANKs. Never an easy task, and this blissful state won't last long.

Like a shark, I have to pump out zines or I'll die...or something like that!

In #123 Mark Plummer cites for you a reference, I gather from Leah

Zeldes, to Derek Pickles (yes, a real fan) and his coeditor inventing either “the usual” or what that phrase stands for: swapping your (printed) fanzine for a fanzine in trade, a LoC, or a contribution – rather than for money (a subscription). All of this in 1954.

I didn't chase down the citation, but I doubt its accuracy. I know for a fact that I was putting out fanzines in 1953 which followed that policy and so did most of the fanzine editors I knew then. Indeed, I started doing a fanzine so I wouldn't have to write LoCs or contributions to get other fanzines. ***That makes sense to me since I've always thought that The Usual was how it all began.***

The question is two-fold: when did fans stop selling their fanzines, and when did the stock phrase “the usual” come into common or regular usage? ***I went looking through some of my old zines and I don't have any zine which mentions The Usual by name until the 1960s, but my collection's small, so I'm imagining it was much earlier than that.***

We all put prices on our fanzines, usually on both the cover and in the colophon. Typically fanzines went for anything between a nickel and a quarter. But this was sort of the default method of acquiring a fanzine, and useful for the fanzine reviewers in the prozines of the day (there were three or four fanzine review columns

in the prozines when I started buying them in 1951) and their readers. Dean Grennell coined and made famous the phrase “sticky quarters,” because fans and would-be fans of the day would tape nickels, dimes or quarters to a 3 x 5 file card or even to the bottom of a letter and send them off to the lucky faned. I confess I did this when sending away for my first fanzines. Invariably the coins, freed from the tape, were sticky.

rich brown mentioned that he was the last reviewer of fanzines for a prozine. It rather amazed me that they'd care what fans were doing. I guess things were much different back then. Makes sense about the quarters. I know there was a zine called Sticky Quarters in the 1970s (maybe earlier) that I found an issue of once upon a time.

By the late '60s and the '70s some of us were asking then-outrageous prices for our fanzines (\$1 and up) in their colophons, but largely as a way of saying “we don't want your money – we want a LoC, trade or contribution – but if money's all you've got, let's make it interesting.” I do not recall ever receiving Actual Money for fanzines like Egoboo (which John D. Berry and I did in the late '60s and early '70s).

As I understand it, there were a number of zines that mostly did accept money instead of The Usual.



I'm thinking of Dick Geis' zines of the 1970s.

On the other hand, there was this fan in the '50s named W. C. Houston, if my memory still serves, who lived in North Carolina and was famous for subscribing to fanzines. You'd get this little (#6) envelope, and inside would be a 3 x 5 file card, with some coins taped to it and Houston's name and address rubber-stamped in green ink on it. Never more than that. Never a single word added. He (I

guess it was a “he”) was still doing this in 1959, sending me just such a card of sticky coins for Void. He'd acquired all my previous fanzines the same way, and by then I was getting fed up with him. The lack of any feedback, any personal contact, struck me as antithetical to fandom.

Nowadays, at least on the e-side of things, no feedback is a typical mode for a large swatch of readers. I looked at the numbers that SF/SF got on some of the sites where it's posted and we seem to get 1 response for every 100 readers.

Starting in the '40s, fans began expressing their preference for “the usual” (not yet so codified) over money. But money bought postage stamps (some fans asked for unused stamps instead of coins) and defrayed the expense (as much as five or ten bucks) of paper and ink, so faneds were loath to stop asking for it entirely. Nonetheless, the price of a fanzine became a pro forma sort of thing and “the usual” became the understood preference. Exactly when the phrase, “the usual,” itself came into being and usage I'm no longer sure. I think it snuck up on us.

That makes sense.

In #124 you wonder if Forry is to blame for “modern fandom.” Yes and no.

He was one of several early pioneers of fandom. He was also one

of the youngest of them, still a young boy when he started reading *Amazing Stories*. The thing is that *Amazing Stories* published full addresses in its letter column. This allowed its readers to write directly to each other, becoming “pen pals,” and for the earliest fanzine editors to compile mailing lists from those letter columns (although usually they sent advertising circulars for the fanzines to that list, soliciting subscriptions). The earliest fanclubs were correspondence clubs, some of them devoted as much to science in general, astronomy or rocketry as they were to SF. The earliest fanzines tended to be club publications, or at least club-sponsored.

That has tended to be the case for most zines not only in SF fandom, but in Sports, Music and Film fandoms as well.

Forry was not one of those early fanzine editors. Indeed, I don’t think he actually did any fanzines until he started *ImagiNation* at LASFS in the late ‘30s (from which came *The Voice of ImagiNation*, a letter column cum fanzine better known as *VoM*, which eclipsed its parent fanzine). No, Forry was one of fandom’s first letterhacks. He had many letters in the prozine letter columns in the ‘30s, and established himself fannishly that way. He wasn’t the only one. An early competitor was Jack Darrow. One of the features of the first Worldcon,



the New York World Convention, was the first meeting of Ackerman and Darrow. They met as equals. Others who established themselves in those ‘30s prozine lettercols were Bob Tucker (as both himself and as Hoy Ping Pong) and Don Wollheim, whose *Great Staple War* played itself out in the back pages of the prozines.

I was reading All Our Yesterdays and there were so many names that just seemed to pop up out of nowhere. I don’t remember Jack Darrow, though.

I credit Bob Tucker with “modern fandom” and with the introduction of fannishness and fan humor, but his ideas fell on fertile ground and were quickly picked up by many others. Other very important early fans included Sam Moskowitz (more

important in his own mind than in the minds of others) and Jack Speer (inventor of the hoax fan, John Bristol, circa 1940, and fandom’s first historian – he invented numbered fandoms – and encyclopedist with *Fancylopedia I*).

I thought hoax fans were much more modern than that. I’ll have to ask Jack next time I see him.

Well, I went on longer on those two topics than I’d expected to, so I’ll knock off here, knowing that in no time at all I will be backlogged another dozen issues or more. (Yes, I did read #125, but have no comments on it.)

All best

Ted

Only one this time, Ted! I’ve been slacking off for a while, so I only managed to do one extra after the ones you commented on.

Thanks much, Ted! And now on issue 124...John Purcell!

Chris, you are showing signs of creeping SMOF-ishness. No sooner do you get the idea of bringing Corflu to San Jose in 2011, that you get a Fan Hugo nod. *Now* all of a sudden, you are laying out in your fanzine what your idea of the Perfect WorldCon would be. I am getting fearful for you, my friend. If you are not careful, we may have to put in a call for the SMOF Patrol to come and lock you away in a

room filled with manual typewriters, mimeograph, electro-stencillers, styli, correction fluid, reams of Minneapolis Yellow paper, and enough beer to drown a water buffalo. Drastic action, I know, but we will do what we have to do.

Nothing wrong with thinking of these things so long as I don't go over to the SMOF side. I think time with so much mimeograph stuff might put me off of fanzining. I might only do 1 zine a week instead of 3.

You. Have. Been. Warned. Other than that, I have to agree with you about the basics of a "good" WorldCon. Since I am not into con organizing - I would much rather help out as needed once it's all set up and ready to roll - this is stuff that I really don't lose sleep over. If I ever organize a con, it would be a relaxacon-type of a deal. Nothing elaborate. In fact, I would probably model it after what Pat Virzi did with Corflu 24. Scaled down, relaxed, with a well-stocked consuite, block everyone's rooms on the same floor(s) or wing, and the danged hotel MUST have a pool. That last one is a no-brainer. Oh, and a bar in the hotel Just In Case, or within reasonable staggering distance from the con hotel. Your musings are well-thought out and make sense. I also agree that every worldcon should "try something really unusual and fun" to spice things up a



bit. Things like that help to give each WorldCon its distinct identity, much like each major regional con has its own signature style. Again, this makes perfect sense.

I think that's the biggest thing for me: identity. I don't wanna feel like I'm just at any con. I'll never run a big con (CorFlu will be a big deal for me) but I'll be happy to run a fanzine lounge or a film festival for folks if they need me).

I really have to hand it you, too, because just about everything you consider needs to be covered in order for a modern day WorldCon to succeed. Even so, I really hope you don't succumb to that dreaded SMOF Disease. I hear it's terminal. Great illos to accompany your article, too. I really loved the escalator full of Storm Troopers, and the chick on the cycle was truly hawt. Oh! Hawt chicks make a con a success, too! But I digress...

No question. That photo is my latest obsession!

Mark Plummer makes a good point about hoping for a better mix of Hugo nominees. However, since the vast majority of the literature happens to be published in English, this is perhaps to be expected. No matter what, I really don't care for the fiction Hugos this year, merely the Fan Hugos, and even there I have my qualms. Oh, well. At least there are some very good zines and people nominated over-all, and I wish them all well.

I still wish some Japanese works had gotten nomed, especially something Anime. Still, this year is something of an experiment. Japanese fandom has never had such a big deal thrust upon it and we're just seeing what happens when a new place gets into the WorldCon game.

It will be interesting to see how the Dramatic Presentation: Long-Form Hugo Award - the *movie* Hugo, people, for criminey's sake! call it what it is - turns out now. I think that category is going to be close. I haven't seen *V for Vendetta* yet, but I hear from just about all who have seen it that it was a pretty cool film. Must rent it and check it out.

Very cool. I liked it better than the comic, though I'm sure I'll be throttled for admitting that!

Oohh... We love the B-52's "Love Shack" and that entire album, *Cosmic Thing*. Great party music!

I want them in the Rock 'n Roll Hall of Fame, along with Kiss and Kraftwerk and Devo) and I'm still think Roam is one of the best songs of all time.

I love Lloyd Penney-style loc, especially when one is written by the master himself. I bow down before him in abject obeisance and display the appropriate gesture to him.

All hail Lloyd Penney! Hail Lloyd! Hail!

Finally, before I forget, did you ever find your cell phone? Just curious, especially since once you program in all those numbers and such, it's damned hard to remember every last one of them to re-enter onto a NEW cell phone. Pain in the butt, fer shure.

Indeed I did, just the other day. Evelyn distracted me while I was getting a bottle of water and I somehow left it in the fridge. These things happen...but only to me!

Great photos and art throughout. Gud stuph, mein roomie. Continue the trend, and keep 'em coming.

All the best,
John Purcell

Thanks much, John!

Had enough of John Purcell? I hope



not since here's another, this time on issues 125 and 126!

As promised, here's that Lloyd Penney-style loc on issues #125 & 126 of *Drink Tank*.

I know Lloyd Penney. I've gotten LoCs from Lloyd Penney. You, sir, are no Lloyd Penney...but your LoCs are just as welcome!!

DT #125: I know that I've mentioned this before in my most recent SNAPS zine - *Nukking Futz #8*, to be in your e-mailbox later this week - but I am going to say it again: This was a really nice tribute issue to Kurt Vonnegut. I had no idea, until I read the lead article, how much of an influence Vonnegut had on you. This proves, I guess, that individual responses to his work vary from person to person, especially in light of the extreme reactions people have had to Vonnegut's work. As much as I enjoyed his writings, over the years I learned that I had to be in the "mood" for

reading his novels. They are not what could be called "light reading." Far from it. Vonnegut was one of the most challenging writers America has ever produced, and maybe this fall I will teach one of his novels in class. I will have to think about that a bit more. But, overall, Kurt Vonnegut's output was remarkable and never lagged in interest from the beginning of his career to its end. A hell of a run. He will be missed.

Yeah, I'd been wanting to write that article for a while, but I'd never gotten around to it. I guess I was waiting for the inevitable.

Also, that McFadden Lecture he was to give on April 27th was given by his son Mark, which was a nice touch. It was treated as a memorial to Kurt Vonnegut (I just read from a Google search), and I somehow think that KV would have been quite astonished by that.

I wish I could have heard it. Mark's quite the speaker. I heard him on NPR a while back and he was very interesting.

Now for *DT #126*:

Y'know, there is nothing finer than to start an issue off with a catch-up loc on "old" issues by none other than Ted White. Speaking of the man, thank you, Ted, for reminding me of Klaatu. I do remember reading about the hoopla about them being the Beatles in disguise, but that was



probably more of a publicity stunt than anything else. But as usual, Ted provides more than ample information, which I love;

his knowledge of music is quite vast, so I am looking forward to chatting with Ted at next year's Corflu much more than I did at this year's version.

I wish I could be there with y'all, but I'll be at CostumeCon workin' for Kevin Roche. It's a bummer because I love Vegas fandom, but at least I'll get a chance to hang with 'em at Westercon.

Eric Mayer's musings about UK zines having a "British accent" is quite accurate. I believe that whenever I get *Banana Wings* or *Prolapse* in the mail, or read some Brit-zine on the web - like *Motorway Dreamer* or *Plokta*, for example - I tend to read them with a bit of an upper-class twit of the year accent rolling through my head. It really doesn't help, I don't think, but it is still a curious phenomenon. I wonder if anybody else on this side of the Pond does that.

Funny note: I tend to spell things a bit British due to the early influence of a Brit Babysitter I had when I was a kid. Apparently

Adobe recognises this and when read through a vocalizer, it is spoken with a British accent. When Ed Meskys told me this, I nearly plotzed.

Of course, the lingo they use helps this along, too, which constantly reminds me of my personal old joke about getting an ESL degree (which I have) and going to the British Isles to teach English as a Second Language. Funny thing, though, is that there really *are* a lot of ESL jobs all over England, Scotland, Wales, and Ireland, so I really could do this if I wanted to. Sometimes it is very, very tempting to complete the on-line applications, attach my CV and a cover letter, then see what happens. It would be interesting - and fun, too - to teach in England.

I wish I spoke English well enough to understand the Brits, but I'm not quite there.

Your article "The Crappy Old Warehouse" reminded me of this ancient classroom building on the Iowa State University campus - build in 1892 - that I once taught in: Morrill Hall. No air conditioning, windows that barely opened, wooden floors that creaked at the slightest pressure, and the steps leading up to the second floor classroom were scooped and rounded by the passage of millions of feet trodding up and down those steps over the years. Morrill Hall has since

been renovated - for a sizeable chunk of change, I might add - because it is such an historical building and deserved



the refit. It's a cool building - and I think they might have finally installed central air as part of the deal.

There's a certain love I only find for old buildings that are almost entirely unloved.

You Bastard! You got a an article out of Dave Langford! As always, it is highly entertaining - which just proves that when Dave *does* actually produce fan writing, he is one of the best - and this time with photos, no less. Well played, Chris. Well played. This was greatly enjoyed, and I congratulate you, Mr. Best Fan Writer and Fanzine Hugo nominee, for acquiring this for your zine.

Fucker.

You see, I use my powers not merely for Good, but for AWESOME! Dave was kind enough to send it, which apparently annoyed Peter Weston who believes that it is Dave's solemn duty to write for Prolapse!

Ooohh... I see I have to get an article about Iguanacon to you. When's the deadline, roomie? Chances are I

will be needing to do some basic on-line research to recharge my memory banks before committing words to paper.

The Deadline for This Were WorldCons is Middle of July. If YOU wanna write about a WorldCon you attended, let me know and I'll set you up!

With that, thanks for the fun zines. Judging by your proposed schedule on the last page, we're about to be swamped by Garcia zines again. Everybody: duck!

All the best,
John Purcell

And as you can see, it's already happening!

We also had notes from Dave Langford, Earl Kemp, Jeff Redmond, Ty Wistera, Jason Hays, James Bacon, M Lloyd (she's doin' OK in Finland) and Mark Velentine.



My SPAMfilter ate this article that was supposed to be in the Vonnegut Issue, but sadly, I didn't find it until after we'd gone to press. Here now is Frank Wu's piece that should have been in issue 125!

Don't Let the Bastards Grind You Down by Frank Wu!

Tonight I hang with the hippies.

Or rather, those who would have been hippies if the calendar said 1967 instead of 2007.

Tonight I hang with people who mock authorities, who load color into their hair, who draw odd pictures, who seek out arty experiences, the grander, the gaudier, the more ambitious and ridiculous the better. The sort of people you'd find at the annual BYOBW. (That's an event every Easter afternoon, wherein they rope off San Francisco's Lombard Street, the steepest and windiest street in the world. And then they race down that steep, windy street on tricycles and Big Wheels.)

These folks live for gatherings like that.

These are my people.

They are free, doing with their minds and bodies and souls what they and God have decided is right for them to do.

But there is a fear - or, perhaps, a

reactionary-ness - in their eyes. Constantly nipping at their heels are the small minds of the type described in their worst nightmare.

In Kurt Vonnegut Jr.'s masterful story "Harrison Bergeron."

Vonnegut's story begins thus:

"The year was 2081, and everybody was finally equal. They weren't only equal before God and the law. They were equal every which way. Nobody was smarter than anybody else. Nobody was better looking than anybody else.

Nobody was stronger or quicker than anybody else. All this equality was due to the 211th, 212th, and 213th Amendments to the Constitution, and to the unceasing vigilance of agents of the United States Handicapper General."

In that story, ballerinas are - by law - saddled with bags of birdshot.

Smart folks have devices blare harsh sounds at them every few seconds so they can't think. Beautiful faces are covered in ugly masks, so the plainest of us doesn't feel bad about themselves.

Vonnegut writes of a world wherein the mediocrities in charge impose

mediocrity on all of us.

It is a world my art friends fight against daily.

It is a world all around us.

When I visited China in 1986, I was horrified to discover that there are no good Chinese restaurants in China. Under Communism, everyone - from the busboy to the master chef - earn the same amount of money. To run a good restaurant would only mean extra work, with no more pay. You can sit at a table, waiting to be served, while a gaggle of waiters hang against a wall. None of them moves to help you. Why should they? They all get paid anyway.

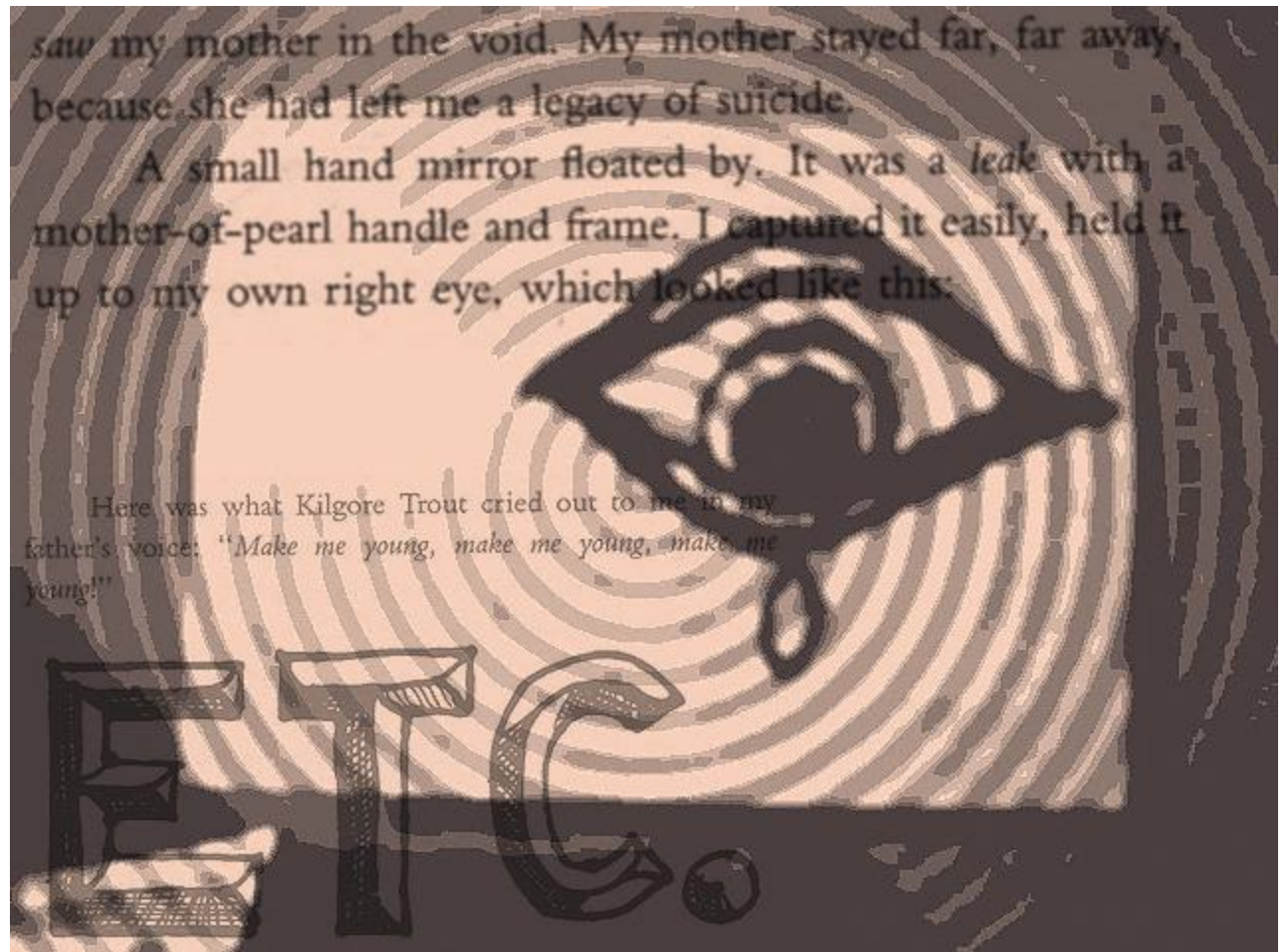
I hope things have changed since then.

But this sort of mentality exists in the States, too.

Scholars nigger that Shakespeare could not have possibly written all those plays. They argue that no one could have envisioned so many divers people - because they could not have.

A fifty-foot-tall concrete dinosaur named Dixie was erected in the Bay Area, quickly becoming the beloved icon of schoolchildren. Then the local politicians stepped in, whining that the builders didn't have the right permits.

Jim Reinders and his family built a reproduction of Stonehenge in old automobiles. That is Carhenge in western Nebraska. It is a beautiful, lovely thing, and the local politicians there demanded he set up a parking



lot and a toilet for visitors.

Last night I saw the third Spider-Man, a marvelous achievement. Mostly because it was the third film in a series and it didn't suck. But the critics uniformly lined up against it.

Critics. Politicians. Handicappers General. Naysayers and whiners.

Tonight I hang with the hippies, who don't let the bastards grind us down.

Tonight - at least in our own minds

- we don't live in the world of Harrison Bergeron.

Tonight we are free.

Note: Harrison Bergeron is one of my favourites when it comes to Vonnegut's shorter stuff. It's almost as pointed as *The Great Space Fuck from Again, Dangerous Visions*. The thing is, I loved it because of the handicapping. I wanted to be as good as everyone else!



It's that time of year again. Aussie Rules Football has started up, and thanks to Bill Wright over in that part of the world, I've got a schedule too! I'm a huge fan, as I've said before, of the Geelong Cats, the greatest of all the AFL teams. Yes, they haven't won a Premiership in 44 years, but they've still played the best football and had the most exciting players in all the game. I've often said that Gary Ablett was the most exciting player I've ever seen and without him I wouldn't be a fan, and now he's been gone for almost 10 years, but there's new hope, and exciting ballers on my favourite team.

And two of them are named Ablett.

Cameron Mooney is a 27 year old who is the leading goal scorer for Geelong so far this year. While you kinda expect bigger numbers for the team leader, his 18 goals is pretty darn good. The first of the two Abletts, Nathan, has the second most goals, and I consider him to be the third most exciting player on the team (behind Mooney and Nathan's brother). Tom Hawkins, the 19 year old wunderkind, is third and is also pretty exciting to watch. He's going to be huge in five years and could be a legend if he improves as quickly as he has been. In a lot of ways he reminds me of another legend, Gavin Wannagan, another long-time star.

And then there's the guy with the big name to live up to. Gary Ablett Jr. He's a strong player, very exciting to watch, and while not a huge goal scorer, he has ten so far this year, is a good kicker and has his dad's talent for marking. Both Nathan and Gary Jr. are going to have good careers if they stay healthy, and I'd love to see the two of them stick around and bring the Premiership back to Geelong. This could be the year too.

Last year, they missed the Final Eight, finishing tenth in the Home & Away portion of the season. They had some heartbreakers, but they managed to win ten games and a draw,

which really isn't all that bad. When they had a huge star like Gary Ablett Sr. playing for them, they were always in the mix, and they were for much of the season, but the last few games, after drawing the former Premiership side, saw Geelong lose the spirit. It was a lot like watching the Sharks fall in the Playoffs this season. The 2007 team came out and won a couple, lost a couple, and then hit a big deal: a sound thrashing of Richmond 222 to 79. That's a huge win, the second highest in the history of Aussie Rules. The next match was against the Ladder-topping West Coast Eagles.

The West Coast Eagles are my second favourite team. When it was the Eagles vs. Geelong in the early 1990s, I was rooting for the Cats but I wasn't unhappy when The Eagles took it all home. I was expecting a close game against Eagles, but the Cats won in this year's seventh round by more than 30 points. That's a good win that put Geelong right in the middle of the pack on top.

I'm hoping that this is our year. I know I'll be rooting for them all the way and I'm betting that either Gary Jr. or Cameron Mooney will take the team's Best and Fairest, though I doubt any of them will be up for the Brownlow Medal (basically the MVP). I'm hoping for good things from these guys for years to come.