

## Women at Warp Episode 71: Women of the First Conventions

Sue: Hi, and welcome to Women at Warp, a Roddenberry *Star Trek* podcast. Join us as our crew of four women *Star Trek* fans boldly go on our biweekly mission to explore our favorite franchise. My name is Sue. And thanks for tuning in. Today with me we have Jarrah...

Jarrah: Hello!

Sue: And it is just the two of us today because we have two very special guests who are going to be joining us by phone in just a little bit. We are going to be talking to Devra Langsam who you might remember as the publisher of *Spockanalia* as well as some other original *Star Trek* fanzines. And she was also a Welcommittee member involved in some of the first *Star Trek* conventions. We're also joined by Lynn Cohen-Koehler who helped to organize the first *Star Trek* convention in Philadelphia in 1975 and is also one of the organizers and involved in Lunacon and a member of the Lunarians

Jarrah: It's super exciting. So yeah I mean this episode may sound a little bit different to regular listeners because we did this over the phone but hopefully you enjoy. And it was just such a cool opportunity getting to talk to these two women who were involved in the earliest *Star Trek* conventions as well as fanzines and talk about, sort of, how conventions work in the 70s and how they've changed since then.

Sue: But as usual we have a little bit of housekeeping to do first. As you know our show is entirely supported by our patrons on Patreon. If you would like to become a patron you can do so for as little as a dollar for a month and get awesome rewards from thanks on social media to joining us for watch-a-long commentaries and lots of other stuff, anything that we find that we throw up there. We were talking about at one point there throwing up some very early pictures of us at *Star Trek* conventions. Maybe I'll go looking for some of those. If you're interested in joining us on Patreon, you can find that at [patreon.com/womenatwarp](https://patreon.com/womenatwarp).

Jarrah: Another way you can support our show is by leaving us a rating or review on Apple podcasts or wherever you listen to podcasts. It helps people find us and learn more about us and we really appreciate it so, if you get a second if you can go look at your podcast feed and submit a review. That would be super appreciated.

Sue: And our last bit of housekeeping is our giveaway. We are having a giveaway for two of the 50th anniversary Her Universe infinity scarves and there is a way to enter and photos of the scarves in our show notes so we won't spend a whole lot of time going into detail. And the entry period for that giveaway closes at noon eastern on November 12th. So there should be about a week left when this episode goes live.

Jarrah: Awesome.

Sue: And that is it! So we're going to get right into our discussion with Lynn and Devra. So joining us today are Devra Langsam and Lynn Cohen-Koehler. And we're so excited to have you both here. We're going to start by asking you to just introduce yourselves. Talk about your history with *Star Trek*, why you love it, whatever you would love to share with the audience would be great. So why don't we start with Lynn.

Lynn: Hi, my name is Lynn. When I was involved in the early Trek days I was Lynn Cohen, and I got married and became Lynn Koehler so I'm known by both names. I live in New York now, but I have originally from Philadelphia. I helped start the first *Star Trek* convention in Philadelphia which was in 1975, I think. And I also attended the second *Star Trek* convention in New York, as a child! I was still a child then.

Devra: This is Devra Langsam and I started the first *Star Trek* fanfiction magazine, Spockanalia. I did five issues of that. And I did 18 issues of Masiform D and I also did... When I say did, I mean published. I wrote a few stories but most of it was other people's stories. I also published several full length novels such as *One Way Mirror* and *No Peaceful Roads Lead Home* and I was one of the people who started the first *Star Trek* convention in New York City, which I think was 1970. But I'll be damned if I can remember.

Lynn: '72.

Devra: '72. We did it for five years and then we said enough. And it was an enormous amount of work and it was great fun. And I was not actually in the Welcommittee, I was just familiar with the people who ran it which was Jacqueline Lichtenberg started it. And then there was several other people who helped run it ending up with Shirley Maiewski. Since there was no Internet, all of our communication was by letters, really physical paper letters and by telephone. And because if you lived in Nowhere. Missouri you very often had a lot of trouble finding any other people who liked *Star Trek*, the Welcommittee was a conduit for you to locate other people who liked the show so that you would have somebody to talk to. Now, of course, that's not really a problem because you can just go online. But at the time many people felt tremendously isolated.

Lynn: Welcommittee was one of the organizations, there was another one called Star. And so sometimes there were chapters around the country and in Philadelphia we had sort of like a branch of Welcommittee that is also part of another organization. And we were sort of gay together semi-regularly and then became the fan base for the first *Star Trek* convention in Philadelphia.

Devra: Now what happened in New York, there was a local science fiction convention called Lunacon, which I was a member of, I went to it and I enjoyed it. And there were very nice people but there was a sort of feeling that *Star Trek* fans were well, a little pushy and all they wanted to talk about was *Star Trek*. And of course Lunacon covered a great many other science fiction and fantasy aspects. And one day Elyse Rosenstein and I were sorting film clips which were discarded pieces of actual film from the episodes, which we got from the Bjo Trimble and Mr.

Roddenberry, and we were trying to make a film show which you used a slide projector for. I know this is all ancient history and people have probably never seen a piece of actual film but that's how we did it. And we said to each other wouldn't it be lovely if we could have a convention that was all about *Star Trek* and we could just talk about it to our hearts content and all our friends could come. And Elyse said, that's a great idea. And I said, well, yeah. OK. And then three or four days later Elyse called me and said I've got a printer! And we've got a hotel! And somehow it just quite got away from us after that. The first convention we had.... we modeled the convention after Lunacon which is the convention that we knew. So we had an art show and a costume ball and panels and a dealer's room and we told all our friends and they told their friends and it was all word of mouth and letters. And we had about 800 advance registrations. At Lunacon, used to basically double its advance registration so we thought wow maybe we'll have 1600 attendees which is an enormous number. So we planned for 2000. And we ended up with about 3400.

Sue: Oh my gosh.

Devra: It was overwhelming. We ended up pinning pieces of paper onto people's chests because we ran out of badges. We ran out of everything, including room.

Sue: I was gonna ask!

Devra: The space we had was rated for eighteen hundred people. Fortunately the fire marshals never found out but it was a near thing. But it was wonderful.

Sue: Wow. You know one of the things... we had the opportunity to speak with Bjo Trimble, about a year ago? And that was one of my major questions to her is when you don't have the Internet, which of course we're so used to now, is how you organize and handle all those logistics and get the word out. So I think sharing what the I guess, analog way of communicating all of this stuff I think is fascinating.

Devra: At the later conventions we occasionally would have a thirty second paid ad at the end of a rerun. And of course there were the articles in the *TV Guide*. We got people calling us up and saying I hear there's a *Star Trek* convention. Oh, sorry it was last week. But it was primarily word of mouth and and letter contact. It was a tremendous correspondence going on because everybody wanted to talk about it. And originally it was all volunteer. And I cannot describe to you the amount of work that we did, to do that. Later we hired people from the convention bureau to handle registration. But basically the committee did all the other work including stuffing the giveaway bags. You haven't lived until you have slid across the floor on a sea of plastic bags.

[laughter]

Jarrah: Yeah I just finished reading Joan Winston's book *The Making of the Trek Conventions*. And it was really interesting. I mean a lot of things are similar but a lot has changed and certainly I mean it's not surprising it's a monumental effort. And she talks about how you know after the first convention people wanted to just start buying their memberships for the next one already. And I was interested in the... She talks a lot about the Dead Dog Party. Could you tell us what that was? Because I don't think that something that happens so much anymore.

Devra: It's basically the committee and helpers and anybody who hasn't gone home when the convention officially ends. Suppose you live in California and you decided to fly in for the convention. Well maybe you're not going home that evening. So there you are hanging around. You don't really have anything to do. You go to the Dead Dog Party and there are people that you can talk to and there might be some snacks. And in the early days there was beer. Later on we started worrying about the age of the people who were there and it was all sodas. But basically it was just kind of like, oh my god it's over.

[laughter]

Lynn: At the larger conventions it really is more the staff and the volunteers. Because it really is a facility for that. The smaller fan run conventions in general the Dead Dog Party would be open to everyone. And it's almost expected at this point.

Sue: I can tell you that it definitely still happens at Dragon\*Con.

Lynn: Yeah, it still happens. My dogs haven't died until they die. Sometimes they have gone on for days because people just don't leave.

Devra: But the committee is so tired. All they want to do is lie around.

Lynn: When I was at the first Philly convention, which was five days, a five day convention. I was going the whole five days and had the Dead Dog Party... actually at that convention we probably had about eight Dead Dog Parties going on. People were throwing me around it was so cool, so awesome, that they were literally carrying me from Dead Dog Party to Dead Dog Party. I was passing out at each one. I was 21 then. So, I certainly had a lot of stamina. But after five days of sleeping maybe two hours a night I was pretty dead. I was the true dead dog.

Devra: And there were all kinds of strange things happening because there were people who were just wild to see the stars, to talk to each other and many bizarre things happened that we can't even remember, we just knew at the time we said, what? People showing up, there was this one lady I believe it was an artist named Carole Swoboda, she made a full sized model of Spock, a dummy. And she brought it to the convention in a bus, a Greyhound bus, and the head fell off and rolled down the aisle while the bus was driving. And we put him, the dummy, he was entered in the art show, and we'd put him into a chair, next to the door and people would come up to the dummy and say, "Sir, where is your name tag, you can't sit there." Really. They did. I

was running the art show and I watched them doing that. But you can't imagine how much work it was. There were some very... one of our friends had access to a mainframe computer. So we went up in the off hours and used it to make a mailing list. Guess who typed the names and addresses in every Thursday night? Guess who picked the mail up from the post office box and drove it up to the place where this guy's mainframe was located? And then of course we would have committee meetings that lasted for hours and we screamed at each other. None of us had any experience except for helping to run a small Lunacon. And it was... it was so big and there were no backers. I put down the deposit for the original hotel because I had some cash, but everything had to be done on the cheap because we had no money. And although we didn't, at the first convention, pay the guests anything we still had to pay for the hotel, printing, and the postage and renting a post office box. I don't know how Lynn's people managed it but it was all done very much on a shoestring.

Lynn: Well, I think we're at one of your questions you were thinking about asking which is about how the split between fan run and more corporate commercial conventions happened, because that's about when it happened, which was the Philly convention was actually semi-commercial in the sense that even though it was supported by fans and all the basic groundwork was done by fans, it was actually owned by Al Schuster who was one of the original people from the first *Star Trek* convention with Devra, and that was part of the big split off. So, in the early early days the first corporate conventions were still supported by fans and we would get small stipends and our expenses covered but it was still... someone was making money. But the the actual work work was done by fans. So that's how it began.

Jarrah: So how did they make their money differently from the fan run conventions?

Devra: I think that there was a lady, I believe her name was Lisa Boynton. She was a Chicago person. And I think that these corporate people looked at the newspaper recordings and read the articles and TV Guide and said, "Oh goodness, look there must be money in this." And then they decided to run their own conventions. But we had no idea that there was money in it. We just knew that with science fiction conventions you ran the convention and you paid the guests' expenses. And nobody expected to make any money. So we really... I remember we asked for something like \$21 for the last convention, that was five days. And I mean you could barely get your foot in the door these days with \$21 and the guests didn't ask for money to do autographs. And they didn't ask for money to have a photo taken with them. I think that they didn't realize at the time that they could and of course it was... I mean it's their livelihood. They came because after a while they came because we paid them, and you can't really complain about their asking for money because after all, their their bodies are what they're using to earn just like a football player. They can't afford to give away a weekend to somebody else. But I think also the commercial conventions cut down on things, besides having a dealer's room, we had an art show. That meant we had to have hangings which we purchased the materials and we put them together and then we stored them in Al Schuster's shop and then we transported them to the hotel and put them up and we charged a very small amount for the artist to do their displays. And that was a lot of work. But the the commercial convention said, "Oh well we don't need to

do that.” And they saved money on that. But they were still asking for the admission fee and we did a lot of stuff. We had a musical that was performed by a school *Gilbert and Sullivan* group out of New Jersey and we paid for their transportation and their uniforms and for their hotel room and it was a special thing.

Jarrah: Yeah, it sounded too like there was just a lot of effort by the helpers and the organizers to really pull together to help people who needed help in terms of like disability issues, to make the conventions accessible. And also you know, really taking seriously when like a convention goer lost her wallet and things like that to that it was maybe felt kind of like it's our responsibility to all help each other because we're all part of this family?

Lynn: Fans helping fans was definitely a big family. Absolutely.

Sue: Well it feels like the biggest difference even now between some of the corporate conventions and fan conventions, is the focus, right? Because the corporate conventions their focus is on making as much money as they can that weekend. Where is the fan run conventions are about, you know celebrating not only the property but the community that's there and the fan community and the art and the stories and the creativity that comes out of it.

Lynn: Exactly. And the early fan run conventions and the early business ones still came out of fandom where you would have Lisa Boynton who relied on Chicago fandom, then Al Schuster who was part of the Lunarians and the original *Star Trek* convention, and then you had the Creation people, Adam and Gary, and they were doing conventions all over and it turned into a business but their first convention was almost a fan run convention too. They started out of fandom.

Devra: That's because they were our helpers originally.

Lynn: Yeah, exactly. And they saw the opportunity like, “Oh, maybe we can make some money at it” and they actually created a model of “what's the least we could do to make the most amount of money.”

Jarrah: Yup.

Devra: Yup.

Lynn: So basically a dealer's room and the main stage. And, as long as you had a place for someone to sell stuff and then some form of entertainment a show. That's all they had to do for their ticket.

Sue: I started attending conventions in, I'd say the early to mid 90s, and it felt to me like Creation was the only game in town.

Lynn: They wanted you to feel that.

Sue: Of course. But I mean especially at that time I didn't really... I wasn't even aware about fan conventions. So I'm just wondering like how did it get to that point? Did it feel like fan conventions were being pushed out? Or did they just like throw marketing dollars behind the Creation events?

Devra: That's very hard to say. One of the problems with fan run conventions is that it's all volunteer, and people get older and people change their interests. Originally it was all *Star Trek*. And then in 1977 it was *Star Wars*, and a lot of people just said, "Oh my god *Star Wars*!" and they changed their focus. They weren't interested in coming to *Trek* conventions anymore. And around that time the actors started to say, "Hey, this is my livelihood. You've got to pay me. Not just my hotel room, not just my airfare, not just my bar bill. Not just a per diem so I can go out and have dinner. You have to pay me real money." And all the fan run conventions couldn't do that. They didn't have the money. And also there's a nasty kind of catch 22. If you know that you're going to have 6000 people because you have signed up 6000 people you have got to have a facility that is big enough and that's not cheap. But if you have to pay for the hotel and the guests then you have to get those 6000 people or you're in a big hole. Even if you're a corporation. We were incorporated the last two or three years because we could not afford to put our cars and our bank accounts in there out upfront in case something happened and there was no money. But you have to have the large facility because you have to have the room for the people, then you have to have the expensive guests so that you can bring in the people. Anyway. I keep feeling like I'm going in circles. It's the cold.

Sue: [laughter] Not at all. So Lynn you're still affiliated with the Lunarians and Lunacon, right?

Lynn: Kind of. Yes. I'm still involved in fandom. I help with Philcon and Lunacon and World Con and whatever conventions I can get. I helped at Arisia this year and I'll be helping them next year. Arisia is a pretty large fan run convention in Boston, so I stay involved.

Sue: I lived in Boston for four years and nobody ever told me about Arisia and I'm still bitter about it. I'm just wondering, how is it different you know from running a fan convention in the 70s, when it was all starting out, versus running a fan convention now.

Lynn: Well, first there's email. And everything was... when I was working on the Philadelphia World Con in 2001, I could swear that I spent five hours a day reading emails from people who had problems, like committee members. I was deputy division head of programming and in charge of conference and one of the main people was started to fill up at World Con. And in 2001 everyone was on e-mail by then. So that was the major change, is that we were able to do a lot of communication and tracking by email and then there were wikis where you keep track of stuff online and now you can do just like we're doing now, we can do meetings without having to actually see anybody or be there physically. Although really physical in-person meetings are always really the best still. So that's a major change. What that means is that if I'm helping out a

convention in Boston I can still participate in the meeting. If I want to help out with the World Con that just happened in Finland I can still be a part of that, so that's that big change. So we are able to draw on resources all around the country, all around the world, and our fandom is even more connected than ever.

Devra: But you also have the opportunity for all of your computers to crash and to be unable to check people in the door because the registration has gone snafu! Which I think happened at an Arisia that I was recently. And Arisia is really very good about that. But their computers were just overwhelmed. So we ended up not not being able to check in for quite a while.

Lynn: Always have an analog backup copy.

Sue: It happened at a somewhat recent Dragon Con as well.

Devra: So hard copy is such a great idea but I think that there's also a bit more commercial aspect of it. You do have to have hired security guards and you don't do your own mailing. We use to do our own mailing which means we would print out 6000 or 8000 labels and then people would get together, we'd get... Al would do the printing and we would get together with boxes and boxes and boxes of printed advance progress reports which we sent out to the people who'd been there last year so they would pay for the next year. Also, people would write us and say, "Tell me about your convention!" and we'd send them one of these. But for the main mailing there'd be eight or ten thousand copies of these little collated booklets and we would sit there with strips of mailing labels and stick them on and then we would have to sort them, they were more or less sorted by zip code but you had to divide them up into bundles for the post office by same zip, the same first three letters, same city, and then you had to rubber band them in a certain way and put them into the mailing sacks and deliver them to the post office. And this was all done by us. In Elyse Rosenstein's living room or my living room and they'd be eight or ten fans sitting around doing this on a Sunday afternoon and all the pay they'd get would be a meal. And now of course it's all done by commercial. You pay somebody to send out the postcards.

Lynn: Or you use a mail program like MailChimp.

Sue: See, I feel like I'm missing out because I've never done that.

Lynn: It's really a party! Lots of fun. It was fun.

Jarrah: I was going to ask why do you think that so many of the original convention organizers were women and whether... what that any different from the convention scene in general or were all conventions like that? What was that like?

Devra: Originally all the science fiction conventions were pretty much male because almost all the fans were male. They were what we would now call geeks but it wasn't fashionable. And many of them were so unsocialized that they couldn't really communicate with other people



unless they were drunk. Scuse me, that's a rude thing to say. But anyway the conventions were very very heavily male. And then when *Star Trek* came in a vast number of women became involved and they sort of overwhelmed the original group. That's what my feeling is of why the conventions were mostly run by women because it was driven by the *Star Trek* desire. I mean our convention, at one point there were 14 on the committee and I think four of them were men. So. Lynn how do you feel about this?

Lynn: I concur. But by the time I got into fandom, I was already seeing the change because my first convention was 1972. So right after your first convention, that was Philcon then I came up to New York for a Lunacon in '73 and the *Star Trek* convention in '73.

Sue: I think that's fascinating because even now the stereotype of the *Star Trek* fan is like a lonely guy in his parents basement.

Devra: Well, they're wrong.

Sue: It's not accurate at all.

Devra: They never paid any attention. Yes. Some people wore a lot of buttons and some people wore ears and some people are a little different. But the networks never... we wrote them thousands of letters, they saw our names and they saw us at the conventions and they refuse to recognize the fact that there were so many women. I mean they had all of these hunks on that show and they only had two or three women. They were lovely women, wonderful women, but the main focus of the show was always these men.

Lynn: Let me just chime in, that the first Worldcon chair was a woman, it was Julian May, in 1952 she chaired a Worldcon, and she was the first woman to chair Worldcon and she just passed away.

Devra: And there were some wonderful women in early science fiction fandom but they were a very small number of them. And what, 2%? A very small number. I'm not sure about the percentages but it was a very small number.

Lynn: And definitely *Star Trek* played a factor in the change of that.

Devra: Definitely.

Sue: It feels like every aspect of the fan community that we look into, all of it's being driven by women. And a lot of the same women. I mean, Devra, not only conventions but I mean fan fiction and fanzines. It's huge.

Devra: Well I would never have done a fanzine, if my friend Sherna Comerford had not gone to an Open ESFA, which was a Newark science-fiction convention where she met Brian Burley

and she talked to him about *Star Trek* and he put her, and then me, in touch with Juanita Coulson, who is a Midwest fan who had been publishing a fanzine, not a fiction fanzine, but one with reviews of books and convention discussions and letters. And she and her husband Buck Coulson had been publishing *Yandro*, for years and years and years. And Juanita and Sherna and I had this very involved correspondence about *Star Trek*. At that time we were talking about, "Look that color shirt means he is an X!" Really, I mean it was very basic. And Juanita said, "Why don't you two do a *Star Trek* fanzine. I have my hands full doing my own fanzine but I'll help you. I'll help you with the production." And if she hadn't done that and given us advice we would never ever have done it. Because we didn't know anything at the time. And of course we were... it was all it was all volunteer labor. We're going back to the "doing it by hand". Now I don't know whether your school ever used a ditto. Ditto is the purple print on the slimy paper and it smells funny. And they used to send home messages to parents because you can get 50 or 100 copies off of the ditto before the ink runs out. But what we used was a mimeograph, which is the next step up, in which you can get two or three thousand printings from one stencil and we would type the stencils on our typewriters and then we would stick them onto the machine and run them. "Oh my God, it's electric. You don't have to hand crank it." So. And then we would collate it. That was another thing people would come and sit around and put page one on page three, on page five, and then you'd staple it.

Lynn: And so before the internet fanzine fandom was really strong. That was one of the best way of communicating with other fans. They would create the fanzines, sometimes either self-made or often they were a solicited contributions from other people and collated and put together and... mail it out to people! Or hand it out at conventions and that's how they would share opinions and thoughts. Now it's all on Facebook. I mean, there are still fanzines. Fanzines haven't totally died? But now most of them are internet fanzines and sent by email.

Devra: Archive of Our Own. And stuff like that. But we got the stories and we edited them. We said. "No, you have to make sure that he's got the same color eyes at the end of the story as he did at the beginning of the story."

[laughter]

There's a story that someone wrote, I think it was Paula Smith and it's a satire, a gothic take off a fan story in which the heroine's name changes every three or four paragraphs and it it full of excessive purple verbiage and her eye color changes and she's Tippiie Marie Smith and she is the youngest ensign ever on the *Enterprise* and she's so gorgeous, silver gilt hair down to her backside and all the crew adores her and she has the same name as the author. [pause] That's a dead giveaway. Well, people do write these stories and everybody has a little bit of this Mary Sue in them. It's not natural. People want to put yourself with characters you love. So you write the story, but as you get to be a better writer you can make the character less perfect. And we helped them. We guided them. [wryly] We're so smart, we're so old, and well read. We can say to you, "no that's the wrong word. You don't mean to say that." Like the man who said, "The girl

was holding a small monolith in her hand.” Well, monolith does mean a single stone but usually it means more like Stonehenge.

Sue: That's the kind of... I guess, tutelage mentorship? That doesn't happen today. You know now somebody puts something up on AO3 or even one when we moved to alt.startrek.creative and you know, there weren't nice suggestions of how to improve your story. It's flame wars and mean comments, and insults that fly.

Devra: I'm afraid sometimes I was a little rude when I told people they needed to fix things but, no not flaming.

Sue: Right.

Devra: We thought we did a pretty good job helping people and we published some really great stories.

Jarrah: Devra I read in a Wiki I think that you have a rule called Langsam's Law when you were editing fiction? Could you tell us what that is?

Devra: You know I don't even remember what it was.

Jarrah: Ok, well what I read is that it's called Don't Make Him Say That?

Devra: Oh. Oh, okay. Well. The very first convention we had a panel which we called Don't Make Him Say That. And it was intended to be a guide but also it was just funny because there were things that people put into the stories that were obviously so wrong, they were badly handled or they were not... Well, there was this one person who obviously just didn't like Spock. So every time he described Spock he called him hulking, green, logical or Vulcan. Sometimes all at once in the same sentence that was not really well written. And then there were what my cousin Debbie. You understand I have a cousin whose name is almost identical to mine and she looks like me and we were *Star Trek* fans together. So people say no no that's one person. Well no. She's Debra Langsam, which is a separate person but she had this thing that she called “neon words”. It's where you used the word once on page three and then 300 pages later you used the same word. And people say, “oh my god why is she always using that word.” It's just poor writing. So we sort of were trying to guide people into realizing that if this is what the character is he's not going to sound that way. And if he's on top of a cliff you shouldn't suddenly have been pounding on the door of a building at the bottom, without saying “after we slid down the cliff” and stuff like that.

Jarrah: Did you have a writing background or did you just kind of learn it by doing it?

Devra: Mmm, I was a children's librarian for 37 years so I had a lot of literature in the background but also I will say this very modestly have a good feeling for what is grammatical

and well written. And I read a great deal. I'm an enormous reader. Yes, I'm also very tall. But having having read a lot of stuff I could say there's a better way of phrasing this or why use the passive voice when you could say this in an active way and it would be better. It would also be short. People like short sentences sometimes.

Jarrah: Maybe, I can go back to conventions for a second. And I'm wondering what it was like. I know Sue and I have in the last couple of years got to do some panels with some of like our Star Trek star idols. And it was... you got a bit star struck. What was it like inviting these people from the show to the conventions and having them come out and basically getting to hang out with them and at those early conventions?

Devra: I didn't really hang out with people that much because I was in the art show. All the time.

Jarrah: Yeah.

Lynn: I didn't hang out either. Oh we got to... sometimes we had dinner. We would have a dinner or something together with like... George or Jimmy or, Jimmy and his wife Wendy. But generally we were working. We had to do our jobs. We had responsibilities. And I was actually helping out Lisa Boynton, actually her first Chicago convention and she brought me in to help her out there, to like help because she had a run a convention before. I was sitting up in the... I don't know it was called command central. And Shatner was there and Nimoy was there and I didn't talk to them! I was so busy! I had so much to do. I was actually like, they put me in charge of the art show and the dealer's room because no one there knew what it was and I had to help them set it up and I was so busy I was like, "hi guys". So that's what it was like.

Devra: That's the way it works. My friend Joyce and I did, Joyce Yasner, and I did a small convention. We called it Mostly Eastly Con. Or Mos' Eastly Con because it was taking the place of MediaWest\*Con which was... which still is the big media fan, fanzine convention which is run out in the Midwest and it's generally Memorial Day weekend. But they weren't doing it that year for some reason so they allowed us, how we could use their weekend. And Joyce said to me "but I want to go to a panel!" I said you don't go to panels you are running this thing. You're working! You get up at the crack of dawn and if you're lucky, you're in bed at a normal hour and just pray. There have been some disasters at conventions. There was I believe it was Disclave but I'm not going to swear to it. There was a flood. This guy managed to break the sprinkler in his bedroom which was right above either the art show or the dealer's room. And in the middle of the night there was a flood and they had to get the convention committee in to do something about it. And well you just pray that nothing like that happens. But if it does you're there you're the person on the spot.

Lynn: I was at that convention and my two year old daughter was at that convention and she remembers that night because they got everybody out of the rooms and it was horrible and scary and was like 3:00 to 5:00 in the morning and she remembers that. That's probably her first

memory. In fact, if you hear me say, "excuse me, I have to go" it's cause she's coming back in the house and she'll be making noise. So a warning, it could happen, I don't know.

Sue: No worries. Well I keep bringing up Dragon\*Con because that's where most of my support slash volunteer slash organizing experience lays but I know several of the track directors and they say the same thing. They're like, "I don't get to go to panels. Maybe if I'm moderating one. Or I might see somebody backstage for two or three minutes but I'm working."

Devra: Well, that's the fact. You're running this. You're the one responsible. I was a chairman of one of the *Star Trek* conventions and I ended up hiding in the convention bedroom because it was overcrowded and people kept coming in and wanting to get refunds and I shouldn't have done that. But it's your job. So yeah we had dinner with the with the actors and that was just lovely but the volunteers who were helping to get them to their program items saw them more than we did.

Jarra: Had either of you been to the set when it was filming.

Devra: No. I was supposed to go to the set. Sherna Comeford and I went out to California. I think it was Bay Con that we went to and we had been invited to come out to the set but we thought we will go after the convention instead of before the convention and it turned out they were on hiatus. So we got to see the prop room and they took us around and showed us some stuff but we didn't actually see them filming.

Jarra: So after the convention, the Welcommittee conventions in New York in... I think the last one was 75?

Devra: They were not Welcommittee conventions. Welcommittee was a separate organization.

Jarra: OK. There was just overlap.

Devra: Yes. Well, we were all doing all this stuff. I mean I was doing fanzines and I was running conventions and I was going to other conventions.

Lynn: And we were trying to bring *Star Trek* back. And trying to connect with other fans.

Devra: Thousands of letters. Thousands of petitions.

Jarra: Yeah. I was interested in the stuff that the Welcommittee and stars and the other sort of fan groups were doing in the period I guess between like 75 and I think 95 is when we.... I think it was just like a bit less of that sort of central fan organizing in *Star Trek*.

Devra: The Welcommittee did a lot of stuff. They put out... I think they put out a newsletter at one point but mostly it was helping people communicate with other fans and giving them

guidance about running conventions. And sometimes they would answer questions. Jaqueline Lichtenberg actually set it up. Her name was in the book and people wrote her letters asking her, "How do I get in touch with the other fans? How do I find out about conventions?" And she would write back. And eventually it got to be too much for her and then she organized the Welcomittee, which was a group of people and of course one of the things we did was we wrote letters to Paramount saying "we want *Star Trek*. Bring it back." We wrote a lot of letters. And they used to send us back... at the very beginning they would send us back what we called "Thank you very much and please drop dead" letters.

Jarrah: Yes, we have a slightly more graphic term for right now.

Devra: Well, but that's what it was.

Jarrah: Yep. [laughter]

Devra: And we wrote hundreds of them and we sent them petitions and I don't know if they really listened to us or not. Probably not.

Sue: So it was there mostly for central organization.

Devra: It was a matter of communication. It was getting in touch with friends.

Sue: And then I guess that is sort of what happened when everything moved online. With things like the BBS and news groups.

Devra: I will tell you a terrible secret. I'm not in contact with any of these people online.

Jarrah: That's totally fair. It's got its pros and cons for sure. It's interesting.

Devra: You understand, what happened with our *Star Trek* convention was that it was too much work to be a hobby. It was every Thursday and every weekend all year and then we took a week off and then we started planning the next one. And this was not a job that we were being paid for. There wasn't enough money in it for us to pay 15 people to work and it was too much work for a hobby and too little money for a job. And after five years we just said "I can't do this anymore."

Lynn: Plus, there's got to be a proliferation of people doing it for business purposes. Then there started being nasty stuff about people trying to undercut people, as a competition. And it wasn't a friendly competition because there are a lot of people really just out for themselves, thinking they can make a fast buck. Horrible.

Devra: And the actors who, very reasonably felt that this was their livelihood, started to ask for a great deal more money than we had available. And Paramount started getting a little

uncomfortable about it. They thought we were making.... I think we made about five cents an hour over the five years.

Jarrah: So how how did it feel when you got more *Star Trek*. Like, when you got the movies and *The Next Generation*? Was it surprising? I guess I'm asking like at the time you wanted it to come back did you think that you would be here fifty years later talking about it?

Devra: Never. I'm sorry to say that I never liked any of the sequels except maybe *Deep Space 9*. And then when they killed off Vedek Bareil I said, "these people cannot cope with adult human relationships". To hell with them.

Lynn: *Deep Space 9* was really cool because it actually was telling stories and it contains faith, that we had a lot more thinking about. So yeah for serious Trekkers or Trekkies, that many people find that's their favorite.

Sue: So, I'm wondering since you're still involved in the fandoms today how you think the convention culture has changed among the attendees. Do you think there's still that same sense of community or do you think that it is you know, just basically a big marketing engine?

Lynn: I have a lot of opinions.

Devra: I don't really know these people so I can't say. But it's hard to reconcile the people who will pay \$80 to have an autograph with all the people who used to love it so much that they would go out and make their own phasers cause Paramount couldn't comprehend that there were adults who wanted phasers. And when they did do the phasers they put *Star Trek* on the side of it. We didn't want a phaser that said *Star Trek* we wanted a real phaser.

Lynn: But the fan conventions now... all the major changes... There's two sides to it. One is the commercial side, where people go and expect a show. Then they come back, they're paying their money, they want to get entertained. That's totally different from people who are going to a fan run convention who generally get memberships, and are a part of a community. That's one thing. And then the other side of it is that culture has changed, and that people's standards of interaction, one because there are so many crowds that they have to have more rules and structure and two, because people are more sensitive, and more aware to things like cosplay isn't permission and things like that. So... and it's also about access that access we didn't really require but you know so many people that need help. So those are some things that convention culture changed for the better. And then some for the worse, especially for people who don't know that there are fan run conventions. They're stuck in that world where it's just about money.

Devra: And autographs!

Sue: Finding fan run conventions changed my feeling about conventions. But in my own experience I feel like among the people I know, among the people that I do events with,

because I'm part of a few different fan groups that go to these corporate conventions to do events, there is almost a pushback. You know people are finally it seems starting to realize that they're being herded like cattle and paying admission in order to be allowed to either shop or be marketed at. So I feel like I'm seeing a lot of people heading out and searching for a fan convention. Something that might be smaller or something that might be a little bit more focused. I don't know if anybody else has seen that but I'm wondering do you think there's going to be a resurgence, at least even a little one, in the fan run convention.

Devra: It's hard to say because it's... fan run conventions involve a tremendous amount of work and it is difficult to find people who are willing to spend the entire convention working. Not actually going to panels or seeing things because they are running registration and running the art show and they can not leave their job. And people don't necessarily want to do that. If they want to go to a convention they want to enjoy it. And also it's a matter of experience if you have not been running and working at a convention, you don't necessarily know how to do some things and it's hard to get people to come and learn. And then again, you have to rent the space and you have to have the money for all the same monetary problems that we had in the beginning. You have to have the post office box or the website. You have to have the bank account you have to have the credit card machine. Everybody expects to be able to pay online with a credit card. So you have to. Did you realize that you had to pay to use a credit card when you're a business?

Sue: Yep! [laughter]

Devra: So it's hard to see whether there will be more fan run conventions. I know a couple of fan run conventions have recently closed down, with most of these problems.

Sue: Yeah. And then again the one I keep bringing up, Dragon\*Con, seems to grow every year and there is some fear among a lot of the attendees who do go that they're going to quote "start selling out."

Lynn: Well they're like a quasi-business.

Sue: Yeah, there is an LLC.

Lynn: San Diego Comic-Con is a fan run, nonprofit but they make money. New York Comic-Con is fully business.

Sue: Yes.

Lynn: So you'll see the differences, if you go to any of those conventions, where the fan run ones still care about people enjoying it. And you know more than just legal safety, their general well-being.



Sue: Yes.

Lynn: Right. And not that the people who are running the business ones don't care about safety and well-being but that's not their prime directive. They just don't want to get sued or having to refund.

Jarrah: In my experience also there just there tends to be a bit more diversity of programming at the fan run conventions. Maybe it's partly necessity because it's harder to get as many of the actors out when you maybe can't afford to pay them as much or you're a smaller convention. But there's more fan panels, more like maybe having like scientific experts who are inspired by *Star Trek*... just different things to see, I guess.

Devra: Most fan run conventions, which are not media conventions, which is to say they're not *Star Trek* or *Star Wars*, don't have paid guests. Maybe the major guests. The big names, like at Philcon they had C.J. Cherryh, who was a lady who has what, 35 books? Big fan following and I'm sure that she did not pay for her own hotel room.

Lynn: Right, so like they'll get their expenses and hotel covered. But occasionally a small honorarium, and I mean really small like a couple hundred dollars kind of thing. But generally fan run conventions do not pay the guests. For the media convention they work out something, sometimes they won't pay but they can sell their autographs. At the fan run science fiction conventions there's no sales of autographs. If you're or your audience is interested in convention running that I know of a couple different groups that help and you could probably find them with Facebook. One is Journeymen of Fandom, JOF, and the other is SmofCon. SmofCon does conventions around... I say around the world but in the United States and that's one in Boston in December. I don't know if there's going to be a JOFcon coming up or not they are sporadic. But they happen to have a lot of conversation about topics of running conventions. So there's still... there's definitely a network out there and I know there is an organization out west but I can't think what they are right now.

Jarrah: OK. Well we can post the links to those in our show notes. That's super helpful. Thanks.

Lynn: Sure.

Sue: And we don't want to keep you too long but I guess our final question would be how do you feel about the fact that we have a new *Star Trek* show. Fifty one years after we had our first *Star Trek* show. And are you watching it?

Devra: I watched the first episode and I was really annoyed at what they did to the Klingons, the original Klingons were sexy. Ok? That's why people are fascinated by them and that's why you've got people writing stories and learning to speak Klingon. And I didn't find the new Klingons that attractive.

Lynn: And I did not see it. This streaming services that I have not connected with a source that has it yet. Plus most of my friends are like really annoyed that they have to pay to watch it. Other than the first episode. So I think that was an interesting marketing thing that may not be successful.

Devra: I think it was kind of... not the cleverest move in the world. Maybe they thought, "Oh there are so many *Star Trek* fans we will make a lot of money selling this to them." But I think that many people have their backs put up because of being asked to pay for it.

Jarrah: Yeah. So definitely for those of us in the US and Canada that had to get a separate service from Netflix it was a little annoying.

Lynn: Yeah.

Jarrah: I'm jealous of the rest of the world.

Lynn: Other fan run conventions, definitely check out the World Science Fiction Convention that goes around the world is just last in Finland. I think the next one is in San Jose?

Devra: San Jose sounds right, either San Diego or San Jose.

Sue: They're great cons and they're great fun.

Lynn: There's a good size do you get somewhere between four and eight thousand people generally that shows up. And then my favorite convention actually is the World Fantasy Convention that also goes around the world. And that one I actually do panels. I don't know how that happens, I do volunteer at most of them. But there I hit the town and relax and have a good time. And if you're into talking to authors it's great. If you're an artist IlluxCon which just happened, is a pretty major art convention. And that's in Reading, Pennsylvania.

Devra: Well, the thing with Fantasy Con is that they have a strict limitation on the size. They know what they want and they don't want more than what, fifteen hundred people. That's it. When they reach their maximum, you could stand on your head. You can get on the waiting list in case somebody decides they can't come. But that takes care of the problem of having to constantly worry about paying for your site because you know how many bodies you can fit into that site and how many people can get a ticket.

Lynn: And there's still a fanzine thing, and in and they have a convention called Corflu. That's pretty small and it's pretty long time fans but that also goes around the country or maybe around the world too. So I mean they're still out there. You can find it, it's you know, your your your town probably has the convention! Or two, or three.

Devra: Don't mortgage your house to run your own convention. That's a bad idea. Don't quit your day job.

Lynn: I will say that my experience at the conventions is really my base for what I know now. You know everything I learned, I learned from conventions. I learned how to do publicity, I learned how to work with people. I learned about organizing and putting things together. I mean I went to college, but everything I learned was through conventions, really.

Devra: Helping to negotiate contracts. You don't realize you have to have a contract with that hotel. Yeah. You better have a bank account with some money in it or the hotel won't talk to you.

Lynn: And the most important thing is that my friends? They're all from conventions. All my friends are fans. I met them at the LA convention and I'm still friends with them.

Devra: Yeah right. That's true. Yeah.

Sue: Going back to that community.

Lynn: Exactly. It's your community, it's your base, it's your family. It's like a family.

Devra: In the musical *Chorus Line* there's a song after one of the people who's trying out for a part in the chorus injures himself and the other people sing about how they can't forget and won't regret what they did for love. That's basically what it is. We just loved it.

Jarrah: That's perfect.

Sue: You just plucked all of my heart strings. Because we're also big musical theater fans here. Thank you both so so much for joining us. Did either of you have final thoughts, anything else that you want to say? I think we've just about talked about everything.

Lynn: Live long and prosper!

Devra: Yes.

Jarrah: Thanks so much!

Devra: OK, you're very welcome.

Sue: This was really great.

Jarrah: Yes. Have a great rest of your evening.

Devra: Thank you.

Lynn: Thank you.

Everyone: Bye!

Sue: If you'd like to get in touch with us you can find us on Twitter, at [@womenatwarp](#), on [Facebook](#), by e-mail at [crew@womenatwarp.com](mailto:crew@womenatwarp.com), and you can find our show notes and blog online at [womenatwarp.com](http://womenatwarp.com). Thanks so much for listening.