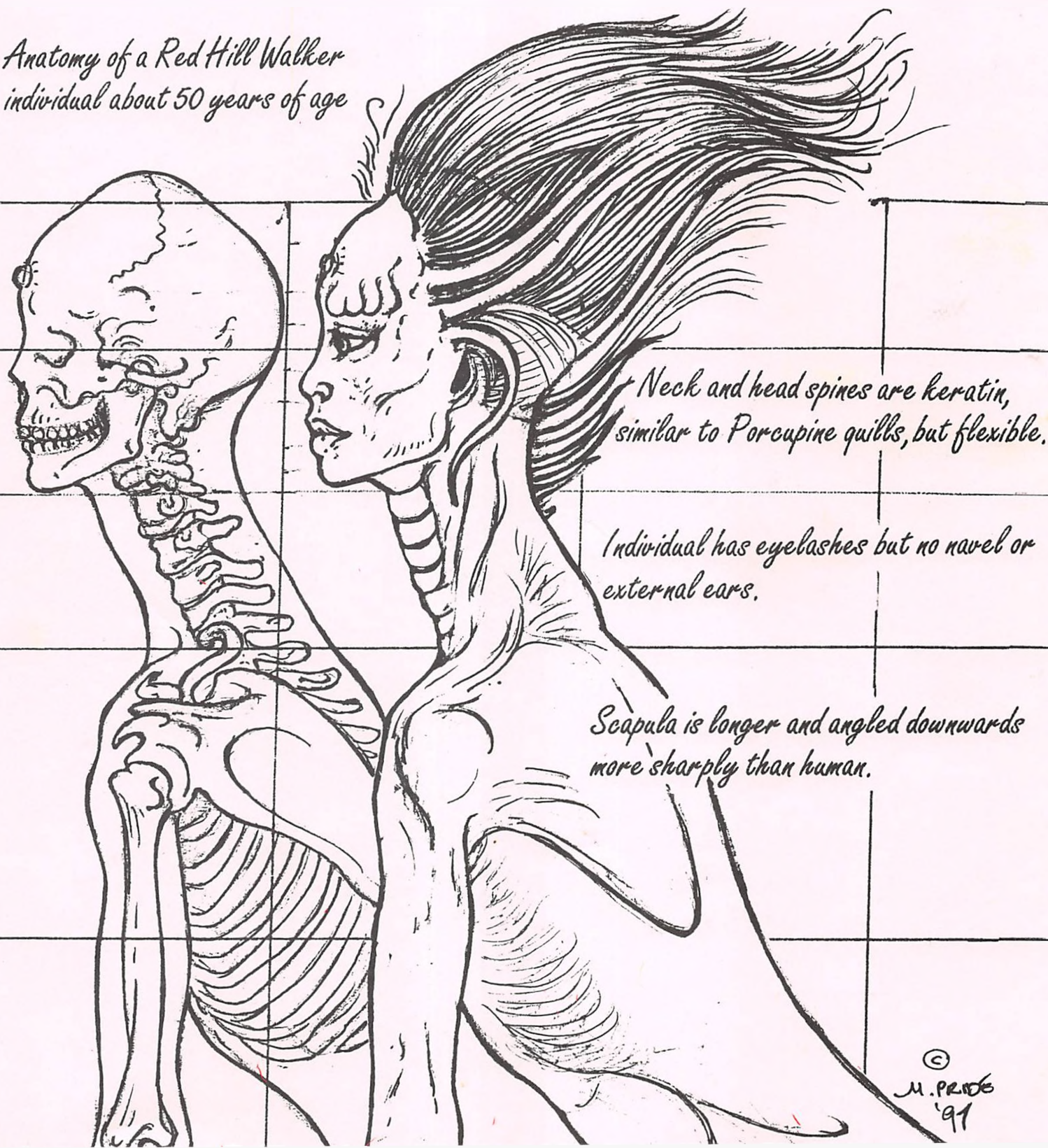


aussiecon three

progress report # 1

*Anatomy of a Red Hill Walker
individual about 50 years of age*



*Neck and head spines are keratin,
similar to Porcupine quills, but flexible.*

*Individual has eyelashes but no navel or
external ears.*

*Scapula is longer and angled downwards
more sharply than human.*

Progress Report #1 - Aussiecon Three

The 57th World Science Fiction Convention

Thursday 2 September through Monday 6 September 1999

World Congress Centre, Melbourne, Australia

<http://www.aussiecon3.worldcon.org>

Aussiecon Three, GPO Box 1212K, Melbourne, 3001, Australia

Aussiecon Three, PO Box 266, Prospect Heights, IL 60070-0266, USA

Guests of Honour

Gregory Benford

Bruce Gillespie

George Turner

Contents

Chairman's Message, by Perry Middlemiss	3
Greg Benford, Fan, by Ted White	4
Bruce Gillespie	6
George Turner, by Judith Buckrich	8
Board Members	10
Committee Structure	10
Membership Rates	11
Dealers Room	11
The Convention Site	11
Judith Buckrich, Conversation with George Turner	12
Standing On Foundations, by Greg Benford	19
Membership Lists	23

Advertisers

Buccooner	19
Toronto in 2003	23
Chicago in 2000	24
Boston in 2001	26
Philadelphia in 2001	28
San Francisco in 2002	30

Business Names and Service Marks

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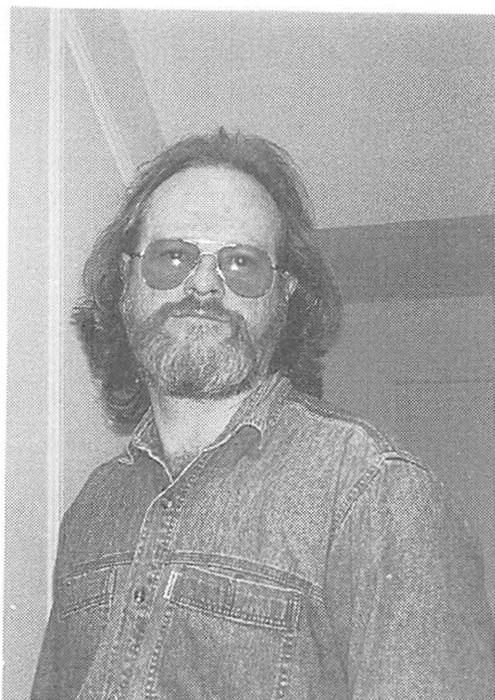
"Aussiecon Three PR#1" dinosaur cover by Marilyn Pride, who has agreed to provide the dinosaur drawings for future PRs. The drawing on this cover is an anatomical study of the main creature Marilyn did on the Aussiecon Two Program Book cover. It is part of a study for a graphics novel Marilyn is working on.

Progress Report 1 Editor: Eric Lindsay

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Incorporated

Chairman's Message

by Perry Middlemiss, Chair, Aussiecon Three



Welcome to the first progress report for Aussiecon Three, the 1999 World Science Fiction Convention, and the third Worldcon to be held in Australia. As I write it is some eight months since LACon III where we won the right to hold the convention and there are still more than two years to go before the actual event

This progress report has been designed to provide you with all the information we can muster at this time. In it you'll find details of our guests of honour, the convention site and associated hotels, and lists of the committee and our current members. As is the way with such long-term projects there is a lot of information that you will require in the next few years that isn't included here, but have no fear, future progress reports will gradually fill in all the gaps in the data log until we hope you reach a state of "knowledge bliss," with all the data you need and very little you don't. Or, at least, that's the current plan.

It is with profound regret that I announce that George Turner (one of our guests-of-honour) won't be with us at the convention. George has been rather unwell over the past couple of years and in early June 1997 he suffered a massive stroke, from which he

never recovered, and he passed away on June 8th. He will be sadly missed. He will, however, certainly not be forgotten, and while he may not be able to be with us at the convention in a physical sense, we have every intention that he will remain a Guest of the convention and that his life and work within the science fiction community will be remembered and honoured.

By the time we get to 1999 it will have been 14 years since the previous Worldcon held in Australia. It will have been a long time between parties for some of us and we hope to put on as good a show as we possibly can. While the programme details are yet to be finalised you can expect to see items covering all aspects of Austn and world science fiction and fandom, in all its forms - from professional publications to fanzines, from hi-tech hi-budget movies to low-everything amateur productions, and from fan hall costumes to professional artwork. We intend to encompass as much as we can of our rapidly growing field and to aim to exclude nothing as a matter of principle.

We look forward to seeing you in Melbourne for the start of spring in 1999. It's the best time of the year in this wonderful city. And we hope to put on Australia's best Worldcon yet.

Progress Reports Schedule

Progress Report #2, Mid 1998.

Progress Report #3, January 1999.

Progress Report #4, late April 1999.

Progress Report #5, "catch up" issue, July 1999.

Deadline for advertising space reservations for PR#2 is 1 April 1998, deadline for material is 1 May 1998. All ads should be camera ready. Contact us for details or revised advertising rates.

Greg Benford, Fan

by Ted White

In this Modern Era he's known as "Gregory Benford," the author of *Timescape*, and a goodly number of other important skiffy books, but to many of us he's still good ol' Greg Benford, faaan.

We remember when he and his twin brother Jim, stationed as Air Force brats in Germany, published a scrappy, nifty fanzine called *Void*. That was only forty-odd years ago — and several of those years were odd indeed.

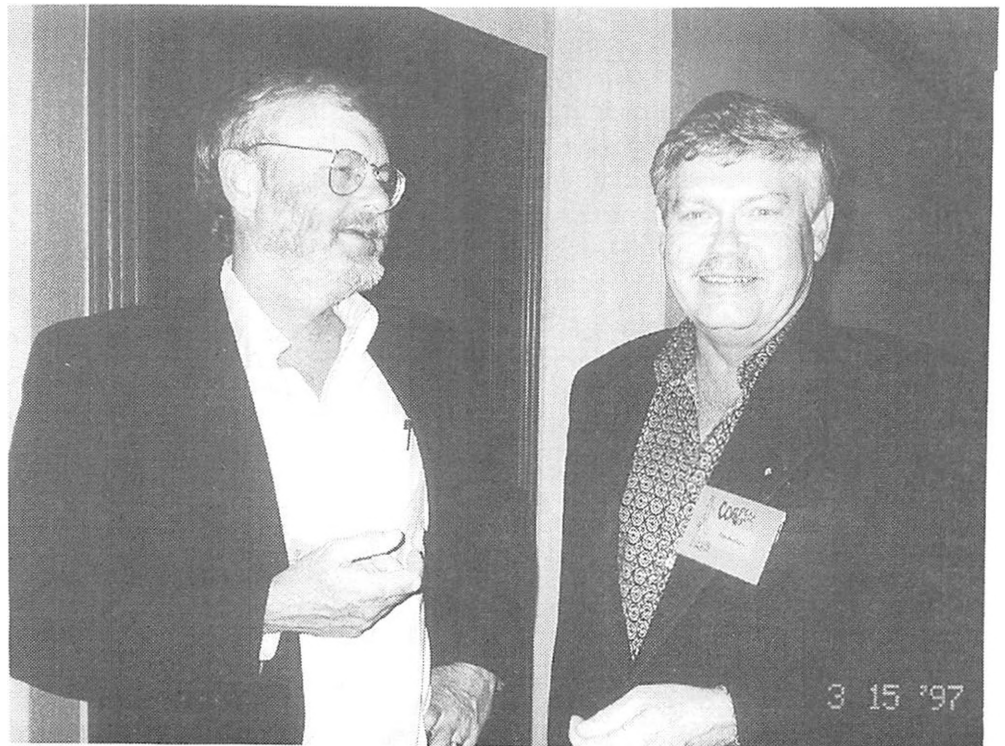
Not long after they returned from Germany and started their college years, Greg suggested I co-edit *Void* with him (Jim, the co-editor and art director — he stencilled the art — didn't want to continue with *Void* by then), which was the beginning of a new tradition: the growing list of Void Boys, to which we added Pete Graham and Terry Carr a year or two later.

Greg was pretty busy in college, working toward his first degree in physics, but he wasn't too busy to be a fan. He continued to write editorials ("Happy Benford Chatter"), and to edit the lettercolumn for *Void*. And the rest of us were happy to do our bits for His Fanzine.

I met him for the first time at the ill-fated 1964 Worldcon, in Oakland. Actually, I met both Benfords for the first time at that con. At first glance they were identical and not easy to tell apart, but I looked for the subtle clues. One such clue was the fact that Jim was wearing contacts, while Greg still wore glasses. As a fan I had Broad Mental Horizons and was able to deal with such subtleties. More difficult to grasp was the fact that neither Benford twin was related to Alva Rogers (whom I also met at that same convention — or, rather, at a party which preceded it), who looked uncannily like a (much) older brother, uncle, or father of the twins.

What is amazing to me is that, while the rest of us have undergone the normal aging process in the ensuing years, turning from teens into middle-aged (and older) sorts, the Benford twins have changed in appearance very little. (One popular theory has it that Greg came up with a new theoretical physics approach to immortality — it involves going faster than light and circling the universe so fast that one returns younger than one was upon departure — and Jim, whose forte is applied physics, invented the

*Greg and Jim Benford
at Corflu, March 1997.*



machine that made this possible.) Talk with Greg for ten minutes and you'll notice that he still possesses the energy and enthusiasm of a teenager.

I noticed this at Silvercon, a couple of years ago, when Greg and I were guests of honor. He was the pro GoH, I was the fan GoH. But if anything, his speech at the banquet was more fannish than mine. Greg still gets excited about fandom, and he has the energy with which to imbue that excitement. And an aura of fannish mischief hovers over him.

Back in the late seventies, when all the Void Boys had become skiffy pros, I floated a suggestion to Dave Hartwell (then the primo editor in the field) that we do a final issue of *Void* — as a book!

"I can see it now," I said, waving my arms. "We do a Typical Issue, you know, with *Void*itorials, articles, all the usual stuff, but we do it in a book format!"

Greg liked it, and Hartwell seemed at least intrigued, but Terry Carr poo-pooed it. "That's silly, Ted," he said. "No one would buy it."

That was before Greg had written the book (*Timescape*) whose title would become the imprint of a whole line of books (Pocketbook/Timescape Books) — after which his name alone might have sold a *Void* book. (But, by then, the Downunder Version of *Void* — the semi-prozine — had appeared, and without even a Please May I or a Thank You to the Void Boys....)

Actually, the last (and, it turned out, Final) issue of *Void* had come out in 1969...more than seven years after the previous issue. Terry and I had put much of it together in 1962, and in fact I'd run off a third of that issue in 1962, before bogging down on it. I hosted a New Year's Eve party at which conversation turned at some point to that unfinished issue, and, Arnie Katz and John D. Berry in tow, Terry and I unearthed both the run-off pages and the file of unstencilled and unmimeod material.

"Let's finish it and put it out," someone said. It was probably John Berry, still filled with the enthusiasm of a neofan. "Let's do it now," someone else said. It was probably Arnie Katz, still filled with the smoke of serconnishness. Terry and I both sighed and said, "Sure. If you guys will do the work."

So we devoted the next two days to a whirlwind of activity, John typing stencils, Terry and I stencilling artwork, and Arnie coordinating us. We had only one problem: Greg was 3,000 miles away. In this pre-fax, pre-e-mail era, there was no way to get a contribution

from him — but an issue of *Void* without "Happy Benford Chatter" was unthinkable.

Terry had the answer: "You do it, Ted."

Terry was referring to another Old *Void* Tradition, one somewhat less known, the tradition of *Void* editors writing each other's material. There are sections of my *Void* editorials from the early sixties that were written by Terry, and Terry was not above inserting a paragraph or two in Pete Graham's editorials as he stencilled them.

So I wrote a "Happy Benford Chatter." I wrote one entire section — the part about the new issue — from scratch, and stole the rest from late-fifties editorials Greg had written, with minor updating to make them seem current. Thus, Greg maintained his place in *Void*, and, as I expected, no one caught on; no one remembered the earlier editorials from which I'd cribbed.

In fact, Greg himself seemed confused about the editorial. The next time I talked to him, he asked me, "Did I write that? Parts seemed familiar...."

We talked frequently in those days — the late sixties — because Greg was working at the Lawrence Livermore Lab, which had a WATS Line — the precursor to modern toll-free lines. He used to call me once a week, and we'd chat for an hour or more. Some of it was about writing (Greg was in the process of becoming a skiffy pro) and The Field, but more of it was fannish chatter and gossip.

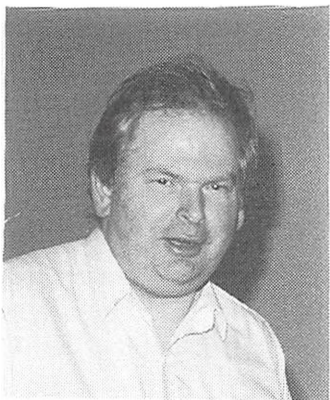
Over the years we've kept in touch, visited each other, and run into each other at cons, and if Greg's fanac has dwindled with his success as a Filthy Pro and Reknowned Physicist, it has never ceased entirely. He still contributes occasionally to fanzines like *Trap Door* and *F&SF*.

So, when you see him at Aussiecon Three, don't rush up and ask him to autograph one of his books. Instead, just walk up and ask him, "What's new in fandom, Greg?"

And watch him really light up with bright enthusiasm.

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Bruce Gillespie



[We couldn't find anyone to do a better job of introducing Bruce than Bruce himself. This is from an apazine for Acnestis. (Eric Lindsay, PR1 editor)]

- I was born on 17 February 1947.
- Lived at Oakleigh, a suburb 13 km south-east of Melbourne, Victoria, Australia, then all round Melbourne; some time in the country; then inner suburbs.
- Parents: Frank (d. 1989) and Betty; two sisters: Robin (b. 1948) and Jeanette (b. 1951).
- Went to school at Oakleigh State School (now called Oakleigh Primary School) for Grades 1 to 6 (1953-58). Then to Oakleigh High School (now defunct for lack of students, although it had 1100 of them in 1959) for Forms 1 to 4 (1959-62). Then to Bacchus Marsh High School (50 km west of Melbourne) for Forms 5 and 6 (1963 and 1964). Three years of Arts, majoring in English and History, at the University of Melbourne (1965-67) followed by a perfunctory year of Diploma of Education (1968).
- Bought my first copy of *Australian Science Fiction Review* in 1966, but joined fandom only at the beginning of 1968. First convention: 1968 Melbourne Science Fiction Conference.
- Thrown to the wolves in 1969: attempted to teach for two years at Ararat Technical School. Liked teaching about as much as D. H. Lawrence did. Worst two years of my life, but
- Began publishing *SF Commentary* at the beginning of 1969. The first eighteen issues appeared in its first two years!
- Beginning of 1971: by a weird series of accidents I gained a job I liked: editor/writer for the Publications Branch of the Education Department; invaluable pressure course in learning to edit magazines and books and write for magazines.
- 1972: Gained first Ditmar Award and first Hugo nomination for *SF Commentary*. Kissed a woman for the first time. (Don't laugh immoderately. If it hadn't been for fandom giving a boost to my minuscule self esteem, I might never have got around to kissing.)
- 1973-74: Quit Publications Branch to do my one and only Big Overseas Trip. Four months in Canada and USA (Torcon to beginning of January 1974); one month in Britain (all of January 1974). I recovered, although most of the people I stayed with didn't. Met in America someone I wanted to marry, but for the usual complicated reasons, didn't.
- 1974: Became a freelance editor, and lived in a wonderfully grotty flat in Carlton Street, Carlton. Met Elaine for the first time, although she doesn't remember the event.
- 1975: Many exciting turn-ups, including the formation of Norstrilia Press with Carey Handfield (and, later, Rob Gerrand). Our first book was *Philip K. Dick: Electric Shepherd*. Also Aussiecon 1, Melbourne's first Worldcon. I was officially coordinator for Ursula Le Guin's Writers' Workshop. Rotten coordinator, but I did get to meet Ursula, attend the Workshop and write some stories. Attempted to share my life and grotty flat with a wonderful woman. This lasted from August until October.

- 1976: Did various lugubriously awful things, such as falling in love with a woman who was already in love with someone else. Wrote agonised fanzines about all this. Finished the year sans flat, sans job, sans much hope at all. Everybody should have a year like 1976 to remind them how good the rest of their life can be.
- 1977: Invited by Elaine and Frank, the bloke she was living with, to share their large flat in Collingwood. I brought with me two cats (my cat Flodnap, and Flodnap's cat Julius) to add to the household's Solomon, Ishtar and Apple Blossom. Gained a half-time freelance job as assistant editor of the magazine of the Victorian Secondary Teachers Association. Was flat broke most of the year. Elaine and I found that we lived quite comfortably in the same house.
- 1978: Frank finished his medical course, and was posted to Tasmania to do his internship. After what seemed to us an uninevitable series of events, what other people took as inevitable happened: in early March Elaine and I began 'living together' rather than 'living in the same house.' Early April: freelance work began to pour in, and I left the VSTA job. Phew! Norstrilia Press bought an IBM Electronic Composer (a cross between an IBM golfball typewriter and a computer). I began several profitable years of typesetting books for NP, Paul Collins, Hyland House and several other publishers.
- 1979: Elaine and I get married almost exactly a year after we started living together. A small event, with 14 close relatives. The wedding photos show that I had lots of hair then, and Elaine had very long hair.
- 1980-84: My work began to disappear, even as Elaine decided to become a proof-reader and editor. Not enough money to publish *SF Commentary*, so it did not appear for eight years. In a fit of madness, I published *SF Commentary Reprint Edition: First Year 1969* in an edition of 200 copies; 80 of them are still unsold.
- 1984: Macmillan offered me the arrangement I'm still working under: I stay a freelance, but work mainly for them, first as an editor, then as a desktop publisher. With real money in my pocket for the first time in three years, I began *The Metaphysical Review* (and revived *SFC* in 1989).

Elaine rose quickly from being a freelance proof-reader to being a full-time proof-reader, to gaining a full-time job as editor.

- 1985: Financial disaster! I bought a CD player, and then began buying CDs. Lots of them. Virtually bankrupt by 1987, but Elaine rescued me (and got me to cut up my Bankcard). CDs are still my favourite waste of time.
- Not much after that except keeping our collective heads above water. Elaine's mother died in 1987, my father in 1989, and Elaine's father a year later. Grow old; wear trousers rolled; disappearing hair; much death of old cats and acquiring of new cats: present crew are TC (16 years old and fading), Oscar (11 years old), Theodore (10 years old), Sophie (5 years old), and Polly (7 months old). Elaine became a freelance editor, also working at home, a couple of years ago. Because she's one of the few maths/science editors in Victoria, she has plenty of work.

In summary? My story is that of a very shy lad who happened to find science fiction fans, the one group of people who could (partially) socialise me and give me a place to exist. Fandom has been very kind to me. My story also shows the yearnings of someone who would have liked to do something magnificent in the literary line, but could never work out what it might be, and is now sure that he hasn't the talent to do it. I've never written a novel because I could never think of an idea that might stretch to 60,000 words. I've had a few stories published, but, dispirited by my own stuff, have written no fiction for ten years.

Kosher Tour

Not part of Aussiecon, however former DUFF candidate (and 1995 visitor to Australia) Lucy Schmeidler plans a Kosher Tour of Australia. You don't need to be a convention member, nor keep kosher, nor be Jewish, nor need you come from overseas. Contact Lucy at 470 West End Avenue, New York, NY 10024-4933, phone +1 (212) 580-0207 or email lucys@panix.com

George Turner

1916-1997

by Judith Raphael Buckrich

George Turner was born in Melbourne in 1916, but spent the first six years of his life in the gold mining city of Kalgoorlie in Western Australia at the height of its boom. He has had a strange and complex life, and since the 1960s, has possibly been the greatest influence on Australian science fiction as a critic, essayist and writer. The great love of his life has been science fiction. Like all great loves it is full of contradictions and marked by periods of neglect, partial attention and total passion.

His love of science fiction began when his father read and re-read *Alice in Wonderland* to him at the age of three. Some cousins remember him as being able to recite whole passages of it off by heart. When he was eight or nine, he started visiting one of his aunt's houses and there found the works of H. G. Wells and Jules Verne. After that there was no stopping young George who started to buy copies of *Amazing Stories* as soon as they arrived from the U.S. at the newsagents opposite St. Paul's Cathedral in Swanston Street, where he was a not so angelic choir boy. He was addicted to these, and would often take the risk of stealing money from wealthier relatives to buy them.

Although he was already writing from the time he was ten — or perhaps even younger, he did not send anything away to a publisher till he was over 40. This was a novel called *Young Man of Talent* and it was immediately accepted by Cassell in London and published in 1959. It was a sort of war novel.

He wrote six mainstream novels between 1959 and 1968. For one of these, *The Cupboard Under the Stairs*, he received a joint Miles Franklin Prize. His last mainstream novel was the much under-rated *Transit of Cassidy* which he finished in 1968 or 1969, but which was not published till 1978, just after his first science fiction novel, *Beloved Son*.

In 1967 George Turner had met John Bangsund who was publishing *Australian Science Fiction Review*. Turner began to write for it immediately. Among his first contributions was an article called "The Double Standard" in the June 1967 edition of

Austn Science Fiction Review. And with little experience at criticism he confidently took the reviewers of science fiction who wrote for the fanzines to task about the quality of their reviewing.

Beloved Son was a success. It was doubly delightful that *Transit of Cassidy* was finally published, by Nelson, at almost the same time. *Cassidy* had come second as an entry for the Alan Marshall Award in 1977, and Thomas Nelson who financed the award decided not to publish the winner, but rather to publish *Transit of Cassidy*.

The next book, *Vaneglory*, was set mostly in Glasgow. It was about a group of beings who looked exactly like humans, but who were in fact genetically able to live forever. It was set in an apocalyptic world in the near future (as are many of Turner's works), which was slowly dying from destruction of the biosphere and from radio-active dusting being used as a weapon of war.

The third of this loose trilogy, *Yesterday's Men* (Faber and Faber, London 1983) is a strange book set in the future in Niugini. I say strange, because in some ways it harks back to his first novel *A Young Man of Talent*, and not only because the two books share the setting of the jungles of that extraordinary country, but because both novels are also about soldiers and war. Turner has often said to me that war is really the place where men grow up, that he believes that war, for men, is to some degree like childbirth for women. *Vaneglory* (Faber and Faber 1981) and *Yesterday's Men* (Faber and Faber 1993) were building in the detail of the fictional world that Turner has more or less stuck to since *Beloved Son*.

His next book was the autobiographical *In the Heart or in the Head* (Norstrilia Press 1984). It combined a parallel life of George Turner and life of science fiction, and is a gem as an overview of the latter, but hides more than it reveals about Turner himself.

Then *The Sea and Summer* came out in 1987. It won the Arthur C. Clarke Prize and the Commonwealth Literary Prize for the South East

Asian Region. The book tackles so many issues that it's hard to write a summary. Here are just some of them — overpopulation, the greenhouse effect, political corruption and poverty. It is set in the far future with a few sharply different characters looking back at a near future in Melbourne. It is this near future that really takes up the bulk of the book. The story is about a family in crisis, except that the crisis is permanent and a symptom of the crisis the world is having. Turner's vision of Melbourne is gripping, especially to readers familiar with the geographical areas he is describing, and this strange picture of the familiar altered only slightly is more startling than any alien world full of strange creatures, and much more disturbing.

Each of his books in turn seemed to be more exciting and more human. And Turner himself was, throughout this time involved not only in the science fiction scene, as a critic, and very often as the father figure who young writers would send their manuscripts to, but he now gave lectures on science and the future to conferences and groups outside science fiction circles, indeed outside writing circles.

Brainchild (AvoNova, New York, 1991), *The Destiny Makers* (AvoNova, New York, 1993) and *Genetic Soldier* (AvoNova, New York, 1994) are Turner's most recent books and all have contributed greatly to the science fiction of ideas and ethics which continues to play such an important role in literature and cultural debate.

Turner has contributed greatly to Austn literature. His point of view is totally individual; he writes with a purpose. He writes because he cares. The big picture is always the world we are creating, and the small one the struggle of the individual to deal with it, and his or her ultimate loneliness in this struggle, despite, or often because of those who share the struggle. As to us, his readers, he has given the gift of the future or really the gift of the present. It is a simple truth that none of us can ever know the future, but understanding the present might help us to a better world.

Bibliography

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A Stranger and Afraid: Cassell, London 1961
The Cupboard under the Stairs: Cassell, London 1962
A Waste of Shame: Cassell, Australia, 1965
The Lane Dog Man: Cassell, Australia, 1967
Transit of Cassidy: Nelson Australia, 1978

Beloved Son: Faber and Faber, London, 1978
Vaneglorry: Faber and Faber, London, 1981
Yesterday's Men: Faber and Faber, London, 1983
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The Sea and Summer: Faber and Faber, London, 1987
Brainchild: AvoNova, New York, 1991
The Destiny Makers: AvoNova, New York, 1993
Genetic Soldier: AvoNova, New York, 1994

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George Turner died on 8 June 1997.
 He will be greatly missed.



Executive Board

Stephen Boucher, Donna Heenan, Perry Middlemiss, Dick Smith, Leah Smith, Alan Stewart.

Committee Structure

Division	Area	Person
Chair	Advisors	Perry Middlemiss
		Martin Easterbrook
		John Foyster
		David Grigg
		Carey Handfield
		Robin Johnson
		Mark Olson
		Robyn Mills
		Jean Weber
		Danny Heap
US Division	Legal (Australia)	Dick Smith
	GoH Liaison	Dick Smith
	Resident Larrikin	Mark Linneman
	Finance (US)	Jim Wesley
	Legal (US)	Lanny "Inky" Waitsman
	Mail Room (US)	Leah Smith
Contingency Planning	Printer's Devil	
	Muse	
Administration	Finance (Australia)	Perry Middlemiss
		Julian Warner
	Mail Room (Australia)	Justin Ackroyd
Publicity	Electronic Corress	Julian Warner
		Alan Stewart
	PR#1	Eric Lindsay
	Club Liaison	Beverley Hope
	Library Liaison	James Allen
	Publishers Liaison	Alan Stewart
	Web Site	Eric Lindsay
Membership Services		Christine Dziadosz
	Memberships (Australia)	Jamie Reuel
Facilities		Stephen Boucher
WSFS		Stephen Boucher
	Hugo Awards	Roy Ferguson
		Justin Ackroyd
	Business Session	Jack Herman
	Site Selection	Covert Beach
Committee	Board Member	Donna Heenan
	Board Member	Leah Smith
	Merchandising	Scott and Jane Dennis
	Airline Liaison	Michael Jordan
	Dealers/Hucksters	Justin Ackroyd

Want to help? Write or email us!

Membership Rates

Before 1 November 1997

Attending	A\$175	US\$140	£90
Supporting	A\$45	US\$35	£25
Child	A\$45	US\$35	£25
Infants	free	free	free

Child memberships available for those born after 1 September 1987.

There are **discounts** for those who were presupporters, and those who voted in the site selection election held by L.A.Con III. Contact us for pricing. These discounts will end after 1 November 1997.

After 1 November 1997

Attending	A\$200	US\$155	£95
Supporting	A\$45	US\$35	£25
Child	A\$45	US\$35	£25
Infants	free	free	free

Dealers Room

The reservation of tables in Aussiecon Three Dealers' Room is now available. An A\$50.00 per table deposit, to a maximum of five tables per dealer, is due upon booking.

When booking, please send the following details: name, business name, address for all correspondence, phone, fax, e-mail, type of merchandise, and special requirements. Payment may be made by cheque or credit card (Mastercard & Visa - just send or fax your card type, card number, name as it appears on the card, and the expiry date), and a receipt will be issued immediately.

Please note that all dealers must be attending members of Aussiecon Three, and that Aussiecon does reserve the right to accept or not accept any dealer.

Please direct all correspondence to:
Justin Ackroyd – Aussiecon Three Dealers' Room
G.P.O. Box 2708X
Melbourne, VIC 3001
Australia
Phone & Fax:
Within Australia: (03) 96391511
Outside Australia: +61 3 96391511

Further details (final table price, hours of business, et al.) will appear in a later Progress Report. If you have any queries in regard to Aussiecon Three's Dealers Room (e.g. Australian Customs requirements for overseas dealers) please do not hesitate to contact us.

Weapons Policy

Basically no weapons. The masquerade director may approve weapons as part of a costume entered in the masquerade.

The Convention Site

The convention returns to Melbourne, Australia, to a new site for us at the World Congress Centre, and the attached Centra on the Yarra hotel, located by the banks of the Yarra River, just 1.5 kilometres SW of the centre of Melbourne, on Siddeley Street near the corner of Spencer Street and Flinders Street.

The three function floors of the World Congress Centre include two theatres, plus program rooms and a ballroom. 6,900 square metres is available. The Centra on the Yarra hotel is attached to the site.

The reception areas for both the World Congress Centre and the Centra Hotel are directly off a ramped vehicle access around the Centre at the second floor entrance to both. (In Australia, as in North America, the second floor is the one immediately above the ground floor.) This area is flanked by seven smaller meeting rooms, and a tiered 400 seat theatre style room. The hotel has kitchens, restaurants and a bar downstairs, while the World Congress Centre ground floor is exclusively utilities and unloading areas.

Escalators take you from the lobby up to the main function area on the third floor, and open directly upon the atrium. At one end, full length windows give a view of the city and river. There are five rooms for smaller panels (130 capacity), plus a 1000 person room. The largest room on this level is the tiered 1400 seat Batman Theatre (not named after the comic book hero). The top floor contains another five smaller rooms (180 capacity), and a pair of considerably larger rooms, which can be opened to form a 2500 capacity ballroom.

All rooms, including concourses, are fully carpetted, and all partitioned walls are sound absorbent and reach the full height to the high ceilings. There are lifts (elevators), escalators and stairs to each floor. There are disabled facilities on some floors. The centre meets Australian standards for handicapped access.

Judith Buckrich in Conversation with George Turner

This conversation took place on the eve of George Turner's 78th birthday, at Turner's home in Ballarat. I was asked by the editors of *Eidolon* to interview Turner in September 1994, well into the third year of my work on his biography. We found it difficult to stick to the 'interview' framework; our association has been based on many 'interviews' towards the biography and on correspondence. During the course of time we have become friends and developed the habits of conversation that always go beyond the bounds of interview; we find it difficult to stick to 'the point,' thus the result is a conversation, and not an interview.

My brief from *Eidolon* was to talk mainly about Turner's last four books, *The Sea and Summer* (Drowning Towers in the US), *Brain Child*, *The Destiny Makers* and *Genetic Soldier*, and about science fiction in general.

Let's begin with The Sea and Summer. What were your motivations for writing it?

I wanted to write a science fiction book in the mainstream form - concentrating on people and events. And about the greenhouse effect, but about how it could affect people, not the environment.

Aren't you one of those science fiction who always write about people?

To a great extent, but in this case I wanted to write a novel that would not depend upon science for its effect. There were people in a situation (in *The Sea and Summer*) and they had to behave as their situation drove him. Nothing to do with being driven by new inventions or anything of that sort.

One of your other great interests is population. You've spoken at conferences about it, you've written about it. Do you see the kind of problems that appear in The Sea and Summer around you already?

Not in Australia. But in other parts of the world. For instance in the situation in Africa, with all the tribes fighting in central Africa in particular. I think

that a lot of that is driven by overpopulation. They're clearing the jungle. The same is true in South America, particularly in Brazil where the natives are being practically deprived of their living. In fact they're moving into the cities because their jungle living has been destroyed. They've got nothing to eat unless they move into cities.

You always write about people in cities, apart from in Genetic Soldier where there are no cities left. Don't you see any impact, even in a city like Melbourne?

Melbourne, or any big city, provides me with things that I can look at and I can say, yes, well that won't last, or this has got to be changed; things of that sort. For instance the towers in *The Sea and Summer* are the direct outcome of bankrupt government and automation. Of course we haven't even seen the beginning of automation yet.

Do you think there's going to be a lot more?

Oho, we think we've got ten percent of people out of work and that's bad. I think it will go to forty and fifty before we're through.

Do you think that in your following three books, your science fiction has continued to be people-driven?

Once I've got the general idea of background, the characters are the main consideration. Particularly the main characters: they have to be set even before I start writing.

What do you mean they have to be set?

They have to be a physical and mental type and I have to have some idea of their philosophical orientation; what kind of people they are. And from then on they stay that way. As events happen, they have to react to them in the persona I've given them, they're not allowed to act any other way.

So you control it quite strongly, how these characters behave?

No, I don't control them, that's the point. Once they're set, they're out of my control: they have to react to what happens.

What about what happens, do you have an idea of what will happen? I mean obvious at the beginning you have an idea, but do things ever develop completely differently to what you expect?

Quite often. I know the end of the novel to some extent - I know the point I want to get to - but I don't know what will happen in the middle; that has to take its own way. So what happens generally is that the last twenty thousand words might take up to six months to write because I simply don't know where I'm going and how I'm going to get there. And it might take me six months to work it out.

When you say the main characters have to be set, what do you mean? The main three or four? Is it also true of the minor but important characters.

No; they're the sort of people that major characters are liable to run into.

Because of the kinds of characters they are?

But also because of the circumstances under which they live.

I want to ask you about your female characters. I know you have been asked about them before, but I think in Genetic Soldier there is actually a change in your attitude towards them. Do you think there is a difference between the way you set your female characters and your male characters, or not? For instance in The Sea and Summer, the two mothers: were they two characters that were already set?

No they weren't. The middle-class mother (Alison Conway) was an afterthought. When I started describing the house, the idea of the husband killing himself came to mind, and then I realised that there had to be something to hold the family together, so I turned back and wrote the introduction from her point of view. And it also gave me the final scene. But the two boys, Francis and Teddy, and Kovacs, they were set. And the other woman, the business woman, Nola Parkes. She was necessary in order to get the boy on his upward path.

So I'll ask the question again: do you think there is a difference in the way you set out to write about men and the way you set out to write about women?

Not sure. Let's go on a bit of a diversion here. Right from the start, when I first started to write, I was determined that there weren't going to be any forced love affairs. Because as far as I can see in actual life, either the women are central to what's happening or they're peripheral. Even when you have a family man who is, let's say, involved in business affairs, the plot is going to hang on him. If you have the plot centred on a woman, you have to handle it from a different point of view.

Now, I write about men, because I know them better. But when it comes to - there must be some women naturally, then I sit down and start thinking what sort of women are these liable to be.

Now, for many years, before I started writing science fiction the personality of my mother dominated the female characters far too much. Eventually I got rid of her in *Beloved Son* - it was rather a brutal act, but still, I did it.

Then I found that I was interested in my father, who I didn't know. Well, I was six years old when I last saw him, so I can't remember. From then on I started to concentrate on rather different female types. *Brain Child* used quite a lot of them, fairly experimentally really. In *The Destiny Makers*, I knew what I was about then.

What do you mean, you experimented with female characters?

I gave them very definite, strong personalities. And they were created simply to kick the book along.

In Brain Child when David Chance has that sexual experience with one of his "aunts" - Belinda - that's quite an extraordinary scene. There's a woman who is so strong, even if she is a bit two-dimensional. That's a thing I find in your work, that you have a way of presenting female characters as two dimensional, but enormously strong. It's confusing. I kind of admire them, but I don't understand their motivation. This happens more with your female characters than your male characters.

Yes. All my female characters are strong, but I've never sat down to think about it. I think what happens is that I conceive the strength first and then I build the woman around it.

It's not how you work with men.

Sometimes it is. Kostakis in *The Destiny Makers* was like that. Whereas Osrov (also in *The Destiny Makers*) was aspects of me. And Kovacs in *The Sea*

and *Summer* appeared full blown. I don't know where he came from.

Perhaps it was a result of living all those years in St. Kilda with all those East Europeans around you. Were you affected by that at all?

No. I'd had five or six years working in an employment office (1946-1951 approx.) so I knew all those different kinds of people backwards and forwards.

Do you still draw on that?

Yes I do for odd traits of personality and actions.

*When you're writing, is each book a different experience? Can we talk about the difference between writing *The Sea* and *Summer* and *Brain Child*?*

The Sea and Summer was an outcome of one of my mainstream novels. I simply wrote that with a complete concentration on the characters. *Brain Child* was a very deliberate book. It was started as a short story and I realized that I'd told the wrong tale. So I sat down and wrote the right one.

How long does it take you to write a book?

About two years.

And how does it happen; what happens in those two year?

Usually I start with an introductory twenty thousand words to establish the theme and style, and then I throw that out and start all over again.

How long does that take?

About six months.

And then you throw it out?

And then I write all the things I've learned in the six months.

When you say six months, do you sit down every day to write?

No, I'm very bad in that respect. I stop writing at the slightest excuse.

Is there a particular time of day when you like writing the most?

At night, though lately I've begun to write in the morning, since I've been here in Ballarat.

Are there times when the thing is doing nothing but gestating?

Whenever I come up against a point where I start wondering what happens next I simply stop and shove it down into my subconscious and in a week or so I can say "oh yes, that's it."

What do you read, George?

What do I read?

I'm trying to get an idea of where you get your inspiration from. Where are your sources?

I read everything that you can think of. The classics, science, essays.

Do they input into the work as you're going along?

I don't know. They produce useful facts. My inspiration usually comes from whatever happens to be interesting me at the time.

*What inspired *Brain Child*? Was it just concern about genetic engineering?*

To a degree. But more the science fiction idea that the super mentality has got to be a super mind in the way that we understand it: like our own minds only better. I tried to point out that there might be all sorts of different minds. And that they wouldn't necessarily be better, they would be less effective in some ways. And then there's the questions of how we as normal people would react to them. I came to the conclusion that on the whole we wouldn't want them (the superminds).

*And that's the tragedy of *Brain Child*, isn't it, that they're like aliens and so the others don't want them? But is *Brain Child* also about a search that someone makes with their own life? Is the search for one's life a common thread in your work? It was there in *Transit of Cassidy* too.*

Yes it is. But it's common to a lot of novels. It was there in *The Destiny Makers* too. Though Ostrov isn't really searching, he realizes that he has to change his mind.

Change his mind about what?

About his whole attitude to life really. It begins with his parents, who as a youngster he's more or less despised, and finishes up in the last couple of pages looking to all the things he can do for other people. He's had a chance to have a look at his own subconscious.

It's interesting that both in The Destiny Makers and The Sea and Summer it's the ordinary people that you like, and that the reader gets to like. Do you admire these people who are struggling to live?

I don't know about admire them. I understand them.

Does that come from your own experience? Or from your mother and grandmother?

Actually it is mother's struggle. I've never really had to struggle. I haven't had it easy. On the whole I've had it pretty good. Even in times of recession I've always had a job.

There was that one time when you went to Sydney and you came home broke. You said that you literally had nothing.

Yes that's true. I had no money and no job. What did I do then?

All I know is that John Bangsund gave you a typewriter.

Oh I know, I went to work for Carlton & United. It only took a few days. The first thing I tried was the Melbourne Tramways, but I had to tell so many lies about my age [GT was over 50] that it was a waste of time.

Did you want to be a tram conductor?

Anything. I just wanted a job.

George Turner the tram conductor - that would have been great.

Then I tried Carlton & United. Someone suggested it. I had to lie about my age there too, but no-one checked it. They found out eventually though.

What did you say when they found out?

They asked me why I'd lied, and I said that I needed a job, that's why. By that time I'd had a promotion, so what the hell.

Getting back to the books, the last four are very different from one another, much more so than the first three science fiction books [Beloved Son, Vaneglorry, Yesterday's Men].

Yes. Three of them were set on totally different worlds. The fact that they were all set in the greenhouse was just a background.

With a book like The Destiny Makers which is so much about politics -

No.

You don't think so?

Pretty superficial politics.

It does have a go at political corruption of the kind that exists in the world today.

Yes; I accept corruption as part of politics.

What did you feel about The Destiny Makers when it was finished?

It was a 'plotty' novel. I was all the time working out how to get from point A to point B. The only really connecting thread in it was Ostrov's self discovery.

Well if you weren't happy with it, did you try to rewrite it? Or did you just accept it the way it was?

No, I just accepted it the way it was. I got to the end and felt that any kind of rewriting would have to take a whole new theme.

So would you say that, of the last four novels, this was the one that satisfied you the least?

Yes.

How have the reviews been for the four?

They've all had good reviews, except *Brain Child* had one real stinker from Brian Stableford. But I didn't worry too much about that; on the whole they were well reviewed.

The Destiny Makers was too? Did anyone mention that it was too plot-driven?

No.

Let's talk about Genetic Soldier. When did you finish writing it?

Sometime early in 1993.

What was the driving force for it?

Originally it was a short story called "I Still Call Australia Home". Someone, I think one of the fans, wrote and said that in the short story. there didn't seem to be enough reason for a starship coming home to be driven away. So I provided a reason. And, working backwards from there, I had to create the different kind of characters. And it involved creating a world that was very simple on the surface and very

complex underneath, because I don't believe that there are any simplicities in human relationships; none whatsoever. And it had to be a kind of civilization that the 'old' people couldn't merge into whether they wanted to or not.

And there were lots of other things that I wanted to put in too. For instance, the idea of a starship leaving Earth and looking for other planets; now that's a commonplace of science fiction, and one of the things I wanted to point out is that as far as other liveable planets go, there might be one in ten million. It's very unlikely that they'd find any in a lifetime, which really is the reason they wanted to come home.

In the Locus (August 1994) review it says that Genetic Soldier is a book about a homecoming starship, but it also calls it a Utopia. And you've just said that that's how it seems on the surface, but really in order for human beings to create a real Utopia, they'd have to become something else, wouldn't they? And there is the theme of belonging and the question of home. Tommy in Genetic Soldier eventually runs away from his home because he doesn't belong even though he has always lived there.

He's running for his life.

Yes. But right from the start the reader senses that he is different, that he doesn't fit into the forced genetic system of the place. He's friends with someone who is not in his own group; his father is an Ordinand, he has a whole lot of things in him that mark him out, including the fact that he was conceived in 'Carnival.' And 'Carnival' is a very strange concept too, a time when anyone can mate with anyone. Is that part of the Utopia, or is that a 'disorder'? And is there something tragic about the starpeople coming home and not being able to stay. The disappointment of not finding yourself or what you're looking for is a common theme in your work isn't it?

Yes. But I think it's true of most people. I think most people are disappointed with their lives. People grow up to marry and have children, and that is the great ambition, but I wonder how many of them are satisfied with it? They don't seem to be satisfied with their wives or husbands, or with their children. They, think, if only, they'd taken the other one it would have been better. But it would only have been different. I've always had the feeling that as human beings we're only at a transitional stage, that we're only at the beginning of understanding what it means

to be human. And if we last several hundred thousand years, and we get to the roots of intelligence and are able to manage our lives, then humanity will begin. This is only a childhood stage.

Do you think that people are conscious of this? Do you think people are not just dissatisfied with their lives, but also with the limits of their humanity?

Yes. That could be true. Imagination is the great refuge.

For people like you and me, who were only children and found our refuge in books - and you started writing early too - imagination is the great refuge. But do you think that's true of everyone? For people who don't write or paint?

Of course. They dream of having money, they dream of having brilliant children, or success in their jobs. They always dream of something they're not capable of: the great ambition of the beauty-contest winner who wants to go to Hollywood, but who'll just marry the boy next door.

When one first starts to read Genetic Soldier the air is clean and there are gum trees, the reader is aroused to a kind of longing. When you start writing about a world like that, or like the far future world of the autumn people in The Sea and Summer, is there something in you that longs for that sort of world?

No, I'm a city boy. Not that I haven't had country experiences; I can appreciate it, but I don't want it.

Yet when you write about it, there is a strong sense of something very positive about it; the physical strength of people, the fact that they walk long distances and work hard.

The point of those people was simply that they were 'created' by a scientist hundreds of years before who thought he was producing people suited to their environment. What he got was human beings who went their own way.

What about the 'Library'? I mean, despite the perfection of these people in terms of their environment, they are so interested in the past that they find in the old books and they are also interested in a Buddhist kind of working-towards-Nirvana. The past, present and future are linked up. Why is it the past that is so important?

The past has always been important to humans; look at the fascination with historical novels. No, the

general idea was that the scientist who created the genetic races had one ambition, but people being people found another one - for instance the ordinands and their interest in the investigation of the mind.

And the 'Net' is a result of that.

Yes: 'Indra's Net'. I had to do a lot of research for that. The general idea was expressed in the last line of the book.

But that is the strangest scene at the end. I mean the spaceship people have stayed the same, and yet on Earth this extraordinary thing has happened; human beings have become something else.

The inspiration for that came from the Australian Aboriginal fascination with "Dreamtime" and the Earth; the sense of belonging which is something I don't believe any other race has in such a strong way. There's a novel by someone that credits the *Kudaitcha* men with being able to separate the spirit from the body. But they don't talk about it because in Aboriginal hierarchy information can only be passed on to someone who has been initiated.

Is this interest that you have in Aboriginal society partly a result of your thinking about your own background?

Yes.

I don't think that many people know that you have Aboriginal ancestry. You've kind of meshed the Aboriginal indigenous ideas with Buddhist ones.

And, of course, morphic resonance. Those experiments with the rats and the platypus were done and they were the real results. But no one's ever gone any further with it.

Yes, it's interesting how these concepts come up and then disappear. Getting back to Genetic Soldier, do you think that it could be perceived as didactic at all? Is didacticism one of the marks of your work?

I think like anybody. I have my perceptions of human nature and I try to write about real people. I'm not interested in superman heroes. People have to behave as I see them behaving. If there is any didacticism, it would be an outpouring of my own personal beliefs, and I've never really examined them to find out what they are. In *Genetic Soldier*, for instance, I don't know where didacticism would come in there. I don't know from one moment to the next where the plot was going. And the final chapter came

as a result of a complaint that the book was unfinished. I wanted to end it at the point where Tommy said "and now the stars".

One of the other things I wanted to ask you about was the extraordinary sexuality of "the match" in Genetic Soldier. Where did that idea come from?

It just suddenly appeared. It may have been simply that I was reading about pheromones and it clicked into position. And also it was logically possible.

Other animals do behave like that don't they?

Butterflies can detect each other from a mile away. All the dogs in the neighbourhood know when a bitch comes on heat.

It was also about controlling violence wasn't it?

Yes. I wanted to discuss how a civilized man would control violence.

Yes, but it was also about how women control the men in the Genetic Soldier society through 'the match'. The implication is that women aren't as violent as men.

My feeling about violence has always been rational. Kovacs in *The and Summer* believes that violence is necessary under certain circumstances, but it practically kills him when he tries it.

Tommy in Genetic Soldier was like that too. In fact it was one of the keys in the book because he realized that he wasn't what he seemed to be at that point.

The book I'm writing at the present time will deal with the genetics that appear in *Genetic Soldier*. There will be the question raised that, if the Earth is overpopulated and the only means of getting it back into liveable condition is to cull humanity, what is the moral standpoint? That is what the last part of the book will be about, with Ostrov (see *The Destiny Makers*) dealing with it to some extent, and that despite his *kill the lot of the bastards* reaction he has to have a civilized approach. And he's up against the scientist Wishart whose approach is simply that if it's necessary it's necessary. Who has the right to say if it's necessary?

This is something you've been thinking about for a long time - about the morality, of it.

Well, you have the church complaining about abortion. They put the moral clement into it right away.

They do and they don't. There's plenty of people who don't think it's immoral to terminate an unwanted pregnancy.

What about Chinese morality, putting girl children on a hillside? Morality comes up against necessity. But *whose* necessity is the question. A human being is only a source of making another human being. God's great mistake was to give us brains.

I still want to talk about the extraordinary sexuality in Genetic Soldier and in Beloved Son. It's a typical George Turner thing that out of the blue you get a sexual event happening. It does always seem to be an extraordinary event in your work. In 'normal life' in your books we don't seem to get much sexuality referred to at all, in the every day. When it does happen it always seems to have great significance. Is there a reason for that? Do you think sexuality is a strong force?

Obviously it is. But I think it comes from memory. *A memory of an event in your life?*

No, the whole business of sexual contact. You see, I had the prostate operation about ten years ago and a prostate operation does nothing about preventing sexual requirements. What it does is prevent you from doing anything about it.

The desire is there but

Actually it's been stronger than it ever was before.

Just before we finish up. Do you have any thoughts about what is happening in science fiction in general? Do you think there's anything new happening?

No, I don't think so. There are a few writers trying to keep up to date and handling new ideas as fast as they come out, but my real thought about science fiction at the present time is that it's been swamped by fantasy and that too many science fiction writers are trying to beat fantasy at its own game, turning out science fiction that really is fantasy, except that it's hooked on a single idea of genetics, or virtual reality, or something of that sort. And that people are writing very long, involved novels that are about practically nothing; start with an idea and have

an adventure. Start with an idea, I say, and see where it leads

Do you think it's because we're up against a huge number of problems but we don't seem to be up against any one particular thing that we can put our fingers on?

Well yes, but one of my great complaints about science fiction is that it doesn't deal with our present problems at all. I mean, we've had dozens of novels in the past talking about an overpopulated Earth, but what you get in the outcome is bigger buildings and bigger cities; nobody talks about how we're going to feed them. Nobody talks about clearing the forests or running the animals off the ground, because that's too difficult. They never think out what the result of the bigger cities will be, and that's the great point.

Do you think that that's true only for science fiction, or for fiction in general?

In science fiction, money drives: that's what all the big novels are about. You feel as though the writers are turning them out over the weekend.

Do you think the mainstream pool is bigger, so you get greater variety?

I think it's the same for both. It's not usually the big sellers who are the best writers. I mean people like Jeffery Archer are a catastrophe.

At this point we had a good laugh and I stopped the tape. We were both tired. George as usual had some new, and interesting things to say about his work and the world, and had avoided the questions he didn't want to (or couldn't) answer. I was pleased that I had managed to broach some aspects of his work that he finds it difficult to talk about - the question of female characters and of the way he deals with sex. Of course the answers weren't complete - but they were interesting. We had a cup of coffee and left to visit Dunwoodie's Butcher Shop in Ballarat and had a quick look at the Ballarat Art Gallery before I took the train back to Melbourne.

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Standing On Foundations

Greg Benford

It is one thing to be an sf fan, another to become a professional, and still more to find oneself walking the hallowed halls of a literary monument, adding a wing to citadels where once you had tread with hushed whispers.

Asimov's *Foundation* series began in World War II, as America arced toward its zenith as a world power. The series played out over decades as the United States dominated the world's matters in a fashion no other nation ever had. Yet *Foundation* is about imperium and decline. Did this betray an anxiety, born even in the moment of approaching glory?

I had always wondered if this was so. Part of me itched to explore the issues which lace the series.

The idea of writing further novels in the *Foundation* universe came from Janet Asimov and the Asimov estate's representative, Ralph Vicinanza. Approached by them, I at first declined, being busy with physics and my own novels. But my subconscious, once aroused, refused to let go the notion.

After half a year of struggling with ideas plainly made for the *Foundation*, persistently demanding expression, I finally called up Ralph Vicinanza and began putting together a plan to construct a fittingly complex curve of action and meaning, to be revealed in several novels. Though we spoke to several authors about this project, the best suited seemed two hard sf writers broadly influenced by Asimov and of unchallenged technical ability: Greg Bear and David Brin.

Bear, Brin and I have kept in close touch while I wrote the first volume, for we intend to create three stand-alone novels which none the less carry forward an overarching mystery to its end. Elements of this make their first appearance here, to amplify further through Greg Bear's *Foundation and Chaos*, finding completion in Brin's *Third Foundation*. (These are preliminary titles.) I have planted in the narrative prefiguring details and key elements which shall bear later fruit.

Genres are constrained conversations. Constraint is essential, defining the rules and assumptions open to an author. If hard SF occupies the center of science

fiction, that is probably because hardness gives the firmest boundary. Science itself yields crisp confines.

Genres are also like immense discussions, with ideas developed, traded, mutated, their variations spun down through time. Players ring changes on each other—more like a steppin'-out jazz band than a solo concert in a plush auditorium. Contrast "serious" fiction (more accurately described, in my eyes, as merely self-consciously solemn). It has canonical classics that supposedly stand outside of time, deserving awe, looming great and intact by themselves.

Much of the pleasure of mysteries, of espionage novels or SF, lies in the interaction of writers with each other and, particularly in SF's invention of fandom, with the readers as well. This isn't a defect; it's the essential nature of popular culture, which the United States has dominated in our age, with the invention of jazz, rock, the musical, and written genres such as the western, the hardboiled detective, modern fantasy and other rich areas. Many kinds of SF (hard; utopian; military; satirical) share assumptions, code words, lines of argument, narrative voices. Fond remembrance of golden age *Astounding* and its letter column, of the New Wave, of Horace Gold's *Galaxy*—these are echoes of distant conversations earnestly carried out.

Genre pleasures are many, but this quality of shared values within an on-going discussion may be the most powerful, enlisting lifelong devotion in its fans. In contrast to the Grand Canon view of great works standing like monoliths in a deserted landscape, genre reading satisfactions are a striking facet of modern democratic (pop) culture, a shared movement.

There are questions about how writers deal with what some call the "anxiety of influence" but which I'd prefer to term more mildly: the digestion of tradition.

I'm reminded of John Berger's definition of hack work, describing oil painting in *Ways of Seeing*, as "not the result of either clumsiness or provincialism; it is the result of the market making more insistent demands than the art." Fair enough; but this can happen in any context. Working in a known region of concept-space does not necessarily imply that the

territory has been mined out. Nor is fresh ground always fertile.

Surely we should notice that a novel Hemingway thought the best in American literature is a sequel — indeed, following on a boy's book, *Tom Sawyer*? Sharing common ground isn't only a literary tradition. Are we thrown into moral confusion when we hear "Rhapsody on a Theme" by Paganini? Do we indignantly march from the concert hall when assaulted by "Variations on a Theme" by Haydn? Sharecropping by The Greats? Shocking!

Reinspecting the assumptions and methods of classical works can yield new fruit. Fresh narrative can both strike out into new territory while reflecting on the landscape of the past. Recall that "Hamlet" drew from several earlier plays about the same plot.

Isaac himself revisited the Foundation, taking different angles of attack each time. In the beginning, psychohistory equated the movements of people as a whole with the motions of molecules. *Second Foundation* looked at perturbations to such deterministic laws (the Mule) and implied that only a superhuman elite could manage instabilities. Later, robots emerged as the elite, better than humans at dispassionate government. Beyond robots came Gaia... and so on.

In this three-book series we three "Killer Bs" who stand in the shadow of Asimov and his generation shall reinspect the role of robots, and what psychohistory might look like as a theory. More riffs upon the basic tune.

So I set out to walk the sacrosanct lyceum where once as a boy I had stood in awed wonder. There were oddities and surprises galore.

Laying Fresh Foundations

When I set about writing a new novel set in Asimov's Foundation, titled *Foundation's Fear*, I remembered that I had always wondered about crucial aspects of Asimov's Empire:

Why were there no aliens in the galaxy?

What role did computers play?

What did the theory of psychohistory actually look like?

Finally, who was Hari Seldon — as a character, a man?

The new novel attempts some answers. It is my contribution to a discussion about power and determinism which has now spanned over half a century.

Of course, we know some incidental answers. The term "psychohistory" was commonly used in the thirties and appears in the 1934 Webster's dictionary; Isaac greatly extended its meaning, though. He didn't want to deal with John W. Campbell's notorious dislike of aliens who might be as clever as we, so his Foundation had none. But it seemed to me there might be more to the matter.

As well, Asimov's uniting of his robot novels and the Foundation series became intricate and puzzling. The British critic Brian Stableford found this "comforting in its claustrophobic enclosure." There are no robots in the early Foundation novels, but they are behind-the-scenes manipulators in both *Prelude to Foundation* and *Forward the Foundation*.

Some form of advanced computing machines must underlie the Empire, surely. Isaac remarked that "I just put very advanced computers in the new Foundation novel and hoped that nobody would notice the inconsistency. Nobody did." As James Gunn remarked, "More accurately, people noticed but didn't care."

Asimov wrote each novel at the level of the then-current scientific understanding. Later works updated the surrounding science. Thus his galaxy is more detailed in later books, including in *Foundation's Edge* both advanced computers and a black hole at the galactic center. Similarly, here I have depicted our more detailed knowledge of the galactic center. In place of Isaac's "hyperspace" ships I have used wormholes, which have considerably more theoretical justification now than they did when Einstein and Rosen introduced them in the 1930s. Indeed, wormholes are allowed by the general theory of relativity, but must have extreme forms of matter to form and support them. (Matt Visser's *Lorentzian Wormholes* is the standard work on current thinking. I wrote a paper on wormholes several years ago with Matt, John Cramer, Bob Forward and Geoff Landis, a suitably stfnal subject, published in *Physical Review*.)

Isaac wrote much of his fiction in a style he termed "direct and spare," though in the later works he relaxed this constraint a bit. I did not attempt to write in the Asimov style. (Those who think it is easy to write clearly about complex subjects should try it.) For the Foundation novels he used a particularly bare-boards approach, with virtually no background descriptions or novelistic details.

Note his own reaction when he decided to return to the series and revisited the trilogy: "I read it with mounting uneasiness. I kept waiting for something to

happen, and nothing ever did. All three volumes, all the nearly quarter of a million words, consisted of thoughts and conversation. No action. No physical suspense.”

But it worked, famously so. I could not manage such an approach, so have taken my own way.

I found that the details of Trantor, of psychohistory and the Empire called out to me as I began thinking about this novel — indeed, they led me on my subconscious quest of the underlying story. So the book is not an imitation Asimov novel, but a Benford novel using Asimov’s basic ideas and backdrop.

Necessarily my approach has harkened back to the older storytelling styles which prevailed in the SF of Isaac’s days. I have never responded favorably to the recent razoring of literature by critics — the tribes of structuralists, post-modernists, deconstructionists. To many SF writers, “post-modern” is simply a signature of exhaustion. Its typical apparatus — self-reference, heavy dollops of obligatory irony, self-conscious use of older genre devices, pastiche and parody — betrays lack of invention, of the crucial coin of SF, imagination. Some deconstructionists have attacked science itself as mere rhetoric, not an ordering of nature, seeking to reduce it to the status of the ultimately arbitrary humanities. Most SF types find this attack on empiricism a worn old song with new lyrics, quite quaintly retro.

At the core of SF lies the experience of science. This makes the genre finally hostile to such fashions in criticism, for it values its empirical ground. Deconstructionism’s stress on a contradictory or self-contained internal differences in texts, rather than their link to reality, often merely leads to literature seen as empty word games.

SF novels give us worlds which are not to be taken as metaphors, but as real. We are asked to participate in wrenchingly strange events, not merely watch them for clues to what they’re really talking about. (Ummm, if this stands for that, then the other stuff must stand for.... Not a way to gather narrative momentum.) The Mars and stars and digital deserts of our best novels are, finally, to be taken as real, as if to say: life isn’t like this, it is this. Journeys can go to fresh places, not merely return us to ourselves.

Even so, I indulged myself a bit in the satirical scenes depicting an academia going off the rails, but I feel Isaac would have approved of my targets. Readers thinking I’ve gone overboard in depicting the view that science does not deal with objective truths,

but instead is a battleground of power politics where “naive realism” meets relativist worldviews, should look into *The Golem* by Harry Collins and Trevor Pinch. This book attempts to portray scientists as no more the holders of objective knowledge than are lawyers or travel agents.

The recent “re-norming” of the Scholastic Aptitude Tests so that each year the average is forced to the same number, thus masking the decline of ability in students, I satirize in the very last pages of the novel; I hope Isaac would have gotten a chuckle from seeing the issue framed against an entire galaxy.

From Verne and Wells to somewhere near 1970, science fiction was mostly about the wonders of movement, of transportation. Note the innumerable novels with the word star in their titles, evoking far destinations, and stories like Robert Heinlein’s “The Roads Must Roll.”

But in the past few decades we have focused more on the wonders of information, of transformations at least partly internal, not external. The Internet, virtual reality, computer simulations — all these loom large in our visions of our futures. This novel attempts to combine these two themes, with several conspicuous scenes about travel, and a larger background motif on computers.

As James Gunn noted, the *Foundation* series is a saga. Its method lies in a repeated pattern: Out of the solution of each problem grows the next problem to be solved. This became, of course, a considerable constraint on later novels. Asimov seemed to be saying that life was a series of problems to be solved, but life itself could never be solved. As Gunn remarked, considering that the combined and integrated Foundation and Robot saga now covers sixteen books, perhaps a directory of it all is called for; named, perhaps, Encyclopedia Galactica?

Galactic Empires became a mainstay frame for science fiction. Poul Anderson’s Flandry novels and Gordon R. Dickson (in his *Dorsai* series) particularly studied the sociopolitical structure of such vast complexes, for a powerful, autocratic imperial system demands great organizational skill—the primary asset of the Romans themselves.

Isaac was not always consistent in his numbers. How many dwell on Trantor? Usually he says 40 billion, but in *Second Foundation* it is 400 billion (unless that’s a typo). Spread 40 billion over an Earth-sized world (with all its seas drained) and that’s only about a hundred per square kilometer. Surely housing them would not demand a half-kilometer deep city.

Dates also get difficult to follow, across such immensities of time. Trantor is at least 12,000 years old—and note that we assume that the year is Earth's, though Earth's location has been forgotten. By the Galactic Empire calendar, *Pebble in the Sky*, which has references to hundreds of thousands of years of expansion into space, occurs about 900 G.E. In *Foundation* atomic energy is 50,000 years old. The robot Daneel is 20,000 years old in *Prelude to Foundation*, and in *Forward the Foundation*. How far away in our future do the Sun and Spaceship emblem rule? Perhaps 40,000 years? No one date reconciles every detail.

Not that it truly matters. I know the dangers of writing a long series over decades. I took twenty-five years to wrestle with the six volumes of my *Galactic Center* series. Undoubtedly there are contradictions I missed in dating and other details, even though I laid it all out in a timeline, published in the last volume.

The aliens of that series are not those implicated in this novel, but there are clearly conceptual links.

Science fiction speaks of the future, but to the present. The grand issues of social power and the technology that drives it will never fade. Often problems are best seen in the perspectives of implication, before we meet them on the gritty ground of their arrival.

Isaac Asimov was ultimately hopeful about humanity. He saw us again and again coming to a crossroads and prevailing. The Foundation is about that.

What matters in sagas is sweep. This, the Foundation series surely has. I can only hope I have added a bit to that.

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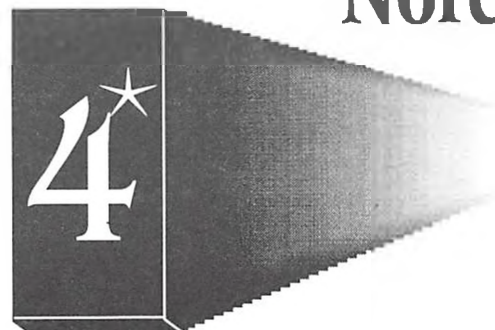
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~A 275	Fawcett, Bill	~S 717	Gold, Steven T	~A 499	Hay, James H.	~A 379	Jensen, Bill
~A 135	Feder, Moshe	~S 714	Gold, Barry	~A 476	Hayes, Lisa	~S 1241	Jewell, Jane
~A 136	Feldbaum, Gary Keith	S 718	Goldberg, Seth	~S 1237	Hech, Peter J.	~S 1034	Johns, James H.
~S 1038	Feller, Tom	~S 1069	Goldsworth, Julie	~A 29	Heenan, Donna	~A 285	Johnson, Julie Serena
~S 688	Ferer, Susan	S 1138	Gomez, Larry	~S 1238	Heiskanen, Jussi-Ville	~S 764	Johnson, Robin
~S 1197	Feruglio Dal Dan, Anna	A 143	Goodhand, Gail	~A 478	Hejna, Kristine	~A 161	Johnson, Tom
~S 1052	Fields, Carl C.	~S 719	Goodman, Sarah E	~S 734	Hellinger, Stuart C	~S 480	Johnson, David W.
~A 137	Finder, Jan Howard	A 508	Gordon, Marc E.	~A 150	Henderson, Arthur L	~S 481	Johnson, Sally A.
~S 690	Finkelstein, Ed	~S 720	Grady, Daphne G	~S 735	Henderson, Rebecca	~A 390	Johnson, Karen
~S 691	Fisher, Melanie A	~S 721	Grant, Mary C.	S 1162	Henderson, Lea A.	~A 1280	Johnson-Haddad, Barbara
~A 138	Fisher, Naomi C	~S 722	Grasso, Elyse M	~A 250	Hendrick, Lyndia	~S 1039	Jones, Angela
~A 405	Fitch, Don	A 144	Gray, Louis Elver W	~A 151	Hendrick, Woody	~A 280	Jones, Lenore Jean
~S 692	Flanagan, Sally	~S 722	Green, Eleanor	~A 265	Heneghan, Jack	~S 765	Jones, Wayne H
~A 438	Flentke, George	~A 408	Green, Jon B	~A 152	Henry, Tracy L	~S 1040	Josserand, Earl T.
~S 693	Flynn, John L	~A 146	Green Jr, Ralph	S 1154	Hepperle, Robert	~A 433	Juozenas, Joan
~A 353	Flynn, George	~S 560	Greene, Robert	~A 318	Herkes, Karen	~A 433	Kaden, Neil E
S 1170	Flynn, Peter K.	S 561	Greene, Edith	~S 736	Hertel, Elisa	~A 162	Kaden, Chris Palomo
~A 381	Foglio, Phil	~S 723	Gregory, Hugh	~S 737	Hertel, Mark	~S 766	Kafka, Anita
~A 382	Foglio, Kaja	~A 330	Sinclair	~S 738	Hertz, John	~S 767	Kahn, Walter
~S 694	Fong, Kandy	S 1153	Gresham, David	~S 739	Herz, Melanie	~A 451	Kahn, Millie
~A 309	Ford, Mike	~S 1030	Grieve, Robyn	~A 740	Hewitt, Marylouise	~A 452	Kalisz, Frank
A 312	Fortin, Jacob	A 1274	Griffith, Brooks	~S 741	Higashi, Michael	S 1230	Kapko, Alex
~S 695	Foss, Janice	A 367	Grimm, David L.	~S 742	Higgins, William S	~S 768	Kappesser, Peter J
~S 696	Foss, Rick	~A 366	Groat, Rebekah R.	~S 743	Hill, Betsy	~S 770	Kare, Mary Kay
~S 697	Foster, Adrienne	S 1021	Groat, Jim	~S 744	Hill Jr, Wesley	~S 769	Kare, Jordin
A 1151	Fox, John	~A 413	Groot, Harold	~A 536	Hillis, Robert L	~S 771	Karpierz, Joe
~A 1152	Fox, Diane	~S 724	Grosko, Stephen J.	S 1164	Hilton, Craig	~S 772	Karpierz, Sharon
~S 1292	Fox, Teresa B.	~A 535	Gross, Merryl	~S 745	Hina, Holly	~S 773	Kasten-Lowerre, Lorinda
~S 698	Fox, Crickett	S 1106	Gross, Elizabeth	~S 746	Hinz, Colin	~S 1242	Katic, Jim
S 1163	Frahm, Leanne	~S 274	Gunn, Ian	~S 747	Hipp, Scott	~S 1037	Katz, Sunshine
~A 145	Frame-Gray, Nola	A 1281	Gunnarsson, Urban	S 1239	Hirota, Kihara	~S 774	Katze, Rick
~A 459	Francis, Steve	~S 1159	Haddad, Trey	~A 1320	Hirsh, Irwin	~S 267	Kaumeyer, Erika
~A 460	Francis, Sue	A 380	Haddad III, George N	~A 463	Hisle, Debra M	~A 529	Kaylor, Cheryl Lynn
S 984	Frankel-Lieven, Robin	~A 488	Hager, Dana	~A 154	Hitchcock, Charles	S 1135	Keaton, William J.
~S 699	Franson, Donald	~A 215	Hager, Jerry J.	~A 155	Hoare, Jean	~A 325	Keesan, Morris M
S 700	Frech, James R	~A 335	Haggerty, Paul	~A 156	Hoare, Martin	~S 1019	Keith, Greg
~S 702	Freeman, H Denise	~S 1063	Haight, Cindy	~A 157	Hoey, Dan	~S 1020	Keith, Lorna
~S 701	Freeman, Barry C	~S 1064	Hail, Guy	~A 575	Hoff, Gary	S 1108	Kemper, Rayma
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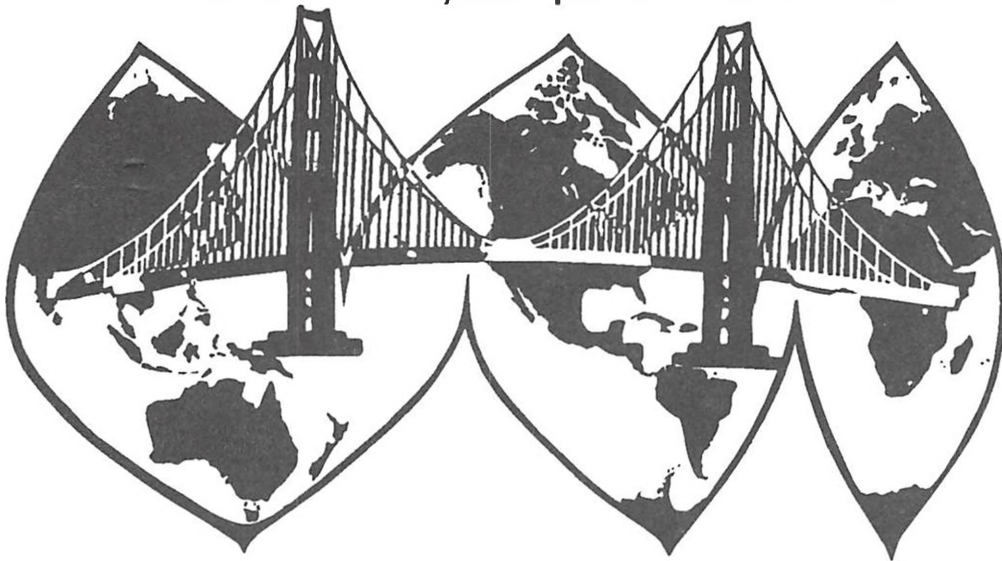


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- S 776	Kent, Allan	-A 28	Linneman, Mark A	-A 443	McCombs, Cheryl	-A 1122	Newall, Clive
- S 777	Keough, Elizabeth	-S 1270	Lister, Mark	-A 181	McCoy, Marcia Kelly	C 1303	Newall, Estelle
- A 372	Ketter, Greg	-S 801	Litt, Elan Jane	-S 819	McDaniel, Timothy A.	C 1312	Newall, Roger
- S 1166	Kiefer, Hope	A 534	Locus, Guest of	-S 820	McGrain, Tim	-S 1096	Ney, Richard
S 1074	Kienle, Susan A.	-S 803	Lonehawk, Patti	S 1132	McGuire, LeAnna	-S 846	Nicholas, B L
S 1086	Kimmel, Leigh	-S 802	Lonehawk, Brendan	-S 821	McKenna, Marjorie	-S 591	Nichols, Ian
-A 164	Kindell, Judith E	-A 1167	Loney, Mark	-S 1035	McMenamin, Mark	-S 1093	Nordley, G. David
-A 434	King, Deborah A	-A 170	Loomis, Nancy E.	-A 520	McMurrian, Althea	-S 847	Novak, John J
- S 1016	Kitay, Michele A.	-A 171	Lopez, Edward	-A 392	McNary, Lucinda	S 1078	Nyder, Katrina E.
- S 1171	Klein, Robert	-S 804	Lorentz, John	-A 393	McNary, Mark	-A 276	Nye, Jody Lynn
- S 778	Kliman, Lincoln W	-S 805	Lorrah, Jean	-A 578	Mealy, Jeanne	S 1045	O'Brien, Ulrika
- S 1221	Klover, Kristoph	-A 806	Louie, Gary	-S 822	Meier, Wes	-A 544	O'Brien, Kevin S.
-A 361	Knabbe, Ken	-S 1173	Love, April M.	-A 182	Meier, Wilma	-S 995	O'Brien, Terry
- S 779	Knauer, Michael	-A 495	Love, J. Spencer	-S 823	Melder, A Zane	S 1247	O'Connell, Ann Marie
- S 780	Knowles, Martha	S 1155	Lovett, Gayle	-S 824	Melder, Grace	-S 1224	O'Conner, Dea
- S 781	Kobee, Sally A	-S 1005	Low, Danny	-A 326	Meltzer, Lori	-S 1139	O'Dell, Tom
-A 426	Koivunen, Diana M.	S 1219	Lowe, Vincent D.	-S 825	Meschke, Karen	-A 304	O'Halloran, Christina
- S 1184	Koman, Victor	-S 807	Lowerre, Jim	-S 396	Meserole, Thomas A	-S 305	O'Halloran, John F.
-A 374	Konkin III, Samuel E.	A 558	Lu, Sharon	-S 826	Meskys, Edmund R	-A 355	O'Hanlon, Roderick
-A 519	Konkol, Kenneth R	-S 1013	Lucyshyn, P. Alex	-S 828	Meskys, Stanley	-A 187	O'Shea II, Christopher
- S 782	Konoya, Hiroshi	-A 310	Ludwig, Gaye	-S 827	Meskys, Sandra	-A 188	Oakes, Deborah A.
- S 783	Korn, Daniel	-A 348	Luoma, Robert J.	-S 1076	Metzger, Steve	A 1158	Oakes, Mary Ann
- S 784	Korra'ti, R'ykandar	-A 191	Lurie, Perrienne	C 1311	Middlemiss, Catherine	-S 386	Oberg, Michael
-A 387	Kovalcik, Rick	-A 1121	Lync, Lyn	-A 21	Middlemiss, Perry	-S 1186	Oberhofer, Mark
- S 1031	Krause, Dina S.	-A 172	Lynch, Dick	-A 370	Mildebrandt, Nancy E	-S 1006	Odom Jr., James Carl
-A 315	Krentz, Laura	-A 271	Lynch, Keith F	A 571	Miller, Ellie	-S 848	Olanich, Cathy
-A 165	Krolak, Jack P	A 173	Lynch, Nicki	-A 296	Miller, Theodore	-A 565	Oldham, Barbara
- S 1174	Kucera, Tommy	S 1215	Lyons, Peter	-S 831	Miller, Sasha	-S 849	Olmsted, Gene
S 1205	Kuch, Lutz	-S 808	Lysaught, Joan	-A 439	Miller, Claire	-A 189	Olson, Mark
-A 287	Kunsman, Tom	A 351	MacFarlane, Ben	-S 830	Miller, Ben W	-A 190	Olson, Priscilla
-A 223	Kurilecz, Diane M	-A 352	MacFarlane, Tish	-S 1246	Miller, Keith	-A 282	Olynky, Frank
-A 786	Kushner, David M	-A 317	MacIntosh, Robert J	S 1245	Miller, Audrey	-A 503	Ong, Marisa
-A 349	Labonville, Suzanne	-A 490	MacLaney, Thomas	-S 1179	Miller, Diane	-S 515	Ontell, Val
- S 1083	Ladue, Ruth Anne	-S 809	Madden, J R	-S 829	Miller, Alan F	-A 516	Ontell, Ron
S 166	Lakh, Stefan	-A 511	Mailander, Mary Jane	-A 1156	Mills, Robyn	-S 1124	Ortlieb, Cath
-A 522	Landis, Jim	-S 810	Mainhardt, Ricia	-S 833	Micambres, Teresa C	-S 1125	Ortlieb, Marc
- S 1147	Lang, David	-S 811	Maizels, John	-S 832	Minneman, Lynn I	-S 1248	Owens, Bea
A 787	Langsam, Devra M	-A 270	Majerus, Laura	-A 1314	Mitchell, Linda	S 1193	Pack, Denis
A 1008	Larson, Bob	-S 1165	Major, Joseph	S 400	Moen, Rick	-A 359	Paleo, Lyn
-A 167	Larson, Ronald A.	-S 812	Malmberg, Norwin	-S 835	Moffatt, Len	-S 850	Paltin, Josephine A
- S 788	Larue, Candace	-S 813	Mangan, Lois H	-S 834	Moffatt, June	-S 851	Paolucci, Carol
- S 789	Larue, Stephen M	-S 992	Mann, Jim	-S 549	Moir, Lillian E.	-S 1249	Parcel, Jan
S 1244	Larue, Justin	-S 814	Manning, Sandra	-S 837	Moir, Mike	-S 1080	Parker, Carole
- S 790	Laskowski, George	-S 815	Mannion, Robert	-S 836	Moir, Debby	-A 307	Parker, Tony E
S 1007	Lavender, Roy	-A 174	Marble, Beth	-S 838	Molloy, G Patrick	-A 192	Parker, Beverly J.
-A 168	Lawrence, Matt	-A 175	Marble, Chris	-S 539	Moon, Elizabeth	-A 193	Parker, Rembert N.
- S 791	Lay, Toni	A 278	March, Russell	-S 839	Moore, Perry Glen	A 485	Parker, Steve
- S 1211	Lazar, Judith T.	S 1188	Margaret, Susan	A 542	Morely, Lewis	A 473	Parker, Lisa
S 1131	Leblond, Roch	-S 1057	Marier, Shawn	-A 212	Morgan, Cheryl	-A 179	Parris,
-A 552	Leeper, Mark	-S 816	Marks, Kimberlee	-A 109	Morman, Mary	A 320	Parsons, Spike
-A 551	Leeper, Evelyn	-A 1022	Marr, Leon	-S 841	Morman, Melissa	-S 1128	Partridge, Jim
S 1243	Lehen, Laura	-A 176	Marston, Bonnie	-S 840	Morman, Brian	-A 297	Patten, Frederick
A 583	Leibig, Ruth	Alexandra		-S 843	Morningstar, Janice	-S 852	Paul, Sara
-A 432	Leibowitz, Hope	-A 177	Martin, George E	-S 842	Morningstar, Chip	-S 442	Paulsen, Joanne C.
-A 570	Lerner, Fred	-A 178	Martin, George R R	-S 909	Morris, Skip	S 853	Pavlac, Ross
- S 1029	Levine, Rennie	-S 817	Mason, Michael	-A 404	Morris, Phillip L	-A 194	Pavlat, Peggy Rae
-A 169	Levy, Benjamin M	-S 261	Massoglia, Benjamin	-A 403	Morris, Hilarie A	-S 854	Payne, Michael H
- S 792	Lewis, Alice	-S 259	Massoglia, Alice	-S 1137	Moulton, Fred C.	-S 1046	Pearlman, Eileen D.
- S 793	Lewis, Suford	-S 260	Massoglia, Marty	-A 518	Moursund, Beth	-S 855	Peel, Susan
- S 794	Lewis, Tony	-S 262	Massoglia, Mariel		"Bethmo"	S 857	Peirce, Hayford
- S 795	Lieberman, Paula	A 1298	Masters, Rob	-S 1068	Moylan, Ken	S 856	Peirce, Douchka
-A 436	Lieberman, Danny	-A 579	Matthews, Robert	-A 388	Mozzicato, Susan E	-S 858	Pekar, Bonnie V
- S 796	Liebmman, Michael	-A 180	Matthews Jr, Winton	-S 844	Mulligan, Rikk	-S 859	Pelz, Bruce E
-A 321	Lien, Anton	-S 818	Maughan, Ian	-A 428	Mumaw, Lorraine A	-S 860	Pelz, Elayne F
- S 797	Lieven, Andre	-A 409	Mayer, Sally	-S 429	Mumaw, Donnalyn	S 1002	Perkins, Jr., Frank
- S 798	Lillian III, Guy H	-A 421	Maynard, Jeffrey D.	-A 184	Murray, Janice	A 281	Peterson, John D.
- S 799	Lim, Marie	A 1323	McArdie, Edward	-A 185	Murray-White, Sarah	-S 1250	Peterson, Jean
S 1310	Lindquist, Rowena	S 1191	McCaw, Shelley	-S 1084	Nachman, Heather	-S 1143	Peterson, Amy
- S 800	Lindsay, Tamar	S 1189	McCaw, Ken	-A 186	Nakashima, Lex	-A 195	Peterson, Polly Jo
		S 1192	McCaw, Adam	-A 553	Nelson, Michael R	-S 861	Pettinger, Sandra G

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~ S 862	Pettinger Jr, Pierre E	~ S 891	Ruh, Larry	~ A 470	Siclari, Daniel	S 1201	Stratmann, M.D., Henry
~ S 863	Pettis Jr, Roy C	~ A 457	Ruhle, Kristen	~ A 469	Siclari, Joe	~ A 545	Strauss, Erwin S
~ S 864	Phillips, Daryl L	~ A 892	Rush, Ed	~ S 913	Siders, Ellen	S 1257	Stretton, Fabian
A 994	Phillips, Mark	~ A 340	Russell, Richard S	~ A 420	Sieber, Renee	~ S 939	Strub, Deborah K
~ S 865	Phillips, Karen	A 202	Russell, David L.	~ S 914	Siegel, Kurt	~ S 938	Strub, Bernard L
~ S 866	Phillips, Sue	~ A 406	Ryan, Charles C.	~ S 915	Sieler, Stan	~ S 940	Stuckey, Lindalee
~ S 867	Pierce, Samuel C	~ A 1266	Ryan, Elizabeth	~ S 1271	Siladi, Michael	~ A 576	Stump, Donna L.
~ A 258	Pierce, Sharon	A 407	Ryan, Guest of Charles	S 916	Silber, Rachel	~ A 563	Suiter, Anne
~ S 1278	Pilvinis, James	~ S 893	Sachter, Ruth L	~ S 918	Silverberg, Robert	~ S 1204	Suits, Karen
~ A 365	Plumlee, Gary L	~ A 203	Sacks, Robert E	~ S 917	Silverberg, Karen	~ S 1203	Suits, Michael
~ S 868	Pomeranz, John	~ S 894	Sakers, Don	~ S 1136	Simpson, Neil	A 213	Sumiya, Kazuo
~ S 1251	Pomeranz, Hal	~ A 447	Salter, David Ian	~ A 210	Sims, Roger	~ A 214	Surette, Gayle
~ A 391	Porter, Patrick	A 1295	Samuel, John	~ A 209	Sims, Pat	~ A 216	Sutherland, James L
~ S 1047	Porter, Ken	~ S 895	Sanderson, Sue E	~ S 920	Siros, Willie	A 461	Svendsen, Ole
~ A 1279	Porter, Julie S.	~ A 554	Sandler, Richard	~ S 919	Siros, Nina	~ S 548	Swain, Alan
~ S 869	Porter, Andrew	~ A 587	Sanmiguel, Juan J.	~ S 921	Skran Jr, Dale L	~ S 941	Swanson, Anders
~ S 870	Potter, D	S 1223	Santoso, Widya	~ A 302	Sloan, John	S 1079	Swanson, Teresa
~ A 479	Power, David	~ A 204	Sapienza Jr, John T	~ A 303	Sloan, Kathleen A	~ A 314	Sweeney, Peggy
~ S 1054	Prather, Joseph Y.	~ A 402	Sargent, Gene	~ S 929	Smith, Vicki	~ A 528	Szczepaniak III, Joseph B
~ A 513	Preston, Janice	~ S 896	Satterfield, Dale	~ S 877	Smith, Theresa	~ S 942	Szczesuili, Timothy
~ A 514	Preston, Richard	~ S 410	Saunders, Gordon	~ S 922	Smith, Laurence C	~ A 217	Tacouni, Lorraine
S 1048	Price, Nick	~ S 1066	Savchenko, Yuri	~ A 26	Smith, Leah Zeldes	~ S 943	Takeuchi, Shinsuke
A 543	Pride, Marilyn	~ S 897	Savitzky, Colleen	~ S 923	Smith, Dennis Lee	~ A 1284	Tallan, Carolyn
~ A 337	Proctor, Brian	~ S 898	Savitzky, Kathryn	~ S 925	Smith, Randy	~ A 1283	Tallan, Michael
~ S 872	Proni, Tullio	~ S 899	Savitzky, Stephen	~ S 926	Smith, Rodford	~ S 944	Tate, James
~ S 871	Proni, Amy	~ A 205	Sbarsky, Sharon	~ S 927	Smith, Sean M	S 1258	Taylor, Robert B.
~ A 316	Prophet, Fred	~ A 555	Scharadin, Mary Ellen	~ S 928	Smith, Timothy L	S 945	Taylor, Charlene
~ S 873	Pruitt, Timothy A	A 1291	Schild, Jon J.	~ A 475	Smith, Victoria A	S 1070	Taylor, Jr., Bill
S 1053	Pulido, Cristina	~ S 1014	Schilling, Ben	~ A 27	Smith, Richard H.E.	~ A 562	Teems, James
S 1160	Pulla, Stefanie	~ A 431	Schleifer, Colette H.	A 1299	Smith, Alicia	~ S 946	Thagard, Sheryllynn
~ S 874	Puller, Martin	~ S 1141	Schlofner, Mike	S 1195	Smith, Tara	S 1259	Thau, Susan
S 996	Rabenn, Andrew J.	~ S 900	Schmeidler, Lucy	~ A 1182	Smith, Gerald	~ A 294	Thayer, Diana
~ A 418	Ramey, Timothy B.	A 206	Cohen	~ A 437	Smith, Susan M.	~ A 568	Therou, Philip
~ A 417	Ramey, Laurie	~ S 1028	Schneider, Jim	~ S 1107	Smithers, Jane	~ S 1092	Thiesen, Peter A.
~ S 875	Ratti, David	~ S 1027	Schneider, Marlys	~ S 1109	Smookler, Kenneth M.	~ S 427	Thomson, Becky
~ A 196	Raymond, Eric S.	~ A 252	Schneider, Gene	~ S 1176	Smullen, Russell	~ A 464	Thomson, Amy
S 1142	Reisler, Kurt	~ A 493	Schoenhuth, Spring	~ A 462	Snyder, Deborah M	~ A 494	Thorndike, Persis L.
~ S 876	Reitz, Susan	A 1099	Schultz, Colleen	~ S 430	Snyder, Saliljan	~ A 557	Thornhill, Denise
~ S 878	Renton Jr, Neil H	S 1049	Schutzman, David L.	~ S 930	Sokola, Joseph A	~ A 255	Thorp, Steve
~ A 197	Resnick, Carol	~ S 901	Schweppe, Jane	~ S 1081	Solomon, Michele	~ A 254	Thorp, Katy
~ A 198	Resnick, Laura	A 114	Schweppe, Jane	~ S 931	Jaye	~ S 947	Thorsen, John
~ A 199	Resnick, Mike	~ A 360	Score, David	~ S 932	Soukup, Martha	~ S 948	Tibbetts, Jennifer
~ A 200	Rest, Neil	~ S 902	Scott, Eric P.	~ S 1255	Speer, Jack	~ S 1150	Tihor, Stephen
~ S 879	Reutersward, Anders	~ S 903	Scrivner, Joyce K	~ S 933	Spelman, Richard C	~ A 425	Timm, Don A
S 880	Richards, Mark	A 1194	Seabrook, Laura	~ A 530	Spencer, Henry	~ A 422	Timson, Katrina
~ S 881	Richardson, Kathy A	~ A 574	Sears, Teri	~ S 934	Sperling, Allan	~ S 1120	Tisell, Jane
~ S 882	Riel, Roberta T	S 1253	Sedwick, Kathy	A 338	Spitzer, Sheldon	~ S 1055	Todd-Prather, Martha
~ A 201	Riley, Connie L	~ S 273	Sefcovic, Fabian	~ S 1225	Staffan, Lorie	~ A 218	Toker, Susan L.
~ S 1065	Ripley, Paul S.	S 1254	Semnel, Justin	~ A 211	Stage, Jesper	~ S 949	Tomaino, Samuel J
~ A 384	Ritch, Bill	~ A 328	Senchy, Andrea	~ A 577	Standlee, Kevin	~ A 484	Toop, Geoffrey
~ A 272	Ritter, Bruce	~ A 207	Sero, Zev	~ S 935	Stanley, John	A 219	Torck, Fred
~ A 342	Roberts, John P	~ S 904	Sessoms, Lee	~ A 283	Starke, Marcia	~ A 298	Tracy, Jamie
~ A 341	Roberts, Carol	S 1127	Shallcross, David F.	~ A 284	Stearns, Freda E	~ A 453	Travis, David
~ S 883	Robinett, Linda Louise	~ A 291	Shaw, Nancy Tucker	~ S 936	Stearns, Robert E	~ S 950	Tripp, Galen A
~ A 286	Rogow, Roberta	~ A 208	Shawcross, William	~ S 937	Steele, Mariann S	~ A 449	Trocchia, Gregory
S 956	Roper, Gretchen H.	~ S 905	Sheffield, Vivian	~ A 344	Stein, Michael P	S 1112	Troldahl, Eric
~ S 884	Roper, Bill	A 589	Sheffield, Rhonda	~ A 343	Stein, Diana	A 399	Tsuzawa, Hiroko
S 1213	Rose, Thomas J.	A 588	Sheffield, Michael	~ S 689	Stein, Dave	~ S 951	Turek, Leslie J
~ S 1214	Rose, Shawn	~ S 1024	Shellenbarger, Shane	~ S 1067	Steinhoff, Katie	A 1	Turner, George
~ S 885	Rosenbaum, Arwen	~ S 1025	Shellenbarger, Lauren	~ A 471	Stephan, Alan R.	A 4	Turner, Guest of George
~ S 886	Rosenberg, Robert	~ S 906	Shepherd, Randall L	~ A 322	Stern, Edie	~ S 1011	Turtledove, Laura
~ A 378	Rosenburg, Diane	~ S 907	Shere, Howard	~ A 23	Stevens, Milt	~ S 1012	Turtledove, Alison
~ A 264	Rosenthal, Alan	~ S 908	Sherman, Keith	~ A 582	Stewart, Alan	~ S 1010	Turtledove, Harry
~ S 887	Ross-Mansfield, Linda	~ S 910	Shibley, James	~ S 1256	Stoddard, Richard	~ S 952	Tuthasi, Lorraine
S 888	Roth, Stefan	~ S 911	Shipman, Linda	~ A 257	Stoller, Peter	S 1178	Tyra, Sandra S.
S 1252	Roth, Shirl	~ S 912	Short, K Michiko	A 1297	Straede, Cherly	S 1177	Tyra, Gerard R.
S 1207	Rousseau, Yvonne	S 1051	Shuman, Heather	A 1296	Straede, John	~ S 954	Uchida, Keiko
~ S 890	Roy, Kenneth	S 1050	Shuman, David	~ A 725	Straf, Samantha Star	~ S 953	Uchida, Hideo
~ S 889	Roy, Eileen						
~ A 440	Rubinstein, Peter						

✓ S 1060	Unferth, Kenneth	A 1318	Walls, Brian	✓ S 975	White, Donya Hazard	✓ S 983	Wolkoff, Lew
✓ S 955	Uttke, Susan	✓ S 965	Walsh, Michael J	S 1126	White, Nikki	✓ S 1041	Wong, Peter
✓ S 1056	Valentine, Lou Anna	✓ S 966	Walsh, Michael R.	✓ S 976	Whitley, Eva C	✓ S 1095	Wong, Patricia
S 1260	Valentine, Kimmerly	✓ A 465	Walton, Evelyn J	✓ S 1209	Whitlock, Mary M.	✓ S 1042	Wong, Lawrence
✓ A 362	Van Asseldonk, Bertie	✓ S 967	Ward, Anthony D.	✓ A 253	Whitman, Marc	✓ S 1175	Wong, Henry
✓ A 450	Van De Bospoort, Wim	✓ A 266	Ward, Charles Douglas	✓ S 977	Whitmore, Tom	✓ S 1202	Wood, Malcolm
✓ S 1262	Van De Walker, Ray	✓ S 556	Ward, Michael J.	✓ A 376	Whitmore, Cheryl	✓ A 585	Wooster, Martin
✓ S 1261	Van De Walker, Karen Louise	A 1302	Warner, Julian	✓ A 383	Wicker, Guy	✓ S 455	Workman, Barry
✓ A 329	van der Putte, Larry	A 1183	Warnock, Karen	✓ S 263	Widner, Art	S 456	Workman, Marcia
✓ A 375	Van Deusen, David J	✓ S 968	Warren, Victoria	A 228	Wierda, Clark B.	✓ S 999	Wright, Richard
✓ S 1073	Van Gelder, Gordon	✓ A 1119	Wasiliew, Alexander	✓ A 385	Wilbanks, Caran	S 1157	Wyatt, Garry
✓ S 957	Van Name, Mark L.	A 581	Watchorn, Christopher	✓ S 525	Willett, Steven	A 231	Wysocki, Mike
✓ S 958	Van Toorn, Kees	A 1290	Watkins, Michael	✓ S 524	Willett, Janet	✓ A 423	Yalow, Ben
✓ A 371	Vande Bunt, Mike	S 969	Watson, Carmen	✓ S 527	Willett, Michelle	✓ A 398	Yamaoka, Ken
✓ S 959	Vandenberg, Patricia Ann	✓ S 1003	Watson, Diane	✓ S 526	Willett, Kathy	✓ S 985	Yaworski, Veronica
✓ A 364	Vargo, Anna L P	A 512	Weasner, Michael	✓ S 523	Willett, Paul	✓ S 1023	Youmans, Brian
✓ S 961	Vaughan, Mary	✓ A 222	Webbert, Jim	✓ S 1015	Williams, Susan L.	✓ S 986	Young, Jim
✓ S 960	Vaughan, Bill	✓ S 1036	Webbert, Doreen	✓ S 979	Williams, Rondinella	✓ A 1282	Zacher, Laurence J.
✓ A 220	Veal, Tom	✓ A 233	Weber, Jean	✓ S 978	Williams, Perry	✓ A 232	Zakem, Joel D.
✓ A 346	Vincent, Ian	✓ S 1077	Weber, Eric	S 1264	Willis, Walter	✓ A 357	Zang, Linda C.
✓ S 962	Virzi, Dennis	✓ S 970	Weidner, Charles	✓ S 980	Willis, Dorothy A	✓ S 987	Zeiger, J. Barry
S 500	Wadey, Katherine	S 1134	Weinstein, Carole	✓ S 1263	Willis, Steven J.	✓ S 989	Zellich, Richard W
✓ A 1286	Wald, Dick	✓ S 971	Weinstein MD, Elliot	✓ A 229	Willis, John F	✓ S 988	Zellich, Michelle
✓ A 1287	Wald, Bette	✓ S 1001	Weiskopf, T.K.F.	✓ S 230	Willmoth, Mike	✓ S 990	Zeve, Steven Joel
✓ A 474	Waldman, Jacob M	✓ S 972	Weissinger, Robert	A 572	Wilper, Holly	✓ A 339	Zink, David S.
✓ A 221	Walker, Gail	✓ A 224	Welch, Henry L.	✓ S 1272	Wilson, Edward	A 1304	Zinkiewicz, Lucy
✓ S 964	Wallbank, Tom	✓ S 225	Welch, Letha R.	S 1273	Buchan	A 300	Zrubek, Kim A.
✓ S 963	Wallbank, Mary	✓ A 226	Weller, W. A.	✓ S 981	Wilson, Karen M.	A 301	Zrubek, Scott
✓ S 1212	Wallentinson, Denise	✓ S 974	Wells, Patty	✓ S 982	Woehrle, Sally		
✓ S 1043	Wallner, Martin L	✓ S 973	Wells, Marc	S 1061	Wolansky, Taras		
		A 227	Wesley, James T.	✓ S 1089	Woldow, Catherine V.		
				✓ S 1098	Wolf, Lori		
					Wolf, Katherine		