

FORREST J. ACKERMAN



THE DRINK TANK 191

I'll miss Forry. I didn't spend that much time with him, I haven't been to the Ackermansion since the late 1980s or to the Ackermani-mansion, but I always felt that there was always Forry, there even if not present. I've never known fandom without Forry, and I think that everyone in fandom can say that. He was such a part of everything and so over-whelmingly important to the formation of our traditions. Like Lloyd Penney said "if there hadn't been a Forry, we would have had to create him."

Forrest J Ackerman's passing is the only time I can remember a New York Times obituary mentioning specifically that someone was a science fiction fan. It's easy to understand why, he was the most identifiable SF fan ever, even during the periods when he was less than active, he was always known to us, always talked about, always felt.

Why did I take his death so hard when I hardly knew the fellow? Well, there's the fact that this fandom that I love grew from seeds he helped plant. There's also the fact that my love of movies partly came from the minds of those who were inspired to go into the business by reading Famous Monsters of Filmland. The biggest reason is that Forry is the reason I'm working in a museum today.

That's right, it's all Forrest J Ackerman's fault.

My family went to LA a lot. I love LA, to a degree, and there was a lot to do there. One day, I think right around the time of the 1984 WorldCon, we went over to Forry's place, as fans had been doing for a few decades at that point. Forry walked around with us, telling stories and cracking jokes. I remember that he was so happy to be showing people around, and he had the best stuff ever. I can vividly recall the False Maria and I seem to remember him showing us a model of a dinosaur from King Kong.

I was the only kid of the group, which was my family and another couple, and I was big-eyed with excitement.

This guy lived in a museum!

I had been going to museums my entire life. School went to a museum a month, Mom or Dad would drag me to the Rosecrusian or the de Young or the Academy of Sciences, but this was so much cooler than mummies, Asian art and African Mammal Dioramas. This was fun stuff. This was a guy who had everything you could see on Dialing for Dollars when they'd show old movies like Things to Come or When Worlds Collide. He had death masks, something I'd never seen, and he had signed photos of all sorts of movie stars



and writers and people who were big deals around the world. He told the story of the time that young filmmakers who would ask him to watch their movies and give blurbs, about how he acquired some piece or another for his collection and how much he had to beg to get this that or the other thing. I remember the top hat that I thought was from a Jack the Ripper movie, but was really from London After Midnight.

And I remember him smiling.

This guy lived at his museum and he was smiling, excited still by the objects, by getting to share them. That's why I knew I would work at a museum when I grew up, and that's why I'll never work anywhere else.

Forry and Me
A memoir of Forrest J Ackerman
By Steven H Silver

The first time I met Forry, I believe, was at a Rivercon on July 29, 1994. The day I was leaving for the convention, I had picked up a copy of *Reel Futures: The Stories That Inspired 16 Classic Science Fiction Movies*, edited by Forry and Jean Stine. Naturally, since I knew Forry would be at the con, I took the book with me.

Early in the con, I found myself sitting in front of Forry at a panel. Before the panel started, I asked if he would sign the book and he agreed. When I passed it back to him, Forry expressed confusion. He had never seen the book before, had not yet received his author's copies. He signed it for me and then asked if he could flip through it. Of course I agreed, and I didn't get the book back until after the panel was over. Forry spent the entire time flipping through the book. When he did return it to me, he invited me to stop by the famed Ackermansion if I was ever in Los Angeles and gave me his phone number (MOONFAN).

I was never able to make it to the Ackermansion.

The last time I saw Forry was at Ditto in 2001. Partly to honor the other contender for the title of Greatest Fan Ever, the convention was held in Bloomington, Illinois, home of Wilson Tucker. Forry had flown in for the convention, but because of a mix-up, he thought the con was in Bloomington, Indiana. Good communications and long distance driving on the part of other fans brought Forry from Indiana to Illinois for

the convention and I, along with several other fans, had dinner with Forry in the hotel dining room the first night.

Forry was quiet at dinner that night, perhaps the result of his harsh travel schedule. I don't think I had ever seen him that quiet. Nevertheless, we knew that he was listening to every word that we said and filing it away for stories he might relate to make it sound much more exciting than the simple dinner it was in a restaurant in Bloomington-Normal, Illinois.

For Forry was a raconteur of the highest caliber. His skill was in taking a story, however mundane, and breathing a life into it that make the listeners wish they had been present when the events happened. I, and many others, have tried to get Forry to write his memoirs, and they may exist, but they haven't been published, except for pieces here and there in fanzines that some enterprising fan might one day piece together into a coherent narrative.

Another aspect of Forry's ability as a raconteur was to build up his own involvement. He has numerous great accomplishments under his belt, from his editorship of *Famous Monsters of Filmland* (a magazine which, I admit, I've never looked through) to the popularization of the term "sci-fi" (although there is strong indication that Heinlein used it before Forry) to his work as an agent (usually for minor authors whose work would disappear otherwise), to perhaps his most

important work, the salvaging of movie props for display at the Ackermansion, much downsized since its heyday.

As a fanwriter, Forry was no Walt Willis. As an author, he was no Ray Bradbury. As an editor, he wasn't a John W. Campbell, or even a Hugo Gernsback. Nevertheless, Forry's influence on the field of science fiction was as great as any of those men and more. In the wide world, he may not have the name recognition of Robert Heinlein, Isaac Asimov, George Lucas, or Steven Spielberg, but he helped mould the public perception of science fiction as much as any of those men. He helped form the field and, perhaps more importantly, the culture that surrounds it in fandom.



I met him twice. A gentleman who flirted beautifully. I kissed him on the cheek and called him sugar the last time I saw him.

-M Crasdan

Sci-Fi Forry's A Jolly Good Fellow
David Thiel, <http://thielavision.com/>

One thing that I missed during my recent spell of gastrointestinal distress was the passing of uberfan Forrest J Ackerman last Thursday. Ackerman could've laid claim to a significant place in pop culture history for several reasons. He coined the term "sci-fi." As a literary agent, he represented Ray Bradbury, H.P. Lovecraft and L. Ron Hubbard. (I'll forgive him that last one.) Most importantly, for some 25 years he edited the preeminent newsstand magazine devoted to sci-fi, fantasy and horror, Famous Monsters of Filmland.

The cheaply printed black-and-white mag was chock-full of terrible puns and rare photos from unheard-of or forgotten feature films. In the days before VCR, DVD or IMDB, Forry offered tantalizing, sometimes frustrating glimpses of horror flicks a young fan would've likely had to stay up until 3:00 am to watch, if they aired on TV at all. Famous Monsters inspired a generation of fantasy filmmakers, including a couple of guys named Lucas and Spielberg.

Forry was always approachable

to his followers. Once, when I was in college, I called his home and left a message. (His phone number was an open secret.) It blew my young mind when he called me back and talked for what may have been a half hour. On his dime.

Perhaps the most remarkable thing about Forry was the fabulous "Ackermansion," his house in the Hollywood outskirts in which resided a massive collection of novels, photos, movie posters and props. On most every Saturday afternoon for many years, Forry held an open house in which fans from all across the world visited to stumble in slack-jawed awe through the detritus of decades.

Now, truth to tell, I was a little dismayed at the condition of the some of the items on display when I made my first pilgrimage in 1986. Forry's wife Wendayne was still alive, and she requested that the collection stay in the basement. As you might image, it was not exactly climate-controlled. Unique items from

filmdom's history, donated by Forry's many industry friends, were scattered and strewn about the place, fondled by fanboys.

Forry would hold court, regaling his people (and I still count myself among them) with stories of Bela Lugosi and Boris Karloff. I'm sure that he loved the attention, but still, one has to appreciate the commitment and willingness to share.

During my year in L.A., I had a couple of significant encounters with Forry. I once had lunch with him, though I'm pretty sure that the reason he invited me had more to do with my roommate at the time, a young woman



named Margo who was a big Lugosi fan and had communicated with Forry for years. Forry was hailed as the Hugh Hefner of sci-fi, and I think that wasn't entirely due to his magazine publishing interests.

Later that year, my friends and I crashed his 70th birthday party. Yes, we were the sort of people who did that sort of thing. Granted, at least one of us (not me) had an actual invitation, and no one questioned the others when we arrived at the hotel bearing his gift: a life-sized, head-and-shoulders bust of Charles Laughton as the Hunchback of Notre Dame. I wound up at a table with Bela Lugosi, Jr.

I talked to him a few more times in the 20 years since I left L.A. I even took Vic on the journey to the Ackermansion once.

The last time I spoke to Forry was perhaps four or five years ago. Medical and legal bills had forced him to sell his house and much of his collection, and he'd moved to a smaller abode. (He still had his regular open house, though.) At the time, I was occasionally filling-in as a host for WILL-AM's interview shows, and I'd hoped to schedule Forry for an hour of chat. For whatever reason, it never happened. I'm sorry about that. It would've been fun to have him share his tales with our Central Illinois audience.

I doff my skull-cap to you, Forry.

Whatever I am today I owe in at least some small part to you.



First Among Equals
by
Warren Buff

Ever since I read Bob Madle's TAFF report, I have stood by the notion that a fan is definitionally someone who is interested enough in science fiction to want to communicate with other like-minded individuals. While there had been previous communication between the early fans in the letter columns of prozines, the first fan to take a direct route to

communicating, in his much-cited letter to Jack Darrow, was Forrest J. Ackerman. Frequently, from diverse corners, this letter is credited as the beginning of Fandom itself. In a very important sense, Forry was the first fan.

For years, Forry was in the vanguard of Fandom. He wrote that first letter, contributed to the first fanzines, and at the first Worldcon, he was the first to wear a stfnal costume. As Fandom got bigger, he was there in the middle of it, whether it was in the N3F or keeping LASFS alive during the worst of Laney's reign of terror. Eventually, Fandom got bigger than 4SJ, but it never got too big to include him, and (as the association of his name with the Big Heart Award indicates) he was always big enough for Fandom. His willingness to bring strangers in to see the Ackermansion represented some of the best of the fannish spirit of community.

But you know these things. You probably wouldn't be reading a tribute to Forry if you didn't know these things. I am overwhelmed by the notion that it is not my place to write a memorial to a man I never met. I will doubtless be one of the youngest to contribute to this project, though not necessarily *the* youngest. Yet I feel compelled to say *something*. I know who 4E was, and why he was important, and I want to be sure that

those who come after me also know. We cannot forget him, for he was not just the first of us, but also one of the exemplars of the best of our spirit.

Yet we must not let his death change us. Fandom has, of late, weathered a number of great losses. This decade has seen the passing of such luminaries as Walt Willis, Bob Tucker, Meade Frierson, Hank Reinhardt, and Jack Speer (please forgive my regional bias – I know that we've lost great ones all over), and Fandom has carried on. There is a tendency among those who knew them best to pause, remembering the glorious past, and lament that it will never be so good again. We must resist this, for as surely as my elders miss those they looked up to in their youth who had, in later days, become their greatest friends, so too will I one day miss them. We can, however, endure these losses, and grieve for them, without losing ourselves. We

can remember Forry, and make sure that his legacy endures, by carrying on as he did. While Fandom will never again be drawn from the ether, it can continue to be grand fun, as we

follow in Forry's example. Today, too, can be our glorious past.

When I lamented to Glug that I didn't know how to write this piece, he suggested that, as the young fan who had no personal acquaintance with Forry, but wanted to recognize his significance, I ought to follow a theme of "and ye will know him by his works." I have tried to do this without cataloging them, as so many sources already have. And in trying to find a way to say goodbye to the fan I never knew who once dressed as the Man of the Future, I decided that the best epigraph had already been used. When I went to find the exact wording, I found that Christopher Wren's tomb bore precisely the right words: "*LECTOR, SI MONUMENTUM REQUIRIS, CIRCUMSPICE.*"

Reader, if you would seek his monument, look around you.



11 Point Courier New

by Jay Crasdan

Excerpts from a longer article meant for a Drink Tank in 2006

I learned about fandom from a guy at my school named Gary Lewis. He read all the pro-mags and attended Windycon. In high school, he'd lend me copies of Analog and Omni and I'd pass them on to SaBean or M and then they'd pass them on to whoever they were sleeping with at the time. Gary's issues were all over the place, but he didn't care. One day, he had a stack of old issues of Famous Monsters. He didn't let me borrow them. He sat across the table from me in the Library and we passed issues back and forth.

That's when I first heard about Forry.

I visited the Ackermansion. I've been to some magical places, but few of them compare to that house. It held wonders, a False Maria, Bela Lugosi's cape and his ring, a mile of pulps. Forry and I talked about Harryhausen and O'Brien. He showed me the model of the stegosaurus from King Kong and I knew I would never be closer to anything so historic. He told me stories of old worldcons that afternoon.

When Forry passes, we will lose another connection to the start of fandom, but worse, we'll lose the one who taught us what it meant.

My parents took me to England for 3 months when I was 12 years old. It was the first time I ever flew, and I had to write out my “last will and testament” before leaving. I never told my parents, but I left everything to Forry. At that stage, my worldly goods amounted to several Tintin books and a pencil case - but Forry meant so much to me, it was all going to him if the Jumbo Jet had gone down.

-Peter Jackson on Aintitcool.com

One thing that made Forry great was that he kept you guessing. I’ve always been a guy for Aliases. My mom often yelled at me for giving weird names at restaurants when I was a kid. Thor was always a favorite, as was Lincoln and Shaft for the few weeks after Dad rented the video of Shaft Goes to Africa. And I used to make up names when I’d meet new kids. Dennis Hopkins, Floyd Merrymonth, Mike Dupp. All of them were stupid little games.

But Forry was even more devilish.

He had dozens of pseudonyms. I believe the reason my Dad loved to use fake names at cons over the years was that he knew Forry did it. Wikipedia lists a bunch of them, but certainly not all:

Weaver Wright, Spencer Strong, Walter Chinwell, Allis Villette, Alus Kerlay, Laurajean Ermayne, Alden Lorraine, J.

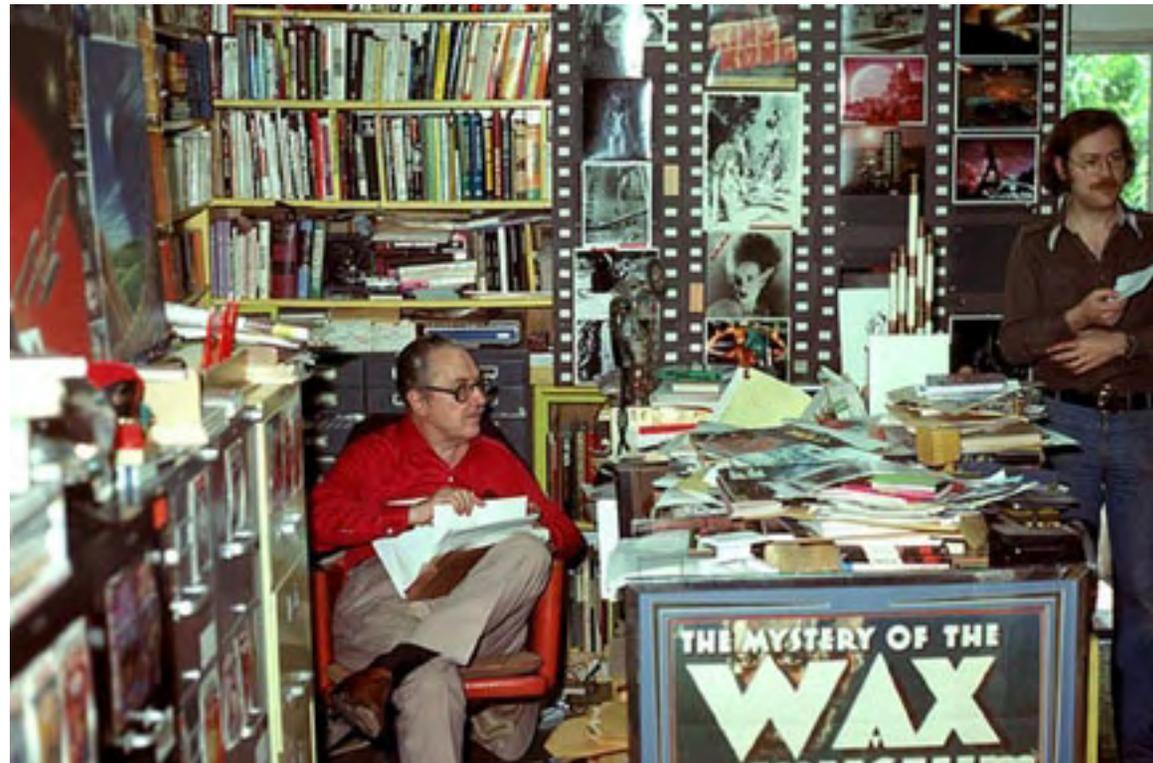
Forrester Eckman, Fisher Trentworth, SF Balboa, Hubert G. Wells, Jacques De Forest Erman, Jone Lee Heard, Sgt. Ack-Ack, and Dr. Acula. In collaboration with others: Jacques de Forrest Erman (with Wilfred Owen Morley), Geoffrey Giles (with Walter Gillings)

I also believe he was Donald Lane at one point, and probably Kenneth DuMond. The soft core stuff that they wrote would fit Forry’s voice.

I think one of the truly great Fan History projects that someone could do would be to find all of Forry’s pseudonyms. I’m betting there’s at least 100 or them, certainly if you include things like 4SJ, ForSJay, Forry and so on.

One area that I was surprised at was his role with the Daughters of Bilitis. The Daughters of Bilitis is one of many groups founded in San Francisco in the 1950s that put the focus on issues of Gay Rights. It was a significant group, less political at first than the Mattachine Society, it started as a social group and evolved.

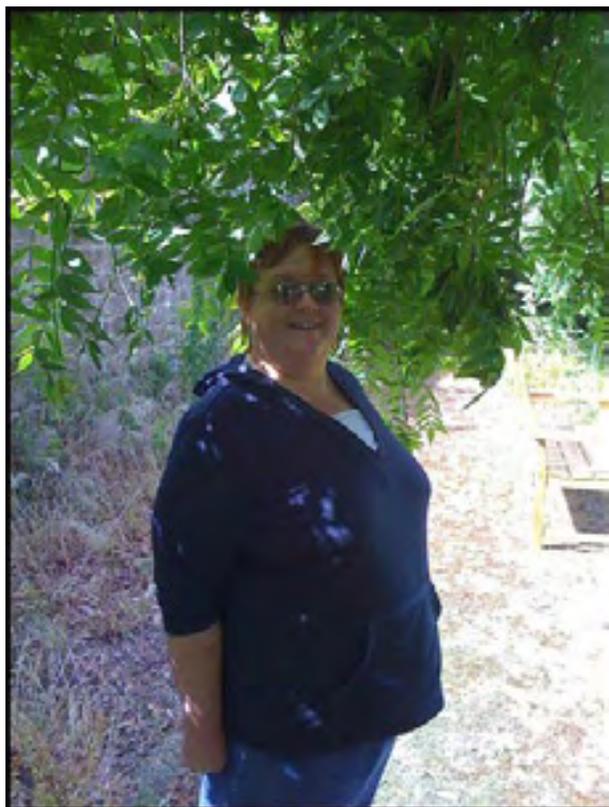
Forry helped by working with them to produce The Ladder, the newsletter for the society. He even wrote some of the material for them and was named an ‘honorary lesbian’ for all the work he’d done. It’s an interesting part of the story which gets over-looked, but is interesting.



Fannish Memory Syndrome

by Steve Green

The previous days had seen rain and snow, and the following weekend would bring freezing fog, but that particular Thursday afternoon in early December, the wind dropped and the winter sun cast a cool gaze upon Phil Greenaway and me as we stood



years ago, and who stood next to me at her hospital bed as she slipped away from us on 29 July; it would have been inconceivable for him to be anywhere else that day.

Thence to the historic naval city of Portsmouth, or rather to Portsea Island, which lies at its bow. It's my first trip to the coast since Ann's funeral, but the South Hants Science Fiction Group is holding its xmas shindig this coming Saturday and it'll be good to relax amongst friends.

My hosts are Peter and Anne-Marie Wright, along with my elder god-daughter Rachael, and I arrive Thursday lunchtime to discover the four of us are being treated to a meal at the nearby Blue Cobra Restaurant by SHSFG mover and shaker-in-exile John Richards. It's all connected to cosmic karma, gentleman John explains later; is that like chicken korma, I wonder, suitably stuffed with house specialities hush tikka (tandoori duck) and Bombay buffalo bhuna (I didn't realise they *had* buffalo in Mumbai).

Friday morning sees Pete (the male half of Wright Computer Ltd) attempting to perform a necromantic ritual upon my laptop, which has finally buckled under the strain of producing a

amongst the ruins of Jervaulx Abbey and scattered Ann's ashes alongside those of her ragamuffin terrier Baldrick.

It was Phil who introduced the two of us nearly twenty-seven

weekly column for *The Drink Tank*. Sadly, so mammoth a task proves beyond even Pete's mystic abilities. Maybe I should send Chris the bill.

Elsewhen, we bade farewell to Forry. The last time I saw "Mister Sci-Fi" was at Manchester's Festival of Fantastic Films back in 2001. His fellow guests included Ray Harryhausen, and the two of them had huge fun introducing the original *King Kong* at a restored 1930s cinema in Stockport (convention members arrived aboard a double-decker bus boasting "Skull Island" as its destination).

Ann had been requested by the committee to look after their seats whilst the pair reminisced about the way that particular movie had transformed their lives, and took great delight in telling one latecomer: "I'm sorry, these seats are reserved for Mr *Ackerman* and Mr *Harryhausen*." And then, so typical of my wife, she shifted position so I should sit next to Ray.

Another treasured memory of that weekend was Forry's delight at the surprise appearance of Ron Bennett, whose newszine *Skyrack* was one of the main inspirations for Martin Tudor's and my own *Critical Wave*. Two old friends, the many overlaps of their past suddenly telescoped into the present, like so much of fandom. I mourn them both.

Ann Green at Jervaulx Abbey, North Yorkshire, June 2008

[photograph by Phil Greenaway]