

Science Fiction Book Club

Interview with Noel Sturgeon (November 2019)

Noël Sturgeon is the fourth daughter of Theodore Sturgeon. She is the Trustee of the Theodore Sturgeon Literary Trust, and a regular participant in choosing the winners of the annual Theodore Sturgeon Memorial Award for Short Science Fiction. Now retired, she is a former Dean and professor of the Faculty of Environmental Studies at York University in Toronto, and professor of Women, Gender and Sexuality Studies and American Studies at Washington State University.

Wyatt Trunk: Did your father have any good writing advice?

Ted loved teaching, both informally and as an instructor in many writing programs, (where students included Octavia Butler and (it is rumored) Stephen King) especially the Center for Science Fiction at the University of Kansas, which runs summer workshops for the writing and teaching of science fiction. Some of Ted's writing advice that I have heard from his students included: "put a character in a situation where they can't be what they are and see what happens," and an insistence on understanding the meter of your prose, as though you were a poet. He often recommended writing a sonnet as a way to begin understanding how to write prose. One of his favorite teaching tools was the 1947 book, *Exercises in Style*, by Raymond Queneau, which tells the same brief story in different registers (noir, hysterical, intellectual, comic, tragic, etc.).

John Watkins: How did 'Ask the Next Question,' come about? Thanks.



Throughout his entire life, Ted rejected conventional explanations that justified repressive and discriminatory beliefs. "Ask the Next Question" evolved from his efforts to communicate how important it is to challenge normative discourses. More commonly now we call this practice "critical thinking," especially when challenging the idea that social arrangements are "natural" and therefore unchangeable. Ted's crystallization of this practice of critical interrogation into the adage "ask the next question" appears in a June 1967, essay from *Cavalier Magazine*, which you can see here: <http://www.sfcenter.ku.edu/Sturgeon-Q.htm>, but it had been an important part of his thinking for a long time. This link is to a Center for Science Fiction page that explains why the Sturgeon Award for Best Short Fiction of the year is a Q with an arrow through it. Many stories contain a detailed description of the method of asking the next question ("The [Widget], the [Wadget] and Boff," "And My Fear Is Great," "Affair With a Green Monkey," *Venus Plus X*, etc).

Evan Stein: How did your father get connected to Star Trek and wind up writing one of the stories that most defined the Vulcan race?

Ted experienced writing blocks and severe depression several times in his life. One of those times was in the 1960s, following a flood of high quality writing from 1949 to 1964. With four children and a

mortgage on our house in Woodstock, NY, Ted was desperate to make money. Harlan Ellison suggested that Ted come out to LA and join the writers working on the fledgling science fiction series, *Star Trek*. Harlan (who was a long-time fan of Ted's work and had met him at a science fiction convention when Harlan was 14), offered him a place to stay at his house, introduced him to Gene Roddenberry, and gave him advice on writing TV screenplays (though Ted had written radio and teleplays previously). Thus, Ted was on the *Star Trek* set at the very beginning of the series, and got to know the cast well. One of the results of this was that the first red-shirt to die was named Sturgeon (apparently in homage). My siblings and I got a big kick out of the moment when a red-shirt runs to Captain Kirk shouting, "Sturgeon's dead!" in the first episode. Ted brought one or two of us on set occasionally, and many of the cast visited my sister when she was in the hospital with an injury. They are (and were) lovely people.

John Grayshaw: Was your father given parameters to follow about pon farr and Vulcans or was he able to write it how he wanted?

As the answer to the question above would indicate, Ted was present for much of the early development of the world of *Star Trek*, and talked through his ideas for the script with the cast, director Joseph Pevney, and producer Gene Roddenberry, so I think it was somewhat collaborative, though the basic pon farr plot and emphasis on character development and sexuality are pure Sturgeon. Some of this collaboration is apparent in what Leonard Nimoy has said about the origination of the Vulcan greeting. <http://www.theodoresturgeontrust.com/news.html> When Nimoy talked with Ted about what such a greeting would be like, Nimoy suggested the split fingers gesture (which for him referenced Jewish religious practice), while Ted came up with "Live long and prosper."

Clement Dulongpre: Did your father prefer writing novels or short stories? He did both so well and was an amazingly prolific short story writer.

Most of Ted's writing was in the short story or novella format. You are right, Clement, there are 222 short form works in *The Complete Stories of Theodore Sturgeon*, which belies the common and mistaken idea that Ted didn't produce much in his relatively short lifetime (he was 67 when he died). There are seven novels, not counting works for hire (that is, movie and TV novelizations (*The King and Four Queens*, *The Rare Breed*, *Voyage to the Bottom of the Sea*) and an Ellery Queen novel, *The Player on the Other Side*). Ted's most famous novel, *More Than Human*, began as the short story "Baby is Three." Encouraged by Ian and Betty Ballantine, he then wrote two sections, before and after what happens in "Baby is Three," to make a longer (and different) narrative, the novel *More Than Human* (which numerous people have pointed out might have served as the inspiration for everything from the X-Men to Sense8). *To Marry Medusa* is a set of linked short narratives with different protagonists. *Some of Your Blood* links letters, psychiatric reports, and an autobiography into one narrative (an unusual vampire story). *Venus Plus X* is two different stories, set in different universes with different narrators, only connected by the ideas about gender that are the heart of the book. *Godbody* is a set of linked events told from multiple points of view. Only *The Dreaming Jewels*, and *I, Libertine* (which has a strange genesis as it was published under the name Frederick R. Ewing) are more conventional novels with basically one point of view and an uninterrupted lengthy narrative.

Which is a long way of saying (sorry!) that it does seem that Ted was most comfortable with shorter forms. Why was this so? It may be that the kind of story he liked to tell (ones with punch-lines, ones with twists, ones turning on a startling, life-altering insight for a character) fit the short form better. It may also be that since the short story market was the one he started in, and until the 1950s, was a healthy market, short stories were how he could make a living. His stories were widely anthologized as well. When the SF magazines weren't paying enough, he wrote for *Playboy*, *Omni*, and even *Hustler*, but other short story markets were biased against science fiction (places like *The New Yorker*, for example). Hence his life-long struggle with feeling locked into a category, science fiction, which was denigrated as a lesser form of literature and paid accordingly. Sturgeon's Law arises from that struggle: that if 90% of SF is bad writing, 90% of all writing (and by extension all creative production) is of poor quality. There is always 10% of SF that is just as good as 10% of literary fiction, and that's the work that is remembered.

Gregory Dietz: Love is a pervasive theme in your father's stories - where do you think that comes from? Was he a spiritual man? If so, what form did that take?

Ted's work is frequently depicted as being about love. Robert Heinlein liked to emphasize that aspect of his work and said once: "Ted is love with skin around it." (You can find this quote in Heinlein's Afterword to *Volume III: Killdozer!* of *The Complete Stories of Theodore Sturgeon*). Certainly, major themes in his work were the importance of being loved and loving. "When You Care, When You Love" is about a woman who loves a man so much that she recreates him in every physical and experiential detail after he dies. "Case and the Dreamer" is about the way enduring love between two people becomes an example for an all-powerful alien and a ship's artificial intelligence.

But I think it is just as true to say that hate is a major theme of his work. There are many characters in Sturgeon's stories that are filled with hate. "Die, Maestro, Die" is an example of that; "And Now the News..." is another (which needs to be read today in our news-saturated culture). Certainly, Ted's imagination produced some truly terrifying ideas. Though you could say it is a story about love, "Bianca's Hands" was turned down for publication many times (until it won a major short story award) because of its horrific content. Famously, an editor said that he would never publish anything from a writer who could write "Bianca's Hands." "It" (which inspired the comic book character Swamp Thing), is a real horror story, as is "The Girl Had Guts," and "The Professor's Teddy Bear." And there are many other examples.

Another major theme for Sturgeon is children, especially children who are abused, lonely, different, and bullied. *More Than Human*, *The Dreaming Jewels*, "Shadow, Shadow, on the Wall," "Crate," and many others are examples; all these children are struggling with a sense of being different and marginalized. Accepting difference and finding strength in difference might be the overarching Sturgeon theme, and love, empathy, and the power of human connection follow from that.

A repeated element of Sturgeon's plots is something (an alien force, a technology, a telepathic ability) that creates instantaneous communication between people, allowing them to share their knowledge and their skills as needed. "The Touch of Your Hand," "The Skills of Xanadu," *More Than Human*, *To*

Marry Medusa, are prime examples of this theme. Ted believed that if this capacity existed, empathy and shared knowledge would ensure that poverty, war, repression, and loneliness would be eliminated. Ted died in 1985, just before the internet became widely accessible, and I have often wondered what he would have thought about its effects, given that it has provided that kind of immediate, world-spanning communication that he often envisioned.

As far as spirituality, Ted was an atheist and detested organized religion. But at the same time, he was intellectually curious about why people believed what they believed, and willing to explore ways of expanding one's consciousness. He said that he was in the room with several other writers when L. Ron Hubbard pointed out that you could make more money inventing a religion than writing science fiction. Yet, years later, he was curious enough about Scientology to become an "auditor," though he didn't fully trust it. Many of his forays into various self-help, therapies, and spiritual practices provided fodder for his stories. He dabbled in Freudian analysis (see "Baby is Three"), LSD therapy (see "The Beholders"), and EST therapy. Ted's partner and widow, Jayne Williams, was a minister in the American Holistic Church. I wouldn't say he was a seeker, but he was willing to entertain unconventional ideas. *Godbody*, published posthumously, focuses on a Jesus-like figure who preaches free love and sex as solutions to human fear, violence and separation, and is probably the closest expression of Ted's spiritual beliefs.

Michael Payne: It is said your father loved Jazz; do you know of any story that features jazz as a story element?

The best example of this is "Die, Maestro, Die!" which centers on the complex interpersonal relationships in a jazz or bebop band. There is also a story called "Wham Bop!" which describes the discovery of a talented jazz drummer.

Tony DeSimone: Who were his favorite jazz musicians?

Ted loved music in general, especially classical, jazz, the blues and folk-songs. He played guitar and piano and loved to sing and jam with other people. I grew up thinking that it was natural to develop four-part harmonies when on a car trip together. He was born in 1918, so it isn't surprising that his favorite jazz was 1940s be-bop and swing: Ella Fitzgerald, Billie Holiday, Count Basie, Duke Ellington, Dizzy Gillespie, Louis Armstrong, Artie Shaw. The two stories mentioned above are about be-bop bands. One of Ted's closest friends, Janie Hamilton (who introduced Ted to my mother Marion, and whose name graces an important character in *More Than Human*) was a singer in Ellington's band. Ted wrote a song for a character who was a singer in the story "Thunder and Roses," and it was performed at Philcon, an SF convention in Philadelphia in 1949. Ted played guitar and it was sung by Mary Mair, a showgirl to whom Ted was briefly married. An arrangement of the song for piano by Chandler Davis (a SF writer who was an early friend of Ted's and later became a well-known mathematician) has been performed at a SF convention in Toronto in 2014 and I think is being collected in a book of Davis's piano arrangements.

When Ted moved to LA in the 1970s, and began living with Wina Golden (who had been a rock music journalist in London), he was introduced through her connections to fans of his in the rock scene in Laurel Canyon: Crosby, Stills and Nash, The Mamas and the Papas, the Monkees, Joni Mitchell, Frank Zappa. He worked with David Crosby on a screenplay for the song, *Wooden Ships*, which unfortunately

never came to fruition. David Crosby wrote an introduction for *Volume VI: Baby is Three of The Complete Stories* that describes Ted's influence on him. During this period, Ted wrote to us in Woodstock about how thrilling it was to sit and listen to CSNY developing harmonies; that kind of interchange in music, where a group of differently talented individuals become something larger together, was an expression of the idea of the *gestalt* homo sapiens that he loved and wrote about in *More Than Human* and that many musicians in the 1960s and 70s responded to, including the *Grateful Dead*. Ted's idea of "bleshing" (the word he used to describe this deep interaction) and his lifelong war against sexual repression made his work very influential on the 1960s counterculture.

Tony DeSimone: A Saucer of Loneliness is one of the most powerful portrayals of loneliness and depression that I have come across. Was there any real life inspiration for the story?

I've said above that Ted suffered from depression and writer's block off and on throughout his life. He also suffered from a sense of being different and an outcast. Given that he was a handsome, articulate, charismatic and successful person, it is curious to repeatedly encounter the depth of his belief that he was unworthy in some way. Perhaps his being bullied by his stepfather (see Ted's autobiographical essay, *Argyll*, for a lengthy description of this), perhaps his bisexuality, perhaps primarily his relegation to a genre thought to be low-quality writing (which Kurt Vonnegut called "genreism") all may have played a part in his thorough understanding of feeling lonely, unworthy, and marginalized. It is sad, but it is also true that he produced some amazing work because of this understanding (including the first SF story to deal positively with homosexuality, "The World Well Lost"). In a review of *Selected Stories*, John Clute has written movingly about the quality of a Sturgeon story that makes you wonder what tragedy happened to Sturgeon, and how Ted's ability to convey that quality deeply affects his readers.

<https://www.salon.com/2000/11/15/sturgeon/>

Gary Denton: Famously Robert A. Heinlein sent Theodore some money and story ideas when he was stuck once. Can you tell us about his relationships with other writers as well as Heinlein?

Because of its publication by David Hartwell in *The New York Review of Science Fiction*, that letter has become well-known; the story referenced above "And Now The News..." was one of the few that arose from Heinlein's letter, along with the powerful "The Comedian's Children." Though having very different views politically (Ted was an anti-militarist, rejected economic inequality as unjust, and was much more of a feminist than Heinlein, though certainly not perfectly), they shared a belief in sex and nudity as liberatory. They were good friends (weirdly, Heinlein died exactly three years to the day after Ted). Ted's friendship with Harlan is referenced above; Harlan's obituary of Ted in *Locus Magazine* is very moving, and his introduction to *Volume XI: The Nail and the Oracle of The Complete Stories*, will tell you more than you may want to know about their friendship. Early friends were Edgar Pangborn, Phil Klass (William Tenn) and Chandler Davis. He was romantically involved with Judith Merrill, and they remained friends throughout her life; Judy credited him with supporting her efforts to become a writer, which was rare for men in the SF field in the 1940s when they met. He was extremely fond of Samuel R. (Chip) Delany. And of course, through his years of teaching at the Center for Science Fiction summer workshops, he became good friends with James Gunn, who novelized Ted's unaired Star Trek screenplay, *The Joy Machine* (which contains the first mention of the Prime Directive). There are others I

am sure I am leaving out, like Robert Silverberg, for example. I am indebted to those who loved and appreciated him for their help in getting all of Ted's work published and available today.

But though Ted could instantly make people feel that they were incredibly special to him, he was actually a frustrating friend, as he seemed to forget those that weren't in his immediate space. Paul Williams (also a writer and friend, a fan from an early age, the editor of *The Complete Stories* and a tireless promoter of Ted's work) wrote very intelligently about this quality of Ted's and its implications for Ted's writing in his biographical essay, "Theodore Sturgeon: Storyteller" (which can be found on the Trust's webpage, <http://www.theodoresturgeontrust.com>, and in *Volume 13: Case and the Dreamer* of *The Complete Stories* as an appendix).

Gary Denton: As far as I can tell he had one New York Times bestseller 'I, Libertine,' which was written under another name. As a mainly pulp short story writer was there any works that kept income coming in to pay the bills?

The story behind *I, Libertine* is strange. Jean Shepherd, the NYC radio personality, who had an avid following he called "The Night People," decided as a hoax to advertise a book called *I, Libertine*, which didn't exist. Demand for the book was surprising, though, and so Shepherd and Ian and Betty Ballantine asked Ted to write it, working from a very short description of its content. Supposedly, Ted wrote the book in three days; it is a weird part of his literary catalogue, a historical romance set in 18th century London. It was only briefly a bestseller when it was published, and out of print for years until it was published as an ebook by Open Road Media.

More Than Human, on the other hand, has never been out of print since its publication in 1952, and is consistently ranked as one of the best science fiction novels ever written. *MTH* brought in a constant trickle of royalties, and then movie rights were continuously optioned from the early 1960s onwards (once by Orson Welles), though a movie has not been made as yet. Sturgeon was able to immediately sell every short story he wrote (except for "Bianca's Hands," which, as I've said, took a few years); but, as mentioned above, short forms paid a lot less than novels. So Ted struggled financially his entire life. Yet the work is still selling, and selling around the world, 34 years after his death. Now that all of the writing (*The Complete Stories* and all of the novels) are in ebook form through North Atlantic Books and Open Road Media, they are much more accessible. His centenary in 2018 has spurred more interest in his work, with Sturgeon-themed events in France and the US.

Gary Denton: He is one of my favorite authors with great ideas and a liberal sympathetic humanitarian slant to his stories, not surprised he had difficulties with Campbell the editor of Astounding. Was he involved with any political groups or any religious institutions?

I've discussed religious beliefs in answer to Gregory Deitz's question above. As far as politics, he was as you describe, a liberal humanitarian. Many of his ideas about love, sex, equality and anti-militarism made him a strong influence on the 1960s counterculture. He was horrified by McCarthyism; the story he wrote in response, "Mr. Costello, Hero," is one of his best and a chilling read in today's context. Though he wasn't really a joiner of organizations, he was active in the local Woodstock branch of SANE (National Committee for a SANE Nuclear Policy), which was formed in 1957, and his stories "Memorial"

and especially “Thunder and Roses,” are strong statements about the danger of nuclear war (although Ted was not a pacifist, and several of his stories, such as “There is No Defense,” argued for a willingness to go to war if morally necessary, not surprising from someone of his WWII generation). He was a dedicated proponent of free speech and the ACLU. Ted and my mother, Marion, protested the Vietnam War and supported the Civil Rights movement; I can remember going on an anti-war march with the whole family in NYC when I was five or six. Ted was not a radical leftist, however; he was more of a libertarian, especially in his later years.

Gary Mark Bernstein: I was unaware of trouble between Campbell and Surgeon and would like to hear more about this.

I don't know much about this; I think Campbell frustrated a lot of writers because of his directive editorial practices. Ted was also interested in character development, literary style, and social and individual struggles, and, unlike Campbell, not so much in space opera or hard science fiction. If anyone is seriously interested in this question, letters between him and Campbell and his comments about Campbell can be found in his papers (The Sturgeon Collection, Spencer Research Library at the University of Kansas; <https://spencer.lib.ku.edu/collections/special-collections/science-fiction>), which can be digitally searched.

Hubert Siwecki: Is it true that your father was a prototype for Kilgore Trout character in Vonnegut's novels? And how did he feel about this?

Yes, Vonnegut has said several times that Ted was the initial inspiration for the Kilgore Trout character, partially because he thought the name was interesting, but also because Ted symbolized the struggle of SF writers to be taken seriously. Vonnegut was a fan of Ted's writing in the 1940s and 50s; he met Ted in 1958 when they were both living on Cape Cod, and he was struck by how poor and tired Ted was and how difficult it was to support his children. Kilgore Trout appears in Vonnegut's work shortly after that meeting; but Vonnegut was always clear that the character was not actually Ted, as he respected Ted's work very much, calling him “one of the best writers in America.” Did this meeting influence Vonnegut to turn away from identifying as an SF writer? That's just speculation; probably the animus against SF was enough. Vonnegut was gracious enough to respond to my invitation to write an introduction for *Volume VII: A Saucer of Loneliness of The Complete Stories*, and he describes that meeting there. He wrote: “[Ted] was a victim of a hate crime then commonly practiced by the American literary establishment. It wasn't racism or sexism or ageism. It was ‘genreism.’ Definition: ‘The unexamined conviction that anyone who wrote science fiction wasn't really a writer, but a geek of some sort.’ A genuine geek, of course, is a carnival employee who is displayed in a filthy cage and billed as ‘The Wild Man from Borneo.’” (From Vonnegut's introduction to *Volume VII*, p xi)

John Grayshaw: What was his friendship with Vonnegut like?

Outside of that one meeting in 1958, I am not aware that they met or corresponded again, though Vonnegut does refer to Ted as his “friend” in the introduction.

Eva Sable: Was your dad's writing a significant part of your family life? What I mean is was it talked about, part of dinner table conversation, and so on, or was it regarded as just dad's job?

I don't remember Ted ever talking about a specific piece of writing with us. That said, storytelling was a major part of my family's everyday life. Every event was experienced with the knowledge that it would become a story; narrating the events of one's day for others was standard for all of us. My maternal grandmother was a natural storyteller (Ted dedicated one of his books to "Grandma Sal") and my mother was also a writer (albeit unpublished). Once my father had a good story down pat, you could guarantee that it would be told again and again, sometimes maddeningly. Knowing how to tell a good joke was also something we learned at the dinner table; he especially loved puns (See Spider Robinson's Afterword to *Volume XII: Slow Sculpture of The Complete Stories* for a description of a punning session with Ted, if you can bear it). I can remember going grocery shopping with my father and waiting for what felt like forever as stories were exchanged with the people he met.

The fact that he was a writer who worked at home meant that he was around much more than other fathers in the 1950s and 1960s. He did a lot of the domestic work and childcare, and telling stories was a part of all of this work. You can see in his writing numerous domestic details that fill out a character. He used to say "I'm writing a story in my head" when he was washing dishes, and indeed it did seem like it, because unless he was suffering a writing block, he could turn from washing dishes to writing a story in several hours with no or little revision. Yet he constantly missed deadlines. An editor (I think it was Groff Conklin) said once (and I'm approximating this quote): "I know Sturgeon can write a story in three hours, but which three hours?"

Ed Newsom: A theme that turns up several times in your father's work is losing one's identity within a relationship. Was this autobiographical?

Well, I'd be interested to know which stories you mean here. The only one I can think of is "It's You!" which describes pretty closely his relationship with Wina Golden (Sturgeon), who among many talents was a seamstress, encouraged him to wear jewelry, and brought him into new social circles.

Ed Newsom: Can you lend insight into the reasons behind his periods of writer's block?

I think I've addressed this in answer to a couple of questions above. It should be said that most writers have writer's block; one reason his writer's blocks became part of his reputation (so much so that one of his later anthologies was titled *Sturgeon Is Alive And Well*) is because his output was so incredibly prolific in the late 1940s and 1950s. SF readers became used to regularly seeing a Sturgeon story in issues of *Astounding* and *Science Fiction and Fantasy*, so when the output slowed down in the middle 1960s, it caused concern and frustration among his fans.

Ed Newsom: I could be very wrong about this, but your father strikes me as a restless soul. Did he (eventually or periodically) find peace within himself?

I'm not sure how to answer this question; I think he remained a conflicted person his whole life. But that doesn't mean he didn't have moments of pure joy and love; his expression of those feelings in his stories

is one of the reason he had so many fans, and why his writing was so different than many of his contemporaries.

Ed Newsom: Who within the writing profession did he consider his closest friends?

I think I've answered this question in response to Gary's question, above.

Amy Binns: Did your dad tell you stories? What were they about? Did he read books with you? Which were his favourites?

Well, as I've said, storytelling was a constant in our household, and in all of Ted's households before and after ours (besides the four children that he had with my mother, Marion, whom he never divorced, he had two daughters with his first wife, Dorothé and a son with his partner, Wina; as well as a long relationship with his last partner, Jayne). He read to us as well: Kipling's *Just So Stories*, *Aesop's Fables*, *Alice in Wonderland*, *The Wizard of Oz*. His favorite children's books were the ones he read as a child, *The Waterbabies*, by Charles Kingsley, *At the Back of the North Wind* by George MacDonald, and *The Garden of the Plynck* by Karle Wilson Baker, Victoria-era books that are very imaginative and a bit silly, at least they seem so to me now. But one can see these stories leading to Ted's fantasy writing, depicting various gremlins, leprechauns, changelings, unicorns, mermaids, and centaurs. Sometimes these fantasy stories were funny and light, such as "Brat," "A Touch of Strange," and "Cargo"; sometimes more adult and serious, like "The Silken-Swift" and "One Foot and the Grave."

Aside from children's fiction, he particularly loved Faulkner, Sherwood Anderson (my sister, Tandy, is named after an Anderson story), and Flannery O'Connor, and one can see this influence in his work. He also enjoyed authors like H.P Lovecraft, H.G. Wells, and George Orwell. But he read very widely, indeed. Reading and writing were the revered occupations of our house; Ted taught us to treat books with special care, never to put stress on the bindings or dog-ear the pages.

John Grayshaw: You spent many years working on your father's complete stories and going through his personal papers. Was there anything in there you were genuinely surprised to learn?

Well, as I've mentioned above, having lived with the constant struggles around writer's block and money, I was surprised at the sheer number of stories he had written. I was also surprised at the number of stories that were very good. Aside from a lot of his initial output as he was learning to be a writer and trying to find a formula that would sell, and some of his later stories, most of Sturgeon defies Sturgeon's Law, in that far more than 10% of it is very good writing.

When Ted first began writing SF, it was primarily space opera and hard science fiction; the stylistic quality of the writing was not as much a priority. Ted, however, was interested in good writing, more complex and fleshed out characters, and social, political, and anthropological questions, though science was important to him, too. Sturgeon is credited with a turn away from hard SF, and opening the door for the many writers of a younger generation who were concerned with questions of gender, race, politics, and culture. So one of the things I had to negotiate as I managed the literary estate in a post-1990s SF world that had changed so considerably, was the multiplication of categories that had developed in SF:

science fiction delineated from fantasy; a division of horror from SF; alternate histories, cyberpunk, genderqueer SF, steampunk, silkpunk, etc. etc. Ted's work did not have to operate inside those categories. He wrote "straight" literary fiction, Westerns, horror, comic stories, fantasy, hard science fiction, a little (often satirical) space opera (see "Two Percent Inspiration"), and what is now called "soft" science fiction. This did surprise me, when I realized how much he defied the category of SF itself; and it also made it more understandable why he felt both so constricted and freed by the SF label.

John Grayshaw: What are some of your fondest memories of your father and what are some of the funniest memories?

Well, John, this is hard to answer. I'll respond with just one memory: as mentioned before, Ted was constantly creating narratives, sometimes to the point that I think he was unclear what was truth and what was fiction. A favorite family story is one time when my brother Robin (named after a character in Ted's short story, "Maturity"), told Ted a story he had read in a newspaper about a couple who were robbed while at a baseball game. A few months later, Ted started to tell Robin a shaggy dog story, and slowly Robin realized this was the same plot as the newspaper story, except instead of a baseball game, it was the opera; instead of a Honda, it was a Mercedes Benz, etc., etc. When Robin told Ted that it was the same story, only modified, Ted said, with no defensiveness, "Well, it could have been." This phrase is a touchstone for us when we remember Ted, and try to figure out what was real and what was false in what he told us. Notably, Robin says, the story Ted told was considerably better than the real story.

John Grayshaw: I heard that Sturgeon was involved in bringing the Strugatsky brothers to America. Do you know anything about this?

I don't know much about this. Ted wrote the introduction to the first English language edition of *Roadside Picnic* in 1978, and I believe he wrote other introductions to their work. He thought they were very good.

John Grayshaw: What do you know about your father's involvement in the famous men's club the Trap Door Spiders?

Sorry, again, I don't know much about this. Perhaps the Sturgeon Papers at the Spencer Library at the University of Kansas would have some information.

John Grayshaw: Did your father have favorites of his works?

He was particularly proud of "The Man Who Lost the Sea," even though it was the only story he wrote in a entire year of writer's block (but is a story many love and one which I think about often lately, as it deals with a mission to Mars; it also describes the way he died) and "Bianca's Hands," especially since it won a prize from the British literary magazine *Argosy*, beating out Graham Greene.

John Grayshaw: What are your personal favorites of your father's works? And why?

John, you ask tough questions that are hard to answer! I like *The Dreaming Jewels* a lot, and *More Than Human*. *Venus Plus X* is interesting to me as a feminist academic, since it deals with a critique of gender

through its exploration of an intersex (or transgender? or hermaphroditic? you have to read it to find out) society, but it's not the greatest example of Ted's writing.

I had a hand in assisting the editor of *The Selected Stories* in choosing the thirteen stories in that volume, and we had many aspects guiding our selection (which is why it isn't called "Sturgeon's Best") such as length, representative kinds of stories and different time periods of the work. But I think you can find some of my favorites there. Of course, I have a special place in my heart for "Tandy's Story," as the characters are based on my immediate family. This story was also chosen by Ursula K. LeGuin and Brian Attebery to represent Ted's work in the *Norton Anthology of Science Fiction*.

John Grayshaw: When did you first read your father's writing?

I am not sure; certainly before I was a teenager. I started reading very early. Reading was a major activity in our household when I was growing up, and we had complete access to a huge collection of books ranging across every category imaginable, none of which was ever restricted by our parents. My mother was also a great influence on my reading as well. I couldn't say when I first read a story of my father's, and it took me a long while to realize he was famous in any way. This is probably because he had a strong personal effect on almost everyone he met, from the check-out staff at the grocery store to the president of my college, so it took me quite a while to understand what being famous in the relatively small pond of SF meant.

John Grayshaw: Sturgeon's law that 90% of everything is crap has always made me think he was a harsh critic, is that the case?

Ted spent many years, particularly in the 1970s and 1980s as his own output declined, reviewing SF works for *The New York Times* and other publications. He was very supportive of other writers, so I wouldn't say he was a harsh critic. Reading some of those many reviews in the Sturgeon Papers, I think even when he didn't particularly like a work, he usually found something positive to say.

John Grayshaw: Did you go with your father to science fiction conventions? Any memories of these?

My sister Tandy and my brother Robin went with Ted and Marion to the 1962 WorldCon in Chicago, where Ted was a guest of honor, and have strong memories (I was 6, so I stayed home with my grandmother.) I remember going to see him at a Lunacon convention in 1975 in New York, when I was about 19; at the time he lived in LA and I lived in NY. Chip Delaney has a wonderful description of what that convention was like in his introduction to *Volume II: Microcosmic God of The Complete Stories*.

John Grayshaw: I heard that Sturgeon was a nudist. Is that how you grew up?

Yes. It wasn't imposed, it just was the way things were; you wore clothes when you wanted but weren't shy about taking them off if that seemed more comfortable. Ted had a strong belief that the fear of naked bodies was a major element in other kinds of repressive practices. We were also living in Woodstock, NY, in the 1960s and 1970s, so occasional nudity didn't seem so shocking or unusual. But Ted could be insensitive about his own nudity. Harlan Ellison, in his Introduction to *Volume XI: The Nail*

and the Oracle of The Complete Stories, tells a story about a poor Avon lady shocked by Ted answering the door in the nude.

John Grayshaw: Why do you think your father worked on *Godbody* for so long?

He gave several explanations for not finishing or publishing *Godbody*, which he started writing in the very early 1960s: since the book had many explicit sex scenes, he felt he couldn't publish it at the time without censorship; since many of the characters were recognizably based on some of the townspeople in Woodstock, NY, he didn't want to embarrass them; since he wasn't satisfied with the writing and had to keep working on it. I suspect, though I have no evidence for this idea, that Heinlein's publishing in 1961 of *Stranger In A Strange Land*, which had a similar Jesus-like figure who promoted sexual liberation and deep human connection ("grokking") acted as a brake on Ted's development of *Godbody*. *Godbody* was published posthumously in 1986 (Ted died in 1985), through the efforts of Jayne Williams, with an introduction by Heinlein and an afterword by Stephen R. Donaldson. It is now available (after being out of print for many years) in ebook from Open Road Media.

John Grayshaw: Why did your father's output slowdown in the 60s and 70s?

I think I've answered this in response to Evan's question, above.

John Grayshaw: Your father participated in the science fiction institute at the University of Kansas for many years. What did he enjoy about helping young writers?

I think he relished the role of mentor and guide. He liked to help young and aspiring writers. In some ways, much of his personal style was charismatic and full of adages and insights (some of which felt recycled if you were around him a lot, but still meaningful for those encountering them for the first time), so he felt comfortable and powerful as a teacher. He also had a blind spot about the use of this charisma in personal relationships; here he didn't ask the next question enough.

John Grayshaw: Do you know of any future adaptations of your father's works in TV or movies?

As you know, several of my father's works were made into film or TV; "Bright Segment" in a French version, *Parcelles Brilliantes*, directed by Christian Chalonge; "Killdozer!" as a TV movie; two Twilight Zone episodes, "A Saucer of Loneliness," (written by David Gerrold and starring Shelly Duvall), and "A Matter of Minutes," (based on Sturgeon's story "Yesterday Was Monday" and written by Harlan Ellison and Rockne S. O'Bannon). And as I mentioned, *More Than Human* has been optioned many times, and *The Dreaming Jewels* more occasionally. I think until recently, the kind of SF Ted wrote was difficult to turn into a movie; again, he wasn't the kind of SF writer that fit the *Star Wars* or *Alien* mode, but his reputation as an SF writer kept other filmmakers from looking at his work. Now I think there is much more potential for developing Sturgeon on the screen, with streaming, high-quality episodic TV series, TV anthologies, and interest in character-driven plots and questions of gender, difference, bullying, empathy and connection. And other social and political themes, such as those explored in "Microcosmic God." Indeed there has been an uptick of interest recently. But most filmmakers seem fixated on *More Than Human*, and I am hoping that these creative types will look more closely at the stories and other

novels as well, since many of them have a lot of filmic potential. I was encouraged, for example, of the success of *Arrival*, from a short story by Ted Chiang called “Story of Your Life,” which won a Theodore Sturgeon Award in 1999.

John Grayshaw: What were some of your father’s hobbies other than writing?

Ted had many jobs as a young man, and loved working with his hands. Indeed, one of the things Chip Delaney has pointed out about his work is that he often focused on working-class characters, pretty rare in SF. Ted could cook, fix engines and toys, build radios, kill rabbits and clean them, diaper a baby, chop wood, fly a plane, help a cat have her kittens, drive a bulldozer, write a song. Of course, some of these things were necessities of life, some of them pleasures, some of them good ways to procrastinate when he should have been writing. His stories, though, are filled with these descriptions of material processes, manual labor, the creation of gadgets and meals, the minutiae of work and life.

John Grayshaw: Did your father have a writing routine he stuck to?

Not really. He would usually have a space of his own to work in, an office and a studio, filled with the projects of the “hobbies” listed above, where he wasn’t supposed to be disturbed. Sometimes he could be “working” there for hours; other times, he was doing the numerous domestic chores in the house.

John Grayshaw: What is your father’s legacy?

As I mentioned above, he opened the genre of SF to include more literary quality, social and political topics, and questions of gender, sexuality, psychological and human struggle. For this, he was beloved especially by a generation of writers who came after him: Ray Bradbury, Robert Silverberg, James Tiptree Jr., Chip Delaney, Harlan Ellison, Connie Willis, John Varley, Peter S. Beagle; and later generations, Octavia Butler, Karen Joy Fowler, Jonathan Lethem, Michael Chabon, Nalo Hopkinson among others. Reading the various introductions to the volumes of *The Complete Stories* gives you a sense of that legacy. There is a list of quotes about Sturgeon from a number of authors on the Theodore Sturgeon Trust webpage (which needs to be updated) that indicates his impact.

And, certainly “Amok Time” has had an influence on the world of Star Trek. Where would Vulcans be without Sturgeon!