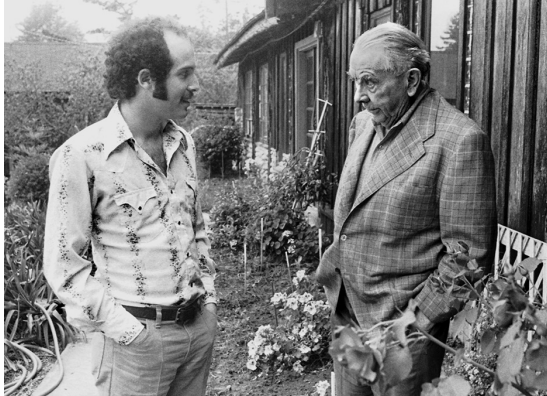


APPENDIX B

The Story of The Book



Paul Schatzzin with George Everson in 1975

“Genius is eternal patience.”
— Michelangelo

This book has taken more than twenty-five years to finish. I first heard of Philo T. Farnsworth in the summer of 1973. I had just graduated from a branch of Antioch College near Baltimore, where I majored in communications. I was off to California to seek my fortune in the television industry, when I happened across the most recent issue of a publication called *Radical Software*—an obscure underground periodical that promoted the use of portable video recorders for social action. Originally published from New York City, this new issue was published from San Francisco and called the “Videocity” edition, in homage to the medium’s origins. The issue included an elegy to Farnsworth, “The Electromagnetic Spectrum Blues” by Max Crosley.

Lamenting the lack of TV coverage of Farnsworth’s death on March 12, 1971, Max wrote:

Athena weeps,
The electro-magnetic spectrum has the blues,
And not one of you has been unaffected by this man.
THEY OWE IT ALL TO HIM. . . but they never said a word.
HE GAVE ALL
As they nothinged him right into nothing.
When Picasso was wildly experimenting with deco cement
THIS MAN WAS DRAWING WITH ELECTRONS,
You all know he went through here,
Whether you know his name or not.
HE RIGHT NOW IS COMMANDING YOUR LIVING ROOM
MIND.¹³⁹

Until that chance encounter in the pages of a rather obscure publication, I had never given the origins of television much thought. But there was a quality to the illustrations that accompanied the poem, the photos of the young Farnsworth holding his tubes and standing by a crude wooden camera box in the 1920s, that filled in a piece of history that I did not even know was missing.

A few weeks later, rummaging through the stacks at the Santa Monica library, I stumbled across *The Story of Television: The Life of Philo T. Farnsworth* by George Everson. Everson, I learned from this book, was the man who discovered Farnsworth in 1926, helped arrange his financing, and remained one of his primary supporters until the company was restructured in the late 1940s. I read the book quickly, from cover to cover.

Still later that same summer, my former college roommate, Tom Klein (now a Hollywood TV producer) and I took a trip up the Pacific Coast Highway and stopped in Santa Cruz to visit with a fellow I remember only as “Johnny Videotape”—a pseudonym he’d adopted for his public-access cable video work. Johnny knew Phil Geitzen, who had edited the “Videocity” issue of *Radical Software*, and Geitzen knew Philo Farnsworth III, the TV inventor’s oldest son. It was through this chain of connections, on a hill overlooking the Pacific in Santa Cruz in the summer of 1973, that I first heard the word “fusion.” The apocryphal way Johnny Videotape

conveyed the story sent chills through me that has kept me connected to this story for more than two decades.

For some reason, I guess I've always had a thing for inventor stories. When my mother was trying desperately while I was in the third grade to get me to read, she took me to the library and I picked out a Signature Series biography of Thomas Edison. The next year, when we all got to pick a character to portray in the fourth grade play, I chose to play Edison, and attempted to invent the lightbulb in front of the entire Forrestdale School in Rumson, New Jersey. Unfortunately, my lightbulb did not work quite as well as Edison's. But a seed was planted when I read my first book about Edison; a seed that took root that summer when I stumbled upon these stories of Philo T. Farnsworth.

In the spring of 1975, I'd found work with Videography, Inc., a small video production house in Hollywood. I was in charge of promoting the company's computerized video editing services, and suggested to the owner, Bob Kiger, that we issue a "video buck" to our prospects, each coupon worth one free hour of editing. In place of George Washington on our facsimile dollar bill, I suggested we place a portrait of Philo T. Farnsworth.

"Who is Philo T. Farnsworth?" Bob asked, half laughing at the name.

I explained, "He's the father of television... he invented it..." and proceeded to lay out the story I'd read in Everson's book of the farm boy who had dreamed up electronic video.

"That's a great story," Bob said, "that would make a great movie for television!"

With that seemingly reasonable suggestion, I was off on an odyssey that has woven in and out of my life for more than twenty-five years, which continues even with the completion of this volume.

Bob and I tracked down George Everson—by then well into his nineties but still quite coherent—in the rugged foothills of Mendocino County, and we acquired an option on his book. From there, we located the Farnsworth family in Salt Lake City and made similar arrangements for the movie rights to the then-unfinished

book that Farnsworth's widow, Pem, was researching and writing at the time. We never did get a movie made for television, but the Farnsworth family has remained a near constant presence in my life ever since.

The material in this book is drawn largely from interviews I conducted with Pem Farnsworth and Philo T. Farnsworth III between July 1975 and September 1977. Those interviews, and supporting material I dredged up in the stacks of the UCLA Research Library, were first compiled into the treatment that Bob Kiger and I used in our efforts to interest the television networks in our project. Bob dropped out of the project in 1976, but my then-future-ex-wife, Georja Skinner, and I continued to carry the torch.

In 1977, in concert with the 50th anniversary of Farnsworth's first successful electronic video experiments, the material I had gathered was published in another obscure "alternate media" journal based in Washington, D.C. called *TeleVisions*. I worked closely with the editor of that publication, Nick DeMartino, to clean up the narrative I'd written for the TV treatment to make it suitable for publishing in four installments through the course of the anniversary year. The celebration culminated with a re-enactment of Farnsworth's successful September 7, 1927 experiment that was covered by two of the three major networks in their nightly newscasts.

The publication of that material in *TeleVisions* was the first effort of any consequence to compare the Farnsworth family's recollections with the existing historical record, much of which had been dictated over the course of the previous four decades by the public relations departments of those companies that survived the shakeout from television's early years. It has been suggested by some observers that the reclaiming of Philo T. Farnsworth's true legacy began with the 50th anniversary celebration and the publication of those four installments in *TeleVisions*.

It's nice to know that I had some role in setting the record straight. In the two-and-a-half decades since, a number of publications and media productions have basically confirmed and echoed the themes first expressed in those four *TeleVisions* installments. Most notable among them is Pem Farnsworth's own book, *Distant*

Vision: Romance and Discovery on an Invisible Frontier. When it was published in 1990, *Distant Vision* culminated fifteen years of Pem's own research and writing on the subject. I was privileged to work closely with Pem and her son, Kent Farnsworth, in the completion and publication of that book, and added substantially to my knowledge of the subject matter as a result of that experience. I recommend Pem's book to any reader who desires a more intimate, firsthand interpretation of the material contained in the pages of *The Boy Who Invented Television.*



Pem Farnsworth in 1977

Another volume that is indispensable for any serious student of Farnsworth's life is *Philo T. Farnsworth: Father of Television*, written by Dr. Donald Godfrey, a professor at the Walter Cronkite School of Journalism and Telecommunications at the University of Arizona, and published in 2001. Godfrey's book is the most extensively researched and documented volume on the subject of Philo T. Farnsworth yet published, and sets the standard for journalistic excellence by which all future efforts must be judged. I was pleased that Dr. Godfrey saw fit to draw a little bit from the material I had published some twenty years earlier. His scholarly research largely confirms the stories I first wrote about in the 1970s.

I have taken the liberty of drawing on both of these works in the rewriting of my original treatment for this book. Wherever I have used direct quotations and excerpts from these books, as well as others, I have included reference notes. In doing so, I wish to recognize to the scholarship displayed by these authors, who have likewise acknowledged my own earlier contributions. I would like to think that my work stands on the shoulders of theirs, and by so doing extends the thematic reach of all the material now in circulation, which gets to the heart of the real issues that shaped the life of Philo T. Farnsworth, his successes and his shortcomings.

I never met Philo Farnsworth II, the inventor recalled in these pages. He died two years before I ever heard his name. I did, however, become very close to his oldest son, Philo T. Farnsworth III. Much of my understanding of the broader themes that challenged the elder Philo, I absorbed during the time that I was privileged to spend with “P3” in the late 1970s. Philo III was cut from the same cloth as his father, but lived his life in a manner much like a mirror image. Philo III was a reluctant inventor in his own right, reluctant because of what he had seen the process of invention do to his father. From his experience, I came to understand the eternal clash between invention and industrial capitalism, and the impact that had on the health, wealth, and well-being of both father and son.

In 1987 Philo III left this world through the same dark corridor that accounted for many of the detours in his father’s life.¹⁴⁰ I sorely miss him. But I am fortunate that much of the time we shared together was recorded on audiotape. I returned to those tapes during the rewriting of this book and discovered a rich vein of material that had been necessarily overlooked in the original preparation of what at the time was a movie treatment. Listening to the interviews I conducted with Philo III and Pem during the seventies was like opening a time capsule. Where Pem provided most of the “play by play” based on her personal recollections of the events she experienced with her husband, Philo III provided all the “color commentary.” His attitudes, philosophies, vocabulary, and vision infuse practically every paragraph of this text. Given the similarities of his character to that of his father, I would like to think that this book is how the story might have come across had his father had the opportunity—or the desire—to tell it himself.



Philo T. Farnsworth III in 1972

Wherever possible, the stories in these pages are conveyed precisely as Pem and Philo III relayed them to me. I have cross-referenced their accounts with my own additional research and the work of Godfrey, Everson, and others, always striving to provide as much reliable historical accuracy as possible. It has always been important to me to create a narrative based on fact, with as little “documentary bio-drama” as possible. I don’t want readers—or viewers, if ever there is a movie made—to sit and wonder if a particular scene really happened. I have tried not to invent scenes or storylines. All the scenes portrayed in this book really happened, to the extent that memory and ancient texts can reliably recall. I have taken the liberty of embellishing some scenes with suggestions of dialog and action, but the scenes themselves are derived from first or secondhand accounts of the actual events.

My own material languished in the years after its first publication in 1977. A second effort at organizing a feature film or movie for television after the publication of Pem’s book suffered the same fate as the first effort in the 1970s. Then in 1995, as the Internet started bubbling into consciousness, I started an Internet business. I remember waking up one Saturday morning in 1995, the week after I’d purchased a flatbed scanner, thinking, “Hey, I can put all my Philo stuff on the Web!” Over the course of the next two years, I serialized my original text and published it online as *The Farnsworth Chronicles* (<http://farnovision.com>). I’m pleased that the site has received tens of thousands of visitors, and that the legacy of Farnsworth’s contribution to our daily lives has spread via this new medium, which is also predicated in part on his contribution.

It is no exaggeration to say that it has taken twenty-five years to write this book. When I first met the Farnsworths in 1975, and for many years thereafter, the family was quietly reluctant to talk much about Farnsworth’s fusion work. It was not until I worked with Pem on the completion of *Distant Vision* in 1989 and ’90 that some of the compelling details of those years began to surface. Still, there was not enough to effectively trace the arc of events and ideas that truly tell the story of this man’s life and struggles.

An unexpected benefit rose out of the material I posted to the Web in 1998, when I created an online discussion board (<http://fusor.net>) and discovered that there is a small number of individual enthusiasts around the world who are experimenting with the work Farnsworth left unfinished in the 1960s. From the online discussions, I encountered Richard Hull, a “high energy” amateur experimenter from Richmond, Virginia, who has done his own extensive research into Farnsworth’s last twenty years.

Richard’s interest in fusion is equal to mine, and he had interviewed many of Farnsworth’s co-workers from the fifties and sixties when our paths crossed. In the summer of 2001, I joined Richard for some follow-up interviews with Farnsworth’s fusion team, which provided further insight into what was really going on at the Pontiac Street lab in Fort Wayne. In the past two years I have also found Pem and Kent Farnsworth much more willing to discuss Phil’s fusion experiments. Thus, it has only recently become possible to reconstruct Farnsworth’s last decade in such a way that much of the mystery surrounding his fusion work can be stripped away.

There are still many unanswered questions about the Fusor, and just what really happened while Farnsworth was with IIT. On the one hand, nobody can say for certain that the Fusor was ultimately capable of producing a self-sustaining fusion reaction or delivering a practical power plant. On the other hand, nobody can say for certain that it was not. What we do know is that the political and financial obstacles that Farnsworth faced were at least as daunting as the technical obstacles, if not more so.

Richard Hull has graciously allowed me to use here some of the material he has gathered, without which it would be impossible to complete the arc of the Farnsworth story that appears in these pages. Thanks to Richard’s research, we now have a much better idea exactly what transpired during those “missing years.”

Publishing my original material to the World Wide Web had one other unintended side-effect: this book. I first met Bruce Fries at an Internet music conference in 1999; when we encountered each other online again through an e-mail discussion group, I asked him to take a look at my website, to see if he thought there might be

a book in there somewhere. When he said “yes,” I was on my way to the culmination of twenty-five years of work. I fought Bruce a lot along the way, but in the end I can see that his suggestions were instrumental in strengthening and finding the true heart of this material. I am grateful to Bruce for his patience with



The author pounds out the first draft on a 70s “word-processor”

me, and also to Chris Roerden, the editor whose suggestions have gone a long way toward shaping this final manuscript.

I am immensely indebted to Kent Farnsworth for his tireless assistance in assembling the illustrations for this volume, and for his passionate fellowship over the past twenty-plus years. I am equally grateful to Kent’s wife, Linda Farnsworth, for her personal strength and help through some of the challenging parts of the process. And I want to thank Georja Skinner, who has been a part of this effort from the very beginning, for her unwavering faith in this story.

Finally, I will consider it one of the great privileges of my life to have befriended Elma Farnsworth, and to have assisted her in whatever way I could in the preservation of her husband’s legacy. I can only hope that Pem feels I have done justice to the full sweep of their story.

As the 75th anniversary of the first-ever electronic television transmission approaches in the fall of 2002, I expect there will be another wave in the mounting resurgence of interest in this man whose work so dramatically affected the course of our civilization. I hope that this volume, and all the years that have gone into its making, will add some texture and meaning to that celebration.

Paul Schatzkin

Pegram, Tennessee

May 2002