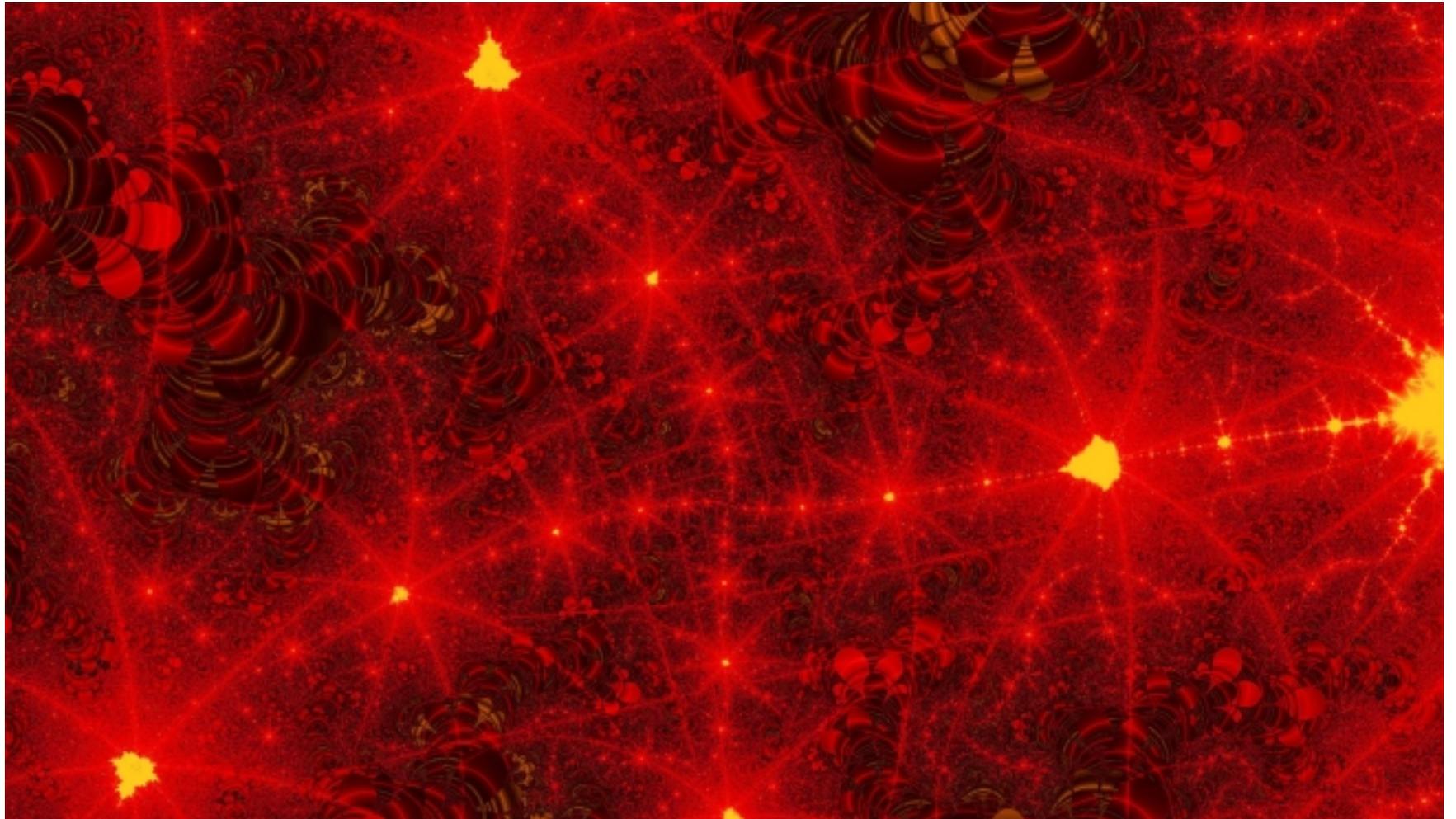


Treasure 3

November 2014

John Baxter
William Breiding
Ditmar (Dick Jensen)
John Lichen
Cat Sparks



'Star Carpet' (DJFractal by Ditmar (Dick Jensen))

Treasure

No. 3 November 2014

First publication: October 2014 mailing of ANZAPA.

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Illustrations

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

Back cover: 'Sutro Tower, San Francisco' (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* 2 and 3 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 technogobbledook extras, and suddenly Facebook loaded instantaneously.

Facebook offers a service that bypasses many of the difficulties of producing and replying to blogs. I still don't know how to blog or winkle 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.

And now some news ...

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.

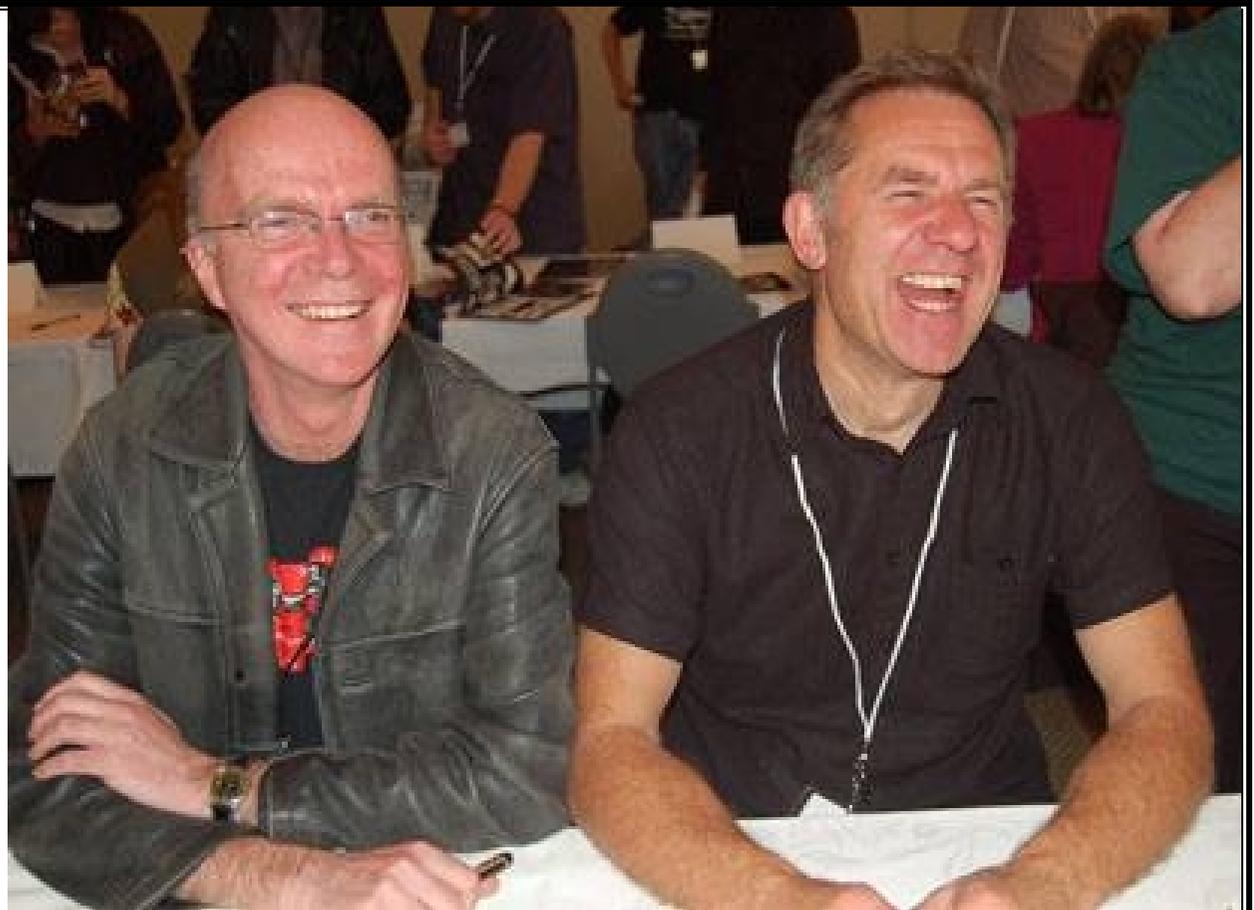
THE MELBOURNE SCIENCE FICTION CLUB

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 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.



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

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

The venue this year is the OES 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 <jtfson@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.

Ron had tried to contact me for an OHS Reunion, but he had found only my Goglegmail 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 it 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 Primitiv, 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.

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 Swimming Carnival, held at the old Olympic Pool in town; and (c) being forced to take swimming lessons in October at the Oakleigh Swimming Pool. It was an open-air pool, and it was pure fiction that the swimming season started in October. We each dropped into the pool, became instant ice cubes, and hurtled out again as fast as possible.

— Bruce Gillespie, May 2014

Almost all the other Australian autobiographies have been written either by people who attended private schools and came from a privileged background, or 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 shopping 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 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 those 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.

Wen 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 Warrnamnbool. 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

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.

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 sweetnatured. 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, simultane-

ous 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 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.



The author, aged 12.

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.

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.

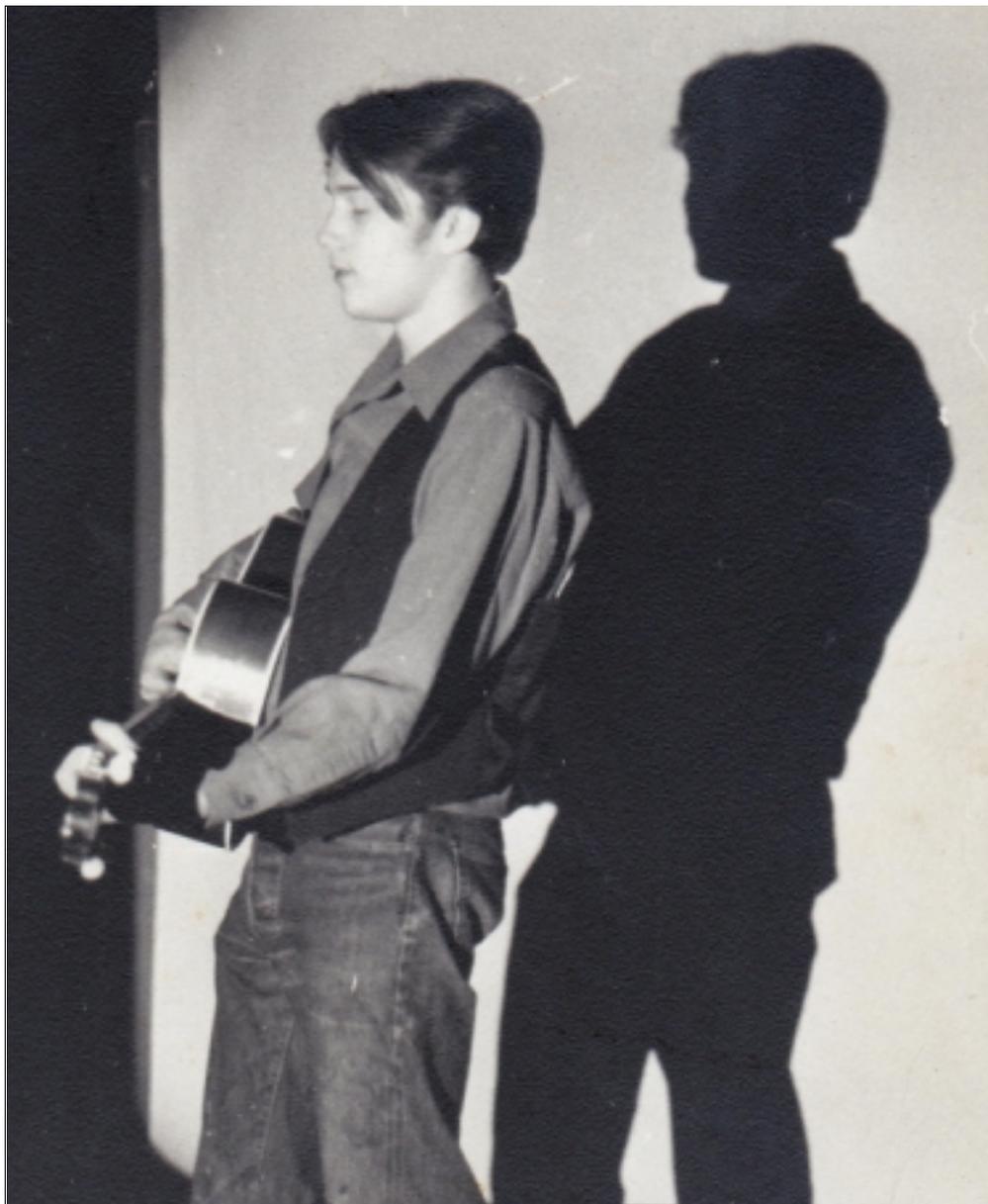
She made no further attempts at child rearing. My brothers and I were furnished with basic food and shelter and left on our own. I was delighted to be freed of schooling and spent my time exploring the streets of San Francisco, much as I had the woods of Morgantown. I adjusted easily and completely.

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 surrounded 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.

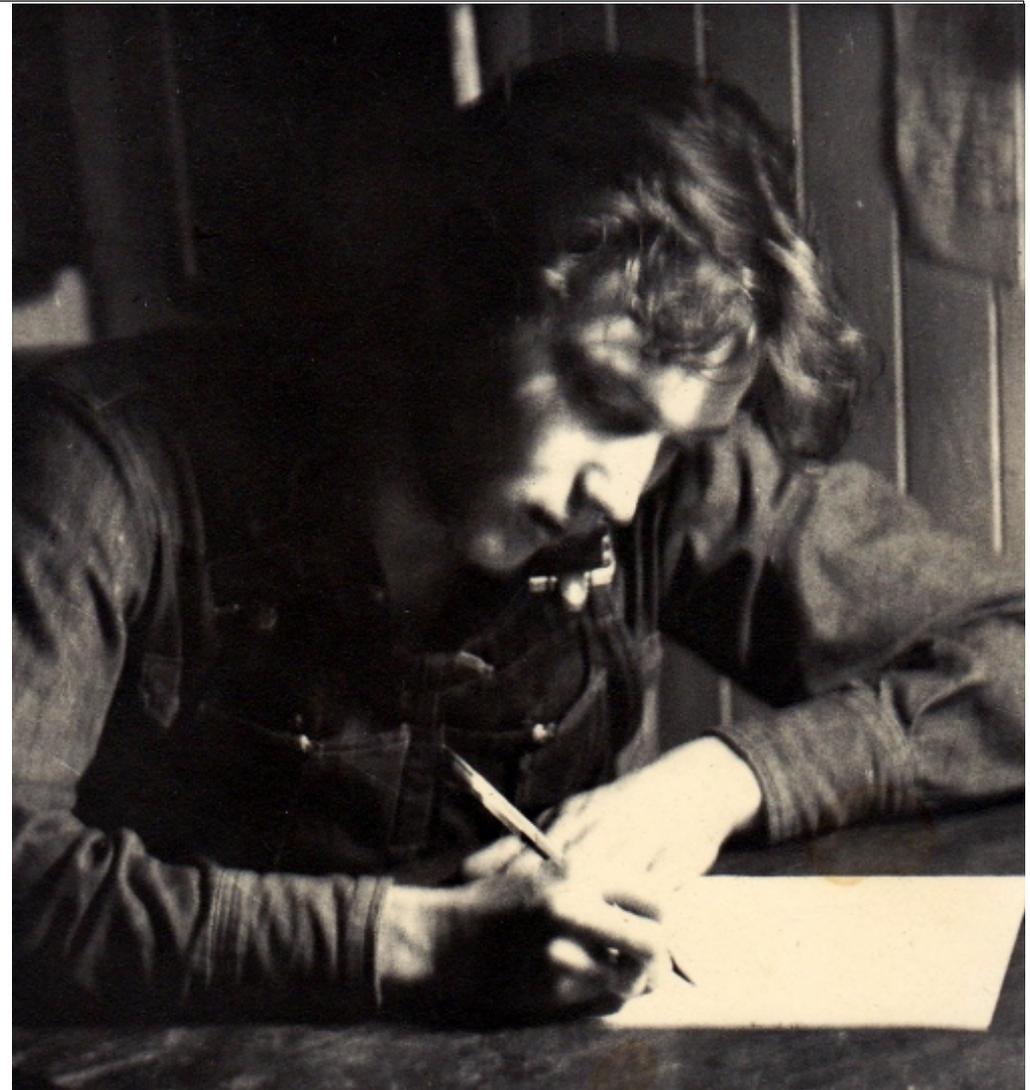
I lost my virginity the night before leaving San Francisco. I was bursting with romance and sex at the farm. I wandered naked through our upper apple orchard and masturbated in sunny hay lofts, dreamy with women. I wrote romantic sexual fantasies in a black looseleaf notebook and embraced the farm boy 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 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 Communiversity, 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 neighbourhoods 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 Communiversity 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 pursued 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



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

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 unthinking, 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



William Breiding, 2013.

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 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**

John Baxter is best known as a writer of film biographies and, in recent years, books of memoirs based on his life as a bookseller and writer in Paris. Fan historians would remember him as one of the first Australian SF fans to correspond widely with overseas fans (during the early 1960s), and as a pioneer Australian writer of SF short stories and novels (during the late 1960s). He also returned to Australia for a few years in the 1980s, broadcasting on the ABC's 'Books and Writing' program, and renewing friendships with various Sydney personalities, such as Martin Hibble.

Martin Hibble, the most ebullient and knowledgeable of ABC FM's many classical music broadcasters, died suddenly in 2000, leaving many of us feeling bereft. The long decline of ABC FM as a quality broadcaster dates from his death. His most notable program was a two-hour weekly discussion between the station's best music critics, comparing and contrasting different versions of a particular piece of music. Both Leigh Edmonds and I remember this as the high point of ABC FM's 37 years, the sort of stimulating music education program that has disappeared forever. Thanks, John, for this tribute, published as a *festschrift*, **Martin Hibble: A Tribute** (2003).

John Baxter

Martin Hibble: a tribute

Martin Clive Hibble

Born: Fareham, England, 22 June 1945

Died: Adelaide, 10 October 2000

Martin Hibble missed his era. He should have been born a satyr. With the beard and crooked smile, the impish sideways look and the slight drag of one foot, it required little imagination to visualise him with hairy haunches, cloven hoofs and a pan pipe, pursuing nymphs and shepherds — well, in his case, only shepherds — through the woods of some Norman Lindsay fantasy.

We met very shortly after he arrived from Scotland, at one of the get-together suppers organised by Sydney Film Festival groupie Dorothy Shoemark Cozijn. Interesting conversations over plates of macaroni cheese and tuna bake soon sent us out into the night in search of a decent curry.

Before long, we took to haunting a tiny and probably illegal restaurant on the unfashionable downhill side of Kings Cross where each dish arrived with a saucer of gravy corrosive enough to etch steel. It became a macho gesture to empty all of it into one's plate. Once, driving there in a rainstorm, I bumped the car in front; a headlight broke, the electrics fused, and we were plunged into a darkness filled with pungent smoke. Without comment,



Martin got out and helped push the car to the side of the road. We slogged four blocks to the restaurant in the downpour, and only rang for a tow after we'd devoured a searing vindaloo. Accidents happened — but a dinner was *dinner*.

Martin drifted into the orbit of the Workers Education Association Film Society, and became a regular at its Sunday evening meetings. He also began attending the clandestine Sunday afternoon screenings of film buff Barrie Pattison, whose showings of obscure 1930s Hollywood oddities on his living-room wall ('Title will not be revealed until flashed on the screen!') were what we had instead of a Cinemathèque or National Film Theatre. (I gather that, in the intervening four decades, nothing much has changed.)

Sydney's film universe being exceedingly small, he was soon drawn into that of the Film Festival, where he joined the Film Selection Panel, of which I was chairman. Martin echoed my complaint that the Committee existed only to rubber stamp the choices of our globe-trotting director David Stratton, but when I dissolved this institution as a means of drawing attention to this state of affairs, Martin speedily volunteered for a renamed panel, which had, if anything, even less influence on the Festival's program. He greeted my protests with a shrug. Who cared who selected the films, so long as he got to see them before anyone else? It's an index to his charm that, after a few days of coldness, we became friends again.

He also foreshadowed his later media stardom when he agreed to address the WEA Music Study Group on 'The History of Music'. Promptly at 7.30, he plunged in with plainsong, and two hours later, emerged, breathless but still going strong, at the most recent toots and squeaks of serialism. As he gulped a well-earned glass of water, a little old lady rose and said accusingly, 'You forgot Scriabin!'

Martin was never backward at making his presence felt, and his snorts of contempt ('Ridiculous!') or his 'Hich-hich-hich' laugh soon became familiar components of any film event. His dogmatism won him a few enemies but many friends. The words 'discretion' and 'restraint' were not in his lexicon. Likes and hates alike were frankly paraded, no more so than at table. Martin actually did rub his hands together in anticipation of a good meal. And, too

appreciative of a decent dinner to talk through it, he would gesture at the plate with his fork in repeated silent appreciation as he chewed.

He flung himself into applause at a concert with equal vigour. Not for him the reverent pause for the last reverberation to fade. He was on his feet and applauding as the conductor lowered his baton, and always with absolute confidence — though he did once confess that, at the coda of one modern work, he'd started to clap without being entirely sure that the last bong-clack-fart really marked the end of the piece. I can't remember another occasion on which he admitted the slightest lack of confidence in the rightness of his judgment.

Soon after we met, Martin joined Tarantella Records, not far from the Australian Commonwealth Film Unit, later Film Australia, where I then worked. He also moved into a boarding house near my home. The term 'furnished room' hardly does justice to his accommodation, since it was big enough to hold not only a bed and the usual wardrobes but his piano and an already enormous record library that soon became more so. At the rear of the house, a kitchen also lurked, but Martin seldom set foot there. Instead, he relied on the generosity of another tenant, Derek, a keen cook whom he quickly house-trained. Derek had converted a wardrobe into a well-stocked larder, and it only took a hint from Hibble that he was feeling a wee bit peckish for Derek to unlock the double doors and produce a three-course dinner for Martin and his guests.

There were plenty of such guests, since Martin had already enrolled many of us in his informal course of music appreciation. I shared his enthusiasm for the European avant-garde, my meagre knowledge of which he was more than ready to augment. He introduced me to the exhilarating blare of Penderecki and Baird, and the glorious clangour of Messiaen. I was never as keen on the classical repertoire, and excited his derision by failing to appreciate a Prom performance of the *Hammerklavier* by Tamas Vasary, not to mention Martin's own Cesar Franck-ish piano improvisations. My comment that one of the latter 'didn't seem to resolve itself' earned one of his trademark snorts and a 'Ridiculous!'

But we did agree about much of what we saw and heard at the Proms, pro

and con. 'Pro' for highlights like a dizzying performance of Messiaen's *Et Expecto Resurrectionem Mortuorum*, the gongs and cymbals of which genuinely seemed likely to raise the dead. And 'Con' for a *Goon Show* recreation of the first performance of Stravinsky's *Les Noces*. At the 1923 premiere, the four pianos were played by four composers of the eminence of Stravinsky and Satie. Sydney's prom organisers tried, ill-advisedly, to achieve the same effect with four contemporary Australian composers, Nigel Butterley, Donald Hollier, Larry Sitsky, and Richard Meale. To compound the error, they chose to use the same line-up in the first half, playing a transcription for four pianos of J. S. Bach's Concerto for Four Harpsichords in A minor, BWV 1065. Within a minute, some of the players had lost track entirely, and Martin and I could barely disguise our giggles as first one, then the next, rose to his feet at the keyboard like Jerry Lee Lewis to peer at the others and mouth agitatedly, 'What bar are we on?'

During his first years in Sydney, Martin was accompanied everywhere by Jan Cadogan, who worked with him at Tarantella. They were taken by everyone, including me, as a couple, and so it needed some readjustment when Martin exploded from the closet in 1968. The impetus was almost certainly his encounter with the cultivated gay community at Film Australia, of which he quickly became a valued member. Not long after, Martin and the late Barry Bowden went on a round-the-world tour that included, as Martin later gleefully recounted, highly satisfying visits to numerous bath-houses. Only those of London disappointed, since British law forbade the private rooms that were such an agreeable feature of those elsewhere. Little knots of Gays of All Nations could be found in most such places, loudly expressing their disappointment, and Martin was not slow to make arrangements to meet later.

On their return, Barry hosted a black-tie dinner at his home, ostensibly in honour of the founding of the Mexican Republic (Mexico City having been apparently most congenial). The invitation carried a photograph of Aztec ruins, and announced discreetly 'Decorations will be worn'. Martin arrived in a tuxedo, and sporting an enormous gold object on his lapel, which, on closer inspection, proved not to be The Royal Antidileuvian Order of the Elephant, First Class, but the label 'Grand Prix du Disque' peeled off a record sleeve.

Even after he moved to Adelaide and won FM fame, Martin maintained his close ties with Sydney, the film festival and his old friends, not to mention the steam-room scene. He stayed with us for two years when he came to the festival, and we often went to screenings together, but in the breaks he would slip away to some local gay hangout. Concerned that he ran the risk of AIDS, my then-wife sat him down and quizzed him about this. Far from resenting

her query, he put her mind at rest with a frank chapter-and-verse description of his sexual preferences. From Martin, one would have expected nothing less.

— John Baxter, 18 July 2011

Martin Hibble was a complicated individual, as I suggested in this piece for the *festschrift*. He could be intolerably opinionated, particularly when drunk, but one forgave him a lot for his erudition, and his obvious love of music. A long-term relationship would have taken the edge off the abrasive manner, but he enjoyed the bath-house scene too much.

He died in an ambiguous manner. He had just come out of the shower and was drying his hair with an electric dryer. Apparently there wasn't any evidence of either heart attack or stroke, and the dryer was operating properly too, since he fell on it, and was burned. He left no will, so his huge record collection went to some remote relatives back in Scotland. I don't know what they did with it.

I thought you might be interested in this shot of Hibble in his prime. It was taken at the Sydney Film Festival in the mid sixties. From left to right, there's myself (was I ever that young?), Martin, Brian Hannant, later co-screenwriter of *Mad Max II* and *Time Guardians*, a man

named Les Innes, about whom I know nothing whatsoever, Barbara Wronowski, my then girlfriend (note the ocelot coat; I wish you could have seen the lingerie), Martin (for once with no glass in hand), and Ian McPherson, then President of the Festival. *Ou sont les filles d'antan*, etc.



John Litchen



It's 1964. John begins his first world trip wondering whether he should spend the rest of his life in Tahiti.

An innocent afloat: My life and science fiction, part 6

At loose ends, I often found myself down on The Strand at Williamstown where watching yachts bobbing at their moorings in Hobson's Bay somehow made me feel less lonely. I also enjoyed watching the huge passenger liners come in and moor across the harbour at Port Melbourne. It seemed as if a new one arrived —and departed — every week. You could hear the foghorn bellow of the ship's siren as it left the port, and often drifting across the water was the sound of thousands of people yelling and calling goodbye to their loved ones as they embarked on an adventure to the old world. At night these massive liners departing were a spectacular sight, with thousands of lights from the decks and countless portholes brightening the darkness and glistening in reflections bounced off the waves across Hobson's Bay. I would watch as they diminished in size, the glow of the lights shrinking and finally disappearing the further the ship travelled down the channel towards the distant Heads of Port Phillip Bay.

Williamstown is a peninsula that juts out into Port Phillip Bay near the mouth of the Yarra River, and it forms a small protected bay, which is Hobson's Bay. Historically it was the harbour where the tall sailing ships came when they arrived. It was the location of the original settlement of Melbourne, but because there was no fresh water available the town was shifted up the Yarra river to a location near Dight's Falls, where the tidal rise and ebb of the river came up against a rocky barrier. On the other side, fresh water was available for the growing settlement. Still, all the ships arriving came into the piers at Williamstown, and Williamstown was where immigrants and new settlers disembarked and stayed before heading for the nearby goldfields or into the growing city of Melbourne. Dockyards were built (The Alfred Graving Dock) using convict *slave* labour. This dry and wet dock serviced the hundreds of tall ships that came in every year. Every street corner near the piers and docks and boat repair businesses had a pub on it. At one point there were more

than one hundred in the city of Williamstown, but now that number is greatly reduced. Even so, Williamstown has more pubs than any other suburb in greater Melbourne, and each has its loyal customers.

I would watch the liners come in up the channel and head across to Port Melbourne. The arriving and departing foghorn bellows often brought to mind Bradbury's story 'The Foghorn', which was filmed as *The Beast from 20,000 Fathoms*. This very short story, first published in 1952, dealt with a lovesick marine dinosaur (a pliosaur perhaps? Bradbury was rather vague with his description, other than to say it had a neck about 70 feet long, and that it rose up out of the sea and wrapped around the light house.) It believed the sound of the fog horn was a long lost mate calling. It emerged from the sea one foggy night only to create mayhem and destruction instead of finding love. Bradbury could make any silly idea beautiful and compelling to read. The film was a typical disaster film, with the monster created by Ray Harryhausen and his stop-motion model animation. More than anything, the movie monster looked like a dinosaur, not something that would have lived in the sea, which seemed incongruous. A pliosaur would not have been able to come on land and smash up a city, as it did in the film, so a dinosaur it had to be. This made the film ridiculous even though it was popular. It took the world by storm and unleashed a series of even worse films from many countries about dinosaur-like monsters, created by the effects of radiation or other such ideas, destroying major cities. *Godzilla* from Japan became the enduring and most popular one. Maybe I was lonely too, which is why that film and that Bradbury story kept popping into my head every time I heard a big ship's siren echo across the water.

I watched the yachts sailing on weekends. I would walk along the piers and into the yacht clubs and look at the most beautiful boats moored there. At

one stage I even joined the Hobson's Bay Yacht Club, with the idea of one day buying a yacht and sailing around the world. I started buying yachting magazines to read about the adventures of all those long-distance sailors and the exotic places they visited, such as the islands of the Caribbean, Tahiti, Fiji, the Greek Islands in the Mediterranean, and the South Pacific Islands closer to home, even sailing boats up the rivers and canals of Europe. You could practically go anywhere in a good yacht.

The catch was I simply couldn't afford to buy one, let alone pay for the maintenance of one. For a while I thought I should have stayed in Darwin; driving a dry cleaning van to pick up and deliver clothes was not something I imagined I would be doing forever, but at least it was better than being inside a dry cleaning factory all day working the machines for cleaning or the presses for the finishing.

There were lots of musicians out of work too. The jazz clubs disappeared and the few big balls weren't enough to earn decent living. There were not enough variety shows, ballets, or other theatrical work to employ all the musos who were out there looking for something. I managed a couple of small recording gigs, but after that it all dried up. No one wanted anything else but rock and roll. If you couldn't switch to rock and roll, you were out of a job. I was lucky, because we had a family business to fall back on. My sister Zara, when she wasn't dancing or working as a showgirl at the Tivoli, worked at the factory. Christine too. If I had anything on and needed to rehearse, I could always get a few hours off to do that.

For a while my good friend Brian and I would go down to the Williamstown front beach and swim from the lifesavers' club across to the dressing sheds and the fishing clubs at the other end, then run back along the sand. We went through a winter and into the following summer doing this every day, then for some reason which escapes me now we stopped. He got tied up with his advertising and just didn't have the time, I suspect. Once you stop, though, you never go back to it.

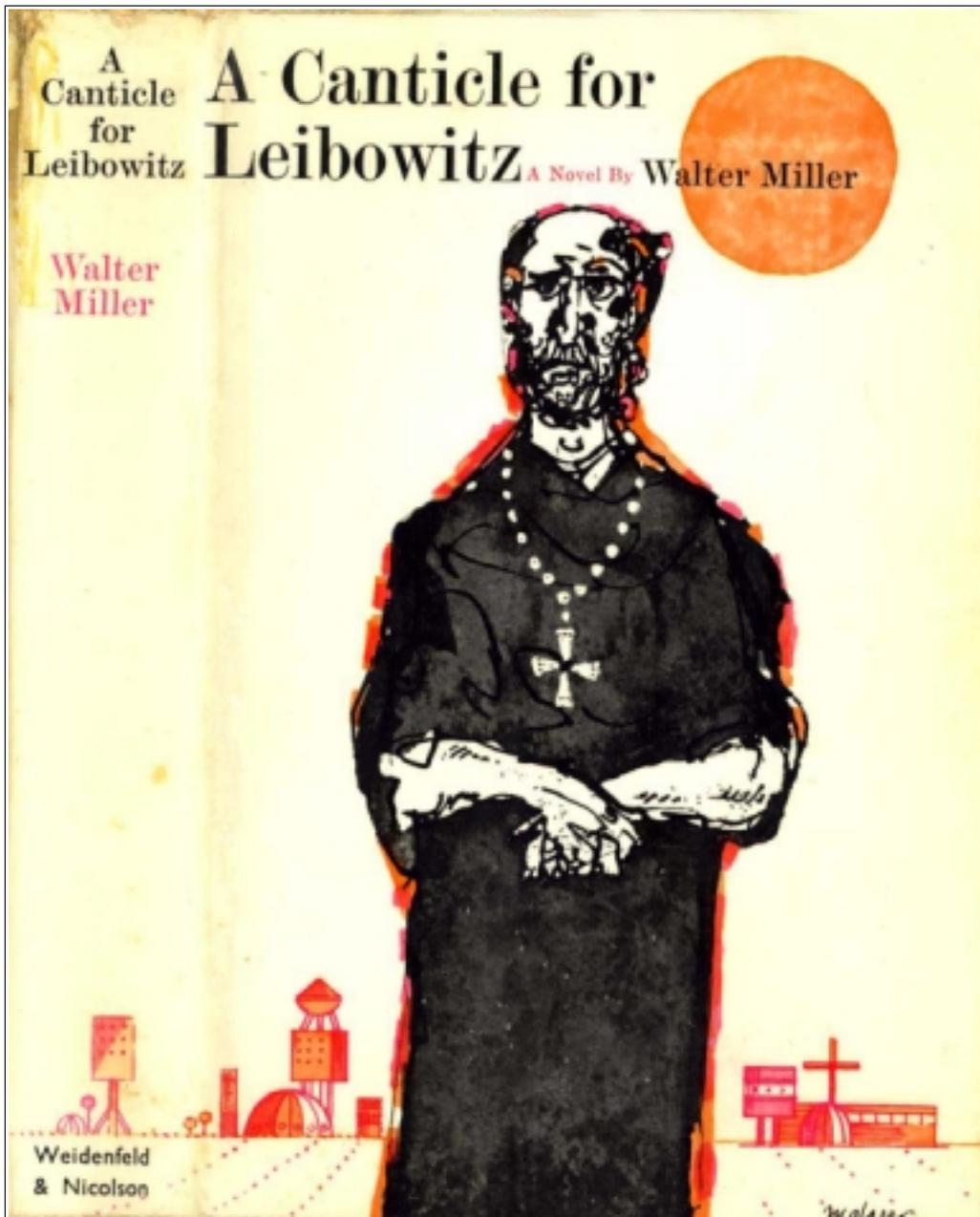
My brother-in-law Fred stopped driving buses and took up abalone diving, and I would go out with him on his boat to take photos and shoot film of him in action. Apart from that, we dived at various locations around the Victorian

coast, and ventured several times as far north as Bermagui in New South Wales. We would drive there usually at night so we would have all day for diving and snorkelling, but the drive was gruelling once you left Lakes Entrance. The highway, if you could call it that, was a gravel road that twisted and wound through the foothills on the coast side of the Dividing Range between Lakes Entrance and Eden on the NSW border. It was hard driving, bone shaking, with constant gear changes to prevent skidding on corrugated gravel. But the diving was fabulous once you got there. We also tried water skiing on some of Victoria's inland lakes but I preferred to stay in the boat rather than climb on a pair of skis to be dragged across a choppy lake. Falling off skis and hitting the water at high speed was not my idea of fun.

Apart from the platonic relationship with Beryl I hadn't had much luck with girls. My only two dates ended in disasters, the first being when I was 17 and trying to impress a girl I met while we camped at Portarlington on the Bellarine Peninsula I was trying to back Dad's car out and up onto the gravel road through the camp, when instead of going back I shot forward and smashed a hole in the neighbour's caravan. Dad's car's gear shift was a column shift. The position of reverse was up and forward while first gear was forward. I accidentally put it into first instead of reverse, and while looking back through the rear window to watch out for traffic I released the clutch and the damned car shot forward instead of backwards and smashed into the caravan before I could even get my foot off the accelerator pedal. The engine stalled and the caravan shook like it was in an earthquake while I sat there stunned. Needless to say, the girl sitting beside me quickly got out of the car and I never saw her again.

During my other unfortunate date, I invited a Russian girl from high school to go out to a Russian club. I drank too much vodka and was determined to show that I could do a Cossack dance with the best of them. I managed the dance, but got too drunk to take the girl home so she went in a taxi. For a week after that dance my legs were so painfully stiff I could hardly walk.

I was kind of shy, having spent a lot of time reading books and not chasing girls. My friend Brian had no such qualms, and it seemed he had a different girlfriend every week. I don't know to this day what impulse made me go over to the ABC studios in Elwood to see Inez Amaya (Beryl) but the impulses



one's mind generates are often incomprehensible. If it hadn't been for the fact that she was at Birdland I would never have spoken to her or have had the chance to meet her. However, that hadn't worked out in the long run.

Feeling lonely but unable to articulate it, my answer, as always, was to dive into some good books.

This was the year I read *A Canticle for Leibowitz* by Walter Miller (1959) and *A Case of Conscience* by James Blish (1958), both fantastic books by very good authors writing in top form. I would put these books on a par with anything written by mainstream authors of both literary and genre novels. Although both of these books were published in the last two years of the 1950s, I didn't see either of them until sometime in 1963. Perhaps it took that long for them to reach Australia. That these two books didn't get the recognition they deserved was because they were characterised as Science Fiction. Yet my hardcover copy of *A Canticle for Leibowitz* doesn't have any mention of SF or Science Fiction on the dust jacket or inside. Weidenfeld & Nicolson simply marketed it as 'A Novel by Walter Miller'.

Kingsley Amis chose the American edition as his novel of the year, and said in the *Observer*: 'This book goes as far as any I have read to justify the claim that science fiction has become a mature vehicle for the expression of certain important themes which ordinary fiction cannot well accommodate. It is a serious (not earnest), imaginative (not fantastic), religious (not religious) novel.'

This was one of the best books I ever read, and I can't recommend it highly enough to anyone looking for a serious and insightful reading experience. I am about to re-read it, and I am sure it will hold up as well today as it did 50 years ago.

So too was *A Case of Conscience* by James Blish, which I am also about to re-read. This is a powerful novel that examines the problems and conflicts raised by a man of the cloth who struggles to reconcile the teachings of his faith with the teachings of science as he becomes part of an expedition to a world similar to Earth, but populated by intelligent reptilian beings who have no concept of religion or of original sin, and who live their lives governed by



stories as well as some of the popular magazines, and for a while there I could remember all the plots and story-lines of each book. I can't now. My brain over the last 50 years has devoured too many books, and similarities of plots get confused and become indistinguishable. Even recent stuff I thought was very good is hard to remember and indistinguishable from fragments of earlier books that continue to impinge upon my consciousness.

I did of course read more Heinlein, even though I was not fond of him. His stories were everywhere, since he was so prolific. Many adhered to a timeline into the future that he designated as future history, so there was a consistency in background detail that gave them a kind of reality. Asimov did the same with his stories of the Foundation and the future history it presided over (written and published in the early 1940s, but which I didn't see until the mid 1950s).

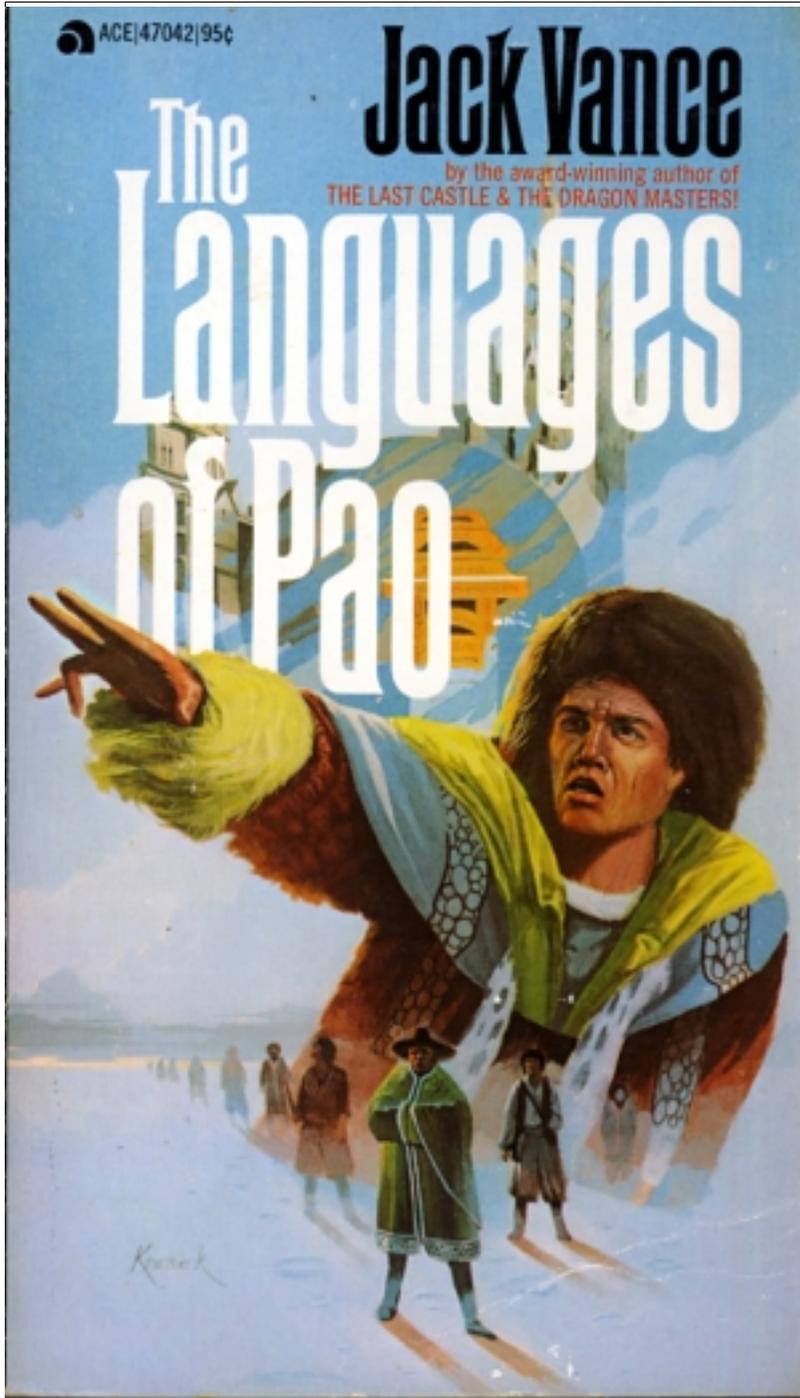
I do remember *The Puppet Masters* as being one of Heinlein's better early stories. It was made many years later into a suitably creepy film. One author I must have read but whose stories I can only recall from much later was Jack Vance. It's odd how an author like him could be bypassed in my mind when I would certainly have read *The Dying Earth* (1950) and *Big Planet* (1952). I must have dismissed *The Dying Earth* as a fantasy, which meant I would not remember it, since I didn't really like fantasy, and *Big Planet* must have been so badly written it guaranteed I wouldn't remember it. I did re-read *The Dying Earth* in the 1970s after coming across some of Jack Vance's later books, but still can't remember much about it. So too for *Dust of Far Suns*, which was originally *Sail 25* in its magazine publication, but was renamed and used as the lead story in a collection by Daw Books in 1964. The *Languages of Pao* was another of Vance's science fantasies that I remember enjoying, but of which I can no longer recall any details. Perhaps I will have to read this one again, along with most of the other later books Vance wrote.

Phillip K. Dick I must also have read, although not too many spring to mind from that early period. There were of course his many short stories, which I read and forgot and then remembered again when re-reading them in later collections. There were also some novels that I read in the late '50s and early '60s that I have subsequently forgotten. Books like *The Man who Japed*, *The Cosmic Puppets*, *The Game Players of Titan*, *Time out of Joint*, and *Solar Lottery*

pure reason. It was first serialised in *If Worlds of Science Fiction* magazine, but I did not see that publication until years later when I read it as a paperback novel.

1963 was also the year that *Dune World* by Frank Herbert appeared in *Analog*; I believe, although I didn't see it until it was published as a Gollancz hardcover in 1965. Who would have or could have thought that it would be so popular and successful that fans wouldn't let Herbert write much of anything else? The saga became six books, and after Herbert died his son Brian, in collaboration with Kevin J. Anderson, went on to write another 12 books in a now never-ending saga of trilogy after trilogy. No doubt there will be more, but I won't be reading them. I lost interest in *Dune* by the time I got to the fourth book, *The God Emperor of Dune*.

1963 was about the time I couldn't keep up with everything being published as science fiction. There was simply too much of it. Up until at least 1960 I had managed to read everything available as novels or collections of short



spring to mind, but without much detail, and so these will go on a pile for possible re-reading. To be honest, I didn't really discover Phillip K Dick or Jack Vance in any significant way until after I came back from Europe at the end of 1965. And only then I remembered that I had read much of their early output without being aware of them.

I think the last major science fiction novel I read in 1963 was *Stranger in a Strange Land* (1961) by Robert Heinlein. This was a book that generated a cult for hippies and university students, with its portrayal of free love and religion as seen through the eyes of a Martian-born human. However popular this book was, it wasn't one of Heinlein's best. It just happened to appear at a time when the ideas espoused in it were also being adopted by the younger generation on a broad scale across the USA, and so became the unofficial Bible of the free spirits of the time. I also came across a 'speculative novel', *Kalki* by Gore Vidal, about a religious prophet who generated a huge following and who ended up taking over the whole country. This was a much better book than Heinlein's. Gore Vidal is famous for other mainstream novels, historical and political as well as controversial, but his only science fiction or speculative novel seems to be forgotten and is never listed anywhere. So too was his murder mystery on a patrol boat in the last days of the Second World War, *Williwaw*, which was published only a few months after the end of that war. Though not specifically a war story, it can be classified as such, and thus beats Norman Mailer's claim to have written the very first Second World War novel *The Naked and The Dead* (1948). *Williwaw*, though enjoyable and readable, is not a patch on *The Naked and The Dead*, which stands today as a great classic war novel. It is still one of my all-time favourite novels. It certainly wasn't science fiction, but it could very well have been, because for me the world depicted by Mailer was so far from any reality I had experienced or could understand that it might as well have been set on an alien world.

The only other two war novels I read about this time that I remember were *The Cruel Sea* (published in 1951) by Nicholas Monserrat, which was made into a documentary style war film by a British film company, and *The Caine Mutiny* by Herman Wouk, which was also made into a brilliant film starring Humphrey Bogart — possibly his best performance as an actor, certainly on a par with his performance in *The African Queen*. Nicholas Monserrat also

wrote a creepy novella about an alien found frozen ice thousands of years old, presumably at the North Pole. The alien was thawed out and all sorts of havoc ensued. It sounded to me like *Who Goes There?*, which of course became the Howard Hawks film *The Thing from Another World*. I can't remember the name of the Monsarrat story, but I do believe it was originally published in the late '30s or early '40s, which would have made it a story contemporary to John W. Campbell's story that became the famous movie. The copy I saw was a small hardcover re-issue after that film had become popular, which means I would have read it around 1960.

The early sixties was a time when science fiction fans as well as many other people held great dreams for the future. The space race was in its infancy, with the Americans and the Russians trying to outdo each other with constant spectacular launches into space. The Russians had the first man in orbit (Yuri Gagarin). They'd sent up a dog (Laika), which had died in space, in the second *Sputnik* in November 1957, while the Americans could only counter by sending up unmanned suborbital flights. The Russians had powered ahead, with *Sputniks* getting bigger and better. They even sent more dogs into space, but this time they managed to bring them back to Earth, while the best the Americans could do (in 1961) was to counter by sending a chimpanzee up in a capsule, again only in a suborbital flight. Once more the Russians beat the Americans by sending Yuri Gagarin into orbit (12 April 1961). By the end of that frantic year America finally managed a manned suborbital flight with Alan Shepard. In February 1962 America finally made it into space with a manned capsule (containing John Glenn). It orbited four times in just under five hours.

I devoured all this with ever-growing excitement. Humans were taking their first faltering steps towards the conquering of space. I had been reading about this for years and finally it was all starting to come true.

Again the Russians trumped the Americans by sending a woman into space. Valentina Tereshkova went into orbit (June 16) and made 42 orbits over two days and passed close enough to another Russian satellite, containing another cosmonaut, that they could each see the other's capsule.

The Americans couldn't compete, and it appeared as if they were losing the

space race, so they took a step sideways. They sent an atomic submarine under the Arctic Ice Cap for the first time; a magnificent feat in its own right, which upset and frightened the Russians, who became even more paranoid about the security of their homeland. This American achievement was certainly not as visible or as spectacular as a rocket launched into space, but it started concurrently another much more deadly race which was to see who had domination of the seas. Atomic submarines from each nation started patrolling the other's coastal seas, and they all had missiles with atomic warheads aimed at each other's major cities. It came to a head in 1962. We almost had an atomic war when the Russians wanted to install atomic missiles in Cuba aimed at nearby America.

Frank Herbert published a wonderful novel called *Under Pressure* around this time. It told of the crew of an American atomic submarine towing underwater barges and stealing oil from deposits under the Arctic in territory that belonged to USSR. There was a saboteur on board and the confrontation between the Russians in similar atomic submarines trying to stop the Americans, and the threat of what the saboteur would do, made a taut psychological drama that was a very much an up-to-the-minute reflection of what was happening in the real world. It was one of Herbert's better books before he got lost in the *Dune* saga.

Perhaps to divert attention away from the Cuban missile crisis, President Kennedy announced that America was determined to send a man to the moon within the decade. Once again the space race was on. Everyone started dreaming about moon bases and voyages to Mars, hotels in space and giant passenger liners plying the currents of space (to pinch a title from Isaac Asimov) to travel between far solar systems and their myriad planets teaming with strange and bewildering life forms. It would all be happening soon ... we wished ... we hoped ... but it was not to be. As Arthur C Clarke wrote, 'The Future is not the way we remember it ...' or something like that, and he was right.

What we dreamed about happening never happened, and the future that we presently live in is certainly not what we wanted. Although we have no choice but to accept it for what it is, we can still dream, and science fiction and speculative fiction can help us do this, as it did before and will always do.

Around the World by Sea

Australis · Britanis · Ellinis · CHANDRIS LINES



Brochure describing Chandris Lines' three major ships, the facilities on board, with photos and maps of cabin and deck plans.

I came home one day and announced that I had bought a ticket to go on the Chandris Line's RHMS *Ellinis* to England and Europe. In 1964 the *Ellinis* was one of three Greek passenger ships that took passengers to Europe, where they disembarked either in Piraeus (Greece) or Southampton (England). I would be getting off in Southampton, since that was its second last stop after Lisbon (Portugal) before finishing in Greece, where it would take on immigrants bound for Australia. The *Ellinis*'s sister-ships, the smaller *Patris* and

the much larger *Australis*, also did the same. Several years later they stopped using the *Patris* and introduced a larger ship again, the *Britanis*. These were basically secondhand ships that had been built after the First World War, and used for other purposes before being taken over by Chandris Lines, which converted them to single-class passenger ships to bring migrants from Europe to Australia. Taking passengers to Europe for holidays with 'round the world cruising' was the company's cream: its bread and butter were the migrants brought to Australia. For example, the *Australis*, on which I returned from Europe, was originally a luxury passenger ship sailing between Europe and North America, then used as a troop carrying ship during World War II, after which it was acquired by Chandris Lines. Sadly, as the ship aged it became too expensive to rebuild the engines and maintain the propeller shafts and other major repairs (18 million pounds), so they sold it for scrap. In the process of towing it around Africa to the Indian subcontinent, where it was to be broken up, it mysteriously ran aground off a group of Spanish islands where it was abandoned. What's left of it still sits there on the rocks offshore.

There were also two Italian ships that took passengers to Europe (via Southampton or Italy) and in turn brought back loads of immigrants. Four years later, when I was in Acapulco, my sister Christine and her friend Yvonne stopped for a day on their way to Europe on one of those Italian ships. I had been there for almost a year then, and could show them all the best places to visit.

It must be remembered that these passenger ships were nothing like the cruise ships of today, which are bigger and carry many more passengers and are more like miniature cities than those refurbished one-class liners. There are even giant ships today where people can buy apartments and live in them on a permanent basis, only renting them out when they want to spend some time ashore. These giant ships are always cruising around the world. They are floating cities. They contain parks and gardens, malls with innumerable shops, private and public accommodation with unprecedented views, clubs and bars, restaurants, and coffee shops; everything you would find in a small city centre. They are perhaps the first step in the development of floating cities of the future; cities whose inhabitants will not have to go ashore if they don't want to, and who will have no need to worry about rising oceans



rhms 'Ellinis'
24,351 gross tonnage
Length 642 feet
Width 79 feet
Speed 20 knots
Passenger decks 9
Cabins 520
Passenger capacity 1800
All one-class
Fully air-conditioned

Description of the *Ellinis* from the Chandris Lines brochure.

resulting from the warming of the Earth. But the closest you got to them in the 1960s were the luxurious P&O liners, priced beyond what people like me could afford. Chandris Lines and its one-class passenger ships were affordable, and did give the impression of a degree of luxury, so all on board could pretend that the ships were better than they actually were.

Air travel to Europe was ferociously expensive, so going by ship was the only way. It cost me \$600 or thereabouts for the trip (which included all meals,

accommodation, and entertainment) to go across the Pacific, stopping at Auckland, Tahiti, Panama, then through the canal to Colon, to the island of Aruba (Dutch Antilles), on to Fort De France on Martinique, the French island famous for its massive volcano Mont Pele, over to Lisbon in Portugal, and finally to Southampton, where most of the passengers would be getting off. Only a few would go on to Greece and the port of Piraeus, where the ship terminated its voyage. I thought the price was very reasonable. It was a one-way ticket that I bought. I didn't mention that, and hoped Mum and Dad

wouldn't notice. I didn't want to be constrained by a specific date to return to Australia. I was even thinking at that time that maybe if things went well I wouldn't return, at least in the foreseeable future. I wanted to be free to see what would happen in Europe, and that would determine how long I stayed in any country. I didn't know what I wanted to do, but only that I needed the time to discover this and that would ultimately determine how long I would stay.

They were sitting around the kitchen table and staring at me, Mum and Dad. Christine was in the other room watching TV with young Paul. Zara, married to Fred, wasn't there because they had their own house now in North Altona.

'What do you mean?' Mum asked. 'You're going to Europe?'

I pushed the ship's ticket across to her.

'Have a look at it, at all the places it's going to stop at on the way.'

'You can't go to Europe.'

'Why not? Everyone else is doing it.' Just about everyone my age was going, had been, or was returning from a pilgrimage to Europe — usually to England, the 'Mother Country', unless of course they had European parentage, which meant probably Greece or Italy, with smaller numbers heading for France or Germany or Holland. It was almost a rite of passage for those in their twenties.

'But what about the business? Who is going to do the driving, the pick-up and deliveries?'

'Phillip will.'

'He's in Alice Springs.'

'Write him a letter and ask him to come back. There's plenty of time. I'm not leaving until April 4th. It's only the end of January now.'

'You're leaving on your birthday?'

'Yeah ... Don't you think that's a great time to start something different, something new?'

Mum just shook her head.

Dad finally said, 'It's all right. Nothing will change. Phillip will come back and do the driving. Everything else will be the same, you'll see.' He said this to Mum.

No doubt he was recalling his own moments when he told his parents first that he was going to America with his older brother George. He was only 13 or so at the time. Much later again, when he was in his late twenties or early thirties, he told his parents he was going to Australia, knowing then that he would never see them again. That must have been hard. But I knew he understood that this was something I had to do, though for different reasons. His reasons had been economic, and the desire to better himself, to make life better for his family, whereas mine were ... well I wasn't exactly sure what mine were. They were vague and unformed, mixed with the desire to see if I could be independent of the family, to discover myself, or to assuage the empty feeling I had, and the belief that I wasn't achieving anything by staying at home doing what I was doing. This would be more like an adventure, and not something that was necessary in order to survive. Having spent almost a year in Darwin, I was impatient to do something like that again, only on a grander scale. It was five years since then, and I hadn't had a holiday other than a number of weekend diving trips to various locations around the coast, and I felt it was time to do something different. Going to Europe would certainly be different.

Dad looked at me from the other side of the table. 'Do it,' he said with a smile. He stood up and left the kitchen without saying anything else.

'Well,' Mum said after a long moment of silence. 'I suppose I'd better start organising what you will take with you.'

Typical ... She was a great organizer. It was her way of coping with the

unexpected, or with something she didn't like but inevitably had to accept. She had done the same thing when she was a young girl, but not by her own choice. Her stepmother had basically forced her and her older sister Betty to leave home at a young age. She was only 13 at the time, about the same age as Dad when he went to America. They both managed, and they knew that I would too. Besides, I was older than they had been, already 23, and the world was a much better place to go out into than it had been back in the 1920s. Whether I took any notice of what she planned was irrelevant. What it meant was that she had already accepted the idea that I was going to leave for a voyage to Europe and that it was all okay.

Wandering into bookshops around town was always a pastime I enjoyed immensely (even today). In Collins Bookshop at the top end of Bourke Street, I discovered a lovely book with an attractive cover. It showed a three-masted sailing ship at the top, and in a circle all the way round were delightful illustrations of sea creatures. In the centre of the circle was the title: *The Sea Around Us*, by Rachel L. Carson. Since it was a popular science book and about the sea I couldn't resist buying it. It only cost 15 shillings and six pence (\$1.55 in today's terms). It had no illustrations. A book like that today would be full of technical drawings, and photos both colour and black and white, but this book was entirely text, and so beautifully written and easy to understand that I just couldn't put it down. It was better than any of the science fiction books I had read up to that time.

This little book took the world by storm when it first appeared in the early 1950s. The edition I had was published in 1953, although I didn't see it until early 1960. The *New York Herald Tribune* described this little book as 'the book, not only of the year, but of the decade'. It won the National Book Award 1952 for the 'most distinguished work of non-fiction in 1951 (USA)'. And what was it about? It was about the Sea, its formation and history, and how life developed in it and evolved to fill every part of it from the abyssal depths to the bright sunny areas just below the surface, about how it enveloped the continents and affected life on those lands, how it affected human endeavours over millennia, and ultimately how much we as a species, and all life on this planet, depends on the sea — a truly wonderful book.

There are probably some things in it that are now outdated, because over the

last 60 years marine sciences have discovered much more than was known then, but nevertheless what is in that book is still very relevant and is still beautiful to read. It is, in my opinion, one of the best and most accessible popular science books ever written.

After coming back from Darwin, one of the first things I did was to paint our garage doors with a huge picture of termite mounds and Pandanus palms partly obscured by tufts of fast-growing grass, something I also included in the big mural for the Department of Agriculture that I painted in Darwin. Like that one, it was done with house paint, but being on the garage door it was exposed to the rain and wind and the sun which soon caused the paint to flake and peel off. But while it lasted I thought it looked pretty good.

Antonio Rodriguez and Albert LaGuerre, who shared part of an old heritage-listed house just off St Kilda Road near the junction, were friends of mine, and I often went there to play drums. Antonio was principally a dancer, but he too could play conga drums (called Atabaques in Brazil) in the Brazilian style, while Albert played Haitian style. I was studying how to play Cuban style, yet there was enough in common between us to allow us to play quite well together. Albert was the master drummer here. I still have some tape recordings from these sessions, but no longer have a machine capable of playing them.

Also sharing a studio at the back of this house was a young artist called Asher Bilou. He was experimenting with abstract art in many different forms, which included sculpture. I remember being impressed by one huge sphere-like construction made entirely of hundreds of thousands of watch movements, from the tiniest bits to quite large watch movements. All of these individual bits and pieces of watches of various sizes were soldered or welded together to make a sculpture that moved. All of the watch movements functioned each with its own time and ticking sound. In my imagination it *was* a time machine, but it didn't work. No matter where you looked some part of it was moving and ticking. All the different sounds from the movements blended together to make an unearthly whisper that seemed to penetrate right into your mind.

Asher went on to become quite famous, and has many paintings in galleries around Australia and overseas, but at that time he was relatively unknown. I

loved the way he blended glue and paint together, sometimes selectively burning the glue-paint mixture to create unexpected textures, and then used this thick mixture to build up surface features on the canvas and boards he painted. Antonio also was experimenting with wood carving, and he too used glue and paint mixtures applied and simultaneously burnt onto the wood sculpture to create a unique texture on his carvings. They were very successful at later exhibitions.

In the meantime I was experimenting in doing something similar. At first I simply applied rubber-based glue to pre-painted board surface, then would laboriously paint the splashed glue afterwards. This was far too time consuming, so I progressed to mixing artist's oil paint and spirit-based cellulose glue — Tarzan's Grip — together. I applied this mixture to the surface of the pre-painted board, and would then set fire to it. It would burn furiously, and I had to blow it out rather quickly or there'd be nothing left. Doing this repeatedly, small sections at a time, I could build all kinds of uniquely textured surfaces. Sometimes I would then hand-paint sections of it when it appeared too burnt, or I would have to paint over the parts in between the mixture where the underlying background paint had been scorched.

Gluing things like pieces of papier-mâché or sections of cardboard egg cups to Masonite boards and painting over them and eventually burning glue and paint mixtures and touching them up afterwards produced a series of fairly interesting paintings, which were a lot of fun to create. Art should be fun, shouldn't it? It can be serious, but some people take it too seriously. Shouldn't there be some enjoyment in the creative process, or why bother doing it?

I loved it. I even got my prospective brother-in-law to help with one larger picture, which I later gave to him as a present. He was also helping me the night I almost burnt down the kitchen.

I had made a huge frame about two metres long by one and a half high. It was a large piece of Masonite, with a wooden frame to support it. I had sealed and undercoated it. When it was dry I laid it down flat on the table in the kitchen. Mum and Dad were watching TV in the lounge room, so I shut the door to the passage and thus isolated the kitchen from the rest of the house.

With great abandon I spread a rubber-based glue over various parts of the board. Fred was also watching this act of creation. The rubber-based glue, some of which was mixed with raw colour, was for the background texture. Once I had burnt this to develop the texture I would then apply oil-based paint mixed with transparent Tarzan's Grip, bought in half-pint tins, to complete the textural and colour development of the painting. I had a rough idea of what I was trying to achieve and of what the painting might look like when it was finished, but there was no control over how it bubbled and textured when it was burning, and that was what made each painting individual and unrepeatable. You never really knew how it would look until it was finished.

I should have realised that the smell in the kitchen was quite strong, like the smell of petrol or white spirit in an enclosed space, but then I was used to that kind of smell at the dry cleaning factory and didn't think about it.

I looked at Fred.

'Are you ready?'

He nodded and passed me a box of matches.

'Let's see what happens,' I said as I lit match. 'I've never done a painting this big, before so it should be quite interesting.'

I reached over and touched the match to one corner and immediately the glue and paint started bubbling. Above the bubbles there seemed to be an open space and above that some green coloured flames. I quickly blew it out to see how the texture was. When the bubbles settled, there didn't seem to be much texture, so I decided I would let the next bit burn a little longer before blowing it out. A little wisp of dark smoke drifted up towards the ceiling. It was an old house and we had a 10 foot high ceiling in the kitchen.

I lit another match, and moved to a different spot along one side of the frame and touched the burning match to the glue. It started to burn nicely. Black smoke rose up.

‘Shouldn’t you blow it out?’ Fred suggested.

‘Just a bit longer,’ I mumbled as I leaned in closer to see how the mixture was bubbling.

It was bubbling nicely so I leaned over and blew on it to put it out before moving on to light another patch. The flames didn’t go out, but shot across to another part and ignited that. Suddenly there was loud swoosh and flames shot across the whole surface.

‘Shit,’ Fred yelled. He humped back.

I pulled my head back. I was sure my hair was singed. It felt like it. My eyes were watering but I didn’t want to wipe them in case I rubbed oily soot into them.

Black smoke enveloped us and rose to the ceiling like huge cumulous clouds.

‘Get some water,’ I yelled at Fred.

I grabbed the edge of the painting to drag it off the table without thinking about how I was going to get it outside through the door into the back yard. It was too hot to grab as the burning surface came right to the edge of the frame. I could hear the tap running as Fred filled something with water to throw over the flames. I couldn’t see him because now the smoke was all the way from the ceiling down to chest height. Swirling and black, greasy, horrible smoke that smelled of burning car tyres. It roiled and rolled down the walls. I could see the smoke above the painting glowing red with the flames roaring up.

I dropped to the floor and crawled to the door that opened into the back yard. Outside Mum always had a hose connected to a tap over a gully trap and I turned this on and raced back inside to spray the painting with water. With the flames doused I took the hose back outside and turned it off.

‘Let’s get this outside,’ I said to Fred. He grabbed one end, and with me on the other we turned the painting sideways and I backed across the wet slippery

floor towards the door. Out in the yard we threw the painting on the lawn. Because parts were still glowing and possibly likely to burst into flames again I gave it a thorough hosing. After that we went back into the kitchen, turned on the exhaust fan and opened all the louvre windows above the sink and beside the door to the back yard. There was a large mop in the laundry so I went in there and got that. While the smoke started to clear I mopped up the water on the floor.

Within a few minutes the smoke had cleared enough to see through it, but it was still like looking through a dense fog.

‘Well, that was fun,’ Fred said, just as the door to the passage opened and Dad stood there with a look of astonishment.

‘What the hell happened here?’

Before we could think of a sensible explanation he bent over so that his head was below the layer of smoke still filling the top half of the kitchen. In this bent-over position he made his way across and into the laundry, obviously on his way to the toilet.

Mum had replaced him in the doorway from the passage. ‘Did you set the kitchen on fire?’ she asked as she stared at the heavy smoke slowly dissipating. It didn’t seem to faze her at all. But then she was always like that, calm and collected, no matter what the disaster.

‘It’s all right. It’s fine,’ I mumbled shamefaced. ‘Fred and I will clean it up.’

‘You can have that on your own,’ Fred said with grin and pushed past Mum to go and see what was on TV.

‘I’ll leave it to you then,’ Mum said, and she closed the door so the foul smell wouldn’t get into the rest of the house.

Dad reappeared closing the laundry door behind him. ‘It’s a good thing the kitchen needs to be repainted isn’t it?’ This time he wasn’t bent over, as the worst of the smoke had cleared. There was still a layer clinging to the ceiling.

This seemed to be twisting and writhing as if reluctant to be sucked away by the exhaust fan above the stove.

Dad disappeared into the passage, closing the door behind to leave me alone contemplating the mess I had made. I think that if we hadn't had such a high ceiling in the kitchen the damage would have been much worse, and most likely the ceiling would have been set on fire as well. I was lucky that all I had to do was clean up the greasy residue left by the smoke. It took me almost two hours to clean the bench tops and the cupboards above them and to get rid of the greasy soot that penetrated in through the closed doors. I had to clean the window slats as well, and mop the floor again. I didn't bother with the ceiling, as we didn't have a ladder handy. I cleaned that the next day. Even so, the burnt rubber smell lingered for several days, until finally I had to repaint the kitchen to cover the smoke stains.

I decided after that effort that painting abstract art wasn't something I would continue doing and so I never attempted another painting in that way again, with only one exception: one for the Art Show at Aussicon (1975). Someone bought it and shipped it to America. It was meant to illustrate a novel by Poul Anderson called *Firetime*, and it was abstract in the style I had developed in the early 1960s. That was the second painting I ever sold. All the others were given away or left at home.

It's odd how things you think you will never forget you do, and years later you curse yourself for not writing stuff down or for not taking photos that would later help you remember. When I was 23 just going on 24, I thought my memories of the first big trip, the first trip overseas on a huge passenger liner, would stay in my memory forever. I had never done anything like that before. I had been on lots of small and not so small trips away, but nothing that would take five weeks to reach the initial destination. I imagined it to be like a trip in a hyper-space passenger ship: you leave earth orbit and head out-system for a few days, and when you are clear of the gravitational effects of the major planets the ship drops into hyper-space and you are off to another star system, and weeks later you get there. Your whole world is enclosed in that tiny space, and after a while it seems huge enough that the rest of the world diminishes so much in size and concept that it almost ceases to exist. Only the world of the ship is real while it is there all around you.

I didn't take a still camera. I decided it was one less thing to worry about. I would buy postcards and send them back home. Why take photos when everywhere you went someone would have already taken better shots than mine, available as postcards? Every place has postcards; even the smallest and most backward place has them. However, I did take my Bolex movie camera and 10 rolls of 16 mm film. I would buy film as I needed it and perhaps I could put together a short documentary.

Could I find work as a drummer somewhere in Europe? I took the drums with me. Unlike piano players, who can always find a piano wherever they go, conga drums were not ubiquitous in the 1960s. Unfortunately they took up space. My solution was to have them double up as suitcases, so whatever clothes I needed I stuffed inside the drums. They were heavy being made of wood and metal, but manageable.

So what happened to the memories I thought I would never forget? I suspect that over many years they became buried in my subconscious mind, or worse still, vanished as they were overwritten by later information.

I cannot remember how I reached Station Pier in Port Melbourne, where the RHMS *Ellinis* was to depart, but I suspect my friend Brian Mealy took me there. It would have been early enough to take my drums on board, find my cabin way down below the promenade deck, about two thirds along the length of the ship on C deck, to stash them in there and select one of the four beds as my own, by leaving a drum/suitcase on top of it. The cabin was tiny, like a small cave. Apart from the four bunks, two on each side, there was a small table and a mirror, which gave the impression the cabin was bigger than it was. There was some storage space for clothes and personal items. Only one chair faced the small table. For showers and toilet facilities we used a communal bathroom just along the corridor. The cabin was right on the centreline of the ship, so there was very little movement from side to side or even up and down. Being inside the ship, we had no porthole to let light in. The only light was artificial, so I decided I would spend as little time as possible in there; it would be someplace to sleep, and nothing else.

There were lounges, and libraries, and a cinema way down in the bowels of the ship near the bow, cocktail bars on various levels, shops, a swimming pool,

a ball room, two large dining rooms, and heaps of other stuff on board, so there really was no need to spend time in the cabin. These ships were the latest cross between passenger ships and cruise ships as we know them today. Before the airlines took over the job of transporting people around the world, the only efficient method was by passenger ship.

Having got everything stowed away, I stood with Brian on the promenade deck and watched luggage being loaded through a huge doorway in the side of the ship lower than the lowest passenger deck. Crates of fresh fruit and vegetables went on board, sides of lamb and beef from a freezer truck, and all kinds of cardboard boxes with who knows what? There were lighter vessels on the seaward side of the ship with huge hoses, giant umbilical cords connected to the bowels of our ship throbbing as fuel was pumped through them. These were small sea-going tankers, the equivalent of the tanker trucks that deliver fuel to service stations.

It was a fantastic feeling to be standing there watching all the activity as the ship was prepared for the voyage ahead, not being at work, not having to even think about going to work. I was free for the moment, and full of anticipation for the coming voyage and whatever it might lead to.

I had just taken a sip from my second glass of beer when the bar exploded. Something flew past my head and smashed to bits against the side concrete wall. There was yelling and screaming and people jumped up, knocking chairs over as they did so.

‘What the ...?’

‘Sit still,’ I told the young bloke sitting next to me. He was one of the others staying in my cabin. I had gone back down to unpack a few things and met him there. Together we went back up on deck for a while before deciding to go over to the bar where a large partly enclosed beer garden was a popular drinking hole for crews from the passenger liners that came and went regularly from Station Pier. It was within a short walking distance from the pier and was often the first port of call for crewmen and sailors.

We were sitting at a large table in the middle of the beer garden, a partly

covered lounge with a few people from the ship, cabin staff, passengers and friends there to see them off. One of the cabin staff was a young and beautiful girl with a gorgeous smile. She was flirting with one of the friends of a passenger. At least that is what it seemed to me. She shifted over and sat on this man’s lap. She planted a kiss on his cheek and suddenly the mood around our table went black. The guy sitting on the other side of the girl’s empty chair stood up, flinging his chair away to make space. It crashed into the back of someone sitting at the table beside us.

‘Hey ...’ the man yelled as he too stood up and turned, pissed off that someone or something had thumped him in the back and made him spill his beer.

The guy grabbed the young girl and dragged her off the other man’s lap. ‘You keep your hands off her,’ he snarled at the other man.

‘Get your hands off me.’ The girl yelled and pulled her arm away from the guy’s grip.

The man who had been hit in the back with the chair threw a punch which connected with the guy who had grabbed the girl by the arm. He staggered back and fell against our table. The table shifted and several glasses of beer fell over. I grabbed mine just before it would have fallen.

‘Leave him alone, you bastard,’ the girl yelled.

In that instant several crewman or cabin staff stood up together. They converged on the man who had thrown the punch at one of their own. He wasn’t one of them. They knocked him down, but before any of them could do more than try to kick him — there wasn’t much space between the tables — all his mates stood up and turned on the crewmen.

And that was it. Instantaneously bottles and glasses flew everywhere. People yelled and screamed. Some fell over. Others ran off holding noses spurting blood. A jug flew past my head, trailing a stream of frothing beer. I took a sip of my drink and looked around. It was exactly like one of those bar fights in old cowboy movies. Everyone was trying to hit, push, or punch whoever

happened in that moment to be in front of them. There were people outside gleefully looking in, enjoying the spectacle. In the distance I heard a police siren, so someone, probably the bar manager, had called the cops.

‘It’s time we left,’ I said.

My cabin mate just nodded.

We stood up slowly and pretending to be invisible, quietly made our way towards the side wall, then moved along it until we came to a gate. Then we were outside looking in.

‘I can’t believe we never got hit,’ my mate said as he watched the melee inside.

‘That’s why I told you to sit still. If we didn’t move we wouldn’t be a target.’

‘But we had to move when we got up to leave.’

‘It didn’t matter then. Everyone was busy with someone else, and as long as we didn’t get in their way they wouldn’t see us let alone try to hit us.’

Suddenly the siren wailing became very loud, then cut off with a high squawk as a police van rolled into the side street next to the beer garden. Four officers leapt out.

‘It’s time we got back to the ship,’ I suggested.

We walked away leaving the yelling and fighting and the glasses and jugs being smashed behind us.

The ship left around seven that evening, and there wasn’t a large crowd to see it off. There were only a couple of hundred passengers on board. The other eighteen hundred or so would embark in Sydney. There were few streamers thrown, no whistles blown, and none of the excitement I would have expected at the ship’s departure. It was an anti-climax. All that happened later, when we departed from Sydney. A small group of people stood along Station Pier and waved as the tugs manoeuvred the *Ellinis* out into open

water, allowing her to turn and face the direction of the channel to the Port Phillip Heads.

I stood by the stern and watched the water churn furiously as the huge propellers beneath started to turn. It frothed and splashed and sea gulls flittered above it, searching for food scraps. Their white flapping wings created a stroboscopic affect as they passed through beams of light from the ship. Slowly the *Ellinis* moved away from the pier and the whirling sand and mud churned up by the propellers dissipated. Station Pier and the nearby shoreline slowly diminished in size as we moved out into the channel. Very soon there was nothing to see other than distant lights along the shoreline as twilight turned into night.

The ship’s siren vibrated my bones as it blasted a farewell note. The deck hummed beneath my feet, but there was no other obvious suggestion of movement. We were still in calm waters until we left Port Phillip Bay. Once through the Heads things would no doubt be different.

‘Did you bring sea-sick tablets?’ my cabin mate asked.

I looked at him, surprised to think that he would need such tablets. I had been on lots of boats of various sizes, from large fishing trawlers to small runabouts, and had never thought about getting sea-sick.

‘Are you feeling sea-sick?’

‘No, not yet. But what about when we get out through the Heads?’

‘This is a big ship. You probably won’t notice much movement. I read in the brochure that it has stabilisers installed to minimise sideways movement, to make it smooth.’

‘I guess we’ll find out soon enough, won’t we?’

Supper was served once the ship was through the Heads and into Bass Strait. Since there were only a couple of hundred passengers, supper was nothing elaborate, but there was plenty of it: huge vats of tea and coffee with cups

and saucers stacked beside them, piles of biscuits both sweet and dry, stacks of cakes, trays of sandwiches cut into small triangles, platters of cheese with every type of cheese available in Europe there for the sampling, freshly baked bread rolls that smelled superb, and bowls of fresh apples, oranges, bananas, and pears, all there for us to help ourselves. Supper, as well as morning tea and afternoon tea, although served in the main dining room, was not subject to the usual seating arrangements. Passengers could wander in and help themselves at any time during the period set aside. The main meals were subject to three sittings of about 450 people each time, three times a day. This was obviously an enormous amount of work for the dining room and kitchen staff. Once the passengers in Sydney came on board we would all be told which sitting was ours, and those three sittings would be strictly adhered to.

It turned out that there was almost half the number of crew and staff as there were passengers, which meant once we left Sydney there would be some two thousand people on board. The *Ellinis*, which catered for 1600 passengers plus crew, was a big ship, but not quite as big as her sister ship the *Australis*, which carried over 2000 passengers. These two ships were nowhere near the size of the P&O passenger liners that regularly came to Sydney and Melbourne, but they were somewhat larger than the two Italian ships, which also took Australians to Europe and brought back migrants.

The cruise along Bass Strait was smooth with a gentle up-and-down movement that could be felt only near the bow or the stern; amidships it was hardly noticeable. There was no sideways rolling, since the wind and sea were behind us.

‘See, you don’t need those tablets at all,’ I told my cabin mate. ‘If you’d been out there in a fishing boat you’d be bouncing all over the place, but this ship is so big any movement is going to be slow and easy; no problem at all to adjust to.’

‘I took one anyway, just in case,’ he said, almost as if he was embarrassed to admit it.

‘At least it will make you sleep well.’

A few moments later he left to go back to the cabin to sleep after making sure to remind me to wake him up when we were entering Sydney Harbour. He didn’t want to miss that, and neither did I. I had never entered Sydney Harbour on a ship before. But I wasn’t tired enough to go to bed. I was still excited by the fact that I was on such a big ship.

From the promenade deck the sea was black. The sky was clear and glittered with billions of stars, most of which couldn’t be seen from Melbourne, no matter how clear the sky was. But out here at sea there was no ambient light to obscure the sky by reflecting off microscopic particles in suspension, so you could see everything. The ship’s wake stretched behind with pale white phosphorescence as the churned water disturbed tiny creatures, dinoflagellates like *Noctiluca miliaris*, whose presence was only visible by the luminescence their bodies gave off when disturbed by the ship’s movement through the water. The sound of the waves sloshing along the side of the ship was quiet and soothing and was always there, along with a deep hum that denoted somewhere hidden in the bowels of the ship huge turbines generated electric power to run the lights, refrigerators, the water desalination plant, and any other things that needed electric power. There was also a deeper, barely audible rumble that came from the huge engines that controlled the propellers. This was not noticeable on the promenade deck, but was clearly audible down below where my cabin was located. I found it disturbing at first, trying to sleep with that barely audible sound and the faint vibration that could always be felt in the floor when you stood barefoot, but after a day or so it became reassuring and comforting. It receded into the subconscious, and I was hardly aware of it until it stopped when the ship berthed.

I always thought the *Ellinis* (which translates as ‘Greek Lady’) was a new ship. It only seemed that way because it had been completely refurbished the year before. It had been converted from a luxury liner into a one-class liner with perhaps more cabins. Chandris Lines had bought the liner, which was originally called the *Lurline*, and built for the Matson Line, a US company that used it as a cruise ship travelling from San Francisco to Los Angeles and on to Hawaii. The *Lurline*’s maiden voyage had taken her to Sydney in 1933. She was also used as a troop ship from 1942 until 1946, after which she returned to cruising, before being sold to Chandris Lines in 1963 and was refitted as the *Ellinis*. She was decommissioned in 1986, with equipment

removed to be kept as spare parts for use in the *Britanis*, and then sold for scrap to a Taiwanese company. Every ship belonging to Chandris had been a different ship belonging to a different company. Once aeroplanes took over the job of importing migrants, the shipping lines switched to cruising holidays. Many of them stopped coming to Australia because it wasn't profitable any more.

Cultural shock is defined as the feeling of anxiety and confusion experienced when suddenly encountering an unusual or unfamiliar environment. The word shock has the wrong connotation, as it implies something frightening. The word surprise would be more adequate. Coming from an environment where pubs and bars were forced to close by law at 6 p.m. to finding the bars on the ship serving drinks well after that time was a pleasant surprise. Not only were they serving drinks, the prices were less than half of what we had to pay onshore. Being a ship at sea, it was not subject to local taxes, import duties, luxury levies, and so on. Once the *Ellinis* left the harbour and was technically at sea, everything on board was sold without any imposts whatsoever.

Did this encourage passengers to drink more? Certainly. For the price paid in a pub in Melbourne, and presumably Sydney and elsewhere in Australia, on board the *Ellinis* you could buy four drinks. So of course people drank more. But was it necessarily because booze was cheaper? I don't think so. I think it was because first, we were on holiday and not at work, so had more free time available — all day and night — and second, because we were having a good time, free from any worries we might have had onshore. We were having a party. Having a drink to relax and loosen inhibitions is what one does at a party. It seemed even more appropriate on board a ship cruising across the Pacific Ocean.

So the first intimation of cultural shock was that sense of being in an endless party on a floating city where for successive days and weeks there was nothing around us other than endless vistas of profoundly deep, very dark blue ocean beneath an unlimited sky. The feeling of being the only people alive in the whole world pervaded us and heightened the sense of excitement felt by each passenger, which was broken only momentarily when the ship arrived at a port where we stayed usually for 24 hours before returning to that vast endless

ocean.

That first night, as we headed around Wilson's Promontory well inside the islands of the Furneaux Group, the largest of which was Flinders Island, I kept my back to the bright ship's lights so my eyes could adjust to the darkness beyond, and peering over the side rail along the promenade deck I looked for the smaller islands, such as Curtis Island and others, that were the bane of early sailors. Nothing more than large rocks that jutted up above the waves, they were often invisible to early sailing ships attempting to go through the Strait on their way to Sydney and the colony of New South Wales. Hundreds of shipwrecks in Bass Strait are a testament to the danger these tiny islands presented, but ships' captains would rather take a risk and go through Bass Strait instead of taking added weeks of worse weather encountered by going around the bottom of Tasmania.

I couldn't see anything. No searchlights or navigation lights to indicate where these many small islands were, only stars and a rising moon reflected off unbroken swells that remained black except where the moonlight glistened. It was a bit scary, but I trusted the navigators and the crew of the ship, who had been through this area literally hundreds of times without mishaps. Finally deciding there was really nothing to see, I went down to my cabin, climbed into my bunk, and was asleep before I knew it.

Culture shock for some came at the first dinner served while we were on our way north to Sydney. A couple of lovely old ladies shared the same dinner table as me. They looked with wide eyes at everything served to them by the waiters. I suspect they had never been exposed to Greek or other Southern European dishes. This was confirmed after the first entrée. It was rich with tomatoes and oregano as well as paprika, with a hint of lime, and tasted delicious. The meat was tender and absolutely white once you bit into it. It melted in your mouth.

'What did you think of that?' I asked the ladies who had tentatively tasted it at first, but then, deciding they liked it, they gobbled it down rather quickly.

'That was fabulous,' someone else at the table commented. 'Best I've ever tasted.'

'It was nice,' one of the ladies spoke hesitantly, while the other asked, 'What was it? I've never had anything like that before'

'*Octopodia*,' I told them with a Greek accent, 'in a piquant sweet paprika sauce.'

'Paprika I know ...' One said.

They looked at each other and smiled.

The waiter then arrived with a big tray stacked with plates and began serving the main course, which was roasted lamb with fetta and olives, baked potatoes and carrots with a selection of green vegetables steamed, with melted butter on top. The moment the main course had been served the ladies looked at me again, waiting for me to tell them what they had just eaten.

'Octopus, Greek style, served hot instead of cold as in a salad.'

'Oh yuck,' one said.

'I feel sick,' the other one added.

'Why? You just ate it and said it was delicious. You obviously enjoyed it'

'But we didn't know what it was,' they both said simultaneously.

There were a lot of people in Australia in the 1960s who had never eaten anything other than the British-style foods they were accustomed to. Some had by this time started to experience Italian food, especially in the way of coffee drinking, because espressos and cappuccinos sold in lots of small coffee shops were becoming popular. But this by no means stretched to food other than bastardised spaghetti or macaroni dishes. Few true Australians ventured into the Greek or Italian quarters of the city (Melbourne) to try other cuisines. Their first experience of food that was different was when, like these two old ladies, they boarded a ship like the *Ellinis* to travel to Europe and England.

'Should it make a difference, knowing what it was?'

'Well, of course.'

'That's cultural prejudice. It's okay if you don't know what it is, to eat it, but if you know ... suddenly it's horrible. This is a Greek ship, and you'd better get used to the food because there are a lot of Greek Australians travelling on board and a lot of Greek food is going to be served.'

'On second thought it wasn't too bad was it?' one said to the other, and she nodded reluctantly in agreement.

Once those ladies got over the initial shock of knowing what it was they were eating they decided it was better not to know. If it tasted good, they would eat it, and enjoy it. So, like many other passengers, they gradually overcame their previously held ideas of what food should taste like, and learnt to embrace new things, new tastes, and new sensations.

In Sydney, moored at a pier beside the Harbour Bridge, I didn't go ashore because I had been to Sydney many times and didn't think there was any point in doing it again. I watched the ship being loaded with luggage, this time from the back of a barge. It was on the side of the ship away from the pier where the passengers were streaming aboard. As the workers on the barge threw suitcases, bags, and boxes into the open hatch a suitcase fell off the barge and into the water. It was quickly fished out by someone using a long handled fish hook to drag it back to the side of the barge, but not before it had started to sink, where it was retrieved and thrown through the hatch into the ship. There was probably a lot of water damage to whatever was inside. I'd hate to be the person who owned that bag at the end of the voyage. I imagined most of the contents would be mouldy and totally ruined after five or six weeks of being wet.

All day passengers and their friends and relatives streamed aboard. Their excitement was palpable. Lots of laughter and kids running around ... The bars were full of people sharing their last moments with drinks. The volume of chatter was ear splitting. I was happy to avoid this, and stayed up on the promenade deck sitting in one of the deck chairs. I enjoyed watching the

ferries that cross Sydney Harbour coming and going from nearby Circular Quay. Almost 1500 people boarded in Sydney, so the ship would really be jumping when we left later that afternoon.

Bass Strait and the Tasman Sea are notorious for sudden squalls and vicious storms that brew and explode unexpectedly. Many a yacht in the Sydney-to-Hobart Yacht Race can attest to this. During the night a storm had been developing in the Tasman Sea while we travelled north to Sydney. The *Ellinis* kept just ahead of it, so we didn't notice any adverse movement in the ship other than the usual barely perceptible side-to-side roll. The *Ellinis* was quite large — 24,000 tonnes, 624 feet long by 79 feet wide, and capable of achieving 20 knots — but while we had been in Sydney taking on passengers the storm in the Tasman Sea had continued to evolve into something resembling a medium-sized hurricane. It had moved slowly up the coast and was sitting just outside Sydney Heads. With the *Ellinis* loaded to capacity with 1800 passengers and probably as many crew, we headed up the Harbour towards Sydney Heads. As we got closer the ferocity of what waited for us outside became apparent. Powerful winds lashed the upper and promenade decks with stinging sea spray that kept all but the hardest inside. The ship's bow dived into the massive swells while forcing its way through Sydney Heads. The ship rose and fell with the sickening feel of a fast lift dropping out from under you, before suddenly rising up again to push your stomach back up into your throat. Not very pleasant, but this was also combined with a side roll that even the stabilisers couldn't prevent, although they no doubt lessened its extremes. The *Ellinis* rolled and heaved like a sick whale unable to dive but having to keep coming up for air. Each time the bow dived into a swell, masses of spume sprayed up over it high enough to engulf the whole fore deck area. No one was out there. I presume most of the passengers were in their cabins trying to unpack or sitting in lounges terrified that the whole voyage was going to be like this.

I was on the promenade deck, from where I could see a small pilot boat running alongside of us. A ladder had been dropped down the side and the pilot on board who had taken us out of the harbour to the Heads was standing by the rail at the top of the ladder, waiting for the pilot boat to get close enough so he could scramble down and leave us. His job was done once the *Ellinis* reached the Heads and was about to head out to sea.

Normally the pilot boat would run right next to the hull and the pilot would simply climb down the ladder and step aboard. Then the pilot boat would move away and head back to port. This time, however, it couldn't get close enough. The swells were so huge it rose up 20 or 30 feet, sometimes scraping ominously against the side of the *Ellinis*. The *Ellinis* would heave away as it rolled to one side, suddenly leaving a huge gap between the pilot boat and itself, and then as it dived down and rolled back the pilot boat would pull away so as not to be crushed by the descending mass of the much bigger ship. At one point there was a moment of calm when both the pilot boat and the *Ellinis* moved in unison. It seemed stable. The pilot started to scramble down the ladder. He was halfway down when a large trough opened up and the pilot boat was sucked away from the side of the *Ellinis*, creating a wide gap with the pilot dangling half way down the ladder.

He must have realised that if the next swell made the pilot boat swing back in against the side of the *Ellinis* he would be crushed between them. As the trough started to fill with the next big swell, he scrambled back up the ladder to be dragged back on board the *Ellinis* by the several crewmen who were waiting at the top.

The pilot boat pulled away, turned and went back through the Heads. The *Ellinis* ploughed into the storm, rolling and bucking like a small dinghy in a fierce chop. The pilot stayed on board until our first stop, which was Auckland, New Zealand, from where he flew back to Sydney.

That evening as we rode and pushed through the storm with the ship rolling and heaving no one other than a few hardy souls turned up for dinner. Where were all of those people who came on in Sydney? The dining room was empty. It was hard to keep anything on the table. Waiters scurried feverishly about trying sometimes unsuccessfully to prevent stacks of plates and cups and saucers from sliding off the tables. There was a loud crash somewhere in the kitchen, followed by a lot of yelling and swearing in Greek.

I doubt that anybody slept that night as the *Ellinis* drove through the storm at close to 20 knots. The captain wanted to get through it as quickly as possible. He slowed the ship in the morning when the sea was calmer. The storm, still raging, was way behind us. Even then, very few people turned up

for breakfast. It wasn't until later that afternoon, when the sea was calmer, although still choppy, and the movement of the ship had abated to its usual gentleness, suddenly a thousand or more people appeared. The dining room that night was full, the musicians later in the lounge started playing, people danced, and the bars were busy. Everything was back to normal and everyone had finally gotten their sea legs.

Two days later, as we arrived in Auckland, the storm outside of Sydney was long forgotten as everyone was doing their best to enjoy the holiday, making new friends and partying day and night.

Coming in to Auckland by sea is magnificent. The harbour here is, I think, as fine as Sydney Harbour and just as beautiful. There seemed to be millions of yachts, and there were ferry boats coming and going to locations around the harbour as well as many inhabited islands within the harbour. The sun was shining and everything sparkled as light bounced off it.

I had got to know the guys in my cabin, and we decided we would rent a car and drive to Rotorua to see the bubbling mud and the volcanic springs. There was nothing like that in Australia. We invited a few others, and in the end we rented two cars for the trip. It turned out to be a long drive and we didn't really get to see Auckland at all. However, the buildings look the same in the bigger cities as those in Australia, they drive on the same side of the road as us, and the people speak the same language except for a few mangled vowels. The smaller towns seemed to be very British, much more so than similar small towns in Australia. At Rotorua we saw bubbling mud pools, smelt sulphurous steam, saw Maori dancers and singers perform, tried paddling or bathing in a foul-smelling hot pool, which we were told was good for our health, then finally arrived back at the ship too late for dinner. There was as always plenty of supper, though, served in many different lounges as well as the dining room, so we didn't go hungry.

I slept well that night, and when I got up for breakfast in the morning we were already at sea, having left Auckland way behind.

Ahead was a week of traversing gradually increasingly tropical weather as we headed for Tahiti, our next port of call.

The ship had a well-stocked library, but I found nothing that I felt compelled to read. This was probably the first time on a holiday that I did not take with me a book to read, or bought books on the way to read. Being on a big passenger ship was different from any other holiday I had ever taken, so I had no desire to sit down to read. I did play drums, though. I introduced myself to the band members, and they were happy for me to bring up a couple of congas to play. The drummer in the group had a set of bongos, which he lent to me. He asked me to teach him how to play them and I was happy to oblige. I played congas and bongos with the band every night. Many passengers actually thought I was part of the band rather than simply another passenger like themselves. It was good practice for me, keeping my hands and fingers hard and my arm muscles toned and flexible for playing. As with any physical activity, if you don't continue practising you soon lose the ability to perform. It's hard to regain that edge again.

During the day I did what everyone else did: hung around swimming and sunbaking by the pool, played an occasional game of quoits or deck tennis, sat in a deck chair, watched the endless ocean, had mindless conversations around the cocktail bars and buffets, ate too much food, went to late-night parties, and often slept in late enough to miss breakfast. It was all very relaxing, since there really wasn't much else to do. It didn't take long before everyone more or less knew everyone else, if not by name, then by facial recognition.

Years later, in the most unexpected places, people came up to me to tell me they remembered me from the *Ellinis*. They always mentioned that they remembered me because I played with the band. Often I didn't remember them. If it did, it was because the face seemed familiar. I doubt if I would remember any of them now, almost 60 years later.

One face I do remember, though, was that of a Greek girl who seemed reluctant to mix with the rowdy mob who made up the bulk of the passengers who came on in Sydney. I thought at first she had come aboard in Sydney, but she had actually boarded in Melbourne, and was seasick during the short run up the coast to Sydney. It wasn't that she was very beautiful, but there was something about her that attracted all the guys. Everyone made a pass at her, but she just smiled and was nice and polite. She refused all advances



The *Ellinis* docks in Papeete, Tahiti.

other than those that were simply friendly. Her sense of inner beauty made her appear serene, even saintly.

She went to the church services on board on Sundays — Greek Orthodox services, but a non-denominational service was performed on Sundays as well. Although she seemed devout she didn't give the impression of being very religious. I did not go to these services, simply because I am not religious, and don't like the trappings the various churches use to entice people into following their beliefs, but I did get the impression she found some solace there.

It was odd was she was getting off in England, not going on to Greece as most of the other Greek passengers were going to do.

I found out later that she had fallen in love with an English photographer. In the two years she stayed in London they had a wonderful life together. They came to Australia, but shortly after she died of leukaemia. On the ship, she knew she had leukaemia, and had only had a short time to live unless she could be cured by specialist treatment in London. It also explained her quiet reserve; why she did not want to form any sort of relationship with fellow travellers. She didn't want people to be disappointed or sad because she was going to die, so did not allow herself to become close to anyone. But there is no denying love when it happens, and I'm glad she did have those two years with her photographer friend.

I do remember writing a letter to my friend and science fiction fan Walter (Wally) Shaw, who worked part time at the nursery next door to the dry cleaner, in which I suggested we should write a story about floating cities in a future world where the population had grown so huge that there was no room left for city expansion plus space to grow food, so that the only place where mankind could expand into were the oceans. These huge floating cities could hold millions of people and would be so large that no bad weather or cyclonic storms could affect them. They could have airports and harbours just like any shoreside city. They would have parks and gardens and all the amenities one expects in a normal city. And if you were born and lived somewhere inside these cities, you might never be aware that they were floating, unless of course you went to the edge and saw the ocean beyond. I

could not have imagined then that something like this would be in its infancy today, with serious marine architects designing such floating cities as possible solutions to housing people in today's warming world with its slowly rising ocean levels and coastal cities that may one day disappear beneath the waves.

I bought a stamp and posted the letter in the mailbox on board the ship. Presumably the mail was sent by the ship's post office staff at each port of call. I also sent postcards from the ship back home to Mum and Dad. Mum kept these for many years in a box at home, but eventually they disappeared, along with much else, when we did a big clean up. I probably thought at the time 'What do I want to keep all this stuff for?' and tossed them out with other rubbish. Now I regret it, because it would have been nice to see what I wrote way back then — my actual thoughts in 1964.

I think the captain of the *Ellinis* always adjusted her cruising speed so we would arrive at each port early in the morning. In that way we would have all day to explore as well as most of the night for dining and partying before having to be back on board for departure the next morning.

The sun was just illuminating the sky and the waves with a faint splash of warm colour when I raced up from C deck to the promenade deck to watch us arrive at Tahiti.

Tahiti! The place that those early European sailors, French and English, thought was paradise on Earth. And it must have been for those who manned the ships that rounded Cape Horn and survived its ferocious storms to find themselves negotiating the narrow opening through the surrounding reef where they could anchor in calm clear tropical waters, where a thousand species of fish unknown to them could be seen as clearly as if the water they swam in didn't exist; and smelling the air with its scent of frangipani and other tropical flowers, and listening to the trade winds ruffle the fronds of coconut palms overhanging the lagoon along the shore. Seeing the rugged rainforest-covered volcanic mountain that made up the bulk of the island, and half-naked women running along the beach towards where they were mooring their ship would surely have convinced them that they were arriving at a place that was as close to heaven as they were ever likely to get. It was no wonder many of them never wanted to leave this place where beautiful

women with skin the colour of golden honey and sparkling brown eyes bestowed sexual favours upon them because they were different from their own men, and where some sailors went 'native' with local wives and refused to come back on board when their ship was due to depart. Captain Cook had to force several of his men at gunpoint to return.

It was the place Gaughin fell in love with and for which left his job in a bank in Paris, his wife and family, moving to Tahiti to live like a native and paint gorgeous pictures that everyone all over the world has seen, so they all know an idealised version of Tahiti, whether they have been there or not.

In 1964 you still had to arrive in Tahiti by ship or boat. There was no airport. It wouldn't be constructed for several more years. The narrow channel had been dredged to accommodate large liners like *Ellinis*, but it seemed certain that we would scrape the sides of the ship with the coral walls that made up the edge of the channel. The water against the side of the ship seemed jet black, but it was so clear I could see the jagged edges of the reef that had been cut away to allow large ships to enter the channel through the reef. Those closest to the surface were bleached white, but deeper down the dead coral edges faded into greenish grey until they became almost invisible shadows near the bottom.

Suddenly the gap in the reef was behind us. The sun was higher and the mountain behind the town of Papeete glowed with all shades of green as the sun illuminated its slopes. The air no longer smelt only of salt, but there were hints of mouldy rotting vegetable matter mixed with indefinable sweet scents from flowers. It was the kind of smell I associated with all tropical places no matter where you find them. Across the sea, only about 12 miles away, was the unbelievable volcanic mountain that made the island of Moorea so beautiful. It was on this island that the musical *South Pacific* was filmed. It was in these waters around Tahiti, Moorea and the nearby Marquesas, that Marlon Brando would film his version of *Mutiny on the Bounty*. And we all know now that he ended up marrying his co-star and moving to live on an island in the Marquesas. I'm sure everyone on board the ship had seen other films that depicted life in the South Pacific, especially with Tahiti as a backdrop, so there was no cultural shock on landing and spending time ashore.

We were greeted by a dance troupe of gorgeous girls with a group of solidly muscled drummers playing, singing, and dancing as the passengers came down the gangplank. The girls wore long grass skirts, and leis of flowers covered their breasts. Each one had a flower in her hair. The grass swished and swirled with the manic movement of their hips as they kept time with an ear-shattering barrage of drum logs pounded with sticks. I found the rhythms fascinating, quite different to what I was accustomed to hearing and playing. But before I could get off the ship they had finished their little show and departed.

There were some formalities requiring passports to be stamped, after which we were free to go ashore. The first thing I did was to wander along the road that ran around the harbour. There were cafés and restaurants all along the foreshore, with tables and chairs outside on wide footpaths. I sat at a table at a small café and admired a lovely Tahitian girl at the table next to mine. The place looked a bit scruffy, but it seemed to be popular with the locals. There was no one from the ship here. The menu had ham sandwiches listed (*sandwich de jambon*) so I ordered a *café au lait* and a ham sandwich.

Cultural shock isn't something sudden, so that you walk into a place and it is so unexpectedly different that you are stunned; it's more the accumulation of small things that are different that add up over time to change your perception of what is expected. In my mind a sandwich was made from two slices of bread buttered lightly and filled with whatever you want, such as ham and lettuce. What I received was a huge long chunk of what we would now call French bread stick, with no butter and with thick slices of ham in it. No lettuce or any other condiments such as mustard; just the bread stick and the ham. It was the same in France, as I later found out while staying in Paris. The coffee was better than expected, but the sandwich ... At least the bread stick was freshly baked and it had a lovely crumbly crust with a soft texture inside, making it possibly the best piece of bread roll I had tasted.

Papeete extended from the foreshore, where yachts and fishing boats were moored, back away and up into the towering hills inland. It was a moribund ramshackle village with few buildings more than two storeys high, with washed-out and often flaking pastel-coloured paint, and with winding streets full of barefoot happy people going about their business. Many of these

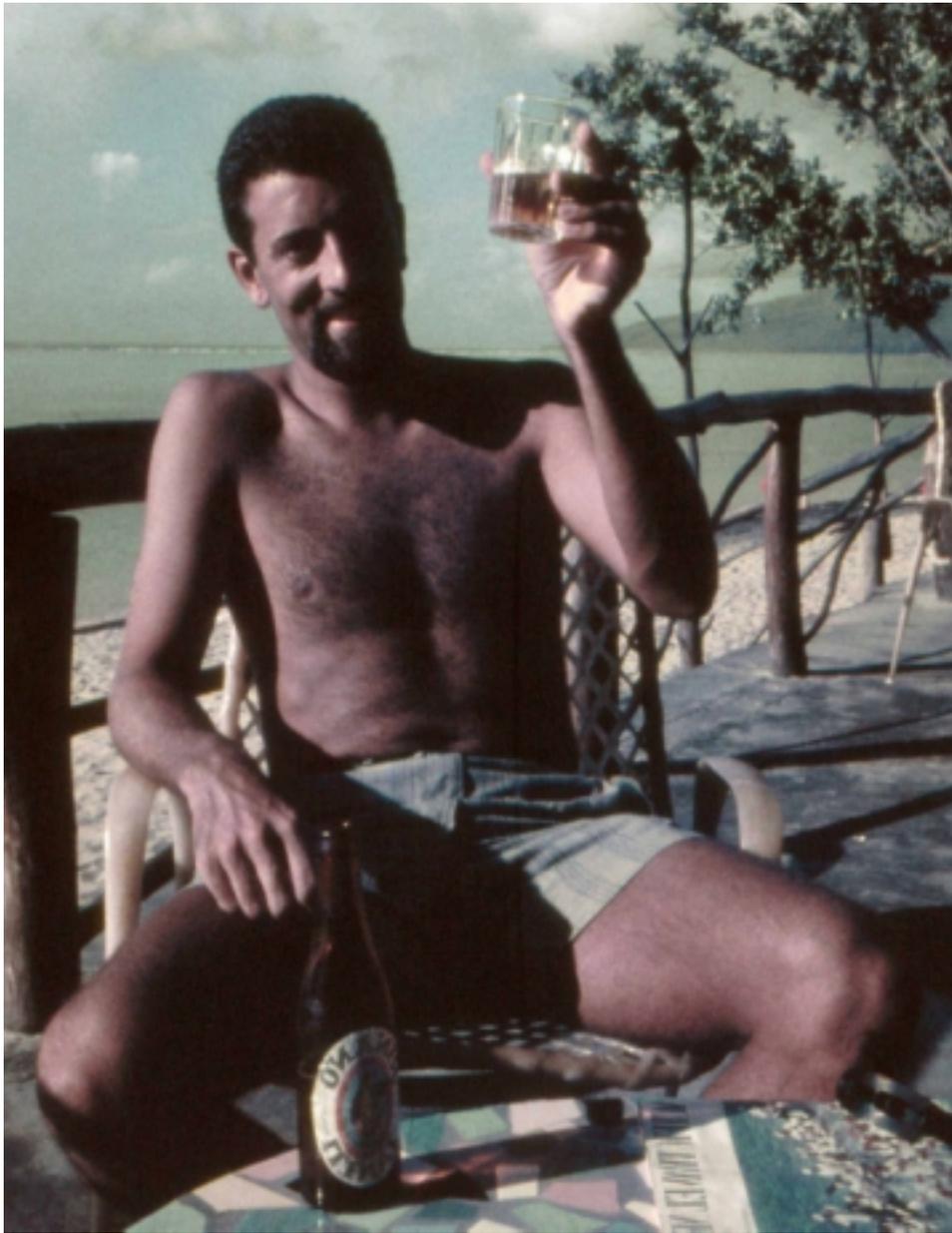
John Litchen in Tahiti, 1964



John paddles a canoe at Moorea.



Fishermen with the day's catch.



John enjoys a drink ...



... and goes for a bike ride.



Street scene, Papeete.

people were heading towards the waterfront, where at least a thousand potential customers were disembarking from the *Ellinis*. I saw some loaded with flower leis, or similar shell necklaces. Several had strings of fish dangling from lines strung over their shoulders. I would have expected them to be heading away from the waterfront, not towards it. Who among the sightseeing passengers would be buying fresh fish? Unless of course they were hoping to sell them to the kitchen staff on board the *Ellinis*. This must have been the case, because in the two days after leaving Tahiti we had some wonderful lunches and dinners with beautiful tropical fish that I had never heard of or tasted before, *mahi-mahi* being one particularly fine example.

Many yachts were moored right in front of the most popular café bar, the Vaima Bar. At one stage it had been a dream to own a yacht and sail around the world, stopping at places like Tahiti. And I must admit I felt tinges of jealousy at the sight of these yachts and the suntanned people lazing on the decks with cups of coffee as they contemplated the morning. The yachts looked well kept, as if they had been here for a while. None of them had that weather-beaten look they took on after spending a long time at sea. I guess, as my brother-in-law's friend said to me before I left, 'Once you get to Tahiti, you never want to leave.' He went there on a surfing trip a few years earlier, fell in love with the place, and never wanted to leave. He married a lovely Tahitian lass, who it turned out had been Marlon Brando's choice as a girlfriend before he started filming *Mutiny on the Bounty*, but when she fell for an Australian he left her for someone else, who became his co-star in the film. Eventually Fred's friend had to return to Melbourne with his wife and children because he was needed as part of the business that ran the Moonee Ponds to Williamstown bus route. For a moment, as I looked around at the sheer beauty of Tahiti, I wondered why he did that, and then had to ask myself: would I do that after I had been in Europe? Would I come home to work again in the dry cleaning business? I wasn't planning to, but then one never knows how circumstances can change.

The only disruptive sight to the quiet native village atmosphere of Tahiti was the sheer bulk of the *Ellinis* towering high above the water. It was moored beside a new wharf constructed in deeper water to accommodate such huge ships.

Suddenly one of the guys from my cabin was standing next to me. 'You should check that out,' he said as he pointed towards one of the bars over the road from the boat moorings. 'Men and women use the same toilets.'

I gave him an odd look.

'It's true. The women line up waiting to use a cubicle, and while they wait they get to check out the guys who are standing there and pissing against the other wall.'

'And you want me to check that out?'

'None of the women from the ship are game to use it, so only Tahitian women are in there.'

'It's a bit early in the morning for me to be going over to look at a toilet. But I suppose if you are bursting and there is no other place nearby, then you'd have to use it' — and to hell with the possibility of a line of women looking at you.

It was the talk of the day, with every bloke I encountered from the ship telling me I should have a look, or asking if I'd been there yet. It wasn't something I was interested in doing, although later than night, when we were in the bar drinking beer, pernod, and other spirits, partying with great gusto, there came a time when you simply had to go to the toilet, and that was the only one. So I went and pissed against the wall with the other blokes while a long line of Tahitian ladies admired or joked about which one of us had the biggest tackle. They may have been prostitutes, because often they would lean on your shoulder while you were taking a piss so they could have a good look. If they liked what they saw, they propositioned you. Quite often a guy having a piss would leave the 'amenity' with the lady who had leaned on his shoulder. There were rooms upstairs. To my great relief, no lady leaned on my shoulder while I was taking a piss, and so I was not propositioned. I returned to the bar and ordered another drink.

Earlier that day I discovered a man on the waterfront renting chunky bicycles with a small petrol motor on the back. Each bicycle featured a gear that rolled

against the wheel so that when you hopped on and pedalled fast, it ignited a spark plug that started the motor. You could then stop pedalling and the small spluttering motor would turn the back wheel for you. This was the first time I'd ever seen one of these.

It seemed every second person in Papeete was riding around on these motor-driven bikes. A chaotic flow of them meandered along every street, dodging other vehicles as well as pedestrians. There must have been some road rules, but I couldn't figure out what they could have been, so I joined the throng, sitting nervously on my rented motorised bike. It wasn't long before I was out of town and in open country on a road that paralleled the beach and the lagoon surrounding the island. I travelled a good distance around the island along this coast road until I came to a place where something large was being constructed. Tractors were grading coral rock, flattening out quite a broad area and pushing stuff towards the shallow water to extend parts of it into the lagoon. A row of coconut palms had been knocked down, and had been pushed haphazardly to one side of the construction area. They looked as if a cyclone had ripped them up and scattered them like matchsticks against the side of the rainforest that extended back towards the volcano near the spine of the island. It could only be an airport they were building. The air was full of diesel fumes and the roar of heavy machinery. Just wait until the planes started landing ... civilisation was arriving!

This devastation spoilt my impression of Tahiti. I turned around and went back to Papeete, where I returned the motorised bike and had lunch at a nearby café. I spent the rest of the day in and around the waterfront area enjoying the relaxed feel of the place.

After a happy night at the bar where virtually everyone eventually had the need to check out Tahiti's famous unisex toilet, we finally found ourselves wandering back, in some cases staggering back, to board the *Ellinis*.

When we woke up the next morning the ship was steaming out through the opening in the reef, with Moorea on our starboard side. It wasn't long before both islands were gone, nothing more than a pile of cumulus clouds towering into the sky way behind us marking their location as we headed north and

east towards the isthmus of Panama.

Ten days of lazing around in deck chairs by the swimming pool, eating loads of great food, drinking too much perhaps, chasing girls, or girls flirting with the eligible boys, dancing and continuing the endless party at night; those were the days that are hard to remember because they all blurred one into another.

We did not encounter even a slight storm as we crossed the wide expanse between the Friendly Islands and the coast of Central America. Once we left the Trade Winds zone the air was still, and the sea for miles in all directions was smooth and glassy. The sky above, without a single cloud anywhere, was so bright it was hard to look at. The sea itself reflected that extreme brightness across its glass smooth surface, which apart from the wake created by the ship was absolutely unmarked. Not even a flying fish jumped out of the water. Apparently these deep areas of the ocean are like deserts. There are hardly any fish here during the day. At night it was different. Things came up from deep down, and often you could see flashing and sparkling lights flit through the water as something or other chased something else in an unrelenting hunt for sustenance.

There was little breeze, other than what we created as the ship moved forward. These were the famous Doldrums, where sailing ships were often stuck for long periods of time without a wind to move them. Sailors hated these glassy hot seas and tried to avoid this zone at all costs, but if you were going from south to north or the other way it was unavoidable. Big ships like *Ellinis* simply powered through this zone without any problems at all.

There was a silly ceremony when we crossed the Equator. Someone was dressed as King Neptune. His minions, dressed to resemble sea nymphs, tossed everybody into the swimming pool but I stayed away from that.

I spent most of those 10 days working on my suntan. Back then nobody had any inkling about skin cancer or the damage the sun could do to your skin, and everyone wanted to be bronzed evenly all over. At night I played drums with the band. The music was very commercial dance music, such as 'Tea for Two Cha Cha', 'I talk to the Trees Cha Cha', 'Mambo #5', as well as romantic



The *Ellinis* entering the first lock for its passage through the Panama Canal.

songs played with a Latin feel, such as the slow rhumba. Very un-Latin, commercial pap, but it was what people wanted. It kept me practising, and maintained the hardness in my fingers and hands.

Panama City gave me a big cultural shock. It was the first city I had ever been to where people openly shot at each other with guns. We had been warned not to leave the Canal Zone to go to Panama City because there were impending elections, and members of the various political parties were often seen shooting at each other or violently fighting whenever they met during the course of their political activities. I thought this could not be real, so took a bus into the city. Some crew members from the *Ellinis* were on that bus. I figured that if they could go into the city, so could I.

There was no escaping the tropical feel to the city, even though it was a lot more modern than Papeete. It was hot and humid and whenever you stood in the sun you could feel it burning into you. This was a big city with wide

boulevards, lots of buses, and traffic that seemed to tear along the roads without any concern for other vehicles or for pedestrians trying to cross streets. They wove in and out and dodged each other in a never-ending chaotic flow. It was noisy too, with every driver in every vehicle honking the horn continuously and yelling at each other.

I had hardly been in town longer than 15 minutes when there was a scuffle across the street from where I stood eating a fabulous orange and chocolate ice cream I had bought from a street vendor. A small group was sticking signs on the broad columns of a large building. I couldn't see what the signs said, but hardly had this group finished sticking them up when a long dark car screeched to a stop. Someone leaned out of the window and started shooting a pistol at the people putting up the signs. The people scattered, dropping spare signs and a bucket of water-based glue. They ran behind the columns or skittered away along the footpath. Other pedestrians too, ran away in a frantic dance to escape the spray of bullets.

As I watched, two men jumped out of the car and started ripping off the posters the other group had just put up. One of them gesticulated towards the bucket left in the gutter and the other grabbed it. Within minutes they had put up their own posters, jumped back into their car, and driven off with loads of loud horn honking and yells as they leaned out of their car and fired the odd pistol into the air.

I could hardly believe it. It was something straight out of an American gangster movie. I suddenly realised my ice cream had started to melt and was dribbling down my hand.

'Happens all the time,' the vendor said to me in American-accented English. 'You watch. It won't be long before the first group comes back and replaces the posters the others tore down.'

And he was right. Ten minutes later they were back again to tear down their rival's posters to replace them with their own. I left then, just in case the guys in the black car came back and started shooting. Who knows where those bullets might go?

What I loved about Panama City was that everywhere I went there was the sound of tropical music: the real stuff, not the watered-down pap we played on the ship. Every shop I passed had music blaring through its front door. By tropical music I mean Cuban music. That's what it was called then — *música tropical*. *Mambos*, *guarachas*, and *pachangas* assailed my ears as I passed and I had to pause at each shop to listen. *Pachangas* played by *Charanga* bands were very popular in the early sixties, with their violins and flutes replacing the heavy sound of brass instruments.

I felt like dancing as I moved along the street, and a sudden revelation struck me. If everyone driving seemingly so chaotically in the streets was listening to tropical music pouring out of their car radios felt like dancing, then that probably explained the chaotic movement of their vehicles and why they suffered far fewer crashes than I would have expected. They drove in time and in concert with the music they listened to. I did not get into a bus or a taxi without a radio playing some form of *música tropical*.

Later that day I bumped into some of the crew members. They told me they were going to a night club and I was welcome to come along. It was one of those seedy places where there was a show that had something to do with a woman having sex with a donkey. Unable to imagine how that was possible I agreed to go with them, but the memory of that night is a blur. I drank too much alcohol, breathed in too much secondary smoke, which made me as sick as a dog, and remembered absolutely nothing about the floor show that I supposedly saw. All I remember was staggering out of the taxi on the wharf and weaving up the gangplank onto the deck, where I promptly sat in a deck chair to wait for the sun to rise and the ship to head into the first lock of the Panama Canal. I didn't want to miss that. Unfortunately I fell asleep. When I woke up, the *Ellinis* was long through the famous canal, having bypassed the city of Colon, and was heading out into the bright sparkling Caribbean Sea.

Curacao was our next stop. The largest of the Netherlands Antilles islands, it is a small low flat island only a short distance off the coast of Venezuela. The ship came into what seemed like short wide canal in the middle of the town of Willemstadt, which I assumed was the capital. The *Ellinis* dwarfed the myriad small fishing and pleasure craft moored along the waterfront. The

passengers poured off the ship in droves and headed through winding, spotlessly clean streets lined with brightly painted stone buildings. Many walked, but there were loads of taxis waiting to take passengers into the main part of town.

I took a taxi and sat in the front so I could shoot some movie film through the window as we drove along. I remember the street being very narrow with hardly any sun shining down — it was early — and with the sides of the buildings very close to the both sides of the taxi. It seemed like the driver went very fast, but that was only because the sides of the buildings were so close that they could have ripped off the vehicle's side mirror if the driver wasn't careful. Suddenly we burst out into a central plaza, a huge open space that seemed to extend beyond sight. It was filled with light and hundreds of people wandering about dressed in colourful clothes. All the buildings that surrounded the plaza seemed out of place, too European for the tropics, but that was compensated for by the bright pastel colours in which they were painted, and the very colourful clothes the local people wore. Passengers from the *Ellinis* looked drab by comparison.

I left the taxi beside an ice cream vendor, from whom I bought a fantastic orange-and-mango-flavoured double scoop. It was the best ice cream I had ever tasted. I wandered about shooting some film of the general activity, finally concentrating on a small group of musicians who were playing Venezuelan music and singing in Spanish. The group consisted of two guitarists, one with a regular guitar while the other had a bass guitar (again, something I hadn't seen before), an accordion, a metal scraper, and a drum like a small *tambora*, which was slung over one shoulder and played with one bare hand and one stick. I wished I had some way of recording them. I think they played *Joropo* because it was in 6/4 time. They had come over from Venezuela, which is less than 20 miles away, knowing that they would be able to make some money entertaining tourists from the cruise ship. Everyone would have known that the ship was arriving.

From the talk I overheard on the ship Curacao was famous for two things, its casino and a place called Happy Valley some distance out of town. Because the Netherlands Antilles major industry was processing oil, which they did on nearby Aruba, there were plenty of workers, foreign and local, who spent

lots of money. Happy Valley was a township that was a huge brothel, with bars to entertain the visitors and shop fronts where the lovely ladies could show off their wares and demonstrate what they had for sale. It was legal, just as doing this was legal in the Dutch capital, so there was nothing seedy or sleazy about the place. It was clean and above board, a great place to have some fun, even if you weren't interested in the basic occupation of the place. Half the ship's passengers were there, having a wonderful time in the bars and dance clubs if they weren't occupied elsewhere in the town. The other half went to the casino. I went to the casino with a couple of friends from the ship, but they wouldn't let us in because we weren't dressed appropriately. You had to wear a lounge suit, at the very least. I didn't have a suit. The glimpse they allowed me through the front showed me that everyone inside was dressed in evening clothes — black dinner suits and bow ties, and the women in elegant gowns. It looked like something I had seen in a James Bond movie: very expensive. Definitely not my style. We turned around and took a taxi back to Happy Valley, where no one cared whether you wore a suit or not.

Once again I don't remember leaving port; only sailing across a sparkling brilliant crystal sea with small choppy waves that made no impression on the ship. It was rock steady as we cruised along and there was always a warm fresh breeze: the famous trade winds? A couple of days later, a faint smudge against the rising sun on the horizon ahead gradually grew into a rugged jungle-covered mountainous island.

This was Martinique, one of the windward series of islands in the Eastern Caribbean, famous for the eruption of Mont Pele, which devastated one half of the island a long time ago. Of the inhabitants who lived in a small town near the foot of the volcano only one survived; a prisoner locked in solitary confinement in a cell underground. The pyroclastic flow from the erupting volcano killed everyone else who remained in the town. Those who tried to escape by running into the sea were cooked as the sea boiled.

Mont Pele isn't the only quiescent volcano on this magnificent island, but it is the highest, at 1379 metres.

Martinique is also famous for being the birthplace of Napoleon's Josephine. It was originally discovered by Columbus (Cristobal Colon) in 1493, but no

Spanish group could settle there because of the fierce Carib Indians who slaughtered anyone who tried, at least until the French arrived in 1635. They brought in slaves from West Africa to start growing sugar cane and bananas. They also make very nice rum, which of course we all sampled once we got ashore. These days the island is an Overseas French Department, which has its own government.

My first glimpse was of the brilliant spires and dome of a huge cathedral that stood proud above a forest of trees and palms. The sun glistened off the whiteness of it. I found out later it was an exact copy of the Sacré Coeur Cathedral in Paris. Behind it I could see the base of a towering mountain, the top of which was obscured by a layer of greyish early morning cloud.

Fishermen launched dozens of lifeboat-sized craft and motored across to the ship. The crew opened a wide door several decks down and dropped a kind of pontoon landing platform so passengers could walk down a short gangway to the landing platform, transfer to a fishing boat, and be ferried across to the short pier jutting out from the town which came right down to the water's edge. Young boys gesticulated and called out in French for us to throw coins into the water so they could dive for them.

Going ashore and wandering up the street towards the centre of the town of Port au Prince, I could not stop thinking how African the place looked. I had never been to Africa, but I had seen a documentary about Guinea and the troubadour musicians. Everyone I saw was of African descent, children of those whose grandparents had once been slaves bought across from West Africa to work the cane fields. I hardly saw anyone who was unmixed European; they were all mixed, African, and European in varying degrees, all friendly with gorgeous smiles whenever they stopped and spoke to us.

A market place was filled with stalls selling all kinds of weird and wonderful local produce and hundreds of people dressed in brilliant colours who stood out under the tropical sun. I couldn't wait to start shooting some film. As unobtrusively as possible, I took my camera out from its bag slung over my shoulder and started filming. I was well aware that some people don't like to be filmed or have their photos taken. I was a bit nervous at first, but no one bothered me. With a telephoto lens I didn't need to get too close to anyone



in particular. I wandered about, and people actually smiled at me. Strangely enough, they didn't try to sell me anything. I was obviously a tourist from the recently arrived ship and tourists rarely bought fresh produce in local markets.

It was hot and humid, but I could feel the continuous warm breeze that fluttered the tree tops and made the air smell sweet as it blew across the market stalls, evaporating any sweat so you didn't realise that it was hot. This market place looked exactly like any number of market places I had seen in numerous adventure films about Africa. I was sure it would look great when I saw the film projected; but of course there would be no sound. I regretted not being able to record the ambient sound of the place, as this would have added so much character to the film.

Back in town later that afternoon, I found a record shop and bought two EPs of local music (to use on a soundtrack for the film I had shot), and discovered an LP by Tito Puente called *Dance Mania*. It was a recent release being played when I went in, and it just blew me away. I had to have it. I also bought a small portable record player so I could play it on board the ship. With my new-found treasures I made my way back to the ship. That recording was by far the best recording Tito Puente ever made, and he made hundreds of LPs over his entire career as a band leader and musician. It was already a bestseller in 1964, and it has remained a bestseller (always in the top 10 Latin LPs) from the time it was released until today, almost 60 years later. There was an excitement about it, a freshness, something intangible that has rarely been captured in other similar recordings, and that is still apparent whenever you listen to it. It makes you want to get up and dance. It is irresistible. It is my favourite big (Tropical Latin) band recording of all time.

After another week at sea we finally approached our first European port. We came around Cabo Espichel, a smudgy dark shape off in the distance. Not long after we entered one of the widest and most beautiful entrances to a large harbour that I had ever seen. There was a feeling of excitement mingled with anticipation in everyone who crowded on the decks to watch us enter this ancient harbour, from where, over 500 years ago, Portuguese sailors and explorers left in their tiny wooden caravels to discover a way around Africa, or the way across to South America. The Portuguese were the first Europeans to visit China and Japan, the first to establish overseas colonies in Brazil, India, and Africa. Yet at the time we arrived in Lisboa (Lisbon), Portugal was one of the poorest countries in Europe, when once it had been the richest and most influential. I wondered if the massive earthquake and the subsequent tsunami that wiped Lisbon off the map in 1755 had anything to do with the country's subsequent downfall. Lisbon, of course, has been rebuilt, yet it looks like a very old and ancient place, while at the same time being modern and bustling.

I had never seen any place like this before. Tahiti and Panama were not so different from my expectations, but this was Europe, the place from where civilisation, if you want to call it that, spread around the world, to absorb or destroy many ancient cultures.

It was late afternoon when we finally berthed, and it was starting to get dark by the time we could clear customs and go ashore. As in Panama City the air was filled with music, but unfamiliar music. There was joy, but also a hint of sadness within the music. I just loved the minor tonality and the huskiness of the singers. The streets were jammed with cars, everyone honking horns and gesticulating at each other. It was like permanent road rage, yet happy rather than angry and frustrated. Many of the cars driven were convertibles with the tops down, and music blared from all of them. It was early summer, and the air was warm, the breeze pleasant. I was with a group of people from the *Ellinis*. We wandered happily along a wide footpath that was composed of swirling mosaic designs—a work of art in itself! And the people thronging along it took no notice of it. It was just somewhere you walked along. But what I found extraordinary was that Lisbon was like this everywhere: little works of art in the most unexpected places, plazas and footpaths filled with gorgeous mosaic patterns that only revealed themselves sporadically when the press of people lessened for a moment.

Tables and chairs outside of cafes and restaurants in all the main streets were filled with people enjoying evening meals or drinking coffees with the port wine for which Portugal is famous. There was nothing like this in Melbourne then, in 1964. It was unheard of, probably not even thought of, unseen. You couldn't take a drink out of any premises after 6 p.m., no one was allowed to sell alcoholic drinks unless at a licensed restaurant, and there were very few of those, yet here in Lisbon in the middle of the evening, probably about 9 p.m. I sat down at an outdoor table with two of the girls from the ship and we ordered a coffee and a cognac to sip with it. I could have done this any time of the day or night, something you could never do in Melbourne. It was the simplicity of the situation that shocked us all, and made us realise how backward and straitlaced we were in Australia.

Almost 2000 people from the ship spread out into Lisbon that night. It was obvious we were tourists from the way we dressed, but more so from the way we looked so intently at everything, the old buildings, the strange cable car that seemed to go from the top of some buildings up the side of a jutting hill, the brilliantly lit ancient fortress perched on top of a nearby hill, the thousands of outdoor tables and chairs filled with people enjoying the early summer evening with glasses of wine or cognac and coffees, snacking on tiny

plates filled with tasty morsels of food (which I later found out were similar to the *tapas* served in the bars of Seville). While we were seated sipping our cognac a car pulled up to the curb right next to us. The driver leaned out and, obviously taken by the girls, asked if they wanted to take a drive around the city. The car was a convertible, a big American one, so there was plenty of room for the three of us. The girls were reluctant at first to get into the car, but he seemed so honest, and genuine in his desire to show off his beloved Lisbon, that they finally acquiesced as long as I came along with them. He was happy with that, and we all piled into the car.

He took off with a roar and chorus of car horns honking as he cut into the flow of traffic. He took us everywhere. He was so proud of his city he was happy to show it off and explain in hesitant English about the history and the relevance of everything. We finished the night in a wonderful club where he insisted on paying for everything, and where for the first time I heard genuine *Fado* music. This is the music of Portugal. This is the music that expresses all desires of life and the sadness of love lost and won again combined in a form that makes you shiver to listen to it even when you don't understand the words. Our guide told me the woman singing was the most famous *Fado* singer in Portugal. I presume now that she must have been Amalia Rodrigues.

Finally, as the sun started to come up for a new day, our guide dropped us off at the pier where the *Ellinis* waited for her passengers to return, and thanked us for letting him show us his beautiful city. We were quite sad to see him drive off, and slowly, as if reluctant to leave this incredible city, we walked back up into the ship.

Those last few days that it took to get to England, for me at least, lacked excitement or anticipation. I wasn't looking forward to getting off in England. I would rather have gotten off in Lisbon, stayed there for a while before moving on into other parts of Europe, but it was not to be. Unfortunately I never did return to Portugal.

But that's the way things go ... never what you expect.

— John Litchen, 2013

Treasure 3

November 2014

John Baxter
William Breiding
Ditmar (Dick Jensen)
John Litchen
Cat Sparks



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