

WisCon 11, February 20-22, 1987

[To Spike Parsons] I was waiting for you to do something, like hit the mike or drool on it. I've just been watching it be abused.

I feel more like an absence in America and in Britain. We were talking over dinner about what a great time we're having at this convention because it's a really great convention. And by the way, Jeanne Gomoll, I really felt the most honored I think I've ever felt looking at that little blue flyer with a picture of Connie falling on me out of a tree.

The reason we realized that we're feeling so hyper and so thrilled at this convention is something that has sort of been being talked about in various ways throughout the convention, which is the fact that all of the really neat intelligent stuff that came out of the feminism in the '70s, which was always really exciting and always kept building into more stuff, sort of has disappeared over the last few years and sort of been swept under and rug and it's now kind of really tedious and uncool and boring to talk about those things in most places in fandom. You know, we have a good time and we tell great jokes and we party hearty and have desperate fun, but God forbid you should actually sit around and talk about how people really interact and what the whole political structure around stuff is, analyze the way stories work and how we're affected by things in our environment, and all that stuff. And we've been doing it for the last few days, and it's, it's so exciting, it's so inspiring, it's stimulating, it's interesting, and what a shame it is that we haven't seen much of it in fandom lately, you know. And it is, it is really depressing that all that exciting stuff that did happen in the seventies, that people have been running around sort of with erasers, you know, rubbing it out, like "feminist fiction that was interesting"—well, that didn't happen. There were a few boring people who wrote long, boring stories with uninteresting stuff going on, or not going on, in them. And "interesting fanzines in the '70d"—well, that didn't happen. There were some really tedious, boring,

humorless people telling unfunny rants in probably not very good prose anyway.

Well, gosh, it sure is a wonderful thing that—what's the phrase?—"tall, thin young men in mirror shades" have come along to rescue us from such tedium.

People asked me what I was going to talk about tonight and I've been saying it's a book review, and Connie, I have to shoot you now....

The thing I really do want to talk about is a kind of a book review. It's a book that is going to be released this month called *IsThat It?* by Bob Geldof. It's an autobiography of a rock musician which I really think you should read. It's a really good book. Not because he's a rock musician, which actually is kind of I thought one of the least interesting things about his life. I mean, being a rock musician is just sort of the job he found to do, which happened to be a useful thing to use for something he later decided to do. It's the rest of the book that's interesting. He talks about growing up in Dun Laoghaire near Dublin—where he grew up—which explains how he wrote about growing up there. Which was an experience he knew about so he knew how to write about it, and I didn't know about it so it was interesting, 'cause I was reading about something I—you know, if someone had given me a book about growing up around Kensington, Maryland, and Bethesda, I would have spent the whole book saying, well, you know, there was so much more he could have said about that. But you know it's really good he wrote about Dun Laoghaire so I couldn't criticize his perception of it.

But also he had a really nice—I was really impressed reading it that even though he doesn't actually come right out and say it, one of the things he talks about is the way as a kid growing up, you're backed into this corner where the only way you can assert your personality, your individuality,

is to do something self-destructive, because you're being pushed into what's good for you. There's such stress that you don't really have any other choice but to do as you are told or to hurt yourself. Or even if that is not always the case, you are made to feel that way.

So that was one nice thing, talking about growing up. One of the best pictures of growing up I've ever seen.

And the other thing, which is the reason he gets to publish a book about himself even though he's just a poprock singer from Dun Laoghaire, is that he organized—he got really unhappy watching these pictures on TV of people starving in Africa, and called up people, some of whom are his friends and colleagues, and some of whom were his not-so-close friends but colleagues, and saying “Did you see that last night on television? We have to do something.”

And he was having a terrible time as a rock musician at that time. The reason I'm talking to you about this now is because my experience for the last two years of being an American in Britain is seeing the world, and especially the U.S., from this incredibly different perspective, which is a really affecting thing. Sometimes a very painful thing for me, as an American, feeling really freaked out, but also a very painful thing for me on a much more personal level because there are people who hate me for being an American, and let me know it. Without even having met me, they hear my accent and they hate me for being American. And sometimes I hate them for that and sometimes I understand it.

And I understood it really well one day when, after Live-Aid, Bob Geldof did something else called Sport-Aid. Now, throughout Europe, throughout the world, in fact, throughout every place except the United States, people in every profession and people all over the world and people from every economic group did something to contribute to the Live-Aid Trust. And Sport-Aid was, of course, the athletes. And they did a lot of things. All the great skaters did this great skating show. The comics did Comic Relief. Everybody did things but .... There was Fashion-Aid, which was pretty funny, you know, with those awful clothes. But Sport-Aid, the big thing was the day they ran the world. The headline in the paper the next day was “The Day Love Ran the World.” Even the tabloids, which are really

pretty tacky, but I loved that headline: “The Day Love Ran the World.”

All over the world, people got out and ran. Everybody got out and ran. Millions of people. Twenty million people all over the world got out and ran. And I have arthritis in every joint in my body, standing up for an hour is probably one of the hardest things I do. This is what I'm doing for Sport-Aid right now is standing here. Really major athletic event for me. But people got out and ran. What I did was I watched it and I thought about everything I was seeing and got incredibly overwrought. And, of course, I wrote a check, too; that was part of what they wanted you to do.

I was watching this in Auckland, New Zealand. It's the middle of the night in New Zealand, right? And it's pouring down rain, and they're running. And in third world countries, the streets are full of people. And in the United States of America, the richest country in the world, the country that dares to make policy for the rest of the world, the country with its finger on the button, the country that wants everyone else to do things their way, a handful of people had Hands across America for money for Americans.

And I kept watching—for New York, you know, New York has the big marathon; for Boston, Boston has the big marathon—where are the runners? The most important athletes in the world, the most important rock stars—people who make millions of dollars for showing up somewhere, just showing up—are out there just running, for Africa. All kinds of people, people in wheelchairs are wheeling, for Africa. People on crutches are hobbling for Africa. People are walking around the block because that is as far as they can go. Everybody's mother and grandmother and little children and everybody are out there. In one country, the president told his whole cabinet he expected them to finish the race.

And Americans can only spend one day a year thinking about hunger maybe every decade or two, so given something the entire rest of the world was involved with, for a country which is suffering really horrible starvation, partly as the result of the political crap that richer nations have helped foist on them, not entirely without their own help – but contributions of that kind come

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from everywhere.

Here, in the richest nation in the world, we couldn't think about hunger for them that day. Maybe think about hunger here another day or even the rest of the year, you know, any other time. We had Hands across America.

So, you know, I was really horrified, because American friends of mine, visitors, came over and I mentioned it, and they didn't know that the Race against Time was going on, that it had happened. This was an event which, you know, on television in England, national television in England, and every newspaper headline, had been *the* event of the day, it had gone on all day long on television. As had Band-Aid. Nobody in America knew it had happened. The whole world participated. It was the largest mass-participation event of anything like it in history. And we didn't know here. My country didn't consider it important enough to televise at all. Didn't mention it, you know; didn't know what was going on.

And in Europe they know that we tell them what kinds of economic systems they should have. But we don't know what's going on there. And I spend a lot of my time feeling very embarrassed about that.

So I want you to read Bob's book, because it's a really good book, and it's really fascinating politics. You'd be amazed how just some guy who spent a few years as a journalist and became a rock musician could wander around the world and see what's going on and really have some insights.

There's a little kind of a footnote though that I'd like you to remember, too. I heard a rumor sometime after Live-Aid had come out in the American press that money wasn't going to people, to feed people in Africa, that it was just going into the pockets of politicians. As soon as I heard the rumor, I said it doesn't matter if it's true, because everyone in America will be sure it is. Everyone. If I heard it in America I'd know it was true. In Britain they know it's not true. In Europe they know it's not true, because Bob Geldof really cares about what he's doing and he's the kind of guy who won't let anybody get away with anything. But in a way it sort of seemed like the punch line to me—and on top of everything else in the richest country in the world they're so sure that money won't do anything that they won't give it anyway.

Those kind of issues, of course, have always been important to me. I've always – I've spent my life criticizing America, let's face it. Really, I have nothing to talk about in Britain because, of course, the things you criticize are the things you've seen most recently, and there's not really that much on the news about America I can criticize, and if you're an American and you criticize Britain... "You Americans are always criticizing us!" "But I live here—you know, everyone who lives here criticizes like, the buses and ...." "You're American, you just think America's better than everywhere else!"

But coming here and being able to bitch about things: you know, sexism—what was that phrase?—occult, medieval paranoia, things like that. Just to talk about important issues—and they *are* important issues—has been a really refreshing change from either not being able to bitch or having desperate fun for the last two years. And it really is an honor to be here, because it's so good to know that all that stuff we were doing in the '70s has, has created a convention like this where we can still talk about these issues even though Bruce Sterling says that the '70s didn't happen. And Ted White says that the '70s didn't happen. And anyway we were all so boring.

So, I really am tired. I'm really tired because there is so much programming here. There is too much programming here. I cannot see it all. I checked to make sure I wasn't actually scheduled opposite myself, since I seem to be scheduled opposite so many other things I wanted to see.

I picked up Teresa's mannerism, now I'm going [makes face]. So, I'm partly still over-hyped-out just from the exposure to thinking and talking. I'm partly just exhausted and jet-lagged. But I want you to know I'm really happy to see you and I'm really glad you're here. And I'm really glad I'm here.

Thank you very much.

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