

In a Prior Lifetime #5

Fall, 2005



Another e-fanzine from John Purcell, 3744 Marielene Circle, College Station, TX 77845

This zine is available for perusal on Bill Burns' excellent site, efanzines.com, and I heartily recommend folks to visit his site for many wonderful and "out there" fanzines. If you want this zine via snail mail, send a note my way with a bag of sunflower seeds, and it's on the way. Otherwise, you may contact me at jpurcell54@earthlink.net to send comments, artwork, or material my way. Always appreciated, don'tcha know.

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What's been going on....

Not too terribly much differently than what I have reported before. My son just turned 10 years old four days ago, which he and I celebrated with a Boy Scout campout this past weekend. For a change, he actually *helped* set up the tent, which is huge, possessing three rooms, dividers, four entrances (one main entrance, and each "room" has its own entrance as well), and scads of floor space. It usually takes a couple extra adults to help me hoist the flex cross beams, but that's okay. My wife and I bought this gigantic tent on sale some six years ago from Sears, and it's the perfect size to accommodate our family of five. As a result, whenever I bring it for one of our scouting campouts - I'm den leader again this year - our tent becomes the general meeting place for the boys to gather and hang when they're not running around the campground like a bunch of Kansas City faggots. But, they are all great kids, and we have a ball. Dan is a Webelos scout now.

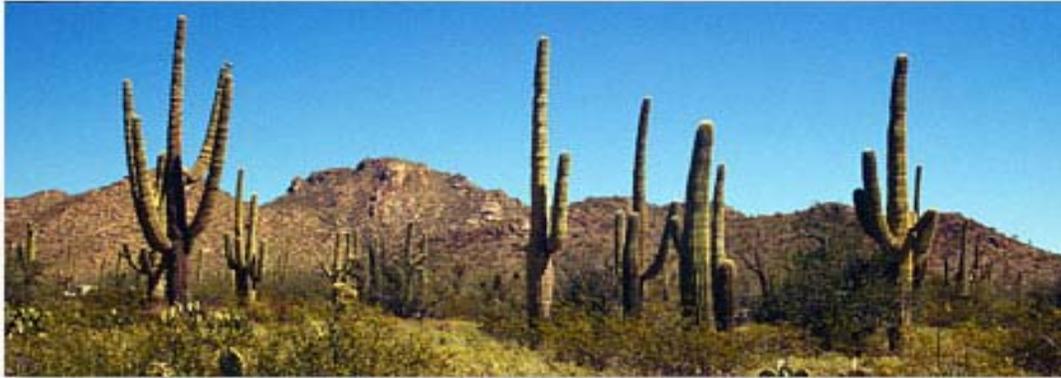
This year, he learned how to fire a BB gun, earning that belt loop in the process. So on Sunday afternoon when we got back from Camp Bovay, south of Navasota, we went off to Wal-Mart and Dan bought his very own Daisy BB gun with his birthday money.

Funny thing, this, too... I've noticed that the dogs and cats have been avoiding him

since then. Smart animals.

Texas Summers Never End

And ain't it da truth?



No, this is not what our backyard looks like, although lately it has definitely felt that way. As I write this, the date is October 13, 2005, and the outdoor temperature is a balmy 86°, and the humidity is actually down. We haven't had much rain recently – Hurricane Rita missed us “by *that* much” (in the immortal words of Maxwell Smart) – so our prairie-grass lawn has gone dormant to the point of growing only the sporadic, die-hard weeds. It had gotten to the point where I told my wife two weekends ago, “Hey, I’m going out to mow the weeds now.” We never water our lawn; what’s the point? We didn’t plant the stuff, and I am a firm believer in my father’s doctrine of yard care: “It says right in the Bible that God created the heavens and the earth, which includes grass. Therefore, He can water it, too.”

This is a wonderful philosophy to live by. May God rest his soul, but my father was a wise fellow despite his assorted faults. Lawn care and home improvement were merely two of them. Heck, dad never learned how to do a simple oil and filter change on his cars. I know how to do it – did it a couple times about 20 years ago while married to Lori – but nowadays I let the boys down at Wal-Mart Auto Express do it for \$20 while I usually go off to buy various goodies and accoutrements we need at home.

And this is yet another wonderful philosophy I have learned in my life thus far: on the eighth day, God created the Superstore.

Our God is truly an awesome God. Aren't you glad He's always thinking about us?

Addendum: It is now November 23, 2005, and the temperature is in the mid-60's with nary a cloud in the sky. Meanwhile, back in my old stomping grounds – Minneapolis and Iowa – there is snow on the ground and the temperature is about 30 degrees colder, if that warm. At times like these I actually enjoy being in Texas. Yet I still miss the seasons up in Minnesota.

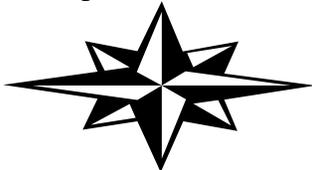
And the fishing.

Dust from the attic redux

In previous issues, I have been writing about my long-term friendship with the late Lee Pelton, a Minneapolis fan who was co-editor of RUNE with Carol Kennedy back in the late 1970's, and also was a member of LASFAPA, a fixture at Midwestern conventions, besides being a singer and lover of rock-n-roll music. However, for a change of pace – and also to buy time to properly remember and make notes for the next installment – I am going to include here something related to Minn-stf and my personal fannish reminiscences.

To explain: What follows is an essay for my Sociology 624 class (Qualitative Methods) as part of my Doctoral Degree Program in Education at Texas A&M University. One of our assignments this semester is to do a coding exercise on a group of people. I chose Minn-stf for the sake of easy, accessible knowledge and personal experience. Input from readers will be appreciated, but not required.

Disclaimer: Aside from naming the entity known as the Minnesota Science Fiction Society, Inc., no individual's names were used in the following essay in order to protect the innocent – as if that's possible.



Groups Within Groups: applying the principle of classification and division to a science fiction club

Once upon a time, a very long time ago, in fact, there was this young man who stumbled into a strange and wondrous world of fantasy and impossible imaginings. At first, he did not know what to make of this world, which was inhabited by equally strange and wondrous people, some of whom were very smart, some who always took care of things, some who were interested in specific subjects, and others who seemed to have no clue as to what they were doing there except simply being there. But the most incredible thing happened to this young man: he discovered that he *enjoyed* being there with these people. For the first time in his life, he felt as if he actually belonged to a group, and that he was accepted without question, something that was completely new and refreshing to him.

That young man was myself back in my freshman year in college, spring semester, 1973, to be exact. Through my best friend from high school, I learned about the Minnesota Science Fiction Society, Inc., and began going to club meetings and local science fiction and fantasy conventions. Looking back on those years from the clarity of distance in terms of both time and space, it's easy to see why I enjoyed being involved with Minn-stf (as it is known in abbreviated form), and to recognize the divisions within the group itself. For that matter, 20/20 hindsight makes it very easy to understand why I gravitated to one particular sub-group within the larger context of the club itself. The best way to explain this is by applying the principle of classification and division to the club, and how by labeling groups and subgroups of people we can come to an understanding of how these labels enable such a large social organization to function as smoothly and efficiently as possible.

Before diving into the make-up of this particular science fiction club, the first thing that needs to be understood is the principle of classification and division itself. Basically, it is a form of coding, giving an identifiable label to items that share common characteristics. By either classifying things together by similarities or separating them by differences, it becomes possible to understand the bigger picture of which they are components by comparing patterns of similarity or difference. It is very much like putting together a 1000-piece jigsaw puzzle. When you first open the box and dump out its contents, all you have is a big pile of individual pieces that don't make sense, but you know that once you assemble them together in the proper manner, a comprehensible picture will emerge. So you begin by sorting the pieces out: the edge pieces go in one pile, all the grass pieces in another, the brown pieces into yet another, and so on until you begin assembling each separate pile, making matched sections, then attaching these to each other through a process known as coded recognition; patterns emerge, and these patterns enable a person to make connections between the once individual sections (the original piles of pieces) and put the whole picture together. The end result thus makes visual sense out of what once was a pile of unrecognizable parts.

In much the same way, the Minnesota Science Fiction Society, Inc., itself is a large pile of puzzle pieces, a subgroup belonging to a much larger puzzle subgroup of American society known as Science Fiction Fandom, a rather amorphous, pseudo-organized social clique that has now grown to titanic proportions compared to its founding back in the late 1920's and early 1930's. Since my focus in this paper is on Minn-stf itself, I will forego on a history of fandom at large to concentrate on the group being coded.

Minn-stf began in the mid-1960's on the campus of the University of Minnesota, Minneapolis. From its small beginnings – not even a dozen members at first – it grew into a group that eventually, by 1980, was composed of over 150 members, hosted annual conventions, and gave birth to prominent science fiction and fantasy authors and poets, such as Steven Brust, Patricia C. Wrede, Emma Bull, Will Shetterly, Pam Dean, and Ruth Berman. Ages of group members ranged from infant (children of married and unmarried club members) to middle age; at one point, the group included Hugo Award winning authors Clifford Simak, J.G. Ballard, Lois McMaster Bujold, and Gordon Dickson. As can be seen from this brief overview, besides finding mates and forming families, males and females enjoyed not only the social side of membership, but some members also achieved professional success.

This was the group that I entered in the spring of 1973, a large, thriving entity that was beginning to consume its membership because it was growing so fast. Out of necessity, sub-groups began to segment themselves underneath the parent umbrella organization. It is interesting to note that no-one seemed to mind being labeled as part of these sub-groups so long as they were still generally known as Minn-stfers; club membership had its perks, after all, when it came down to conventions, writing, publishing, and socializing.

So what are the classifications and divisions in the Minnesota Science Fiction Society? It can be assumed that there are many, and yes, such is definitely the case. As mentioned earlier, there are those who enjoy being in charge of things – this holds true in any social organization (the old “big fish in a small pond” syndrome) – all the way down to those who simply enjoy being part of the group without contributing to the group (getting something out of nothing, so to speak). With this in mind, the club can be broken down in the following manner: authority fans, general club fans, fanzine fans, convention fans, media fans (as in television and movies), and fringe fans. There are naturally more subgroups involved, such as comic book fans, *Star Trek* fans, and so forth, but for the sake of brevity, members of Minn-stf can be coded, or placed, into one of these six major club segments. What I will do is give a brief commentary on each segment, and then attempt to explain how they work together.

1. *Authority fans*

These fans are fairly easy to identify. They are always in need of being in charge of “something”; so long as they are running the show, and getting their egos stroked in the process, they're happy. They are a relatively harmless bunch of people very necessary for keeping any kind of an organization running – at least until they start taking themselves too seriously, and then it gets dodgy.

2. *General club fans*

Like the word “general” implies, these members of the club can be found virtually anywhere in the club; for the most part, they enjoy being involved in various aspects of the group, such as volunteering to work on a local convention, host a club meeting at their house, possibly even organize a movie expedition to see the latest Harry Potter movie, or things of that nature. This is a very affable group whose members can and do mingle with other sub-groups in the overall club.

3. *Fanzine fans*

This title requires a bit of explanation. A “fanzine” is a shortened version of “fan magazine,” which is produced by fans for other fans. As a result, a fanzine can be a reflection of the person or group that produces it. There are many different types of fanzines, such as clubzines (*RUNE* is the official publication of the Minnesota Science Fiction Society, Inc.), perzines (personal fanzines), genzines (general fanzines), and those particular to a specific topic, such as trekzines (*Star Trek* fandom) and apazines (produced for amateur press associations). Fanzine fans generally hang together at larger social gatherings, such as conventions, enjoy seeing their name in print, and cross-pollinate in terms of writing for and about other fanzines. It is a very self-generating group, and can also be an expensive, time-consuming hobby; the advent of e-zines (electronic on-line fanzines) has helped alleviate the time and money crunch of fanzine production.

4. *Convention fans*

These fans, which are legion, enjoy attending and running science fiction and fantasy conventions. Not surprisingly, there are again many different types of conventions that these fans attend: local, regional, national conventions (or cons, for short); comic book cons; *Star Trek* and *Star Wars* cons (more on this in a moment); plus strictly fantasy cons, international cons, fanzine cons, and so forth. The list is virtually endless. Minn-stf enjoys a central location in the heart of the American Midwest, and the convention fans of the club can be found at conventions all over the Midwest, and also at national cons as well. Con fans are a gregarious lot, love to party, and tend to hold down well-paying jobs since traveling requires a relatively healthy bank account.

5. *Media fans*

As intimated above, these are fans whose main interest lies in a specific subject, such as the megalithic *Star Wars* and *Star Trek* phenomena, or smaller yet quite popular movies and television shows like *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, *Lost in Space*, *Twilight Zone*, and *Logan’s Run*. These are the fans who really get into their subject, quite often producing fanzines based on their special interest, design and wear costumes inspired by this show, and running conventions devoted to the movie or show in question. In fact, some of the largest science fiction conventions ever held have been *Star Trek* conventions, frequently surpassing the 10,000 – attendance mark. Minn-stf has a large number of media fans, but nothing like the numbers found in major metropolitan areas such as New York, Los Angeles, Chicago, and Miami. The problem with media fans is that a large percentage of them tend to be fringe fans, which is the last group to be discussed here.

6. *Fringe fans*

These science fiction and fantasy fans come crawling out of the woodwork on rare occasions, usually when a convention occurs in a geographically convenient location.

While they may actually enjoy watching science fiction and fantasy movies and television shows, even reading books of this genre, they are not seen on a regular basis in an organized club, such as Minn-stf, and thus never assume any roles of leadership or responsibility necessary to keep a club afloat. As long as there is an occasional outlet for fringe fans to take advantage of, which they do (conventions are a prime example of this, which could be the subject of an entire study by itself), they will intermittently emerge from their lairs.

All of these subgroups reveal an inner networking between them; even within these subgroups, people will emerge as authority and organization figures, general volunteers, writers and publishers, and specialists in a particular subject, and there is a lot of overlap between these subgroups. A case in point: one of the major regional conventions held annually is Minicon, Minn-stf's official club-sponsored convention that has been held once or twice every year since 1970. Minicon has grown in size from a few dozen in attendance to well over three thousand, and now features programming ranging from the general (a new fan's guide to fandom) to the specific (misogyny in pulp magazines of the 1940's – I believe this was a real panel discussion topic at Minicon 27 in 1992), and includes a well-run operations that oversees two film/media rooms, art show, dealer's rooms, a masquerade ball, music, dance, multi-tracked panel programming, a gaming room, the main convention hospitality suite, publications, publicity, and all the minutiae needed to make the convention run smoothly. Minicon has grown into a bit of a monster, but has managed to maintain its identity and a well-developed sense of humor.

All in all, by identifying the divisions within a large group of people like Minn-stf, it becomes apparent that it is necessary for these subdivisions to emerge in order for the larger entity to not only survive, but to maintain a standard of operation so that club members can know what's going on in the club and where meetings and local events are happening. Without the authority fans holding it together, without the general fans helping out when they can, without the fanzine fans writing things down and publishing information, without the convention fans, without the media fans, and even without the fringe-fans, there would be no Minnesota Science Fiction Society, Inc. These are all necessary organs for the body of the club to thrive and grow; one is the head, another the arms, legs, feet, and hands, still others are the mouth and ears, and so forth. Put them all together and you have a very interesting glimpse into a subculture of modern American society. Is it a monster? No, but when this benign behemoth rises up and begins striding forward, one might very well run screaming into the night the phrase, "It lives!"

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A brief wrap-up to the preceding:

Not meant to be a particularly insightful treatise on Minn-stf, that essay simply was an exercise in using coding, a means of grouping people as a way of understanding them and how they work. Now the question becomes, obviously, does my coding work?

from the hinterlands

A collection of natterings and comments taken from people fool enough to e-mail comments about this zine.

Not too many locs to choose from this time around. So, let's get into it, shall we?

Eric Mayer

To me your articles [about Lee Pelton] are educational. I've learned more about Minneapolis in the early seventies than I ever knew in the early seventies. Back then, I saw a few scattered issues of *Rune*. I thought maybe it was a hoax. I'm not sure I really believed that advanced forms of life could exist in a place where it got so cold in the winter. We all inhabit our own fandoms, I guess. For the six years that Donn Brazier's *Title* arrived monthly, that was my fandom, but you'll have a hard time finding it anywhere in the fan history books.

I remember Donn's zine very well, and always enjoyed it immensely. Fanzines, in general, are a record of our little corner of the universe, and as such become permanent documents even if the information is faulty. I am well aware that my own recollections about the 1970's and 1980's are now suspect since they are so far removed in time; we tend to edit our memories in the re-telling, therefore, our ability to recall objectively what transpired way back when needs to be taken with a few pounds of salt. But then again, even partial records can illuminate some of the past. – JP

Lloyd Penney

I am lucky that in getting close to 30 years of fanac (when does the retirement fund kick in?), I still remember fondly the folks I met in my first fannish endeavours in Victoria, British Columbia, and many of the fanfold I met here in Toronto are still here. I keep an extensive phone book. My oldest friend is one Paul Delaney...when I met him, he was the vice-president of Science Fiction Association of Victoria. Today, Professor Delaney is the head of the Astronomy Department at York University in Toronto. We've known each other for about 27 years. Yvonne and I attended one of his public lectures a few nights ago. We're both much older, but just before the lecture, we were able to reminisce about those days in Victoria, and what's happened to some of our common long-ago friends...

How wonderful to maintain a friendship for so long. Rarely do I correspond with some of my old Mipple-Stipple fan friends, but then again, I'm kinda stuck out here in the fannish boondocks, even though Aggiecon is still running strong on the TAMU campus. When I've dropped in (rarely) all I could think of was "Man, this ain't no Minicon, that's for sure!" Things have a way of changing over time. – JP

...Little zines are good...you can whip up quick locs, and still cover everything inside them. Many thanks for this issue, and I'll look for the next issue at my friendly neighbourhood eFanzines.com. See you then.

*I shall look forward to it, kind sir. And I enjoy producing a little zine; very quick, and less expensive than mailing out a mess of these things the old fashioned way. When **This House** hit a circulation of over 200, I bought a bulk-mailing permit, which cut costs immensely. Even so, a*

very pricey enterprise when you add postage, paper, printing costs, and all sorts of time and effort involved. These e-zines are so much easier. Let's hear it for modern technology! – JP



You are NOT here.

I also heard from - David Burton, Arthur D. Hlavaty, Richard Lynch, Garth Spencer, and R Lorraine Tutihasi. Thank you, folks. Much appreciated.

Some Closing Thoughts...

In which I wax philosophical in a ranting kind of way.

There may be truth in the statement that Popeye was perhaps one of America's premier philosophers of the 20th century. I personally believe that his proclamation "I yam what I yam" ranks right up there with Descartes' "I think, therefore I am", and his existentialist rant of "That's all I can stand, and I can't stand no more" is of equal significance when it comes down to expressing feelings of victimization, frustration, and retaliation. How often do we ourselves shake inside, raging against the idiocies, the atrocities that are inflicted upon us by an apparently unseeing, uncaring world? We need to admit to ourselves that there are times when we truly wish we could lash out and physically smash in the face of our oppressors no matter who they are: family, friends, teachers, students, leaders, followers, hangers-on; to really let them have one right in the kisser, and let loose inner demons raging inside our bodies, minds, souls. How we desire to be cartoons ourselves, to inflict pain and suffering, endure them as well, bouncing back up on our feet, inflating our pride by blowing on our right thumb, and continue our quest of righteous indignation, our personal crusades against the stupidity of modern life.

Examining these feelings brings up a question that we need to ask of ourselves at various times in our lives: What drives us? More to the point, what are the things that push us beyond our breaking point, turn us away from the civilized, intelligent potential that we humans possess to the animal that still snarls within our savage breasts? If we act more like a rational human being by being aware of our base nature, then we might have a chance to bring some form of sanity and rational behavior to our society and to our world. We need to change our nature, be in control of our nature, to positively affect nature, the natural world, to bring sense to it all.

And this likewise raises the specter of mankind trying to act like God by manipulating the natural world. It is this very issue that is at the bottom of controversies like cloning, abortion, stem cell research, controlling weather, and televangelism. So many would say, "Let the natural world run its course," but so many others would try to change the course of that river of cause and effect. It is so astonishing to sit and watch helplessly as catastrophes both large-scale and personal sweep across the landscape and

