

## **Women at Warp Episode 167: Women in Trek Fandom: Joan Marie Verba**

[Women at Warp theme]

**Sue:** Hi and welcome to Women at Warp: A Roddenberry *Star Trek* Podcast. Join us on our continuing mission to explore intersectional diversity in infinite combinations. My name is Sue and thanks for tuning in. With me today is my crew member, Sarah.

**Sarah:** Hello.

**Sue:** We're very excited today. We're going to be talking to Joan Marie Verba. That's a name you should know if you're into *Star Trek* fan history. But before we do, we have a little bit of housekeeping to do first as usual.

Our show is made possible by our patrons on Patreon. If you'd like to become a patron, you can do so for as little as one dollar per month and get awesome rewards from thanks on social media up to silly watch-along commentaries and more. You can check us out at [patreon.com/womenatwarp](https://patreon.com/womenatwarp).

This episode is brought to you by TextExpander, more from them later.

We also want to remind you about our TeePublic store with podcast related and other *Star Trek* designs available on shirts, mugs, bags, stickers, magnets and more. Check us out at [teepublic.com/stores/womenatwarp](https://teepublic.com/stores/womenatwarp).

This Sunday, June 20th at 1:00 PM Eastern Time, Kennedy and Aliza will be at Virtuous Con hosting a special panel with Wilson Cruz. To find out more or to register for that event, visit [virtuouscon.com](https://virtuouscon.com).

And finally, this summer, Women at Warp will be hosting the Virtual IDIC Podcast Festival, celebrating the infinite diversity in sci-fi and *Star Trek* podcasting. The event will take place on July 17th and 18th. And right now, the programming application is open for any podcast who might be interested in joining us. That application is available on our website or at [womenatwarp.com/idic-fest](https://womenatwarp.com/idic-fest) and the application will be open through June 18th.

So, I think that's everything. Did I miss anything, Sarah?

**Sarah:** I think you got it all.

**Sue:** Let's get into it. Let's talk to Joan Verba. Hi, Joan.

**Joan:** Hello and thanks for inviting me.

**Sue:** Oh, I'm so excited to speak to you.

**Joan:** I'm so excited to be here.

**Sue:** So, let's start at the beginning. And why don't you tell us what attracted you first to science fiction in general and to *Star Trek* in particular?

**Joan:** Well, when I was in second grade, my second-grade teacher put up a model of the solar system on a bulletin board, and I was instantly in love with astronomy and went and read all the books in the library that I could about astronomy and planets. And in the process, I found out that people wrote stories about people who lived in outer space or on

other planets. And I started reading those, and I thought that they were great too. So, as I said, I started reading science fiction. I watched science fiction television shows.

By the time that *Star Trek* came along, I was definitely a science fiction fan. *Star Trek* was advertised in the summer of 1966, and I remember the advertisements for it. My younger brother saw it first and he said, "Hey, this is a show that we ought to watch." And I agreed. And so, we were *Star Trek* fans from day one.

**Sue:** Fantastic. I love that. My brother is also the reason that I started watching *Star Trek*, but that was *Next Generation* from day one. So, after you were watching the show, I've read this story in one of your books, and we'll get there, but what attracted you to the fandom?

**Joan:** Well, at the time, there was no internet, of course, back in the day, and you pretty much had to know or run into somebody who knew about fandom in order to join fandom. So, for me, I was at a high school speech festival where high schoolers from all over the state were gathered. And one of the high schoolers there had been to the World Science Fiction Convention, the most recent one. And he was sitting there talking about the most recent science fiction convention, and he also mentioned *Star Trek*. And I came up to him and I said, "Well, I'm interested in *Star Trek*." And he says, "If you're interested in *Star Trek*, you will also be interested that there is a fanzine about *Star Trek* that is published right here in Minneapolis by Ruth Berman, who is a *Star Trek* fan. And why don't I give you, her phone number?"

And so, he gave me her phone number. I called the phone number after *Star Trek* had aired locally of course, I was not going to call in the middle of a *Star Trek* episode. I called her and said, "I understand that you have a fanzine with stories about *Star Trek*." And she said, "Yes." And I said, "Well, how do I get it?" And so, she told me how to order it. And that is how I connected with fandom. I connected in fandom in two ways. First of all, I connected with Ruth. And therefore, we had collating parties where people would come over to her house and she would have the pages of the fanzines arranged out, and we would go and collate them. She did her first issues on a Spirit duplicator. No, she'd make many copies of each page, and then the pages, those were laid out, and we'd collate them together, and she'd staple them and that's how it would get together.

There was also that Ruth told me about the Minnesota Science Fiction Society, which was organized then. And after about my second year in college, I started going to those meetings. And so, that is how I connect with local fandom.

And then, in Ruth's T-Negative fanzine, there were advertisements for other fanzines. So, I ordered those other *Star Trek* fanzines. And in those other *Star Trek* fanzines were advertisement for still more *Star Trek* fanzines. So, that is how my collection started to grow very rapidly. [Sue laughs]

**Sarah:** I'm curious, did you know other kids at school or in college who were watching *Star Trek*?

**Joan:** At the time that *Star Trek* aired in 1966, there were others in my junior high who also watched *Star Trek*. So, at lunch, we would discuss *Star Trek* episodes. There were only about five of us, but we would get together and discuss *Star Trek*. This did not happen when I transitioned to high school. But as I said, when I got into high school, I learned about fandom and then connected with people all over the country. I didn't connect with a large group of local *Star Trek* fans besides Ruth Berman and those that she invited to her collating parties until the early 1980s when I found out that there was another group of three *Star Trek* fans who were putting out a *Star Trek* fanzine. And then, that group grew and I connected

with that group. So, I had that local group for quite some time. And we still are in touch with social media and things. That's my local connection to *Star Trek* fandom.

But I had a, of course, the larger *Star Trek* connection through fanzines and then fan newsletters and then the *Star Trek* Welcommittee, which I joined soon after it organized and many other ways.

**Sue:** Yeah, so, I admit I have looked through your entry on *fanlore.org* [laughs] and to me, anyway, please correct me if I'm incorrect. It looks like you published some fanzines, you've worked with some fan clubs, but a lot of that started in the 80s. Was your fan-ish activity in the 70s, mostly with the welcommittee and collecting the zines that others were creating.

**Joan:** I did not publish my first fanzine until the late 80s and that was something called *Trek Link* and that was a newsletter that had reviews of other fanzines. The first fanfiction that I published was I think in the late 70s, around 1976. And then later in the 80s, I published some of my stories myself. So, in the 1970s, I was highly connected and highly networked with the *Star Trek* fanfiction community, but mostly as a reader, a collector and a critic. As I said, I didn't start writing and publishing fanfiction to any great extent until the 1980s. But in the 1970s, I was very active in *Star Trek* fandom and *Star Trek* fanzine fandom as a reader, as a collector, as a critic.

**Sue:** So, I want to talk a little bit more about *Trek Link*.

**Joan:** Okay.

**Sue:** I found online what I believe is your editorial policy, and I found part of it incredibly interesting, which was, "I will withhold name or address upon request if the comment is favorable to a fanzine or story. Unfavorable comments will be printed with a name and address or not at all."

**Joan:** Yes. There were some fanzine critics at the time who were somewhat acerbic in their observations [Sue laughs] of fanfiction. Now, I have always been a fan critic from way back, I have always felt that you ought to give an honest opinion of the advantages and disadvantages or drawbacks of a certain story and that you should be plain about it. But I felt that if you had something to say that wasn't favorable, you ought to be able to put your name behind it and stand behind what you say on your own name. And I felt strongly about that then and I feel strongly about that now. If you're going to publish something, you ought to be accountable for it. That is the reason for that policy.

I do oppose though, and this didn't happen until really late in the published fanfiction timeline, in the late 80s and beyond that, I started seeing notes saying, "If you have anything negative to say about our stories, we don't want to hear it. Do not write us, do not give us--" And I do not like that at all. When I published one of my own fanzine stories called *Descent into Darkness*, it was a standalone fanfiction novel about *Star Trek*, I received a scathing, scathing critique of it. It was very interesting. And I read it and I put it aside and I thought, "Well, you can't please everybody." And that was pretty much what I felt about strong criticism of anything that I wrote.

And then strangely enough, about a month later, even less than a month later, I got another letter saying, "I read *Descent into Darkness*. It was given to me by a friend, and I know that she wrote you a very scathing critique of that. And I just wanted to write and tell you that I loved it." [laughter]

I am a professional writer now, and I did my first professional publications were in 1984. My first professional short story and first paid magazine article. And I've always felt that as a

professional writer, the reason that I grew and developed as a professional writer is that people would tell me what was wrong with my stories and then I could take that and improve.

I started going to a monthly writing group, which I am still monthly attending back in the late 70s. And it was understood that the other members of the group would give you their unvarnished opinions about your work and say, "This is not working. This part is not working. Fix this. Try this instead. But this part of your writing isn't working for me." That is how I grew and developed as a writer. Otherwise, I would still be a writer that wasn't very good, and that's not acceptable for me. I want to be a good writer. I want my writing to be high quality. Whether people like it or not, I want my writing to be high quality. The only way you get your writing to be high quality is for people to tell you what's wrong with it. Hopefully, they will also tell you how to fix it, but at least they'll tell you what's wrong with it. And you can avoid making silly mistakes. I mean, sometimes in my writing I make silly mistakes. I overlook something that I could very easily correct, and I want those pointed out, preferably before publication.

So, [laughs] I have always been of the opinion that people ought to give their unvarnished opinions. I don't think that's an excuse though to go after the writer with a shovel and a mallet and hit them over the head. But I do think that targeted, respectful criticism is very important to the development of a writer. So, that's the reason for that policy. I think if you just going to sit there and give a screed about how wrong a writing is, you ought to put your name on it or you ought not to write under a pseudonym. If you're going to say something favorable, yeah. If you need to be anonymous, sure. But if you're going to give criticism, you really ought to put your name behind it and be accountable for it.

**Sue:** It just struck me so much because it's so very different from the internet today, right? And so many people have suggested that one of the reasons that "discourse" can become so vitriolic online is because people can hide behind screen names.

**Joan:** Yes. For some people, anonymity, they feel they have a certain license to be harsher than they would if they were doing it face to face. I don't mind harsh criticism. I have gotten harsh criticism face to face. I once gave Paula Smith a short story of mine to look at for Menagerie, and she gave it back to me and she said, "Joan, this is bull," whatever. And I said, "Okay, I understand that. Thank you for your criticism." And I took the story back and went on. This was at a convention. And she later came back to the convention, and she apologized for saying that. And I said, "Do not apologize. I wanted your unvarnished opinion. You gave me your unvarnished opinion. No problem. We're good."

**Sue:** Yeah. And we've spoken to Deborah Langsam on the show, and I've heard her speak at a couple other events, and she said similar, that as a fanzine editor, that she would write back and give suggestions and ask for edits. And that some people took it really well and worked and got better and that other people, they never heard from again.

**Joan:** Yes. I'm afraid that there are some fan writers who believe that every single word that they write is golden and that it's beyond criticism and that you shouldn't say [laughs] anything bad about it, no matter how bad it is. I guess if you want to write for your own personal amusement and you want to just share the love with your friends and family and your readers, I guess there's nothing wrong with that. But I'm not sure that it helps you develop as a writer or get any better. But if that's as far as you want to go, and it's just for fun and all that, I guess I can see that point of view. It's not my point of view, but I guess I understand it.

**Sue:** While you were editing Trek Link, which is an impressive 20 issues-- how do I ask it? Were there hurt feelings in the community because of the reviews, or was it all taken genuinely as constructive feedback?

**Joan:** It was considered constructive criticism. I only had one incident when I was editing Trek Link that I felt was problematic. And that was one time when I was given a long and a detailed and respectful criticism of a Mary Sue story, and the person did put her real name behind it, and I was going to publish it. And somehow, I don't know how or don't remember how, the editor and writer got wind of it, and they said, "Please don't publish this review. We don't want any negative criticism." And I said, "Well." [laughs] I went back to the person that wrote the review, and I gave them the details, and I said, "I'll leave it up to you. Do you want me to publish this or not? Here's what happened." And she said, "Well, in that case, I guess I don't want you to publish it. I said, "Okay."

And then, I went back to the editor-writer and said, "Okay, I'm not going to publish it, but only because the person who submitted the review said not to publish it." I said, "I am inclined to publish it." Now, after this fanzine was published, the editor-writer came back to me and said, "Okay, now that we are published," and this is her exact words, "We have shields up, and so go ahead and publish that critical review." And I said, "Okay," and I published it.

**Sue:** How odd.

**Joan:** Yes, it is. And so, this was the only problematic incident that I can remember in the entire publication history of Trek Link. The rest of it went pretty well and pretty routinely.

**Sue:** It's really interesting what different creators feel responses should be. In my thinking, once someone puts something out there, it's available for anyone to critique as they see fit. Me or anyone, TV creators, movie creators.

**Joan:** Yeah, once it's out in public, it's pretty much, as far as I'm concerned, open to any feedback. And I have to tell you, being open to any feedback gets you some really interesting responses. [Sue laughs] And I really don't mind. Like that person that sent me that scathing review of *Descent into Darkness*, and I was reading that, "Oh, this is interesting. Gee, that's a fresh perspective. I guess I hadn't thought of that before." [laughs] But mostly I thought I did not write the story that she was expecting, and so she was critiquing me that I did not write the story that she expected. And I guess that's a legitimate criticism. If you're expecting a certain story and it's not the story you expected, you're going to have a negative reaction.

You get a lot of interesting feedback if you open yourself up to all feedback. And if you can distance yourself from the story and know that no story is going to satisfy everyone and that criticizing your story isn't necessarily criticizing, you can do it. Now, I have to be up front and tell you that all criticism, to some extent, hurts.

**Sue:** Sure.

**Joan:** Yeah. I published a novel last year in 2020, and I sent it out for some awards, and I haven't even made the finals in any award yet. [laughs] And I really felt kind of bad about that when the finalist-- I mean, three awards so far, I entered it in many more, but three awards so far, and I didn't even make the finalists. Yeah, that's disappointing. And yeah, that hurts some. But that's part of the life of being a writer. [laughs] You don't get every award. You don't please everybody. It's just something that you have to live with. But of course, it always disappoints you. It always disappoints me because I write not only to please myself, but to please an audience. And if the audience isn't pleased, that's disappointing for me. It's not catastrophically disappointing, but it is disappointing in some sense.

**Sue:** That's understandable. But as you said right at the start of this part of the conversation, you can't please everybody.

**Joan:** Right.

**Sue:** When you started writing in *Star Trek* fandom, did that encourage you or light a fire to become a professional writer?

**Joan:** I was happy writing fan stories until about-- I think, it was 1982, and it was sort of as if a switch had been turned on. It happened that suddenly, I was reading an essay from Jacqueline Lichtenberg, who was one of the *Star Trek* fan writers who transitioned into professional writing, and she's still writing professionally. And it was an essay about the process of becoming a pro and what that meant and how that contrasted with fan writing. And after I read that, I thought, "I think I would want to give pro-writing a try and see if I can sell something professionally." And that was 1982. And as I said, I had my first professional magazine and short story sale in 1984. So, it wasn't too long after that I had my first professional sale. But yeah, I did reach that point, and it was rather sudden.

**Sue:** [laughs] Well, and that led you at some point to publish the book, *Boldly Writing*. Was that the first publication in '96?

**Joan:** Yes, yes, it was first published in 1996. That is correct.

**Sue:** And chronicling fan and fanzine history from 1967 to 1987.

**Joan:** Yes.

**Sue:** What made you want to do this? I love it, but this is quite a project.

**Joan:** Yes, it was, and I didn't think it would be. [laughs] I did mention in the introduction to *Boldly Writing* that what got me started was a correspondence with a fanzine editor, and she had said that there was a certain fanzine that was the first in its category. And I looked in my fanzine collection, and it wasn't. So, I wrote her back and I said, "Look, you said in this publication that this was the first fanzine in this category." It wasn't. "Here is name of the fanzine that was first." And she wrote me back and she says, "Who cares what was first?" And I thought, "I care." And I thought, "Well, yeah, I do care."

So, it's time to write some chronology while we've got the fanzines here, while they are being published, while there is some interest in it. Let's do it. And so, I sat down with my fanzine collection and sorted them out by year and started taking notes for *Boldly Writing*. I thought I would get it done in the summer. It didn't happen in the summer. It took me about two to three years to write *Boldly Writing*. It was a tremendous undertaking to write it. I am glad that I did write it for a number of reasons, because as I was writing it and after I published it, there were some points that I wanted to make. And one of the points that I wanted to make was that the best of the fanzine writing was equivalent or even better quality than the professional writing.

Now, at that point, when I was doing *Boldly Writing*, there had been some professional *Star Trek* novels published. And a lot of them were very poor quality because the people who were writing them were experienced authors, but they were not experienced *Star Trek* fans. I mean, James Blish was a very good science fiction writer, but he knew little or nothing about *Star Trek*. And it was a tremendous disappointment to those of us who were in the fanzine fandom that these early *Star Trek* novels were so poor quality. They sold very well. It was almost guaranteed at the time that they would sell 100,000 copies each, because fans were so eager for anything *Star Trek*, and so few of them had any awareness at all of *Star Trek* fanzines, which were much better quality.

So, it was always a disappointment to me that the best of the *Star Trek* fan writers, even though many tried, couldn't get published as professional *Star Trek* writers, even though they were better writers because they did not have the professional credentials. Now, I will add that some *Star Trek* fan writers did make the transition. Good for them. But there were a lot more excellent, excellent *Star Trek* fan writers who were never enlisted to write *Star Trek* novels.

**Sue:** If I'm not mistaken, that didn't really happen till the 80s. Is that correct?

**Joan:** Yeah. Connie Faddis, Ruth Berman, even Pamela Dean. Pamela Dean is a professional science fiction writer, science fiction and fantasy writer. She gave me the manuscript of the *Star Trek* novel that she sent for consideration for professional publication. It was first rate. It has never been published, which was a shame. Now, this is not the case today, because today the professional science fiction writers who are asked to do professional *Star Trek* novels grew up with *Star Trek*. They know *Star Trek*. And so, the quality of writing in the current professional *Star Trek* novels is first rate. But at the time from the 70s when James Blish started writing to the mid to late 90s, the quality of *Star Trek* professional novels was very poor. And if you compare them to the best, not the worst, but the best of the *Star Trek* writing, there was no comparison. The quality of the fanzine writing was much better.

So, one of the reasons that I wrote *Boldly Writing* was to raise awareness of the fact that there was fanfiction going on, that it was good quality fanfiction, that it was worth reading and worth recognizing, even though it was not professionally published. Now, when I wrote *Boldly Writing*, I had hoped that it would follow books, professional published books, such as *Star Trek Lives!* which sold hundreds of thousands of copies, and that hundreds of thousands of fans would buy it and become aware and know about this. But really, the accumulated sales of *Boldly Writing* since I published it 25 years ago maybe accumulated 1,000. So, it really hasn't.

And I did send it to the professional nonfiction *Star Trek* publishers and got rejection after rejection. There was a small press that gave a tentative acceptance, but when I got the contract, it said that, "We're going to edit it," which is fine. I wrote back and I said, "Look, after you've edited, I want to be able to look at the edited version and make any corrections. If the editing introduces errors, I want to be able to read it and correct those errors." They wouldn't let me do that. So, because of that, I self-published it. Then by 2003, I published a second edition because I had so many revisions and notes and things since I published it in 1996.

I have been asked if I'm going to publish another edition, even though I do have notes. And the answer is pretty much no. Because it was such a tremendous task to write it in the first place. It was a tremendous task to rewrite it. Just rewriting the index took an entire year. So, really, I'm not going to make any more revisions to it because it was such a great undertaking. But I still remain-- well, maybe not disappointed, but maybe just let's say, more accurately, confused as to why it hasn't gotten a larger audience.

It does have a large audience among scholars of popular culture. Scholars of popular culture have cited it as an essential text, which is very satisfying. And I have gotten notes from scholars throughout the past 25 years that *Boldly Writing* was cited in a legal brief in one case, or cited in a published paper in a scholarly journal. That makes me very happy. My notes for *Boldly Writing* and the manuscript for *Boldly Writing* is at the University of Iowa Special Collections, as is my fanzine collection. And so, the scholarly recognition is great. But in the general fan community, *Boldly Writing* has not gotten as wide a reading as I had hoped and expected.

**Sue:** Well, let's take a very quick break for a word from TextExpander.

**Sarah:** Work smarter, not harder with TextExpander. TextExpander helps you work faster and smarter so you can focus your time on your most important work. With just a few keystrokes, TextExpander keeps you consistent, accurate, and working efficiently. TextExpander has time-saving power. Use TextExpander's powerful shortcuts and abbreviations to streamline and speed up everything you type. Speed through emails. Expand your forms with fill in the blank fields using a quick abbreviation, and expand content that corrects your spelling and keeps your language consistent with just a few keystrokes. Get your message right, every time. Show listeners get 20% off their first year. Visit [textexpander.com/podcast](http://textexpander.com/podcast) to learn more about TextExpander.

**Sue:** So, Joan, you were talking about how the [unintelligible 00:32:47] writers were not brought in to write the pro novels, and I'm wondering-- maybe I'm just making my own conclusions, but I'm wondering if you think that is a gendered situation because so many of the fan writers were women and still are, and so many of the pro authors for the *Star Trek* novels are men. It's very big disconnect between the fan writers and the pro writers.

**Joan:** That is not something that I can speak to because I don't have any particular data or insight on this. So, I really don't feel knowledgeable enough to answer your question.

**Sue:** Sure. [laughs] It's just speculation on my part as well, came to mind as you were talking about it.

**Joan:** I do think that one of the reasons, and many have speculated on it, that fanfiction had such a bad reputation among the general public or the general authoring public was the fact that it was largely female. Back when fanzines were mostly paper published, fanfiction did not have much respect. We sort of tried to keep it quiet because some writers, I mean, at least one writer of fanfiction published under a pseudonym because she had a professional writing career and she felt that, and not without some realism behind it, that if it was known that she was doing fanfiction, it would hurt her professional career. That was something that we all thought about, that we all knew and we all thought about, that fanfiction was not considered very respectable. One fanfiction writer said, "My husband wishes that I did something more respectable like gun running." [Sue laughs] So, I guess that's another reason that I wrote *Boldy Writing*. I did want it to be more respectable. And now it is.

Now, professional writers will be very upfront about the fact that they wrote fanfiction or they are writing fanfiction or they have written fanfiction. It's no big deal now. And it doesn't hurt their professional career one bit. At the time though, it was something that we all discussed and we all thought about, people who wanted to make transition to prose, would it hurt my career to be known as a fanfiction writer? Should I write professional fiction under another name as my fanfiction? Some people did write their fanfiction under pseudonyms because they were trying to build a professional career, and they did not want their professional career to be hurt. So, that definitely was a factor.

**Sue:** It's interesting. I might even offer now that in some genres anyway, acknowledging that you got a start in fanfiction might give you more clout with certain readers.

**Joan:** Well, I certainly hope that's true. I was on a panel, I think, in the 2010s, maybe even earlier than that, a little earlier than that. And the panel was made of fanfiction writers who had turned pro. And Paul Cornell was sitting next to me, and he was saying that he got his start in professional writing because he did *Doctor Who* fanfiction. And the *Doctor Who* licensees were mining the fanfiction to look for the best writers to write professional *Doctor Who* stories. That is one of the reasons he got his professional start. And he said that he was not the only one. There were other ones too. That is another sign of change, and I am

glad they did that. I only wish that the people who are publishing *Star Trek* professional fiction had done the same in the 70s and 80s and 90s. But yeah, things are changing a lot, and I am glad it is.

And I was definitely glad that An Archive of Our Own won a Hugo Award a couple of years ago, that is, also shows the change. At my first World Science Fiction Convention, I think it was 74-73. Jacqueline Lichtenberg and Laura Basta were nominated for the Hugo Award for best fan writer on the basis of their *Star Trek* fanfiction. They made the final ballot. They did not win the award. Susan Wood won the award. She was an established science fiction fan writer and she won the award.

But there was such a scandal about *Star Trek* fanfiction writers actually being nominated for a Hugo Award that the Hugo committee got together to make sure that this would never happen again. They changed the rules to make sure that would never happen again. So, the fact that the Archive of Our Own won the Hugo shows how much fanfiction has changed and how much more respectable it is now than it was at the time back in the day.

**Sue:** Well, there was a scandal about *Star Trek* even being included in science fiction fandom for a long time, wasn't there?

**Joan:** Oh, yes. Oh, yes. [Sue laughs] And I moved in both worlds. Being a member in good standing of the Minnesota Science Fiction Society, I served one term on their board of directors. I signed their papers to establish themselves as a nonprofit organization, and I went to World Science Fiction Conventions. And I was a member of Minneapa, which was a science fiction APA Amateur Press Association for over a decade, I think. And I was one of their most frequent contributors. So, I was very active in general science fiction fandom as well as very active in *Star Trek* fandom.

**Sue:** One of the things I've read and heard over and over again in learning about early *Trek* fandom is that the assumption of science fiction fans was that *Star Trek* fans didn't read.

**Joan:** Yes, there was that impression. It was true of some *Star Trek* fans. But quite a few *Star Trek* fans read science fiction as well and were well-read in science fiction. I mean, they made generalizations on a small amount of data, in other words. And they were afraid that *Star Trek* would take over, and then literary science fiction would be pushed off to the side and never heard from again. This, of course, was ridiculous. It was ridiculous then, it was ridiculous now. It never happened. It was never going to happen. It never would happen. But the fear was there. And there was some friction between *Star Trek* and science fiction fans as a result.

However, I still went to world science fiction conventions wearing my *Star Trek* Welcommitee badge. I can't remember getting any negative feedback from wearing my *Star Trek* Welcommitee badge at a World Science Fiction Convention. [laughs] Maybe it's because I had a reputation by that time in general science fiction, that I was a serious general science fiction fan as well as a *Star Trek* fan. And because things were changing gradually, but they were changing, visual science fiction was getting more and more recognition. Not only with *Star Trek*, but George Lucas would bring his exhibits to the World Science Fiction Convention. He brought his *Star Wars* exhibit to the 1976 Worldcon. He brought his *Empire Strikes Back* exhibit to the 1979 Worldcon. It was getting there and the transition was being made.

And so, general science fiction fans started relaxing and realizing that no, their beloved literary science fiction fandom was not being taken over by the media fans. It was still there. It was not going to happen and people just relaxed. And it's a lot better today. But at the time, there was friction, no doubt about it.

**Sue:** It's so rare in fandom to hear people just relaxed. [laughter] But jumping back real quick to *Boldly Writing* and the years that you choose to chronicle, '67 to '87, you're stopping this right at, I guess, around the start of the internet fandom and of course, the start of *The Next Generation*. Are there other factors that impacted your decision to just cover these 20 years?

**Joan:** Even *Star Trek* fanzine fandom was changing. And in the 70s, it was mostly *Star Trek* that was the bulk of the fanzine writing. Starting with *Star Wars*, however, this started to expand and many of the established *Star Trek* fanfiction writers started to write *Star Wars*. And then, *Starsky & Hutch*. And then, *Miami Vice*. And then, this and then that, and then the other thing. By the time that I was writing *Boldly Writing*, it had diverged so much that published *Star Trek* fanfiction, had diminished greatly and the number of fanzines had shrunk. And I felt that I didn't have as large a base to go on as I did in the era that I covered, 1967 and 1987.

What you say is also true that we had *Star Trek: The Next Generation*, and there were some *Star Trek: Next Generation* fanzines, which I mentioned in *Boldly Writing*. But again, there weren't a lot of them. The number of *Star Trek* fanzines was diminishing and diminishing and diminishing. And this is why Trek Link went away, because the number of *Star Trek* fanzines, were diminishing. People were getting into more media. The people who wrote lots and lots of *Star Trek* fanfiction back in the 70s were now not writing *Star Trek*. They were writing *Miami Vice* and *Starsky & Hutch* and *Beauty and the Beast* and all the other media things. Which is fine, but I didn't have anything for *Trek*. And then, the internet came along and fanfiction transitioned to the internet and then the number of fanzines really diminished. The published fanzines really diminished.

So, those are reasons why it was just that 20-year period.

**Sue:** But you stayed active in *Star Trek* fandom?

**Joan:** Oh, yes. I never left. [laughs]

**Sue:** Especially *Deep Space Nine*, right?

**Joan:** Oh, yes. *Deep Space Nine*, of course, I have loved all the *Star Treks* from the beginning and even before the beginning. I mentioned in *Boldly Writing* that I got a call before *Star Trek: The Next Generation* premiered from someone from a tabloid magazine and asked me what I thought about, and I said, "I think it's great." And he says, "Well, are there anybody that doesn't like it?" I said, "Yeah, there are fans that don't like it." And then, I told them what the fans that didn't like it were saying. Well, the tabloid writer didn't publish any of my comments. They just published what I said about people detracting from it.

And so, I got a lot of flak from people saying, "Joan isn't supporting *Star Trek: The Next Generation*." Well, that was nonsense. I did support it from the very beginning, but I had to sort of defend myself there for a while. Yeah, *Star Trek: Next Generation*, I loved from the first episode. *Deep Space Nine*, I loved from the first episode. I've loved all the *Treks*.

But when *Deep Space Nine* came, since you asked about that one in particular, when *Deep Space Nine* came, first episode aired, I immediately drew attention to the character of Dr. Bashir, looked at the actor and said, "I wonder if he has a fan club." I wonder how I can approach him. So, there were Bashir fanzines springing up right away and so I subscribed to them. In subscribing to them, I got connected with Gail Stever, who was doing academic research on television audiences at the time, and particularly *Deep Space Nine* audiences, and she was in touch with the actor. And so, to make a long story short, I became, with Gail, the organizer of The Doctor's Exchange, which was the fan club for Alexander Siddig, and

was directing the fan club and publishing the newsletter for the fan club all through *Deep Space Nine*. And then after *Deep Space Nine* ended, that transitioned into a general *Deep Space Nine* actor fan club, which somebody else took over, which was fine. And now, I am still with the Alexander Siddig Fan Club because his Sid City Social Club, I am definitely a member of now, right in 2020 and 2021.

But I'm still *Star Trek*. I never left. I was not able to travel to conventions after 2004, but I still go to local conventions, talk about *Star Trek*, talk about *Star Trek* fanzines. Definitely still active, still going to be active. Don't see any reason why I wouldn't be active. Love *Discovery*, love *Picard*, love *Lower Decks*. Looking forward to *Strange New Worlds* with great eagerness. I support *Star Trek* across all *Star Trek*-dom.

**Sarah:** That's so nice to hear someone say.

**Joan:** Well, thank you.

**Sue:** So, let me ask you. I know the Ni'Var poem from Spockanalia #1 was featured in *Boldly Writing* and it's a big piece of fan history and fan media. When you saw the planet Ni'Var in *Discovery*, what was your reaction?

**Joan:** Yes, yes, yes, yes. [laughter] That is wonderful. And I'm so glad. You do see in *Star Trek* that there is some fan influence. I mean, the writers of *Deep Space Nine*, for instance, were aware of the fact that Alexander Siddig had a fan club [laughs] and that we were very active in supporting *Deep Space Nine*. So, they knew we were there, they knew what kind of reactions that we were. And sometimes, we would see little things that made me think that, "Yeah, they're listening to us." One prime example was the mention in *Deep Space Nine* of the Pennington School of Writing in New Zealand. Lana Pennington is in New Zealand, or was at the time, *Star Trek* fanzine writer and publisher and artist.

**Sue:** I've always loved finding those tidbits right from fandom, from fanzines in the show and usually learning about them later for me anyway, like the Sehlat, like the Pennington School. But I mean, when I watched this episode of *Discovery*, I think I audibly gasped because I recognized that. And to just see it right away and to know it right away because of having that knowledge but then also knowing that in 2020, the writers of the newest *Star Trek* series are going all the way back to the earliest fan activity.

**Joan:** And that they are aware of it, that is really wonderful.

**Sue:** Well, I think we've gone through just about everything. Is there anything I didn't ask you about that you'd like to talk about? [laughs]

**Joan:** Well, I could talk about *Star Trek* for hours, [laughs] but I know that you have to end the podcast at some point. So, I'm satisfied. I think I've said what I'd hoped to say, and thanks again for inviting me. I really appreciate it. I love talking about *Star Trek*, as you can tell.

**Sue:** Absolutely. That's what we do here. [laughter] Do you have any kind of online presence or social media that you'd like to send any listeners to if they'd like to reach you?

**Joan:** Oh, yes. [Sue laughs] My personal site is [joanmarieverba.com](http://joanmarieverba.com). I'm on Twitter as [@joanmarieverba](https://twitter.com/joanmarieverba). I'm on Facebook, [facebook.com/joanmverba](https://facebook.com/joanmverba). I'm on Instagram as [@joanmarieverba](https://instagram.com/joanmarieverba). So, I'm all over the place.

**Sue:** All right, Sarah, where can people find you on the internet?

**Sarah:** I am on Twitter as [@sarahmiyoko](#). And you can find my fanzine, *Star Trek Quarterly* on Facebook or at-- Let's see, is it [wordPress.startrekquarterly.com](#) or [startrekquarterly.wordpress.com](#)? I can never remember, but one of those.

**Sue:** I think it's the second one. All right. And I'm Sue. You can find me on Twitter [@spaltor](#). To learn more about our show or to contact us, visit [womenatwarp.com](#) or find us on Facebook, Twitter or Instagram [@womenatwarp](#). You can also email us at [crew@womenwarp.com](mailto:crew@womenwarp.com). And for more Roddenberry podcasts, visit [podcasts.roddenberry.com](#). Thanks so much for listening.

[Women At Warp theme]

**Female Speaker:** This is a Roddenberry podcast. For more great podcasts, visit [podcasts.roddenberry.com](#).

[Transcript provided by [SpeechDocs Podcast Transcription](#)]