

The previous issue of this zine has been languishing in Minneapolis for the past year, and without follow-up material (which, er, follows) would be neither accurate nor up to date regarding my parental situation. When I left off last issue, I was in deep suspicion about my brother John. This has passed. I never did go see him after the Vegas Corflu, not wanting to dissolve the good fannish feelings I came away with by a possibly unpleasant, perhaps even confrontational visit with him. Time passed and my brother called one day in July to tell me he'd been away, unreachable by phone, for a week in the D.C. area and returned to learn that shortly after his departure our mother fell and broke her hip, had hip replacement surgery, and was already doing well in her rehab program. Both my brother and I were amazed at the speed and ease of her recovery, the more so because our father put off hip replacement surgery for over a decade — surgery which could have vastly improved his quality of life. He apologized for not calling right away, but follow-up with both parents plus getting back to his regular job had taken up a lot of time.

His tone was friendly and informative. He alluded to our previous hassling and seemed to want to put it behind us, and he looked forward to getting together again.

About three weeks later, in mid-August, John called again. Our father had suffered another small stroke, but was now stabilized. He'd keep me posted.

And then ...

Our father passed away on September 14th. He was 81 and, as you know from previous reports, had been in a convalescent hospital since last January. John called to tell me the news and said they hadn't yet determined the immediate cause. But at his age and with all his physical problems, his death will probably be ascribed to general systems failure.

The funeral service took place in Hollywood — where they bought mausoleum space in 1970 — on September 20th, and was pretty minimal. My brother and his girlfriend Karen drove up from San Diego; my brother's daughter and her new husband and 13-month-old daughter (my brother's a grandfather before me) came up separately from Carlsbad, near San Diego; and two of my boys accompanied me. Two neighbors came from their old neighborhood in Los Angeles. And that was it. There was a rent-a-preacher who talked about someone who superficially resembled my father. Altogether it took about twenty minutes. After the funeral we all reassembled at a Mexican restaurant and had a great time.

There's no one left of his generation on my father's side of the family, and their offspring have disappeared into the abyss of non-communication. John said he called our mother's two brothers (in Cleveland and in Phoenix), but neither of them could come on such short notice. There are no family friends. My parents (read, my father) seemed to prefer a largely solitary life; the last people they socialized with died in the '70s.

How do I feel? Well, you know, it's always sad to lose family, but I remember missing others more — my maternal grandmother most of all. The bottom line is that my father wasn't particularly interested in *us* — just in "his sons," a kind of mythological construct.

But life has its way of karmically balancing all accounts. Just five days earlier, my oldest son Ben and his fiancee Lisae announced they're having a baby next April.

... And now as I write she's showing quite visibly, it's going to be a girl, and the due date is April 18th. Ben and Lisae have moved from west Berkeley to Sonoma County, in the country about a mile south of Occidental, and their delivery will be by a midwife who used to live on The Farm and knew Ben as a kid. Whew!

Continuing with family matters, let me tell you about the family-relevant parts of my fourth annual trip to Southern California to visit family and with the Burbees. Some of this was in a letter I sent via the wonder of computers to a number of Apathy members, so if it seems familiar to some of y'all, my apologies. But to enter the narrative: I've just left Greg Benford's where I visited for several hours after lunch at Canter's in L.A. and before going on to San Diego, where my brother was expecting me. Now, from the letter ...

I phoned up my brother to see if he'd been thinking of our having dinner together, but he said

that he and his girlfriend Karen were "eating sandwiches and kicking back after the holidays," so I stopped to eat in Encinitas, partaking of some fairly fast but filling Mexican food before driving on to San Diego and my brother's place in the Ocean Beach neighborhood.

Although I'd thought of it and even assembled a few for the occasion, I didn't end up taking old family photos along with me to show to my mother. Carol and others suggested that this was a futile attempt, referring me to that documentary of a year or so ago by a lady film maker whose mother has Alzheimer's, in which it's made clear that attempts to connect with the past and to former relationships (like her being your mother) are doomed to failure and it's better to be here and now when visiting. In any event, when John and I went over to see her at about 7:30 p.m. she was already asleep. Since she was in a room with two other elderly women who were also asleep, neither of us wanted to talk loud enough to awaken her. I looked at her for a minute before we walked away; she looked peaceful and her facial appearance was more like I remembered than it was the last time I saw her, in February, when she was fairly newly institutionalized and probably freaked out. John told me that she seemed to be moving into the later stages of Alzheimer's; she doesn't do much of anything for herself anymore and that lately all she's spoken is "Am I all right?" over and over. And no, she doesn't know about her husband's death, and won't. No point to it anymore; she no longer remembers him.

When I'd talked with my brother on the phone a couple days before Christmas, he asked for my e-mail address, then told me he had a new computer and was now on-line. So we spent most of the rest of the evening playing around with his computer. He's a true innocent when it comes to the Net, and we wandered around for hours. His computer is rather strange, too, being a Pentium processor in a new tower case, but his keyboard and monitor are from a 386 and the screen resolution sucked. (Everything was jagged-edge dot matrix-like.) I didn't mention this to him, though. At one time he found a cluster of chat lines and we even posted a few interjections in several discussion groups. It was weird, sort of an instantaneous apa, not very good. He located a directory of science-fictional resources on-line and I ran across a listing for *Ansible*. I sent Dave an inane but mercifully brief e-mail; I hope he'll keep sending me his fanzine and contributing to mine. We talked a little bit about the parental estate situation; he said there are some papers being drawn up concerning shifts in the trusts, etc., due to our father's death that he was going to be sending me to sign. One interesting aspect of this he told me about is the requirement that our mother sign the papers. No one involved is unaware of her mental condition, yet all look the other way. Some sort of notary magic is done, and it all works out, he said. I have no reason to doubt the strangeness of it all. The papers came about a month later and the writing on my mother's signature was someone else's (his girlfriend's, says John). I think we made our peace during the course of the evening, in short but focused asides, about how things are going down regarding all this. It felt friendlier, tighter, more brotherly. We were still on the computer around 11 p.m. when John noticed what time it was and said he had to go to work the next day. Since I was beginning to be bored silly over being on-line, I was glad we quickly powered down the computer; but it was at least twenty minutes later before I finally left. It had been a good evening.

Another 48-page issue of *Trap Door* is in the wings; this seems to be the season of genzine fruition for me. This issue will feature Greg Benford, Richard Brandt, Sidney Coleman, Gary Hubbard, Christina Lake, Dave Langford, Dale Speirs, Steve Stiles, Paul Williams and maybe a little Calvin Demmon. Covers by Harry Bell and Brad Foster. I've been saying "by May 1st."

My closing paragraph regarding last issue still applies. I'll repeat it: This will wipe out my backlog. Will y'all help me rebuild it?

Footnote to last issue's mailing comment to **Paul**: I *did* greatly enjoy reading your essay on Nico's first album in *Crawdaddy!* — would like to obtain a cassette tape of her recorded stuff. I have the first three Velvet Underground albums on tape, but not Nico. I assume you saw *Nico Icon*, the 65-minute documentary about Nico that was showing during 1995. If not, I recommend renting it when it comes out on video.

If we're going to return to regular mailings, how about quarterly but with real deadlines? That had been our de facto schedule before the great silence.

[- 2/29/96]