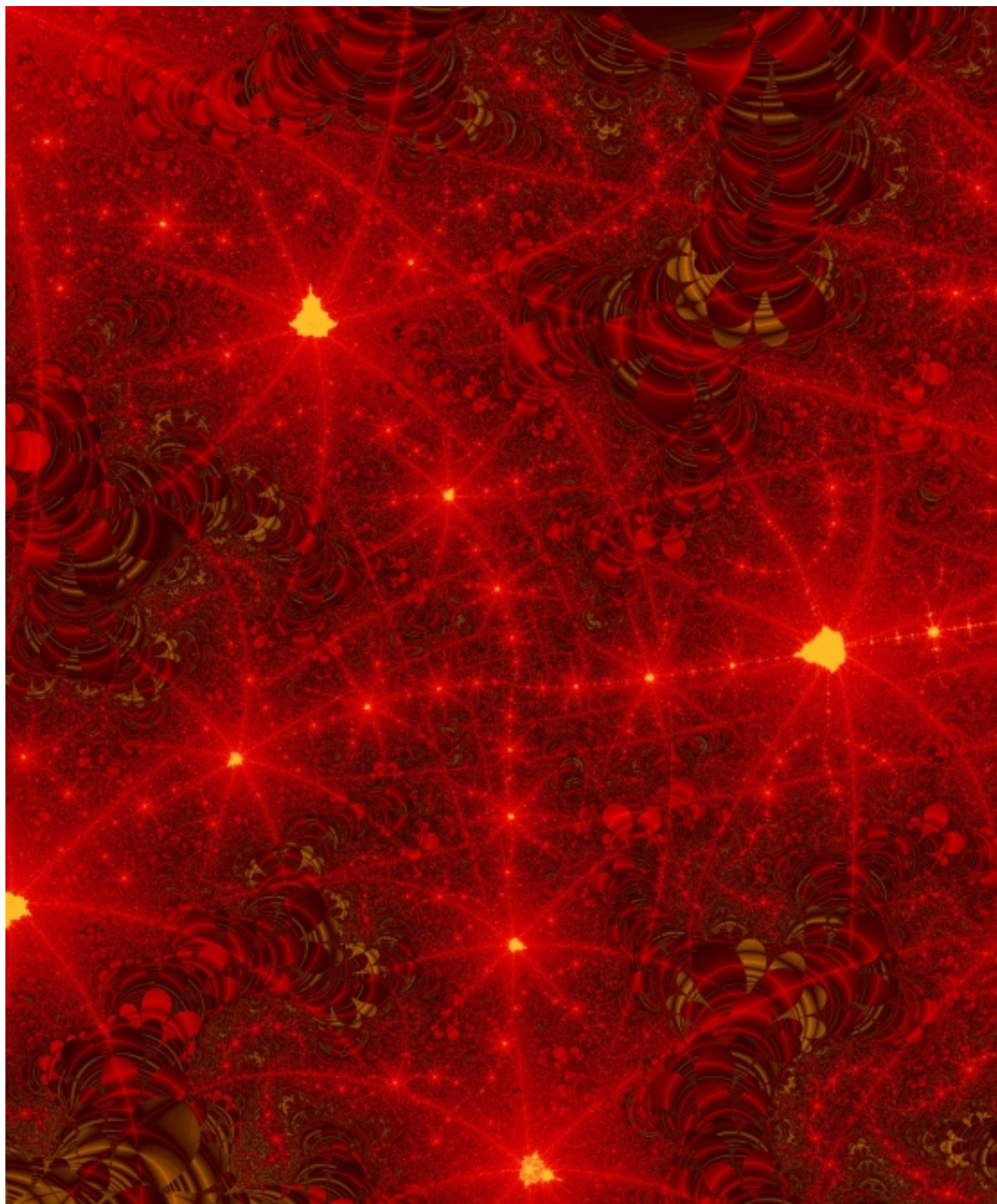


TREASURE 3

John Baxter :: William Breiding :: Bruce Gillespie :: John Litchen

November 2014



Star Carpet (DJFractal by Ditmar (Dick Jensen))

TREASURE
No. 3 November 2014 40 pages

A fanzine published for the October 2014 mailing of ANZAPA and a few others
The electronic version, available as a PDF file on <<http://efanzines.com>>
edited and published by Bruce Gillespie, 5 Howard St., Greensborough VIC 3088.
Phone: (03) 9435 7786. Email: gandc@pacific.net.au. Member fwa.

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Front cover: 'Star Carpet' (DJFractal image by Ditmar (Dick Jenssen)).

Back cover: 'Sutro Tower, San Francisco' (Photo: William Breiding).

Photographs: Cat Sparks (p. 4). Others supplied by the authors.

Treasure

'Life', as John Lennon wrote 'is what happens to you while you're busy making other plans'. Hence the lateness of *Treasures* 1 and 2 and *SF Commentaries* 88 and 89. Despite real life, I'm trying to catch up.

John Lennon might have written, but didn't, that life is what happens to you while others are busy elsewhere. 2014 has been a pleasant enough year, with a few minor health blips and various cat blips (Elaine trying to keep our nineteen-and-a-half-old cat Polly alive and healthy while fending off relentless other cats who know Polly is receiving special treatment), and a bit more paying work than I expected. But Real Life has been happening Over There in London — at **LonCon**, this year's world convention, held in August.

It is said that 170 Australians attended LonCon, but I wasn't one of them. Quite a few of us didn't have the cash to make the trip. However, I did see photos and commentary on Facebook from some people who attended, such as as TAFF winner **Curt Philips**, and multi-picture-snapping travellers such as **Cat Sparks** and **Rob Hood**. **Murray Moore** wrote a wonderfully condensed convention report on Fictionmags while events unfurled, and I saw another report from **Sally Beasley**.

I've read little so far from the fans at the centre of the whirlwind, **Claire Brialey** and **Mark Plummer**. In fact, as the worldcon cyclone sucked them in, I've seen few emails from either of them this year. I did see that Mark was receiving 200 emails a day about LonCon business alone. Claire and Mark were expecting visitors at their house both before and after the convention. I hope they can find time to make a record of their scattered thoughts in ANZAPA or the next issue of *Banana Wings*. (But they still managed to produce an issue of *Banana Wings* during the month before the convention. Impossible!)

Facing up to Facebook

Elaine did not stay on Facebook for very long because the technofascists who run it keep changing the interface and services offered to participants. I nearly dropped off when our old XP computer threw up its keyboard in despair and refused to load messages. However, in 2014 I bought The New Computer, powered by Windows 7 and the usual range of technogobbledegook extras, and suddenly Facebook loaded instantaneously.

Facebook offers a service that bypasses many of the difficulties of producing and and replying to blogs. I still don't know how to blog or wrinkle out new blogs from people I might be interested in. Facebook is far too busy, so all I can do is dip into the endless stream of stuff that my 'friends' are producing, but it provides a method of taking part in a whole-of-fandom conversation. Eventually it puts you in touch with people you might not be

able to contact in any other way.

My old school — not gone, but moved to Facebook

Through Facebook I rediscovered an old school friend I thought lost forever. **Ron Sheldon** was the co-publisher and editor of my first fanzine, although I did not know that term then. That was in 1961, when we were both in Form 3 at **Oakleigh High School**, aged 14.

Ron had tried to contact me for an OHS Reunion, but he had found only my Googlemail address, which I did not publicise or use, and have since let lapse. I missed the Reunion, but did keep up contact with Ron, who now lives in Ferntree Gully. He pointed me toward the Oakleigh High School Facebook group. I don't recognise many of the names of members, because covers all eras of the school's history. Ron posted his own photo, and he looks just as I would have imagined him in his late sixties.

I'm not sure why I should retain many pleasant memories of Oakleigh High School, built in the mid 1950s to accommodate 1100 students, and closed down by the Kirner Labor Government in 1992 when numbers dipped to 200. The buildings were rudimentary, but it had its own sports oval, and eventually a school hall (built entirely from donations from the people of Oakleigh, North Clayton, and Huntingdale). I did not mind moving from Oakleigh High to Bacchus Marsh High in 1963. It had only 500 students, which made for a great improvement in the way people related with each other. By 1964 Oakleigh had more than 200 students in Form 6, whereas we had twelve Form 6 students (Year 12) at Bacchus Marsh High.

I and my fellow OHS classmates survived our schooling, and many thrived. Ron himself went on to do engineering, and has led a varied career. He has written on Facebook that he and some friends formed a band called the Primitivis, who played at dances around the Oakleigh area until 1966.

Ron sent me two sections of his autobiography about his schooldays: about 1961, the year we published the magazine, and 1964, Ron's last year at school. Even in 1961 he was taking part in a whole range of activities that I did not know existed. By 1964 he was falling in love regularly (whereas I was too shy to say anything to the girl I was nuts about), playing in a band, and hurtling around the countryside. I hope he publishes his autobiography on the net, because it provides a unique account of the extraordinary life lived by ordinary teenagers in an ordinary Melbourne suburb in the early 1960s. Almost all the other Australian autobiographies have been written either by people who attended private schools and came from a privileged background, or

And now some news ...



Rob Hood (L.) and Graham Joyce, Continuum 4, 2007. (Photo: Cat Sparks.)

GRAHAM JOYCE (1954–2014)

has long been a favourite writer of mine and many other fans of quality fantasy writing. He made many friends when he was a guest of honour of Canberra's Conflux convention in 2007. About a year ago, when Tony Thomas and I presented talks to the Nova Mob about his novels, he was diagnosed with Mantel cell lymphoma. He was very encouraging to his friends and supporters in his blogs during the past year, but died on 9 September. I regret greatly that numerous delays to the publication of *SF Commentary* 88 meant that he did not see the articles written by Tony and me. Googling should find you plenty of reviews of and articles about his work.

THE MELBOURNE SCIENCE FICTION CLUB

continues, despite the difficulties described in a recent issue of *SF Commentary*. As Bill Wright reports: 'Since the MSFC was turfed out of St David's Church in Melville Road, West Coburg, in December 2013, it has stored the library and moved to a temporary meeting place at **St Augustine's Anglican Church, 100 Sydney Road, Moreland.**

'Sydney Road has two numbering systems:

- (a) for InnerCity/Brunswick, then
- (b) for Moreland/Coburg. This northern part of

those who came from a depressed background.

Apart from writing his autobiography, Ron introduced me to some of the many Facebook groups. One of them brings together people who are interested in the history of Oakleigh, the south-eastern suburb where I spent my first 11 years.

When I was living there, Oakleigh didn't seem have any history or future. Most of the Oakleigh I knew, both sides of the main Gippsland railway line, looked rather rundown and worn out. Chadstone, the first vast shop-

Sydney Road is where St Augustine's Church is.

'The easiest and quickest way there by public transport is via Route 19 tram from Elizabeth Street, alighting at Stop 29. Cross the road and walk back to 100 Sydney Road. Don't take the train.

'The club continues to meet every Friday night at the above address, from 8 to 11 p.m.'

The new venue is a very pleasant meeting place, but cannot offer space for the club's library. In early September 2014, the club had to move the whole library from one storage facility to another. This led to a pleasant jaunt during which the club's more (or less) muscly members, led by Alison Barton, shifted umpteen boxes and bits of furniture in a day.

Still no real solution, though. **Please keep donating funds to keep the library at the new facility, and please, please, keep sending suggestions of possible permanent venues for both the clubrooms and library.**

THIS YEAR'S SYDNEY FREECON information from Garry Dalrymple, organiser

This year's Freecon it will be spread over three days. There will be a program, informal discussion breaks, paradox auction, and short story writing competition.

The venue this year is the O.E.S. Amenities Centre at 188 William St. Earlwood/Clemton Park. It's a 120-seat capacity room.

See <<http://www.freeconconvenor.simplesite.com>>, write to **Garry Dalrymple** at PO Box 4152, Bexley North NSW 2207, or email him at <jtjfon@gmail.com>.

The date: first week of December.

NICK STATHOPOULOS PAINTING LOSES — THEN WINS!

An outstanding painting that **Archibald Prize** judges ignored has taken out the People's Choice at Salon des Refusés. It is an exhibition set up as an alternative to Australia's biggest portrait prize, featuring a number of works that didn't make the Archibald's 54 finalists.

Sydney artist **Nick Stathopoulos** said he was delighted to win Salon's **Holding Redlich People's Choice Award** for his hyper-realist portrait of **Robert Hoge** titled *Ugly*.

Nick, who worked on the portrait for three months, said he was 'astonished and disappointed' it was rejected from the Archibald and Doug Moran prizes. He has been submitting work in those prizes since the 1990s and has been an Archibald finalist four times.

ping centre, was being built nearby. It would destroy the main Oakleigh shopping strip. We just knew it. As a child, I was interested mainly in the huge railway yards, which extended from Oakleigh Station half a mile to the east. I would sit on the veranda of our house on Haughton Road and watch the shunting engines 'playing train bangs' for hours. It resembled the world of Thomas the Tank Engine, with little diesel engines instead of steam engines.

On the Facebook group, some amateur historians

have been placing photos of the Oakleigh I had forgotten or didn't know about. In the nineteenth century, Oakleigh was the only settlement between Prahran and Gippsland. Its houses clustered around Broadwood Street, later called Broadway, and then Dandenong Road, the main Gippsland Highway. The new station in the 1880s was placed half a mile to the south of the road,

stretching from Oakleigh to Bunyip in Gippsland. Eventually the engineers worked out a way to cross the swamp that is now the suburbs of Hughesdale, Murrumbeena, and Carnegie. The Outer Circle Line was built north from Oakleigh to the Hurstbridge Line. However, it opened in 1891, the year in which Victoria suffered its worst ever recession. Few people travelled on the new

Memories of Oakleigh High School

During Form 3 (1961), Ron Sheldon and I published a fortnightly magazine with the puzzling title of Cashbox and Chatter. The 'Cashbox' referred to the American Cashbox Top 100 chart, which I aimed to reproduce in an Australian version, based on all the radio Top 40 charts. The 'chatter' included stories, puzzles, crosswords, jokes, mainly written by Ron. Ron's father, a school teacher, was kind enough to provide the spirit duplicator and stencils, Ron and I typed the stencils, and Ron printed the pages at home. We sold it to other students, around the grounds of Oakleigh High School, and some teachers. It made the tidy profit of 7s 6d for the year. I went on to publish magazines for the rest of my life, but never earned a profit on any of them. Part of the fun of producing the magazine was visiting Ron's place. He ran a radio station around the house, with a turntable and microphone in the front room and speakers in the other rooms. We were both fans of Roy Orbison and Ray Charles, among many others. We stopped publishing at the end of Form 3 because Ron's parents realised that the homework load would increase greatly during Form 4. Which it did. I kept publishing issues using carbon paper and my dad's old Underwood typewriter, four copies at a time, for a year or two after that, and in 1969 began publishing SF Commentary, which is still going. I thank Ron for that first year of publishing.

The most memorable teachers were those who went outside the circle of the curriculum, becoming impatient with the ordinary stuff of the course.

They included Mr O'Hagan, who was a languages teacher roped in to teach us mathematics in Forms 1 and 2. I guess he was one lesson ahead of us the whole time. Every now and again he would just take a lesson off to tell us stories, or make maths interesting by telling us about his 'good friend Mr Pythagoras'.

In Form 3, Mrs Samatauskas always taught us English with a great flourish, with lots of drama.

Our class teacher, Miss Howse, who was also our History teacher, once took a whole double period to tell us the plot of Orwell's Nineteen Eighty-four and explain to us what 'plebs' were. This involved a good canter around Ancient Roman history, with tales of slaves and plebians. That's what school should always have been like.

Oddly enough, Max Oldmeadow, who later became a state politician and much else beside, was a very straight-down-the-line History teacher. When The Age published his obituary just a few years ago, it used the

photo that had been taken of him when he was a teacher at Oakleigh High.

Miss Harris in Form 4 set up an expedition for us to see the Hollywood version of Julius Caesar at the Metro Malvern, then was incensed because we all cracked up when Caesar could be seen breathing after he was supposed to be dead. 'I'm never taking you lot to a film again!' she said. But her lessons were usually interesting, except when she decided to re-teach us English grammar. (We hadn't done much grammar since Grade 6.) This was quite useful for me, though, for the next year I faced Form 5 French, a steep learning curve up from the rather easy-going style of Mr MacMahon in Form 4. I needed every bit of grammar information I could remember to tackle the French variety.

The most astonishing phenomenon any of us ever experienced at Oakleigh High School was the appearance on the school ground of the Principal, Ferdinand Fliegner, known to all of us as 'The Bull'. He looked like an upright bull, walked like a bull, and could crush even the craziest sixth former with a glance. When he walked across the quadrangle, the whole school fell completely silent. I doubt if this could happen at any school in any country these days.

My worst memories of school were those involving sport and practical subjects, because I could not do either. I remember Les Gardiner. I'm told that he attended the recent reunion at the age of 94. He was kind enough to give me 50 out of 100 for each of Woodwork and Metalwork in Forms 1 and 2. He could easily have given me zero. He gave up on me when it came to Phys Ed, but that was not counted as an examinable subject.

I managed to avoid sport for three years because of a series of ailments (because of back problems I wore a brace on my back for a year and a half), but in Form 4 once again I had to choose something to do for an hour and a half on Wednesday afternoon. I and a similar bunch of sports-haters were allowed to do 'athletics'. This involved Mr MacMahon setting off with about half a dozen sturdy runners across the North Clayton countryside, while the rest of us ran for a bit, got puffed and suffered stitch, then walked the rest of the way. These days I know that a good sturdy walk is much healthier than a run, so I was right all along.

The worst sports memories though were (a) the absolute boredom of sitting around the edges of the Annual Athletics Carnival for a whole day (b) the same absolute boredom of being spectators at the Annual

line, so most of it was closed down within two years. A new line linked Oakleigh to the Melbourne suburban network.

At the beginning of 1959, our family moved a few miles away to the brave new frontier suburb of Syndal: lots of unmade roads and not many shops, but it had a feeling of becoming the new heart of Melbourne suburbia. For four years I attended Oakleigh High School, but in 1962 our family moved again — to what was then the small country town of Melton, 30 miles west of Melbourne. (Now it is a suburb of 100,000 people.) During that era, as far as I can tell from the material on the Facebook site, Oakleigh began to resurrect itself. The old railway yards were closed down, a shopping centre was built on the land, and Greek migrants moved into the area between Oakleigh and Hughesdale. The centre of Oakleigh was not killed by the monstrous Chadstone Shopping Centre. People flocked to Chadstone in their cars, but Oakleigh people returned to the local shopping strip near the railway station. Many new houses were built, mainly south of the line.

When Ron Sheldon first made contact with me, all I wanted to do was thank him for helping to produce that first fanzine, and therefore prompting me to start *SF Commentary* in 1969. But he's one of those people who add to the lives of people he meets. It's fun writing to him. We might even meet again in person one day.

Warrnambool, ho!

I'm always discombobulated by doing something that goes against my instincts and practices. In other words, I'm set in my ways, because they are good ways to be set in.

I like staying where I am. I don't like travelling. I don't even like to think about travelling.

David Russell, an illustrator for my magazines and frequent contributor, travels every year from Warrnambool to our place on my birthday, bearing gifts. He has an eye for gifts. He usually brings unexpected things and things that prove to be very congenial and/or useful. For instance, a few years ago he gave us a portable coffee grinder that is ideal for our needs: not too high-tech, yet a great improvement on our little old hand grinder.

He has asked several times if Elaine and I could visit him and his family in Warrnambool. Several times we have almost booked the train ride, but my natural inertia has stopped me. David was determined that I should not escape a trip to Warrnambool.

Recently he has learned to drive the car that his mother left him. He drove to Melbourne on Friday, 28 March. That night, we both went out (by train) to look at the new Melbourne SF Club rooms at St Augustine's Anglican Church in Moreland. They look very much like the clubrooms did at St David's Uniting Church in West Brunswick, minus the library. But the library cannot be set up at St Augustine's, so it's not clear where the Club will finish up.

The next morning I travelled in by train from Greensborough, met David at his hotel, and we began the epic car journey to Warrnambool. Elaine did not

make the trip. She finds that she cannot travel in a car for more than 15 minutes at a time.

I have been a coffee addict for 50 years. I was also nervous about travelling outside my comfort area. I was probably nervous about travelling with someone whose driving skills were unknown to me, but I need not have a worried. David is a very careful driver.

So on the trip we made many loo stops and coffee refill stops, and took our lunch break at a very good pub in Winchelsea. We also stopped to look around the Geelong foreshore. Although we left Melbourne reasonably early, we did not reach Warrnambool until about 4 p.m. On the way I had seen lots of flat farmland and stands of trees. And lots of highway speed signs. The nightmare of David's life as a driver are the constantly changing speed zones on country roads. It's very hard to avoid a speeding ticket coming in and out of many Victorian country towns.

When we arrived, I met David's father Lindsay, his two friendly old dogs Charlie and Tess, and later that night, David's sister Leanne. Somehow they fit into their house. Leanne had returned only recently from working in Queensland. David has his own room, but not much room for drawing and writing. I should have stayed at a motel that night, but they wouldn't hear of it.

David took me on a tour of Greater Warrnambool. I kept glimpsing sights that should be investigated further (on the next visit): clifftops and parks and a large shopping and restaurant centre. Before the light faded, David drove us through the Tower Hill Wildlife Reserve. From my most recent visit (in 1954), I remember a very bare old volcanic crater. Since then, the whole area has been covered in trees and a lake created. An area to be researched sometime in the future.

I usually never sleep well in a strange place, but I slept okay. At 7 a.m. people began to emerge, and David prepared for the trip back to Melbourne. We set off in fog, which gave a bit of photogenic mystery to the landscape north of Warrnambool. Without rushing, David took about half the time to return to Melbourne as we had taken leaving it. We stopped for one coffee break, and bypassed Geelong altogether. We didn't slow down until we tried to enter the Central Business District of Melbourne after leaving the Westgate Bridge. It's almost impossible not to get lost when you come in by car from the west. Eventually we found a way to head north back up St Kilda Road, turned right into Flinders Street, and inched our way up to the Windsor Hotel on Spring Street. We ate a quick cheap lunch, then grabbed a taxi to to out to the Ortliebs' place in Burwood. We were amazed to arrive before 2 p.m. After the Board meeting of the Australian SF Foundation, David and I said goodbye, and Carey Handfield drove me home, where I collapsed.

Next time? Train trip to Warrnambool, book to stay in a motel for a couple of nights, and take a stroll around the mighty metropolis of Warrnambool. But, David warns me, not in the coldest part of winter. We'll see if it ever happens.

— Bruce Gillespie, April, May, and September 2014

William Breiding is a long-time contributor and correspondent from West Virginia, whose articles I first noticed during the heyday of Bill Bowers' fanzines. He writes: 'The bulk of this piece was written as a straight account of my first affair of the heart. But there was something missing: understanding. In order to gain that depth it seemed necessary to inspect how I got to be there. This piece opens with a wide view, narrowing to a single track, hopefully giving that insight.'

William M. Breiding

Beyond the mask

After you're 12 or 13, it's too late to have parents.
— Roman Polanski

I was yanked from my second gruelling attendance of the fifth grade in March 1968 when my family escaped Morgantown, West Virginia and fled to San Francisco.¹

I was 11 at the time. In August I would turn 12. I started first grade in my sixth year, flunking the fifth grade and never finishing it. That's the extent of my formal schooling. As an adult I mostly left uncorrected the assumption of a college education. Occasionally those in the know suggested I study for the GED, the high school equivalency test, but I had neither drive nor interest; I had become disdainful of formal education. In my late twenties I attended classes at City College of San Francisco to discuss formal ways of seeing: Art, Art History and Photo 101. Beyond that, nothing.

I am the youngest child: two sisters, three brothers, and a miscarriage. There is the myth of the youngest child being coddled or treated special, of being sweet-natured. This may have been my case without knowing it, and only later understanding it theoretically. Both sisters, who are eldest, have memories of mothering me. I have very few memories of my mother doing so.

Small children are dependent, of course, but as far back as I can remember I felt distant and autonomous, happiest when on my own. They say a mother's love is the strongest bond. If this is the case the cord was somehow broken for me. My mother said I was an easy child. Was this because I felt little need of her?

My father was a popular, practical, goal-oriented man. He was also violent, unpredictable, possibly psychotic, probably alcoholic. At age six, simultaneous with my entering the first grade, I became aware of my father's brute personality and brutal physicality.

I have no memory of my parents talking to one

The author, aged 12.

another, of being friendly, or having discussions as equals, partners in a marriage with six children. By the time I became cognisant, there was only a mutual hatred. My father was aggressively violent, engaged in physically and psychologically breaking down his wife. I joined in at this point as one of my mother's protectors. There are grisly scenes from my childhood where all six of us are pitted against my raging father, attempting to pull him off my mother. In turn each of us were exposed to his blind pummeling and psychological battering.

Children and mother became a conniving unit of avoidance and subterfuge. Our fear of him drove us to hide everything: his hunting rifles, our true selves. A compulsion that became habit. This fervid collusion created a tensile, nearly unbreakable sense of unity among the siblings, and our mother. My mother was a heroine, above the usual standards of suspicion, for having survived twenty years married to a functional psychotic.

My brothers and I were quietly subversive at school, encouraged by a mother who allowed us to bend most of the clothing and grooming restrictions, abandoning ties and blazers, growing our hair long, wearing politically outspoken buttons on our shirts ('All The Way With LBJ' with a mushroom cloud superimposed over it, etc.), and to play hookie from school with her permission.

1 *Caveat*: my alleged flunking of the fifth grade may be a false memory. No one in my family can verify it. In line with those who suffer from false memories, I have chosen believe in my own perceived experiences rather than in the collective memories of my emotionally beleaguered family.



The spring the nuns of St. Francis Catholic grade school flunked me they informed us we were no longer welcome and would have to find other schools to attend in the fall. My social peers (they were not my friends; the one time I tried to hang out with them outside of school was disastrous) found out, taunting and humiliating me during that summer along my paper route.

My eldest sister remembers my transition from a private Catholic school to a public school as an easy one. It was not. I was nervous, perpetually gripped with fear and wracked by self-consciousness. But my sister's memories are telling. I had already learned to mask the truth with an easygoing exterior.

I was two months away from completing the fifth grade again when my mother, with the help of several friends, planned and executed our Great Escape. And none too soon. I'm certain I would have flunked again.

After a brief stop to visit with my aunt Mildred and regroup under the lucid blue skies of Tucson, we landed in San Francisco six months after the Summer Of Love. This surgical excision was an act of survival. As time went on my father's behaviour became increasingly aberrant and spooky. I believe this escape was the smartest thing my mother ever did, both for herself and her children, but also for my father.

Our arrival in San Francisco set my mother's spirits free. Although she was required to hold down a job to support her children, she spent the majority of her free time as a passionately bohemian woman, attending the opera, befriending gay men, having affairs with younger men, and opening her household to the general riffraff of the late sixties and early seventies.

She made no further attempts at child rearing. My brothers and I were furnished with basic food and shelter and left on our own. I was delighted to be freed of schooling and spent my time exploring the streets of San Francisco, much as I had the woods of Morgantown. I adjusted easily and completely.

Ungoverned and seemingly unmonitored, I gave into the natural rhythms of my body. I stayed up late reading, frequently cooking for myself at odd hours. I walked all over San Francisco by myself, sometimes not returning home until well after midnight. I was neither reprimanded nor asked where I had been. I often saw no one when returning from these sojourns; my absence appeared unnoticed.

Aside from the insular relationships within my family I had very little contact with other kids. I had been isolated on an old farm in Wheeling, West Virginia, where I was born. In Morgantown a neighbour boy was my only friend and playmate. I was surround by people of college age, and older, who gravitated towards the liberal politics of my mother and older siblings. In San Francisco this trend continued. I socialised exclusively with hippies in their late teens and early twenties and older. Despite this age difference I was treated as an equal, and rarely experienced any condescension. When I came across kids my own age I couldn't relate. They were frequently either overly childlike and innocent or precociously adultlike and mean. I found both types threatening, and avoided them.

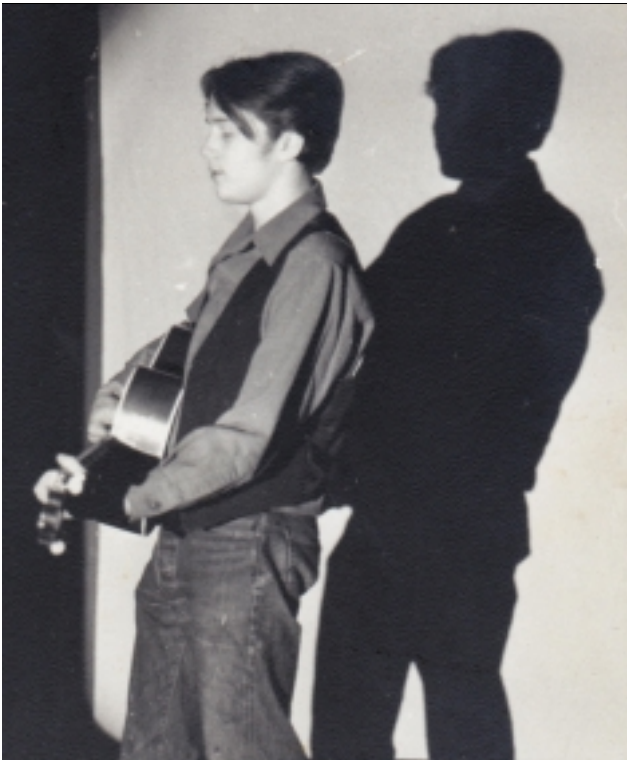
I had been experiencing erections from the age of nine with little understanding. Almost immediately, as if triggered by my new surroundings and newfound freedom, at age 11 I ejaculated for the first time and an awesomely powerful sex drive asserted itself. I began experiencing a wellspring of desire and compulsion that I could not comprehend. I insistently suppressed it, and explored the map of my sudden fetishes secretly and with guilt.

Among other things, I started peeping on hippie chicks. I frequently viewed a couple who insisted on making love with a weird clockwork consistency in front of an uncurtained window, atop a wooden bed-sized loft. I did not know what to do when, at 14, I was propelled to woo a girl about my age into bed. At 15 I somehow convinced a 28-year-old woman to take me into her bed, and finally lost my virginity. My three brothers never spoke of sex in my presence. I was alone in deep waters.

I had been a reader from age four, steeping myself in fairy stories. In San Francisco I moved away from fairy tales to horror fiction and began grappling with science fiction. I started devouring works of existential romance, writers like Carson McCullers and Françoise Sagan. I discovered written pornography when I ran across a copy of *The Pearl*, Victorian-era erotica, sitting casually among other books in the bedroom of a woman who lived next door. I was constantly at the movies, taking in everything from cheesy horror films to French New Wave cinema, opening my heart and mind to all images and ideas.

I was a romantic boy by nature. Despite an inculcated darkness I remained artless and unguarded. The stark juxtaposition of innocence and cynicism in these books and movies I was experiencing was quite clear to me. I had seen violent darkness, psychosis, and intentional meanness played out in my own life.

I made a decision one day, while sitting on the couch in the living room at 2381 Bush Street, to remain innocent and unmanipulative; to consciously cultivate an exterior that was bright and carefree. To this effect I



taught myself guitar, belting out the songs of James Taylor, Carole King, and Bread. I discovered photography, and ran about documenting my life and times (two of my favorite portraits, ever, were taken during this period). I wrote the beginnings of two novels.

The year I was 15 the majority of my family returned to southern West Virginia. We rented a rough but idyllic farm deep in the hills of Pocahontas county as part of the Back to the Land movement. I had been handed *Narcissus and Goldmund* by Hermann Hesse to read on our drive east. The pretty but hardworked farms dotting the vast woodlands of southeast West Virginia were right out of Hesse's medieval Germany. All was illuminated and solidified. I was not meant for the life of the mind, as found in that reserved aesthete, Narcissus. I was Goldmund through and through, an unruly lover with an untrained mind and strong creative drive. Or at least that's what the romantic boy thought.

I lost my virginity the night before leaving San Francisco. I was bursting with romance and sex at the farm. I wandered naked through our upper apple orchard and masturbated in sunny hay lofts, dreamy with women. I wrote romantic sexual fantasies in a black looseleaf notebook and embraced the farm boy image. I engaged in strenuous physical labour with verve, making hay, cutting firewood with saw and axe, tending the truck garden. I was fully conscious, both proud and shameful, of my intellectual failings. But compared with my emotional and sexual life my intellectual life seemed insignificant. It was merely part of my dual nature: one side buoyant, social, and fair, the other shadowed, shy, and uncertain.

I started reading science fiction seriously on the farm, stargazing myself into strange futures. I discovered science fiction fandom and began a wary relationship with it.

Things did not work out down on the farm. Our tenure

up in Sheets Hollow lasted only two growing seasons. We left San Francisco in March 1972 and vacated the farm by October 1973. So much had transpired in my interior that this brief period seems to stretch endlessly.

That autumn a happy, sun-dappled boy of 17 returned to San Francisco. My high sex drive had become both a curse and a blessing and, like Goldmund, it was contiguous with my creative drive. I had two goals I wanted to achieve upon my return: to publish a science fiction fanzine and, not just get laid, but fall in love. I went about implementing both in a blind torrent of passion.

The contradiction of the light and dark personality is a fairly common trait. It feeds creativity, frequently laying the groundwork of charisma, that inexplicable that draws people into a sphere of influence. When I look back on the years directly following my return to San Francisco it seems much of what my family and friends were doing was in reaction to my desires. I was aware that I harboured a tiny bit of charisma but wilfully ignored it, too frightened and dumb, and too conflicted by my romance with innocence, to be manipulative. I let it work unconsciously because I lacked the basic foundation of the truly charismatic personality: the ability to, instinctively and correctly, read people's needs. This failing has long plagued the fragilely constructed image of my inner self.

Too little time is spent observing how one person can alter the entire course of your life. My brother Sutton changed my life irrevocably when he explained science fiction fandom to me, influencing much of what I did, in theory and practice, when we both started actively publishing fanzines. While Sutton was not devoted to the actual solicitation of material, or the physical production of my fanzine *Starfire*, he was always thrumming in background, colouring everything.

Sutton's friend Gary Warne from the Morgantown days followed us out to San Francisco in 1968 (as did many). Gary strongly influenced my forming persona as





Sutro Tower, San Francisco skyline. (Photo: William Breiding.)

a boy. Life was horrible and sublime. Gary used the clown's perspective to delight and scare. He saw little difference between the two. Despite being eight years my senior, Gary and I participated many eccentric and interesting activities, all while he was cackling at the absurdity of life. Gary was an example of a naïve and unselfconscious charismatic personality.

Gary wrote an essay for the first issue of *Starfire* entitled 'Journey to Ourselves'. It included this existential little preface: '[This is] an article on why I am interested in phantasmal and speculative literature, why, when it is dealt with as ... "escapist" it is important to see that it is impossible to "escape" from ourselves and why there is nowhere to "escape" to.'

Gary Warne was the founder of Communiversality, a prototype of the take-a-class-because-you're-interested organisations that flourished through out much of the 1970s and 1980s.

He lived at 800 Shrader Street in San Francisco, a large corner house, between the neighborhoods of the Haight-Ashbury and Cole Valley, with his old friend John R. (and John's lover, Richard) and their roommates, Wendy and Joanne.

I was immediately smitten with Joanne when we met. She was extroverted and sensually feminine, making my heart patter quickly. She had mischievous eyes and her smell thrilled my blood. I was a goner, and fell deeply in love for the first time.

In April 1974, Gary started his own Communiversality class studying the works of Edgar Allan Poe. The class met Sunday evenings in Gary's bedroom, the large attic at 800 Shrader. Each week we piled into Gary's romantically decorated garret to discuss a previously read Poe story or poem.

The Poe group was diverse and interesting. Our range of activities went far beyond Edgar Allan to dinners and outings throughout San Francisco, including each other's homes. Carter was a poet who organised readings. I met John Fugazzi there, fresh from Cincinnati, who was to become a lifelong friend. John Fugazzi also became good friends with Jim and was quite close with Debbie, a diminutive Joni Mitchell lookalike. Abbey and Jim became a couple and eventually married. These are only the relationships of which I was aware. I'm positive there were others of which I knew nothing. John R., Gary's old friend and roommate, was also a part of the class, and brought a vibrancy and humour to the class that might have otherwise been missing.

Joanne also attended the Poe class. She had a vital nervous energy. Sitting around long enough to read passages aloud from a short story (in round robin) and then dissect it was difficult for her. Because of her sporadic attendance, and after she had arrived late once too often, Gary suggested she might want to opt out. She took her cue. It did not occur to me to consider why Joanne was late, or missing classes, or why she quit. I knew nothing about her beyond the moments we shared at the house. When I threw my heart at Joanne I took nothing

into account, including her feelings, or what was happening in her life. I had no idea what I expected, or even wanted. I never told Joanne that I loved her and never tried to claim or possess her. I didn't even know how old she was.

I always made myself integral to the steady stream of activities at 800 Shrader; I think much of the inconclusiveness of our relations was because of that backdrop. When I was rewarded by Joanne's presence I threw myself insistently and inarticulately at her feet like a dog. She had no choice but to trip over me and pat my head. But I did not actively pursue her, or ask her out on a date; it did not occur to me to do so.

I sometimes wonder about the complete manufacturing of my feelings, and how easy it is to build castles when you are broken and your own needs are so great. I was inexorable, and Joanne got it, but I don't quite remember how. I had a manic dynamic that propelled me towards people. But once they were there I didn't know what to do with them. In friendship this social ineptitude is less a problem, and can be glossed over. In matters of the heart it's a serious hindrance to making headway.

After I had already fallen head over heels in love with Joanne I once watched her dress up to go disco dancing. As she fussed with her gorgeous ringlets and applied her lilac lipstick she asked Wendy and I to appraise her dress and her platform shoes. Did they go well together? Wendy was altogether amused while I looked on in hurt hunger. I didn't know how to tell her she was gorgeous, or that my desire for her was almost unendurable.

When Joanne was finally out of the house skipping towards the bus stop, Wendy looked at me with a slight smile and affectionately shook her head. She returned to the painting she was working on. I went off to join Gary in whatever activity he was currently engaged in, the songs of Yes and Kansas running through my head.

San Francisco was still seriously post-hippie in 1974, attracting free spirits (as it has always done, with each new generation). Roommates John R. and Joanne were kindred freewheeling dynamos. I often spent the night at Shrader Street, but not in Joanne's bed. There were times when Richard, John R.'s lover, and I were left to console each other in the early mornings after John and Joanne tripped out of the house to work or school. With so many wanting a share of them we were deeply anguished by how little they gave us. It was easy, and not so easy, to be in love with them.

It must have been obvious to the roommates at Shrader Street that I was suffering, but no one advised me to get off my ass and do something about it. If they had I wouldn't have known what to do. I already thought I was in a relationship. Joanne's sheer presence and slightest attention caused my aching heart to believe this. Such sweet, domestic memories as joining her at the laundromat at the corner of Cole and Carl, both of us horny and buzzing with energy, convinced me. At the laundry I'd hitch myself up onto a folding table, Joanne between my spread legs. I was drunk and dizzy on the smell of her, her flashing eyes, her laugh, the feel of her curving waist and round ass, her lips, her breath. I was hot for her on every level. She probably thought she was doing me a favour, giving me what I wanted, or maybe

testing her own feelings. More likely, she was responding unthinkingly, to the magnet of my needs.

Because of all this, as well as being shy and generally inexperienced to boot, I allowed the following night to happen.

It was mid evening at 800 Shrader Street. The house was dark. This was not uncommon. Although Shrader Street was often a hub of activity, it was just as often dead when everyone was involved with separate lives.

Joanne and I were alone in the small spare bedroom adjacent the kitchen, with its swinging door, horsing around, more like kids than lovers. At one point we were kneeling in front of a mirror that hung above the head of the bed looking at each other. On the wall at the foot of the bed was another mirror. At just the right angle it caused one of those infinite reflection situations.

Joanne stared into the mirror and said, 'You are and you are and you are. We are in the land of You-Are.'

'The land of Yarre,' I said.

'Yes,' she said, 'The land of Yarre, where there is just you and I. If only we could live there!'

At this moment the doorbell rang. Joanne gave me a sidelong glance.

'Stay here. I'll be right back,' she said.

I docilely obeyed. I heard distant voices through the closed door, receding upstairs. Then silence. I lay on the bed for quite a while with a nervous heart. When Joanne finally returned she stood in the doorway.

'It's a friend and he really needs me, so I am going to be upstairs with him.'

Had she anticipated this friend all the while she'd been with me? I was left with a roiling stomach and no reassurances.

Hours later, as I lay there restless and distraught, eyes propped open by anxiety, Joanne came to check on me. She stood, a silhouette in the doorway, as I lay twisted up on the bed.

'I'm sorry. He needs me.' Almost dismissive. She turned. The swinging door swished shut. I heard the soft creak of the steps as she ascended to the bed into which I'd never been invited.

As each roommate came home my heart pounded with an unreasoning fear. It was a long soul-wrenching night.

I did not know when that other boy left. I remained shell shocked in the back bedroom until the morning activities were over. I was too shy and upset and, truthfully, too humiliated to stick my head into the kitchen when I heard Joanne there. She didn't bother to check on me, but Gary did. He cleared his throat as he stood in the doorway. I pretended to be asleep. I heard him mention my name as he buttered his toast.

When I thought everyone had gone off to work or school I emerged to find Richard sitting on the living room couch staring off into space. As I sat down on the far side of the red couch he burst into tears and threw himself into my arms.

'What are we going to do?' Richard asked.

The whole household must know about Joanne and the boy. I'm certain I blushed while I consoled Richard, wondering what John R. had done to cause him such

misery.

Later I walked home through the grey day to Bush and Fillmore and fell into bed, incapacitated not only by a broken heart but by an historic amorphous disconsolateness.

Among various notes towards shaping this piece, I've written that this night was the beginning of masochistic cycles in my life. At the time of writing this night seems the genesis of all the other nights in my life I've spent heartsick and uncertain, never able to take action, never talking about my insecurities, nor my love, hiding everything.

In actuality, there were at least two tracks operating simultaneously that night.

A confrontation with Joanne would have been out of the question. Our entire relationship had been indirect. I'd never told her I loved her. We hadn't fooled around much or made love. I had no idea how she actually felt about me. I only hoped. Whether his arrival had been spontaneous or prearranged, I realise now that this boy was her real lover. My feet-dragging never-quite-proclamations-of-love were probably as much a nuisance as they were flattering. What real consideration did I deserve? I should have departed when he showed up, but I was left with my hopes and the fatal ambiguity of my situation.

That harrowing night also harkened back to my boyhood. Lying in the dark wondering what was going on with Joanne tripped a long train of emotions that went straight back to nights in my bedroom next to my parents', listening while my father raped my mother, remaining mostly quiet and paralysed, for fear of a direct and brutal recrimination. Avoidance was precedent. Engagement led to conflict. The inability to act became indelible. Love was never totally real unless it hurt.

A fool for punishment, I continued to spend restless nights in the bedroom adjacent the kitchen at 800 Shrader, always hoping. As it turned out, the only time Joanne and I made love came on the day that she chose to 'break up' with me.

I was sick with fever that morning, and everything seemed slightly unreal. As she walked me home, the sidewalk, the trees, the Victorian houses and apartment buildings, seemed to shift and refract in the overcast. She went right to it as we held hands, walking down Waller Street.

'I wish I was twenty-five,' she said. 'I might be ready for your love. But I'm not right now.' It was that simple.

I knew they were words of goodbye. My heart followed my eyes, dragging down along the damp pavement with my tired feet. I didn't know what to say. There was nothing to say.

When we arrived at the flat at 2240 Bush Street, Joanne closed the door to my bedroom, took off her clothes, and got into bed with me. We made love, but it was no good. She was not involved, just simply there, as a witness. Later, after she dressed and left, I convulsed with tears.

A few days later Joanne called to tell me she had gotten sick from our intimacy.

To get over Joanne I decided to hitchhike to Maine with

my brother Wayne. (As we made our way through Boston, passing a joint with the two hippies that had picked us up, we cheered President Richard M. Nixon's resignation speech. It was 8 August 1974.)

When I told Joanne I was leaving she presented me with a small red diary. She wrote its first two pages. I've kept this diary as a kind of talisman, though I did not write in it myself.

In these pages Joanne refers to our 'friendship' in the briefest of terms, 'a month, maybe two', when 'we started the laughing, the crying, the curious nervousness of new loving ... I know it's been hard — please believe me when I say I love you. I do love you the very best I can for now. Accept it with its whimsical sprees — that's all the magic I've ever known.' Her last line reads, 'And when you strut on these crazy hills again, my lavender walls and giggling lips will welcome you to the land of Yarre ...' At the time I experienced those words as a kind of victory for my broken heart. When I returned, her giggling lips did not welcome me. I did not see her again.

I still have two pieces of mail from Joanne. One envelope, postmarked 28 June 1974, contains only a curl of her brunette hair, slightly faded now. The other envelope, dated 3 April 1975, is a letter in response to the fifth issue of my fanzine *Starfire*. She apologises for not being in touch. 'I think of you Bill, I remember the summer. The shadow of our silhouette is distant.' Joanne had a loopy, feminine cursive.

'I was afraid to be intimate with you,' she continues. 'I was afraid to be intimate with anyone — so I splashed my love, my fear, my ... Bill, you know me — fast talkin' Jo.' And then she confesses, 'I have been with the same man for six months. Relationships are wars for me. I can't say I'm happy. I'm not. Still — I feel myself exploding. I am tender with myself. There is less drama in my life.'

I wrote a number of poems after Joanne ended it. There are two that remain relevant.

'A Poem for the Past,' a short twelve line poem, dealt with the loss of my virginity, physically, psychically, and violently. I dedicated this poem to 'J & L' and published it in *Starfire* 5. Joanne assumed the poem was about her, which had been my intention.

But 'A Poem for the Past' was really about a man who was much older than me. When I was 13 I shared some transitory moments of masturbation with this guy. We had been travelling about alone, in a big car, in the desert, when it happened. It had meant little to me beyond the excitement of the moment. Later, at home (this man rented a room from my mother), my complete dismissal of what had occurred caused him to try to rape me. When I resisted too much he settled for beating me up.

When I wrote 'A Poem for the Past' I was 17 and still couldn't face what it was actually about. I disguised it in romanticism for two women (the 'L' in the dedication was for Leah, the woman to whom I'd lost my virginity), cloaking it in what was essentially a lie by allowing Joanne to believe it was about her, and convincing myself, also, that it was the truth. It took decades to accept what this poem was actually about.

This behaviour of cloaking, and sometimes outright lying, started with my father, endemic in periods of stress

or strife, as a strategy of avoidance, or getting what I wanted. The important thing to understand about this is that when it happened it was first and foremost a lie to myself, that I invested with a fervent truth, even though I knew deep in my heart it was a deception. This later became a pattern in my love life

The second poem, 'Separate Roads', was a longer piece, specifically about Joanne. It fixates on certain attributes (her 'lilac lips and sweet fern hair'), and the shadowy places love had taken me. More importantly it describes a benign kind of stalking that I am prone to post-relationship: I wander around like a love zombie, inevitably ending by gazing up at her windows, or coming to a stop at her vehicle, my hands affectionately caressing, my darkening heart distraught. A real gone dude. 'Separate Roads' describes it perfectly.

When I was 14 I had a puppy love crush on a woman named Debra Jo. She was very kind to me. We would lie around and talk, sometimes with my head in her lap. Though Debra Jo was naturally reserved, she sometimes kissed me on the mouth. I think of her as a grown woman but she was probably only four years older.

My mother had observed us and had done nothing to intervene. After the infatuation had passed (Debra Jo hooked up with Jesse, a drugstore cowboy) I overheard my mother say to someone, possibly one of my sisters, 'Well, the die has been cast. Bill will be chasing after Debra Jo types the rest of his life.' Debra Jo was blonde, small boned, verbally judicious, and emotionally remote.

Joanne was Debra Jo's opposite: taller, physically lush, brown hair, sparkling eyes, loquacious, emotionally effusive, chaotic. I see no template or type with either. The die had been cast long before, in early childhood.

In trying to understand myself I have long attempted to avoid the cliché of blaming my parents for my own inadequacies. But the base truth remains that we are affected by the biology we inherit and the environment that our parents create for us, consciously or unconsciously. As much as I despise the obvious observation that our parents remain central to every relationship we have, there is a nugget of truth to this analysis.

Early in life I was told I was incapable of maintaining a relationship because of my refusal to compromise. Late in life I was told that my inability to sustain a long-term relationship was because I was unable to give my partners an unequivocal sense of being needed. Freud lurks.

Joanne was a beautiful woman I fell in love with, but she was never remotely my girlfriend. I regret that I have no photos of her, but I feel I still possess clear memories of her face, her hair, her body. Joanne has no internet



William Breiding, 2013.

presence and remains enigmatic.

I met my first actual girlfriend at a small science fiction convention when I was 20. She was far more experienced than I, emotionally and sexually. Young and impetuous, and certain of our feelings, we moved in together after knowing each other for just that weekend. We learned a great deal from each other about the mechanics of living. We lived together for three years, but I remained obtuse about the many important aspects of loving.

I knew very little about my heart when I was in love with Joanne. I continue to have only small successes in uncoiling its intricacies. I have spun Freudian in hopes of trying to explain the soft clotted roundness of my intelligence, my lack of emotional instinct, the independence and distance I've felt from early childhood.

I continue to throw myself into relationships though I understand nothing — about myself or the women I love. I have, in fact, remained pretty dumb as I peer through the battered mask called my heart.

CAMILLA: You sir, should unmask.

STRANGER: Indeed?

CASSILDA: Indeed it's time. We all have laid aside disguise but you.

STRANGER: I wear no mask.

CAMILLA: (Terrified, aside to Cassilda): No mask? No mask!

— *The King In Yellow*, Robert W. Chambers

— William M. Breiding, 2013