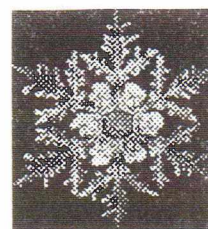




The PATRIOTIC Route





# THE PATRIOTIC ROUTE

being an account faithful and exhaustive

of the journey into

THE HEART OF WINTER and

THE HEART OF AMERICA by

***Guy and Rose-Marie Lillian***

December 20-31, 2001

written by the former in January, 2002

for the Southern Fandom Press Alliance and readers various

P.O. Box 53092 New Orleans LA 70153-3092

GHLIII@yahoo.com

GHLIII Press Publication #925

\*\*\*

Everywhere we went we saw the phrase. It looked down from billboards from the interstate approaching Nashville. It blinked from electronic road signs at work sites in Ohio. It hung from dozens of auto bumpers, from state after state, at Niagara Falls. It leered from the plastic wall of a portable toilet on Broadway in New York. It was scrawled, by hundreds of different hands, on missing persons flyers on the fences around Ground Zero.

*God bless America.*

It's a corny sentiment and I admit to residual problems with it. I remember, probably too well, when such phrases were brandished to shore up support for the Vietnam War and the supremely obscene administration which pursued it. It requires a trick of the spirit to call heavenly mercy down on a country that blinds you with tear gas and butchers your contemporaries. I got through the antiwar era at UC Berkeley by keeping in mind images of a truer America than the tear gas horror that greeted me and mine every spring. The sun-etched faces of a cowboy couple on a bus in Arizona. My cousin Jimmy smiling at 8, as he taught me to climb trees, and grimacing bitterly at 21, on his way to death in Indochina. The firemen struggling into the World Trade Center on September 11<sup>th</sup>, trying to find and help someone, anyone, in peril. You have to remember that a country is far more than the moment, no matter how sickening that moment may be.

That's how I'll get through my suspicion and revulsion at the government of today, the government of W and his 90 proof pretzels and John Ashcroft and his contempt for due process. I'll remember what's real about America. Jefferson's home, Jefferson's heart, the tops of cranes, moving, ever moving, and fences hung with people's pictures and children's notes and flowers, flowers, flowers, flowers. You can't help but God-bless a country like that.

Around a quarter of the nation Rose-Marie and I traveled, to end the incredible year 2001. We journeyed through snow and past horror, confronting the nightmare which afflicts us all and the city that haunts me, personally. It was a very personal journey, of course, but it took us also over sacred common ground. We went and we saw for ourselves. It was the patriotic thing to do.

*12/20/01* As we prepared to book it on December 20, patriotism was far from our thoughts. Cindy, our boarder, and Boo, our neurotic he-cat, were left to guard the fort at the apartment on Allard Boulevard. Into the car we packed Jesse, 3 ½ pounds of fierce yorkie savagery, and her new snowsuit, and what warm clothing a couple from Louisiana and Florida could find in their trunks. We nosed north. Rosy's CRV drove easily, we listened to an old radio version of "The Day the Earth Stood Still", switched driving chores from time to time, and, since WigWam Village was closed for the season, stopped for the night south of Cave City, at a Days Inn in Bowling Green. Days Inns are great cheap motels ... and they allow pets. For once we didn't have to sneak Jesse into the room.

*12/21/01* We had a lunch date with Mike and Carol Resnick in Cincinnati, but as we dogged it north through the handsome, hill-hewn Kentucky countryside, we realized that we had forgotten the time zone change and would be late. I called Mike, apologized, and rescheduled our visit for the afternoon. We still made good time, pausing only to drop by Wigwam to allow Rosy to verify that the funkiest motel in existence *really is* in existence.

Noting, as I usually do, the sad sign between Louisville and Cincy where a bus crashed on May 14, 1988 – the very day my father died – we did not tarry. Too bad. Louisville is one town I would love to explore. But Cincinnati, materializing suddenly before us between tall hills, impressed Rose-Marie, and when we found the Resnick abode, nestled in sublime suburban comfort north of the city, we knew we'd found Paradise. Mike's house is a glory.

The first time I'd seen *chez* Resnick, I'd been exhausted, sick, shaken from a nasty plane flight, and drunk. I'd tried to appreciate the exquisite African decor and elegant appointments, but could only see them through a haze. This time I could see them through Rosy's eyes, and how much richer an experience it was.

Carol was gone on an errand, but Mike was in his glory, showing Rose-Marie his epic abode, entertaining us with another classic Hollywood anecdote, gently prodding me to finish the introduction to his collection of fan writing he'd asked me to write, and signing a book for my brother. (I figured it would make a neat Christmas gift.) He also gave me a Russian version of one of his books – to go with the Japanese edition of *The Demolished Man* (?) Alfred Bester gave me once – and a tape of a short movie made from his story "The Branch". "It's *awful*," he warned. "But its atheistic theme got it banned in Spain!"

We trundled on, over yankee turf now. It grew colder, so we picked up cheap pullover caps and gloves at a rest stop – 99 cents each. The prices of motels rose with the latitude, but we found an acceptable mom'n'pop just short of the Pennsylvania state line, and sacked it.

*12/22/01* On our way through the teensy nub of Pennsylvania which abuts Lake Erie, we exulted. There was *snow* on the ground. True, it was only a trivial dusting, but Rosy hadn't seen snow since childhood, and even if I couldn't do as I dreamed, and photograph her beautiful dark curly locks against a snowy background, she'd seen a *touch* of the white stuff, anyway.

As Mark Verheiden would say, BLAR HAR HAR. Be careful what you wish for.

I had had problems remembering the name of the motel where I wanted us to stay, but none finding it. When we arrived we found our reservation well in order. A poinsettia plant welcomed us to Buffalo and to Christmas. From Lance & Marie & Steven & John, the Lillians of Grand Island.

Soon we were in touch with my brother, and the three of us were at Lance and Marie's new home – a huge, gorgeous place. My nevvies were in fine fettle, whatever that means, and astonishingly tall – at 5, John looks like a boy of 7. They were hot into Nintendo, which they fought competently with their dad, and took to Rose with ease. They also dug on Jesse, though she was regarded with astonished suspicion by Fender, their nearly-albino cat. After Rosy read a story to John, and I had the requisite political argument with my neanderthal yuppie brother, we pronounced it a grand beginning to the stay.

*12/23/01* I've figured out why Niagara Falls is *the* classic honeymoon spot. It truly *jazzes* the ladies.





Greetings from **the wintry**  
**north** – Rose-Marie and her happy  
husband sprinkled with snow.



Say what you will about winter – snow looks  
great on beautiful brunettes!

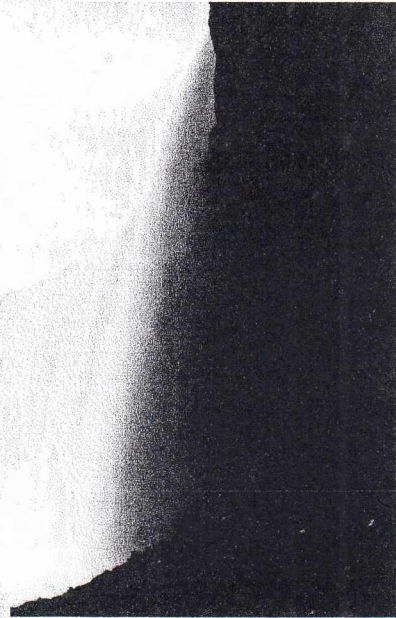


... but not so great piled high on your car.

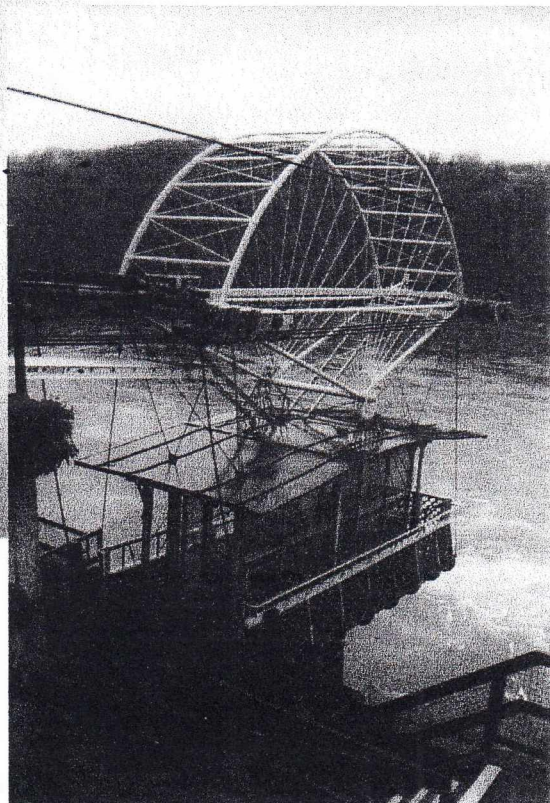


# niagara falls

Indeed she does ...most dramatically from the Cave of the Winds, below and below left.



To right, the cable car above the Niagara Whirlpool. Just like sitting in your living room, if your living room is 600 feet up.





Despite Lance's caution that a border crossing would be burdened with 9-1-1 paranoia, and take hours, we zipped right through – across the bridge into Canada. A few turns and we were at the Wonder of the World, and Rosy has seldom been more ... rosy.

It was a hoot to show her the Falls, which I have known since my Buffalo boyhood (back in the Johnson administration ... the *Andrew Johnson* administration). She was wowed by the rusting barge that got loose in the river during the 'teens, and would have carried two souls to their doom – had in not snagged on God's most fortuitous rocks. But that sight was dwarfed by the cataract itself, which she greeted with joy, and awe. Her perspective was catching – seldom have the mighty waters felt so warm, even in wintertime.

The edge was only the beginning. Reporter first and last, Rosy had to get *behind the scenes*, and so down we went into the Caves of the Winds. The Caves are actually tunnels dug down, down beneath and behind the Falls. From the shelter at their base, the power and beauty of the crushing waters soak you with spray and power – when I'd last gone down there, as a kid in the late '50s, they'd given us slickers, but now we were on our own. Freakiest was the view from behind and within. From the back, Niagara is a translucent curtain of green-mottled white, roaring like a billion storms on a billion rooftops.

Back on the surface, Rosy called her mother. *Guess where I am?* Good enough – only took me six months, but my lady was at Niagara Falls ... a genuine honeymoon.

We weren't though with Canada. Downriver a few miles is the Niagara Whirlpool, a spectacular aside in the river's path over which a cable car rides. During my childhood and in years since I have oft visited the site – and never, ever gotten aboard. I claim nothing but basic, fundamental common sense. Rosy would hear none of that.

Well, it was a beautiful ride, over a spectacular view, and stable as your bathtub. Rosy loved it, and now I can say I've done it, and with any luck that'll keep me off similar horrors in the future.

*12/24/01* Remember what I said about wanting to photograph Rose-Marie in the snow? How relieved I was to show her a Pennsylvania smattering that *might* have chilled a shot glass? Came the dawn, Christmas Eve, 2001.

Rosy peered out through the motel curtain. She said something to the effect of "Wow."

The world was white. At least 5 inches of snow coated the ground.

The way I understand "lake effect" snows is that cold – well, *duh* – winds blow southeast across Lake Erie from Canada. They create a band of fierce precipitation and chill within a shell of relatively warm air. This year's Christmas storm flapped over Buffalo like the wing of a malignant white roc. Usually the effect hits south, not north of the city, but during the night that wind had covered Grand Island, and outside our window lay a spotless winter wonderland. Christmas card stillness, whiteness, chill, and beauty. Rosy grabbed Jesse and her camera, and sallied forth.

Jesse's first experience with snow produced doggy thoughts that could have gone *WHAT THE F—???? \*ARF\**. The critter may have been born in Indiana, but until July '01 she'd lived her entire life in sunny Florida. Remember the snowsuit Rosy had bought for her? She'd reacted to being sheathed therein by bucking and twirling and freaking like a miniature bronc. Plopped into Antarctica by her traitorous mama's lust for photos, I bet she was glad of it.

I was glad, because her mama's dark curly hair caught and held the heavy flakes, and as I'd known she would, my wife looked heavenly in the snow. Also, it was great packing stuff, and I had the honor of beaming Rosy with a snowball for the first time in her life.

The snow was exquisite to look at and exquisitely horrible to drive in. We had Christmas Eve errands to run downtown, and that meant I had to brush off the CRV and take it onto the streets. Many of you have never known the celestial joy of negotiating snow-slicked roads in whiteout conditions. You drive like a needle was poised an inch from your eyeball (sorry, Janice). Every instant could bring a skid, a slide, a collision, catastrophe, death. Marvelous experience. Like strychnine, you ought to try it sometime.



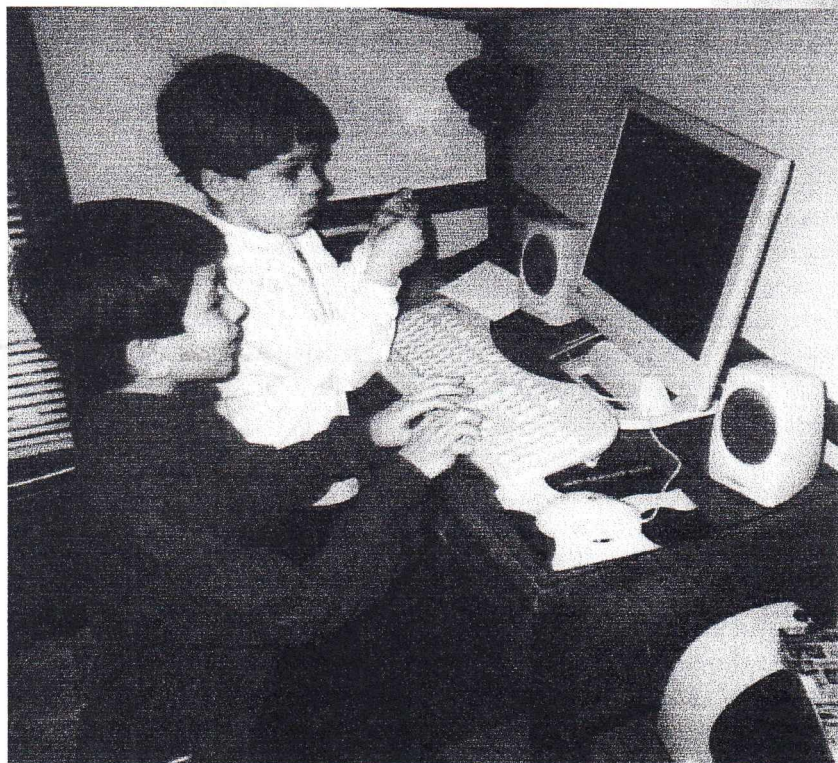
## WE ARE FAMILY ...



Lance and Marie and Steve and John welcomed Uncle Guy and Aunt Rosy



Right, the elder brothers Lillian in the midst of winter



Left, the junior brothers Lillian tear into their new computer.



Our first stop was the Riverside Men's Shop, my favorite clothing store. I hear you protest that there are competent haberdashers closer to home, but I like the Tonawanda store, probably because a visit there always means I am getting a present. This time it was from my wife, a suit, Navy Blue.

After the selection and the fitting and the paying, we found the local megamall. I had shopping to complete. My practice is to supplement the one major gift I get each lady with a small, "personality" gift, usually a variation on a common schtick. One year, hard-carved wooden boxes. Big hit. Candle figures another. Everyone amused. This year, distinctive exotic soaps, each unique, pretty and aromatic. This would go over well with Aunt Cora, I figured, who is 95 if she's a minute and blind as a stoned bat, but whose nose is as epic as Rushmore and who can still enjoy a good sniff of a good smell. The purchases accomplished, I relaxed. The snowfall had not abated, but it was no hassle now. Its beauty was back, and Rosy looked grand in it.

We picked up Jesse, went to my brother's, and all but one of the world's Lillians were gathered. Aunt Cora couldn't see well enough to recognize my face, but knew the voice. I knew hers, too ... it has warmed and charmed me for some 52 years, and it's one of life's kindnesses that it is still around.

Lance and Marie spread a carpet picnic for the clan, and after we chowed down we opened Aunt Cora's Christmas presents. She sniffed appreciatively at the soap.

All the while, snow continued to fall. When it came time to drive Aunt C back to the nursing home, it was all but blinding. Within a block my brother plowed into a ditch. We – with the exception of Aunt Cora – humped the car free and returned, waiting for the snowfall wing to pass over, which it did, eventually.

*12/25/01* It was a busy Christmas day.

At my brother's we opened gifts. I got **Theodore Rex**, the sequel to the exceptional **Rise of Theodore Roosevelt**, and ... uh ... a pink pig made out of yarn. "The boys picked that out themselves," Lance proudly told me. Whatever, my gifts went over well, I think. Rosy had asked for *Myst III: Exile*, after all, and the Harry Potter game was an enormous hit with my nephew Steve. By the time we left he and John were tearing into the first level and had Harry leaping around Hogwarts like a frog. Outstanding dudes, these nevvies, wherever the pink pig idea came from.

Next, there was a most important and most terrifying visit to make. My mother is a resident of the most attractive Alzheimer's unit in western New York. It's a handsome place, but when Lance took her there for the first time, she had to be sedated. When I first saw her there she was somewhat conscious of where she was and what had happened. Since then, L.E. warned, Mama had gone downhill. He warned me that she might not know me, and *might* react to Rose-Marie with rage.

Nevertheless, there we went, bearing the gift I knew she'd like no matter how far along her illness: a box of choice Nawlins pralines. I can't remember my emotions while waiting for the staff to fetch her. Blocked them out. I do know that when she came forth, and recognized me, my feelings twisted into an impossible tangle. I was delighted that she still knew me, horrified at how much she'd aged, worried about her quivering hands, and stunned by her dull affect. Were these side effects of the disease, or of its medication? Damn this, I wanted to shout; stop feeding my mother that poison! Her ebullient, erratic, hilarious, embittered, extroverted, tortured, aggravating and adorable personality was so muffled, so beaten down ... but – she was glad to meet Rosy, and glommed into the pralines. Other residents watched her eat. "They just want some, Mama," I observed. "Ain't gettin' *these*," she vowed.

Note to self: for the rest of time, send a box of those goodies north every month or so. For the gift of life, it's small enough recompense.

Alzheimer's is a slow goodbye, and Christmas Day was one part of it. If – I should probably say "when" – it happens to me, I hope I have as nice a place to live. If – I should say when – it happens to me, somebody send *me* pralines.

We went on to dinner. Lance and Marie had given us a most thoughtful gift certificate for the best restaurant in Niagara Falls. Dinner was indeed delicious, and I'm proud to say we exhausted the gift certificate. My fault, mostly; I had lobster. *Two* lobsters. Then we were off for the theatuh ... and



**Lord of the Rings.** Need I say much? Such was our joy and our excitement that we decided, then and there, to view it again, soon.

I always look forward to visiting my brother's in-laws at the close of a Christmas day; Marie's folks are sweet, friendly people, a large, rambunctious, zestful Italian krewe, and I have a real communication with her older sister Jane. I was anxious to introduce her to Rose-Marie. Another good meeting. I've brought Rosy into the company of several ladies I admire and respect and enjoy – and she's impressed each of them. Guess we all know a lucky boy, huh?

**12/26/01** The “wing” of the lake effect snowstorm swept south again, and as we prepared to take our leave of Buffalo, it began to snow.

Two stops to make. The first was a necessary culinary pause: Ted's Hot Dogs on Niagara Falls Boulevard. *God* those are good weiners! The only tube steak in my experience which surpasses Ted's in splendor is Nathan's, whose call I heard from New York City, 480 miles away.

But first, we took a run by the rest home. Mama recognized me again, and was pleased to be introduced to Rose-Marie – for the second time in two days. It was mealtime and crumbs on the tablecloth betokened the demise of another praline. The residents were gathered at their tables, and silent, numbingly silent. None of the people made a sound, except for one smiling lady, who for no reason I could fathom, out here in the objective world, clapped her hands. What do they dream? What do they remember? I suppose I'll know soon enough.

The attendants wondered if I was the “Guy” Mama constantly spoke of missing. No, I said, that was my father, and they had lived in Spain, and Germany, and Brazil (I explained my *figa*), and noting they were having fried chicken, mentioned that Mama had been an excellent cook in her day. Mama watched me with an unknowable expression. *I wanna live in a friendly world, a friendly world, a friendly world ...* When I saw her last, she was drinking her milk. Rose-Marie and I left a couple of our wedding pictures in her room.

The snowfall and the accumulation slacked off as we headed east. By the time we were abeam Rochester none was falling and only a trace spackled the ground. Soon the turf was clean and the exquisite skies clear. We trundled on, east, then at Albany, south, and about us in the night the megalopolis grew, in busy-ness, and light. Dutch names appeared on signs, and then familiar, famous names, and around us grew an incredible mass of population, industry, commerce and life ...

We were in New York City.

Our jaunt to the Apple had been cemented into our plans mere days before, when Rosy got in touch with Fran Breitstone, sister of her stepfather Harold. A tycoon of real estate on Long Island, she lived in Cedarhurst, very near to JFK Airport. Her directions rather resembled computer instructions given a novice by a confirmed geek (“Take the Whitestone to the Van Wyck and get off at Rockaway ...”), but we got seriously lost only once. (Fran had forgotten that you can go in *two* directions on Rockaway.) Once we were in Cedarhurst her guidance was immaculate, and before the date turned we were in the driveway of a handsome suburban home. The key was where Fran, by now asleep, had left it; without waking her, Rosy and Jesse and I found our room and made use of it.

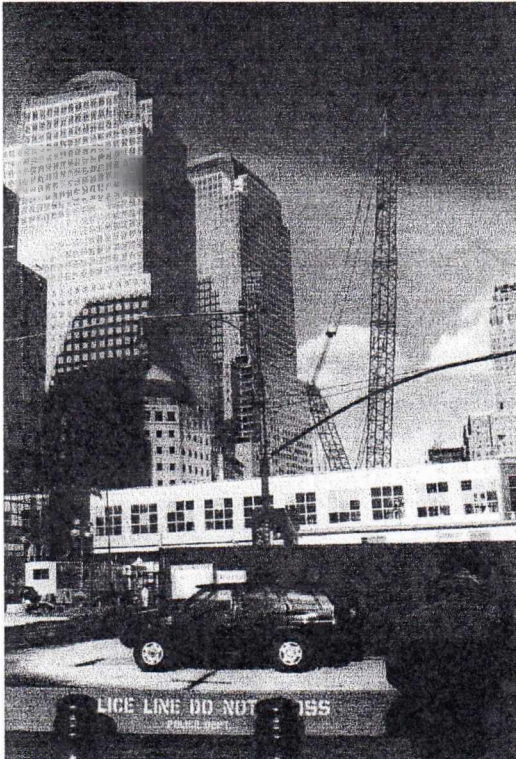
**12/27/01** Fran was an incredible personality. She once went out with her brother's service buddy, Joseph Heller, and corresponded with him for decades. Now a wealthy woman, she opened her home to us, pressed food and money upon us, and dropped us off at the LIRR station the next morning. Within seconds the Manhattan train was upon us. 45 minutes later, we disembarked at Penn Station. We didn't rise to street level as we made our way through the underground mall to the downtown subway.

We emerged into New York at Wall Street, near the spot where George Washington took his first presidential oath. It's a surprisingly narrow avenue, flanked by higher-than-high buildings; I found it cool somehow that the Stock Exchange doesn't front onto it.



## ON THE SPOT: GROUND ZERO

We hit Ground Zero from as many angles as we could, with always the same impression: empty sky. New York City was like a hand missing a finger, a smile missing a tooth, the Big Apple with a big bite missing.



A memorial fence



The City from the Harbor



The air was icy, and the wind, focused through those narrow downtown canyons, brisk to say the least. We headed west.

We passed by beautiful Trinity Church, by the grave of Robert Fulton and the sarcophagus of the slaughtered aristocrat on the \$10 bill, Alexander Hamilton. We passed street construction, and came to a barricade. A block beyond it the sky took on a most unusual cast. *Emptiness*. It was the mark of the place, now that the fires are out and there is no more smoke. The ultimate New York anomaly: Emptiness, in the center of the sky-tickling metropolis, though which moved the tips of construction cranes – moving, always moving. Ground Zero.

We went south. The chilling wind was terrible. From this vantage the damage to neighboring buildings was apparent. One edifice looked as if a corner had been snapped away. Another was covered in what looked like mesh. West again, then north, circling the site. We could hear grinding machines. We could see a distinctive pane of siding lying on the ground. Firetrucks, police cars, dump trucks, cranes circled in perpetual motion. Next to the Dow Jones Building firemen were admitting people two or three at a time past the barricade. We could see them peering off the raised viewing stand. I spoke with a fireman named Figueroa about the people they were admitting. Cops, fellow firefighters, reporters, relatives of the lost. I didn't try to talk our way inside. I did tell him, God bless you, and he thanked me, even though he must hear that a thousand times a day. I hope he does.

We turned away and walked south along the beautiful Battery. Rose-Marie should live in one of those gorgeous condominiums overlooking the Hudson and the Harbor. She deserves a Mercedes and a sailboat. I deserve to make enough money to make these things possible. Everyone contribute.

At the end of the Battery were the wharves and the excursion boats that leave from them. There was a long line for Liberty Island, but none at all for the Staten Island Ferry, merely a crowd which crushed aboard the moment the great doors rose. Passage on the Ferry was a dime when I lived in new York 27 years ago. Now it's an even better deal: free.

The ferry launched into the Harbor. Rosy spotted Ellis Island. I kept my eyes on the Lady. I figured, if any sight could make this all right, she would be it.

Because the vista behind us was *wrong* somehow, at least for me. Manhattan is beautiful from the south. To my shame I found it more beautiful now. I always thought the World Trade Center towers an eyesore. But Christ, *where were they?* New York's southern skyline looked like a smile with a missing tooth, a hand with a missing finger. Rosy didn't get what I meant until she compared the view with the photo on her guide map. There the Lady stood against a background of lit windows. That background was empty sky now. Good *God*.

The Lady's cool, solemn gaze fixed and released us. Ahead the Verrazano Narrows Bridge spanned the great channel. Outside on the viewing deck the wind tore at our faces. It was biting cold. That wind began in the Arctic Circle and charged south across the Atlantic with nothing to stop it til it reached my flesh. It was like being burned by a match. On the return trip we stayed inside.

Back in Manhattan we headed up Broadway, stopping at a deli restaurant to feed. The delicious plateful of dill pickles provided as a free appetizer felt fabulous on my palate, and schlussed through me like a slalom skier on a cliff. Nuff Said about that.

Walking up frigid Broadway, we passed street vendors hawking pictures of the World Trade Center, and more interesting chalk or watercolor prints, paintings based on photos taken at Ground Zero. I hesitated over two. One was the famous image of the three firemen hoisting a flag on a makeshift flagpole – that's it on my cover. The other showed construction workers surrounding a cross made of twisted girders. I couldn't stop looking at them. Corny, of course. The vendor didn't help matters by claiming to be the artist, when the same pictures were on sale at four or five tables in the same block. Small prints, \$10, large ones, \$20. No, no, no ... I walked by. With several backwards glances.

It was along Broadway that we found the fences. In fact, such informal monuments were everywhere in New York; I found one or two in subway stations. But these abutted entrances to the Ground Zero site (cranes, moving) and thronged with people. Fences covered with notes and flyers and



hand-made banners – photos of lost souls, expressions of group support, tokens, trinkets – a cubist sketch of the Lady I wanted to snitch – all a little wilted after weeks in the elements, but constantly renewed, and on the sidewalk beneath people still left flowers; we saw a father give a bouquet to his little daughter to place with the others. We should have laughed at the mawkishness, but instead we lamented that we hadn't brought something distinctly New Orleans to leave, like Mardi Gras beads. I thought of finding a **Challenger** and adding Peggy Ranson's Statue of Liberty cartoon to the mourning wall. I satisfied myself with straightening a pot of flowers.

We bought pullover caps right there at the site: "FDNY", mine reads, and Rosy's pink cap, simply "NY".

It was evening by the time we rose up at the 34<sup>th</sup> Street station. Darkness falls swiftly at the New York latitudes, and though it wasn't past 6PM, it seemed like full night. We wandered west on 34<sup>th</sup> – I had the pleasure of coaxing Rosy to turn, and look up, *way* up, at Itself, the Empire State Building. Its red and green Christmas lights shone lovelily in the deepening twilight.

We walked past Macy's. The windows were splendidly decorated with scenes from the classic film set there, **Miracle on 34<sup>th</sup> Street**. The sidewalks, of course, were crowded with people. We slogged our way through and headed towards Penn Station, a block or so over. After a moment, sirens began to whirl back the way we came. Lots of sirens.

Back on the LIRR to Cedarhurst. Fran met us with the terrible story. An old man had doubleparked outside Macy's, waiting for someone. A cop had told him to move. His foot had slipped off the brake. His car had lurched into the side of a van and knocked it into a bus which had plowed into the crowds on the sidewalk. Crowds which had included Rose-Marie and me not two minutes before, and six other people who would never see 2002.

What was the name of that movie again?

*12/28/01* She'd been superhumanly patient with me on Thursday, so I hoped Friday would be Rosy's day. No such luck – but I think she enjoyed herself. We hit the **Times** on the way into Manhattan and talked theatre. Our Broadway choices culled themselves down to two, both because of the actors: Patrick Stewart's one-man **Christmas Carol** and the sparkingly-named **Dance of Death** with Ian McKellan and Helen Mirren. Before the 8PM curtain, whichever we chose, I looked forward to our spending some time in midtown Manhattan, but first there was business downtown: *Spanyay*.

Charles E. Spanier's friendship was one of the lights of my early 20's. Central Mailer of NYAPA, K-a member, tireless comics fan and zinester, Chuck – or Rick, as everyone now calls him – was a champion of *faanish* fandom, which I have always preferred. "Faanish" means you're into fandom for other fans, more than for the genre. (SFPA is faanish. FAPA is not.) Chuck was stalwart, true to his pals, and I don't think there was anything or anyone I missed more when I left the Apple in 1974. I last saw him in 1979. We talked during our Buffalo sojourn and made a date. Meet me, he said, at the Strand. It was right down the street from the subway.

The Strand Bookstore is *not* heaven. It has no section of cheap used science fiction, mystery, and soft porn, with dusty paperbacks rising to the ceiling. Other than that, it qualifies, with everything else published between covers, and Rosy and I prowled the aisles of the lower east side outlet, hungry for tomes, while waiting for the man to appear.

Appear he did. Ah. The world makes sense. *Spanyay* is back in it.

Unlike me *\*kof\** Chuck has let the decades fill him out a bit, but we knew each other at once, and of course, as with all true friendships, time meant nothing. We still put down Bob Kane the ... the, umm ... uh ... *putz*, that's it, still mourned our friend Neal Pozner, still admired Ben Katchor (whose professional work Chuck proudly showed us). Noting that this was the Lillians' *de facto* honeymoon, he bought us a wedding present, **Up in the Old Hotel**, a collection of Runyonesque pieces about New York by Joseph Mitchell – and then took us by the old hotel it was named for.



We ate lunch at the fabulous Pier 17 mall, overlooking – what else – the Brooklyn Bridge. Via her cell phone, Rosy wrestled her Florida bank into submission – they'd been resisting her move to New Orleans – and then relaxed into enjoying the epic personality of the fabulous Bum. We gossiped about old buddies and Chuck declaimed on his latest passion: antique SF radio shows, which he's been recording onto CD. I thought of Meade.

Then it was time to walk past City Hall ... to the Bridge.

My lassitude made the thought of walking across the Brooklyn Bridge feel like an unendurable endurance trial; but the instant my foot touched the walkway all reluctance vanished. Ahead stood the gothic arches of the New York Tower. Behind us, as we climbed the almost imperceptible slope, Manhattan receded into its fabulous skyline. Up and up we went, following the wide yellow line down the walkway's center. I ignored the signs commanding keep to the right, earning a genuine New York City curse from a cyclist. Astoundingly, it wasn't painfully cold, about 44 degrees according to the temperature sign in Brooklyn Heights, and the scythe-like winds of yesterday were calm. Rosy said that if you looked through the walkway slats, you could see all the way down to the East River.

We reached the first tower. How *comforting* to clap a hand onto the gray permanence of its stone. The westernmost tower rests not on bedrock, like its twin, but on sand – but if it was solid enough for Washington Roebling, it was solid enough for me. We read the bronze tablets detailing facts about the bridge, and followed the precise symmetrical grid of the supportive cables, strumming with Manhattan music, on to the center. There we tarried, and turned.

The Brooklyn Bridge was the engineering feat of its age, a work of stone, cable (the invention which made it possible), sweat, and genius. In submerged compartments rough men making pennies a day ripped into the unseeable riverbed, while the Bridge's obsessed creator, driven by his and his father's vision, supervised from his bed in the Brooklyn heights, crippled by bends. What a story it is. What a *thing* it is. Turning at its center, we could survey the whole promise and passion of New York City, 2001.

Practically on line with the Bridge was the clean and terrible hole-in-the-sky, Ground Zero, betokening such evil, such sadness. But if we swivelled our gaze just a few degrees left, there the Lady stood on her island, inspiration to a nation of immigrants, and with a like turn to the right, Manhattan seemed to rise, a city on a hill instead of a city on an island, towards the iconic pinnacle we all knew, the Empire State Building, and this is no kidding, *while we watched* the sun slipped its rays beneath the cloudy gloom and its full golden power burst onto the city.

Radiant, beautiful, strong, defiant, invincible – New York City *glowed*.

We walked down into Brooklyn. Satisfaction, for the first time, filled my spirit. New York had sent its say. Its message was *victory*.

It was pushing 4, so we started deciding our evening. A third theatrical alternative had come to mind – the Christmas Extravaganza at Radio City Music Hall. Maybe not entirely to my taste, but Rosy liked the idea, and I wanted this to be her evening. Besides, who could pass up the Rockettes? Chuck volunteered to escort us to Times Square, so we hopped on the subway and returned to Manhattan.

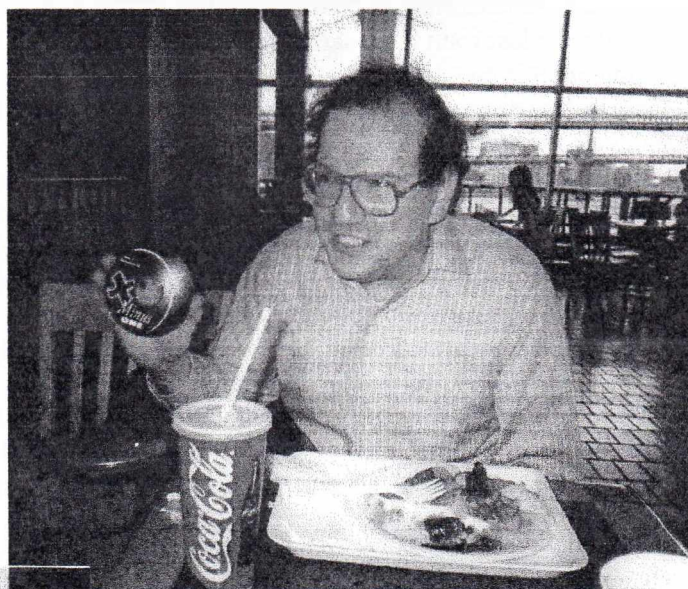
By the time we got to Times Square it was full-on dark – night comes quickly in the far, far north. This was advantageous, because few sights surpass Times Square on a clear night. But this wasn't the tight, intense Times Square of **The Sweet Smell of Success**, or the big parade of laughter and tears from **42<sup>nd</sup> Street**. Chuck/Rick likened it to **Blade Runner**; to me, it was Las Vegas' Strip, folded up and piled onto itself. Sky-high commercials bloomed like misplaced Cinerama over the tall buildings' faces. A **Harry Potter** poster covered the complete wall of a 30-floor edifice. Britney Spears – side bet: **Playboy** spread within two years – beamed above us, ten stories tall. Atop the old **Times** building, the crystal ball destined to announce 2002 waited at the base of its pole. *Towers* of light, blandishments more awesome than crude – through crushing crowds we squirmed towards Radio City.



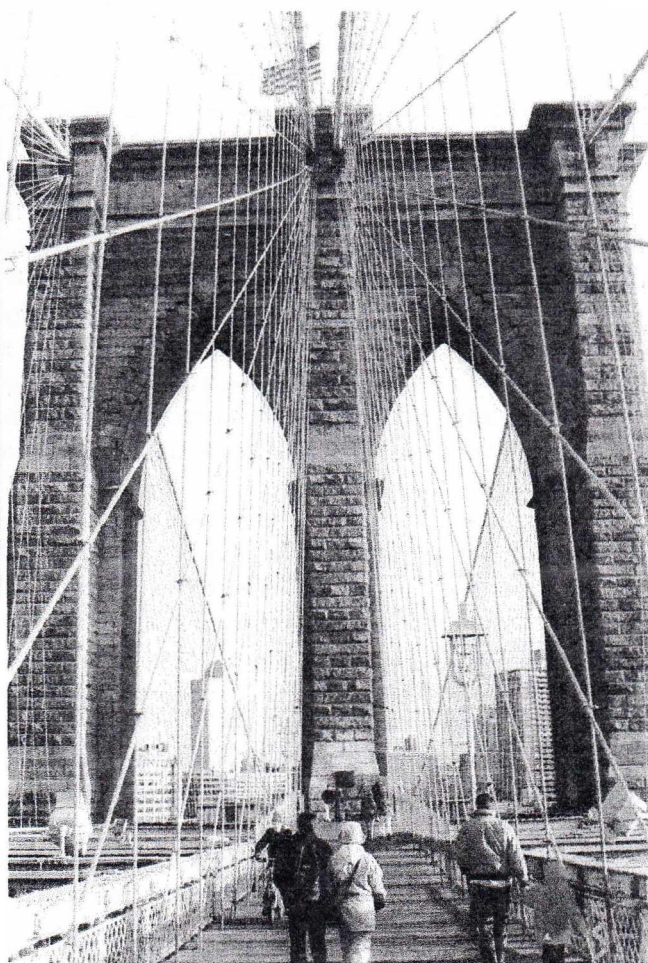
# SPANYAY

...and the  
BROOKLYN  
BRIDGE

Here's Spanier with his  
**X Minus One** disc ...  
And below, with me at  
the North Star Hotel, and  
the book named for it



Right, the magnificent grid of  
the Brooklyn tower.





Suffice it to say – we couldn't get in. By the time we endured the ticket line only singleton seats were left for the 6:30 performance, and Rose wanted to sit with me. A later show was out – we'd be pressed to make the last train to Cedarhurst. So this would be a New York trip without theatre – on any other vacation but this one, a disaster. This year, a shrug.

Only mildly disgruntled, and that not for long, we walked with Spanyay through Rockefeller Plaza, ogling the red-white-&-blue lights on the mammoth Christmas tree, and all the kliegs hanging above the **Today Show** set. Like all healthy male Americans I spend many happy mornings admiring Katie Couric's calves, though there was no sign of them or her at this hour. After photographing Rock Plaza's famous ice rink and its golden Prometheus (I once exchanged grins with Gene Shalit there), *la belle* Rose expressed hunger. "Let's just find a nice *neighborhood* restaurant," she said. My wife thinks Rockefeller Center is a neighborhood. For *Rockefeller*, maybe.

But just maybe she was right. It was only a block or two before we found a place that seemed to qualify, a *faux* Irish pub called the Pig & Whistle. Spanier bid us adieu as we waited, and please heaven that it won't be another 22 years before again we meet to badmouth Bob Kane the, ahh, umm, *putz*, that's it. Maybe 2004 – before the worldcon in Boston. Or next Independence Day. Over our turkey pies, Rose and I agreed: we'd be back for more bites at the Big Apple.

**12/29/01** We had spent almost all of our New York time in lower Manhattan, and neglected the manifold glories above 44<sup>th</sup> Street. We wouldn't have time this trip to tour the Museum of Modern Art – I used to spend *lunch hours* there, do you believe it – or go into Tiffany's to see the big canary diamond. These and many other things I wanted to share with Rose – but there just wasn't time.

On our way out, though, we *made* time to careen a bit about the city. Rose wanted to see Central Park and I ... I couldn't get those damned pictures out of my head. The watercolor or chalk copies, I mean, of the flag-raising and the girder cross at Ground Zero. I could have bought them from any of dozens of street vendors over the last two days, but I'd hemmed and I'd hawed and now I *knew* I wanted them and it was all but too late. Still, I eyed the sidewalks as we drove.

We'd crossed into Manhattan over the uptown George Washington Bridge, and I showed my lady places I'd known even before I knew her. On 106<sup>th</sup> and First Avenue, the apartment building where I lived while at DC Comics. (Did I sing "There is a Rose in Spanish Harlem ..."? ) I crossed through seedy ethnic streets I still dream about and drove her down 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue, her excited attention torn between Central Park on our right and the poshest-possible apartments (and Mount Sinai Hospital) on our left. We passed the Metropolitan Museum of Art; I'd forgotten how huge it is. (I once saw Philip Petit, the acrobat who once tightrope-walked between the lost WTC towers, juggling outside the Met.) At the corner of the Park, facing the wonderful Plaza Hotel, Rosy exulted over the horse-drawn cabs, and I leapt out to raid the tables selling souvenirs. The flag picture was there, and is now here, on my cover. The cross – no.

We drove up the West Side. There the Dakota, where John Lennon lived and died, across from Strawberry Fields and the Imagine plaque, where JoAnn Montalbano and Gary Tesser and I mourned him, many years ago. There the Natural History Museum, site of my coolest moment, ever. We passed a restaurant where Kay Scarpetta once ate in a Patricia Cornwell novel ... and we headed downtown. I sought street vendors; I *wanted* that girder cross!

Alas, the further south we drove the more congestion we found. (An accompanying disaster, I couldn't stop at the great SF bookstore, Forbidden Planet.) After a gummy transit of the Soho district, where they sell art infinitely more tony than anything ever featured on a GHLIII Press Pub, we gave up and headed for the Lincoln Tunnel. No sign of the Praying Mantis. We nosed in, wound about beneath the Hudson River, and popped up in New Jersey.

From the highway we watched the Lady, viewed from the back, recede behind us. New York City is wonderful. This visit had taught me a lesson in resilience and American strength. I *love* New York. But *God* what a relief to get out. At a rest stop, I bought and consumed a Nathan's hot dog.



*Ideal.* Except for that damned picture of the cross made out of girders, the New York segment of our journey was complete.

Rose indicated a desire to be fulfilled for the next day, so we zipped through Baltimore, circled D.C., and found U.S. 29, southwards-leading through Virginia. Everything went splendidly along the Bull Run road, except dinner, stuffed shrimp swathed in enough pepper to water every eye in Mexico City. Maybe we live in New Orleans, people, but we're still *civilized*.

One more thing to December 29<sup>th</sup>. I spoke to my brother as we drove through New York City – surreptitiously, since it's against state law to both drive and talk on a hand-held cellphone. L.E. and his family been due to start their trip out of Buffalo a few hours after us. No could do. Short hours after we'd driven out of town, the lake effect wing had flapped once more over the freeway, and it was once again clogged, and closed. *Seven feet* of snow in five days.

*12/30/01* It's been only a couple of years since my first visit to Monticello, mountaintop home of Thomas Jefferson, the physical manifestation of the genius that composed the Declaration of Independence. I certainly didn't mind a revisit. It is an epic place.

Since I talked about Monticello in some detail so short a time ago, I won't go into it much here – except to assert how much better it was to tour the place with my lady. The moment also fit in easily with the patriotic thrust of the vacation; reading about Jefferson, especially on site, makes it clear that America was, from the start, a work of genius.

Greensboro seemed like a dream from another life. Guess it was. I could make my way around the small North Carolina city easily enough – it comes back to you – showing Rosy the school I'd attended, the bars where one writing class had talked art (*Hemingway, man, and hey, Hitchcock!*) and the other had sorted out unhappy marriages; and even, on her request, the house where I'd lived with Beth ... but it all seemed so long ago. Fred Chappell wasn't home, I wasn't about to bother the Flokstras, and so the only human contact I made in Greensboro was a phone call to a guy from my writing class, who has written several books about home improvement. He credited me for inspiring him. I've done *some* good in life, even a past one.

We went west and stopped just as the flat Piedmont began to rise into the Smoky Mountains. That was planned. I wanted to end our vacation on a spectacular note.

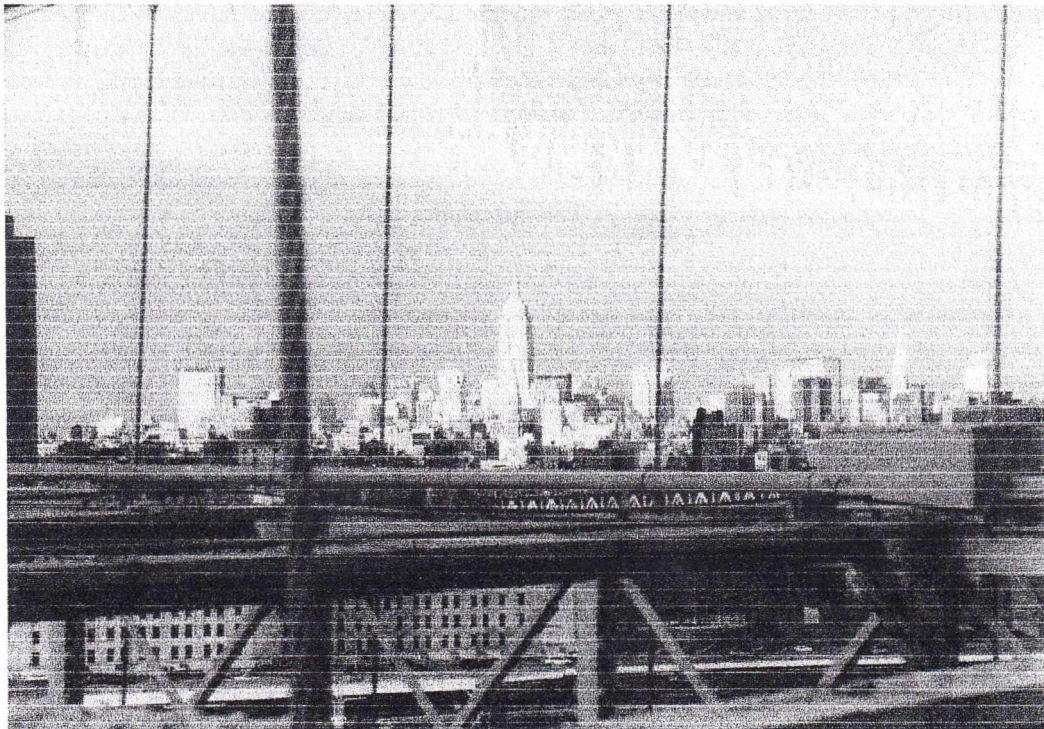
*12/31/01* I had in mind a kind bringing an urban/rural balance to this last day of vacation: to match the glory of the Empire State Building, blazing in the sunset, Grandfather Mountain, lit by the morning sun. I've been through the Smokies a dozen times, of course, but not with Rosy; I wanted it to be a pretty morning for her, and it was.

We drove on. Knoxville. Memories of Vern and the Rusty and the Wild Bunch. Chattanooga. Hello, Read House, and that flocked and mirrored room where I won my Rebel. Birmingham. Vulcan's pedestal awaits his triumphant return. And home. We concluded the year and the vacation on the same day: when we finally reached Allard Boulevard, 2001 had only three hours to go. Through bleary eyes we watched the city we had wandered short days before ring in the palindrome year, 2002. We slept ... but from last mailing's **Spiritus Mundi** you know how long *that* lasted.

In subsequent weeks neighbor Cindy has moved into another abode. I'm reading **Theodore Rex**. Rosy continues to work her way through *Exile*. We've seen **Lord of the Rings** again, appreciating it even more, and watched the short movie made from Resnick's story. He was right; I suspect aesthetics more than atheism drove Spain to forbid it from its shores. My Greensboro writing student mailed me of his newspaper columns, and New Yorker Tim Marion sent a framed print of the flag raising at Ground Zero. It's on display in my office. Rose and I are already talking about our next drive: for worldcon, west. See some more turf, together. Get to know this country of ours, God bless it.



Mib in the midst of it



“The Big Parade / goes on for years ...”