

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

Science Fiction Writing

Experiences as a Writer

O.H. 19

LEIGH B HAMILTON

Interviewed

by

Juanita Roderick
and
Hugh G. Earnhart

on

October 7, 1975

LEIGH HAMILTON

The well known author, Leigh Brackett Hamilton, was born in Los Angeles, California, on December 7, 1915. Her parents were Margaret Douglass and William Brackett. Mrs. Hamilton, an only child, was educated in private all-girl schools. She began writing at the age of thirteen, and published her first story in 1940. Early in her career, she was employed as a script writer by Howard Hawks, where she worked on the script of "The Big Sleep," which starred Humphrey Bogart and Lauren Bacall. In 1946 she married the famous science fiction writer, Edmund Hamilton.

Mrs. Hamilton is presently a free-lance writer, as she has been during a good part of her career. She has done a good deal of work for pulp magazines such as Planet, Astounding, and Weird Tales. Her books include the John Stark series and The Halfling, a collection of short stories. She has also written detective stories and westerns. In 1963, Mrs. Hamilton was given the Silver Spur Award by the Western Writers of America for the best novel of that year. She also shared the Nova Award with her husband for their contributions to the field of science fiction. Mrs. Hamilton is a member of the Writers Guild of America, the Television Academy of Arts and Sciences, the International Platform Association, the Western Writers of America, and the Science Fiction Writers of America. Among her special interests are ancient history, anthropology, music, and travel.

DONNA M. DEBLASIO
August 24, 1976

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

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INTERVIEWEE: LEIGH B. HAMILTON

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SUBJECT: Experiences as a Writer

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R: This is an interview with Leigh B. Hamilton held in her home in Kinsman, Ohio, October 7, 1975, at approximately 10:30 a.m., conducted by Juanita Roderick and Professor Earnhart.

R: Mrs. Hamilton, I wonder if you can tell us something about your family and childhood?

H: Well, my father came from Portsmouth, New Hampshire and he died when I was a baby, in a flu epidemic after World War I. My mother and her family came from St. Louis, Missouri and I was a first generation Californian, which in those days was quite unusual, but which is not anymore.

I had a very happy childhood. I grew up at the beach. My grandfather was a father to me and we had a very close relationship. I had a very happy time of it as a youngster, and a rather haphazard education because we moved around quite a bit. That is, my grandfather didn't but my mother vibrated between him and her aunt and uncle, so part of the time I was living in San Francisco. They had a good bit of money and we traveled with them. I think my mother was more or less a companion to my great aunt, so I was fortunate enough to see a good bit of the country, or rather more than most children do. We took a trip through the Panama Canal and went to New England and Virginia and did quite a bit of travelling in the West.

At the age of eight I was a great reader. I learned to read when I was about five, I think, and I haven't stopped since. I got hold of a copy of Edgar Rice Burrough's The Gods Of Mars and I was never the same after that. Suddenly, I became aware of other worlds out there and then, from that time on, I was destined to be a science fiction writer. Nothing, apart from that, very fascinating happened. I had just a more or less normal childhood.

R: Did you have any brothers or sisters?

H: No, I was an only child. My mother never remarried for some reason. She was a beautiful woman. I don't know why, but she never remarried.

R: Can you tell us something about your school days?

H: I went to a little private school in Santa Monica. My mother was a segregationist; she didn't want me to be with boys, so I went to an all-girl school. Then she was quite ill for several years and she took me out of school. By the time I got to being of college age, I was offered a scholarship, but I couldn't go because I had to get work for we were a little short on money.

I had started to write quite seriously when I was thirteen. I had decided right then that I would be a writer, because obviously, it was a very easy way to make a living; all you had to do was sit down and write stories. Ten years later, at the end of 1939, I sold the first one. It was published in 1940. I tried writing almost everything. I finally decided that I would stick to science fiction because that is what I wanted to do, even though there wasn't that much money in it. Everybody warned me, "You'll starve to death. It's not a very respectable field, you know, I mean, only nut cases write for it and only nut cases read it." Things have changed since then. My aunt used to say, "Why don't you write nice stories for the Ladies' Home Journal?" I used to say, "I wish I could, because they pay well, but I can't read the Ladies' Home Journal and I'm sure I couldn't write for it." So there we were.

I did have a knack for science fiction which I dearly loved, so for quite a while I wrote nothing but science fiction. I was never a quantity producer and it was a very small field. Inasmuch as I has some financial responsibilities, I had to broaden out so I took to writing detective stories. I wrote quite a few of them for the pulp magazines. Then at long last I wrote a novel, which

was perfectly frightful, and I couldn't say that it set any worlds on fire, but I loved it. It was my child, my first born, full-length novel.

It was published and Howard Hawks read it. I had a friend in Martindale's bookstore. Hawks came in every couple of weeks and bought an armload of thrillers and my friend saw to it that mine got in the pile. A few days later my agent rang me up and said, "Howard Hawks wants to see you." I fell on the floor. I went to Warner Brothers for an interview and started to work on "The Big Sleep" and we got a contract for two and one half years then.

R: This was unusual for a woman at that time, or didn't you feel that?

H: Well, I never felt it. See, I don't know, I guess I was liberated on the day I was born, because my mother was a feminine, helpless little person and all of the women in my family were professional ladies with a capital "L". A lady never did anything for herself; somebody always did it for her. They looked down on me a great deal because I was big and husky and active, running up and down the beach, playing with the boys and doing things. Oh, goodness, I got so many lectures. I think I was just the opposite type, that's all, and possibly became even more opposite because I so despised their attitude. I thought it was so ridiculous.

I didn't believe that you were supposed to sit around waiting for a man to come along and want you and provide you with this, that, and the other. I don't need anybody to provide for me. I'll provide for myself. My father and mother dearly loved each other and they were wonderful people and they got married and he died. So where was she? I always prefer to have a little something in my own hands that I have control of.

Everybody says, "How does it feel to be the first woman to crack the science fiction field, which was almost exclusively masculine?" Well, my answer is: I am not the first woman. There was Francis Stevens, who was writing science fiction for Argosy long before and then there was Catherine Moore--C.L. Moore--who was writing science fiction for Weird Tales before I did. There was never the slightest opposition.

Everybody in the field welcomed me with open arms. All the other writers and editors and everybody were just

great because we were such a small clubby group in those days that if you found another nut case that you could talk to, it was great. We were so busy talking about Worm Ouroboros and the Lensman series and all these things. Everybody on the outside was saying, "Why do you waste your time on that childish dribble and space ships? How would they fly? What would they push against?" We just fell on each other's necks and I was just another one of the club.

There was never any feeling of discrimination at all, except one writer whose works I began to displace in one particular magazine. He kept writing very gentlemanly letters stating that ladies were delicate little flowers and should be taken out and given wine and champagne and roses and so on, but they shouldn't write science fiction. I realize there was a sort of personal motive there. I didn't find out until later that he had been writing the letters because he wrote under a different name. Then somebody told me and I thought it was very funny.

When I started to write these hard-boiled detective stories for Popular Detective, Flynn's Detective Weekly, et cetera, which were also masculine markets, there was no problem. They bought them and made no secret of my sex, because I was writing what they wanted to buy.

R: When you became a veteran writer did it come naturally to you, would you say?

H: No, it did not. It did not at all. I had to really fight and struggle. Like most new writers, I think I overwrote dreadfully. I never used one adjective when ten would do. Something I had to learn was to blue pencil. The editors were very patient with me and told me what to do and I did it. Ed, my husband, was always big on construction. His style in his early years was very cranky, but he was good on construction. He always knew the last word in the story before he wrote the first one.

Plot was always a great mystery to me and if I tried to do an outline I killed the story dead. I had to feel it. It was like Byron's words, "If I miss my pounce I go grumbling back into the thickets like an old tiger." I had more half stories because I had written myself into a box and couldn't get myself out of it. I had no idea where I was going. Learning how to construct a story was a long and painful process. It was hit or miss at the beginning, which was one reason that I didn't sell

more. I could have sold more if I would have known what I was doing. It took me a long time to learn. The characters and the background and the color and everything were more important to me than the bones of the thing and it took a long time before I could see the bones without killing the flesh.

R: Did you write on a regularly structured or scheduled basis or as the spirit moved you?

H: I wrote every bloody morning, as many words as I could write and I also wrote in the evenings while I was working on my novel. I wrote pulp in the morning for the money, for one or two cents a word, two cents if I was lucky, and then in the evening I worked on my novel. Of course, when I got to work in the studio, it was a day's work. You know, you check in at nine thirty and out at five thirty and that was it.

R: Would you care to tell us something about the association with the studios in Hollywood in terms of writing and things that you recall?

H: I was very fortunate, I think, because I was never under contract to the studio. I was under contract personally to Howard Hawks and Charles Feldman of H-F Productions, which dissolved about two and one-half years later and I got dissolved along with it. I never had to go through the business of checking out and all that. I came in through the side gate. Hawks had his own bungalow, whereas so many of the people who were under contract to the studio were working in sort of a barracks and they were checked in and out. Of course, that's all changed now. You walked by the gate and they checked you in at nine thirty and you had better not be late and you had better not be caught leaving before five thirty in the afternoon. Of course, this is absolutely ridiculous, because nobody writes that many hours of the day.

E: What was a typical day like when you were writing for the studio?

H: Well, a typical day simply meant that you got to the office and sat down and started to write. You wrote as many pages as you could get out. You took a fairly long break for lunch. I met an awful lot of people at the Warner commissary in what they call the Green Room, which is where us intermediates, us middle class people went. The executives had their own dining room, we had the Green Room, and the lesser folk had a much

larger place on the other side with long trestle tables. Hank and Katherine Kutter were working there at the same time I was, when I went back out many years later. They said they felt people were eating from trenchers over where the peasants were. Warner Brothers was one of the few studios that did that. Anyway, we had the writer's table, so this was beautiful. I was so green and I was very much in awe; this was my first time out in the big world. I met Christopher Isherwood, John Collier, Steven Longstreet, and William Faulkner. Of course, I worked with William Faulkner on "The Big Sleep". That is to say, we worked in adjoining offices; we didn't work together at all. I met very fascinating people at Warner Brothers.

Hawks would sit you down for a couple of days and give you his ideas. Then, he'd go away and you wouldn't see him for weeks or months until he decided that there was a start date and he was going to go with the picture. Then you worked your tail off. That's always been a fact with him. It was not really typical of most studio jobs.

The one small job I had before then was over at Republic. I worked a week and a half on the treatment. Because this was my first job, I was teamed up with a writer who knew what he was doing, Johnny Butler, who was one of the old Black Mask crowd. We did the script in three days, they shot the picture in ten days and that was two days over schedule.

Of course, those were the days when there was plenty of money. Howard Hawks was always his own boss. He was an independent who would make a deal with the studio. He would use their facilities, there would be financing and so on, but he was actually the complete boss. He never had to answer to anybody else and this was very helpful.

- E: You know, many of the stars of that era complained very bitterly about the tremendous pressure and the way they were used. Of course, those of us who were Judy Garland fans have a sour taste if those things really happened; we sort of resent it. Did writers feel the same kind of pressure and feel that they were being used?
- H: They either felt that or they felt that they were being neglected, depending on the situation. There was a script that had been kicking around Warner Brothers for a number of years. When a contract writer would find this script on his desk as the next assignment, he knew that the pink slip was coming in about one week. Nobody could solve this script so it gave them a chance to boot out the contract writers.

They were kind of an unhappy crew, really. They were making tremendous pots of money and most of them were not pressured too hard on the work. There was the usual feeling of frustration; you know, you start out with a beautiful idea and it gets lost. There are so many other elements that enter into it. I really couldn't say because I was not in the writers' building. I didn't have too much conversation with them on that score. I know both Isherwood and Collier were working on Wilkie Collins' The Woman in White and The Moonstone. I forget which one was working on which. I don't think either picture was produced.

I know my friends the Kuttners were there. They adored their producer, who was a nice man, but they were pressured to do "Rappucini's Daughter". There were considerable problems with that. They were just working away like little beavers, then the whole project was cancelled. There's a feeling of not being very sure.

This is one reason I never gave up fiction writing. When you write fiction, you don't have to wait for somebody to do it and pay you to do it; you just sit down and do it. If you're any reasonable amount of a professional, you're pretty darn sure you'll sell it somewhere. There isn't as much money, by any manner of means, but you make a living at it. You are your own man. In the studios, you're always between heaven and earth. Of course, you can sit down and write an original screenplay on your own time and hope to sell it. I did that I don't know how many years ago, six, seven, eight years ago, and I'm still hoping to sell it. We were right at the top with it and all we had to do was sign the contracts, then in the last minute, boom.

R: Did you ever have the experience where someone stole your ideas and took credit for some of them?

H: I'm sure it's done, but I've never had it done to me. Ed's had it done many times and the older science fiction writers have had it done many times, because they would originate so many things. For example, Ed originated the space suit. He was the first one to write a story about people who put on space suits and go outside of the ship in space. He also originated many other concepts in science fiction like that. Now, the younger ones come in and they take this all as public domain. I've had stories of mine lifted practically whole; they hardly even bothered to change the names in science fiction. I suppose that this is the sincerest form of flattery, but you do get a little annoyed. In the films or in television

I don't think I have ever had that happen.

- E: You mentioned earlier that you had an agent. What was the role of an agent when you were beginning a career in writing? Did you lean on him for many things; was he a necessary tool which one cannot do without?
- H: In the field of fiction, one can do without, but it's much better to have an agent. I lived on the West Coast, and I was selling stories in New York. My then agent, Julius Schwartz, was an agent to both of us and still is a very dear friend. He has been out of the agency business for a long time. Now he's one of the top men at National Comics. They're right on the spot. They know who has a need for a story. In those days, they could take it around, submit it, and send you back the editorial comments. Very often, Julie would send back a story saying, "just isn't good enough," "try again," or "do thus and such to it." He was very useful to me, very useful.

Later on, I worked without an agent for a while because Julie quit and got a job. By this time, I was sufficiently established in the science fiction field. Also, you can sell novels, you don't need an agent for that. But there are so many things you can't do for yourself now, much more than then. There are all the foreign markets, which often pay as much or more than your domestic markets, because it's a continuing thing. I've just signed contracts for three books in Japan to a Japanese publisher. Well, I don't know Gengen Sha from a hole in the ground; I only know the name. But an agent who has connections all over the world can make many sales for you that you would not make yourself. So, I had, and have, a literary agent in New York.

In Hollywood, it's different. You don't work without an agent because unless you have an agent, you don't get interviews. They don't come to you, they come to the agent, unless you're all personal friends. Then, they'll ring you up and say, "Would you like to do so and so?" and you get in touch with your agent. In the studios, they would never accept for a very long time, any unsolicited manuscripts or scenarios for screenplays. The reason for this is that they got sued too many times and they won't even open them. You have to have an agent present; you can't go in and fight for yourself on money. You'd be working for base the rest of your life if it was left up to the producers.

- E: How has the fee for agents changed through the years?

- H: In my time it hasn't changed at all. They passed a state law in California and it has been a Guild regulation that an agent gets a flat ten percent. There is some jockeying back and forth now on packaging and stuff that is out of my ken. An agent cannot take more than ten percent. In the very early days, some of the agents were unscrupulous and they were taking fifty and sixty and seventy percent. This also goes for agents for actors and producers, not only for writers. It's always been ten percent, even for literary agents in New York.
- R: Would you reflect on, shall I use the word, the "quality" of science fiction? I don't know from the writer's viewpoint if that is the correct word. How has the field changed since the early days?
- H: Well, it's become more literary. This is probably heresy, but I think in the earlier days stories were better. I'm sure that if I were eight years old now and reading Harlan Ellison, for instance, I wouldn't get the thrill and the charge that I got out of Edgar Rice Burroughs. The people who wrote science fiction in the early days wrote it not for money, because there wasn't any, practically speaking, but for love.

They absolutely adored the field and they had these tremendous bursts of imagination. The stories had so much more vigor and excitement than they have now. Of course, there was some terrible stuff done, admittedly. There were some great stories, some great ideas. Now, it's a much broader field and it's respectable now and they teach it in the universities. The people coming to it are, on the whole, better writers in the sense that they have a smoother style, from a literary standpoint. It was always a great thrill to me to read about strange worlds and shooting the nebula and getting lost in the Horsehead, or the Coalsack, and the drowned suns, burning like candles in the dark nebulae, and all this. This is what just sent me skyrocketing.

Now they do all this inner world stuff, Freudian psychology, and sort of grotty sex. I'm not saying that it ought not to be done; I'm saying that it doesn't have the same excitement for me that the older stuff did.

- R: Do you think that that spark of creativity and imagination can be imparted to a child or cultivated, or do you think some of it is inherited? Some children seem to be more imaginative than others.
- H: I don't really know. My father was a frustrated writer and he made his living as a CPA. Long, long after his death, I came across some of his papers. This was long

after I had become a writer myself. I knew that he had written things, because my mother told me. He was trying very hard to sell stories to films in those days. I found quite a batch of his short stories and ideas and so on. I was working on a story called "The Dancing Girl of Ganymede" and I picked up a story of his called "The Dancing Girl of Gades." I thought, the more it changes, the more it's the same thing. He had a good pulp writer's mind, I can tell you. The thoughts were good, the ideas were good.

Perhaps I got that from him, I don't know. He died so young, and of course, he was married and had a wife and child, so he didn't have time to write. I don't think we're particularly noted for literary people in the family. Way back in the fifteenth century there was a Gavin Douglas--I'm a Douglas on my mother's side--who translated Virgil's Aeneid into English. But as far as I know, that's the only literary light there has been on either side.

R: That whole question of imagination and train of thought intrigues me.

H: Well, it's a delicate little spark and it could so easily be crushed out if conditions aren't right. It's like any little seed that's dropped into the ground; it's got to have a place to grow. I was fortunate, my grandfather subsidized me until I had begun to sell. Otherwise I might have had to get a job and I might never have had enough energy left over to develop as a writer. I think this may happen with quite a few people. On the other hand, if the urge is strong enough, writers will overcome that one way or another, because many writers have. Many have had to work as dishwashers and you name it, to make a living. It's really been that they had this tremendous urge to write.

In music, usually if a musician hasn't shown talent by the time that he is five or six years old, he isn't going to have it. But writing seems to develop later. Costain was fifty when he began to write; Edgar Rice Burroughs was fifty or older when he began. Everybody's different; it's difficult to pin down.

R: I keep thinking about the possibility of canned entertainment, television, or the packaged form of entertainment compared to my childhood when you had to think of ways to entertain yourself.

H: When we were youngsters, the last thing we wanted was to be supervised and have older people telling us what

to do. We just wanted to get off by our little selves and do what we wanted to do, providing that it wasn't vandalism or something we ought not to do. Not that we were little angels. Of course, in those days, we were taught a little more respect for other people's property, I think, than kids are now. It never occurred to me to break somebody's window. I would have gotten punished too harshly. I wouldn't have enjoyed it. Anyway, this has been instilled into me, taboo, you don't touch. We thought up our own games. I think they should be encouraged to speak for themselves and imagine for themselves.

R: If somebody were to ask you, "What advice would you give to a young writer?" what kind of advice would you give that writer?

H: Well, the only possible advice is: If you want to write, write. Write whatever you want to write and keep at it. As I say, it took me ten years. Of course, I started at thirteen, and at thirteen you don't know a blooming thing. I wasn't a genius like Daisy Ashford or Margery Fleming. It took me a little longer. One of the things you have got to learn is to take criticism. I have met people in the writing field and people in the acting field where it's even worse. They simply cannot take the least little criticism or blow to their egos. They cannot accept the fact that something that they've done isn't good. You must be able to do that, and it hurts. You don't like it. It is not pleasant, but you've got to be able to do it, or otherwise, you never become a professional and you never grow into the profession.

I've seen girls go into absolute hysterics because the director said, "Look, you're not doing the scene right." Well, they weren't. They were nineteen or twenty and obviously they didn't know their business. You've simply got to learn. So many writers wouldn't dream of revising a story. It would be like chopping their heads off trying to get them to do it. You can't do this.

There's the talented amateur and there's the professional. You never make that jump until you learn to accept the kicks in the teeth, the discouragement, and the fact that the market has fallen in on you. You know, we wrote pulp for so many years and we knew everybody, we had no problem; then pulp magazines were gone. Presently, the slick magazines were gone as well. I know some pretty unhappy and disoriented people out there in Hollywood who made a fat living writing for the Saturday Evening Post. Now they're trying to do films. It's a whole new world and they are lost. You are going to get lumps and bumps all

the way along the road. You have to be able to ride with them. Some people get horribly discouraged and they want to cut their throats or quit writing. They get terribly upset about people who are working or who are able to get over these bumps. They have negative attitudes, which is fatal.

R: Do you still write frequently now?

H: I'm writing frequently and like mad. You catch me at a bad moment. I'm writing a television pilot script for a new series. I was ill this summer and I wasn't able to go back out there, so I'm doing it here. I just got two acts done and I think, "Ah, isn't that nice. I'm going to be on schedule." They want the thing in three weeks and I just got the first treatment okayed by the network. Last night my little producer called me and I said, "If you don't stop making me revise act one, you're never going to get this thing."

R: We broke right into her act, didn't we?

H: Now, I'm trying to compress two very long acts into one, because the cliffhanger has got to come at the end of act one and not at the end of act two. This is something you run into. You don't write it the way it ought to be written, but the way it has to be written, trying to make the two things come together.

E: Speaking of television, there's been a sudden flurry of interest awakened in science fiction, obviously with the space program and so on. How do you see such weekly features as "Star Trek" and the specials they did on "Did man from outer space come to the earth and leave his mementoes behind in various places in South America?" and so forth. How do you react to this?

H: Well, I'm all for it. I think science fiction right through the years has been very valuable in providing the general reading public with the idea that these things are possible. Many of the people in NASA and many of the astronauts were science fiction readers in their youth. This gives the idea that these things might be or can be. There's the possibility if the concept is there. We had to wait for the engineer to come along and do it.

Of course, when Sputnik went up, that was the cutoff right there. Then everybody had to admit that it was possible. I remember there was a good bit of panic among non-science fiction readers who kept looking up there and saying, "But what could be looking down at

us that's making a hole in the sky? Something might be looking in." The question was brought up at a seminar out in California in the spring, "Why have so many women entered the science fiction field?" Kate Wilhelm said, "Well, after Sputnik went up, it all became real. We realized that so many things were happening in the world, and we just had to get in." Well, that's fine. I was in a long time before it was real because just the idea of the thing fascinated me.

There's no longer any need to tell them that space flight is possible. I think what they need to be told now is that it's necessary. You keep hearing this crud about all the money that's going into the space program just to put a man on the moon, as if that were all of it and the end of it. Any scientist, any technician, any physician, any surgeon will tell you that the knowledge that has come out of the space program already, the fall-out from it--miniaturization of circuitry and so on, and things they have found out medically-- will more than pay for it in benefits to the general public. But the general public, of course, and some of our more myopic politicians don't choose to see that. As far as I'm concerned, the more science fiction they put on the television and the more they do to keep the idea in front of the public, the better.

E: No doubt, you followed all the NASA ascensions?

H: Oh, yes. We were down there for the Apollo 12 shot. Through Esther, we were accredited from the Youngstown Vindicator and we were in the pressbox. Oh my, that was a thrill!

E: That was my question. You watched things you may have thought about or written about or hinted at in your stories, and now, suddenly, there it happens.

H: I think this has been the biggest thrill for both of us, because we labored in these vineyards when it took many a sneer and so on.

E: The old Buck Rogers days.

H: Right. Then, everybody said, "Ha, ha, ha, how stupid." I remember having a terrible fight with my grandfather when I was about eight years old and I said, "I want to be on the first rocket ship that goes to Mars." He said, "There never will be a ship that goes to Mars." I said, "But why?" He said, "There's nothing out there but space. What would it push against? It's impossible."

At age eight, I didn't know what it would push against either, but I remember stamping my foot and saying, "But it will, it will. I know it will."

I think this has been the greatest thrill for both of us, to see this actually happen in our lifetimes. I don't think either one of us thought it would occur really, in our lifetimes. We were positive it would occur sometime, but we were both delighted that we were around when it did happen.

R: I'm going to ask you a strange question about a strange phenomenon. What is your opinion of UFOs?

H: We have an open mind on that. You can dismiss ninety percent or ninety-five percent of it as delusion or crackpot, publicity seeking, nut cases. We actually met a flying saucer nut, a perfectly charming, well educated gentleman, just as crazy as a hatter. There is a small percentage of these sightings that just won't go away. We're just waiting. Of course, we have to fight against the idea that maybe they're going to land right in our meadow and we'll be the first ones to welcome the Martians or whoever, because we want to be. Therefore, we have to push it off. I think it's not at all unlikely that people are sending probes and having a look at us.

E: Do you subscribe, then, to the theory that there is a window out there in space that is a corridor to provide an avenue to travel around?

H: You mean to alternate universes? This is beyond me. We have enough in this universe right now. When the astronauts speak of a window or a corridor for a launch, they're talking about a physical thing, when the other planet is in the proper position in its orbit. Of course, we're way out on one of the spiral arms. We're a very small little pebble, we're a few little dust spots spinning around it. Who knows, maybe further in toward the center of the galaxy where there are so many more suns, there could be a tremendous star traveling civilization. Perhaps they don't want to make contact; perhaps they aren't interested. Heaven knows. I don't know. We've speculated and written stories from all angles. I don't think it's the least bit impossible.

R: Mrs. Hamilton, since I'm interested in telling children about you, hopefully, what could you tell me to tell them about letting them dream their dreams and that sort of thing? In other words, you said you had playmates

and you weren't necessarily a loner. It isn't necessarily the loner that spins daydreams to become a writer.

H: I was both. I think Ed and I were very much alike in that because we had our little friends and we played with them, then we had a life that was apart from that. Most of these kids were not great readers and they couldn't follow me where I went in books. I was fortunate, I grew up at the beach, which in those days was a very lonely place. There were other houses, I don't mean it was isolated; we were only a mile or so from the town. But there was an awful lot of empty beach. I remember that one of the happiest things I used to do as a child was to walk out to the empty jetty and sit on the stringer with my feet in the ocean and just listen to the breathing of the sea and look out at the horizon and just feel and think. I loved being alone.

R: How long did you sit there?

H: Until I got cold. I don't think any of the other kids ever did that. I don't know if they did it or not, but I never encountered any of them doing it. I think there is something in being a loner. I think you have to be enough of an individual yourself, or otherwise nothing that is individual is going to come out of you.

A lot of people that I have known who are extremely bright, intelligent people who have made a success of their lives are not oriented toward books. They can get something from technical books, but they hardly ever read fiction. They don't go to movies much; they didn't even know if the movies were any good. This was just not part of their makeup. There's no reason why it should be. But these people are never going to be writers. If you have the instinct and you're drawn to painting or music or any of these things, you should be allowed, encouraged to go that way. Some people I know don't think it's a good living or they don't want their kid to get into that particular kind of life. They try to stifle it and sometimes they do. I don't think it's a good thing. This isn't saying that everybody has to be a loner, but if you're just a community thing, then you're like a jellyfish; you're a collection of cells.

R: It seems that people are afraid to be alone.

H: Solitude is one of the most difficult things to find these days and it's one of the most valuable, but as you say, people do seem to be frightened to be alone with themselves.

- E: It's part of our culture that people want to be in crowds. They want to be in the big city and yet they move out and create a Boardman and an Austintown and Liberty, which are just as crowded. They're not like Daniel Boone, who thought anybody who lived within ten miles was ten miles too close and he wanted to move.
- R: It's the pressure to conform. You've got to conform, and it starts with the children in the schools. You've got to be like twenty-five others in the class. You don't dare to be different. There was a book written once by I'm sure not a very famous author, entitled, Where Are You Going? Out. What Are You Doing? Nothing. It was written by someone of my vintage. If you saw a kid lying out there in the meadow, looking up at the sky, most times he was taken to the nearest child guidance center to be analyzed. They're just not allowed to do that anymore. That's considered strange and weird.
- H: I think that hardly anybody has enough time to really think now; they're bombarded by so many external stimuli that it's much easier to sit down and look at television.
- R: And have it given to you. In the ten years that I've been here at the College, students seem to have the attitude that "the teacher should entertain me. It's not going to be for me to do it." I don't know. That sense of resourcefulness seems not to be cultivated anymore.
- H: Well, most of the science fiction writers were or are scientists. I mean, they got their master's in science or worked in some related field. They know a whale of a lot more science than I do because what I know you could put in a teaspoon. Ed was going to be an electrical engineer, and majored in physics, chemistry, and whatnot. I took physics and chemistry in high school, like everybody else. I can't write hard science stories; I never could. This is one reason I sold three stories to Astounding, the first two I ever sold, and then one later on, and then I gave up because John Campbell liked a different kind of story. Really, I don't know why he bought those three to begin with; they weren't good and they weren't his kind of story. I don't know enough about ram-jets and all these things to write that kind of story, whereas Ed does and Larry Niven does. Isaac Asimov and all these other people have their Ph.D's or are scientists of one sort or another themselves and they have the background. That's fine.

When I was, I think, in the seventh or eighth grade, they gave us Breasted's The Ancient World. I became an ancient history buff right then. Anything about prehistoric man or Babylonia, Assyria, and Egypt was all fascinating. I read a fair bit of astronomical material. I bone up pretty well before I write anything so that I won't sound absolutely stupid. Then I try to fake it so that it looks good, but we don't get right into the heart of a computer and tell exactly how those little relays work. We just assume that the reader knows what a computer is and go on from there.

Ray Bradbury knows, I think, even less science than I do. He once wrote a story called Golden Apples in the Sun where the cold got colder and colder, thousands of degrees below zero and thus and such. Somebody wrote, "Ray, did you ever hear about absolute zero? There's a point below which it don't go." No, he never had. It hasn't hurt his career particularly. It just depends on what type of thing you're oriented toward and what you like to write. I have exposure to what you call the "soft sciences" like anthropology. I delight in creating worlds and building civilizations. I always want to know how the people eat; what crops they grow, what kind of houses they live in, where they get the building material, do they build with mud, brick, stone, or wood or what? All these things working together fascinate me.

R: Is there anything else that you would like to share about your career?

H: Well, I will say one thing about science fiction: It is unique in that we are a very friendly and clubby group. Anywhere you go in the world, there are science fiction clubs and if the science fiction people know that you are coming, they will roll out the red carpet for you. We landed in Sidney, Australia, and they carried us around in their hands for a week. We had a simply marvelous time. There are friends wherever you go. You go to England and you're invited here and taken there; you get to meet all these lovely people. This is a very rewarding thing. Of course, I met my husband and most of our friends that we've had all our lives in the science fiction field.

R: Is that unusual?

H: I think it is. In the other writing fields there isn't that fan group. The glue that holds it together is the fans. There isn't a fan group in any other field. Millions of people read westerns, millions of people

read detective stories. I belong to the Western Writers of America and they gave me a very handsome prize once for a novel. I used to belong to Mystery Writers of America and I went to the meetings. You meet a lot of fabulous people there. It's fascinating and a lot of fun, but they don't have conventions every year. The fan groups put on conventions, a world convention, every year, and there are little regional gatherings. It's like a big family.

R: Is there a group or a club in this area at all?

H: I don't think there's one. There's one in Cincinnati that is tremendously influential. In fact, we're going to a little gathering in Sandusky a week from Friday. They have what they call the Midwest Conference, which is in June. It was a small affair, but it's been getting big in the last few years because so many people have been attending. It used to be kind of a small family group, a grand bunch of people. You go and you have parties and you chum around and talk. They never have a formal program.

Some of the others put on more elaborate ones. There are programs, panels, seminars, and all that stuff. There's the big World Con, and the last one I went to was in Washington. This year it was in Australia and it wasn't possible for us to go and enjoy it. Next year, it's going to be in Kansas City, I think.

Now the "Trekkies" have come along and that's a totally separate group. The trekkies are the fans of "Star Trek". This is a phenomenon, because the program went off the air several years ago, but it has formed a tremendous group of fans. Some of them seem to be borderline cases. They come out by the thousands and they wear their little Spock ears and antennae.

E: You know, they're replaying it again on television.

H: I know. It's in syndication and they're doing a Saturday morning cartoon version of it. There's some talk that they're going to do a feature film. Even the people who did "Star Trek" have been absolutely astounded. They put on these Star Trek conventions and the people who attend them are a whole different group. However, we do have Star Trek material, and certain number of Trekkies come to the regular conventions. They come out in hordes and they have to be turned away because the fire department says you can't have any more people in this hotel.

E: It's no worse than the Mickey Mouse Club. Everyone ran around in big ears in California. There were people who jammed the Aragon Ballroom every Saturday night to hopefully dance with Lawrence Welk. The world's big enough for us all.

R: Hugh, can you think of anything we overlooked?

E: Not right now. I'll probably think about something two hours after this interview is over. I might ask one question: Where do you see science fiction writing going to in the twenty-first century?

H: Well, that's very fascinating. Science has been breathing down the backs of our necks, of course. You have to keep one jump ahead of them. I don't know. I don't know what is going to happen to the world in that time. I don't know what the economic situation will be at that time. I don't know if there is even going to be a world. As far as science fiction is concerned, I think it's going to go on the way it has gone. There will be innovators and there will be people who follow along. It's such a multiple field. This is one reason it does attract so many brilliant and talented people. It never hardened into any particular form; it's never fossilized. New ideas are always coming up and there are new directions. I really couldn't make any prediction, except that I'm sure whatever it does, it will be good.

The new wave has kind of faded out now. More people are getting back to just writing stories. We had a tremendous new wave phase where everyone was left hanging in mid-air and it was all frightfully esoteric. People would write and say, "So and so's story was absolutely great. I couldn't understand a word of it." They could not understand it, so they knew it was magnificent. Any idiot could write a story that you could understand, but it takes a genius to write one that you can't figure out.

E: Would you say that the current interest in astrology and the stars helped encourage the interest in science fiction?

H: I don't think astrology has too much to do with it, really. I think that the main thing that has encouraged interest in science fiction is simply the fact that so much of it has come true. Most of the people in the science fiction field are pretty hard-headed scientists and pragmatists and I don't think many of them go in much for that sort of mysticism. One of Ed's oldest friends, and a very, very dear friend of mine, is a professional astrologer. He believes in it implicitly. He says, "No, I can't explain it, but if the bloody thing works, then it works."

That's another thing I have an open mind on. I've stayed away from it myself.

I don't think, simply for that reason, that it's had too much effect on science fiction. I'm sure that it's had an effect on all the occult material that has been coming out. That has had a tremendous resurgence in the last few years with "The Exorcist" and possession by the devil and all this stuff. I read Van Daniken's book and it was fascinating, but I want a little more proof before I accept some of these things. I would like to know what some of these strange constructions are, what they actually meant, and what the people thought they were doing when they built them.

It's no new thought that people came to Earth to teach. There's a legend of Oahannes that's much older than Babylon. It has always fascinated us. So many people believed in Kukulcan who came from somewhere and taught the Maya everything they knew. This goes on through a lot of ancient history. It's perfectly simple to believe that a few people dropped in with their spaceships. Also, there are so many gaps in pre-historic man. Cro-Magnon man appeared suddenly, practically full blown, but from where? There's nothing leading up to him; he's just there all of a sudden. Of course, they just probably haven't found the links, or they've been destroyed, or something. But, it's an interesting speculation.

E: Do you remember the two, probably not well educated police officers, I think it was in Mississippi, or Alabama, who claimed that they were captured and taken aboard a spaceship? Their story has been put to the test so many times in a variety of ways. As a science fiction writer, how do you see the story? Did you in your own mind try to put any of these things they said to the test because you thought there was the possibility of them being true?

H: I'm not familiar with that particular case. I read about the one that occurred in Exeter, Massachusetts, which was extremely fascinating. There have been so many of these things where apparently you can't really doubt the people, because they don't seem to be the type to lie about sightings. When Clyde Tombaugh tells me he saw something, I believe him. I might not believe that I myself saw something, but I believe him, because he knows what he's looking at. Airline pilots and ground observers caught something on a theodolite once; they caught it on their instruments. I'm pretty sure there's something out there.

Now actually, whether these people were taken into a spaceship and were interviewed, I don't know. I have no way of proving it one way or another. It's easy enough to pull a hoax like that because there isn't really any way it can be disproved, unless you have witnesses who knew you weren't there, or unless you have negative evidence of some kind which is very difficult to find.

E: Do those types of things which are reported occasionally provide any kind of inspiration to hit the type-writer again?

H: We've both written stories about people who got involved with spaceships. One of mine is being reprinted in January. A fellow had a feeling that he just wasn't happy or comfortable. He kept going back and trying to find the origins of his birth and so on. He tracked it back to Brittany. Way out in the Laudes the spaceship came down. The book thoroughly explained why nobody knew about it. He was taken aboard and passed his test as one of the star-travelling race, the only one. There we were, off galloping away on our plot.

Ed wrote one about a fellow who was sprung out of jail in a small midwestern town ruled by a mysterious individual and discovered that he was ruler of a far-flung space empire. He had been thoroughly brain-washed, had his memory removed, and been tucked away on this remote little planet. There are all kinds of beautiful ways you can use it.

E: You know, we always talk about writing. A favorite phrase in the historical field is "we brought Thomas Jefferson to the dinner table with us for four years while we labored over a biography." Do you ever have the feeling that you're sitting in the room or you're sitting down to lunch with these people whom you have been talking about, describing, and thinking about? To write and make it come alive requires almost jumping on that page and rolling around with the typewriter. It's rare the person that can close the door, walk into other surroundings and forget that. You just don't pull window shades. Do you have these people come to dinner with you and sit around here in the meadow?

H: Oh, yes. The mind is obviously compartmented that way. One part of it is always working on the story that you're working on and the people are always there.

Then, there's the other department that says, "Gee, I've got to get eggs", and "What am I going to have for dinner?" It all seems to be separate tanks. I have found that oftentimes, if I get stumped on a story and a plot, something that isn't working, I just forget it for a couple of days. Then, all of a sudden, the subconscious will start popping it up to you.

R: Then, when it comes to the forefront, do you stick to that typewriter?

H: That's true. You carry these things around with you all the time. Very often, I get this far-away look and Ed will say, "You're thinking, aren't you?"

R: Do you try on your thoughts with each other?

H: Yes, a good bit. Our marriage almost broke up shortly after it began because I had an order for a novel from Startling Stories. It was a whole \$800 and boy did we need it.

E: What year was this?

H: This was in 1947; we were married at the end of 1946. I sat down at my typewriter and wrote the opening chapters. I handed them to Ed, he read it and said, "This is great. Where do you go from here?" I said, "I haven't the foggiest idea." He said, "That is a so-and-so way to write a story." Right there, we discovered we couldn't collaborate too well. So, I went on with it. Then I said, "I think I'm getting into a little bit of trouble here." He said, "Let me read it." So he read it and he said, "Back of chapter two, put in a Dhuvian--a Dhuvian being a strange alien character--on the ship." I could have killed him. The trouble was, he was right. So I had to throw away four chapters and start over again.

R: Thank you for this interview. We really feel it's been a privilege. We've enjoyed it so much.

H: You're so welcome. I hope I have been helpful to you. I'm flattered that you came all this way.

END OF INTERVIEW