

Full Circle - *Ditto 15, Back in T.O.*

Tara Wayne

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At first I thought it was going to be a bummer. I arrived the first day around 5, and there were only a handful of people there, four of them involved in running the con. Others arrived slowly 'till there were Dick & Leah Smith, Mike Glicksohn, Hope Leibowitz, Charles Levi, and Andy Porter. ... then all went out to dinner together. I sat looking at the Penny's sitting behind the registration desk, presiding over a box of nametags they had designed, each with a unique bit of fan art. Next to them, Henry Welch of the Knarly Knews who I've not met before. Ethiopian the others went out for. Hope said it wasn't expensive but \$12 or \$13 per meal for two or three nights was more than I cared to spend. Around 7 though, when people began returning from dinner, or arriving from out of town, things began to pick up considerably.

Art Widner was there, unexpected by me. He wasn't listed among the members in the PR but I was glad to see him. Yhos had always been a favourite, friendly sort of zine, and Art a good guy. I gradually reacquainted myself with Greg Trend as well, a fellow artist of unnecessarily humble opinion of himself. Jim Cauraghn I wasn't sure about. I thought he was the guy I knew from some years ago with a giant pet cockroach who lived in his kitchen. I was relieved to find out Jim was someone else entirely, and had far more common sense. Later than evening, to my slight surprise I butted into a very interesting conversation with Leah and Glicksohn about children's literature. Leah had read it all, when she was supposed to. Mike had read hardly any because he grew up first. I occupied the middle ground by having read a lot, but while too old. To make a long story short, by around 9 I didn't regret being there one bit.

One highlight -- trying to remember the Astral Pole trick. I was one of the few people who could do it when we were all a lot younger and thinner, and it would have been nice to know I could still do it. But no one, not even I, could quite remember how it was supposed to go. Catharine and I tried it again and again, but always bogged down at the same spot, where the pole was to the front with our wrists turned outwards and backwards, and one leg hooked inside the loop. It seemed impossible to go any further. But if that wasn't the trick, what was? Nobody knew.

Once I got home that night I looked it up in one of my old zines. (DNQ if you must look it up yourself.) I *think* I've rediscovered the secret. Apparently so has Catharine, since she was evidently doing the Pole trick all Sunday afternoon whenever she could get somebody to look. I was worried that description may not be accurate -- the diagram I drew to accompany it was never meant to be. Without a pole and some room to use it, possibly I'll never know. Since

Catharine was pulling it off, likely the secret was accurately imparted to the twiltone after all.

A certain cynical friend of mine observed that I was probably only going to Ditto to eat the lavish spread in the con suite. I said, fie, oh dubious one. There would be little that would alone tempt me. Salty carbohydrates there would be, but if that was all I wanted, the 7-11 was a lot closer than the Daze Inn Downtown. I was pretty much spot on too. Enough carrot sticks, celery, chopped green and red peppers, and guacamole to unconstipate an elephant, as I said somewhat over loudly in the consuite. But no cheesecake, sliced salami, chili, chocolate covered coffee beans or strawberries, lox 'n bagels, or pizza... the sort of *quality* junkfood that makes it *worth* a trip downtown for no other reason. Fortunately, I wasn't at Ditto just to overeat. And the junk food was augmented by a couple of bags of President's Choice chocolate chip cookies, which are first rate. Next night there was a decent spread of cheeses as well. And did those re-filled plastic Coke bottles contain *Coke*, or home brew? The later if I know the odds.

Saturday I overslept. I was supposed to give a talk at 2. Usually I have no trouble getting up when I'm supposed to, but naturally because people were waiting on me I was still asleep when I got a call at 2.10. I phoned the hotel first thing of course, and informed them of a slight hitch in the program, in case they hadn't noticed. They'd noticed -- but not to worry. I heard later that Art Widner filled in with a number of increasingly conspiratorial theories about the Washington Sniper. Fans always cope. Not always well, but what the hell, that's mimeo-ink under our fingernails, not grease paint.

I got there, a friend in tow, around 3 or 3.30. Now, it must be understood that it was Murray's idea that I give a talk on Toronto fandom. Time was I used to believe that comprehensive and unbiased fan history was possible, but that was a long time ago. Since then I've come to the conclusion that fan history is like a tangled skein of alternate time-lines, and that everyone experiences a different thread. My fan history of Toronto fandom wasn't going to be anyone else's. For another thing, I don't recall public speaking being on my resume.

Still, I owed Murray a Big One, and agreed to give it a shot. But no thought, I confess. Even as I pulled out the chair and sat in front of what must have been pretty much the attendance of the con, I had no idea what I was going to say. So I just rambled. The talk I gave was just an impromptu, non-linear, anecdotal account of the early days of the (New) Toronto Derelicts, circa 1972 to about 1975. There was no attempt to include much of what had gone on before, nor what happened in circles outside of my own. Better to have those people talk about those things, I think. At that, there didn't seem to be any difficulty going on for about an hour, and it seemed to keep the audience in their seats at least. Just about as I got to Patrick Hayden arriving in time, Murray handed me a note. I had run out of time and would never get to 1976.

No time to explain Victoria's gafiation, or talk about the Woman's Apa, or introduce the improbably Henry Argasinski, or map the break-up of OSFiC, or go

over the family tree of local conventions, or bring up any of about a hundred other things. Maybe it was just as well. If the early 70's were mostly good times, the later 70's were something of a minefield. The talk, incomplete though it was, had gone over well so far as I could tell -- and that was a hell of a surprise to me. It was just a bunch of old stories, whoppers, and bad jokes, and no doubt everyone in the audience could tell as many. I think, though, that fans enjoy sharing their experiences, re-affirming them as common touchstones.

Following me, a well-meaning Greg Trend spoke about preserving paper. While a subject every fan should be well versed in, it was not particularly gripping and much of the audience took a break. Andy Porter livened the talk up a little by illustrating Greg's points on an easel. "Enemies of Paper" headed the sheet. When Greg said "One. Air," Andy wrote a big number 1. "And temperature". Then "Three. Light". "Four. Humidity". And so on. When Greg ran out of numbers, he and the audience swapped views on how well ditto kept relative to hecto, moved on to tapes, and even CD's. I was left feeling it was pretty much a lost cause, given a few thousand years. Will historians someday debate whether the first moon landing was in the 21st. century or the 17th? Barring some new technology, perhaps.

People began to trickle back, in time for the auction. As is traditional, the money to be raised would go to the usual motley crew of fan funds, and naturally to help defray the costs of the con. Glicksohn went to bat first, with a number of king-size zip-loc bags of 70's Brit-zines. With some astonishment he discovered that there were actually several copies of each issue in each bag, not a larger number of sole copies as he expected. This was a little bit harder to auction, but he was game. Dick Smith was next up. He had a rather nice assortment of 50's worldcon program books from Bob Tucker, and these raised serious money. Dick took great pains to describe each item in detail -- he didn't miss a membership receipt or scribbled room number in a single one, as far as I could tell. Colin Hinz was slower still. He seemed to have a very large pile of pop-cult zines and marginalia, as well as a stack of Locus from a couple of years ago. Bidding dragged at around a buck. The next items were another matter. Robert J. Sawyer offered to use the name of the highest bidder in his next novel. To match him, so did Robert Wilson. The bidding was lively, and rose quickly to eighty or a hundred dollars each author. Andy Porter will be *somebody* in Rob's next book. Colin Hinz in Bob's.

A dinner party was forming and this time I wanted in. Swiss Chalet is my idea of affordable, and it was a pretty fine looking crowd. I had the chicken quesidillas if you care to know.

After dinner, the dirty pros just went home. No doubt to rest up for another grueling day producing their quota thousand words. Us mere fans were free, however, to be as irresponsible as we like, and returned to the hotel. If the ice had been broken Friday night, Saturday night I spend plumbing deeper waters. I discovered to my delight that older fans -- and this bunch aged up to the mid 80's -- seem a lot more pinko than fans in their 20's or 30's. They all seemed to think

that things were pretty much all going to hell in a hand-basket politically and economically. Nothing like doom and gloom to liven up my conversation. As well as the cheese, there was one other addition to the con-suite that night. A lot of leftover booze had been brought in. I don't drink whiskey or vodka, but I have a sweet tooth for liqueurs like Bailey's Amaretto, and Grand Marnier, and showed them no mercy. I figured it was time to stop when I saw Phil Paine stroll into the con-suite. But no... it wasn't the Bailey's; Phil was briefly there.

One person I had really hoped to spend a little time with was Kurt Erichson. I saw Kurt come in late Friday night, but he hung out at one end of the con-suite and I at the other. I thought there was always Saturday. But I slept in Saturday, remember, and missed *his* talk entirely. I wondered vainly what he'd had to say for 48 hours. Lucky for me, the miracle of e-mail. I asked him and was spared ignorance. Kurt had shown about 90 slides, he said, to an audience of five. Most of the attendance was at lunch, or touring downtown, he figured. He talked about technologies, how fandom had begun with the emphasis on cheap and universal, and how today it was increasingly digital. His own work, he said, was entirely computer done.

(Me, I'm still in the 20th. century, and hardly use the computer for anything but a glorified delivery service.)

That night too, I left the con about 1. I had intended to return on Sunday, but on the way home I wasn't if I would or not. I was *tired*. It hadn't been just the con. The week leading up to it had made unusual demands on my usual reclusiveness -- a birthday, thanksgiving with the family, a trip to the shopping mall, then on top of all that *two whole days of partying*. It would take a superman, or Hope Leibowitz, to keep up the breakneck pace! Of course, I hated to miss the dead-dog. It had been officially announced even. Yet I gauged attendance would be slender. Of the 30 or so people at Ditto 15, about half were from out of town, and most would likely be on the road Sunday afternoon or evening. I only was only sure of Andy staying until Monday. Later I found out that Dick and Leah had stayed also. According to Murray it was a relaxed dead dog with a half dozen or so there.

I never did reach an actual decision about going. I really slept in this time, then pattered around until I figured everyone left was at dinner. Then let myself be mesmerized by the boob tube until it was obvious I'd only be at the dead dog a couple of hours before having to go home again looked at the time and figured everyone who was left was at dinner. Dead-dogs at very small conventions tend to end early.

Two people I didn't see after Friday were the Penny's. I didn't learn until later that Lloyd and Yvonne had been in a collision on the way home the first night -- Lloyd had a couple of sore ribs I was told, but Yvonne had broken her wrist.

One other mishap. Murray had planned to have a collection of my old fan writing and a sample of art for the con. (*Old Toys* was the title I chose.) He'd have

xeroxed the whole thing, but Catherine volunteered to mimeo the zine, persuading him that it would be more fannish. It must have been a minute-after-last-minute decision, because she and Colin were unable to finish in time. I spotted Colin through an open door next to the con-suite, heroically mimeoing from a stack of electrostencils. I didn't count, but there looked to be two dozen still to go. And the art pages hadn't even been started. Since that was Saturday night, obviously *Old Toys* wouldn't be available at Ditto after all. I wonder if I can resist e-mailing them every day or two until it's done...*

Last things last. Next Ditto it seems will be in the Seattle area. Alan Rosenthal and Janice Murray have expressed interest in holding Ditto 16 in Eugene, if they can.

On the whole, well done Ditto 15.

* *It was not in fact finished until a year later.*