

NCC - 1701 Lives On

"Let us make sure history never forgets the name Enterprise...."

by Beverley R. White

I first heard about it when Robin Yates, one of two close friends of mine who live in Pennsylvania, called me. Her first words were, "I don't know if I heard right, but they said on the news that Gene's dead!" We are both very much *Star Trek* fans, so I knew that Robin wouldn't joke about something like that. Still, I was apprehensive — People like Gene Roddenberry don't die, do they? Not so shortly after *Star Trek's* twenty-fifth anniversary, not so soon after Jim Henson — in fact, if they could ever pull it off, not at all. *People that important aren't supposed to die!*

Two hours after I got off the phone with Robin, CNN (finally) ran a short story that said, in a nutshell, that Roddenberry had died from a heart attack (last) Thursday morning.

I cried most of the night and following morning, even during classes.

No one anticipates something like this happening. Every *Trekker* I know had been steeling themselves for an original cast member to die. DeForest Kelley, ie Dr. McCoy, seemed the most likely after his lung collapse prior to *Star Trek V*. We'd forgotten Gene's age (70, like DeForest) and health (bad), and had thought him to be immortal. I don't remember ever hearing "What will they do if Gene dies?" Only, "What will they do if Leonard Nimoy/Bill Shatner/James Doohan/De Kelley die(s)?" You just don't consider it.

One compares this to Henson: the brilliant creator of a media phenomenon dies (though Henson's

health had been good before, unlike Roddenberry's) and no one's quite certain what will happen next. However, in Roddenberry's case, the loss may not have been so severe.

When Henson died, we not only lost the world's most brilliant puppeteer, we lost dozens of characters that cannot be done by anyone else. One of the more prominent Muppeteers — I'm not sure who — attempted to perform Kermit the Frog last year and failed miserably.

Flipping the coin over, the past has shown that *Star Trek* can continue on, sans Roddenberry, suffering little to none. Roddenberry had dropped out of the executive producer slot for *Star Trek II, III, and IV*, giving it to Harve Bennett and becoming a mere "creative consultant. Those three movies (II and IV especially) are typically deemed the best of the set by most Trekkers (not Trekkies, thank you!). More recently, Roddenberry had had no active role in producing *Star Trek: The Next Generation* since the beginning of the season, despite his name being listed as Executive Producer along with Rick Berman, who will most likely take over the post completely.

Even despite the fact that *Star Trek*, at least in its *Next Generation* form, can carry on without its father (the sixth "classic" film, due out December 13th, is slotted to be last nevertheless), there's still going to be something of a difference. There's going to be something missing.

On *Entertainment Tonight* last Friday, a number of the cast from both generations expressed their feelings about Roddenberry's passing. The word that came up most often was "void," referring to that which he had left behind. Some



Khan sets the Genesis device on self-destruct, and the U.S.S. Enterprise doesn't have the warp capability to escape. Spock heads for the engine compartment, ceases McCoy's protests and tells him, "Remember."



Escaping another "no-win" scenario, Kirk and the U.S.S. Enterprise lure the U.S.S. Reliant into the Mutara Nebula, where Kirk's combat experience bests Khan.

were more outwardly devastated than others (where *Next Generation's* Marina Sirtis was crying openly and several others, *Treks* classic and nouveau alike, were quite on the verge of doing the same, others seemed very calm, taking on their usual interview stance), but it was obvious that all were equally shocked and aware that an important influence in not only their lives but in Western culture had been eliminated.

Reactions amongst those I spoke with, however, were very different. As I said before, I wept a lot (that's stopped, but I will not take off my communicator pin now). Robin and Kayt (the other friend in Pennsylvania), who, like myself, wear certain emblems on *Star Trek*-related occasions, are undoubtedly reacting the same way I am. Several people in my classes made jokes about it, but others, for whom *Star Trek* is important, were more

serious. A few were shocked. One teacher, an occasional watcher, was sympathetic. Generally, people who cared about *Star Trek* reacted as though a distant but well-liked friend had died.

There will obviously be minute changes. When the Great Bird of the Galaxy flies away, someone else has to watch the nest. The executive producer has the final say on scripts and casting. Rick Berman will pass or prohibit some things that Roddenberry would have done the opposite thing with.

Still, the ratings are high (*Next Generation* is the number one syndicated hour long show, the number four syndicated show overall), the fans are numerous (52% of Americans are Trekkers) and the crew is committed (only *Trek Classic's* Nichelle Nichols has ever expressed interest in leaving forever, and she was persuaded by both Roddenberry and Martin

Luther King to remain — she would never say goodbye to Lt. Uhura now). Proof positive that things carry on: *Next Generation* filmed as scheduled the day after Gene died.

The chick will not die just because its father has left. It will thrive amongst the rest of its family.

Roddenberry's memorial service will be held sometime today. At 9:00 tonight and 7:00 tomorrow, MITV (cable 6, air 11) will run new episodes of *Star Trek: The Next Generation*. Watch and remember.

Goodbye Gene continued

world, and succeeded in portraying it to the world. Whether you agree with his *Star Trek* philosophies, which was left in the wake of his death, is irrelevant. What is relevant are his philosophies, his entertainment and his soul which are all in our history, and are there to be considered by all to come.

I wanted to say thank you Mr. Roddenberry for what you left me behind. My only regret is that I did not get to know you personally. Perhaps one day I can contribute to *Star Trek*. You brought us the wagon train to the stars, may you guide the reins of the wagon train back to them in peace.

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