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AN ICE DAY FOR CRUISING THE BLUES

Being random jottings from a summer cruise to Antarctica (Jan. 25-Feb. 5, 2001).

"Getting There Is Half the Fun" goes an old adage. Not when getting there involves a 6-hour flight to Miami, over-nighting at an airport hotel with fairly outrageous restaurant prices and nothing else nearby, then 13 hours on a Charter airline to the southernmost town in South America (with a 2-hour stop in Buenos Aires). Luckily the cruise was a lot more than twice as much fun as getting there.

The crew and staff of Orient Lines "Marco Polo" are very good at dealing with a bunch of Old Fogies (and Old Bats) with less than 100% mobility, getting them into and out of rubber rafts -- Zodiac Boats -- and shepherding them through the rocks, snow, and ice on Antarctic shores. Not all of the 400 passengers were in those classes, but 60-70% probably were. I know I was. And I found myself shaking my head in both wonder and dismay at one passenger, who I unkindly labeled "the 2-stick hippo," taking the cruise. She was extremely overweight, and couldn't move without her two arm-crutches, so she couldn't go ashore in the Zodiacs at all. It must have taken a L*O*T of intestinal fortitude to sink that much money in a cruise from which one would get so much less than optimum return -- hence both the wonder and the dismay.

Penguins. Reportedly 140,000 of them -- Gentoo Penguins, as were almost all the ones we saw -- on Cuverville Island. And, as the Zodiac rounded to the downwind side, we were perfectly willing to acknowledge that number, if not two or three times that number. And they'd been there for centuries, we were sure. Anyone who has been on a chicken or turkey farm has a small idea of what that many penguins can add to the effluvia.

More Penguins. When we went ashore at Port Lockroy we could wander within five or six yards of them. (If they wanted to wander closer, that was OK, but we were supposed to limit approach to 15 feet or so.) When we were ready to go back, we had to go through a waterfront boot-cleaning station. Three pairs of plastic chairs were set up, with a crew/staff member in one of each pair. Passengers would sit down and get our boots scrubbed of any residual penguin shit so that we didn't bring it back on board. As a final precaution, when we got on board another set of staff members removed our boots and plastic-bagged them for us to carry to our staterooms. Penguin shit is *really* powerful!

And Yet More Penguins. Chinstrap Penguins, on Half Moon Island. Clean ones, wandering up from the water and heading uphill to the nesting area, or maybe sliding back down on their bellies and cleaning off in the snow. Dirty ones waddling -- or foot-sliding, which seemed to be preferred to belly-sliding -- down.

Penguins swimming -- doing "water-angels" or "dolphining."

Seals -- Crabeater Seals (which don't eat crabs), Antarctic Fur Seals. One of the latter snoozing happily on Half Moon Island in the middle of penguin trails and a couple hundred tourists -- about 75-100 at a time -- wandering around taking pictures.

Whales, very occasionally seen from the ship.

Ice. Lemaire Channel so full of bits of iceberg that the Marco Polo sends its helicopter to scout out the channel and determine if the ship -- whose hull is ice-strengthened but not as strong as an ice-breaker -- can safely pass through. And Blue Ice -- ice from which the air has been compressed out by glacial pressures. I'd seen Blue Ice in Alaska, when we landed on the top of a glacier, usually with melt-water on top, looking like a very pretty pool, or in a crevice. Antarctica had the darkest Blue Ice I've ever seen -- huge chunks of it floated past the ship once in a while.

Sky Shows at sunset. Especially impressive over Port Lockroy, for some reason.

Remnants of History. Port Lockroy beach has a bunch of bleached whale bones. Half Moon Island beach has a derelict dory, probably from a whaling ship of the very early 1900's.

Participation in Human Affairs. Sort of. On Jan. 31, heading for Paradise Harbor, the Polo got a radio message. A yacht had brought five Australians to Antarctica, and two of them had gone mountain climbing. An avalanche had caught them, and one was carried into a crevasse. He was alive, but in bad shape. Two of the three from the yacht were heading up to help, but more help would be needed. Of the three ships in the area, only the Polo had a helicopter, so we turned around and headed north for about 7 hours. The weather was bad, and the chopper couldn't get to the fallen climber, so we anchored and waited for the weather to change. It didn't. We passed the time doing an impromptu Zodiac landing on the Continent (instead of the Islands around it that we'd been visiting) just to say we'd been there. On board, it snowed on us enough that we could make snowballs by scraping along the railings. (I have photographic evidence.) The next morning the weather was still bad, but the Chilean Naval Base on Antarctica had arrived with its helicopter, and the Polo was released from duty. When last we heard, a day or so later, the climber was alive but paralyzed from the waist down, out of the crevasse and down to helicopter-reach, and was on his way to a hospital in Ushuaia.

Ushuaia. (Pronounced "Oo-SHWAY-uh") Yet another addition to the Direction-most Town (or Whatever) of a Continent collection. I think that makes 3 -- Southernmost / South America (Ushuaia); Northernmost / Europe (Nordkapp); Southernmost / North America (Key West). Lots more to go.

Joyce Katz responded to a copy of TRIPE (pronounced "Trippy") REPORT 43:

*We received your postcard today from the southern tip of Argentina
-- this is one of the most interesting spots (to me) of all you've visited. I*

have always wondered if this place was like northern Alaska, frigid and dreadful, and too close to the pole to be habitable. I was impressed by the picture of the city (and those great snow-covered mountains.) And is the ocean there wild and horrible all the time, as in 'Mutiny on the Bounty', or only at certain times of the year? And do the people all wear gaucho costumes with those flat hats with balls like Rudolph Valentino?

Well, the ocean around Ushuaia was pretty calm, but when one got further south, toward Cape Horn, then into the Drake Passage, it cut up rough even in summer. On the way south I wasn't paying much attention to it, but I tried to read a small-print book while the ship was doing various gyrations, and wound up with a fairly fierce headache. I retired to the cabin for the rest of the evening. As yet I haven't got seasick in the eleven years we've been doing this Cruising Thing, but I'll add the Drake Passage to a couple of others I consider Close Calls. (On the way back, we went through the Passage at night, and I slept through it with no problem.)

And the Native Costume in summertime Ushuaia appears to be jeans and tee shirts. With a strong wind blowing, it was cold enough on the morning of the 3rd of February for us to wear our parkas for the trip to nearby *Parque Nacional de Tierra del Fuego*, but by the time we returned at mid-day, the parkas were off. Modernized to the point of having a CyberCafe, Ushuaia retains at least one feature of archetypal Latin America: everything -- well, almost everything -- closes down from 1:00 to 4:00 in the afternoon for siesta.

Outfitting. The red parkas were complementary cruise presentations -- they make for easy spotting, from a distance, of the difference between a tourist and a penguin. Other than that, we of the Southern California contingent got to do some shopping for stuff we may never wear again: glove liners, thermals, waterproof overpants, wading boots. Of course, if one were a skier one might make further use of the stuff. Me, I'll take a couple of them to Boskone... .

Repeating. It is unlikely that we'll go back again, but I have learned: Never Say Never. As we lay docked at Ushuaia at the end of the cruise, I saw that the *Black Watch* cruise ship was docked alongside of us. I knew the name as one from a British line that I thought stayed up in the North Sea and Mediterranean areas. I wonder what kind of itineraries they have to bring them to Antarctica... .

HOWDAH

NOTHING EXCEEDS LIKE EXCESS Things that one enjoys doing are things that one usually wants to do more of. But every once in a while "more of" such things goes over the line to "too much of" them. An example was the collection of miniature liqueur (etc.) bottles that I had. It was doing fine, with two or three hundred bottles, until John Sapienza offered to give me his collection of the things. Five boxes, each with about 100 bottles. I had no room to handle such an influx, so I started trying to get rid of the collection. (I still have far too many of them left, even after recycling the empty ones -- John wasn't a Only Full Bottles purist as I had been.) There are boxes of them out in a storage area. I ought to start hauling them to conventions a dozen or so at a time and giving them back to John.

The subject of More Leads To Too Much popped up recently because I have -- and am taking -- an opportunity to Over-do Cruising. With the aid of a friend who works for Princess Cruises, we are about to take three cruises back-to-back-to-back. The price was too good a deal not to take all three.

We start by repeating the Mombasa-to-Cape Town cruise of two years ago, which takes 11 days, starting on March 2. Then Cape Town to Istanbul: 25 days. Then Istanbul to New York: 29 days. Total: 65 days. I wonder how that will compare to 50 player pianos... .

The ship is the Pacific Princess again, the smallest of the Princess line -- and one they keep threatening to get rid of as they got rid of her sister ship the Island Princess. Small ships are supposedly not popular these days. (They are with us.) We are learning that some preparations don't ramp up from 7-day (or even 14-day) cruises to something this big. For instance, one can take along clothing for 14 days and do laundry when one gets home; for 65 days one plans to do laundry on the ship once a week from week 3 onward.

If this *Tour de Farce* doesn't discourage me from being a Cruisaholic, I suppose I'll be in shape to try a World Cruise. (Then I'll just have the problem of winning the Lottery to finance such a thing. I don't think Princess gives F&F Rates for a World Cruise.)

ELEPHANT GOAD

A (VERY) FEW COMMENTS ON FAPA 253

SANSEVIERIA 38 (Dale Speirs) I found myself considering, as I read through your review of CON-Version 17, how many of the new authors I have or haven't actually heard of. I know of two of Rebecca Bradley's "three published fantasy novels" (*Lady In Gil*, *Scion's Lady*), but doubt I would have if I weren't a bookseller. I don't know of anything by J. Brian Clarke, or Leslie Gadallah. My records bring up one of Candas Jane Dorsey's anthologies (*Black Wine*), even if my memory couldn't.

Black Wine was from Tor, Bradley's two from Ace -- is the problem with the others lack of US circulation for Canadian publishers, or small-press publishing, or just my (admitted) ignorance?

TRIAL AND AIR I:IV (Michael Waite) On the assumption that you mean, by "class of '36," those born in that year, I can at least add one more data point to your collection: Yes, I liked -- and still like, though not to the same degree, I'm afraid -- astronomy. I still remember wanting, at an early-teen stage, wanting to be an astronomer.

Excuse me while I goshwow a bit: DTP has made producing good-looking fanzines much easier -- to a point where even I can almost do so -- but TaA is extraordinarily impressive!

Those excellent photos from Australia belong in an indexed archive (together with a bit more information as to When & Where (and maybe why)). Would you be able to inquire of Dick Jensen if he would mind them being added to the photo archive that FANAC -- Joe Siclari's Florida-based fan-historical organization -- is maintaining? And I'm positive Siclari -- <jsiclari@bellsouth.net> -- will want to talk about any other fan-historical photos Dick might have.

REYEARVIEW – 2000

The Year Of The Expensive Cat

The week after the December 1999 SMOFCon, it became obvious that Vic, the younger of our two cats, had a Serious Problem. He wasn't eating well, and he bumped into things. So off we went to the vet. Then off to the Cat Optics specialist the vet recommended. The verdict was Not Good: Vic had picked up a virus, which could become deadly, and it had caused him to go blind. There was a pill treatment for it, but no guarantee that his sight would ever return, and the pills -- to be given twice a day -- were Expensive.

Our HMO pharmacy plan didn't recognize anyone in the family named Vic, so the best we could do was from the pharmacy at Costco, which charged about \$4 a pill. After a couple monthly check-ups, the dosage was dropped 25%, alternating one- and two-pill days. The check-ups became bi-monthly. The virus concentration dropped from thousands to hundreds, to 50-some, to 20-some over the year, and with the November checkup the vet suggested the pills could be stopped when the current batch ran out in December, almost a year after they started.

Vic regained his Appetite and Attitude, but not his vision. So we have a housebound, fat, blind cat that bedevils his larger, older, and much more mobile housemate, Chicago. But we DO still have the cat. (In addition to vet and pharmacy bills, there was the problem of what to do when we went traveling. We didn't want to burden any house-sitter with trying to pill Vic, so we carted him off to a Pet Hotel, where they were quite used to doing such things without even charging extra. Chicago could be left home and fed by our house-sitter with little difficulty.) After the January checkup we'll see if improvement continues without the pills. Or at least if things don't get worse without them.

Con-Tinuing Games

I stepped down as Chair of the Southern California Institute for Fan Interests, Inc. (SCIFI, Inc.) in January, and served the year as Vice Chair for Conventions. Elayne continues as Treasurer, and both of us were re-elected for our 7th consecutive 3-year term when SCIFI Directors were elected in mid-year. (There are eight of us, of the present 23 Directors, who have been Directors continuously since the organization was started in 1982.)

I attended relatively few Science Fiction Conventions during the year, for one reason or another. In February I got an attack of Cheap-itis, worrying a bit about paying for an upcoming trip in April, and reneged on my intent to attend Boskone, the Boston area's regional convention to which both Elayne and I have Life Memberships. Instead, I went to Gallifrey One #11, the local "Doctor Who" convention that weekend, as a bookseller. Since I could drive back and forth, staying at home at night, I actually made a bit of money instead of spending the thousand or so that airfare and hotel would have cost if I went to Boskone. I re-worded my intent, and expect to

attend Boskone in 2001. We'll see. Gallifrey One is on a different weekend for a change, and we have no cruise scheduled for Presidents' Day weekend, as we did in 1999, so maybe I'll get there this time.

In May I did my Bookseller Routine at two small conventions, Con-Dor in San Diego, and the local LASFS Fund Raiser, Hu-La-La Con. Con-Dor was enjoyable, if not especially profitable. We also put on a party to promote SCIFI's Westercon bid. Hu-La-La made money for the club, part of which came from a percentage of my booksales. (The rest came from memberships and auctions of donated "stuff.")

In June I went to Midwestcon in Cincinnati, talked up the Westercon bid, and got a number of people who were eligible to vote but hadn't yet to send their ballots in to the tellers with me. The votes would be counted the following weekend, at the current-year's Westercon in Honolulu.

I also wound up being point- and bag-man for a \$1-a-guess pool on how many actual attendees Conolulu would get. Quite a few people at Midwestcon kicked in a buck and signed up. I don't remember whose Brainstorm the pool was -- it wasn't mine -- but it started the week before Midwestcon, and had 38 entrants by the time it was over. It was sparked by the large number of usual Westercon attendees who reported they wouldn't be going this year. The guesses ran from a hyper-pessimistic 101 to a hyper-optimistic 432, with most (26) being in the 200's. (Westercons in the larger cities get over 1000 attendees.) The actual number wasn't made public during the con, or for more than four months afterwards, but at Loscon in November the Chair of Conolulu admitted that it had attracted 240 actual attendees. I had to drive home from Loscon to get the list and see who'd been closest, and the result, I have to admit, looks somewhat fishy: the \$38 went to Elayne, whose 242 was one point closer than Peggy Rae's Sapienza's 243 and two points closer than Priscilla Olson's 236 and Ruth Sachter's 244. Wealth Beyond The Dreams Of Avarice.

At Conolulu itself, I sat behind a table pushing the Los Angeles bid for 2002, while Elayne represented the bid at the Voting Table. (Others relieved us every now and then.) When the Main Room closed down for the evening the first night, we and our Mesa, Arizona, opponents grabbed some dinner, then threw bid parties to entice the Undecided to vote for us. The second night representatives of both bids, plus Neutral Observers from Conolulu, counted ballots. The third night we threw a Victory Party. Arizona will be bidding for Westercon 2004, and we promised our support for their efforts.

Now I get to chair another Westercon. Now I *have* to chair another Westercon. (I chaired one and co-chaired another, a long time ago.) Some people never learn.

At the end of July, the 25th -- and Final -- Rivercon was held in Louisville, and the committee subsidized as many of their Past Guests of Honor and Toastmasters as they could convince to return. I would have gone anyway, as I've been quite fond of Rivercon, but as a Past Toastmaster I too received a subsidy. (I have never been happy with the job I did, and would flat-out refuse any other request to serve as Toastmaster, but the Rivercon people are very forgiving... .) It was a great convention, a wonderfully appropriate Finale. As it is difficult to believe that Louisville Fandom won't have a regional convention any more, even if it isn't Rivercon, I shall watch carefully to see what arises from the celebratory ashes.

I did little official at Rivercon except help with the Fan Fund charity auction, but that was quite enjoyable, and the generosity of both donors and bidders swelled the coffers of the Down Under Fan Fund substantially. The con also served as a staging area for some long-range planning of Worldcon bidding, as the information was passed that the Japanese bid would be for 2007, not against the British bid for 2005, or even for the contiguous 2006.

Over Labor Day, Chicago held the Worldcon for the 6th time in the con's 62 years. Elayne disappeared into the Registration Dept. for most of the con, and I disappeared into the Exhibits

Dept. even more. (When it was time to tear down the History of the Worldcon Exhibit on Monday, there was still a small part of it that I hadn't yet been able to put up. Yuck.) Part of the time-sink was chasing down the 80+ different ribbons that Chicago had had printed, and had distributed to its Department Heads without saving a copy of each for the History Exhibit. Everyone was quite co-operative, but *finding* the appropriate people at the appropriate occasions (when they had copies of the ribbons) took a *lot* of time.

Los Angeles distributed a flyer announcing a bid for the 2006 Worldcon, to be launched in November at Loscon. Bidders for 2003 (Toronto and Cancun; Toronto won), 2004 (Boston and Charlotte), and 2005 (Glasgow) partied into the night, along with the 2001 Worldcon (Philadelphia) committee. The Society of Past (and future-Past) Chairs of Worldcon had another party, which Chicon sponsored and the party-efficient Bostonians set up and ran, and we again took a group Picture For The History Books.

One of these Chicons Elayne and I are going to have to make time to see some of Chicago... .

In November we went to Orycon one weekend, then worked Loscon over the next -- Thanksgiving -- weekend. Elayne was Treasurer, and I ran the Fan Lounge. VERIP Books set up in part of the Fan Lounge, and did almost as well as last year.

I regret missing Boskone, Corflu, and especially <plokta.con> Ah, well: Play This One.

Confessions of a Cruise-aholic

If an obsession is something that takes up an unwarranted amount of one's time and money, than Cruises are probably an obsession with me. This year we managed five of them, from a couple 4-day Get-Out-Of-Town cruises to a 24-day Cruise-Tour.

In March we took the first 4-day, aboard the Royal Caribbean ship Viking Serenade, courtesy of the Diet Coke Rewards program. The program, which gave you points toward all sorts of vacation-like stuff whenever you bought Diet Coke through your standard club-running supermarket, was curtailed about a year and a half after it started, when it hoped to go three years. Before it faded, though, Elayne and I snagged the 6700-point RCI Cruise for two (and, when they subsequently pulled the Cruise from their List, a 6700-point set of 25,000 Delta Miles). Liz Mortensen also managed to snag the Cruise, so she and Ed Green joined us in March as we Got Out Of Town to San Diego, Catalina, and Ensenada, more or less for free.

In April we took the long Cruise-Tour. We flew to New Delhi, India, spent a few days there and in Agra (to see the Taj Mahal), then flew to Bombay to board the Orient Lines ship Marco Polo. The Polo sailed first to Djibouti, on the east coast of Africa, then to Safage, Egypt, for a 2-day trip overland to Luxor. We went with the main mob the first day, but bailed out on the second, taking a balloon flight over the desert near the Valley of the Kings instead of going with the rest of the 700 Polo passengers to see the tombs. We doubted we would see as much -- let alone more -- of the tombs as we saw on our 1995 Egypt trip, and the balloon sounded like more fun.

The Polo then went to Aqaba, Jordan, for a visit to Petra, then back to Egypt. This time we docked at Suez and buses took the passengers, including Elayne, on a several-hour jaunt to Cairo and the Pyramids. I stayed on the ship, and, from what Elayne reported, that was a good idea. Because of time constraints they got to see very little of anything -- and, again, we were there a few years ago with a better timetable.

Through the Suez Canal, stopping at Haifa, Israel -- on Good Friday, yet! -- for visits to either Jerusalem or Acre. We took Acre and the Crusaders' history. And finally to Athens, for a two-day stay. Many places -- almost all except maybe Djibouti -- would repay revisits.

The most profitable area for cruise ships in the summer -- late April through early October, more or less -- is Alaska. In the winter, it is the Caribbean. To get their ships from one to the other, and yet make them pay their way doing it, the companies offer reduced rates for Repositioning Cruises.

In May, through the good graces of Ed Hooper, a LASFSian and a Princess Cruises employee, Elayne and I got a very cheap rate for a repositioning cruise on the Sea Princess. We flew to Acapulco and sailed back to Los Angeles in seven days, discovering that the Sun Class of Princess Cruises ships was quite comfortable to us, though we had feared it would be too big. That means we can comfortably book any of the Sea Princess's sister ships Sun Princess, Dawn Princess, and Ocean Princess. Acapulco was the only new port for us, and we went ashore to take a delightfully bizarre river boat ride with the Shotover Jet Boat company.

Then, in late September, when the repositioning of ships went in the other direction, we again flew to Acapulco. This time we boarded the Ocean Princess -- again through the courtesy of Ed Hooper -- and took it for 12 days, via Puntarenas (Costa Rica), the Panama Canal, Cartagena (Colombia), Aruba, Barbados, Dominica, (all Caribbean island countries), and St. Thomas (U.S. Virgin Islands), to San Juan, Puerto Rico.

The year's cruise list ended as it began -- a 4-day Get-Out-Of-Town cruise on the Viking Serenade -- in early December. The Serenade will be retired in a year or so -- latest estimate is spring 2002 -- and we'll probably ride it a few more times before it goes.

Missile Aneas

I ran the second annual Gary Louie Memorial Mah-Jong Tournament in September. With a little finagling we again had 32 entrants, and, learning from last year, ran only two game rounds on Saturday, with the last two scheduled on Sunday. Once again the final round had to be postponed, this year because a finalist had Theatre Tickets for Sunday night. But it was eventually held, and won by Elayne, who'd been a Reserve co-opted to make up the field of 32! Charles Matheny came in second, Liz Mortensen third, and Darcee Golden fourth. (I got eliminated in Round One.) Maybe the third year will run even smoother.

Neither of us broke any body limb parts this year, though my arthritis got worse in September. I took a cane on the Ocean Princess and opted out of a shore excursion that involved "rustic paths." (Elayne went and reported I'd never have made it up the hill.)

We're still working on downsizing the ~~junk~~ Valuable Collections lying around. It would be nice to discover more stuff that is Highly Desirable To Monied Individuals, but I don't think there are any hidden Freas Astounding covers anywhere. And UC Riverside can't afford to *buy* the fanzine collection. I wonder what the recyclers would pay by the ton...? ☺

We wish you the best of the New Year and the New Millennium! Open the Pod Door, HAL!

-- Bruce & Elayne