

Women at Warp Episode 113: Women in Trek Fandom: Jacqueline Lichtenberg

SUE:

Hi and welcome to Women At Warp. Join us as a 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. with me today is Jarrah.

JARRAH:

Hello.

SUE:

And we have a special interview for you today.

JARRAH:

We're going to be interviewing Jacqueline Lichtenberg, who is- I mean it's hard to sum her up in a super short bio statement but she is an author of many published science fiction works as well as an incredibly important influence in Star Trek fan fiction and fandom history. One of the authors of Star Trek Lives, the book, and in addition when she founded the original Wel-committee, what am I missing Sue?

SUE:

Well her Star Trek fan fiction series is called The Kraith universe, has sprouted into having contributing authors. I believe she's had fan works published in 25 different fanzines. She was at the first Star Trek conventions in New York.

JARRAH:

I think she said that at one point there were *five* fanzines that were fiction based off her fiction.

SUE:

Correct. Yes. So really any aspect of Star Trek fandom in particular you can find her influence. So it was great to get a little bit of information from her on as many aspects as we could.

JARRAH:

Well let's jump right into it.

Transition noise

SUE:

Jacqueline, thank you so much for joining us today. We're so excited to have you and to speak to you about some Trek stuff. But before you became so fully immersed in the fandom, which we will talk about much more, what was it that you think first drew you to Star Trek?

JACQUELINE:

Well, you see the thing is that your premise is a little bit off.

SUE:

Oh all right. *laughs*

JACQUELINE:

Yeah, it's just a little bit off there. The fact is I've been fully immersed in fandom since 1950. Well *well* before Gene Roddenberry thought of Star Trek as a TV show. He- it was part of his imagination even in the 30s and 40s. But he wasn't thinking in terms of television until television really took off in the 50s. But I was totally immersed in fandom when in the seventh grade I sent a letter of comment to Worlds of If magazine, which was at that time edited by Fred Pohl. He published the letter. And in those letters, in those days they published addresses with letters of comment because the world wasn't so dangerous, and members of the National Fantasy Fan Federation, which is on Facebook now N3F, the members of their wel-committee wrote to me. Lots and lots of letters. And I joined the National Fantasy Fan Federation, which was the only organization of fans. I mean, an *actual* organization with a Constitution, elected officers, and a succession plan right? An ongoing plan. And the National Fantasy Fan Federation was founded by Damon Knight. He always wrote his name with two small letters, a small d and a small K. Damon. Knight. He was very very famous science fiction writer, and academic, and later he actually founded the Science Fiction Writers of America. So I joined the M3F, the national fantasy fan federation, in the 1950s and have received many accolades about that because I'm one of their oldest members now. At the time when Fred Pohl was an active member and I could look- and so were some other professional science fiction writers. And I could look *up* at the professional science fiction writers and I got my first writing lessons through them. It was my whole life, or until I got to college and I had to sort of drop out because college takes up your whole life right? And then I got back into it after I got married. But then I started *selling* in the 1960s. I started selling my science fiction and I joined the science fiction writers of America. Now I'm a life member of both organizations. And Damon Knight is not no longer with us. But I was *dedicated* to the concept of fandom *long* before Star Trek. As were most of the people involved in generating the original conventions, which were based on original fanzines. The Key Negative by Ruth Berman, and Spockanalia by Deborah Langsom, and a whole crowd of New York people who eventually founded that convention became *The Committee*. And I was hanging out with these people. But what drew me to Star Trek originally was when they announced that at the Chicago Worldcon there would be a debut of a new TV show. I was on my way to Israel. I had gotten a job there, and I was in California looking for a job as a chemist because I just graduated, and I got this job in Haifa Israel. So I was on my way to Israel and I couldn't go to Chicago, so I *missed* the whole debut of Star Trek. Then I got a letter from Bjo Trimble, which had been forwarded like six times because I moved everywhere in the world and I had just gotten married and moved again. *Sue laughs* And finally this letter with all these addresses written on the front got to me and it was from the Bjo Trimble. Guess what? I knew Bjo Trimble from the Bay Area in California when I was in high school and college.

JARRAH:
Cool!

JACQUELINE:

Cause she was running art shows at that time at conventions. So I knew her! And I got this letter from her saying write to, you know, Paramount to keep the show on the air because you can't syndicate one season of a show. This convinced me that the show that had debuted at Chicago was really as good as the other fans that I'd heard from who saw it in Chicago thought it was. Because I trusted Bjo Trimble's judgment. So I wrote to Paramount and I told Gene Roddenberry "Keep it on the air until I can get back and actually see it" because at that time if you missed the broadcast you would Never. Ever. See. It. Again. *Jarrah laughs* How the world has changed. *all laugh* I don't have that sense of panic now when something I think I want to see comes along. I just let it collect then I'll binge watch it on Netflix. *all laugh/ecstatic* I love this world! I tell you, we have really done it! This is what the women- and this is why the whole women thing, that angle is really right to the point. When you looked around, when I was writing Star Trek Lives I circulated the questionnaires to find out who is publishing, editing, and reading Star Trek fanzines it was all women. Only when we went out and beat the bushes that we could get any of the men to do any fanzines. There were just a scattered few of the men. Because they were active. They were doing things I mean they've changed the world. I mean NASA and everything right? And programming, and computers, and all of this stuff is mostly men. But so women were writing to fanzines. The committee was mostly women. Joanie Winston ran publicity for the committee. She was very much a woman, really enjoyed being a woman and never liked the men and on and on and on. You can just go through the whole roster and you will see the majority of the energy and dedicated hours of hard work and *genius* that went into convincing the world that Gene Roddenberry was correct and that this show should be revived. That audience. That group. That group spending money to go to conventions and buy stuff in the dealer's rooms, and the writing and creating and publishing of fanzines and all of that, almost all of that was women. Don't discount the women. The women are the power source behind Trek. I think Roddenberry knew that too.

JARRAH:

This may be a good point to segue into talking a little bit more about fandom, and then maybe we can come back and talk a bit more about fiction writing after. That sound good to you folks?

JACQUELINE:

Yeah. Well this is the reason I mentioned the women is that prior to Star Trek all the fanzine publishing was non-fiction written and published by men. There were a *scattering* of women and most of them used male pen names. You know, Andre Norton Marion Zimmer Bradley being two of the very most famous science fiction writers who *could not* be published. Manhattan would not allow it under a non male name or non ambiguous name. This is the world that we came from. This is the world that we live in. The world where women count for something, a woman's taste means something. Until Star Trek came along Manhattan was absolutely convinced that

quote science fiction unquote was actually a literature genre that would only sell to teenage boys, *Jarrah laughs* and girls would never be interested you see.

JARRAH:

I think they forgot about Mary Shelley.

JACQUELINE:

laughs Yes. Yes.

JARRAH:

But you're a professional author in addition to being a fan and an author of fanfiction. For our listeners who may not know, can you tell us about your work and the Sime-Gen universe.

JACQUELINE:

Well actually the Sime-Gen universe concept, the worldbuilding that went behind it was done when I was a teenager looong before. Well, not *that* long. I mean it was like 10 years or 15 years before Star Trek, or before Star Trek fandom. My awareness of what Roddenberry was doing with Star Trek did not come until long after the Sime-Gen universe was basically a world that had been built. If you understand what worldbuilding is like, it's gaining right?

JARRAH:

Yes. *laughs*

JACQUELINE:

And the thing is that when I saw Star Trek I realized that somebody else was doing what I was doing, only was doing it to a much bigger audience. Most people would say that's more successful. *skeptical* Not so totally sure about that. But Roddenberry managed to sell this product that no how no way belonged on television to a television network. What he went through to do that is David Gerald's book shows a lot of the steps that he took to go through that. And there's a wonderful post about Lucille Ball on Wikipedia that details a lot of the work that she did behind the scenes to *force* the show onto the air. What happened is that I saw Star Trek and I said "This is the future of science fiction. We have to conform and configure the science fiction quote novel unquote to the market that Roddenberry had managed to pry open" that is episodic television, wide audience, wide appeal market. So I ask myself why is this show appealing to the people that appeals to? And at that time what I knew about the audience for Star Trek on the air was essentially the science fiction reader crowd that I hung out with. And everybody else I met that was doing fanzine and so on. The whole concept of the fanzine is a science fiction fan concept. And it was Deborah Langston with Spockanallia who did the first fanzine that had fiction in it. Original fiction based on and using the premises and the characters of the TV show. That was an original, that had never happened before. Nobody ever wanted to. There weren't any TV shows that were worth it. *all laugh* Yeah. So she did that, and she was able to do that because of her science fiction fan connections. And it just went like wildfire. And Ruth Berman basically simultaneously also went with what she knew. So fandom was my home.

Sime-Gen arose out of reading what fans were saying about books which I had read which had been professionally published. Commentary, right? And I looked at the books that were being published for teenage male readers and I said "But wait, you're missing something." And I set out to write science fiction for the jaded palate. That's basically what it is. It's for science fiction readers- Sime-Gen is for science fiction readers who are tired of reading the same novel over and over again. So I broke new ground. It was very hard, but when I saw Star Trek I analyzed- you know, I knew that what I wanted to do wouldn't be popular because it's not for young males. Right. Yeah. A lot of young males like it, but it's not *for* young males. And it doesn't have *clears throat* we go into a whole theory about intimate Adventure, which is a genre that I say is an invisible genre behind the action adventure genre. If you take adventure in action adventure and you instead of putting action in front of it you put intimacy in front of it and you and you create a genre that is intimate adventure where the emotional risks, the physical risks, the jeopardy, the stakes that the main characters are playing for are actually emotional, psychological, spiritual, whatever you know it is that makes a human being a human, that go right to the core of personal identity. And the awareness, of other people in your world, of who you are. Which is a whole school of psychology is based on that. Needing validation for your identity is something that is very very human. That's what Sime-Gen is really about. And no other science fiction up to that point had been about that. And if you look at the original aired Star Trek it wasn't about that either. It had the potential to be. It left it off-stage, in between scenes, out of the view, just assumed that it had happened.

JARRAH:
Interesting.

JACQUELINE:

And that fact that those things were not ever mentioned on Star Trek is what gave rise to the fanzines, which explained what happened in between. And explains a lot of the inconsistencies, or apparent inconsistencies, that happen because in order to get the script into 46 minutes they had to be shredded. And then reshaped. And it was- I mean Paramount was convinced it had to be for adolescent males and Roddenberry really, when he set out to do this, had no no real- he did not target women. He was *delighted* when women took hold of his fiction, but he never targeted women to begin with. And he was all about the adventure. But women love adventure too. We just don't, you know, we move from time to time we might enjoy it. But it isn't the main point of life to destroy your enemies by beating them to death with a bludgeon. *all laugh* You know? Well yeah, it's not how we solve problems. We look for other ways to do things. And of course neither extreme really is very useful or workable. You have to hit that middle where you combine physical force with psychological force. Right? And that's what we do in the Sime-Gen universe. And it is science fiction for the jaded palate, because it uses a premise which is an Andre Norton premise that fascinated me from the 1950s. What happens if humanity mutates? And when Andre Norton was writing the big bugaboo for causing the human genome to mutate was atomic warfare, which would wipe out civilization. I like the idea of wiping out civilization. I didn't think it was all that great to begin with. You know, we really could do better if we started over. Yeah really. What would you have to change about human nature to make the world a

better place or to make humans who would create a better world? That's the question, you know? And that's why Roddenberry put Spock on the bridge to ask that question, "What is good about humans? What needs work? How could you change humans? What would be an improvement?" Now I don't think Roddenberry hit the answer to that question, but that was the question that I saw on my TV screen. And the way that question is asked is by putting a non-human on the bridge, and that was my- when I finally got back- I should tell the story for posterity. When I finally got back to the United States and actually saw an episode of Star Trek. It was Spock and Spock alone. Let me tell you this story. It's very embarrassing. *Jarrah laughs* I got back with my brand new husband, and we were staying at his aunt's house in Brooklyn, and she invited the rest of his family over, everybody who lived around there, to meet their new relatives. So I'm sitting in their living room and I, you know, amidst the sea of- it was at that time a large family. It was a sea of faces of people I didn't know, who didn't read science fiction had no interest in Star Trek etc, and anything that interested me except my husband. And they, you know, conversation ran around to "Well let's see what's on television" so they pulled out TV Guide, which at that time was a little magazine, and I saw Star Trek was on. We had like three channels and a couple of fuzzy ones, and they had Star Trek on. And I said that I had been waiting to see that show, I really really wanted to see that show because I had heard of it while I was abroad. So being kind to their new in-law guest they graciously put the show on and gritted their teeth through watching most of it. The last scene, I believe it was last scene, it just exploded in my mind as the camera swerved around and got a side view of Spock. This was after several scenes on the bridge where Spock is interacting normally with the rest of the crew and with the captain right? So then they come around and they get the side profile of Leonard Nimoy in his ears. I charged into the middle of the living room accompanied by my new in-laws pointing at the screen and screaming at the top of my lungs *all laugh/shouting* "HE'S NOT HUMAN!" *all laugh* I will never forget that moment. That was the moment, that was the moment I was born for. That was the moment I started to live. That was the moment my life began. That was it for me, the very definition of everything, the television able to communicate with audiences in the size of millions, much bigger than any book could ever reach, has a non-human on TV who behaves like a real person not an idiot. I mean the kiddie shows, they behave like, you know, they're clowns. They're idiots or My Favorite Martian, who was- it was all for gags and it was just silly and nobody could believe. OK. Star Trek was cardboard sets, and primary color uniforms, and the production values by today's standards were very low, but they were very high by the standards of television at that time. And it was really the best they could do. And there were occasional bloopers you know. But we only saw those in reruns. I mean the first time through the story grabs you, because- not because it's original and there was absolutely not one shred of originality in Star Trek anywhere. I had read all of this stuff before. Not just once but by many authors in many directions, but so had Roddenberry. He wasn't an ignoramus; he knew his stuff. They managed to get a real person, an adult person with a mind on television and he wasn't human. That is the definition of how this thing- this work of art asks a question of an audience that has never heard this question before, "What is a human being? What is the essence of humanity?" I didn't like Roddenberry's answer which is why I wrote Kraith.

SUE:

Well I wanted to ask you about that.

JACQUELINE:

laughs It's all connected.

SUE:

It is! So based on everything that I have found, you began writing the Sime-Gen books and your fanfiction the Kraith series around the same time in the late 60s.

JACQUELINE:

Actually Sime-Gen predated the Kraith series. I sold my first story before I had the first Kraith story published in T Negative.

SUE:

So you were a published author, by the time you started having fan works published in fanzines.

JACQUELINE:

Exactly.

SUE:

So with knowing that fan authors in fanzines weren't paid, what prompted you to continue writing for fan works, even though you were making your living as an author with your Sime-Gen works?

JACQUELINE:

Well I tell you, at that time I decided to launch a professional writing career, I had one baby and I was pregnant with another one. And I had a typewriter, which I had to take out and put on the kitchen table in between making meals. And I worked on my kitchen table, and I started writing some stories. And I realized that I really didn't know how- I knew what I wanted to do, but I didn't know how to do it. I knew there had to- in order to write for pay, to write commercially. It can't be a difficult thing to do. Writing a story has to be as easy as flipping a light switch. You have to know what you're doing or if, you know, if you want a faucet replaced you get somebody, you didn't necessarily have to be a licensed plumber. But he has to know how faucets are built and how to take them apart without spraying water all over the place right? There is a method behind every profession, and I realized that I needed more clues to the methodology of how to produce fiction without breaking a sweat. Because if you're going to do it fast enough to sell at a penny a word, at that time that's all they paid, and make actual money at it. You know, I mean if you go work for an hour you make a dollar fifty, but if it takes you five hours to write a page you're not going to make a dollar fifty. So I mean, just the economics of being a writer forces you to think in terms of "How can I make this an easier job?" So I found an advertisement for a correspondence writing course in writing called The famous writers school. And I convinced my

husband to pay for it, you know, that we should pony up the money for these courses because the guy who came to the house to sell it to us, it was one of these high powered hard sell type presentation things that make you part from your money for no value. However, I saw in the course- I saw "That's what I need to learn how to do." what they were teaching. So we signed up for it. I think it cost four thousand dollars or something, and the promise that this guy was making, that salesman, was when you've done your fourth assignment you will have produced something you can sell. And that's what I needed to do. Target your goal. Go after it. So I did that, and I sold the homework assignment for the fourth lesson. And it turned out later on, I had a cousin who took the course and there were other people I knew and I heard about it, It turned out later on this school was sued because nobody ever did that. People were promised, they parted with lots of money, promised that they would sell on the fourth lesson and they finished the whole course and never be able to write anything that could sell. But I did it. I wasn't the only one, but I was one of the very very few. According to the lawsuit anyway. And then I went on and I realized- I looked at the rest of the course, I realized there's a lot more here to learn. So I didn't like the course. It was basically aimed at mundane. It was aimed at writing nonfiction for the mundane market. It was aimed at, you know, like writing your memoirs if you're nobody. And it was aimed at people who had this, you know, dream of writing fiction or selling fiction who really had no ideas. They didn't have anything to say. It didn't give you the foundation of the kind of education and thinking that you need in order to develop something to say about the world. But I already had something to say. What I wanted to say was "Science fiction is not a genre." It contains all genres. Science fiction is not for teenage boys, it's actually for girls. But none of that had ever been published. So what did I do? I took the homework assignments and I tell you I got blistering letters back from the teachers. Each assignment was- you got a different teacher evaluating what you had done. I would get blistering letters back about the stupidity of my science fiction, because I wrote science fiction for the homework assignment.

SUE:

I did that. *laughs*

JACQUELINE:

And they hated it. OK. So anyway, I wrote Kraith the first-I don't remember four, five, six episodes of Kraith that were published in T Negative, those were homework assignments specifically to perfect and speed up the production of fiction according to the lesson taught in each of the assignments. But they didn't understand the science fiction market, which I had studied basically all of my life. So the fourth assignment was to study the editor that you want to sell to, and write something that that editor would buy. So the editor I studied was Fred Pohl. Who was at that time publishing If magazine- Worlds of If magazine which, you know, I had already- I knew this guy from forever. I'd read all of his books, and I had read all of his editorials, and so on and Don Campbell's editorials jousting with him from the other magazines. There was an entire society and letters to the editor and so on. And not only that but "Thank you for talking about the topics that were raised" in the magazine of the month. So I knew what I was doing. And I crafted a Sime-Gen story specifically designed to tweak Fred Pohl's imagination, to be the story he would want to publish. At that time he was running a project to publish the very first

story of certain writers, like Tom Campbell. He was a nurturer of new writers. So he wanted new writers who had never sold anything before. My story was actually bought as part of that program, but it didn't get the label. That story, and it's really very very bad. But it's very very wonderful in that it actually speaks directly to Fred Pohl. And that story is now posted online for free reading. Operation High Time is the title. When I google, you know, Google gives you tailored results. When I google it turns up the Sime-Gen.com posting. But the thing is that this was the beginning, the first sale of the series. Which we are now- we now have the 15th volume in production at our publisher. We now have four professional writers in the series. Now this is the connection, I wrote- I launched the Sime-Gen- the first Sime-Gen story, which I had then projected to go along with one of the universes that I had developed for Sime-Gen. I changed the way Sime-Gen, the worldbuilding, would work according to how I understood what was popular about Star Trek. I studied Star Trek, and then and the fanzines, and the things that people said to each other about it and so on. I studied that very carefully and I came up with a theory about why people love Star Trek especially why people love Spock. And I wrote that into my first novel in Sime-Gen, House of Zeor. I sold the hardcover edition of House of Zeor to Star Trek fans, who were Spock fans specifically, on a money back guarantee and I never got one return. I sold 60 copies of this- *crew laughs* At that time I tell you, it was five ninety five it was an *incredibly* expensive book! *laughs* But people you know would- they paid for it and they didn't return it to me. They liked it, and they wrote stories in my universe. Just the way- that's what I did it for. I saw how Star Trek was making people write stories in the Star Trek universe. And I said "If my theory about why people like Star Trek is correct I can write a novel which will make people write stories in my universe. If that happens then I have proof that I understand why people like Star Trek, and I could write a newspaper article about why people like Star Trek and who these people are and why they're doing what they're doing." That was news at that time because it had never happened before in human history. So that's the origin of Star Trek Lives.

JARRAH:

Yeah. Well that's a good segue into Star Trek Lives, then. That's really interesting. And for, you know, our listeners who aren't familiar, although you all should be, in 1975 you joined Sondra Marshak and Joan Winston and published a book called Star Trek Lives.

JACQUELINE:

No no no no no.

JARRAH:

No?

JACQUELINE:

No, you've got the premise upside down.

JARRAH:

Ok. Correct us.

JACQUELINE:

Okay. Sondra Marshak and Joanie Winston joined *me*.

JARRAH:

OK

JACQUELINE:

OK. That sounds a little egotistical, but that's how it happened. I set out to write this article, which I thought would go like maybe to our local county newspaper or maybe I could sell it to the New York Times. I designed it to be like a New York Times feature. And in order to write a newspaper article you have to know who, what, when, where, and how many. I was raised in journalism. I didn't think that would be- I didn't think writing an article would be so terribly difficult. And I certainly didn't think it would take five years. But what happened is that Star Trek fandom *burgeoned* during that time. It just got bigger and bigger and bigger. And as you were chasing to nail down one fact and the fact is not true a week later. So I needed to know how many fanzines there are, how many writers. Because a lot of writers wrote for more than one. And how many readers, how many people are subscribing, how many people actually read, do you pass it around? I mean, what is the size of this audience? Because if it's a very small audience like four or five hundred people it's not a newspaper article. If it's 50000 people it's a newspaper article. It's a heck of a lot more than 50000 people. And there's no way to count it. But what I did was use the time honored science fiction tools that I had grown up on in order to determine these numbers. I created a questionnaire which I sent to people publishing fan zines, and I knew most of them, because I had connections with connections with connections. I could trace the network of connections because it was a fairly small group before it really exploded. And I knew that the editors, the publishers was usually the same person. And I knew who was doing the writing ,and I had read most of the material, and I knew a lot of the readers because they wrote letters of comment which were published. And I was corresponding with a lot of people who would be- we would talk privately about these various, you know, about the latest episode or about the latest edition of this or that fanzine. And so I sent out a questionnaire, and I got back a lot of really good answers, and then I realized I needed to know who these people are who are reading because the fanzines were selling more copies than there were people contributing to the fanzines. In other words I didn't know everybody there were by standards there was a cast of thousands on the sidelines. So I had to find out how many people were actually reading them. So I put out a questionnaire and I asked the fanzine editors to publish my questionnaire to see if I could get readers to answer me. And they did. And you know those big 32 gallon trash cans they use to collect trash in the big plastic buckets? *Jarrah laughs* I had by the time we finished this project, I had one of those trash cans full of questionnaires that had been filled out. Unfortunately, all of it molded away and I had to throw it away when I moved from that house. *crew makes disappointed noises* Yeah, I discovered the paper it had- the paper itself had just deteriorated. So all of that information, that archived information, is lost. But I kept it for many many years.

SUE:

Was that the S-Trek fan roster questionnaire.

JACQUELINE:

Yes exactly. The *Strek* fan questionnaire was-

SUE:

"Strek fan" OK.

JACQUELINE:

Yeah. And there was a lot of enthusiasm. People wanted to stand up and be counted. They wanted their name in the book. And we also- I am looking at this flood of information and how to sort it and you can't pin it down, because it's growing as you're thinking about it. And I realized that one person could not- I myself, my own voice, my own mind, my own understanding of how this thing is working could not possibly write- I knew it was- it had grown far far beyond an article. Even a New York Times feature article wouldn't be big enough to hold this information. So I realized it was going to have to be a book. And I realized there was no way *on earth* that I as one person could speak for all these different people across this enormous spectrum of opinions and points of view. Now I can't remember- I think Sondra Marshak I think she connected to me through Kraith at some point. Anyway we got started talking on the phone, she was a telephone person, and we got started talking on the phone a lot. And eventually when this realization became absolutely unavoidable I said to her "Help me write this book" and she said yes, because she had gotten involved in trying to figure out the answers to these questions herself. And she showed very different answers than I do. She was an Ayn Rand fan. She I- she's still alive. I have totally lost touch with her, but she's still alive. Joanie Winston is gone. But Sondra was a devoted fan of Ayn Rand and her entire philosophy. And it turns out Roddenberry also had an acquaintance with that angle on the world. But he was a humanist by his personal philosophy. And I'm an Orthodox Jew. So you look at the spectrum of people and you say "We're not capturing the essence of what Star Trek fandom really is, of this audience." This audience is far more diverse than just one person. So I got Sondra involved, and she got Joanie Winston involved, because she also saw that we were not representing the full spectrum of who Star Trek fans were. Between the three of us, we nailed them all. *all laugh* Even the men. And so, what we did was Sondra's idea to interview the cast and crew and to go after trying to interview the stars and Roddenberry. And that was basically- it came to her out of her commercial understanding of what makes a blockbuster non-fiction book sell. That we can't sell this on our representation that this is the way these people, the fans of Star Trek, this is who they are, isn't going to sell the book. We have to have the voices of the people that readers already know. And that's true. That's the way commercial publishing works. And so we went with that and that's why it took five years. We chased these people all over the country even into Canada. So we went around with these tape recorders, and we sat on hotel floors, at the feet of- literally at the feet of these creators of Star Trek. And we asked them our questions. It turns out most of them really don't know. They don't. They're busy in the commercial business of

producing a weekly show. This is high pressure stuff. A lot goes by you and it's hard hard stuff. So they really have not spent their entire lives thinking about the philosophy of where fiction comes from, and why humanity needs fiction, and what it's about, and whether it's a cause or an effect in society and all these things. Roddenberry was the deepest thinker of the bunch. He really did have a life philosophy and he did understand that humanity could change and that we could become *wise*. That was his word. He always said "When we are wise we will behave like so." And he portrayed that in Star Trek. And he was, I think, correct. There will be a change, but the change that he was looking for wasn't the one that I thought would actually fundamentally change the way humans behave. So in Sime-Gen I use the premise that the change in human nature that has to occur in order for us to stop fighting each other and go out and explore the stars is that humans must become more passionate. More involved in each other's emotional lives. More aware of our own emotions subconsciously, and more empathetic, more sympathetic. Different people use the same word to mean different things, so you have to use a whole bunch of these words. But it has to do with the ability to connect person to person. To be intimate without sexuality being involved. And that was, you know, here Roddenberry's ideas were along a completely different line. But nevertheless that makes good science fiction. So we went around interviewing these people, and in those days we recorded this stuff on tape. Then I sat there and, both in New York and at Sondra Marshaks house, and typed every word. And those type scripts were in that bucket that deteriorated and they're lost. But I had to type out every word and then we had to go through it all and excerpt for quotes that finally ended up in the book.

JARRAH:

That's a lot of work! *Sue laughs*

JACQUELINE:

Yeah. Writing the book was a five year mission. *all laugh*

SUE:

Well and you use it to explore that question you mentioned before, of why Star Trek has affected so many fans and stuck with so many fans. Why do you think that is even today? Why 50 some years later are we still talking about Star Trek?

JACQUELINE:

Because it's real science fiction. *Sue laughs* In fact that's the bottom line. People have been taught in school, in high school and college reading courses, they're pointed at certain authors and certain novels and said "This is SCIENCE FICTION write a paper on it" so they come out of school absolutely convinced beyond all belief and with an absolute conviction that science fiction is boring, that they hate it, that they will never read a science fiction novel ever. That's what academics manages to do to our field. But that's not real science fiction. The things that academics like, and I'm pointing fingers at academics. Jean Lorrh, my co-author on Sime-Gen and co creator of much of it, is an English professor. Her specialty is Chaucer, *laughs* which is more like science and spirituality than it is like literature. But she really really knows literature.

And to this day she gives papers at the Conference on the Fantastic. Now, Conference on the Fantastic is an academic convention where Professors give papers to each other, which essentially arose because of Star Trek. Jean Lorrh is very possibly- we believe that Jacqueline Lichtenberg and Jean Lorrh are very possibly the first female female collaborating team to publish in the science fiction genre. And Jean Lorrh may in fact be the very first professor to get tenure on the basis of publishing a science fiction novel.

SUE:
Huh.

JACQUELINE:

Weird. We are the weird couple. *Sue laughs* And we now have a third collaborator, whose second novel in Sime-Gen is coming out in the end of June, who is a PHD in plant genetics. She's a geneticist. Yeah. attached to the University of California Davis where- Davis campus is in the middle of the valley, you know, up by San Francisco in the middle. And that's where the agricultural school was originally. But now the campus has grown huge, and it has absolutely everything on it. Just like Berkeley did when I went there. I was a University California Berkeley graduate and so is my older daughter. I graduated in chemistry. I'm a chemist. My older daughter is a computer programmer. *laughs* Yes, it gets even more interesting but that's a whole nother topic. *Sue laughs* The thing with Star Trek generating fan activity if you can duplicate that- it hadn't ever happened before in human history. Figured out why it happened and duplicated. That's science applied to fiction. Figure it out, duplicate it. I did that. There was, at a certain point, there were five paper fanzines published devoted entirely 100 percent to Sime-Gen.

SUE:
Oh wow! That's fantastic.

JACQUELINE:

People wrote and they're still writing it. We made the transition online, and we now have- we're still publishing fiction, fanzine fiction, on our website Sime-Gen.com. Edited by one of the people who started the second fanzine companion in Zeor. Zeor, Z E O R is the name of the household in- the name of the group of people who finally make peace with human genetics. They figure out how the world works and they start actually living together without killing each other.

SUE:
You mentioned the fanzines and the Star Trek activity, but another thing that that you started in in the Star Trek fan community was the well-committee and that was during the time you were working on Star Trek lives.

JACQUELINE:

Oh well that I forgot to mention when I got back. I got to go back all the way to the beginning of this interview, where I was talking about the National Fantasy Fan Federation. When I was in

seventh grade I wrote this letter that Fred Pohl, the editor who bought Star Trek Lives eventually, published my first letter to an editor and later on bought my first Sime-Gen story and then bought Star Trek lives. OK? A lot of this goes right to this one guy whose personal fiction- he's a very famous author. He's written some of the most incredible science fiction. I absolutely love it. Not a character in sight anywhere. No relationships! There's nothing, no substance of what I'm looking for. We've got wonderful world building, great science, wonderful speculation about what we could accomplish and no love story. No romance. But he brought my stuff.

JARRAH:

That's awesome! That's really cool.

JACQUELINE:

Well he was a member of the M3F and when my address was published in the professional science fiction magazine, They wrote to me. And the people who wrote to me were members of an M3F organization zero called Wel-committee. My introduction to fandom was via a committee of volunteers who wrote to new people welcoming them and introducing them around to the various facilities and teachers and bureaus and activities of this organization. So when Fred Pohl bought Star Trek Lives and I saw that it had a publication date, it was imminent, my face must've gone pale. I mean I was in shock because I realized that the amount of mail I was going to have, and that my heart and soul would be in answering very personal very very very unique answers to each and every piece of mail. There's no way on earth I could ever do that. No way, no way. It can't happen. *Jarrah laughs* So I was at a room party at a New York Star Trek convention. A bunch of Star Trek fans were sitting around and I'm wailing and moaning that, you know, that I'm going to have this book published. And I said "What I really need is an address I can put in the back of the book that people can write to and connect with members of the committee, who will each answer them personally." Because a personal answer is so much different than a form letter you get back from- you write to Paramount you get one of these form letters back from them. Fandom is about personal relationships, not about form letters. And I was kind of desperate. Shirley Maiewski and a couple of others volunteered, said "OK we'll get a post office box and we'll distribute the mail to a bunch of people and volunteers and everybody will get an actual real for honest to goodness answer from somebody who knows what they're talking about." And it happened! *Sue laughs* She did it!

SUE:

For years.

JACQUELINE:

For years! And the thing is the entire- the structure although it was changed and morphed several times as technology advanced, the *structure* the *concept* was what had welcomed me into fandom through the National Fantasy Fan Federation oh these many years ago. And most of the people involved in it at that time were long gone. I stole the name from fandom, because Star Trek fandom is fandom. Which has nothing to do with fanaticism and everything to do with science, philosophy, academics, abstractions, and the application of abstract ideas to daily life.

JARRAH:

Well, and I'm interested- you know you've talked a little bit about how the world has changed and how we've seen fandom change a little bit. Do you still watch any Star Trek and, either way, how do you think that Star Trek has changed since the original series?

JACQUELINE:

Well I've made a habit of going to the movies. And of course they come up on Netflix and so on. I mean, you know, you watch them a few times and I have watched all the series up until CBS put a paywall in front. My take on it is that at this point in time because, you know, Roddenberry had a vision. And it was Gene Roddenberry whose vision communicated with me personally and gave me *pause* not the idea for Sime-Gen but the idea of how to *market* Sime-Gen. And that was what was important to me. What was important to me was Vulcans. And if you see that you see it Kraith, Vulcans as *not* human. That however was not really Roddenberry's idea. He's much more like Isaac Asimov, which is why Isaac Asimov was such a Star Trek fan. Roddenberry's idea of Vulcans was that they were humans who had suppressed their emotions. My idea in Kraith was the Vulcans were aliens and they didn't suppress their emotions.

JARRAH:

So they didn't have emotions in the same way?

JACQUELINE:

Their emotions worked differently. If you study now, even in the modern years, you've seen a lot of biochemistry is being done, and nerve studies, brain studies, all kinds of stuff going on studying human physiology. We realize how much of our emotional life is really biochemical in nature. Now if Vulcans evolved on a different planet and they have green blood and who knows right? Why do you assume their emotions work the same way? It doesn't make sense. It's not real science fiction to make that assumption. So in Kraith I assumed that Vulcans were aliens. Now this is the interesting thing. It's not an argument between me and Gene Roddenberry. What happened is eventually when he was working on, I guess it was the Next Generation I don't remember. Joanie Winston had connections on the- with Bjo Trimble and on the set. Everybody knew everybody. So Joanie and I got into Paramount and into Gene Roddenberry's office. And what did we find? Worn copies of Kraith collected on the coffee table.

JARRAH:

That's really cool.

JACQUELINE:

And we were told that the writers and the crew were informed by Roddenberry that they should read that fanzine. And here's the thing, Star Trek opened the audience accessibility to the general public. Where that will lead, I don't know. Right now we are in a tremendous fight. You know, I mean right now politically we're into the free speech thing. You know, what can you say online? And is a platform owner or facilitator responsible for the things that strangers come

online and say? And there's no way for the recipient to sort what they will or will not tolerate. Culture has been shattered and it hasn't formed a new set of rules. However fandom has always been a separate culture and it has always evolved rules. For example in original science fiction fandom, which I joined when I was in seventh grade, it at that time the general public considered it impolite to type a letter to a friend on a typewriter. In order to communicate heart to heart properly, You had to handwrite your letters. In science fiction it was considered rude beyond belief to handwrite a letter. And today we are in the process of having lost the cultural *pauses* protocols that say how to be polite to strangers in public. You know? But we have not yet developed the cultural protocols that say how to be polite to strangers in this new venue: Twitter, Facebook, Snapchat. Gosh knows, right? So we have an opportunity to redevelop human culture and it's actually happening worldwide. At that time, Countries were countries. Today, Countries don't have borders. And it's happening little by little by little. We have for example fanfic.com where people have begun hanging up fan fiction to almost every TV show, book, I don't know what. Most of the words put up on fanfic.com, *pure garbage*. Punctuation, spelling, grammar, formatting. And never mind the substance of, you know, the non sequiturs, scenes that didn't count, scenes that went nowhere. Lots of words that didn't say anything. Really really bad writing. Teenagers, maybe 13 year olds starting out trying to tell the story that was in their heart, that really meant something to them, but they didn't have the mechanical tools. And the fact of the matter is that no matter how old you get, no matter how much experience you have, there's no way a writer can do without an editor. They invented editors. They called them Beta readers. So today there is a cultural opprobrium to posting fiction that hasn't been through at least two or three beta readers.

JARRAH:

That is true.

JACQUELINE:

Why? Because it's unreadable! *Jarrah laughs* Because you're a bad writer? No! Because all writers need editors. OK. That's what I mean by a cultural revolution in progress. Now there are more rules that have to arise and not be imposed, but arise *organically* from the behavior of the group. Today what forms a group may- well I know in Sime-Gen fandom I mean we have fans in Australia, and Germany, and France, and oh my God all over the world. So we have people who look at things, you know, like you might just toss off a comment to some article that you're both reading. You just toss off a comment, and the way you phrase it in an American English *offends* the very soul of the Australians. *panicked voice* Ahh I didn't mean that! You know? So there we are, still in the process of creating a world culture. But that's what Star Trek is actually doing. What Roddenberry said "When we're wise" How do you get wise? You get wise not by having some government imposed laws on your behaviour, you get wise by people getting together and understanding each other and forming groups that grow and grow and grow. And to be a member of this group you have to be polite, and nice, and considerate, and gentle and very very opinionated.

SUE:

laughs Opinions are something Star Trek fandom certainly doesn't lack.

JACQUELINE:

You have to be articulate about your opinions, but not force them down other people's throats, not reject people because they have an opinion different from yours. That culture, that's what he's called being wise right?

JARRAH:

That's interesting. I'm wondering if- so do you feel like Star Trek today, is there is there still a role to play in moving us as a society where you think we need to go in the future?

JACQUELINE:

That speaks to the question of what is fiction and what is a human being and what is the relationship between them. And what is a culture? What is a society? What is a group of human beings? Is the group more important than the individual or the individual more important than the group? This was also one of the things, you know, in Spock's death scene you know? It's Nietzsche and I don't know, all those big thinkers that have impacted humanity. And it's all in a point of view, which is the cause and which is effect? Which came first the chicken or the egg? As I see it, as a professional writer, the way I see it is that the writer, the fiction purveyor, the storyteller, the bard is someone who relates in an articulate and illustrative fashion that which is driving the culture he's looking at. In other words your writers, your fiction writers and even non-fiction writers, are the vehicle by which the culture expresses its values. But because a majority culture, it might be a 50 percent to 51 percent majority, the kind that oscillates. As its values become more clearly and precisely expressed, other people will catch. Like a virus, you know? Catch hold of those ideas, and those values, and those methods and how smoothly and well they make your life go. And begin to implement them. One of the ways- I've seen a psychological study recently, one of the ways that psychologists are discovering humans organize themselves in large societies, and we can study large societies in great detail now with computers that we couldn't ever do before, and they're discovering one of the driving forces in the human brain is an absolute need to fit in, to agree, to adopt the values of the people around you. And that this is *inaudible*, that it's everywhere, and it's all the time. And that's how these waves of cultural values and the identifying marks of different cultures, that is how they originate and propagate. And I suspect, I don't think there have been any official studies. I don't know, I don't read the whole literature in psychology. But I think that this has its origin in the traveling bard of the Middle Ages and maybe before that. That's how cultures glutamate or change. There's a core group of people who have adopted a certain way of living. And it gets publicized and other people look at it and say "That works really good. I want to be part of that group." And that's exactly how fandom became the core of Star Trek fandom. Exact same process. There was this little group of people who all read the same books and talked to each other about it in little like fanzines basically. OK? And little articles. And they talk to each other, and they share their lives. And you know "my car broke down" and little stories about things that they did, or they got a new job, or they went back to school, or every- all those life stories were also in those fanzines. So you know who these people are, you become part of a group, a society, a world called fandom. And this was the first country, fandom was the first country that didn't have a

geographical location. So it makes perfect sense to me that Star Trek fandom is like native to the online world, because Star Trek fandom does not have a geographical location. And the associations and linkages between people and the culture that this group of people develop among themselves is distinctive and different. The really distinctive signature of what's going on right now is that because well CBS has now made a new Star Trek, behind a paywall, but there it is right. And it looks like it's good. A lot of people who know good fiction you know think they're onto something here, they may actually do something truly significant with this new universe as they develop. I don't see any reason why it should be called Star Trek, but you know. Why couldn't it be an original? You know, why? Well because they want to play to that particular group of people who loved this original television show. And also because, you know, there are people who own the rights to it who are offering product. Yeah. So yeah it works both ways. But the fans of this phenomenon actually have a different attitude towards life than the rest of the general population. But here's the distinctive thing: this is a core group that is being publicized whose values are being absorbed and implemented by the general population, that wants to belong. We're developing a new culture.

JARRAH:

I just wanted to let you know that we have to wrap up in about five or six minutes, but just didn't want you to feel like you ran out of time.

JACQUELINE:

laughs I can go on forever! With the little topics that we've touched on each can open out into much much larger topics. A lot of it having to do with the way women and the unique view of the world that women have and the impact of women on cultural development, which is totally different from the impact of men on cultural development. And how our attitudes towards what the difference is between a man and a woman have evolved. And eventually I think we're going to see, I've written some of these myself, what we're going to see science fiction focusing more on the ambiguity of sexual identity. I think that is an enormous field that has to be worked through. Only now are we beginning to ask the question. We don't have answers. All the answers that have been proposed or are mostly unworkable in any practical sense, and new things are going to evolve, and develop. And I think there will be another- I don't know about television because like, you know, cable is kind of gone. I mean I do mostly streaming. I cut the cable a while ago. But your podcasts for example, these other means of disseminating fiction. They have, you know, the video casts and all kinds of online facilities. And yet to be developed, because I mean the 5G coming down the pike here, we're going to have a whole new bandwidth to fill. And somebody who has grown up on these podcasts, the Mission Logs and all of that, somebody is going to come up with a TV show that has the kind of impact that Star Trek has had, on the current generation of young people, who will grow up to have the kind of impact on the world that we predicted in Star Trek Lives that Star Trek fans would have upon the world. And most of what we predicted in Star Trek has come true. And like I say from my point of view, different from Sondra Marshak and Joanie Winston, my point of view the way Sime-Gen has- and it's now going to become a videogame, and maybe a board game, and graphic novels, and I don't know what. There is more graphic media coming into Sime-Gen and the impact, the proof

that we understood why Star Trek was important. *inaudible* We understood what that was about. It's in Kraith, it's in Star Trek Lives. It's part of the record and that is illustrated by the way fans have responded to Sime-Gen. So there's *something* to the theory. *Sue laughs* Not everything, but there is something important to this theory. We really do believe we have found something that is different at a very fundamental level of the structure of fiction in Star Trek, and Roddenberry didn't do that on purpose. *laughs* It's so wonderful! That's the way art works. It isn't all on purpose. A lot of it is, especially the commercialization, but not all of it. Not all of it. Creativity is not always on purpose.

SUE:

Well Jacqueline, I want to thank you so much for taking the time to talk to us today. This was such great fun and so enlightening. I'm so happy you could come talk to us. If people wanted to find you online, I know you're at Sime-Gen.com. Could they reach out to you on Twitter or is there somewhere to follow you to to get the biggest updates?

JACQUELINE:

Yeah on Twitter, I'm @JLichtenberg on Facebook. I guess you have- you know what? Go to Amazon dot com. Put in Jacqueline Lichtenberg. L I C H T E N B E R G, because there's not a B U R G it's B E R G. Go to my one of my books, click on my name, and go to my page, and my blog, all my books, my blog, the connection to Facebook and Twitter. It's all there, all linked to on my page.

SUE:

Fantastic.

JARRAH:

And we'll share all of that on our show notes for this episode as well.

JACQUELINE:

Most of those books are on- they're all on e-book, Kindle. All on paper and some on audiobook, and more audiobooks coming.

SUE:

Well again, thank you so much. So happy to talk to you today.

JACQUELINE:

Oh! I'm so glad that you- I'm glad that we connected because I think you're doing something important here.

SUE:

Oh thank you so much.

JARRAH:

Thank you.

Transition f/x

SUE:

So we know that was a long one, but hopefully it was fun and informative and interesting for everybody here today.

JARRAH:

I found it super interesting. Like I had no idea that Wel-committees were a thing before the Star Trek Wel-committee. That was really interesting to me. And just, you know, when she was talking about like the different perspectives that people came from. That's something we still see in Star Trek today, and I think it still sometimes surprises us. And it's interesting to look at how Star Trek has brought together so many people with different backgrounds and different beliefs.

SUE:

And I certainly hope that if we are truly in the process of creating a new culture that the core group influencing it is Star Trek fans, because I think that would put us on the right path.

JARRAH:

Yeah. And if you're a podcast listener who's going to create the next Star Trek. I would not say no to a writing job. *all laugh* But seriously you know. I mean, I really hope so too.

SUE:

So we just have one more thing to say today, and that is that our podcast is entirely supported by our patrons on Patreon.

JARRAH:

If you hop on over to [Patreon.com/womenatwarp](https://patreon.com/womenatwarp) and pledge as low as a dollar a month you get access to some of our exclusive online bonus content. And we have other tiers of rewards that get you access to things like joining us for watch along commentary recordings, and our new tier which will allow you access to our special episodes on non-Trek topics. Like, we're definitely planning on doing one on C.J. Cregg from the West Wing, which was an April Fool's joke but everyone said they actually wanted us to do it. And we're pretty excited about that. And who knows what else we're gonna get to? Probably Star Wars, Doctor Who. If you want to hear our thoughts on other things you can also suggest topics, and you can find that over on patreon.com/womenatwarp.

SUE:

And that about does it for us today. Jarrah, where can people find you on the Internet?

JARRAH:

You can find me on Twitter @JARRAH-penguin or at Trekiefeminist.com.

SUE:

And again I'm Sue. You can find me on Twitter @spaltor. That's S P A L T O R. And if you'd like to reach out to the show you can find us on Twitter @womenatwarp. Facebook, and Instagram as well @womenatwarp. Send us an email at crew@womenatwarp.Com or visit our home page and blog at womenatwarp.com. Thanks so much for listening.