

## Women at Warp Episode 106: Book Club: Letters to Star Trek

[Women at Warp theme]

**Jarrah:** Hi and welcome to Women at Warp: A Roddenberry *Star Trek* Podcast. Join us as our crew of four-women *Star Trek* fans boldly go on our bi-weekly mission to explore our favorite franchise. My name's Jarrah and thanks for tuning in. Today, with us we have crew member, Sue.

**Sue:** Hi, I have a cold.

**Jarrah:** And Grace.

**Grace:** It's just really cold here. [laughs]

**Jarrah:** Good times. So, thank you for joining us today. Our topic for today is the book, *Letters to Star Trek*, by Susan Sackett who was the secretary to Gene Roddenberry. And also, this is very widely known information including she's written about it, she also was a mistress of Gene Roddenberry's. This is actually a pretty cool book where she collects a bunch of letters that they received from fans throughout the late *Original Series* through syndication and goes into various themes and sometimes shares Gene Roddenberry's responses and sometimes interviews him as what would you say to this if you were to respond today. So, we're going to talk about that.

Before that, just a little bit of housekeeping as usual. Just need to remind you that our show isn't supported entirely by our patrons on Patreon. If you'd like to become a patron, you can do so for as little as a dollar a month and get awesome rewards from thanks on social media up to silly watch-along commentaries. Visit [patreon.com/womenatwarp](https://patreon.com/womenatwarp).

You can also support us by leaving a rating or review on Apple Podcasts or wherever you get your podcasts. And finally, congratulations to the winners of our Fansets giveaway. And, Sue, can I turn that over to you for that?

**Sue:** Yeah, winners, there are five winners. By the time you're hearing this, your pins are likely on their way to you in the mail.

**Jarrah:** Yayyy.

**Sue:** For anyone who unfortunately did not win at this giveaway, we encourage everybody to check out the Fansets website, look at everything they have to offer. They don't just do *Star Trek* and a huge thanks to Fansets for sponsoring this giveaway for us for.

**Grace:** Setting up our fans.

**Sue:** Yeah.

**Jarrah:** Yeah, okie-dokie. So, now we go back to our main topic, *Letters to Star Trek*. As I mentioned, this book was by Susan Sackett who was Roddenberry's personal executive assistant from 1974 until his death in 1991. So, 17 years. While working full time as Roddenberry's assistant, she wrote three books about *Star Trek*, including this book in 1977, *Star Trek Speaks*, in 1979, and the *Making of Star Trek: The Motion Picture* co-authored with Gene Roddenberry. She filled various roles as a production assistant.

**Sue:** She was a PA on the motion picture and worked with Gene on the others.

**Jarrah:** All right. And she was a production associate for the first five seasons of *TNG*. Her and her writing partner, Fred Bronson, sold several stories and a teleplay to that series, including the episodes *Ménage à Troi*, and *The Game*, our favorite. She also won \$10,000 on *Jeopardy* in 1986. Fun fact there-

**Grace:** That's not her.

**Jarrah:** -research.

**Sue:** I just think that's awesome-

**Jarrah:** It is.

**Sue:** Because I love *Jeopardy*.

[laughter]

**Jarrah:** So, before we get into talking about this book, I want to know from you guys, have you ever written fan mail to a TV show, *Star Trek*, or another show or a celebrity?

**Sue:** Yes.

**Grace:** Yes. [laughs]

**Jarrah:** Do you remember a particular example of who you wrote to and what you might have said and whether you got a reply?

**Grace:** Yes. [chuckles]

**Sue:** Yes. [laughs]

**Jarrah:** Is it embarrassing?

**Sue:** A little bit.

**Grace:** Yeah.

[laughter]

**Sue:** When I found the correct address to write to people on *Star Trek*, I wrote to everyone on *Star Trek*.

**Jarrah:** Yep. [laughs]

**Sue:** But the coolest thing was I wrote to the special effects, the production effects people listed in the credits because my brother was making fun of me and made jokes like, "These people probably never get fan mail." And I asked all these questions, like, "How do you do the effects for the transporter? How do you do this?" And I was like 13 or 14. And they wrote me back like a multi-page handwritten letter with diagrams and drawings and everything, explaining how they did it. And that was just very, very cool to receive back because what you get back from the actors is a signed photograph, maybe. Your letter doesn't get answered. But the people in the production office took the time to actually answer all of my questions.

**Jarrah:** Yeah, for sure. I also wrote to a lot of people on *Star Trek*. That's really cool. I did not think to do that.

**Sue:** [laughs] I wish I still had it. I have no idea where that is.

**Jarrah:** Yeah, I did write to a lot of people on *Star Trek* during the *Deep Space Nine* and *Voyager* years. I wasn't quite on the ball during *TNG* and I got like-- I think I have a signed photo of Avery Brooks and I got like a small one of Nana Visitor.

**Sue:** Nana sent a postcard.

**Jarrah:** Yeah, [Sue laughs] it was like a postcard of her in a dancing pose with a hat on her foot.

**Grace:** Oh, that's a great picture.

**Jarrah:** Yeah.

**Grace:** I'm sorry, but if you're a dancer by trade, it's a good publicity picture.

**Jarrah:** Yes.

**Sue:** I had a Kira picture.

**Jarrah:** Nice. [Sue laughs] And I did also get one of Kate Mulgrew. So that was really what I was hoping for at that point. I also was super into *Law & Order* at the time, and I also wrote to everyone on *Law & Order*, and I got autographed photos that were actually personalized back from Mariska Hargitay and S. Epatha Merkerson.

**Grace:** Wow.

**Sue:** So neat.

**Jarrah:** So, it was like God bless.

**Sue:** She seems like such a cool lady.

**Jarrah:** Mariska Hargitay. And I was like, "Thanks, thanks. Well, glad you're nice."

[laughter]

**Sue:** [laughs] Yeah. How about you, Grace?

**Grace:** My first ever fan letter was to Portland mayor, Vera Katz, who was also the first woman to be a speaker of the Oregon House of Representatives.

**Jarrah:** Yes.

**Grace:** And also fled from the Nazis as a child. So, I thought she was very cool as a kid.

**Jarrah:** That's not embarrassing at all. That's super awesome.

**Grace:** It's very political nerdy though, isn't it?

**Sue:** But it's very you.

**Grace:** It gets better. I think I was four or five at the time, so I asked her why guns weren't illegal. And I got a very diplomatic answer back that I barely remember because I was four or five at the time.

**Jarrah:** That's awesome. Were you asking your parents these questions and they encouraged you to write to her?

**Grace:** Yes, but I couldn't really write at age 5, so there was a lot of "Mother, take a letter for me. Send this to the proper channels."

**Jarrah:** My favorite fan mail experience was there's a Canadian author, named Carol Shields. And when I was in grade 12, I had like a CanLit marathon. And I read all of her books and everything by Margaret Atwood. I wrote them both. And she was very sick with cancer at the time. And I wrote her a letter about how much I loved her book. And she wrote me back a postcard from her home address, and it said, "Dear Jarrah, thank you so much for your wonderful note. I never think of my books being read in schools. And by the way, I like your name. All best, Carol Shields." And she died actually a couple months later. And I just was so touched that she took the time when she was sick to reply to me. And yeah, it was really nice, so.

**Grace:** Plus, we proved she has great taste with your name.

**Jarrah:** Thanks.

**Sue:** For sure.

**Jarrah:** And now, I guess our goal is to get LeVar Burton to retweet us. So, that's like our new fan mail.

**Sue:** Yeah. I was just-- does fan mail exist in the same way anymore?

**Grace:** That's what I was thinking a lot about with this book because, without getting too much into the book, there's lots of little repeating questions that pop up and stuff. And I can't help but wonder, like, "Wow." A lot of people asking the same questions they ask as Twitter, except taking a lot longer to do it and having to pay for postage to do it. That said, does getting tweeted back by someone you're a fan of count as receiving answer to your fan mail?

**Jarrah:** I think it sort of does. It depends on the interaction. We would probably need a different name for it. But I think, for example, you'll see people tweet questions or I saw, for example, people were tweeting at Jayne Brooks saying, "I really miss Cornwell." And then, her responding like, "She'll be in the next episode." I think that counts.

**Grace:** Yeah, I would think so. It's a form of interaction.

**Jarrah:** It's answering a question. It's not just retweeting something.

**Sue:** But I think too at least when I was young and writing fan mail, I never really expected to get a response. I hoped to, and I knew that more often than not, it would be like an assistant opening it up and copying my address and shoving a photo and sending it back, if anything. But I think it's special when you get that personalized response that somebody took the time to do, when there's still something weird and special about getting a handwritten note from somebody. And that is, I think, far less common. Especially-- you're never going to get that exact same feeling on Twitter.

**Jarrah:** We occasionally write emails to some of the people who were or are on *Star Trek*, usually through their agencies, and occasionally get actual responses back about the podcast. But I feel like, if an average fan just wrote a letter saying, oh, “Dear Roxann Dawson,” just say random example. Don't mean to single her out, but, like, “Hi, I'm a really big fan. I want to know how you get into directing.” I don't know that she wouldn't respond, but I feel like that they must get a lot of inquiries, and it's kind of the job of the agency to screen what's most worthwhile for their clients.

**Grace:** Which I'm guessing they really didn't have the benefit of quite as much back in the 70s and the 60s.

**Sue:** Well, they had their fan clubs-

**Grace:** That's true, yeah.

**Sue:** -which this little piece of history that I love in the back of this book is the appendix with everybody's fan club address, and they're all care of a fan and they're almost all personal home addresses.

**Grace:** Oh, my gosh.

**Jarrah:** Yep.

**Grace:** Back when you could just put someone's home address in a book.

**Sue:** Yeah.

**Jarrah:** Yeah. And so, when we're reading this book, it was really remarkable, even just the number of letters that Gene wrote back to himself at the time and the amount of detail he went into. But let's maybe start by doing a bit of a round robin and just pick some of our favorite letters in this book. So, maybe I'll start with Sue.

**Sue:** My absolute favorite, I think, is from the one that Sackett identifies as the Female Liberation Movement.

**Jarrah:** Yeah, the women's libber.

**Sue:** Yeah. It's rather long and they publish the whole thing. And I mean, good on them. But my favorite bit is right at the end. I'll just read the paragraph. She says, “Despite the sexist flaws in *The Original Series*, there are many feminists who are fans and who ignore or curse those flaws now. They're not prepared to do so with future scripts. We look forward to an improved *Star Trek*, one in which we can relate to and not feel alienated by.” That is a mood.

**Jarrah:** Yeah.

**Grace:** Yeah.

**Sue:** And that's from September 1975, so it's not a new feeling either. [laughs]

**Jarrah:** Yeah. And there's a few letters like this in the book, and I think it's probably worth us spending a bit of time on them because I know when I first read this, what was most surprising to me was the fact that people were calling it out at the time. Obviously, there were also women who felt that these representations were great, but this whole argument that, well, it was just the 60s, actually, there wasn't consensus that the representations of women were all progressive. And there's a letter in here from a woman named Amy Fuller

later in the book that starts out with, basically, "If you have a movie," and then, "Undoubtedly you will want to improve the image of women on Enterprise--"

**Grace:** I love this letter.

**Jarrah:** "--and in Federation society as well. One of the worst examples was and then she talks about *Who mourns for Adonais?* and how Carolyn Palamas is supposed to be a competent archaeologist and anthropologist, promptly forgets all of her training when she first catches sight of the handsome alien." And so, she goes into depth on this and argues that they should change the uniforms to pants because they're more practical and realistic.

**Sue:** She has subpoints. She's amazing.

**Jarrah:** Yeah, I know.

**Grace:** I love how she elaborates on the *Who Mourns for Adonais* episode by saying something along the lines of, "If this is how the standard woman in Starfleet acts, Starfleet is just completely boned and it won't take the Romulans or the Klingons."

**Jarrah:** Yes.

**Sue:** [laughs] Yes.

**Grace:** I'm paraphrasing, of course.

**Jarrah:** Yeah, totally. And then also worth really mentioning. Her point three is, "If you really enjoy challenges, you might want to try to have some homosexual-oriented crew members because if we can understand and tolerate other life forms and cultures, we can do the same for our own people who choose a different lifestyle." So, obviously like a bit problematic language today, but I think at the time, like the intention was actually pretty progressive.

**Grace:** Right. Now, if I can bring it to another example of crossing of barriers. I think one of my favorites, it reads along the lines of, "My friend, Valerie, and I live on different star bases. We are united by our love of *Star Trek*. You might say we are on either side of a Romulan Neutral Zone thanks to the Klingons masquerading as our parents. But with our subspace radio, we manage. I hope you receive my message before our new code is broken. Please rush our order because we are expecting a Klingon attack any minute."

**Sue:** So great.

**Grace:** [laughs] I know, I love that. I mean, it's sad that their parents disapprove of this interest of theirs, but I love that they've got this sort of *Star Trek* based-- probably not literal code but means of communicating with each other. And I really appreciated that because it took me back.

**Jarrah:** Oh, I wanted to talk about the same subject. Is it another one on the same topic?

**Sue:** No, not really.

**Jarrah:** So, I think it's worth spending a couple minutes to talk about Gene's response to the letter which is in-- I think we all have the same paperback because there's no e-book of this.

**Grace:** Yes.

**Jarrah:** Page 61 letter from Margaret M. Bailey, who is also talking about sexism in *The Original Series*, objects to the miniskirts. Also says that the depiction of women in the scripts is rather distasteful too because they are consistently shown in soft lights, sexy hairdos and scenes guaranteed to draw attention to their physical attractiveness. Again, why only the women? So, she draws attention to that. She also is critical of use of language to call some of the women "girl" and using the term yeoman for a female and even the episode title where *No Man Has Gone Before*.

So, this is I think another interesting letter and ends with, "As an ardent feminist and research librarian who has done extensive study of the program and the fan publications, I would be interested in your comments and happy to assist you in implementing my suggestions."

**Grace:** Would it be all right if we read the paragraph she puts in of her proposed changes just to draw the contrast out a little further?

**Jarrah:** Yeah.

**Grace:** Because I love that.

**Sue:** Just like tongue-in-cheek gender-swapped thing she does to prove her point.

**Grace:** "Most effective means I can suggest to help you understand how such treatment of women comes across as to try and imagine it in the reverse. For example, male yeoman has collapsed on the bridge. Captain, a woman, of course, orders the doctor, a woman, to take the boy to sickbay. Boy enters the bridge. Close up, soft lights, romantic music. Emphasis on the tight sexy costume. Captain sighs, looks at the doctor, who winks at her. Boy is specialist in geophysics. Captain wonders what he'd be like in bed. Every male guest star is the object of at least minor allusion to his sex. Emphasis for female guest stars is on their professional ability. And the plot usually centers around some dramatic action of theirs. Landing party is in trouble. The lone male member looks pleadingly at the captain. 'I'm frightened,' he says." Nail on the head there.

**Jarrah:** And I mean, you have to give them some credit because they could have just published all the nicest letters, but they published these letters and then they respond to them pretty respectfully. So, what do we think about Gene Roddenberry's response to this? Which in this case is not a written letter back to the person, it's an interview. So, Sackett asks, for example, "Does he think that *Star Trek* was male chauvinistic by today's standards?" "Yes, by today's standards, indeed it was." And Roddenberry goes on to say, "We didn't use women as strongly as we might have. We did have women lieutenants, women attorneys. We often fell into the trap of making the captain's secretary/valet, the yeoman, a woman. I think if we did begin today, we would start off more advanced than were able to at the time." But then, he goes on to answer some of the other things.

**Sue:** That part is just fine. It's the next part that's frustrating.

**Grace:** Yeah.

**Sue:** Where he says, "There's nothing wrong with being a sex symbol. In fact, Will Shatner is a sex symbol, and you should want to be a sex symbol."

**Jarrah:** I think there's nothing wrong with using women as sex symbols as well. As long as that's not the only way you're using women, which is like that's not wrong on the face of it. The problem is the equating using women and men as sex symbols, especially at that time, because there's a very different history and a very different meaning to a virile-looking man

like young William Shatner taking off his shirt and showing off basically power. Whereas a woman used as a sex symbol is like the object of the male gaze, who is basically her all of the rest of her personality is taken away. So, it's actually disempowering.

**Grace:** And also, I can't get over how much in this book, they keep being like, "Oh, yeah, it was such a different time. Just completely different time 10 years ago."

**Sue:** Well, it's interesting the part of his response he adds, "Also, we can't ignore the fact that I was playing to a 1964-1966 audience with a large group that would enjoy seeing women in a setting not too different from what was the norm then and would be pulled close to the show by seeing those things." So, I'm playing to my audience, basically. You can excuse me, because this is just how it's done.

**Grace:** Yeah.

**Jarrah:** He also blames the male actors, saying that you can't work with them without having some pressure to be playing opposite, "lovely, sensual, sexual women. There is a continual pressure from actors, 'Hey, let me win the girl now.' And they get a charge out of playing a character who is so masculine, aggressive and charming and so on that he wins the girl. It's an ego trip, but that's not a bad thing. It's like sitting around in your daydream and saying, 'Wouldn't it be fun for me to win that man or woman. The things I could do if I really put on the charm.' And for the actor, it's the same kind of feeling." So basically, the actors were just demanding that the women be sexy all the time and that's how we satisfy their egos.

**Grace:** There's just a whole lot of, "This isn't my fault, this isn't my problem at all," coming here.

**Jarrah:** He also says that, "We need to remember that there were people who were unsympathetic towards the women's liberation movement or who are made to feel uncomfortable by it. So, I couldn't have women's liberation there at every moment in every scene. Remember, *Star Trek* was in a mass medium playing to a mass audience and I couldn't give more than a fair amount of time to any one viewpoint."

So, it's kind of disappointing because he actually at other times, including in this book, argues *Star Trek* did give-- it pushed social points. And I do understand, I mean, George Takei talks about the conversations he had with Gene about having an openly gay character on *The Original Series* and why that couldn't be the fight that they had at the time. And Takei sort of agrees with that. He says, "I agree, I know that Gene wanted to do this. I believe he couldn't make it happen." I believe there's some of that. But I think, it's a bit of a cop-out to say--

**Grace:** Yeah, absolutely. I

**Jarrah:** It's just, I couldn't possibly push a view like one view all the time because people were uncomfortable by women's liberation. I don't know. It starts out saying it could have been different. Just leave it at that.

**Grace:** Yeah.

**Sue:** Later in the *Star Trek* and education section, this is on page 147, there is a-

**Grace:** For our listeners following along at home also.

**Sue:** Also, if you want to go read it later from Julie Dickinson and Helen Wood, who taught an interim college course like a seminar on *Star Trek* and they included their syllabus. And



there are a lot of talking points that include stuff like this. One of them is, “In *Turnabout Intruder*, women, as shown by Janice and Kirk’s body, are seen as constantly looking in the mirror, being continually interested in their nails, having hysterics when things go wrong, and men never display any of these characteristics. Another is, *Is there in truth, no beauty?* it is assumed that just because Miranda is a human female, she will want the company of a human male someday. Why?” And especially reading through all these talking points, I was like, they’re on top of this. And also, this looks like a list of possible topics that we’ve written for this podcast.

**Grace:** I know. I was reading through all of these syllabuses for *Star Trek*-related classes and programs that are included in here. And I’m like, “Damn, we can just put away our notes for the year and follow this if we wanted.”

[laughter]

**Jarrah:** I actually have a friend who is teaching *Discovery* to her grade A class because it’s a French immersion class and so they watch it with subtitles and then talk about the philosophies and the social issues. And so, I was really excited to share the syllabi and letters from teachers in this book to say, like, “Look, we’re all doing this same thing and here are some other cool ideas that you could pursue with your classes.”

**Grace:** And if I can tangent briefly off of the multilingual aspect, I love this letter in here from a fan in Japan who’s talking about how she feels sad because with the dubbed-over versions in Japan, she doesn’t know what Spock’s true voice is like. And she says, “But I’m enclosing a tape along so that you may hear that Spock’s voice is rather good in Japan.”

**Jarrah:** Ah, that was so awesome.

**Grace:** I loved that. I actually know multiple people whose weird audiophile hobby is comparing different country voice dubs over. And I have a friend who was briefly obsessed with the different voice dubbings for international versions of *The Simpsons*. And apparently, he considers the German Homer Simpson the best one.

**Sue:** Huh.

**Jarrah:** That sounds amazing. That sounds like a super fun hobby if I wasn’t already really obsessed with something that takes a lot of time.

**Grace:** There’s always room for more things to wish you had time for.

**Jarrah:** Yeah. On the education thing, it was also just really sweet. And again, a thing that still happens today, the letters from people talking about what a difference this made to their students.

**Grace:** Oh, my gosh. It was incredible.

**Jarrah:** There’s a teacher who talks about a kid being really bullied and how he changed when he discovered Spock and found something he could relate to. And yeah, my friend talks also about how she has some students who have real, real, real trouble focusing and writing and being engaged in school, different issues. And that *Discovery* has become a really important focal point that this one girl who has really, really hard time focusing can sit for the entire episode and not say a word. And then, after is just immediately seized by the desire to like, discuss the deep issues in that episode. And it’s really cool.

**Grace:** I really appreciated the part where they're talking about a severely dyslexic kid and they're helping him learn to read better by giving him *Star Trek*-related stuff to read because then he wants to know what's going on with it. Which is exactly how we were able to get my older sister reading when she was trying to learn how with severe dyslexia and ADD.

**Jarrah:** Yeah.

**Grace:** *Sabrina the Teenage Witch* comics though.

**Jarrah:** Amazing.

**Sue:** Perfect.

**Jarrah:** Just going back to the Gene's response to that letter just for a second because I wanted to mention, did anyone notice that there's a similarity because we often talk about the importance of context and effect.

**Grace:** Yeah, context is for kings.

**Jarrah:** [laughs] Yeah, but the comments that he makes about how, like, "It's cool to be a sex symbol. And besides, look, we're objectifying men too," basically. He doesn't obviously use that phrase, but that was basically exactly what was used to defend the whole Carol Marcus bra scene in *Into Darkness*. It was like, "Oh, we also had a Benedict Cumberbatch shower scene. We just cut it."

**Grace:** False equivalencies, man. False equivalencies.

**Jarrah:** So, just in terms of context, I would say I cut less slack for the people who were doing *Into Darkness* several decades later.

**Sue:** Agreed.

**Grace:** Yeah. We'll cut slack when we see fit.

**Jarrah:** So, there's some other themes in this book. Can we maybe talk about some of the other adorable letters from kids?

**Grace:** Oh, my gosh.

**Sue:** Yes.

**Grace:** Where to start?

**Jarrah:** Did anyone have a favorite that jumped out?

**Sue:** Where was it? I just saw it.

**Grace:** Flipping back through to see if I can find.

**Jarrah:** I mean, mine was the girl who basically pitched a story where she was Spock's like niece or cousin, and she's a prodigy, I guess. I was like, "That would be me."

**Grace:** Yeah.

**Sue:** It's just also problematic because she's like, "I wouldn't have disabilities from being born to my mother later in life. I would be smart because of it." Like, oh, yikes.

**Grace:** I really liked the one that someone-- this teenage boy wrote in, like, "Hey, I heard you guys are making a movie. Do you think I could be in it? Here's some pictures of me. Maybe I could be Spock's cousin or something. I know I've got some acne, but if you guys are able to make those pointy ears on Spock work, you can definitely cover that up."

**Jarrah:** [laughs] Yeah, that was really funny.

**Grace:** Kid, I like your moxie.

**Sue:** This one's not attributed, and I assume it is from a kid, but it's, "Captain Kirk should not like every girl on the ship. It makes him out to be a pervert, and he is not."

**Jarrah:** [laughs] Oh, I love it.

**Grace:** Can we get a plaque that says that? "It makes Kirk out to be a pervert and he is not."

**Jarrah:** This is on kids and on education. One of my favorite responses from Gene Roddenberry is where- actually this might have been about the boy that you were talking about, the boy who had dyslexia. The response that Gene gives to this explanation that now he's reading these really complicated science papers. He writes a really, really long response to this fan, and I can't even-- or to the teacher about this fan. And I can't even imagine what it would have been like to get this.

**Grace:** Yeah.

**Jarrah:** Oh, no, he found the actual student's address. But there's also this quote in it where he talks about reading and I just want to frame it and put it on the wall.

**Grace:** Oh, it was gorgeous. I loved it.

**Jarrah:** "I consider reading the greatest bargain in the world. A shelf of books is a shelf of many lives and ideas and imaginations which the reader can enjoy whenever he wishes and as often as he wishes. Instead of experiencing just one life, the book lover can experience hundreds or even thousands of lives. He can live any kind of adventure in the world. Books are his time machine into the past and also into the future. Books are his transporter by which he can beam instantly to any part of the universe and explore what he finds there." And it just keeps going on and it's so just like such a joyous hymn to reading.

**Grace:** Ah, gorgeous. I do think it's funny though that one of the letters following that up is one of the ones of the class of children who have to learn from home because of physical disabilities, and I think they're talking to a kid with cerebral palsy who's in a wheelchair. And then, Gene gives a similar response saying like, "I had a breathing problem as a child, so I know what you're going through." And it was just one of those moments of [onomatopoeia].

**Jarrah:** Yeah, he does that a couple times. And I definitely thought, "Mm, I'm not sure that's exactly the same."

**Grace:** That could very well be another false equivalency, Gene.

**Jarrah:** Yeah. That said, I mean, I do appreciate the attempt to try to find some common ground--

**Grace:** Oh, absolutely, absolutely.

**Jarrah:** Yeah. And to be like, "Hey, I can understand about what you're going through." And especially I think like if you're a kid, that would have been meaningful.

**Grace:** Definitely if you're a kid who loves *Star Trek*, that would mean the world probably. But also, that just made me go, "Mmm." Things that make you go, "Mmm."

**Jarrah:** So, yeah, another thing that made me go, "Mmm, was there's [laughs] a section about people basically trying to get into *Star Trek* where, like writing to be- You talked about the kid with acne saying he could have like Spock's cousins.

**Sue:** I think I know exactly where you're going with this.

**Jarrah:** Yeah, yeah. Do you want to take it?

**Sue:** So, he talks about all of these people writing letters basically asking to be in *Star Trek* and the-- I need to find it to find the exact phrase.

**Jarrah:** It's on 172.

**Sue:** Thank you. I was just about to get there.

**Grace:** Did you mark every page in this book?

**Sue:** I have a lot of little-- [crosstalk]

**Jarrah:** I have several Post it notes, yes.

**Grace:** I can't argue with that.

**Sue:** Okay. So, he says, "I've gotten many letters from housewives and some of them are rather middle aged and by our current standards of beauty, not particularly attractive people who will pose in a bikini for a Polaroid shot, send it in and say, 'Could you use me? My husband says I'm attractive.' And I'm sure such people are attractive in dimensions of caring, loving and giving, gifts far beyond our two-dimensional television screens power to convey."

**Grace:** Yeah, just have a bin of Lamé bikinis that you can mail back to them and be like, "Go home and stretch your own hot space stuff." I think that would be a fun response to get.

**Jarrah:** [laughs] It made me think about Mudd's women and the whole like his beauty skin deep thing. And it's one thing to talk about it, we've talked in the show before about how that episode maybe didn't execute that concept perfectly, but also that it's hard to overcome when those attitudes are super ingrained by the people who are creating the show, that you can be like an attractive person-- a nice person or a beautiful person [laughs] and there's no combining. But that said, I think that there is-- What was I going to say? I think that it's a good reminder because, particularly, no one else besides Gene Roddenberry is as lionized in our fandom and there's a real tendency for people to treat him as like almost a deity, remember his quotes and--

**Grace:** Who mourns for Roddenberry.

**Jarrah:** -and what would Roddenberry think about this decision or that decision and if we need to go back to what really is *Star Trek*, which is supposed to be what Roddenberry's vision was. It's a good reminder, like, dude's a human.

**Sue:** And he didn't have nearly as much of a say in things as people think he did. [chuckles]

**Grace:** Yeah.

**Sue:** But it's interesting. I was at several cons this fall. People talking about-- It's usually when they complain about *Discovery*, it comes in, "What would Gene think? Gene would hate this." You know what? Gene would have hated *Deep Space Nine* too a lot.

**Jarrah:** Yeah.

**Grace:** Sure. There are many things Gene would hate.

**Sue:** Gene passed in '91. He wasn't very hands on with the last few years that he was around for *Next Gen* and even when you go and you read the production history of *The Original Series* movies, they didn't want him around for those really either. So, he is not the end-all and be-all and this like deification of the idea of Gene Roddenberry of the Great Bird of the Galaxy, he did that for himself. He went on these college lecturing tours and he created that image for himself to make himself more appealing to the studios and then the fans bought into it. It wasn't the other way around.

**Jarrah:** Yeah. And it doesn't take away value from the things he said that were good.

**Sue:** No, not at all.

**Jarrah:** It just means that we need to treat it realistically and realize that all of the people who worked on *Star Trek* were complicated people. And Gene obviously played a really, really crucial founding role that influences *Star Trek* to this day and just need to sort of keep that in perspective, I guess. And actually, Rod Roddenberry's documentary, *Trek Nation*, I think is a really good resource to show just a bit more about how he was a complicated guy and that, again, doesn't take anything away from the impact that his creations have had. But he's also not the only person who impacted the show.

But back to the book, it's interesting because there's a couple sections that talk about the future and equality and technology. There's also some like sort of funny sections about people writing like, "Can you mail me the Enterprise?"

**Grace:** "I would like a signed photo of the Enterprise." That was my favorite.

**Sue:** That's adorable.

**Grace:** Yeah, but the Enterprise has horrible penmanship.

**Jarrah:** Yeah, well, and then he actually signs a photo of the Enterprise from *The Enterprise*.

**Sue:** Or somebody did, right? Was it definitely Gene?

**Jarrah:** Yeah, she said it was him. It looks like his writing too. There's a photo of it in the book. There is also people writing some really sweet letters about the actors and some really cute letters about how sexy McCoy is and how great Kirk is.

**Grace:** My favorite was the multiple people being like, "Oh, does William Shatner still hate fruit salad?"

**Sue:** Oh, gee.

**Jarrah:** Oh, yeah.

**Grace:** Because that struck me just as such a Twitter joke that would crop up all the time.

**Sue:** It's such fan-ish behavior, right? There's one interview where one thing is mentioned and literally everybody clamps onto it for the next 25 years. [laughs]

**Jarrah:** Oh, one really interesting things in the letters about and to the actors because she talks to most of the actors from *The Original Series* about their experience with the fans and their letters, and there was a really interesting thing about where Walter Koenig talks about how fans know he's Jewish and I quote, "A lot of religious tracts in the mail from fans who are trying to convert me. I remember a letter from a 14-year-old girl whose friends told her that Jews don't go to heaven. She was concerned and wanted to know what happens to us when we die. I told her we go to a small island off the coast of France where we eat mangoes and peanut brittle." And says that Shatner, Nimoy and Harlan Ellison and David and Gerald were all Jewish and people like Mormons were sending them tracts trying to convert them. Yeah, that's messed up.

**Grace:** Yeah.

**Jarrah:** Also, something that happens today.

**Grace:** Yeah. Yeah. A few years ago, we had to deal with a big ruckus of the Mormon Church trying to claim Anne Frank as a posthumous Mormon.

**Sue:** What?

**Grace:** Which is messed up on many levels.

**Jarrah:** Man. But it was something I told my aunt about because I was reading this book when I was visiting her and she was lamenting the internet and toxic fan culture which we've done an episode on and absolutely, it is a lot easier now to tweet at someone and tell them you don't agree with their religion.

**Sue:** Or to show up at a convention and protest.

**Jarrah:** Yeah. But certainly, people had the thoughts and were communicating them since the beginning of *Star Trek*, so it's not a good thing but just an observation. Also, not very *Star Trek*-y people.

**Grace:** No. That's not appreciating the infinite diversity.

**Jarrah:** No.

**Sue:** Ooh, speaking of, there's one in here. Here it is from someone writing. His name is Charles Cull from Detroit, Michigan, about what the concept of IDIC in *The Original Series* meant to him.

**Grace:** That one made me smile.

**Sue:** He says, "It has been even more recent that I've discovered that there is a whole world of *Star Trek* which is very much alive and functioning. I now find that I have become an active part of that world and a damn nice place it is too. But of course, you already know that since you created it. But it makes me believe that you must be very special person. I refer

especially to the IDIC concept that you have created. Now, I do not intend to sound melodramatic, but for me, the IDIC has most certainly become a way of life. What it did to 'get my head together' is more than my doctors could do in years."

"Mr. Roddenberry, they have given you and your IDIC credit for what I have accomplished, for bringing me back from a world where I could not cope because I was different from the woman next door or the guy down the street. You have taught me that being different is not to be wrong. You have also taught me that it is my duty to combine my differences with others to create for both of us. And so, Mr. Roddenberry, I thank you as you have never been thanked before."

**Grace:** I'm getting verklempt. There are many points in this book that made me emotionally compromised definitely and that would be kind of impossible to do in a book that's so much about these people and their outpouring of their love for this thing that's brought them together and has brought them comfort. And the part that just really boggles my mind on this book is we've got such a core sampling of how much it has touched and affected all these different people in different ways. And this was just the first 10 years.

**Sue:** Yeah. And now, 40 years later, we're sitting here reading this and identifying with these letters.

**Jarrah:** Yeah.

**Sue:** From four decades ago.

**Grace:** The one that really punched me is an early one in the book from a Vietnam vet talking about how that took him out of a dark place. And I just had to put the book down and be like, [sighs] "I'm going to call my dad now, see how he's doing."

**Jarrah:** There's another one too about a woman who felt like life wasn't worth living and how *Star Trek* brought her out of that. It's just been so powerful for so many people. We've featured stories like that on our blog, and it just always makes me tear up.

**Grace:** This book is just such a testament to how wonderful it can be to just love a thing and how much loving a thing can help you love other people. And I truly do not understand people who like to deride other people for something that makes them happy and brings them joy and clearly just means so much to so many people. And that's beautiful. And how can you not think that? That's incredibly beautiful.

**Jarrah:** Absolutely.

**Grace:** Argh, gets me choked up.

**Sue:** Emotions with Grace.

**Grace:** I do it for the listeners.

**Sue:** There's one not nearly as deep, but it still really jumped out at me. That was written to the Welcomittee, not necessarily to *Star Trek* itself, but from a woman named Jackie, who was encouraged to get rid of all of her *Star Trek* stuff when she graduated to make her way in the world and found herself missing it until after getting married, she unpacked her husband's boxes and he had packed away many of the same *Star Trek* memorabilia that she had given up. And it reminds me of when I got rid of a bunch of *Star Trek* stuff that I wish I still had.

[laughter]

**Jarrah:** There's also a really cool letter that's like three pages long from a Benedictine nun near the beginning of the book. All sorts of her thoughts on various episodes and the philosophy of *Star Trek* and references literature, and it's basically like a mini thesis.

**Grace:** She has got that beautiful poetic reference in there. I wish I could find it. Let me see. It's a reference from *A Sleep of Prisoners* from Christopher Fry, and if I can just share part of that. "Thank God our time is now when wrong comes up to face us everywhere, never to leave us till we take the longest stride our soul men ever took. Affairs are now soul size. The Enterprise is exploration into God."

**Jarrah:** Also, my head canon now is that she got to cameo one of the nuns in *Star Trek IV*.

**Sue:** Oh, my gosh.

**Jarrah:** Probably not, but I'm just going to imagine that.

**Grace:** So, it said that she was a professor at OSU and for a minute there I was like, "Oh my gosh, dad, when was grandpa professor at OSU? I've got a nun he needs to track down." Didn't work. Didn't work. Turned out it was U of O. I just lost all my credibility with the Ducks fans.

**Jarrah:** [laughs] There's an interesting part near the end of the book which starts on page 190 that is Gene Roddenberry sort of being interviewed again by Susan Sackett talking about-- The question is, do you really see *Star Trek* as an accurate depiction of what you expect the future to be like? And this is interesting. It reads a bit like the book, *The Making of Star Trek* that he wrote with Stephen Whitfield where he postulates on the philosophy of *Star Trek*, only this is a bit later. And he says that, "It's definite no, only in the sense that we do have an exciting future ahead of us."

But then, my ears perked up, I wasn't listening to the book. But if I was, they would have perked up. Talks about how, "I think the next 200 to 300 years will see great changes in the species, great changes in values and attitudes and so on. For example, I doubt that the institution of marriage as we presently know it will survive another half century. I think that certainly people of different sexes or the same sex will find those with whom they feel comfortable, whose attitudes give pleasure and strength to the other, and they will have relationships, sexual and nonsexual. But I doubt very much that it will be a marriage contract. I think that by half a century from now, there will be a thing like children's liberation. I think for people to own their children as they do today is rather primitive."

And so those are just a couple of the points in here. But he also comments on politics and says, "I think the idea of a person or corporation owning hunks of our resources has got to go." Says that politics needs to change. And again goes into how he needed to camouflage his ideas in order to be palatable to the audience of the 60s.

**Grace:** On one hand, damn, Gene.

**Jarrah:** Yeah. On the comments around-- marriage isn't dead.

**Sue:** Nope.

**Grace:** No. But forms of it have definitely evolved and partnership in modern terms is ever changing.



**Jarrah:** Yes, absolutely. Children's liberation, I don't know that's coming, but certainly people-- There are different styles of parenting.

**Grace:** There are definitely evolving ideas on how-- what's the phrase I'm looking for? Children's right to self-describe themselves and to not be considered ownership of their parents.

**Jarrah:** Yeah. There's certainly been pushes for children to be able to better identify their gender, to be able to have more say in their education, to be able to pursue interests instead of being forced into a particular box that's considered to be the particular things you need to be "successful." So that's pretty prescient observations.

**Grace:** Damn, Gene.

**Jarrah:** Yeah, Sadly, corporations and people still own giant hunks of resources. That has not changed.

**Grace:** Which I believe-- I think there's actually a Vulcan saying for that. I just read it the other day. Okay, let me bring it. I'm probably going to say it wrong, but it's bullshit.

[laughter]

**Sue:** I just like that when he's talking about that, he has to say, "I'm not a communist, but."  
[laughs]

**Jarrah:** Yeah, that was the time--

**Grace:** There's no shame in socialism, dude.

**Sue:** I was going to say it also feels very now. Not a socialist, but-

**Grace:** Oh, if I could bring it back for just a second. We do also have a growing movement right now of advocating for children being allowed to make their own decisions on whether or not they are vaccinated or not. If they have parents who don't want to vaccinate them, if the child is able to plead, "I want to be vaccinated," they should legally be allowed to be.

**Jarrah:** Yeah. I mean, it's also possible that I don't know what the framework was like in 1977, but that children probably do have greater healthcare rights in general today.

**Grace:** Yes, agency. That's the phrase I was trying to look for.

**Jarrah:** Well, we are also out of time. So, are there any final thoughts on this book?

**Grace:** Everyone, find a nice thing from it that they wanted to share.

**Sue:** And the pages turn.

**Jarrah:** Oh, I have a good one. I have a good one. Near the end, there's a bunch of letters from scientists and people at NASA and other people who are experts in the field, academics, people who have met Gene at conferences. And there's a really nice letter from a guy named Dick Hoagland, Science Advisor to NASA at Goddard Space Flight Center. And he talks about, and I just loved this note that if there's new *Star Trek*, it should follow on the heels of the old *Star Trek*.

And he says, "People need to see that their problems have solutions, that history is not drawing to a close, but just beginning. Somehow, that should be conveyed by what you will do. It is a fascinating coincidence that the *Star Trek* universe should be set approximately 200 years from now. In my role to the NASA Bicentennial Committee, I have suggested several projects on theme the next 200 years. It seems to me therefore quite appropriate that the release date of the *Star Trek* feature will be semi coincidental with the start of these celebrations of our heritage, part of which some of us are trying valiantly to get aimed toward the idea, 'Where do we go from here?'" And I just loved that thought about the optimism and how it's influencing and continues today to influence science and space exploration.

**Sue:** You stopped right before my favorite part.

**Grace:** What was your favorite part?

**Sue:** He signs off with, "You have their attention, Gene. Tell them something important."

**Grace:** Aah.

**Jarrah:** Yeah. That is so great.

**Grace:** One of my favorites is a letter from Daniel Gutman of Minneapolis writing in to say that he has had a tree in Israel planted for Gene Roddenberry. And it in Jewish culture, it's a thing a lot to plant trees and do good deeds on Tu B'Shevat, which is the New Year of Nature celebration. And it really is such a stereotypical Jewish thing to be like, "It's your birthday, I had a tree planted for you in Israel." And I just love the thought that this was this kid's frame of reference for an awesome gift that he could give in that sense to Gene Roddenberry. And just the part of the meaning behind having a tree planted for someone is that it's a from generation-to-generation gift and that you are giving them something that they are by proxy giving the future. And that feels so perfect for having a tree planted for the guy who created *Star Trek*.

**Grace:** And I thought that was the sweetest thing.

**Sue:** Yeah. And just to bookend it, wink, real, quick.

[laughter]

**Grace:** Nice.

**Sue:** Very early is a letter from Virginia Walker, who becomes very active in the *Star Trek* Welcommittee. In the middle of her rather long letter is the phrase, "*Star Trek* shoved a whole new set of ideas in front of my nose. And like the donkey and the carrot on the stick, I started moving forward again."

**Grace:** Guys, this book just made me feel so warm and fuzzy.

**Jarrah:** Mm-hmm.

**Sue:** Mm. It really is. I highly recommend it if you haven't read through this to, pick it up, even skim it, look for the stuff that's going to be of interest to you because it really is this like fascinating time capsule of what *Star Trek* fandom was around 1975-76.

**Grace:** Wouldn't it be great if we started a campaign to Ballantine Books to get them to reprint this?

**Jarrah:** And to make an e-book and an Audiobooks for accessibility. But if you're able to read a paperback, there are many, many copies available cheaply used online and I think it is well worth the five or so dollars you might spend. Yeah, we read a lot of good books in the book club, but I think this speaks about *Star Trek* in a way that's really interesting and heartwarming in a way that nothing else we've covered does.

**Sue:** For sure.

**Grace:** For reals.

**Jarrah:** All right. And if you want to join the discussion, maybe you're going to pick up the book and then you want to add your thoughts, you can shoot us an email, contact us the all the usual ways. So, our email is [crew@womenatwarp.com](mailto:crew@womenatwarp.com). We also have Facebook and Instagram and Twitter [@womenatwarp](https://twitter.com/womenatwarp). You can visit our website, [womenatwarp.com](http://womenatwarp.com). But particularly for book club, we also have a reading group on Goodreads where we try to post some discussion questions and have people give their thoughts. So, if you go to [goodreads.com](http://goodreads.com) and search under the groups for Women at Warp Book Club, then you will find us and you can join and follow along and pick up the discussion also for our next pick when we announce that.

**Grace:** And then you'll say, "Mm, those were some good reads."

**Jarrah:** All right. So, Grace, where can people find you elsewhere on the internet?

**Grace:** You can find me on Twitter [@bonecrusherjenk](https://twitter.com/bonecrusherjenk) and curled up with more fan letters that other people wrote for other things because love is amazing.

**Jarrah:** Aww. And, Sue?

**Sue:** You can find me on Twitter [@spaltor](https://twitter.com/spaltor). That's S-P-A-L-T-O-R and sorry about my voice this week, everybody. [laughs]

**Jarrah:** It's okay. And I am Jarrah. And you can find me on Twitter [@jarrahpenguin](https://twitter.com/jarrahpenguin). That's J-A-R-R-A-H-Penguin. And also on my website, [trekkiefeminist.com](http://trekkiefeminist.com).

**Sue:** For more from the Roddenberry Podcast Network, visit [podcast.rodnenberry.com](http://podcast.rodnenberry.com).

**Grace:** Keep loving what you love.

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