

# My Back Pages #3

Rich Lynch



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a few more of my articles and essays

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And so we make it to the end of another year. At my age, I consider that a real accomplishment. Holiday cards are already starting to appear, but end-of-year greetings are not always glad tidings. Back in 2003, one of the last holiday cards my wife Nicki and I received that year was from one of our college friends, Donna, giving us the bad news that her husband Alan had passed away the week before Thanksgiving. He was a good friend, and the news of his death was just stunning. Every New Year I tell friends and relatives that my only goal for the year is just to make it to next year. It's not a trivial thing to hope for.

The end of the year also that means there are only a few weeks until the annual mid-winter vacation trip to New York City. Hey, I *love* New York! It's a great place for an out-of-town getaway. Nicki and I have had three mini-vacations there in the past three years, and I've written a 'trilogy' of essays about these enjoyable trips. The first of these began, as you will read, with the rediscovery of an unusual but unique bit of American history...

*Rich Lynch  
Gaithersburg, Maryland  
December 2010*

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# A Bite of the Big Apple (July 2008)

## Prolog: History Is Where You Find It

Well, it wasn't old Europe, but New York City was still a pretty special place to spend a few days on a short vacation. Nicki and I had originally planned a trip to Europe this year, but plans changed when the value of the dollar began dropping like a stone.

So, instead of history tour of Prague's Old Town, there we were at 51<sup>st</sup> Street and Lexington Avenue, right across the street from our hotel, looking for a more modern historical site, of sorts, that we saw on our map of Manhattan. And there it was – a subway grate. We looked and there didn't appear to be any plaque to commemorate the site, but this was the spot where a very famous movie scene was filmed of an American icon, back in 1954. It was where Marilyn Monroe stood with her skirt billowing up around her in the movie *The Seven Year Itch*.

History is all around you. All you have to do is find it.



Lexington Avenue

## North by Northeast

There were actually a few more details to figure out for this trip than I thought there would be. Nicki and I had decided early on to take Amtrak north by northeast to New York, but from where? (It turned out that driving to BWI Airport was a better option than commuting down to Union Station in Washington, and the train ride was a pleasant three hours of passing scenery.) And where would we stay when we got there? (Travelocity found us a good deal at the Doubletree Hotel on Lexington Avenue, but because it was a special rate I couldn't accumulate any Hilton points for the stay.) And how would we even get to the hotel once we arrived at Penn Station? (We decided to cast our fate to the New York subway system, and it worked out fine – the "E" Train took us to within two blocks of the hotel.)

The biggest question mark of all had been: what weekend would we go? That decision had taken a bit more work to decide because of a place I had wanted to see the inside of. I wanted to go to Yankee Stadium.

## The House That Ruth Built

All my life I had wanted to see a major league baseball game in Yankee Stadium, and now, nearly six decades in, this was my first and only chance. And it almost didn't come to pass. This is the final year of The House That Ruth Built – a new Yankee Stadium looms nearby and will come into use starting next year. And since this is the final year of the old stadium, tickets are not easy to come by. I checked the

Yankees website, and it turned out that it was not possible to get tickets for two seats together, anywhere in the stadium, for any remaining game there this season.

Luckily, there was another option. There is a ticket resale website called “Stubhub!” where it is apparently legal for people to buy and sell tickets to many different kinds of events, including, of course, major league baseball. Yankees season ticket holders who can’t or don’t want to attend every home game sell their tickets on Stubhub. The ticketholder apparently sets the price, and I was relieved to see that there were plenty of relatively affordable seat pairs available for many games.



in Yankee Stadium, way up high

So we picked Friday evening, July 18<sup>th</sup>, against Oakland, and I bought tickets for two seats in the upper deck. We didn’t know exactly how high in the upper deck we were until the night of the game. They were *way up* there, two rows from the top – the narrow stairs to get there seemed like a mountain trail up to some Himalayan pass. It was so high that we were well above the top of the foul pole, and it was a precarious enough climb that we were both had a death grip hold on the handrail all the way up. And yet, there were food and drink vendors climbing those same stairs carrying what must have been very heavy loads. One of them charged up the stairs while using one hand to balance a big crate full of beer bottles on his *head*! I asked him if he received hazardous duty pay, but he only smiled and said, “You get used to it.”



Miss Liberty is a Mets fan!

### The Sidewalks of New York

The thing about New York is, you *never* get used to it. No matter how many times you go there you find things new and interesting, often right there on the streets and sidewalks. One morning we were surprised to find that Lexington Avenue right outside the hotel was closed off for several blocks both to the north and south for a street fair that featured lots and lots of grilled food of various kinds. And just a few blocks away, toward Rockefeller Center, we happened across part of a “Statues of Liberty on Parade” exhibition. Baseball’s All Star Game had been held in Yankee Stadium less than a week earlier, and to help celebrate the event there were smaller versions of the Statue of Liberty on display at various places in the city, each painted with the colors and logo of one of the major league baseball teams. Very much a photo opportunity for tourists, and who knew Miss Liberty was a Mets fan?



## Across New York with Subway Pass and Water Bottle

Before the trip we had contemplated spending the money for a Grey Line tour of the city. In the end, we decided not to, because it looked like many of the things we wanted to see and do were conveniently located near subway stops. And we had a good guide book, just in case. The first place we went to was Ground Zero, though there really wasn't all that much to see. It's a fenced off construction site that looks pretty much like any other urban construction site, except it's a lot bigger in area. I found myself looking up at the empty area above the site, imagining what it must have been like on that day. And then I looked around and saw that many other people there were doing the same thing.

After that it was on to nearby Trinity Church, the oldest public building in continuous use in the city. It has a place in history as the headquarters of British military operations during the American Revolution, but in the past few years gained a bit of prominence because of its cameo appearance in the movie *National Treasure*. I half jokingly asked the gift shop attendant if it were possible to see the treasure, and she smiled and rolled her eyes. "I get that that a lot," she said.

There is a large cemetery that half circles the church. It's the final resting spot for several notables, including Alexander Hamilton and Robert Fulton, but on hot days like the day we were there, it's also a welcome temporary resting spot for visitors to the church. We were glad we had bottled water with us, but we saw there was another, maybe even better way that visitors to the churchyard were getting hydrated. One of the church's caretakers was watering the shrubbery with a garden hose and every so often he would point it toward the paved path so that little kids in swimsuits could dash through the spray. They were having a great time on a hot day.



Trinity Church

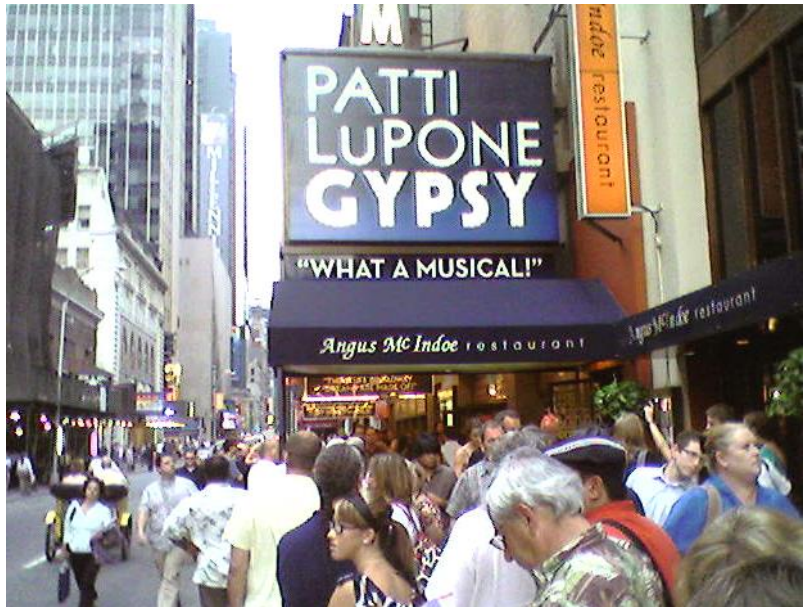


a whole lotta bull

Trinity Church is located in New York's Financial District, and before we headed back to midtown there was a famous statue there that we wanted to see – the bronze Charging Bull. It's located in Bowling Green Park, and it's such a tourist attraction that I had to practically muscle my way in to get a photo. Turns out that it's also popular with New York's stockbrokers – rubbing the bull's testicles is supposed to bring them good luck. There's no way to know if that's true, of course, but I did notice that while most of the statue had a dark patina, the bull's balls looked brightly polished.

## Broadway from the Nosebleed Section

We couldn't end a New York City vacation, even a short three-day one, without experiencing something we'd both always wanted to do – see a Broadway musical. So we decided to see two. We'd done a bit of research on **broadway.com**, and came up with a list of about 15 musicals we were interested in. There is a half-price day-of-show ticket outlet near Times Square, but we were a bit put off by the length of the line and that it was cash only. So instead, we just visited the box offices on West 44<sup>th</sup> Street until we found two shows with tickets we could afford.



outside the St. James Theater on West 44<sup>th</sup> Street

It was fairly easy, actually. The first one we tried, *Phantom of the Opera*, was a no-go, but right across the street, at the St. James Theater, balcony seats were available for *Gypsy* for Thursday evening. Farther up the street was *Xanadu*, but we decided we'd rather instead try (successfully, as it turned out) to get seats at the Shubert Theater, in the balcony once again, for *Monty Python's Spamalot* on Saturday night.



the Shubert Theater

The seats were not just in the balconies, they were *way up* in the balconies – two rows from the back for *Gypsy* and the very last row for *Spamalot*. We thought it unusual to get such good views of the tops of heads during a live performance. And since *Spamalot* has a lot of technical whizbang involved in the production, being so high up allowed us a view over the top of the stage props where the stage technicians were busily scurrying around.

Both plays were excellent, as we'd expected, with many very fine performances. We certainly got our money's worth. It was a positive experience, and we'd like to do it again. But from not so far up there. Next time: the mezzanine.



## Epilog: Things We Did and Didn't Get to Do in New York

On the train ride home on Sunday, Nicki and I decided that our New York weekend was really not unlike our stay in Rome in 2007. It took some planning to get there, and we really weren't quite sure what we'd do, or even how we'd get around, once we had arrived. It wasn't as if we'd never been to New York City before, but the previous time was eighteen years ago and it was for a weekend convention. But coming home, we both realized that New York no longer posed any uncertainty. We now knew our way around and our next trip would be even better.

And there will be plenty of things to do the next trip that we didn't have time or energy for this time. One of them will be a stroll across the Brooklyn Bridge. We were going to do that this time, but the very hot weather discouraged us from doing more than viewing it from a distance. We'll visit more museums next time, too. The only one we went to this time was the American Folk Art Museum, which we discovered, once we were there, was featuring an exhibition by an obscure and apparently disturbed writer/artist named Henry Darger (1892-1973). Much of his work, discovered after his death, was extended murals featuring naked prepubescent children depicted in pseudo-religious themes. We were both unimpressed. Next time it's MOMA.

There's still a lot for us left to see, of course – you couldn't "see" New York in a month, much less three days. There were a few places we made sure to visit, like St. Patrick's Cathedral and the lions of the New York Public Library, but Central Park and Strawberry Fields will have to wait.

But we're *already* planning a return! ☀



Brooklyn Bridge on a hot day



Nicki and a Literary Lion of the Library

## Afterword:

That ending sentence was no exaggeration. Our planning for the next New York trip started on the train ride back to Maryland. It turned out that the ideal time to vacation in New York City is the dead of winter just after the New Year. Things are relatively inexpensive then (for New York, anyway), and there are some pretty good deals to be had on hotel rooms and Broadway show tickets – *if* you can withstand the frigid weather!

And so, about six months later, Nicki and I returned to the Big Apple. The weather was indeed frigid, with a brisk cold north wind and isolated snow flurries. But New York, even in mid-January, is a bustling place, and on our last afternoon in town it became even more so.

# A Nibble of the Frozen Apple *(January 2009)*

## Prolog: Trouble near Times Square

It was a frigid late Thursday afternoon in Manhattan, with a biting wind from the north that made it unpleasant to be out on the street. Nicki and I were heading for the half-price TKTS booth at the north end of Times Square to buy tickets for *Phantom of the Opera* when the first of many emergency vehicles raced past us, heading south, sirens screaming.

January, we'd been told, is the so-called "low season" in New York City, at least as far as hotel rates go. We had had such a good time the previous time we were in New York, last July, we decided to come back for another short vacation. This time we decided to stay at a hotel near Times Square and Travelocity found us a good one – the Novotel on the corner of Broadway and 52<sup>nd</sup> Street, right in the middle of the Theater District. Our room was on the 33<sup>rd</sup> floor, and just down the hall was a window that looked out to the west with a clear view of the Hudson River. Had we been at that window just a short while earlier we would have witnessed a startling event involving a US Airways jetliner.



the view west toward the Hudson River from the hotel

As it was, news of the event was everywhere down at street level. And everybody seemed to be taking it in stride, going about their business. After all, this was New York.

## Nothing is real and nothing to get hung about...

We did not do much sightseeing this trip. We did manage to see some things we didn't get around to back in July, but the cold weather pretty much kept us from straying very far from subway stations. One of the places we made sure to visit was Strawberry Fields, a two acre memorial to the late John Lennon, located at the western edge of Central Park near The Dakota apartment building where Lennon lived.

There is a subway stop less than a block away from the Central Park West entrance, and when we exited the station we were met with an icy blast of wind that made us grateful the memorial wasn't somewhere in the center of the park.



Nicki at the entrance to Strawberry Fields





"Imagine" mosaic in Strawberry Fields

The memorial would have been quite pleasant on a nicer day. It reminded me of a small forest glade with rocky outcroppings, and the paved pathway takes you to a mosaic, inlaid into the path, which has in its center a single word – “Imagine”. The day we were there we saw a peace symbol made from tulip blossoms that had “come together” in the middle of the mosaic. We later found out that this is a piece of floral performance art, of sorts, that has been renewed every day, in different variations, since 1993.

From there it was on to the Village. I remember that on my first visit to New York, more than four decades ago, I had been to see Washington Square and its marvelous arch. The Square itself is undergoing reconstruction, but the arch is still there, as splendid as I remembered it. It dates back to the late 1890s, and was originally constructed in celebration of the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the presidential inauguration of George Washington. The Square has hosted many famous visitors, including Mark Twain, Robert Louis Stevenson, and Stanley Kubrick, and has also appeared as a ‘character’ in many movies, including *Deep Impact* (where the arch is destroyed by a tsunami) and *I Am Legend* (where Will Smith’s character had his home and laboratory on a street bordering the Square).



the Arch at Washington Square

None of that is real, of course, but on the way back to the subway station we did marvel over something that *was* genuine – the wonderfully ornate wrought iron fences in front of the row houses along the way. There is an inscription on the arch that reads: “Let us raise a standard to which the wise and the honest can repair.” All who have preserved and maintained this fencework, through the years, certainly have taken this to heart.



Nicki at 81<sup>st</sup> Street subway station

## A Day at the Museum

One other place we had intended to visit was the Metropolitan Museum of Art, about a half mile walk across Central Park from the 81<sup>st</sup> Street subway station which is one of the most visually fascinating subway stations I’ve ever been through. It’s located right next to the American Museum of Natural History, and to celebrate this proximity there are dozens of mosaics inlaid into the walls, depicting both living and extinct animals. But when we left the station the cold wind was so penetrating that we decided that a long hike across the park just wasn’t a good idea. We were fortunate that there was a world class natural history museum a one minute walk away, and that’s where we spent much of the day.



the dinosaur fossils section of the museum

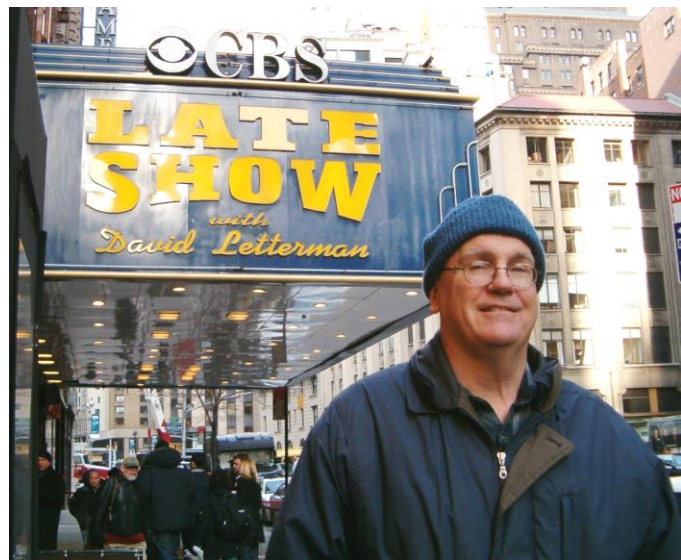
There's certainly a lot to see there, from meteorites and space science, to geology, to dioramas of all the mammals and birds of the world, to anthropology of all the traditional cultures of the world, to (of course) fossils. It was the fossils, especially of the dinosaurs, that were the prime attraction of busloads of grade school kids in the museum that day for a field trip. They all seemed to have amazing stamina and exuberance. The teachers who accompanied them, considerably less so.

### True Fans are Where You Find Them

Most of our time in New York was spent in and around Times Square. We had planned on seeing three shows, but it turned out we were also able to get into a fourth, and the tickets to that one were even free.

We doing some window shopping, trying to stay warm, and were approached by a guy who asked us if we wanted free tickets to attend a taping of the *Late Show with David Letterman*. It sounded good to us, and the price was right. But it wasn't all that simple to get into the show.

The first thing we had to do was answer some dumb trivia question to show we were true fans of the show. I had no clue (I didn't have the heart to tell him we usually watch Jay Leno instead), and it took a couple of hints to get the right answer. Our names were put on a list and we were told to show up at the Ed Sullivan Theater (where the show is taped) between two and three o'clock. When we got there at two, we had to stand in a long line to get the actual tickets, which were individually numbered (ours were in the 140s). After that, we were told to scam and reassemble no later than 3:30pm in an indoor concert hall a short distance away that they were using as a holding area. After reconvening, there was a lengthy indoctrination, or something close to it, on what was expected of the audience – we were told what we should do (laugh uproariously at every joke as if it was the funniest thing we had ever heard) and what we should *not* do (no whistling, just cheering, and no long drawn-out “awwwwww”s as they cause problems with the sound pickup). It wasn't until four o'clock that we were finally ushered into the theater for the taping, which began shortly thereafter.



in front of the Ed Sullivan Theater



Unfortunately, the show itself was mostly forgettable and the house band that played just before the taping and during the breaks was so painfully loud it became somewhat of an ordeal just to sit through it all. The only redemption was the show's guest, who was *very* memorable. Clint Eastwood. Letterman has a rather puerile sense of humor, but he *is* a good interviewer and for about fifteen minutes the show sparkled.

Afterwards, we decided that if we'd known of all the machinations we'd had to go through, and how unpleasantly loud the house band was, we would probably have given it a pass. I don't know how many other people felt the same way, but on the other hand a woman from Perth, Australia, who sat next to us, was so happy to be there that she had taken a loss on a ticket to a matinee of *The Lion King* musical to see Dave instead. Now *that's* a true fan!

### Why don't we paint the town and all that jazz?

We were managing to have a pretty good time in spite of the cold weather, but the main reason we were in New York was to see a few Broadway shows. There are few things more entertaining than a well-staged Broadway musical and the two shows we saw back in July were the highlight of that trip. A bit of research on [broadway.com](http://broadway.com) showed us that there were a *lot* of musicals playing we'd like to see, and it took some agonizing to pare the list down to a top three.

The best place to buy Broadway tickets is the TKTS booth at 47<sup>th</sup> Street and Broadway. It offers day-of-show seats only, usually at a 50% discount from the theater box office prices. The TKTS booth is an attraction in itself. It's a wedge-shaped structure, with the back of which is a red fiberglass amphitheater-style stairway. From the top you get a very nice southerly view of the neon extravaganza that is Times Square.

The first night we decided, why don't we paint the town and all that jazz, and we went to see *Chicago*. Very entertaining, and it was more comedic than the Oscar-winning movie. The next night it was the equally enjoyable *Mamma Mia!* and, saving the best for last, *Phantom of the Opera* on our final night in town. Except that I'm not sure *Phantom* was really the best, though it was for sure the most different. Both *Chicago* and *Mamma Mia!* were very minimalist in set design. *Phantom*, however, was lush and way over the top, closer in production values to an actual opera than a musical.

We had good lower level seats for all of them because TKTS does not sell any of the upper level cheap seats. During the intermission in *Chicago*, I took a look "over the top" into the balcony to see how many people were there. It was almost empty. Back in July the only unsold seats would have been the back few rows. I guess January really *is* the low season in New York.



Nicki at the top of the TKTS booth

## Signs of the Times (Square)

Times Square itself was also way over the top in production values. It was if every store on or even near the Square was trying to outdo all the others in outrageousness. The Toys R Us store, for instance, has a four story operational Ferris Wheel inside, and if they intend that it cause a double take for a first time visitor to the store, it does. There's a Hershey's Chocolate Store, whose 200 foot tall store facade with numerous props and steam machines embedded within it is reportedly the largest permanent fixture ever constructed in Times Square.

Our favorite, though, was M&Ms World, with its giant video billboard showing comic little vignettes of the four M&M characters, such as 'Red' doing a King Kong imitation atop the Empire State Building only to discover he is afraid of heights. Inside the store there is a lot more than just candy. There was everything from themed clothing to piggy banks to holiday ornaments, and even a couple of squashed penny machines. There were M&Ms of all kinds, in colors I had never seen before. And, of course, the M&Ms characters were in evidence practically everywhere.



inside M&Ms World with 'Red' and Nicki

## Epilog: Rich the Destroyer

We would probably go back to the Novotel if we could get a room rate that good again. We paid much less than \$200 a night, which was a big reduction from the rack rate of up to \$799 a night. But we did have a few problems with the place. I had no sooner locked some things in the room safe when it showed an error code of some kind and refused to open. The hotel finally had to have it drilled out to get it open, and then replaced it with a new one. Not long after that I attempted to draw down the inner window shade, and instead pulled the thing right off the wall. And later, when I turned on the room television, all there was to see was a dark screen (which, after maintenance was called in, turned out to be a satellite television outage of some kind).

There was so much bad luck that Nicki started to think that I was the cause of it all and refused to let me near anything that could possibly malfunction. I took this to heart when, one evening in the hotel's lobby (five floors up from ground level), I saw a group of people outside on the terrace who had been admiring the view of Times Square. Except that they were now all freezing and the door back in wouldn't open. They saw me and waved frantically. I made a point of noticing them, nodded and smiled, and languidly waved back at them. They then waved at me even more frantically, pointing at the door. At that point I took pity on them, walked over and pushed the door release.

I was afraid this hex might even extend to my car, which had been parked for four days in the frosty Amtrak garage at BWI Airport. But nope, it started right up. ☀

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## Afterword:

It would be a full year before Nicki and I could get back to New York, and we pretty much repeated the 2009 trip – several Broadway shows and some leisurely walks through parts of the city. But instead of Greenwich Village, this time we went to see the Chelsea neighborhood where we found a fascinating bit of history.



# A Taste of the Temptuous Apple (January 2010)

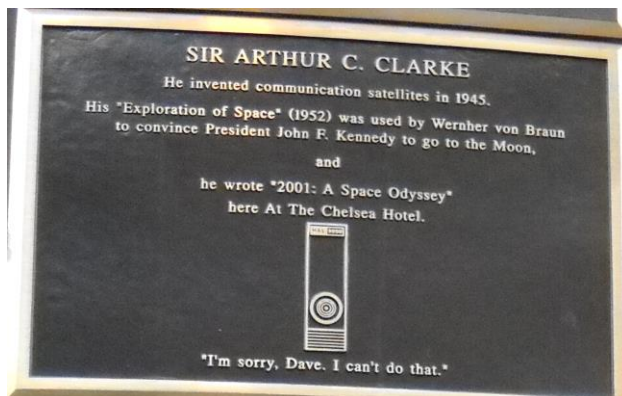
## Prolog: You were Famous, Your Heart was a Legend

Mid-winter afternoons in Manhattan are usually chilly, and this was no exception. Nicki and I were most of the way through the last day of our annual mid-January visit to New York and, as usual, were trying to do and see as many things as we could without wearing ourselves down. We had spent most of the afternoon in the Chelsea neighborhood on the Lower West Side and had saved the most notable place for last.

It was the famous Chelsea Hotel. The place was built back in 1883 as one of New York's first private apartment cooperatives, but has spent just about all of its existence as a hotel and is now on the National Register of Historic Places. I don't think I'd want to stay there (most of the reviews on [tripadvisor.com](http://tripadvisor.com) are not kind to the place), but over the decades of its existence it has been the temporary residence of many, many famous people, including Mark Twain, O Henry, William S. Burroughs, Dylan Thomas, Gore Vidal, Tennessee Williams, Arthur Miller, and Jean-Paul Sartre. Jack Kerouac wrote *On the Road* while living there and Arthur C. Clarke wrote the novelization of *2001: A Space Odyssey* there. It has had a very colorful history, and not all of it upbeat. Its darkest hour was on October 12, 1978, when Sex Pistols bassist Sid Vicious allegedly killed his girlfriend Nancy Sprungen in Room 100 of the Chelsea. But he was never brought to trial, dying from a drug overdose a few months later while out on bail.



the Chelsea Hotel



Clarke plaque at the Chelsea Hotel

Nicki and I spend a few minutes in the lobby of the Chelsea, trying to imagine what it must have been like there during its heyday in the 1950s and 1960s. The ambience still exists. The vintage furniture has been cared for, and it is easy to imagine some of the luminaries who resided there sitting and sharing pleasantries in front of a warming fire on a cold January evening.

There is a huge sense of history about the place. The great Leonard Cohen, who also once resided there, made the Chelsea the subject of one of his songs: "*I remember you well in the Chelsea Hotel / you were famous, your heart was a legend.*" For the hotel itself, that's still true.

## The Theater that's Actually a City

My first trip to New York City was way back in 1967, when I was in high school. It was a senior class trip and while I know we didn't stay at the Chelsea, I do remember that whatever hotel we did stay at probably would probably make the Chelsea seem like a palace in comparison.

There were a lot of 'firsts' for me on that trip, among them my first airplane ride, my first time at a major league baseball game (at the now-demolished Shea Stadium), and (on the way home) the first time I became so ill that I needed hospitalization (for pneumonia).

Another 'first' that had been scheduled during that trip was a visit to Radio City Music Hall, but I was starting to feel ill the evening we were supposed to go and instead stayed at the hotel by myself. And now, more than 40 years later, I finally got to see the place.



Nicki and tour guide James



Nicki and me with one of the Rockettes

Radio City is the largest indoor theater in the world, seating about 6,000, but there's a lot more to it than just that. James, the tour guide, gave us an extensive behind-the-scenes look at the place. There is everything from stage-raising elevators that were once so advanced that the U.S. Navy incorporated similar hydraulics into its World War Two-era aircraft carriers, to a mighty pipe organ (one of the largest in the world, though we didn't get to hear it), to an upper-level apartment (now used mostly as a party suite) where many famous show business personalities have passed through. We even got to talk to a member of the Rockettes dance ensemble, world-famous for their high leg-kick chorus line routines. We asked her about her

background, and it turns out she was originally from Oklahoma, having studied performing arts at one of the universities there.

There was so much to see that sensory overload eventually set in for me. The interior is art deco in style, with ornate sculptures, murals, and chandeliers filling the many lounges and entryways. And it's huge. There were work crews on stage, finishing up the removal of the sets from the annual holiday spectacular show that runs there every December. They seemed no bigger than insects beneath the tall arch that frames a stage that must easily be a couple hundred feet wide.

I was happy to finally get to see what the others in my class trip told me I had missed those many years ago. There are many other theaters in Manhattan, but none so lavish as Radio City.



## Some Enchanted Evenings

The main purpose of our trip to New York was to go inside a few of those other theaters to see musical productions. January is low season in New York and good seats on Broadway are usually available for reasonable rates. But there are some musicals that are so successful, no matter what the season, that cheap tickets are hard to come by. That's what we found out when we tried to get tickets to see *A Little Night Music*. It had been playing for only about a month, and had plenty of star power with Angela Lansbury and Catherine Zeta-Jones in the cast. No half-price day-of-show tickets were to be had. In fact, the best that seemed to be available, for any performance, were isolated seats that went for about \$120 each.

So instead, we went to see *South Pacific*, the great Rodgers & Hammerstein musical that was playing at The Lincoln Center's Beaumont Theater. It's a very modern venue compared to other places we've been to see plays in New York. The stage protrudes out into the audience, and the seats are arranged in amphitheater style, with the result that it was a performance in the half-round. Our discounted tickets got us seats that were only about 30 feet from the stage. The performance was terrific – *South Pacific* was one of R&H's greatest plays and has some of the best songs of any Broadway musical, including “Some Enchanted Evening”, “There is Nothin' Like a Dame”, “Younger than Springtime”, “Bali Ha'i”, “I'm Gonna Wash That Man Right Outa My Hair”, and “(I'm In Love With) A Wonderful Guy”.



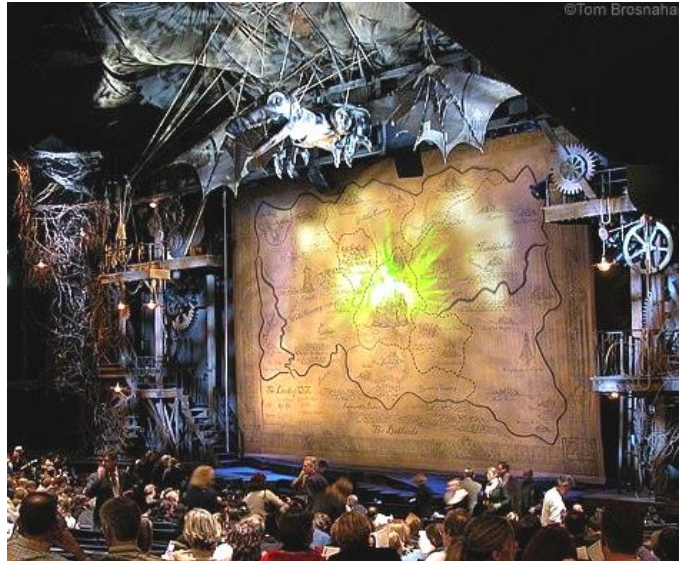
outside The Lincoln Center Theater



the August Wilson Theater

Half-price seats were also unavailable for the other two performances we saw during the trip – *Jersey Boys* and *Wicked*. For *Jersey Boys*, we compromised and got less expensive full price seats near the back of the orchestra section. The view of the stage was just fine, but the overhang of the balcony restricted the view of some of the video effects that were shown on a big screen above the stage. The play was an adaptation, of sorts, of the life story of singer Frankie Valli and the other three members of The Four Seasons and featured performances of all the group's hit songs in ways that moved the storyline forward. I wasn't at all familiar with the history of the group, so I was surprised (even though perhaps I shouldn't have been) that the members of the group were somewhat caught up in criminal activities from time to time and that the true talent of the group was as much songwriter Bob Gaudin as it was Frankie Valli.

The tickets hardest to get were for *Wicked*, but we had saved that one for last and decided to spend the money for good seats on our last night in town. It was worth it. The show is based on Gregory Maguire's novel that re-imagines the events in *The Wizard of Oz* such that the Wicked Witch of the West is a sympathetic character. It was hugely entertaining and the production values for the play were right up there on a level with *Phantom of the Opera*. The one fault, if there is one, is that apart from "Defying Gravity", none of the songs were all that memorable. But hey, we can't all come and go by bubble.



the stage for *Wicked* prior to the show

### Not a Creature was Stirring...

Radio City Music Hall is part of the much larger complex of buildings at Rockefeller Center. One of the other buildings there is the '30 Rock' tower, the home offices of the NBC television network (among other things). There is a plaza next to 30 Rock that appears almost every day on *The Today Show*, where hundreds of screaming tourists vie for a few seconds of national television exposure with Matt Lauer, Meredith Vieira, Ann Curry, or Al Roker.



at the ice rink in Rockefeller Center

Nicki and I had no interest in that, but we did pay the place a visit a few hours after the show had wrapped for the day. There is a very popular ice rink there that was populated with skaters of all stages of ability. There was one lady who was elegantly skating backward, making graceful motions with her arms, and there were many school kids out there trying to just make it around the rink without falling, not all of them succeeding. We cheered them all on, applauding the expert woman and shouting encouragement to the novices. If there had been more time I would have been tempted to join them out there, but we had other places to go and things to see.

It turned out that Nicki had never been to Macys, so that's where we went next. The store itself was nothing out of the ordinary except for its size, but there was a splendid view of the Empire State Building from the street outside the store. After that it was on to Grand Central Station, mostly to see the astronomical ceiling in the main concourse. There had been a renovation back in the 1990s that had restored the luster to the ceiling by removing decades of



tobacco smoke residue that had built up. It's a pretty amazing sight, with constellations traced in gold on an aqua background, but for some reason, the view is backward, as if we were looking at it from the wrong side of a celestial sphere.

But it was the Chelsea neighborhood we found the most pleasant, possibly because it *is* a neighborhood. There are shops and restaurants, row houses with ornate ironwork fences, and several stately old churches. It turns out that this part of the city was once the home of Clement Clarke Moore, a Professor of Oriental and Greek Literature at Columbia University. Back in the early 1800s, Moore lived in an estate home named 'Chelsea', which gave its name to the surrounding neighborhood, and there is now a small park (at 10<sup>th</sup> Avenue and West 22<sup>nd</sup> Street) that bears his name.



in Clement Clarke Moore Park

Moore is best known, of course, for the poem attributed to him that was first published in the Troy, New York *Sentinel* on December 23, 1823, about "A Visit from St. Nicholas". Nicki and I walked around the Moore Park looking for a plaque in his honor, but there was none to be found. It seems to be now mostly a children's playground, but it was almost empty the afternoon we were there. Apart from a woman and her young daughter sitting on a bench in a corner of the park, not a creature was stirring, not even a mouse.

### Epilog: The Winged Warrior of Trenton, New Jersey

Just east of Trenton, New Jersey, adjacent to the Amtrak rail line, is a sculpture garden whose most visible exhibit is a shiny metal stylized statue of a winged horseman, pointed toward New York. What made it attention-worthy was that Nicki and I have seen paintings of such horsemen before, at a museum exhibit about 16<sup>th</sup> to 18<sup>th</sup> century Poland. Back then Poland was known as 'The Land of the Winged Horsemen', and the winged warriors, or 'Hussars', were an elite cavalry. I've been to Poland enough times that I feel a connection to the country, so someday I'll have to go to New Jersey and see that sculpture at a speed slower than 60 miles per hour.



the Winged Warrior of Trenton

There are no winged warriors in New York, but there are many other temptuous wonders and a three-day sojourn is not nearly enough to get more than a taste of what a great city it is. We'll be going back next January. ☀

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### Afterword:

My connection to Poland goes beyond having visited there. Nicki's grandfather was from Poland, though exactly what city we're not sure because of lack of records. I also have been on the invite list, every November, from the Embassy of Poland for its annual reception in honor of the anniversary of Poland's independence. There is always good food and conversation, and once in a while, like back in 2004, the event even has a bit more visibility than usual.

# Tis the Season

You know it's getting close to the holiday season when evening reception events start happening down in D.C. There was one the 3<sup>rd</sup> week of November that Nicki and I went to, sponsored by the National Coal Council. (Appropriately, it was held in the underground ballroom of the hotel that hosted the event.) We'd gone to last year's NCC reception and it had been kind of a so-so event – not all that well attended, and the best food of the evening was from the fruit bar. (I had tanked up on bananas with strawberry compote, chocolate syrup, and whipped cream – kind of like a banana split, but without the ice cream.)

This year's NCC reception, however, was its 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary year. I could tell right off this was going to be a much more deluxe event than the previous year because the



**Duke Ellington**  
*school of the arts*

first thing I saw (and heard) when I entered the hotel ballroom was a small promenade orchestra in the corner that was playing jazz compositions. (It turned out they were from the Duke Ellington School of the Arts, and this was the first time they had performed in public.) And the food was much, much better than last year – roast turkey and prime rib (both being carved right there at the buffet table), crab claws and shrimp, oysters, and best of all, an open bar. We didn't go away hungry or thirsty.



**The National Coal Council**  
*Power for America from America*

The NCC is actually a fairly high profile organization – it does studies of various kinds and takes its marching orders directly from the

Secretaries of Energy and Interior. Gail Norton, the present Secretary of the Interior, was there and made a brief welcoming speech. Some of the other notables (to me, at least) that were present included two past Assistant Secretaries of Energy, both of whom recognized me when I went over to say hi, and my old third-level boss back when I worked at the Tennessee Valley Authority. I hadn't seen him in 16 years, but we both recognized each other immediately. Gosh, was it really that long ago?

It turned out there were two more receptions the very next evening, at the Embassy of Slovakia (an art opening, and the brother of Andy Warhol was scheduled to be there) and the Embassy of Poland. We decided to go to the Poland event with its full buffet of excellent food (the Slovak event had only wine and cheese) and also because we had missed it last year when a big windstorm blew over a tree across our driveway.

The Polish Embassy reception turned out to be a bit more interesting than I thought it would be. Nicki and I took the subway to go to the reception, and when we got to the Embassy we had thought there had been some kind of traffic accident from all the police cars present and the warning lights that had been placed on the street to divert traffic from the lane closest to the Embassy. But when we got to the fence that surrounds the Embassy, there, just inside the gate, was a big guy dressed in a dark suit standing there quietly observant, with his right hand resting inside the lapel of his coat. He and the police presence were there for security.





Embassy of Poland in Washington, D.C.

The reception was in honor of the 86<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the independence of the Republic of Poland, and there were at least 300 people there to help celebrate. It was actually a rather special reception because of events that had occurred earlier in the year – Poland had made its long-awaited entry into the European Union, and, oh yes, Poland had sent armed forces into Iraq as part of George W. Bush’s “coalition of the willing”. Because of this, some rather high-profile military people (from several countries) were in

attendance. It wasn’t until I saw the most high-profile of them all, standing quietly in the corner talking to his underlings, that it dawned on me just how much a juicy target this reception might be to the bad guys – it was U.S. Air Force General Richard Myers, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and the United States’ highest-ranking military officer.

There were no incidents of any kind and the reception started winding down about nine o’clock when the food started to run out. I talked with a few people I knew there, including the Polish Embassy Commercial Attaché, ate more than my share of baked salmon, and drank a couple of glasses of fine Polish beer. I think I could get used to this kind of thing.

Anyway, on the way home I got to thinking, I probably get to go to maybe a half dozen or more embassy events every year, thanks to some of the connections I’ve made in the 16 years I’ve been in the D.C. area. But really, I’m just a neophyte when it comes to the Washington international nightlife scene – there must be dozens and dozens of events like this that I never even hear of, much less wangle an invite to.

But I’m working on it! ☀



Poland’s Coat of Arms

### Afterword:

This autumn there have been several enjoyable embassy events that Nicki and I have attended, as well as the autumn NCC reception. The Embassy of Poland is actually having two receptions this year – the November event in celebration of its independence and a smaller one later in December, sponsored by the Embassy’s Economics and Commercial Section, just because they like to party during the holidays.

This is probably a good place to mention that Poland is one of my favorite places to visit. I’ve been there 12 times, most recently this past October for a big international meeting on carbon sequestration. But the October trip started out with a ‘visit’ to places much, much farther away than that!

# ‘Do Zobaczenia’ Still Doesn’t Mean ‘Good-Bye’

## Prolog: Outta This World!

There are some places that are beyond the reach of even the most veteran air travelers.

I was at Dulles Airport, on my way to Poland for a big international meeting on carbon sequestration. The way to the concourse took me through a recently-constructed passageway that the Washington Airports Authority uses as a gallery, and the current display was a stunning photography exhibit from the Smithsonian’s National Air and Space Museum titled “NASA presents BEYOND: Visions of Our Solar System”.

There were dozens of gorgeous photos, taken from images sent back to Earth by various planetary probes. For the short length of time it took me to walk through the exhibit it was almost as if I had been transmogrified into a human-powered spacecraft; I had close encounters with the clouds of Venus, the volcanoes of Mars, the Great Red Spot of Jupiter, the rings of Saturn...

If the purpose of the exhibit was to instill a sense of wonder, it worked. At least for me it did, but for others who were passing through...not so much. Dozens of people passed by me while I was marveling at the space photos, and very few seemed to notice there was anything out of the ordinary there. Their loss. For me, long distance air travel is something mostly to be endured, but after seeing this photographic journey to the planets I was all charged up and ready to go.

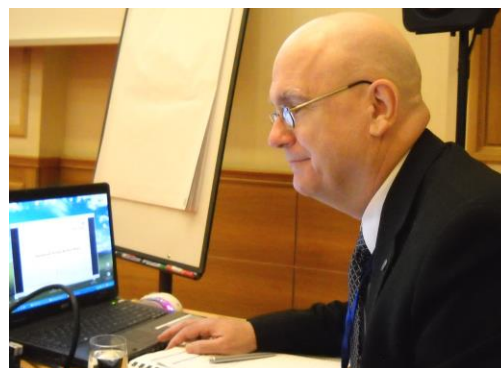
Just not *quite* that far.

## Memories of Other Polands

Warsaw, Poland is not as far away as Mars, but it sure *seemed* that way. Including the interminable layover at Frankfurt’s airport and the six hour difference in time zones, subjectively I was just about a full day in transit. I had come to Poland for a big international meeting on carbon sequestration (I am part of the group that organized the event), and it was difficult and complex enough that my walking-around time outside the meeting was never more than a couple of hours at a time, here and there.



part of NASA's solar system photography exhibition



at the carbon sequestration meeting



This was not my first visit to Poland. I've been there 11 other times, all on business, dating all the way back to the early 1990s. In those other trips I had gotten to see many other parts of the country besides Warsaw, from Gdansk in the north to Kraków in the south. I would have really liked to return to Kraków if there had only been time, as it is a superbly beautiful and picturesque city. Centuries ago it was the capital of Poland; parts of the city date back to the twelfth century, if not further. The major feature of Kraków is the wonderful castle on the hill, but there are also no less than three large cathedrals situated on the largest old town square in Europe. At the beginning of every hour, night and day, a lone trumpeter plays a "call-to-arms" theme from the top tower of St. Mary's, the largest of these churches.

When I first listened to the theme, I was surprised that it ended in mid-note; the reason is that the theme dates back to the invasion of the Tatars in the 1200s – the theme actually *is* a call-to-arms for the Polish defenders, and the trumpeter was silenced, in mid-note, by a Tatar arrow through his throat. The first time I visited Kraków, in 1992, it was just a couple of years since the fall of communism and before the economic resurgence had taken hold. After dark, the city itself seemed to go to sleep and you could hear the trumpeter from blocks away. The very next year, however, there were enough new restaurants with music and nightlife that it was difficult to hear the theme from right in front of the cathedral.

One other thing I remember about 1992 Kraków was the 'crazy boys'. These were young men who had just completed their required Army service; they celebrated by parading around in groups, wearing brightly colored capes, and singing loudly until well into the night. In 1993 there was no sign of them. Poland had changed.



the "Crazy Boys" of Kraków (in 1992)



at the boundary of the Warsaw Ghetto

## In the Ghetto

My most recent visit to Warsaw had been eight years back, in 2002. The biggest change since then has been that Poland is now a member of the European Union, and because of that the investment money has come into the country in a big way. The most obvious example of this, to me, was that the hotel I stayed at for this trip did not even exist in 2002.

Turns out that the hotel is not far from an important piece of history, the Warsaw Ghetto. The Nazis established it at the beginning of World War Two as a walled holding area for the estimated 400,000

Jews living in the city, many of whom were later sent to the extermination camp at Treblinka. There was a disastrously unsuccessful uprising near the end of the war (graphically depicted by the movie *The Pianist*), which resulted in the Nazis methodically destroying most of the buildings within the Ghetto walls and later almost all of the walls as well. Places where the walls once existed are well-marked and easy to find, and there are also many monuments and memorials in and near the Ghetto. The most significant one is the memorial to the Warsaw Ghetto heroes, which stands at the edge of a plaza within the boundary of the Ghetto. The day I was there it was being visited by a large group of schoolchildren, being lectured by their rabbi about what had happened so many years ago.



the Memorial to the Heroes of the Warsaw Ghetto

### In Search of Chopin

The movie *The Pianist* is the story of Władysław Szpilman, who was one of the survivors of the Warsaw Ghetto. Szpilman was a concert pianist, as the film's title would indicate, and the movie features a complete performance of Polish composer Fryderyk Chopin's "Grand Polonaise" for piano and orchestra over the closing credits. I am a great fan of classical piano and I had hoped to find time to attend a Chopin recital during my time in Warsaw, but it was not to be, even though the prestigious International Chopin Piano Competition was being held in Warsaw while I was there. The closest I came was



string quartet performing at the dinner event



dancers at the Folk Gospoda restaurant

the night of the dinner event, where the Polish hosts had arranged for a string quartet to perform. Most of their set was modernistic compositions that were not very memorable, but near the end they snuck in a couple of Chopin preludes that had been transposed from solo piano.

That was not the only musical event of the trip, though. I and some of some of the other meeting attendees had gone to a Polish restaurant the evening before the dinner event. The food was great, but it turned out that the place also offered some authentic Polish folk culture in the form of songs and dances. And there was even more – to further engage the diners, there were a



couple of contests. Three men competed in a whip-cracking contest, and two women (one of them my upper management) participated in a bead-stringing contest. I only hope the men's contest doesn't inspire a new office motivational tool.

## A Walk through Warsaw

Chopin was not the only notable I was in search of while I was in Warsaw. Just outside the walls of the *Stare Miasto* (the 'old town') is the birthplace of one of Warsaw's other famous residents, Maria Skłodowska Curie. There is a small museum on the upper floor, but most of the place is now a gift shop.



birthplace of Maria Skłodowska Curie



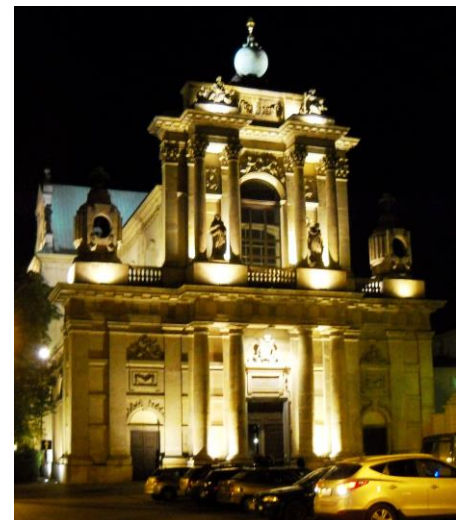
Warsaw's Old Town Square at dusk

The walk back to the hotel took me through the old and historic part of the city. Warsaw's old town square, while not as large as the one in Kraków, is still one of the larger ones in Europe. In this case, though, 'old' is a relative term, as every building in and around the square (as well as the rest of the *Stare Miasto*) had been mostly destroyed during World War Two and was rebuilt afterwards. Because of this it has been placed on the UNESCO's list of World Heritage Sites as "an outstanding example of a near-total reconstruction of a span of history covering the 13<sup>th</sup> to the 20<sup>th</sup> century".

were carried out. Today, it's a bit more sedate, with plenty of restaurants and souvenir shops. Nowadays the only hangings that happen in the square are of the numerous drawings and paintings done by local artists who display their work there.

The way out of the *Stare Miasto* took me down the so-called 'Royal Route' boulevard, which leads past many notable structures – the Royal Castle, the Presidential Palace, the Tyszkiewicz Palace (now part of the University of Warsaw), statues of various statesmen and scientists (including a large one of Copernicus), and several cathedrals. Of these, my favorite was the Carmelite Church with its columns and belfries, which looks all the more impressive after dark. This was also the place of Chopin's first employment as a musician, when as a young man he

In centuries past the square was the place where guilds met, fairs were held, and executions



Church of the Carmelites

gave a recital on the church's pipe organ. Warsaw must have been a very different place in Chopin's time. But then again, for me, Warsaw was also a very different place in 1992. It was good to be back again.

### Epilog: The Best Amber Shop in Warsaw

I couldn't leave Warsaw without a visit to the best amber shop in the city. The Marysienka Amber Gallery is located in Warsaw's *Stare Miasto*, about a block south of the old town square. I can't remember exactly when I first found it, but I've been there so many times that I became friends with the owners.

Amber, as we all know from *Jurassic Park*, is a semi-precious stone that is actually the fossilized resin of ancient conifer trees. It occurs in several places in the world, but about 90% of the world's supply comes from the Baltic Sea coast of Poland, Lithuania, Latvia, and Russia. In Poland, craftspeople have become quite skilled in transforming amber into jewelry, often in settings made from locally mined silver. So much so that almost every gift and souvenir shop in Warsaw features Polish amber jewelry. I think what originally brought me to the Marysienka shop was its large variety of pendants, necklaces, earrings. That, and the very reasonable prices.



with my friend Mirka of the Marysienka Amber Gallery

It had been more than eight years since I'd last been to their shop but the owners, Mirka and Marcin, immediately recognized me and were happy to see me. When it came time to leave, Mirka asked when I would next return to Warsaw, but I had no answer to that other than "someday". When I was there in 2002, I had, as usual, practiced my fractured Polish on Mirka, and as usual she had politely pretended that I wasn't mangling the language. Back then, on my way out of the shop, I had reluctantly bid her *do widzenia* ('good-bye'), but she hadn't accepted that. "No," she had replied, "not *do widzenia*. *Do zobaczenia*." ('Until later'.) "*Do zobaczenia*" doesn't mean 'good-bye'." When I mentioned this to Mirka, she laughed and told me, "It's still true!"

She's right, you know... ☀

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### Afterword:

In case you're wondering, I have many other friends in Poland that I originally met during previous visits to the country. Some of them even have a professional interest in carbon sequestration technologies, but none of them, alas, attended the meeting.

Anyway, I can't 'leave' Warsaw without reprinting a short appreciation (from January 2004) of a musician who had a connection, of sorts, to the city. This was one of a series of short biographical essays I wrote several years back, just for the fun of it, to remember classical music composers on their birthdays. Most of them had created many notable works that have become familiar and evergreen to listeners over the years, but there are some composers who are mostly known for a single memorable piece of music. Here is a case in point.

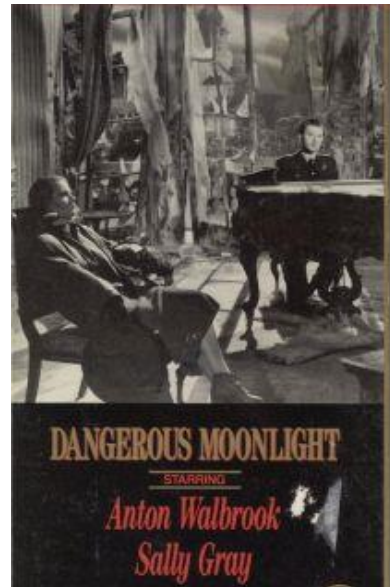


# Happy 100<sup>th</sup> Birthday to a Semi-Obscure but Talented Composer

Today, January 13<sup>th</sup>, is the 100<sup>th</sup> birthday of British composer Richard Addinsell (1904-1977), who perhaps qualifies as the greatest ‘one-hit wonder’ in the history of classical music. He was born in London and apparently received most of his primary and secondary education home-schooled. When he reached college age, he attempted to continue his education in first law and then music, but never obtained a degree in either. Addinsell found that he did have a talent for composing, however, and by the time he had reached middle age he had achieved a successful career writing music for the movies.



Richard Addinsell



Addinsell might have remained in semi-obscurity except for one of his cinema compositions, a splendid concerto for piano and orchestra in one movement that appeared in the movie *Dangerous Moonlight* (1941). The film producers had wanted something that sounded like one of Rachmaninoff’s famous piano concertos but apparently had not wanted to pay the royalties for the usage rights. So they hired Addinsell and what they got instead was the “Warsaw Concerto”, a composition so transcendental of its film score heritage that to this day it invariably ranks among the top 100 compositions in classical music radio station listener polls.

Addinsell apparently did not have very high personal regard for the composition, though, and indeed, never again composed anything that so captured listeners’ interest. He preferred to remain in semi-obscurity and continue his career as a composer for the movies, where he knew he could be successful. And he was. According to one of his biographers, Addinsell “was hugely influential on a generation of British film composers and established a quality and style of full scale orchestral writing that was never bettered”. For his famous piano concerto, at least, there is no doubt. ☀

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## Afterword:

I have never seen the movie *Dangerous Moonlight*, but I’m expecting that the Turner Classic Movies cable television channel will show it someday. If so, I’ll watch.

Next up is another remembrance, but this time of a famous fan personality. The beginning of December marks the second anniversary of the death of Forrest J Ackerman. He has been described as “a key figure in the wider cultural perception of science fiction as a literary, art, and film genre”. And for me, he was also a friend. Here’s what I wrote about his passing.

# A Farewell to Forry

I'm not sure when I first met Forrest J Ackerman. It must have been at some Worldcon, most likely in the 1980s, and our mutual friend Dave Kyle probably made the introduction. I have a very clear memory when I first had a chance to *talk* to Forry, though. It was in 1994, at the first FanHistoricon in Hagerstown, Maryland. Peggy Rae Pavlat had organized the convention to try to set up a continuing organization that would collect and preserve bits of fan history. Forry attended the convention, probably because it allowed him to visit with Harry Warner, Jr., who lived in Hagerstown, one final time. It had been hoped that Harry would attend the convention but true to his reputation as fandom's most famous hermit, he remained at home. Instead, the convention, all 15 or so of us, visited Harry in groups of three at a time.

It's my own fault, of course, that I had never taken the opportunity to seek out and talk to Forry prior to the FanHistoricon. By then I had been editor of Harry Warner's history of 1950s fandom, *A Wealth of Fable*, and in the process, had developed a driving interest in learning what had gone on before. But then, on the last evening of the convention, while we were all sitting in the con suite after the last program item had ended, Peggy Rae thrust a tape recorder into my hand and told me, "Interview Forry."



Forry and Peggy Rae at the 1994 FanHistoricon

I didn't so much interview him as let him tell some stories. The tape still exists somewhere, and the transcript became the first four installments of a series of autobiographical articles that ran in *Mimosa* between December 1994 and December 2001. Those four articles each generated quite a few comments from readers, and these were compiled and mailed to Forry. He apparently loved the feedback so much that he agreed to continue the series. So for the next few Worldcons, Forry and I would sit for about an hour or so in one of the less trafficked parts of the convention. He would relate more of his memories into a tape recorder, and the transcripts from those sessions were edited into the remaining installments of the series.

I had always thought that Forry would, one day, write an autobiography. But he never did, and the twelve articles in *Mimosa* might be as close as he ever came. The last time I ever saw him was at the 2006 Worldcon in Anaheim. It was in the aftermath of the Hugo Award ceremony, and I was in a rush to meet up with a friend at one of the parties. As I was hurrying out of the arena where the ceremony had just ended, there was Forry, seated in a wheelchair and looking very frail. It took about 20 paces after that for my brain to shift into gear and get the rest of me to stop and go back, but by then he had disappeared into the mass of people that were working their way toward the exits.



I have many memories of the relatively short time I knew Forry, but the one I treasure the most is from 1996, when my wife Nicki and I visited him at his ‘Ackermansion’ home in the Hollywood Hills section of Los Angeles. It took an effort to get there, located as it was halfway up the twisty narrow road rather generously named Glendower ‘Avenue’, but it lived up to our expectations. *Every* room in the house was chock-full of books, paintings, posters, and memorabilia, even including the outdoor storage rooms. As one might expect, there was much emphasis on fantastic cinema, from which he gained fame outside fandom as a magazine editor. But it was easy to see that



Forry with a very small part of his memorabilia collection



Forry Ackerman at the Ackermansion

Forry had not lost track of his fan roots – there were many mementos and artifacts from decades past and he had, at that time, probably the second- or third-largest collection of fanzines in existence, including many from the 1930s when science fiction fanzines were first being published.

And now he’s gone. History will remember Forrest J Ackerman as perhaps the most famous and influential fan of all time, and justifiably so. Dave Kyle once referred to Forry as “The Fan for All Seasons” and that’s true – Forry wasn’t just a famous fan, he *lived* fandom, all the time, for the last 82 years of his life. But it was another famous fan, Walter Willis, who way back in 1951 so accurately described Forry in just a few words: “Forry Ackerman is a true fan in a way that most of us don’t come within a mile of being. Forry really *believes* in fandom. ... There are two things that every neofan learns: one is that John W. Campbell, Jr. is the editor of *Astounding Science Fiction* and the other is that Forrest J Ackerman is the No.1 Fan. For my money, Ackerman’s position is infinitely stronger. I am sold on Ackerman.”

I consider myself privileged to have known Forry, and I am already missing him. We will not see his like again. ☀

### Afterword:

I originally wrote this essay at the request of the editor of the British newszine *Critical Wave*. It was supposed to have been published in January 2009, but that issue still has yet to appear. That’s not the first time this sort of thing has happened, so I guess I must possess potent and nefarious publication-killing powers.

Anyway, it’s time to close this collection but before I do (and since winter is just beginning), here’s a short narrative on what *last* winter was like. Back then I had just finished the wrap-up to a carbon sequestration meeting in London and had thought another one in Australia was coming up. But it didn’t work out that way, and as it turned out, that wasn’t necessarily a bad thing.

# What I Did (and Didn't Do) in Early February

I might have been in Australia when the Big One hit.

December and January are usually the 'low season' at work, but this year was an exception. An aftermath from the October international carbon sequestration meeting in London was that the technical people in the organization decided they needed to re-do their action plan for the next three years. There will be a meeting of the technical group in March, but prior to that the core group had decided it would be a good idea if they held a meeting, at the beginning of February, to develop an initial draft of the plan, as well as deal with several other action items that had resulted from the London meeting. I am not one of the technical group, but I am part of the organization that stages these meetings. So it fell to me and my compatriot John to organize the early February meeting. And, since the meeting chair is from Australia, that's where the meeting was held.

There was a lot to do. We had to parse through the London meeting minutes to determine the content of the meeting, develop an outline of all the topics and subtopics to be considered at the meeting, and finally, after two tricontinental teleconferences, come up with an approved agenda for the meeting and put together briefing books for everybody who would be there. Both John and I were supposed to go, but in the end only John did. Initially, both John and I had been refused travel funds but after a complaint from the Australian meeting hosts, only John's travel money was grudgingly restored.

At any rate, what I missed by staying here was mostly a replay of the itinerary from my previous Australia trip of September 2008. There was a three-day meeting in Canberra followed by a rainy field trip to the Otway Project.

What I didn't miss by staying here was the Snowmageddon.

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I might have been in Australia when the Big One hit. But it's probably a good thing I wasn't.

There was a moderately severe storm a few days after John left for Australia there that dropped about five inches of light fluffy snow. It created a nice wintery scene in our backyard but it took over an hour for Nicki and me to shovel the driveway, including the foot-and-a-half high impacted mass thrown into the end of the driveway by the city plows. Three days later the Big One hit. I knew we were in trouble when the normally jovial local TV weatherman started appearing grim-faced. The upcoming weekend storm, we were told, would probably deposit between two and three feet of snow, but if we were lucky we might get only about a foot-and-a-half.



back deck after first storm



We were not lucky.

The snow began near noon on Friday, and by midnight about nine inches had come down. Nicki and I stayed ahead of it as best we could by doing some shoveling, and at about one in the morning we went to bed with a mostly cleared driveway. The trouble started on Saturday morning – sometime around 3:00am or so there was an electricity outage that lasted until about 8:00pm. We looked out the window and couldn't tell where the driveway even was. By Saturday evening the total for the day was another foot-and-a-half. Our home has electric heat, and with no power there was no way to



back deck after weekend storm  
(compare with previous photo)



Nicki with some of snow from driveway

warm up after being outside shoveling. So all during the day we watched the snow get deeper and deeper while it became chillier and chillier inside the house. By Sunday morning the snow had finally ended and the electricity was back on, but phone/internet and cable TV were in outage. (Cable didn't come back until Monday afternoon, so I had to listen to the Super Bowl from the radio.) We were eventually saved from most of the driveway clearing by an enterprising crew who showed up with a high-power snow blower. For forty dollars, we were spared a long day's labor.

We had thought that would be the end of it, but no. Just two days later *another* huge storm came charging through, dropping another foot of snow. This one was a true blizzard, as there were high winds as well. I did a bit of shoveling, late at night during the worst of it, and the stark solitude, with only the wind keeping you company, was actually invigorating.

In all, I think we moved about 12-16 tons of snow from driveway, deck, sidewalks, and the low roof over the garage. So how was *your* February? ☀



our backyard and beyond, after the Snowmageddon



