**Edgar Rice Burroughs Chain of Friendship convention**

**Louisville KY June 28th-30th 1985**

by Laurence G. Dunn

In early 1985, Ken Hall and myself were visiting Frank and Doreen Westwood in their home, in Seven Kings, London. It had come to our attention that George McWhorter was going to host a 3-day convention in Kentucky at the University of Louisville, one of the highlights being to see the magnificent Burroughs collection he had assembled. There was a definite desire for all four of us to attend, plus we had heard that Frank Shonfeld and his sister Betty were also making their own arrangements to be there. Frank of course had coined the phrase ECOF (Edgar Rice Burroughs Chain of Friendship) after he began corresponding with Burroughs in 1921 through to his death in 1950. He then continued to correspond with his two sons John and Hully. When Irwin Porges knocked on his door in 1983 during a trip to London, Frank had no idea that ERB fandom existed and was introduced to a wealth of other fans, and so began his Chain of Friendship letter writing.

The four of us met up at Gatwick Airport and flew into Bangor, Maine for customs and immigration, before getting our next flight to Orlando, Florida where we picked up our car. Heading north through Georgia, negotiating the bumper car race track that encircles Atlanta, passing through Tennessee, visiting Ruby Falls in Chattanooga, up into Kentucky stopping off to see the Mammoth Caves before making the final leg into Louisville. Our first port of call was to meet George McWhorter at his home. He invited us to dinner at his favourite restaurant, Masterson’s (eventually pulled down in 2010 to make way for new student accommodation). Following some furtive glances when we saw the prices on the menu, George put our minds at rest saying that dinner was on him.

Ken and I were bunkered in at the student block located on the campus, on the 10th floor along with the majority of other ERB fans that would be attending. Ladies and married couple were given free reign on the 11th floor. There were just two lifts to the building, but only one went the full height which meant it was often cramped but fun at the same time. Curiously one of them had two sets of doors, one that opened to a concrete wall – which wasn’t supposed to happen as it was a service door to be opened on a specific floor. Frank and Doreen were staying with George, which meant they missed out on all the late night hilarities amongst the Burroughs fans into the early hours of each morning of our stay. And we did have fun, staying up talking and laughing until three in the morning. Joan Bledig had come down one floor to join us, as did the legendary John Flint Roy – but he always retired around midnight. I miss that guy and wish that I could have known him better. One of the things that came out of those late night discussions, bearing in mind most of us staying in the dorms were in our 20s and early 30s, our perception was that we noticed a strong divide between us and what we called the ‘big time collectors’ who had their own little group discussing / perhaps bragging, what marvels they had in their collections, and ‘us’, who we considered to be the ‘real fans’ because our discussions were centred around the actual stories. Years later, we can look back on it now with laughter as our own collections have grown.

With the University basically closed to students during the summer break, we had to trek far across the other side of the campus to reach Hardees for our breakfast and lunch. Eighteen year old John McGuigan, and young schoolfriend Peter Link, had asked to let them know when we were heading for breakfast. So we gave them a wakeup call by knocking on the door. Only it was more of a bang, bang, bang. And we all did it as we filed past their room. This continued over the next two days. Behaving like we had all known each other for years rather having just met the night before, other patrons at the restaurant were probably glad to see us leave for the noise we made. After breakfast, we made our way to the Ekstrom Library and down in the basement to the Rare book Dept. that housed George’s magnificent collection. While there was plenty to see in the glass display cases that filled the reading room, the real treasures and the majority of the collection was in a back room that could only take a few people at a time. The shelving units were probably less than a metre apart that made it difficult to squeeze past anyone already in the aisle. It was a sense of wonder and awe perusing the collection. Back at home I probably had 40 or 50 paperbacks and a few fanzines which had amounted to my entire knowledge of Burroughs work. And there I was standing amongst what must have amounted to several 1000 items of various editions and descriptions. It was like being in Wonderland. Another room had been set aside for trading which I had not expected. Other fans had brought along boxes of great stuff for sale, things that I never knew existed and could easily have gone broke had I bought what I wanted. But I had just one suitcase and an ocean to cross. The idea of buying a second case never occurred to me, nor without things such as the internet, could I have found out if I could increase my baggage allowance, so my buying capacity was very limited. A lady did show up the following day with her deceased father’s ERB collection and I was able to obtain a very nice copy of Canaveral’s Tales of Three Planets.

By the time lunch was suggested, we headed back to Hardees and our friendship had grown. Pretty soon there were Tarzan yells. What the staff and other diners made of us, I have no idea, but we were having so much fun. John McGuigan, unshaven for a couple of days, began mimicking Christopher Lambert with his “Ra-zor, Mir-ror”. Mike Conran’s young son Chris was calling out “Mother, Father, Family!!” Hardees probably had a tough time recovering after that.

Frank Shonfeld and his sister Betty had arrived with Jim and Linda Thompson, having spent a few days with them beforehand and doing some sight-seeing. Frank, aged around 80 at this time, had had an angina attack during this time, the first of several during his time in the U.S. as the stress of so much activity had got to him. After the event, Frank and Betty later stayed with Bill and Kathy Ross for a few days and simply relaxed, allowing time for him to recover. Scott Reynolds was another fan in attendance at the convention. Scott had terminal cancer but was allowed by his doctors to attend. By all accounts, he had a grand time.

That evening, George had set up a cheese and wine party for everyone just outside the Rare Book department that gave time for a much quieter time to eat, discuss Burroughs, and get to know each other a little better. Danton Burroughs and Burne Hogarth were there, mingling amongst us. One person who didn’t survive the evening well was Ken Hall. He drank just a little too much wine, consumed too much cheese, and was later discovered in the toilet area, ‘praying to a porcelain god’ as the incident was later described with hilarity much to Ken’s obvious discomfort, but we laughed with him rather than at him.

The following morning as we headed for breakfast, we all crammed into a lift while one person stood outside John and Peter’s room and began banging as though it was everyone. He then sprinted for the lift and the doors closed. We later heard that John had opened the door only to discover no-one was there. Hardees once again survived the invasion as we headed over to the Ekstrom Library.

George had set up a series of old Tarzan films to be played throughout the day in the auditorium next door. People came and went, some sitting down, others standing close to the door to capture a few moments of these wonderful films. Later in the afternoon, several home movies were shown that was shot by John Coleman Burroughs, with Danton standing by giving us a narration of what was going on.

The evening banquet was held at Masterson’s restaurant of course at their upstairs dining room. Perhaps it was just as well we were separated from other diners when the after dinner speeches that began with Danton Burroughs giving his Tarzan yell. Suddenly the doors opened as kitchen and hotel staff came rushing in to discover what was happening. One of our group who will remain nameless, asked our waitress out for a date afterwards. Unfortunately, he got stood up and had to wait under a bridge for two hours while a thunderstorm struck with heavy driving rain.

On Sunday morning, we met at another restaurant called Jerry’s for a late breakfast / early lunch. It was time for farewells amongst newly made friends, too numerous to name them all and I would be afraid to miss someone out if I tried. Friends that I have now known for many years, some, if not more than several, have long since travelled along the River Iss where they no doubt play amongst the creations that came from the mind of Edgar Rice Burroughs for perpetuity.