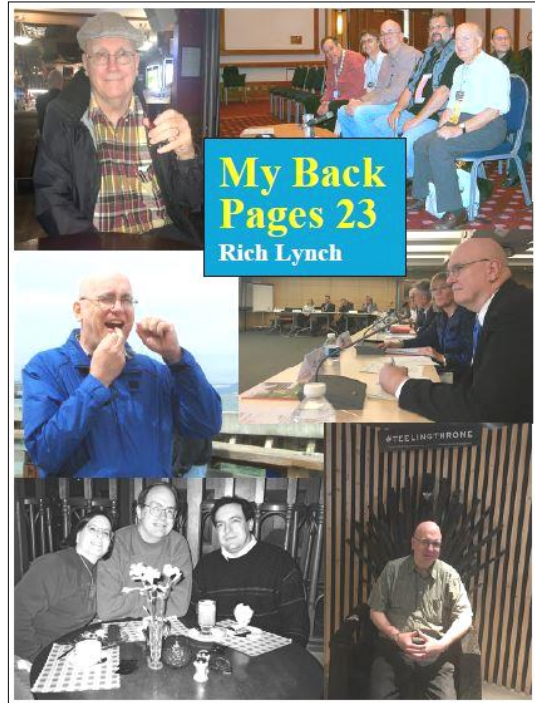


You're Still on My Mind #6

from Rich Lynch * rw_lynch (at) yahoo (dot) com * May 2024

Hello once again! This is the sixth in a continuing series of letterzines for belated conversations with fans who wrote me letters of comment about *My Back Pages*, my personal time capsule which masquerades as a fanzine. The first five issues covered through *MBP 22*, so let's see what readers told me about the next several issues...

I received only two letters of any substance about *MBP 23*, which was published in December 2019. I'd described the issue as "a mixed bag of everything from Broadway musicals to scary movies, from rock music concerts to obscure songs, from a short vacation to a long business trip, from launching rockets to launching baseballs." That 'long business trip' was for a carbon sequestration conference in Australia and after reading about it, [Esther Cole](#) offered the following comment.



I enjoyed revisiting Australia, as your piggy-back rider. Les and I celebrated our 50th wedding anniversary there. Les asked how I wanted to celebrate, and that was our gift to ourselves. We had such a good time, we celebrated No. 51 there, too. We got to New Zealand, as well. It was intact back then. I'm talking about Christchurch where we landed from Australia. I hope that visit didn't contribute to the last calamity.

Esther went on to tell me that her husband Les had died a few months earlier. I'd last seen him (and Esther) when my wife Nicki and I were in California for the 2018 Worldcon.

He had been very sick for a long time. Still, he hung on, and was 93 when I kissed him goodbye, the night before he died. Did you ever read any of Les' published books? One of them, *Spithead*, is an alternate universe where WWI and WWII never happened.

I've read one of Les's novels – *The Sea Kings*, set during the time of the ancient Crete civilization. But I've never found a copy of *Spithead*, at least not yet. Les is much better known as one of the co-chairs of the 1954 Worldcon and for being a member of the Little Men's Science Fiction, Chowder, and Marching Society fan club who, in the early 1950s, had staked a claim for a small part of the Moon and in doing so gained a great amount of visibility in the international news media. I wrote a remembrance of Les that appeared in the **File770.com** newsblog that I'll be reprinting in an upcoming issue of *MBP*.

The other letter of comment about the issue was from frequent correspondent [Lloyd Penney](#). Part of my Australia essay had noted that the Australian chair of one of the conference's meetings had in his opening comments acknowledged "the traditional custodians of the land on which we meet" and paid respects "to the local people for allowing us to have our meeting on their land and to their Elders: past, present and future". Lloyd noted that in Canada a similar degree of respect is now being paid to First Nations people at the start of any Governmental meetings.

Here in Toronto, and this is directly from the city website... "We acknowledge the land we are meeting on is the traditional territory of many nations, including the Mississaugas of the Credit, the Anishnabeg, the Chippewa, the Haudenosaunee and the Wendat peoples, and is now home to many diverse First Nations, Inuit and Métis peoples. We also acknowledge that Toronto is covered by Treaty 13 with the Mississaugas of the Credit."

This is said at the beginning of many events in Toronto, and there are variations depending on where in the province we might be. This has become important in continuing reconciliation with our indigenous peoples.

As far as I know, that kind of recognition is not yet happening in any Governmental meetings held in the United States, at least the ones I've been involved with. Another of the essays in the issue looked back at how the movie *2001: A Space Odyssey* had been received by movie critics and the science fiction community. And also about how it had been adapted from a very fine short story by the famous writer Arthur C. Clarke. I'd noted in my afterword that I'd never had the privilege of meeting Mr. Clarke, and that induced Lloyd to tell me about a now-lost memorial to the author.

As with you, Arthur C. Clarke was someone I had wanted to meet, but it was not to be. Clarke was Yvonne's favorite author, and when the word came down that he had died, Yvonne got a good-quality blank journal, and started a book of condolences. We were the first to sign it, and we passed it along to our fellow fans, after it went around two conventions, one of our local fans, who was also a space enthusiast, asked to take the book down to a large space

conference in the USA, and the book was a hit there. We never did see the book again, but while we were the first to sign, we gather that Buzz Aldrin was the last. We asked that the book be sent to the Clarke family home in Minehead, UK, to Arthur's brother Fred, for he had wanted to set up a museum about his brother. Much later, we found out that Fred has passed away, too. So, we do not know much more about the book of condolences, if it is in a place of honour, or lying in a drawer somewhere.

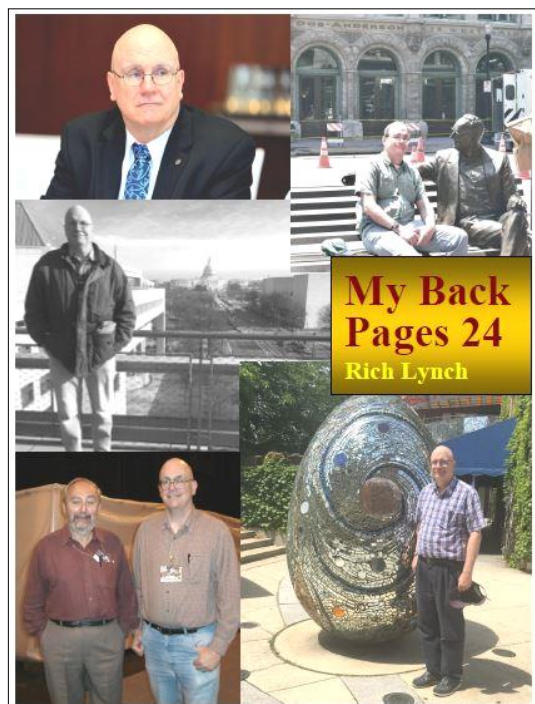
There was a similar kind of memorial, for astronaut Neil Armstrong, that happened during the 2012 Chicago Worldcon – a large placard at the Adler Planetarium (during the visit there by convention attendees) where we all signed it and provided our thoughts of remembrance. Maybe it's now at the Armstrong Air & Space Museum in Ohio. Or maybe it's still at the Adler. I hope it still exists.

My final essay in the issue was about the success of the local professional baseball team, the Washington Nationals, who had won the World Series in 2019. The team at one point in its history had been based in Canada, and Lloyd pointed out that there's still popularity for it there.

There is some interest in Canada about the Washington Nationals, mostly because they used to be the Montreal Expos. Right now, there's excitement about the Raptors and the Leafs, but Montreal remembers their Expos well, especially when the Nationals won the World Series in 2019.

Alas, the team has not done well since then and after four years of futility is only now starting to play well enough to be taken seriously. One last comment Lloyd made before he signed off was about a small event of some kind where he and Yvonne would be vendors. I assume that went well for him, but it also happened only about a month before most of the world was shut down from the COVID-19 pandemic.

MBP 24, published in June 2020, was the first of several issues published during the plague years of the early '20s. Once COVID-19 was declared a pandemic by the World Health Organization in March 2020, public events of all kinds were either canceled or made virtual-only, and that included science fiction conventions. One of them was the MidSouthCon in Memphis. As part of her



response to receiving *MBP 24*, [Greta Coger](#) provided a brief update on what had been happening with her since the onset of the pandemic.

The local Mid South Convention was canceled in March. Only about 20% asked for refunds. The rest are rolled over to 2021. The numbering of that convention is not finally decided yet. I am on the board mainly because of hosting extra meetings at my house and also the Dalvan Coger Hall of Fame Awards made each year at the convention. ... I am staying in, walking around the block or getting on my treadmill, not swimming in my pool yet until a friend will come by as I am 86; though I have no health problems and miss supervised swimming and water exercises at the U of Memphis pool.

Nicki and I did some walking around the neighborhood on days when the weather cooperated. And it was interesting to see the changes that had occurred. Social distancing was easy to observe – other people out on walks invariably crossed to the opposite sides of streets to avoid getting very near each other. Just up the street from us, the Dress-Up Goose which guards the entrance to a house was wearing pandemic protective wear. But the most obvious sign that things were very different was a Soul Pantry that had taken up curbside residence a few houses up the street from ours – a little metal cabinet that was stocked with food supplies, urging people to “take what you need, give when you can”. From what we could see, it got a lot of use during the peak of the pandemic. Nevertheless, there were still a lot of people who seemed to have a cavalier attitude about COVID lockdown, and from how [Lloyd Penney](#) described it in his letter of comment about the issue, it seemed like it was pretty much the same across the border in Canada.

The last event of any kind we attended was our Third Monday fannish pubnight, on March 16. The next day was to be St. Patrick’s Day, but it was lockdown day for the entire province, and much of the country. We’ve been in lockdown since, although we seem to have made it through Stage 2 of the lockdown, and Stage 3 will be announced tomorrow. So many people are taking this entire thing as a hoax, and especially here in Ontario, so many are cheering the easing of the lockdown, and gathering in huge numbers on the beach. They don’t, or won’t get it.

The whole world seems to have discovered Zoom, even though it’s been around for more than a decade. I miss conventions, but I have attended a few Zoom cons and a few lectures. Just not the same.

Lloyd also had a short comment about a spur-of-the-moment pandemic project I’d started – growing a beard.

Yvonne has made facemasks for us and family and friends, and it's become quite the cottage industry for so many. I have tried the beard myself, and I just can't do it. I look rather Amish when I try. It looks like tribbles are sliding down my face and neck. And, Yvonne will not tolerate it, so I suspect I shall be clean-shaven for the rest of my life.

I'm back to being clean shaven again – after I retired in 2022 at the end of February, one of the first things I did was to get rid of the beard. It had turned out to be a bit of a hassle to keep it trimmed to where I liked it and even when I did, it kept getting tainted with food – I found out that one of the things that's damn difficult to clean from a mustache and beard is smoky barbecue sauce. The aroma tended to linger even after a washing.

Another essay in the issue described in length a vacation trip that Nicki and I had made to Paris, Brussels, and Ghent in the summer of 2013. As Lloyd described it, one of them is never going to be on his bucket list of places to visit.

Yvonne is French-Canadian in descent, and I live in a fairly multicultural and multilingual city, so *je comprend un petit peu*. I have asked Yvonne if she ever wanted to go to Paris, and her answer? NO! She says the city is run down and dirty, and she really has no interest. We were in London about 13 months ago...I guess she likes that kind of dirty and rundown a little more.

As far as I'm concerned, both Paris and London are terrific places to spend a few days (as well as lots of money). If I had to choose a favorite, I couldn't. On a closer-to-home topic, I'd written some disparaging remarks about the 45th President of the United States in my afterword to an essay about the pandemic and that had been enough to inspire a comment from Lloyd

Anything I could say about Donald Trump...well, nothing I haven't said elsewhere, and fortunately, I am a foreign national, which makes it a little more difficult to do and say anything about it. ... November will be a most interesting time, and the intervening months between Election Day and Inauguration Day could be the most dangerous and chaotic in American history. Beware, America.

Lloyd, you get 10 out of 10 for those predictions. Even though I'd expected some Trump-stoked unrest in D.C. on the day of the electoral vote count, I hadn't thought that Trump would incite a failed coup. He belongs behind bars, and I look forward to the day when I see a photo of him modeling an orange prison jumpsuit.

One other letter of substance that I received was from [Bruce Gillespie](#), who provided a brief comment on my remembrance of my friend Steve Stiles. And also on the kinds of weather that he doesn't get to experience down in Australia.

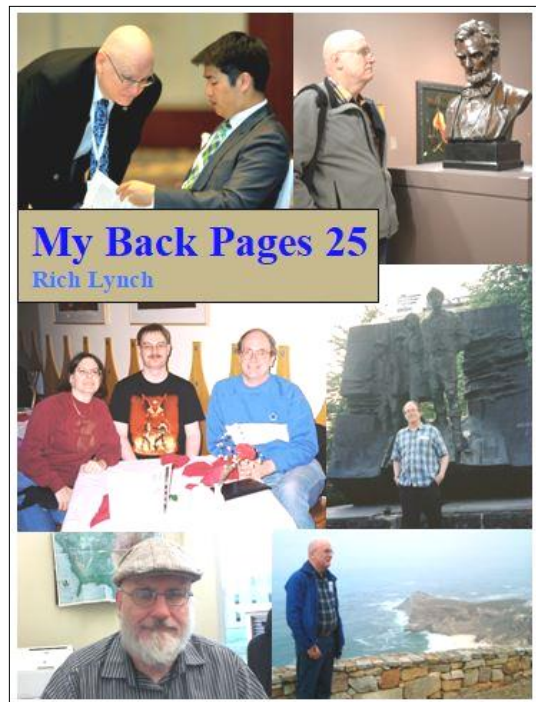
Thanks for the tribute to Steve Stiles from somebody who's met him. Unfortunately I didn't. He didn't have much money in 2005 when I attended Corflu in San Francisco. In fact, few of the regulars from the East Coast except [Ted] White and [Frank] Lunney could make it. When Lunney was leaving the convention, he said that he would be flying into a snowstorm back home. The weather in SF and along that part of the coast during the week I was there was very mild, and I was over-warm during my day touring around Los Angeles.

There was never any chance that Nicki and I would attend the 2005 Corflu fanzine fans' convention. Back then we didn't attend very many conventions (we still don't). And we never did road trips in February (we still don't) because of the ever-persistent threat of major snowstorms. February is usually the worst time for winter weather in these parts, so for that month we're pretty much homebodies.

MBP 25, published in December 2020, was constructed such that every essay had some kind of relevancy or resonance to either the pandemic or the Presidential election, as those were the defining events of the year. The opening 'keynote' essay, "The Whole World's Watching", looked back at defining events for previous decades with special emphasis on the 1968 Chicago riots in Grant Park during that year's Democratic Party Convention. After that the world changed – politics in the United States was perceived as a cutthroat rather than a mostly gentlemanly/gentlewomanly endeavor. And mass entertainment, including the music industry, became edgier and less apt to shy away from controversial topics. An example I cited was the groundbreaking debut album by the jazz-rock group Chicago (when they were still known as Chicago Transit Authority), which contained several politically-charged songs. And this got me an unexpected letter of comment from my now-retired second level boss, **David Mohler**.

I loved CTA back in the day. They were early to mix some jazz and great horns into their stuff. Buffalo Springfield also did "Something's Happening Here" in response to the '68 convention. I was there in Grant Park.

Holy moly! I never knew that! This was even more of a revelation to me than when one of my contractors told me that he'd attended the Woodstock concert



back in 1969. I can't claim to have been present at *any* momentous event. But maybe that's not altogether a bad thing.

Another essay in the issue described Nicki's and my annual early January mini-vacation to New York City, in which we managed to see six Broadway shows during the four days we were there. And David had a tangentially-related comment about that.

I especially enjoyed your Broadway reviews. My daughter is an actress and is still performing even in the pandemic. Did *Hamlet* on Zoom after performing live in *The Lost Colony* here on the Outer Banks last summer. She also performs with a regional choral group, and they sound great on Zoom. She's been asked to a one-year contract for dinner theater in Pigeon Forge, TN, but I think she'll turn it down because the boyfriend is a Carolina boy and seems to have a thing about rival southern states. She's also concerned about Covid19 protocol for a dinner theater.

It's been many years since Nicki and I have been to a dinner theater. There's a good one over in Columbia, Maryland, a bit less than an hour's drive from here, but it's been mostly out of sight / out of mind for us, since it isn't nearly as visible in its promotional material as other relatively nearby regional theatres. I also received a letter from [Mark Olson](#), who commented about the Broadway part of my New York essay. Or more to the point, about my huge displeasure and disappointment with what turned out to be a godawful production of *West Side Story*.

Your reaction to *West Side Story* is very interesting. I like some out-of-place/time versions of Shakespeare a lot. (I would not suggest that my own taste for them should apply to musicals where the music, is, well, important and hard to transplant, BTW.)

Some of the very best Shakespeare I've seen have been a bit odd... E.g., Ian McClellan, et al's *Richard III* set in a vaguely fascist 1930s UK was brilliant. And Helen Mirren playing Prospera in *The Tempest* was also very good. (They can also be terrible. I recently saw National Theatre productions of *Julius Caesar* and *Macbeth* both set in some modern 3rd world dictatorship. It was a tough battle – they competed hard – but *Macbeth* clearly won the title of “Worst Professional Shakespeare Production I Have Ever Seen”.)

Mark also had a few quickie comments about three other essays that described a famous Washington Beltway graffiti incident from the 1970s (“Of Beer and the Beltway”), a nearly-in-vain attempt to see celestial visitor (“Night of the Comet”), and the entertaining Food Network show *Good Eats* (“It's Complicated!”).

I remember seeing the Surrender Dorothy graffiti. I don't remember why we were in DC – Disclave? – but we were warned to look for it.

I'm glad you saw [Comet] Neowise. I almost didn't go looking for it, but finally decided to and it was well worth the wait and the mosquito bites.

We're *Good Eats* fans, but find [Alton Brown's] recipes generally to be too fussy and capable of being radically simplified some times without loss of quality.

Here's a somewhat strange postscript to the "Of Beer and the Beltway" essay. 7 Locks Brewery's 'Surrender Dorothy' beer was renamed 'Surrender' back in the autumn of 2021 after they were cease-and-desisted by Turner Entertainment, which owns the rights to *The Wizard of Oz* movie. This, in spite of the fact that the name of the beer referenced a news story from the early 1970s that had nothing to do with the movie. If the brewing company had fought it they might have won, but I guess they figured that it would have been too costly and that it was easier just to make a name adjustment. As for Comet Neowise, I guess I was disappointed at how relatively faint it was. I hadn't been expecting another Hale Bopp, but I had been hoping it would be much more of a naked eye object than it turned out to be. And it looks like the revival of *Good Eats* was short-lived – there hasn't been any new episodes since about the spring of 2021. Nicki and I only watched the show for entertainment value and haven't tried to do any of the recipes. And yeah, some of them did seem overly intricate.

Circling back to my New York essay, after reading about how dreadful the new production of *West Side Story* was, [Jeff Copeland](#) wondered if the 2021 movie remake was any good.

I was disappointed about what you said about the revival of *West Side Story*. I notice that there's a new movie of it, directed by Steven Spielberg with a book rewritten by Tony Kushner. I wonder if the movie makes that same mistakes as the revival.

It did not. I watched the movie when it came to one of the streaming services we subscribe to, and it mostly succeeded in washing away the foulness of that terrible Broadway show. I don't know why Spielberg felt like the 1961 movie needed a remake, but he treated it with respect and the result seemed to me nearly as good as the original.

Another letter of substance about the issue came from [Lloyd Penney](#), who also had something to say about my New York Essay. But in this case, it was related to our visit to the Museum of the Moving Image and it's permanent exhibition dedicated to the great Jim Henson and his production company.

I would have liked to have seen The Jim Henson Exhibition. We met him at a Worldcon some years ago, and being Canadian, we knew that Canadian puppeteers and writers were being recruited to work on the new show called *Fraggle Rock*. When we were at the Henson panel, we asked about *Fraggle Rock*... “Oh, you guys must be from Canada.” The masses demanded to know, and Henson had to spill it all to the adoring fans. Sorry, Jim, but you would have had to tell all at some point, we just hastened that opportunity along.

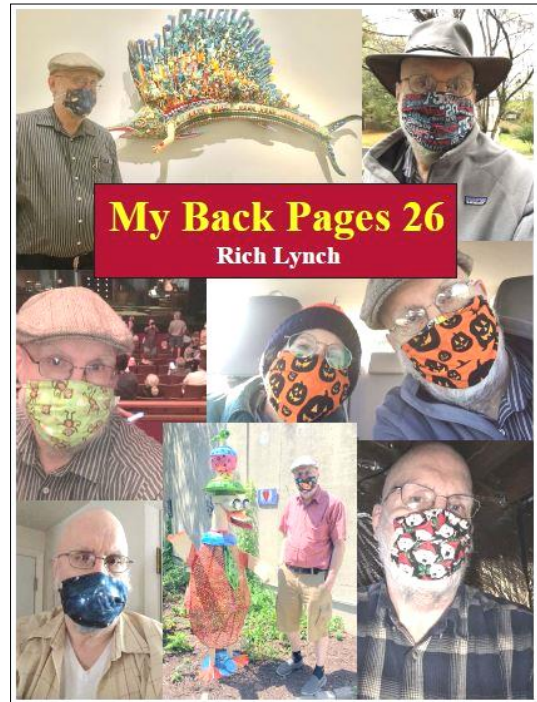
Fraggle Rock was part of the exhibition, but it was only a small part. There was much more about *The Muppet Show* and some of his movies. The exhibition also contained a small screening room where Nicki and I enjoyed a 1970s episode of *The Muppet Show*. Overall, there was a lot to like and it did a good job of tracing Henson’s career all the way back to its very beginnings here in the D.C. area. I have to wonder what he would have further accomplished if he had lived. As for his appearance at the Worldcon, that happened in 1983 (in Baltimore). Nicki and I were there and attended the Henson presentation, but my only memory of that was somebody asking Henson a question and requesting that he answer as Kermit the Frog. Which he did.

One other essay in the issue got a substantial comment – my review of the Stephen Foster tribute album *Beautiful Dreamer*. I had titled the essay “The Best Tribute Album You’ve Probably Never Listened To”, but [Bruce Gillespie](#) proved me wrong.

I have a copy of *Beautiful Dreamer*, one of the very best tribute albums ... and I collect tribute albums whenever I hear about them. Raoul Malo’s version of “Beautiful Dreamer” alerted me to him as a singer, and then I discovered him as the singer with the Mavericks, but well after most of their albums appeared. Any version of “Hard Times” goes well with me, although my favourites are Emmylou Harris’s (on a box set) and a version I heard on the radio, but can’t track down, by Martha Wainwright.

It’s certainly a terrific album. Like you, it pointed Nicki and me toward Raúl Malo and the Mavericks and we became big fans of them. (If you can find reruns of the *Austin City Limits* concert series, they’re featured in one of the episodes.) I haven’t heard Martha Wainwright’s cover of “Hard Times” and I couldn’t find it on YouTube. There *is* a cover of the song there that features Rufus and Martha Wainwright with several other singers – it was recorded sometime in 2021 apparently as a statement of defiance about the pandemic. But I still think I like Mavis Staples’ cover from *Beautiful Dreamer* the best. She sings it as a Gospel song, a perfect choice for the album. I think it’s probably the third best cover on *Beautiful Dreamer*, which is an indication of how good the album is.

As its cover might indicate, [MBP 26](#) (published in December 2021) was once again composed in the belly of the beast, a.k.a. the fucking COVID-19 pandemic. Life had become very much stay-at-home and almost every essay in the issue had been written during the previous 12 months. One of them was a fan history article I'd written for the Souvenir Book of the 2021 Worldcon, held in Washington, D.C., that looked back at the 1963 Worldcon, also held in Washington. In the prologue to that article I'd mentioned that Nicki and I were "sufficiently pissed off at the convention committee for a couple of reasons such that one day's attendance seems sufficient (mostly so we can vote in site selection for the 2023 Worldcon and connect up with out-of-town friends who will be there)". And [Mark Olson](#) had a comment about that.



I find that I wish I'd gone and am very glad I didn't, if that makes any sense at all. There are so many people I would have liked to have visited with and Worldcon is, well Worldcon. (Well, it was, anyway.)

But I have found that I don't enjoy trying to communicate and socialize with people while masked, so that would likely have diminished my enjoyment quite a bit. I also really enjoy convention dinners with friends, but the confined space of a restaurant is still a bit off-putting. (I think you were smart to stay out of program rooms – if there's anything we know about the transmission of Covid is that it's by air and risk is pretty much directly proportional to the number of people per unit volume.) (I must admit to a distinct glint of schadenfreude at the WSFS Business Meeting being the main source of contagion...)

Indeed, there had been many COVID infections which had happened at the convention, even with the strict masking rules that were in effect. Nicki and I had been multiply-vaxed by the time of Discon III but I still I count it as an accomplishment that we remained COVID-free. By then it was 21 months into the pandemic and, as [Lloyd Penney](#) attested, it had worn us down.

This pandemic lost its novelty long ago, and we date the beginning of the lockdown connected with it from St. Patrick's Day of 2020. Coming up on two

years. We are fully vaccinated, with one of each...Astra-Zeneca, Moderna and Pfizer, with a flu shot as chaser. Just wish we had some place to go... with provincial government mandates, just about everything is shut down again. Good opportunity to catch up with fanzines, I guess...

So many of us thought we might see the end of the COVID tunnel, but it was just the Omicron Variant train, coming straight at us. Yvonne had made a lot of face masks over the past year or so, and it sure did get rid of a lot of excess fabric. More and more, we hear that the blue gauze masks we all seem to have just aren't good enough, that the N95 masks should be used by everyone. They are not cheap, though...

Nicki and I each had been triply-vaxed by the time of Discon III (all of them mRNA vaccines) and we've each had an additional four vaxes in the nearly 2½ years since then. With more yet to come, no doubt. Before and during the Discon we were still wearing Nicki's homemade masks (which were multiple ply in thickness), but a couple of months after that the county where we live started making N95 masks available for free at branches of the public library and we immediately switched over those. The pandemic was declared over about a year ago, and even though there are still new transmissions happening we no longer feel the need to wear masks.

MBP 26 contained two essays that remembered departed friends. One of them was Walt Willis, of whom I'd put together a collection of all of his fan history articles that had appeared in Nicki's and my fanzine *Mimosa*. I'd mentioned in the essay that I only got to meet Walt one time – at the 1992 Worldcon in Orlando, where he was a Guest of Honor. It was the same for Lloyd.

I got to meet Walt Willis at Magicon, too. I was introduced to him in the fan lounge there, and he complemented me on my quality, and quantity, of locs. I am not sure if my feet were touching the floor after that.

I'm now believing that Lloyd had a longer conversation with Walt than I did – mine was in the Green Room after the Hugo Awards ceremony had concluded and I only remember talking to him for just a minute or two. Ever since then I've been mentally kicking myself for not finding a way to spend more time with Walt during the convention even though that might have been a challenge, considering how busy a schedule he'd had.

The other remembrance in the issue was for fanartist Charlie Williams, the only other person besides Nicki and me who had been represented in all 30 issues of *Mimosa*. He was one of three different and unrelated Tennessee fans named Charlie Williams, all of them friends, and it was a strange and terrible coincidence that all three of them died in 2021. Lloyd had a comment about that.

I knew of a Charlie Williams, and I noticed there was more than one as well, unless his fanac was at a high level. I think we have all lost friends to the pandemic...just this morning, I learned that Bill Mills in Las Vegas has passed away, and his name goes at the top of a long list.

I never met Bill Mills and I'm sorry Lloyd never got to meet any of the Charlie Williamses. They all had lively personalities, and they're all much missed. Lloyd's final comment on the issue was about my opening essay in which I'd lamented the lack of Halloween trick-or-treaters and had noted that as a result, Nicki and I had been left with a very large number of Hershey's Miniatures to consume.

Hallowe'en in 2021 was a no go. We never had anyone banging at our doors that night, and we don't usually find out about Hallowe'en parties until after they happen, so any chocolate we might have had was for us. ... Two Hershey's Miniatures franked into the next issue?

Not a chance! It took several days, but we eventually scarfed them all down. It turned out that the 2021 All Hallows' Eve was an aberration in terms of amount of trick-or-treaters. The Halloweens since then had about the usual number of them, which left us far fewer Hershey's Miniatures to eat afterwards. (Not sure if that's a good thing or a bad thing.)

There was one more letter of comment I received about the issue, from my friend [Staci Ostrup](#) who is a science fiction reader but is not really into fandom.

I'm only a few essays in, but this is totally what I'm doing today. I love how you write. The words you use to tie these essays together, such as this last paragraph I read after Paris, well.... it's our life, too... feeling vax'd enough to wander further in the world. It's a very blustery, cold day, so I think I'm going to remain under my warm blankie and keep reading your essays.

She'd been referring to my statement that after being multiply vaxed, Nicki and I had finally started to feel a bit better about being out in public. Meanwhile, it's a cold and blustery day here in Maryland, so I may follow her lead and find a warm blankie for myself.

And that's it for this issue. Next one will be in August or September. Before then there will be another issue of *My Back Pages* and most likely that'll happen in June. Previous issues of *MBP* and *YSOMM* are readily available at both efanzines.com and fanac.org. Thank you all for writing!

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