

THE HISTORY OF THE KEITH KATO CHILI PARTY

by Keith G. Kato

On Sunday, 9 August 2009, the 35th Anniversary “Keith Kato Chili Party” was held at Anticipation, the 67th Worldcon, in Montreal’s Delta Centre-Ville Hotel. Because only events such as the Worldcon itself, the Hugo Awards, and Robert Silverberg’s continuing unbroken attendance at Worldcons have lasted longer in fandom, *File 770*’s Ye Olde Editor asked that I produce a history of this party. The Chili Party has grown (or metastasized) from humble beginnings into something held at LASFS fundraisers, Westercons, Loscons, and something like twenty-two of the twenty-nine Worldcons I attended from 1972-2009. It has been held all over the continental U.S., thrice in Canada, and in Melbourne, Glasgow, and Yokohama. It began as an open party, but for reasons which I hope become understandable, is now closed. John Hertz has said (correctly) it is impolite to discuss a closed party to a readership that cannot get in, but I’ll explain how to gain access in the modern era.

As the name implies the Chili Party is (a) a personally-funded party I host at SF cons that (b) serves home-made chili, the American Tex-Mex soup/stew dish. At Worldcons I usually try to hold the party on Hugo night. One need not eat anything; some come for the ambiance. Simple, but like onions there are layers within layers.

In the early years I held parties in my sleeping room, but my present Worldcon *modus operandi* is to rent a separate party suite for Hugo night. In addition to beer, soft drinks, bottled water, and juices, hand-prepared fruit, vegetable, and, cheese platters, and dishes of candies, I usually serve three types of chili. One is a beef-based Hot version without beans, targeted for the high end of human toleration. It is usually labeled, for reasons that will become obvious, “Hot (To Everyone But Bob Silverberg).” A second beef-based Mild version with beans has kick but is tolerable to most. The exception was Marion Zimmer Bradley, who once came to me gasping and said “I can’t imagine how hot the Hot must be, if what you call Mild you think is mild.” In MZB’s honor this pot is usually labeled “Mild (To Everyone But Marion Zimmer Bradley).” In the last few years, after a failed attempt to produce an acceptably kosher version for Janice Gelb, I have offered Vegetarian chili based on portabella mushrooms. Condiments are saltine or oyster crackers, chopped onions, grated cheeses (mixed cheddar and Monterey Jack), and pitted black olives. At Loscons only, I also prepare a Bison chili, and offer additional condiments of brown rice, avocado, chopped scallions, and sour cream.

By necessity, when on the road, cooking takes place in my room on a single hotplate, to produce up to twelve total gallons. I observe scrupulous cleanliness, and wear a medical face mask and hair bonnet while cooking. I purchase canned and bottled goods days in advance, but depending on whether I have refrigeration, I may buy meats, cheeses, vegetables, and fruits (and definitely 100+ pounds of ice) the “day of.” I usually work alone and I miss all programming on party day. I can’t remember seeing but one Hugo ceremony in the past twenty years. I stay up until 4-5 AM just to clean and evacuate the party suite. I always generously tip the hotel maids.

Prelude

My first contact with fandom occurred in 1971. I was finishing my senior year at UCLA as a physics major, but I was also enrolled in a Special Studies English course under Professor Ben Vorpahl, for whom I wrote a 254 page paper on the then-recently-deceased longtime editor of *Astounding Science Fiction* (later *Analog*), John W. Campbell, Jr. I encountered Los Angeles fan Matthew Tepper at Sherry Gottlieb’s old Change of Hobbit bookstore; he told me about LASFS. I needed access to old issues of *As-*



Nippon 2007: Stephen Davis, Keith Kato, Grania Davis, Miho Hiramoto and Sachiko Shibano.

tounding from Campbell’s early years as editor, so I attended a LASFS meeting to ask if anyone had copies I could use. LASFSian Cy Condra volunteered his private collection. Matthew also told me of the upcoming 1972 Westercon in Long Beach and Worldcon near LAX.

By the 1972 Westercon I was gainfully employed and could attend, although being a neofan and not knowing any better, I commuted. My earliest memory of Westercon is of an attractive young woman in the hotel lobby screaming “Harlan!” and jumping into our Mr. Ellison’s arms in greeting, and attaching faces to names I knew only from print. And these room

parties.... In one, I stood next to this giant both physically and by reputation named Poul Anderson, who with beer in hand was leading the room singing limericks. I also attended the 1972 LACon I, where more faces-to-names began accumulating — such as GoH Frederick Pohl, Jack Williamson, Robert Silverberg, Terry Carr, Larry Niven, and a not-yet-published guy named Jerry Pournelle.

As many can relate, the “gosh-wow” factor infected me, so I made plans to attend the 1973 Westercon (Oakland) and Worldcon (Toronto). To me SF fandom is a collective of weakly- (or non-) interacting interest cliques that co-locate at cons, and being very neo and rather diffident around new people, I was having trouble finding my cliques. I also noticed many of the pros vanished during the nighttime open parties. It was at this Westercon, at a panel (endlessly repeated) on attending one’s first con, where one suggestion to meet people was to host a room party. Hmm. The problem was how to differentiate myself from every other soft drinks/beer/potato chips/pretzels open party.

I pondered this problem and thought (being a physicist) that the solution obviously depended on the “boundary conditions” I established: Be different (hah!), cheap (double hah!), and easily done by one person (quadruple hah!—you notice this is a geometric divergent expansion). My family seems pre-disposed to entertain large numbers of people. During my high school years, although we were innately a family of seven, we hosted summer barbecue dinners almost

nightly with several families and more than twenty gathered. My parents (back then) and my brothers and sister (now) will host around fifty or so at parties, Thanksgivings, and Christmases. I observed my mother making chili for one such gathering and thought it was simple enough for me to do. Aha!

1974: An Experiment In Insanity

The 1974 Westercon was at a private dormitory called the Francisco Torres near the University of California, Santa Barbara. This was no luxury hotel. The rooms were institutionally undistinguished, small, and sparsely furnished; you shared the bathroom with the people next door; and we took meals dormitory-style in a large dining room. The Francisco Torres was the site of the first Chili Party. I provided maybe two cases of canned soft drinks, four six-packs of beer, and a single gallon of my mother's chili using a packet of French's Chili-O mix. I posted a party notice, and when the door opened fans slowed wandered in. I served the chili in small six ounce plastic drinking glasses to stretch the number of servings, and several guests (none of whom I knew) commented how different this party was. The only pro I recall dropping in was Terry Carr, and in retrospect there was some irony that Bob Silverberg passed the door and glanced in, but did not come in.

Well that was an interesting experiment. I attended the 1974 Worldcon (Washington) and the 1975 Westercon (Oakland), but did not throw a party at either.

1975: The Damn Dam Breaks

I also did not attend Aussiecon, the 1975 Worldcon (Melbourne) to save money to begin graduate school in 1976. The WSFS constitution had been changed recently to permit the first NASFiC, which was won by Los Angeles. Coincidentally, and helpful to the cause, was a \$300 check (using the annual Consumer Price Index this about \$1,200 in 2010) sent out by the IRS as part of President Gerald Ford's Whip Inflation Now ("WIN") campaign. Since this was "found money" I set it aside and began talking with friends about hosting a joint party at NASFiC.

John Burchfield, John Scharles (both have long since gafiated), and Dave Gordon (who still attends occasional Loscons and Worldcons) each brought one pot of their own chili for the party. I brought Hot and Mild chili (nowhere near the recipes I now serve), but with the WIN money also brought a half-keg of Michelob beer, lots of soft drinks, and finger foods prepared by my mother: beef taquitos with guacamole sauce, pork-filled wonton with Chinese mustard and soy sauce dips, and Chinese chicken salad garnished with lemon juice and pepper. All foods were supplied in the typical Kato family quantities, huge, and the taquitos and wonton were fried on-site. We handed out business-card-sized printed invitations. Harlan seemed especially

enthused about the party, although Bob Silverberg reminded him "We're going to the Moroccan restaurant that night."

We reserved a room with twin beds plus rollaways for the con, but requested an adjoining room only for the party night. This turned out to be a mistake. NASFiC did not sell out the hotel, and the only way the hotel could honor adjoining rooms for one night was to put us outside the fan bloc among the mundanes. We did not know this, of course. We maximized the floor space in both rooms by disassembling three of the four beds and storing them in the closets.

During preparation we encountered a problem in fluid mechanics—none of us knew how to tap the beer keg. Dave Gordon went out and found the one guy who knows significantly something about nearly everything to help us, Jerry Pournelle. By the time Jerry arrived (his first words, softly and in some wonderment: "Is that a keg of Michelob?") we had, by trial and error, managed to insert the tap properly, so Jerry inspected and approved our work. Harlan knocked on the door in the late afternoon, and looking at the activity asked "Does the hotel know what you cuckoos are up to?" I let out a frustrated semi-scream, not directed at Harlan but mostly in self-pity at the realization this was a BIG job. If you've seen Chef Robert Irvine's Food Channel show *Dinner: Impossible* you know how I felt under the pressure of the moment.

Once the party began the room quickly filled to beyond legal capacity. As word spread through the con the crowd got even bigger, eventually spilling out into the corridor. During this chaos I met Larry Niven and David Gerrold for the first time, and The Wombat, jan howard finder, who had just come back from Aussiecon that day. Jerry Pournelle visited several times, the last after 5 a.m.

Harlan showed up, after what I was told was a nine (or nineteen?) course Moroccan dinner at Dar Maghreb on Sunset Boulevard. He gathered his bowl and sat in the middle of the only remaining bed, and seemed with each spoonful to unbutton another button on his waistband, all the while telling his Jerry Pournelle Chili Story. Jerry heard of this and walked across the room to offer rebuttal testimony. The event allegedly took place when Jerry, as SFWA president, visited Harlan's house with papers to sign. Harlan had been simmering his chili for several days continuously, and it was represented as so vile as to be the kind served in a shallow bowl, with salty crackers, and eaten with a teaspoon. Harlan said he served Jerry with a deep bowl and a tablespoon. According to Harlan, at first spoonful Jerry reacted with nostrils flaring, vein on his temple bulging and throbbing, and beads of sweat on the forehead. Jerry said it was potent but never that bad.

The kicker is alleged to be (this is hearsay only) that Jerry manfully finished his bowl but lost his voice for a little while afterward. Harlan also accused me, in that jocular Ellisonian way, of serving him "Pussy chili." I asked how he managed to eat hot food, and he replied it was because he had a Jewish mother, and Pygmies from Africa would come to dip their darts in her cooking. I don't recall Bob Silverberg at this particular party either, but that would change the next year as I would come under His Holiness's tutelage and evaluation on what "hot" actually was.

Eventually the mundanes complained to the hotel and a couple of security guys showed up. They were none too happy with the crowd size, congestion, noise, cooking, and three missing beds. To this day there are fannish stories that I was threatened by the hotel with ejection, arrest, and lawsuit, but I don't recall things getting that extreme. The concom became aware of the situation and immediately intervened on my behalf. The hotel agreed to let us continue (without me being ejected, arrested, or sued) if we thinned the crowd, closed the door, suppressed the noise, and (shown the beds stored in the closet) reassembled the beds.

Thus the first large version of what has become known as the Keith Kato Chili Party (I didn't name it that) came into existence and fannish consciousness. During the party, several people asked what con we were bidding for and were surprised when told "None." *Locus* reported on it. Larry Niven said this single event catapulted me to immediate BNF status, which I find hard to believe because most people at cons don't know who I am (see the George R.R. Martin story from 2003).

The year 1976 was pivotal for my life trajectory and this memoir. At the 1976 Westercon, Bob Silverberg made his first appearance at the Chili Party, beginning his almost-uninterrupted attendance through the years (with one glitch in 1993), and his much-valued advice on the ingredients needed to achieve his level of hot in food. Bob, my *sensei* of spice, suggested using tepin, which he said was the hottest pepper in the world. I was instructed to "crumble a few" pods per gallon to kick the heat up on what I thought was my Hot recipe, and I did so for the 1976 Worldcon party at MidAmeriCon (Kansas City). I found out just how potent tepin was: I crumbled some dried pods (they look like red BBs) with my fingers, then wiped my forehead with those fingers and raised a welt.

Upon leaving the 1976 Worldcon Chili Party, Bob declared it "a wonderful tradition" (and he is the Pope, therefore infallible), which is when something is done more than once in fandom. MidAmeriCon's GoH was Robert A. Heinlein, and I held a party that year in the hopes RAH would drop by. Unfor-

tunately, he was unable to come because his duties at the con took its toll on his stamina. Recall, he agreed to meet with everyone who even attempted to donate blood that year, establishing the Heinlein Blood Drive, also a continuing tradition.

After the 1976 Worldcon I began graduate school at the University of California, Irvine, eventually becoming Greg Benford's dissertation student and obtaining my Ph.D. in plasma physics. In one of those "six degrees of separation," in the Silverberg novel *The Masks of Time* (aka *Vornan-19*) the protagonist is the Schultz Professor of Physics at UCI. My graduate class in classical mechanics was taught by Jonas Schultz, whose wife was a college roommate of Bob's first wife Barbara, and who worked with Bob on the Columbia University school newspaper.

The Once (Not Future) Parties

1972 (L.A.con I, Los Angeles): Attended, no party held.

1973 (Torcon II, Toronto): Attended, no party held.

1974 (Discon II, Washington): Attended, no party held.

1975 (Aussiecon I, Melbourne): Did not attend.

1975 NASFiC (Los Angeles): Already discussed.

1976 (MidAmeriCon, Kansas City): The curative power of my chili was revealed. George R.R. Martin attended, I believe for the first time, ditching his own Hugo Losers Party. George said his (then-) wife Gale Burnick was sick, but asked if he could take a bowl to her. Half an hour later, Gale was up and at my party.

1977 (SunCon, Miami Beach): This con was at the Fontainebleau Hotel, which still used elevator operators. Guests told me when my floor was requested the operator would say "Oh, you're hungry!" and give directions from the elevator to my room. The Heinleins

were at this con, but could not attend my party because of his fatigue. Instead, they invited me to their suite for their private party. This was probably the year I handed out buttons with "Kato's Natural Gas Company" printed on them. This was inspired by a joke by Jerry Pournelle, who said he was no longer worried about energy shortages. Forget petroleum, coal, or nuclear; just feed everyone Keith's chili.

1978 (IguanaCon II, Phoenix): I had no real con activity except the party, spending most of my time in my room studying for my Ph.D. qualifying exam. Neil Schulman took a bowl to Harlan just before a late-night reading of his *I, Robot* movie script that Asimov really liked. I was told Harlan read his script between spoonfuls, and afterward asked the assembled throng "Does anybody know where Keith Kato's party is?" Jerry Pournelle brought the entire Norwegian contingent at the con to meet me. I spoke with Robert Forward about General Relativity. The next day, I encountered Ginny Heinlein with Jerry at poolside; RAH was home. After hearing Jerry praise the previous night's party, she said "I'm sorry I missed it," whereupon I said "I have leftovers." The three of us went to my room where I re-heated, and we had lunch. I gave Ginny his-and-hers "Natural Gas" buttons. Much to my amazement, just a few years ago Bill Patterson, the official Heinlein biographer, told me that in twenty-something hours of taped interviews with Ginny she mentioned the chili and me about six times. (By the way, RAH always said "Pay it forward," and I'd hope my work to help organize and run the 2007 Heinlein Centennial in Kansas City offset my debt to him, and her, a little.)

1979 (Seacon '79, Brighton): Did not attend. At my Westercon party earlier that year, upon hearing I was not going to Brighton, Jerry Pournelle said "You know what I'm

going to tell that rotten kid [meaning Greg Benford]? I'm going to take a can of Denison's with me and tell him 'We don't have decent stuff to eat, only this, and it's all your fault.'"

1980 (Noreascon Two, Boston): I announced my retirement from the Chili Party, with a manifesto explaining why. I cited the size, expense, effort, and that I could no longer sustain an open party of this magnitude. Ye Olde Editor's favorite line from my manifesto: "I did not begin this party to win a convention, become famous, or get laid. (Well....)" I left my spices at home, and after three days of vainly searching for replacements in Boston, my roommates mailed the spices via pre-FedEx airmail. I told my *The Empire Strikes Back* story for the first time: In the scene where Luke goes to Yoda's home, Luke removes a small snake from his bowl, sniffs whatever is in the pot and reacts, then tastes it and really reacts. At the showing I attended, I heard someone say in the dark "Must be Keith's chili." Never found out who said it.

1981 (Denvention Two, Denver): Did not attend.

1982 (Chicon IV, Chicago): "Unretired" by hosting a party to celebrate passing my thesis defense oral exam earlier that summer. First met Moshe Feder and Lise Eisenberg the day after the party, when Moshe introduced himself on the elevator landing and asked "Can I come to your party next year?"

1983 (ConStellation, Baltimore): Attended, but I don't remember having a party (I was not in the main hotel). I do remember *The Right Stuff* panel with cast from that great film, and Chuck Yeager. A Congressman who said his district was the Atlanta airport showed up to solicit SF-like ideas for a "Millennium Project" mentioned in his book *Window Of Opportunity*. His name was Newt Gingrich. During this Worldcon, the Soviet

(Left) The cooks at work at Nippon 2007. (Right) Anticipation 2009: The chili is served!



Union shot down Korean Air Lines flight 007.

1984 (L.A.con II, Anaheim): Hosted a party, but don't remember much, other than I met Masamichi and Michiko Osako for the first time.

1985 (Aussiecon Two, Melbourne): Did not attend.

1986 (ConFederation, Atlanta): As a fan of *Gone With The Wind*, I noticed while walking several miles to the nearest supermarket for party supplies that the dirt in Georgia really is red.

1987 (Conspiracy '87, Brighton): Did not attend.

1988 (Nolacon II, New Orleans): Attended, but did not host a party. Why bother when the French Quarter is just outside the hotel?

1989 (Noreascon 3, Boston): I recall this was the party where Greg Benford introduced me to the famous Marvin Minsky of M.I.T.'s artificial intelligence lab. As we three spoke, Minsky kept grabbing and eating bread slices from the bag.

1990 (ConFiction, The Hague): Did not attend.

1991 (Chicon V, Chicago): Another Worldcon where I think I had a party.

1992 (MagiCon, Orlando): Did not attend.

1993 (ConFrancisco, San Francisco): My room was at or above the 25th floor, and the elevator broke on party night. The elevator waiting line snaked outside the hotel. Bob Silverberg called to say the wait was prohibitive, and wouldn't be able to make the party—the only time this happened. Perhaps ten people showed up. The next day, I put the food into zip-lock baggies and distributed MREs (military-speak for Meals Ready to Eat, although the alternate is Meals Rejected by Ethiopians) to the homeless outside the hotel.

1994 (ConAdian, Winnipeg): The staff at the Louis Riel Hotel was especially helpful in preparing for this party. I could not find canned pinto beans in Canada, which also happened at later Worldcons in Toronto and Montreal. The room had a kitchen so I could cook several days in advance. After the first night of cooking, the hotel fire alarm went off at 4 AM, and my first groggy thoughts were "I've set fire to the hotel." The rain set off the alarm—Whew!

1995 (Intersection, Glasgow): Did not attend.

1996 (L.A.con III, Anaheim): Threw two parties at this Worldcon; the second was a non-chili function in honor of Takumi and Sachiko Shibano, the Fan GoHs. Used a corner room, and both party nights we got two fireworks shows, one from Disneyland, another from Angels Stadium. I told a four-way ethnic joke to a small group: In the af-



Robert Silverberg, Karen Haber and Keith Kato

terlife, how does a man know if he is in Heaven or Hell? In Heaven, he has an American salary, a British home, a Chinese cook, and a Japanese wife. In Hell, he has a Chinese salary, a Japanese home, a British cook, and an American wife. After polite laughter, we saw Sachiko Shibano giving Forry Ackerman a neck and shoulder massage. I hooked my thumb at them and said "Japanese wife."

1997 (LoneStarCon 2, San Antonio): There was a chili cookoff at the con; instead of participating, I was asked to judge. I could not since the cookoff was the same day as my party and I couldn't afford the time. Bob Silverberg took my place, and Karen Haber Silverberg later said I would have won. Walking miles in the noon sun to the supermarket taught me why Texans wear big hats. During the party, Rick Katze came in with breaking news that Princess Diana had been killed in a car crash.

1998 (BucConeer, Baltimore): Attended, and I think there was a party.

1999 (Aussiecon Three, Melbourne): My first overseas Worldcon—Greg Benford was GoH, and it was my 25th Anniversary party. Getting spices through Aussie customs was touchy; imported biological matter has a bad history in Oz. The All-Seasons Grand Hotel where I stayed had a kitchen, so I could prepare and store in advance. The only spilled chili in thirty-five years occurred when Laurie Meltzer dropped her bowl on the floor and her white tennis shoes. Next year, I see her pushing a baby carriage containing Joseph. Medicinal properties *redux*: My chili cleaned out Laurie's plumbing. Or maybe Morris had something to do with it.

2000 (Chicon 2000, Chicago): Attended, but no party held although not willfully—the hotel would not permit it.

2001 (Millennium Philcon, Philadelphia):

Did not attend in protest of the hotel staff's stupidity. In trying to book a room on the "party floor" the human on the other end insisted no such reservation contingency existed. I did call Moshe and Lise during their Wednesday pre-con party, though.

2002 (ConJose, San Jose): Attended, but no party held, having been cancelled by the concom. At the Gripe Session, Japanese fans made their displeasure known that my party was cancelled.

2003 (Torcon 3, Toronto): Cooked in the recreation area in the apartment where Ken and Frances Smookler live. At Closing Ceremonies, Fan GoH Ye Olde Editor thanked me from

the podium for many years of parties. There was no reaction from the audience that this statement meant anything to them. Pro GoH George R.R. Martin came up next and said: "I didn't know Keith was here! I love Keith's chili! How come nobody told me!" Thereafter whenever I inform George, I kid him it's only to stop his public whining.

2004 (ConKopelli, Litchfield Park) A disaster at Westercon, which was held at the Wigwam Resort outside Phoenix. The facility was spread-out bungalows next to a golf course. There were signs guiding fans to Party Row, but since my party was closed, no one could find me. Only four people showed up.

2004 (Noreascon 4, Boston): Hosted a party, but I don't remember much.

2005 (Interaction, Glasgow): My second overseas party. Party hosts used the Hilton's banquet kitchen, so cooking *etc.* was fairly easy. (Seeing how some fans prepared food, though, I never want to eat anything at future con parties.) The Hilton set up my party suite with chairs, tables, tablecloths, bowls, cutlery, glasses, ice, and chafing dishes. The door was marked "Private Party" so at a ten-foot radius one saw a semicircle of curious Euro-fans wondering what was going on past the door. The next day, the Hilton's cleaning crew and management reportedly swabbed the chafing dishes with bread slices to sample cold leftover chili. Using the local Scottish beef, this seemed to be the most flavorful chili I can remember.

2006 (L.A.con IV, Anaheim): My most extravagant and well-provisioned party. My sister helped, and she provided wrapped and piled-in-a-mound sushi, teriyaki chicken, wonton of various fillings, and Chinese chicken salad. Harlan attended after several years' absence. One of my mundane friends, wondering why a lot of people seemed ex-

cited, intercepted him at the buffet to ask “Why are you so revered?” Harlan’s immediate answer: “Because I am God.”

2007 (Nippon 2007, Yokohama): My most logistically difficult overseas party to prepare. One BIG problem was the cost a party suite for one night—¥132,825, about US\$1,150. Several “angels” in the Japanese fan community contributed to offset this cost by 10%. My room number was actually listed in the Pocket Program as “Closed Party.” When I told Bob Silverberg about this, I sputtered how listing a closed party in the open was so...so...so... when Bob suggested “Inscrutable?” There was a mall nearby where Masamichi Osako, Yasushi Okada, and I bought everything except beef. The store had only a pre-packaged beef-plus-pork ground mixture in 150-gram sizes, with no butcher shop for larger orders; the clerk was shocked when I asked for forty-five boxes. Yasushi got online and found another market, about 15 minutes away, that could grind seven kilograms of pure beef. Local fans and a restaurant owner lent me large pots and an induction hot plate, while the concon arranged use of a huge, blessedly air conditioned kitchen with stainless steel counters and walk-in refrigerator. I actually had STAFF—five volunteers—so I ended up personally not doing much cooking. My party suite was half Western (rug, coffee table, chairs, sofa) and half Japanese (*tatami* floor, low table, low chairs, with a pit under the table so people could sit with legs dangling loose) areas separated by a sliding panel. Shoes were not permitted on the *tatami*, so everyone unshod as they entered the room, creating a large annulus of shoes at the entrance. Bob Silverberg said I fed him his only enjoyable meal in Japan, since he does not like Japanese food. I told him I don’t either, since my mother prepared so much of it while I was growing up.

2008 (Denver 3, Denver): Noteworthy in that Bob Silverberg told me, after decades of trying, that I finally managed to burn his palate out. The Silverberg index for hot food is the number of times one wipes the forehead during the meal. Five is lethal, and once in the past he graded me 4.9. When I said “That’s quite an admission from you” he replied with Silverbergian *savoir faire* “I’m not the boy I used to be.”

2009 (Anticipation, Montreal): My 35th Anniversary party. I wore a tuxedo for the occasion, and handed out green badge ribbons (the 35th anniversary is jade) with “35th Anniversary [etc.]” and “Kato’s Natural Gas Co” on it. My room number was changed three times in four days. This party was more heavily attended than normal, in part because the hotel closed down all parties not on the party floor, including the SFWA suite.

“How do I get invited?”

The only open Chili Party is now Friday night of Loscon, where the concon grants use of the Presidential Suite of the LAX Marriott for a combined open party containing Carole and Elliot (“Elst”) Weinstein’s Church of Herbangilism Wine And Cheese Party, Rochelle Uhlenkott and Kenn Bates’s Dessert Bar Party (with infamous chocolate fountain), and the Chili Party with aforementioned Hot, Mild, Vegetarian, and Bison recipes. Occasionally I make my “seven by seven” vegetarian vegetable soup (seven vegetables and seven fresh spices) or pasta with meat sauce containing beef and hot Italian sausage.

Since my “un-retirement” in 1982, my Worldcon parties have been closed. Those who knew me from the beginning are grandfathered in. On a case-by-case basis I invite new people who share the dais with me on panels, or who take my Shotokan Karate Workshop, or who favorably encounter and engage me during the con. My rule-of-thumb is for invitees to be above the second standard deviation in some significant (to me) category of achievement; that is the top 2%. So if you are a *Playboy* centerfold or a Nobel laureate in physics, you are IN!

I expect my guests to be polite, pleasant, reasonable, and civil not only to me but my other guests. Please introduce your own guests to me. I have banned, disinvited, or ejected some individuals for cause, and I am the bouncer.

Was It Worth It?

At the 2009 Montreal Worldcon I was on a panel “Why I Fan” and I said I do not consider myself a fan in the sense fandom takes up a large portion of my life. Other than simply reading SF, I do not produce a fanzine, website, or blog, nor do I costume or filk. My only fanac is attending one or two cons a year, usually Worldcon and Loscon.

By comparison, outside the SF world I work on microwave directed energy, which is interesting, challenging, and (I hope) important. I have seven patents because of my work. I am a martial artist of forty-five years continuing experience. I patronize the arts, and see anywhere from forty to fifty live productions of plays, musicals, concerts, and operas each year. And I have six cats (OK, maybe that’s fannish).

One mathematical tool in physics is the Dirac delta function, which can be likened to a spike that is zero everywhere but one value, where it is infinite. The Chili Party is a delta function of fanac, an intense momentary blip of activity.

That said, what started out as a lark thirty-five years ago has enabled me to meet some of the most interesting and prominent names in SF (artists Freas, Sternbach, Rotsler, Whelan; writers Barnes, Bear, Bradley, Brin, Budrys, Dick, Gerrold, Herbert, Kingsbury,



Martin, Niven, Pournelle, Spinrad, Sturgeon; Grand Masters Heinlein, Williamson, Simak, de Camp, Leiber, del Rey, Pohl, Anderson, Silverberg, Ellison, Haldeman). It seems likely Greg Benford took notice me at the very first lecture of his graduate Mathematical Methods of Physics course because of my SF connection. This led to me becoming his graduate student, and my specialty in plasmas, pulsed power, and microwaves, which served as my entry into the directed energy world and a professional career. And I met and made any number of life-long friends too numerous to mention.

The conditions cited in my 1980 retirement manifesto remain true, and today are mitigated in that I can better cope with the expense. That I continue to do this party only shows I am certifiably insane: Doing the same thing repeatedly and expecting a different result. My Worldcon parties now officially end with me standing on a chair and declaring “I am never throwing this party again. See you all next year!”

So, is it worth spending more than a round-trip airfare from Los Angeles to London or Tokyo to throw a single party, or work intense hours before, during, and after, or miss one full day of a Worldcon, or miss the Hugos? The multiple choice answer is left as an exercise for the alert reader: (a) no; (b) no, but Keith is stupid to do it anyway; (c) hell no; (d) yes; (e) hell yes; or (f) all of the above.

The Heart of a City, Amsterdam

by James Bacon

I first visited The Netherlands over 20 years ago, being the destination for our annual family holiday one year. It was a time when trips to Brittany were about as interesting as it got for the school aged. So when my father decided to take the land-bridge to the Netherlands – by ferry and car – it was a great adventure. It was a great success and I subsequently spent more summer holidays there. When I was in my '20s, I journeyed to Amsterdam annually, with my father, brothers, friends and whoever else could go with me at the time – usually February – for a long weekend of indulging in all that Amsterdam had to offer. It is a fantastic city, much more than clichéd imaginings of windmills and legal weed.

On my last trip to Amsterdam, I traveled with my wife, Simoné – always my first choice in companions. She understands Dutch after a fashion, since Afrikaans is her first language. In practice, the South African tongue is a dialect of Dutch. To make matters more complicated, in The Netherlands, Dutch is called Flemish. All the better reason to bring her along. We stayed at The Grand Amrath which is about 5 minutes from the central station and therefore close to everything downtown, and – given its original office use – is both elegant and comfortable.

I know general travel writing is not a *File 770* thing (sometimes) but I thought that with the possibility of holding a Smofcon in Amsterdam, a small independent report would not be amiss. [*The site of Smofcon 2011 has been confirmed as Amsterdam.*]

Schiphol is a typical airport, the only real difference between this one and others I've used is that Schiphol has smoking areas. Smoking in the Netherlands has not been stigmatized as it has in some other countries, but then, also, smoking in the Netherlands is never rudely in your face.

The Netherlands is a heavily industrialized country, like England. The people are hard-working and eager to advance themselves. Agriculture, technology, electronics are all major industries and the countryside is dotted with factories, plants and workshops of every sort. These are a people who have fought against nature and stolen back land from the sea. As our plane flew over the coast, my wife and myself wondered if whether, when global warming drowns the rest of Europe, the Netherlands might be an island below sea level, protected by massive dikes fifty meters tall – like a well of land in a surrounding sea.

Of course, I know some readers of *File 770* will be thinking about Amsterdam specifically as a future Smofcon venue... whereas others may welcome any excuse for a convention so long as they can visit an interesting city. If the Amsterdam Smofcon bid wins, it would be held in the Victoria Hotel. It's a sumptuous venue and the first fine building you see as you walk out of Central Station. Having taken tea there, I can say it's a high quality hotel with an airy bar and open



Go Joker comic shop.

lobby. I am astounded at the potential price of rooms – an incredible deal! But less of the future, and more of the now. Amsterdam City Center is compact – in the sense that you can easily walk around to all the main attractions. If you want to do so more smartly, there are public trams run by the GVB. The hotel is just about 20 minutes by train from Schiphol Airport, and when one arrives in the city you are immediately immersed in Amsterdam's own, unique European feel that is impossible to put in words but is everywhere in the air.

Loving books and comics, I naturally intended to check out local stores when I was not playing the tourist, relaxing, enjoying good food and having a few beers. Our first evening was spent in "Humphries" – a well known Dutch restaurant that can be a bit of a bugger to get into, if you haven't made a booking. For 23 Euro, you order a three-course meal. The courses are changed every month, and specialize in seasonal local foods. The fare is intrinsically Dutch, and always very good. Deep, dark, wood furnishing, and friendly service adds atmosphere to the evening. After a gently paced meal, my wife and I ventured into the Red Light district.

Red Light districts – when safe – are always worth a stroll. One smells the waft of tobacco smoke on the air, and sees much. Our first venture was on a Wednesday night, and the area is quiet. Even in this day and age, it is still a surprise for many Brits and Americans to see sex for sale in such an open – and dare one say – *professional* manner. The area only covers a few canal-side streets, but is undergoing an enforced change. We noticed that "windows" – glass doorways, really – are being bought up by the government and turned into street displays. This is a rather slow process, but it is clear that the "Red Light" side of Amsterdam does not cultivate a sense of civic pride in every citizen.

We enjoyed a drink in "The Old Sailor," a pub in the heart of the Red Light district, and very much full of transient people in the habit of stopping before, or after, other refreshments. Even though it was in the middle-of-the-week, there was a slightly-party atmosphere. There is still an afterglow of the massive reception the national football team received, when they returned from their defeat in South Africa. Small pubs are frequent in Amsterdam; the smaller the better. You cannot walk far without finding one, especially on corners, so even on a leisurely stroll you can be tempted into any number of beguiling bars. From "The Old Sailor," we sampled one drink here and another drink there along the way, before finally staggering back to our hotel.

On Thursday I spent a little time looking at comic shops. I chose the "Go Joker" which is situated on the Zeedijke, on the Old Side. The building is from the 17th century and seems to be crooked,

leaning oddly – rather as though M.C. Escher had given one wall a gentle push. But inside, it seemed fine. Perhaps you adopt the “lean” when you go in?

Inside, the shelves on the left wall are lined with Dutch comics. “Strepboeks” is their word for them. There is a mezzanine with collectable and very old comics, while other shelves stock America’s best. The owner is relaxed and cheerful – an older gentleman, happy to direct the customers to exactly what they’re looking for. He was in the process of making changes in how the store was laid out. He was sorting at least a hundred boxes of comics back issues in the basement. They were all in a very easy to understand order, with a wide selection of comics in Dutch as well as in English. I found some fanzines while browsing. I was astonished to hear from the store owner that 42 comic shops in northern Belgium carry at least one Dutch title. These Flemish fanzines are very professionally done and though unable to read them I grabbed greedily. Soon I’d put my wife and her command of the language to even more good use.

A little way up the Zeedijk, towards the picturesque Nieuwmarkt, is “Henk.” This is a small, compact comic shop, specializing in *manga* and American imports. The shop had a sale on, and I bought a few a small sampling. I continue up the street, then, towards another book store. “The College” has a long hallway lined on both sides with books. With enough books, finally, to satisfy my need, Simoné and I head off to explore the rest of the city. We had opted to buy 7-Euro, 24-hour tram and bus passes, which is a much better deal than the 4-Euro per hour option. We rode toward the Westermarkt, where we enjoyed a superb lunch at the “Wester” restaurant at the corner of Prinsingracht at the Westermarkt. It was “toasties” for me; cheese, bacon and egg on pancakes for Simoné. It was a lovely restaurant and served nothing that was aimed at the tourist. We avoid anywhere that advertises “Traditional English” breakfasts. When we are in the Netherlands; we eat Dutch food. Likewise, we avoid “Durdy Nellys,” “The O’Neils” and any other “Irish” pubs, preferring local establishments and beverages.

The city has an incredible public travel network, and we made good use of it. The trams were frequent and quick, and very comfortable. We headed to the Waterloo Plien, in what was once the old Jewish quarter, and where today there is a famous Jewish Museum. The Waterloo Plien is also known for its huge, open flea-market. We found a large number and variety of stalls with semi-professional-looking people spreading whatever it is they have on sheets or tarpaulins. We enjoyed browsing, and made some few purchases – I was especially pleased with an ex-RUC gabardine, double-breasted, long coat for 25 Euro. We had previously decided on this trip to give the numerous art museums a miss. The Van Gogh, Stedelijk Museum and Rijks museums are incredible – I have visited them, and know whereof I speak – but they are not *the soul* of Amsterdam for me. This is confirmed by a charming Dutch lady who served us beer. We chatted about what in Amsterdam “was or wasn’t authentic” and she agreed that our itinerary was Amsterdam to a fault.

After spending a time in the flea market, we meandered back towards the center of Waterloo Plien. We took our time on the way back towards our hotel, our way taking us through the Flower Market first, then the ‘Munt Plien.’ A



De Slegte bookshop.

pedestrian shopping mall called the Kalverstratt brings us to a little lane we nip into, called the Rozenboomsteeg. There, underneath feral ivy foliage, we refresh ourselves with a drink in “The Café De Docktor.” The café interior is a deep, dark brown, and the fittings are encrusted with dust. There is not much brass to be seen. This beautiful pub, unchanged in many years, is a step out of kilter from the busy shopping street only two-dozen yards away.

In the evening, we sit down across the road from the “Café t’Gusthuis.” We sat next to the window over the Grinburgwaal canal to enjoy the evening. Watching the massive variety of boats weaving through a pinch point nearby, we were amazed at how many people own boats. Not as many as are on bikes, mind you. We decide we must hire a boat on our next visit.

For Friday, Simoné arranged something special – we crossed from our hotel to The Central Station and walked up to Platform 2. There we have reservations for a restaurant called, “1e klass.”

It was like stepping into a bygone era, the word of European railroads when 1st class meant *first class*. In the 1890s, the restaurant was the first class passenger brassiere at Amsterdam central station.

Here we ate breakfast as we looked out over platform 2b. Across the platforms I could see modern electric double-deck trains slide in-and-out of the station. What the scene needed, though, was a big red-wheeled, black bodied locomotive and a haze of smoke under the ceiling. The ornate wood paneling, detailed ceiling and fine artistic beams, deep green marble, the ambiance of furniture, solidly built from hard woods, added to the charm of the place. In a massive mahogany display case was a collection of blue-white Delft pottery. We noted many Dutch people enjoying their breakfast – a sign we had chosen well. The leather seating was reminiscent of Victorian era passenger coaches. But lest it all grow too familiar, a touch of the Dutch East Indies was provided by palm trees, flower arrangements and a resident parrot. You dared not get too close, as the bird would pop down from his massive perch, cheekily sidle along the bar and climb on your shoulder. He wouldn’t get off, just because you want to go.

“The Spui Book markt” is held on Fridays, much to our good fortune. The

Lambiek comic shop.





(Left) **Café Open.** (Right) **Spui Book markt.**

Spui is a quiet cobbled square that was once a pond, and comes alive once a week with a book fair. A wide selection and variety of publications were available from the local vendors – including one who is an American specializing in English paperbacks. A lady nearby had a table of fantasy. The Spui is an area surrounded by bookshops, with a branch of Waterstones (an English chain) at one end of the square and the American bookshop and at the other end. A number of pleasant bars face the Western side of the square. I'm sure you see what's coming. We stopped to relax outside the "De Beiaard." It had about ten different beers on tap, and three page menu to choose from that offers a generous bottled selection. I found the Steenbeugge triple at 9% on tap to be especially pleasant. Also on tap were Trappist, Dutch and Belgian beers, including the 12% Bush Amber.

The book market was wonderful. There were two sets of musicians playing, and down a laneway could be found the famous "Vlemminckx" and enjoy a chip lunch, double fried, with hot Belgian "war" sauce. There is a queue, but we don't mind on this occasion as the chips are renowned. The Dutch prefer a nice satay sauce, like warmed up peanut butter, but less viscous. "Frite Sauce" is another topping, like mayonnaise, but creamier, thicker and less tart. After enjoying our chips with live music, we slipped into "The American Book Shop."

It was an amazingly place, which can't be compared to anywhere in the U.K. The ground floor is given to magazines and a variety of popular culture book sections, the floor above is much bigger, and has a massive section of science fiction that dominates it. Here also are children's lit, Horror, *manga* and Graphic Novels. The novelty for us is that they stock American imports. The people stocking and buying obviously know and understand the genres concerned, and don't under-estimate the customer.

At long last I found the first book in *The Destroyermen* series by Taylor Anderson. This had been eluding me in the U.K. for ages. The store had so many other usually unobtainable American imports that we ended up with an impressive stack to check-out. We trawled their bargain sections and our luck continues. Although the new books were pricier than we were prepared for, the used books evened the expenses out. We did well to come here.

After this, we returned to De Sleghte, which is on the Kalverstraat where it intersects the narrowest part of The Spui. The store looks like any modern bookshop on the ground floor. It specializes in bargains and there is a decent selection of books in English just inside the door. It is modern and clean and light. There is a decent SF section on the ground floor as well, arranged alphabetically in an airy space at the back of the shop. The SF is multilingual, an indication perhaps that readers devour science fiction in whatever language they can, and a comment on the language skills of the Dutch. The first and

second floors feel like totally different shop, though – older, very old and second-hand books are displayed in long rows. Here the shelves are wooden and are tightly packed right to the ceiling. The light is dimmer and fustier, the atmosphere a dark presence. One end of the floor is a special section with interesting marine exhibits and model sailing ships in glass cases displayed between leather-bound tomes of undoubted antique vintage. One wall is nothing but glass cases of collectors editions for the well-heeled connoisseur of books. As if by inspiration, this suddenly seemed to be the perfect second-hand bookshop! And the floor above is only more of the same. Time slips easily by, as my wife considers the too-many books in Dutch that she would like.

Further up the street, we find the English bookshop in Kalverstraat (they also have a branch on Leidestraat that we didn't visit.) A good selection of remaindered and discounted books were available and included about thirty feet of graphic novels at *half* the UK price.

We took a break to do some mundane shopping, Simoné suddenly developing an interest in Birkenstock footwear on sale. After a refreshing drink nearby, we decide to continue our bookstore crawl a while longer, then head towards "Lambiek."

"Lambiek" is the most amazing comic shop in the world. OK, Jim Hanley's "Universe" in New York is impressive. "Gosh" and "Orbital" in London are the best the U.K. has, and give each other a decent run for the prize. ("Page 45" in Nottingham comes in a close third.) "Outer Limits" in Melville, near Johannesburg, South Africa, may be the best in that whole continent. Although I yearned to read French, I could only salivate at the massive amount of *Bandes Desinees*, in "Album" on Boulevard Saint-Germain. In comparison with all of them, though, "Lambiek" is still *the* best.

It's not that it claims to be the oldest comic shop in Europe, or that it has many wonderful items, or that they seem to have two shops, a comic shop, with a massive selection of books, and an art gallery with displays, original art, prints and unique T-shirts to view, or that it has an appreciation of comics, displayed in the order of author. But "Lambiek" surpasses any store that I've ever seen for providing customer service. The help engages the customer at a level of natural friendliness that is unique in my experience.

OK, Aronn in "The Dreaming" in Seattle is incredible... but anyhow.

On our visit, the staff was helping my wife find comics in Dutch. She was looking for something similar to "Dark like Hellblazer," but in Dutch. Meanwhile, I purchased some Buck Danny, The Black Hawks (not the same as the DC one) and Biggles comics. They were all in Dutch, as there are very few translated editions – but the artwork is so beautiful, and at €2 each, they were a steal. I being a Friday evening, one of the staff offered my wife a beer. Soon, everyone had a glass. We chatted comics, and they loved it when my

wife attempted to speak her odd kind of Dutch. Like everyone in Amsterdam, they initially recognized the accent was not from the Netherlands. They tried English, yet she continued in her Afrikaans, and you could see in their eyes that they were amused. And as we left we were given a Chris Ware comic that he created *especially* for “Lambiek.”

That is world class.

On Saturday, we were slow to get up. The beer at “Lambiek” led to more beer, and perhaps a little too much good food. We laid in bed a while, enjoying the luxury of a holiday. Simoné discovered another “interesting restaurant” in a brochure, but it was literally off the downtown map we had. It was just as well it was, as it gave us an incentive to see sights further off the beaten track than we had so far. But, when we consulted Google Maps, the restaurant proved to be closer-by than we thought. “Cafe Open” is built on a swing bridge that had once been used by the railway to cross the entrance to the Prinsengracht canal from the IJmeer. The railway is now disused, but the asymmetrical bridge still spans the broad canal. We took the way going through the Central Station and along the waterfront – brisk with ferries taking cyclists to-and-from the North Side of Amsterdam.

We spot the old architecture of the industrial bridge. A modern passageway was built over it – a rectangular structure of glass, with a foot bridge leading down from one side of the canal. We entered a very modern and clean restaurant. “The Kitchen” was airy and the furniture functional. From one side there was a great view of the dock and the other bank of the river. Every few minutes, a train or two crossed a massive modern bridge leading to Central Station. This restaurant is just 800 meters, a 12-minute walk from the central station. We must have learned to blend in by then. None of the Dutch couples enjoying their afternoon, appeared to realize we were strangers. Despite Simoné’s “Dutch – or because of it – we are welcome.

Exquisite food arrives almost unnoticed, brought by an unhurried waiter – there were home-made breads and seafood chowder. We have time for a cigarette between courses – which might not have suited the

impatient American fans I encountered in Montreal – but here, on holiday, we moved at Dutch speed in Dutch restaurants. Excellent taste and presentation and atmosphere should not be rushed. or fretted over. Each serving should be significant and a few moments of relaxation between courses is beneficial. I was loath to leave this idyllic eatery my wife had led me to. But it was time to take our leave and wander up the Leidsesraat Market, where we knew we would find our fill of fresh fruit, breads, vegetables, books, comics, toiletries, cheese, fresh and smoked fish and many other treasures. No wonder that the citizens of Amsterdam carried bags with them at all times.

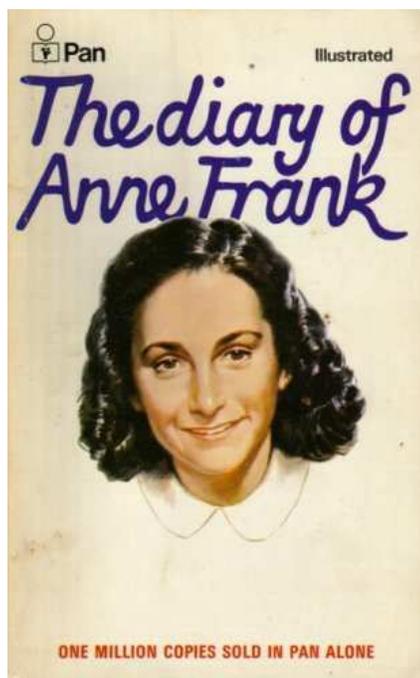
If Simoné and I had an agenda, it was beer, culture, books and more beer. So it was that we make our way to “t’Arendsnest” on the Harrengracht canal. Translated, this is “The Eagles Nest,” although it is no relation to the more famous Bavarian pub of the same name. We sat outside, and relaxed. There were 30 beers on tap, 15 different *types* of beer, and over 120 different varieties in bottles. As well, we could have ordered from 100 Dutch Jenever (a local type of Gin) and even a selection of Dutch *whiskey*. Everything here is Dutch. It reminded me of the ale pub in Addiscombe, Croydon, *The Claret*. But this was on a far larger scale and with an even more antique decor. The blackboard listed beer up to a 13.4% bock. Simoné declined to live life dangerously in favour of a milder 11% brew.

Our next stop was to be the Anne Frank Huis. This is a destination that is nearly mandatory for visitors to Amsterdam. The long queues at all times of day – even 9 p.m. on a summer Saturday what the Dutch do – went on-line, well before, to book a convenient half hour slot, then walk past the queue and in through a second doorway especially for ticket holders. There is a limited number of tickets, so don’t tell *everyone*.

Tickets sell out *very* fast so book *well* ahead. It’s an amazing museum, though, and worth even a wait in line. One has to remember that Anne and her family hid in rooms that were an almost forgotten annex to a building that was itself only a small jam ingredient factory with offices, and it was a very small place. The building has been repaired and renovated to recapture its 1940’s look. Unlike many museums, where hundreds can get lost at any one time, it is difficult to have more than twenty people in any of the original rooms that made up the Anne Frank Huis.

When you enter, one is lead slowly through the exhibits downstairs. There is video footage documenting the history of the Frank family, their escape from Germany to Holland, and finally their taking refuge in the annex. One sees the offices of the co- conspirators who hid the Franks and supported them for over two years. There are displays of actual items from the house. Then you are conducted through the open bookcase – an image that must be immediately recognizable to any book reader in the western world – and into the world where Anne spent the last of her short life.

Once in the dim Annex, one soon realizes they are standing in an empty room, with no furniture. (Otto Frank, the sole survivor of the family, asked that it never be shown with furniture – models show how it once was.) Even so, it is surprisingly tiny. The entire Annex where 8 people lived was barely 500 square feet.) This was where Anne Frank spent her long days and wrote her diary. It is an incredible experience to look at the same floorboards and walls and imagine it was 1942. One continues through the rest of the Annex, and then out into the actual Museum, a modern



(Right) Anne Frank House.



building adjoining the Anne Frank Huis. The horror of the Holocaust is driven home with the stories of each of the eight secret residents after their betrayal to the Nazis. One by one they die, all but the father, Otto. Then you see the diary itself, laid open for all to read. I cannot. But Simone's Afrikaans is near enough to German, as well as Dutch, that she can understand the handwritten words. Outwardly stoic, she is soon inwardly overcome as impact of a loving young girl, with such wonderful aspirations and observations, brutally snuffed out by ideological machinery that hated and feared her merely because she was a Jew. Simone lets her emotions speak for themselves. My wife is a strong woman, of great character, and not easily fazed. But her feelings are much too intense to conceal.

Who could fail to be moved? I remember once seeing Otto Frank on the BBC children's program, *Blue Peter*. He was interviewed by a childhood crush, and I may have tuned in more to watch Janet Ellis than whoever she happened to be interviewing at the time. This must have been early 1980. Mr. Frank had previously been on the show, when *Blue Peter* visited the House, in 1976. But even when he spoke about Anne Frank four years later, he was just as captivating. I made a point to read the book, soon after, and like many other young readers, felt something for Anne. She had been a girl only a little older than I, but because of the Holocaust would never age.

This is the real sense of history. When one stands where Anne stood and feels what she felt, the brutality of the Second World War becomes more personal. It happened to her; it could happen to you; it could happen to anyone of us.

The modern building next to the House is a massive resource. It contains libraries and is used for and meetings and forums. It is a legacy to us so that we should never forget what happened next door. Thanks Anne's daily outpourings, and the father who preserved them, is doubtful anyone ever will. I am grateful to Mr. Frank for his efforts on behalf of his daughter. Seeing her words into print, seeing the house protected and expanded into a temple of understanding and learning – they are a gift to the world that has outlived him, and will outlive me.

Even though our stay in Amsterdam lasted another few days, and the best secondhand bookshop had yet to be visited – I've not even mentioned the Book Exchange – I no longer feel the desire to write.

Rather, I shall sit a quiet moment. I shall share thoughts with the Dutch people, savor their conviction that the Anne Frank House is Amsterdam as much as the bock and the tulips are. I'll wonder how much a part of the Dutch character the horror of invasion and the destruction of a people has become, and how far the writings and life of one young German girl, taking refuge in her adopted city, had made it so. I'll think about the girl who looked out of me from the cover of a Pan book, pretty and neat. She is embedded in my memory thus. I'll try to think of her, too, without her smile, reduced to skin and bone, incarcerated in a place of utter horror devoid of hope or humanity, her sister deathly ill, her mother and father separated from her and presumed dead, lice infested, starving, a slave... and how it is any wonder that she died – crushingly – only weeks from liberation.

Hopefully, I will not be able to picture it at all. The real Anne Frank is immortal.



Helping the Worldcon, and the World Too

Colin Harris has invited Renovation committee members to help him form a Kiva team. Kiva is an organization that facilitates microfinance, providing financial services such as small loans to low-income individuals and those without access to typical banking services, often in the Third World. The team would be independent of and unrelated to the Worldcon, the members simply having that fannish connection in common.

So far 17 team members have stepped forward. They have put \$4,025 out to loan in 102 transactions.

Colin, a past Worldcon chair (2005) and part of this year's Worldcon committee, explains: "I thought that creating a Renovation team was a nice idea because I was sure there would already be Renovation members who were also Kiva lenders and that they would enjoy this chance to link their interests together. I also thought that it would raise the profile of Kiva with Renovation members who've never heard of Kiva or microfinance, and maybe encourage some new people to join. So it reflects my personal support for Kiva and what it stands for.

"The first key point to say straight away is that this isn't an official Renovation activity (hence for instance you won't find it linked from our website or discussed in the PRs). As I'm sure you know very well, things like official con charities are very contentious and within any staff or member community there will be a spectrum of opinion from 'conventions should have nothing to do with "causes" as they are inherently political (with a small "p" at least)' to 'science fiction as a genre is highly sensitive to the future of the world and of society and the SF genre and SF fans have an opportunity, indeed almost a duty, to try and make the world a better place.'

"The idea for the group was mine, and I openly admit to appreciating both of the above views. SF IS a genre of the future, full of stories that help us think about the world we are in now or the one we're creating, and I have always met many fans who (as fans or professionally) are concerned to make the world better. However I also believe that it's wise to avoid such initiatives becoming official convention activities because there IS a diversity of views about any specific cause and that can become divisive. Far better in my experience to provide space for special interest groups etc, so that fandom helps those who want to come together, while not forcing participation or contribution on people against their will."

This is an open team — anyone can join -- click on <http://www.kiva.org/team/renovationsf>

The first step is to create a personal account on Kiva. Deposit funds, then choose who to lend them to. Colin explains, "This creates a direct connection between lender and receiver which makes the experience much more tangible for lenders. The idea is to spread risk, so a loan of \$1000 total will typically be covered by e.g. 20 people lending \$50 each in case of a default. (You lend in units of \$25). When funds are repaid to your account, you can lend them again, or withdraw them – so it really is a loan arrangement, not a charity donation.

"Teams are just way of affiliating the loans you make to a social group. If you're a member of a team (and you can be in none, one, or more than one), then when you loan you get asked if you want to count your loan against that team.

"I am very taken with the idea of micro-finance as a way to encourage sustainable development in a tangible way, rather than an aid dependency culture. I've been a member of Kiva for about 18 months now myself."