



Goodbye, Gunny!

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# Scratch Pad 31

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Based on *The Great Cosmic Donut of Life* No. 16, a magazine written and published by Bruce Gillespie, 59 Keele Street, Victoria 3066, Australia (phone (03) 9419-4797; email: gandc@mira.net) for the December 1998 mailing of Acnestis.

Cover: Ian Gunn. He drew this in February 1997 as a fiftieth birthday card for me. It shows his interpretation of our front room. He gave me permission to use it as an *SFC* cover. Much better to use it to say goodbye to Gunny.

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## Contents

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2 NO ONE SHOULD WEAR BLACK: THE FUNERAL  
OF IAN GUNN by Bruce Gillespie

3 TOO MUCH OF NOTHING by Bruce Gillespie

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## NO ONE SHOULD WEAR BLACK: THE FUNERAL OF IAN GUNN

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Today, Monday 16 November, at 2.15 p.m., under a clear sky and in bright spring sunlight, more than 200 friends and family of Ian Gunn gathered to celebrate his life and work. We worked hard at celebrating the fun and delight and friendship that this extraordinary man gave to us all, but somehow the sadness kept breaking through.

Jan Tully is a friend of Ian and Karen's. I had met her at one of Gunny's birthday celebrations. She's the same age as me, looks twenty years younger, and is the mother of Beky Tully, one of the most active members of the Melbourne SF Club and also a good friend of Ian and Karen's for many years. It also turns out she is a civil celebrant. During the week she had sent out an email to all the people likely to attend the funeral, and told them to dress brightly and bring photos and other memorabilia of Ian's life. Ian had specified that no one was to wear black, and that he wanted a celebration, not a funeral. When we arrived with Geoff Roderick (partner of Roger Weddall, who died nearly six years ago), we found balloons covering the front of the chapel, display panels being put up, and rock music being played: it was Ian's choice of pop music of his generation. The whole form and tone of the funeral/celebration had been decided by Ian shortly before he died.

People who arrived in suits and ties were a bit put out, but soon got into the swing of things. At all times Jan Tully kept control of proceedings and kept calm, despite her own closeness to Ian and Karen. She introduced friends of Ian and asked them to speak. A whole lot of stories I'd never heard were told. (That's because I've been at very few conventions at which Gunny has done his thing.) These also included some stories of his activities in the Scouts. Ian's parents did not tell Ian stories, and did not appear to take much part in the ceremony, but it was obvious from various comments that Jan made that everything had been worked out with them as well as with Karen. One of their neighbours stood up and said he remembered Ian as a child splashing in their wading pool. Emails from overseas were read. At the end, various people spontaneously told their Gunny stories. Lots of laughter, lots of memories.

It was a bit more difficult later at the committal service at the Springvale Crematorium. Jan was still in control, but she must have found the whole afternoon very hard. There's something awfully final about that coffin sinking from sight as the last words are said. He really was gone at last. We really hadn't believed it was possible until then. I still don't believe it, but I've now seen the photos taken at his and Karen's wedding, on his second-last day, and I realise it's an awful long time since he's been well.

Some people not only have massive amounts of talent but also the wit and wisdom and sense of humour to share those talents with everybody. Gunny's gone, but if he had always known that he would die at the age of forty of cancer, I doubt if he would have led his life any differently.

### A few more notes about Gunny

Sorry I don't have any photos of Ian Gunn. Probably you have more pictures of him (from his and Karen's GUFF trip) than I have. He was doing fine at Basicon, in August 1997, which he and Karen organised during his first bout of chemotherapy. He was very chirpy, of course, during the Victory Dinner in early January. At that stage he had been pronounced clear of cancer. He had no body hair and he was still having trouble holding a pen steady in order to draw cartoons.

A few weeks later the symptoms returned. That would have finished me; I would have just curled up somewhere, and put up the surrender sign. But not Gunny. He remained good at Doing Things. From then until his death he edited quite a few issues of *Ethel the Aardvark* (the magazine of the Melbourne SF Club) and an issue of *Stunned Mullet*, finished several art projects, wrote lots, kept in contact over the Internet, planned the Fan Lounge for Aussiecon III, etc. He was always cheerful. He was heard to make jokes during his wedding to Karen, which took place at Box Hill Hospital the day before he died. He leaves behind a giant space in our lives.

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## TOO MUCH OF NOTHING

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Either I will write comments, very conscientiously, for every mailing since March, or I will stay in Acnestis. I was sure I was going to have a free, workless November, after going crazy during October, my busiest month for several years. But bits and pieces of work came in, adding up to nothing much financially, but they stopped me from doing anything interesting, such as catch up on my Acnestis mailing comments.

But was that what *really* stopped me? I keep saying I don't have time to do the many fannish things I want to do. It's not time I lack, but organising power. I let Time slop all over my life. I intend to gather it up into neat globules, and make the globules into Real Fannish Achievement.

But I let the globules gloop away; they're gone.

Now it's 8 December. If this contribution does not go in the mail today I might as well not send it. Write on! Write on!

A week ago, one of my more reliable 1998 clients assured me that there was no work around for freelance editors. On Friday the same client sent me a 150,000-word manuscript on diskette, and an hour later I received the scrappy bits and pieces of a project which another client wants turned around instantly. I finished one job over the weekend, and tomorrow for the other job I start setting a world record for editing on disk. Today? I'm ignoring both jobs. But do I have anything to say to a breathlessly waiting Acnestis?

Not much that's cheerful, that's for sure. But when did you read Bruce Gillespie for anything other than 'pure bracing gloom'?

Gunny's death and funeral occupies a vast psychic space in this last part of 1998. Then, within a day or so of each other, **Vince Clarke** and **John Millard** died.

I didn't know much about Vince, except what I could guess from Rob Hansen's postings on Timebinders about visiting Vince during his last months. Recent tributes have shown me the importance Vince had for British fandom. He seems to have been the ultimate fan, a great inspiration to those who came along after him. I hope tributes and a mini-biography will appear in a British fanzine somewhere soon.

John Millard was the Chair of Torcon II, the only overseas world convention I've attended. On the last day of August 1973 I arrived in Toronto to find that I could not occupy my room at the Royal York until the next day. John Millard, large, dependable, affable, gave me a bed that night in his own room (which was gigantic; it was the official Con suite), and nodded at me every time we met in the corridors of the Royal York. Capable and unflappable, he moved among a team of sturdy Canadians, all of whom seemed large, capable and unflappable, who ensured that the convention ran very smoothly. I exchanged letters with John for awhile after the convention, then fell out of touch. He wrote to me in the early eighties, and said that his main interest was now things Antarctic. I looked out for some of the items he mentioned he wanted, but couldn't find them. We fell out of touch again, but I wish I'd had his address in recent years. I keep meeting people who've spent time on Antarctic bases, or are very interested in the subject. A recent TV/video documentary, *Breaking the Ice* by Tim Bow-

den, is a useful introduction to the continent and Australia's role there.

1998 has not been the pick-me-up that Elaine and I had hoped for after the disastrous 1997. The Liberal-National Party Coalition winning this year's federal election has not cheered us up. They won despite promising to bring in a GST (i.e. VAT). How could Australian voters do this to themselves? (Because the bastards spent \$20 million on their advertising campaign, of course.) Since books are untaxed in Australia under the current system, all I can look forward to is the wiping out of the Australian publishing industry, such as it is. This falling axe is nearly two years in the future, I realise, and might not mean much if I'm already workless by then. I don't mind the thought of retirement, but I would prefer a funded retirement to an unfunded retirement.

My mother turned eighty in June this year, and seems pretty cheerful. My sister Robin and brother-in-law John, who live in Queensland, seem to have split up, but maybe not. If I count the years they were engaged before they married, they've been together for well over thirty years.

Friends drop in, and we even visit a few people. Elaine gardens. I read books and watch films. Elaine, a Maths/Science editor, still has work. Two double issues of *Meta-physical Review* did appear in 1998, which is something of a miracle, especially as I have no idea how to raise the cash for the next issue. I kept in touch with fandom through apas and letters, and have found lots of new friends through the Internet, which we installed in February. I realise that I should apply to apa writing the same daily routine that I apply to email, but that doesn't seem to be the way paper fan activity works.

A very odd year for reading. I volunteered to read lots and lots of Young Adult novels for the Aurealis Awards (Australia's jury awards for SF and fantasy). None of them reaches the standard I had hoped for in Young Adult fiction, but few of them are unreadable, and most are entertaining. I'll say more after the results are announced in February.

I read lots of Joanna Russ, and have done my paper on her, which I gave at the November Nova Mob meeting. However, the discussion produced so many stray thoughts and useful directions that I need to rewrite the paper before publishing it.

Take away YA and Russ books and there are few books on the 1998 list. I can only wish for Dave Langford's ability to plough through umpteen books per month (with *The Lord of the Rings* as an add-on). Currently I'm cutting my way through (like a lugger cutting through heavy seas) *Dreaming Down-Under*, the big big anthology of Australian SF, fantasy and horror that has been edited by Jack Dann and Janeen Webb (HarperCollins 0-7322-5917-7; 556 pp.; \$A24.95). Jack had just moved to Melbourne in 1994 when I first heard him soliciting stories for this anthology. Here it is, with its mighty green Nick Stathopoulos cover and roll call of nearly everybody except my favourite five living Australian SF authors (Greg Egan, Philippa Maddern, Petrina Smith, Lee Harding and Andrew Whitmore), but so far I haven't found anything of startling originality. (Paul

## Nearly thirty years ago today . . .



Astonish your friends. Show them a pic from the **Melbourne Easter Convention, 1971**. You might recognise the man on the left, Lee Harding. Hasn't changed much. And that's obviously George Turner on the right. But who can that be in the middle? See the next page of this fanzine for a clue.

Voermans isn't here, either. He didn't get around to finishing his story.) Maybe I'm old, bitter and twisted (maybe?), but I can think of Australian anthologies, some appearing in the late 1970s and early 1980s, that included stories that were much fresher than the ones I've read so far in this collection.

But I'm only halfway through *Dreaming Down-Under*. I know already that George Turner's story is the best in the collection, but it remained unfinished when George died. HarperCollins is offering a prize for anyone who can finish the story in 3500 words. My impression from reading it is that George's intended novel still had 100,000 words to go.

I've had a good year for watching films, but that's mainly because Dick Jenssen has lent me a number of videos, and has shown Bill Wright, Elaine and me several films on DVD at his place. We've also seen some good films at Race Mathews' monthly gathering. My favourite for the year, though, I saw at the Lumiere Cinema: Kurosawa's *Rashomon*, which I had never seen before. I'll write about it when I have time.

Most peculiar film of the year is **Jim Jarmusch's *The Year of the Horse***, which might not even have been shown commercially in Britain. Filmed in Super-8 and similar grainy, out-of-focus formats, it is a rock documentary based on the perambulations of Neil Young and Crazy Horse, mainly in Europe, during 1996. The sound on the performances is good (although the film shares few songs with the *Year of the Horse* double CD from last year). For much of the film, I found it quite hard to see what was going on, although I was wearing my new glasses. There are interviews with Neil, the members of Crazy Horse, Neil's father Scott Young, Elliot Roberts and a few other members of the entourage. They are trying to tell us what a great, unified band this is. This isn't true. Neil Young is no team player, as evidenced from his inability to finish tours with Crosby, Stills and Nash, and he's often deserted Crazy Horse for years at a time.

What the documentary tells us is that all these people are getting old. In one sequence, the road manager tells us that they are all *old*; even the equipment and guitars are *old*. The last half of the film includes a melancholy roll call of all the Crazy Horse members and hangers-on who have bitten the dust during the last thirty years. Neil Young looks nearly as old as his father, who seems spry by comparison. It's been a hard life on the road. Startling are the clips from

tours as recent as those of 1986, in which Neil retains some of the sweet-hippie-boy good looks that one remembers from the early photographs. More startling is the final sequence: an impassioned 'Tonight's the Night', in which Neil and the guys nearly blow all the amps, followed by the beginning of the 1996 footage of 'Like a Hurricane', only to cut to a late 1970s clip (from *Rust Never Sleeps*?), with an impossibly young-looking Young powering through the same song in the same way.

I suspect this is not a film for the Neil Young fans, but it's hard to tell who it *is* for. Jim Jarmusch relishes the prospect of a late-1990s apocalypse. The film shows that Neil and Crazy Horse have never played better. It also shows that something in them must break soon; nobody can live long by living like this. But when they go, what's left? This is a bleak, bleak film; irritating often; but a must-see. I just wish *Rust Never Sleeps* was available on video so that I could sit down and watch a Neil Young concert.

The inevitable comparison is with the two Rolling Stones concert videos I bought within the last year, the brilliant *Voodoo Lounge* and less-brilliant *Bridges to Babylon*, which nearly convince one that Mick Jagger, if not the other Stones, have never heard the word 'old'. There are moments in both films in which you could put a bag over Jagger's head and suspect that you were watching a fifteen-year-old skipping around that gigantic stage. No talk of *old* here; this is the American dream of *forever*. Even Keef, the friendly skeleton, is starting to play well again, with a return-to-form version of 'Gimme Shelter' on *Bridges to Babylon*.

Enough of the real passions of my life. Now to endure Christmas, get both paying jobs done, and try to find some time to write mailing comments for Acnestis. Maybe, maybe. No promises.

Thanks, Maureen and the production crew, for the progress reports during the epic journey across America. I loved the fact that you love New York, Maureen. Of all cities I visited during my 1973 trip, it's the one I most regretted leaving, and the city I would most like to revisit. Which sounds a bit unkind to old London town, but I didn't have a guide to London. I haven't been to some other fannish meccas, such as Minneapolis. Someday? Maybe.

— Bruce Gillespie, 8 December 1998



## Nearly twenty years ago . . .

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**Believe it or not . . .** Bruce Gillespie and Elaine Cochrane on their wedding day, 3 March 1979.

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**Even more unbelievable . . .** the same people, nearly twenty years later. (Above photo taken by Elaine Cochrane; photo right taken by Jeanette Gillespie.)

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