

## Science Fiction Book Club

### Interview with Astrid Anderson Bear (Sept. 2019)

*Astrid Anderson Bear, daughter of Poul and Karen Anderson, was raised in the science fiction realm. Along with being a master costumer and fiber artist, she has been heavily involved in the science fiction community, from serving on the board for the Clarion West writer's workshop, to serving on the advisory board for Seattle's Science Fiction Museum & Hall of Fame, to her involvement with the Science Fiction Writers of America (SFWA). She contributed to San Diego Noir and Multiverse: Exploring the Worlds of Poul Anderson.*

**Blaine Savini: Which of your father's works was your personal favorite and why?** My favorites include Tau Zero, Operation Chaos, and the Hoka stories. Tau Zero because it is tour-de-force hard SF, Operation Chaos because it's grand blend of fantasy and an alternate 20<sup>th</sup> century world, and the Hoka stories because they are silly fun.

**Ken Thomas: Did Poul Anderson base his character, Nicholas van Rijn, on someone in real life?** No, I don't think so. He is certainly a colorful character, though!

**Eva Sable: Did your father have particularly favorite authors and books that he would talk about on a regular basis, or cite as influences? Also, what did you like to read, and did any of your choices make their way into your dad's shelf?** He was quite widely read. The Norse sagas (Snorri's works, especially) were a big influence. And course all the SF writers of his youth and young adulthood: Bob Heinlein, Clifford Simak, Jack Williamson, L. Sprague de Camp, etc. Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes stories were a shared love between all of us. And he probably ended up reading more Greg Bear books than he might have planned to after we were married :)

**Robert Matthew Knuckles He wrote both fantasy and science fiction stories, so what did he say or feel about the differences/similarities between the two.** I don't know. But he certainly could go from one to the other with ease.

**Gary Denton: Do you have any good stories about sci-fi conventions?** Yes. Oh, you want me to tell you some? So many delightful times! Singing "Teen Angel" at 2 am with David Hartwell and a roomful of other folks. Being at the Spokane WorldCon at the revived Hugo Losers Party and seeing George Martin give out the first set of Alfies. Standing behind Scott Shaw at the 1972 LA WorldCon masquerade as the peanut butter he wore as his costume as the underground comic character The Turd turned rancid and gently sloughed off. This prompted the "no peanut butter" rule, which has been widened to become something on the order of, "No substances which might damage other costumes or the stage." Basically, SF conventions are the family reunions of our tribe, with as much fun, drama, thrills, tedium, and odd cousins as you might expect at any family reunion.

**John Grayshaw: What are some of your favorite memories of your mom's costumes at Worldcons? Which she won a lifetime achievement award for.** I'd forgotten about that award. Her best known costume is the one we did together, The Bat and the Bitten. Her costume, The Bat, had originally been Countess Dracula, presented at (I think) the 1958 WorldCon. One evening we came with the idea in

conversation, “If cats have kittens, do bats have bittens?” which led to deciding to make that a costume presentation. I used her costume’s wings as a general template for The Bitten’s wings. It was presented at the 1969 WesterCon and WorldCon, and no one who saw it has ever forgotten it. It also was perhaps the first use of a taped soundtrack for a masquerade presentation – they are pretty commonly used these days.

**John Grayshaw: Since your mom created the term, do you have any favorite filk songs?** I’m particularly fond of The Friggin Falcon by Ted Cogswell.

**John Grayshaw: How did you and your family help found the SCA? And what was it like in its early days and how has the organization changed over the years? And are you still involved?** The first event of the group that became the SCA was a gathering with medievalish dress-up, and sword fighting in Diana Paxson’s back yard. So she really was the founding mother. Everyone who was there had so much fun, they decided to keep doing it again and again. It was a lot of fun, and a wonderful place to grow up in. My parents were quite active, my dad as a fighter who also took part in the bardic circles, and my mother as a herald and part of the “civil service” that kept things organized. The early days had a lot of improvisation and making it up as we went along. I think things have gotten much more formalized over the years. I’m not terribly involved in the SCA these past years, but did attend the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebration of the Kingdom of the West, which was marvelous. It’s truly remarkable to see the scholarship, creativity and hands-on knowledge in so many areas of endeavor: natural dyes, pottery, weaving, archery, weapons making, armor making, manuscript illumination – one could go on and on.

**Gary Denton: Do you have any good stories about SCA get-togethers? And writers at SCA?** For anecdotes about the early SCA years, dive in here: [www.history.westkingdom.org/index.php](http://www.history.westkingdom.org/index.php)

Look on the right side, and click on the various SCA years. Dad is Bela of Eastmarch, I am Astrid of Hawk Ridge, and my mother is Karina of the Far West.

This link is to the first overnight tourney which was quite eventful and a lot of fun.  
[http://history.westkingdom.org/events/event.php?event\\_code=15&sca\\_year=4](http://history.westkingdom.org/events/event.php?event_code=15&sca_year=4)

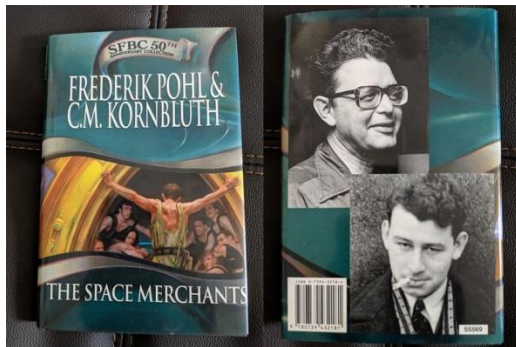
**Eryn Kathryn Perry Utz: Due to Poul's involvement as a founding member of the Society for Creative Anachronism: “how is sci-fi related to the romantic/heroic genres of the 19th c such as Walter Scott? Many SCAdians were inspired by such literature but are also Sci-fi fans.”** That’s probably a question for an actual English major. I would imagine that early Anglophone writers of 20<sup>th</sup> century SF read Scott, as well as Wells, MacDonald, Dunsany, etc. If one enjoys reading about things other than the here and now, one is often open to a wide range of literature. My dad read widely, and of course wrote *The Broken Sword* early in his career. It was published in 1954, the same year as *The Lord of the Rings*. In early days of the SCA, there was pretty much 100% overlap between SCA folks and SF fans. And sometimes in SF/fantasy of the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, you’d see SF writers writing fantasy, or SF set in historical settings, such as time travel stories.

**John Grayshaw: What can you tell me about your mother’s founding and involvement in the Sherlock Holmes group the “Red Circle Society?” Was your father involved too?** Mother was in high school

when she and some friends founded The Red Circle. They didn't meet until later, so he wasn't involved with that, but they were both active members of the San Francisco Sherlock Holmes group, The Scowrers and the Molly Maguires. Dad was invested in the Baker Street Irregulars in 1960, Mother in 2000 – they were both very honored to receive their shillings. Historic note: Mother made sure that the Red Circle was open to both men and women, and the Scowrers and Molly Maguires also had that policy. The Baker Street Irregulars didn't admit women as members until 1991.

**Chris Barkley: Have you ever seen this? And how often have mix ups like this have happened?**

That is hilarious! I've not seen it before. As for how often mix ups like that have happened, they certainly pop up from time to time, especially in conversation, but that's the first time I've seen a book. Of course, I notice the mistake when it's Pohl instead of Poul – I imagine Fred's family notice the Poul instead of Pohl version. 😊



**Steve Staab: What was it like growing up having a free-lance writer for a dad? Did he work from home? Did he bounce ideas off of family or otherwise engage them in the writing process? Did he have a cat(s)?** Yes, he worked from home. One of the bedrooms was his office, and he'd go in there after breakfast, work until lunch, then go back in until dinner, most weekdays. He was Not To Be Disturbed, except for emergencies or the occasional call from an editor. He loved talking about book details with my mother, she was definitely a part of his process. Yes, we had a cat or two for many years. The longest lived one was a seal-point Siamese named Topsy (short for Taffimai Metallumai, from Kipling's Just So Stories). She came from a litter from the cats of Reginald Bretnor, an SF writer who lived in Berkeley and who was a friend.

**David Stuckey I'd ask what his view of history was - If he was like H Beam Piper in the sense that he believed history repeated as humans respond to similar situations in the same way, or more Asimov that humans change their responses as their knowledge and technical abilities increase?** He did read Spengler – everybody did at that time, I think. But I think you can find both viewpoints in his work.

**John Grayshaw: Who are some of the Science Fiction writers your father was friends with? What are some amusing stories about those relationships?** He was close friends with Jack Vance and Jerry Pournelle, and of course, through the SF conventions came to know most of the other writers working field from the 1950s on. For a good dip into his relationship with Jack, read his memoir, THIS IS ME, JACK VANCE! It's a wonderful book, which really gives a sense of the times they shared in the 1960s

especially. As for Jerry Pournelle, the story I tell often is of the time they were attempting to sail Jerry's small racing boat from Seattle to Los Angeles. They got stuck in a storm in the straights of Juan de Fuca, where Puget Sound enters the Pacific Ocean. After a night battling the winds, Jerry quipped, "I love my country, but not when she's a lee shore!"

**Anastasia Hilvers I'd love insider info on the relationship with Jerry Pournelle?** They were quite good friends, and had a lot of good times together. Jerry was involved in the SCA in the early days, so would drive up from LA for tourney weekends and stay with us.

**John Grayshaw: I was talking to Andrew Lippert who is processing your parent's papers at the University of California Riverside. Thank you very much for donating those and making sure that source of SF history will be preserved...Lippert mentioned that you and your mother were regular letter writers to the original cast of Star Trek and Gene Roddenberry. Can you tell us about this? Did you get interesting responses? Did your father enjoy Star Trek too? Did he ever want to write for the show or write a Star Trek novel?** There were a few letters exchanged between my parents and Gene – what there is surviving is at UCR, so they'll have the details. The original show reached out to various SF writers including my dad, I think during the first season. They asked him to come down to LA and meet with them (we lived in the Bay Area), so we did that, and got to visit the set while they were filming. Dad did submit a script proposal, but it wasn't accepted. We'd see Gene at SF cons from time to time, so there was a casual friendship.

I'm very happy that UCR has taken my parents' papers and really appreciate their enthusiasm, expertise, and commitment to preserving SF/F history.

**John Grayshaw: Are you and your husband still involved in protecting author's copyright?** Yes, we do try to fight the good fight when people assert that they can reprint copyrighted material without permission of the copyright holder.

**John Grayshaw: What did your father tell you about his childhood? He lived in a lot of very different places.** He loved daytrips in the Gulf of Mexico with his parents and younger brother in the sailboat his father built. He truly detested chickens as a result of the chicken and egg operation his mother had on the small farm in Minnesota that she bought after his father died. The Wikipedia article implies he lived in Denmark for some years, but that's not the case, although he visited there more than once in his childhood.

**John Grayshaw: Why did your father go into writing rather than pursuing a career in physics?** He had started selling some stories while still in college and realizing that he'd be a mediocre physicist but potentially a pretty good writer, he stuck with that.

**John Grayshaw: With "Tau Zero" did your father have to fight to keep all the science passages in it. I can easily see editors wanting to dumb it down.** Good question! I don't know. But he had a pretty solid reputation for including science successfully in works by that time, so I would hope it wasn't too much of a battle at all.

**John Grayshaw: Did your father have any favorites of his works?** I don't know.

**John Grayshaw: Reading your father's "On Thud and Blunder" where he tore apart various tropes in fantasy, I have to wonder did he often pick apart the stories he read (or the movies and tv shows he watched) in this much detail?** In written form, not that I know of. As a working writer, I'm sure he paid attention to structure and form in most of the fiction he read, to a greater or lesser extent.

**John Grayshaw: Why did your father stop writing his Future History/ The Psychotechnic League stories?** I don't know. He might have felt had done enough with those ideas and had other things he wanted to write.

**John Grayshaw: Do you know of any future adaptations of your father's works in TV or movies?** Nothing in the works at this time, but we'd love to see something! There have been nibbles over the years, most recently on BRAINWAVE.

**John Grayshaw: What were some of your father's hobbies other than writing?** He enjoyed woodworking, and also hiking and camping.

**John Grayshaw: Did your father have a writing routine he stuck to?** Answered above.

**John Grayshaw: What is your father's legacy?** I think his legacy is as one of the mid-to-late 20<sup>th</sup> century writers that brought more humanity and depth to science fiction while also trying to work within actual science when it was appropriate to the story. So there might be a faster than light drive if the story needs it, but the planetary science and orbital mechanics are correct. And his fantasy work also exhibited the humanity and depth he brought to SF. He really was a bit of a renaissance literary man, being so accomplished in both fields.