



My Back Pages #4

Rich Lynch



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more of my articles and essays

Hey, it's almost summer! I'm ready for it! The winter was not nearly as brutal here in Maryland as it was last year, but there were still many consecutive days where the outdoor temperature never made it above freezing. I admit that I really should be used to it – I grew up in far northern New York State where lake-effect snow was so common that I thought it was the most natural thing in the world to wake up on a cold December morning and look out the window to see a couple of feet of new-fallen snow. That far north, White Christmases were the rule and I can remember many White Thanksgivings and even a White Halloween. It doesn't seem much of an exaggeration to claim that part of the country has only two seasons – winter and July.

But anyway. Summer is almost here, and with it comes baseball season. Last year I set a personal record by seeing baseball games in four different major league ballparks. And three of them, as you will read, were stadiums I'd never before experienced...

Rich Lynch
Gaithersburg, Maryland
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(Thanks to Chaz Boston Baden for permission to use his photo of Ken Moore.)

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The Door into Summer, 2010

Prolog: The Cathedral of Oakland, Pennsylvania

I was driving home from a mid-May three day technical conference in Pittsburgh. There were dark skies and I wanted to be on the road before the weather further deteriorated, but there was a very special place I wanted to see before I left the city.

The University of Pittsburgh is located in the suburb of Oakland, about three miles east of downtown. The campus is dominated by a 42-story tower, the so-called “Cathedral of Learning” that dates back to the late 1930s. Tours of the building are available and the view from the upper floors is said to be spectacular, but it was a different cathedral of sorts, very near there, that I had come to pay my respects to.



Cathedral of Learning on
campus of
University of Pittsburgh



remaining section of outfield wall

It actually no longer exists, at least in whole. But parts of it have been lovingly preserved, including a section of the outfield wall. Yes, it was a sports stadium, the home of the Pittsburgh Pirates major league baseball team from 1909 to 1971, and even today the place still has a great sense of history. It was here, on August 5, 1921, that the first-ever live broadcast of a team sporting event occurred. And on May 25, 1935, the great Babe Ruth hit three home runs in a single game, the final home runs of his legendary career. But it was on

October 13, 1960, that this old stadium had its finest moment, when Pirates second baseman Bill Mazeroski hit a home run in the last inning of the final game of the World Series that allowed the Pirates to win the championship from the mighty New York Yankees.

I spent about half an hour there before I moved on, and I can only imagine what it must have been like to see a game there. Over the years of its existence, many famous baseball players, true legends of the game, took the field there. There were many memorable moments, with some great fielding plays and tremendous home runs. But there never was a no-hitter pitched at Forbes Field.

Opening the Door into Summer

I've never attended a no-hit baseball game, but just two days before my visit to Forbes Field I did get to witness the nearest thing to one. Part of the exorbitant fee for that Pittsburgh technical conference covered food events such as coffee breaks and lunches. There was also one evening event, a choice between dinner at a regional history museum or admission (with \$20 in stadium vendor credits) to a Pirates game.

The choice was a no-brainer, at least for me. I'd been wanting to see a game in the Pirates' new ballpark ever since it opened almost a decade ago, but the relatively few times my travels had brought me to Pittsburgh it was either off-season for baseball or else the Pirates were on a road trip. And the new stadium was certainly worth seeing. After the Pirates abandoned Forbes Field in 1971, they played for 30 years in one of the most characterless ballparks ever constructed, the multi-use Three Rivers Stadium. It was one of those ubiquitous 'cookie cutter' stadiums, a huge concrete doughnut with artificial turf, poor sightlines, and views only of other parts of the ballpark. In contrast, PNC Park, where the Pirates have played their home games since 2001, is a gem of a ballpark with seating closer to the natural grass playing field and a splendid view of downtown Pittsburgh.



the view from inside PNC Park

The only constant between my one and only visit to Three Rivers Stadium, back in the 1980s, and my evening at PNC Park was how few people there were at the ballpark. The Pirates, as usual, were in the midst of a dismal season and there were only about 3,000 people at the game. But for those of us who *were* there, we witnessed a pitching masterpiece. The Cincinnati Reds pitcher that evening allowed only two baserunners – a hit batsman and an infield single – and the Reds won by a lopsided score.

In the 50+ years I've been a baseball fan, I've come to equate the beginning of baseball season as the door into summer. There are some chilly and damp evenings for baseball at the beginning of the season (like I experienced at PNC Park) but you know that the warm weather is not very far away.



Great American Ball Park in Cincinnati

By late June the long-awaited warm weather had finally arrived. My wife Nicki and I were in Cincinnati for the annual Midwestcon convention, and we were able to take in a Reds home game at *their* new stadium, Great American Ball Park. It's slightly younger than PNC Park, and replaced another relatively characterless cookie cutter ballpark the Reds had called home between 1970 and 2002. But for this evening only, the Reds became the 'Greens' – it was Irish Heritage Night, and for the occasion the Reds had changed their usual cherry red baseball caps for ones that were kelly green. Once again the Reds won handily, this time against their in-state rival, the Cleveland Indians. But the big attraction of the evening was the spectacular fireworks display after the game which kept Nicki and me, as well as most of the other 33,000 people who were there, from leaving after the 7th inning stretch.

Summer had finally arrived.

Epilog: Born on the Fourth of July

The way back to my car from Forbes Field led me past the south entrance to the Cathedral of Learning. It's also the entrance to the Stephen Foster Memorial, which includes two small theaters and a shrine to the famous songwriter. Inside are all kinds of Foster memorabilia, including one of his pianos, and there are even stained glass windows depicting Foster and some of the characters in his songs.

Turns out that Stephen Foster had been born in the Lawrenceville section of Pittsburgh on the Fourth of July. Foster was America's first professional songwriter and in his short lifetime he wrote more than 200 songs, most of which he sold for a pittance. Following his death in 1864, a search of his wallet found 35¢ in Civil War scrip, three pennies, and a note that read "dear friends and gentle hearts".



stained glass windows of the Stephen Foster shrine



Stephen Foster

It would be easy to say that Foster was well ahead of his time, but actually he wasn't. As one biographer described him, Foster "completely changed the way we think about American culture, musical culture, and musical commerce. ... [In Foster's music] we can find the elements for a country music style, a bluegrass style, a rock style, a jazz style." And it's true. Bob Dylan once described how he learned to write songs: "Anyone who wants to be a songwriter should listen to as much folk music as they can, study the form and structure of stuff that has been around for 100 years. I go back to Stephen Foster."

On my way out of the Memorial, the receptionist asked me what I thought of it. I replied that I was glad I visited, and that I hadn't even known it was there. As I was leaving she called after me: "The next time you're in town, make sure to see the Cathedral."

I smiled and said, "I think I already have." ☀

Afterword:

Pittsburgh is only a moderate-distance drive from where Nicki and I live, but to get there you have to brave several hours on the nasty old Pennsylvania Turnpike. Cincinnati, on the other hand, is more than twice as far away, but the roads are a lot nicer and it's a drive that we actually look forward to. Even farther away is the small village of Altona, New York, where some of Nicki's aunts and uncles live, and recently it has become home to mechanical giants that have also taken up residence there.

A Look toward the Future [from the summer of 2009]

Prolog: A Mighty Wind

I'd known they were coming when I was there a year ago. But standing right next to one was a lot different than seeing a photo, or even seeing one in the distance. These were *big*!

Nicki and I were in Altona, New York, where many of her aunts and uncles live. They hold a Fourth of July picnic cookout and family reunion every year, and it's an annual event for us. Altona is located in far northeast New York State, about ten miles south of the Canadian border, very near the edge of Adirondack Park and not far from Plattsburgh. Altona is a very small village, and until now it's only visibility to the world, for those who watch *Law and Order*, is the occasional mention on the show of the medium security state prison there. (It's actually a converted K-12 school that Nicki once attended.)

But now there was another reason for Altona to be in the media. Noble Environmental Power Corporation had taken advantage of the excellent conditions for windpower generation that exist in northeastern New York State and installed 65 wind turbines there. Each one is about 300 feet tall and generates about 1½ megawatts continuously. Two of them are located on the property of Nicki's uncle's brother, and her uncle had taken us there for a close-up encounter.

I was surprised how quiet these big machines were. The blades are each about 120 feet long, weigh 7 tons, and rotate around the hub at about 15 rpm. And they make almost no noise – a hotel room air conditioner is far louder.

Back at the picnic there was good food and pleasant conversation, as usually happens at reunions, about things that had happened in the past. But after visiting those energy-generating behemoths, I was pretty sure I had seen a glimpse of the future.

I Left My Shoes in San Francisco

Well, I didn't, actually, but if I hadn't taken one last look through the hotel room I would have. I had a week-long business trip to San Francisco at the end of June, the unfortunate timing of which had caused Nicki and me to cancel our annual trip to Cincinnati for the 2009 Midwestcon. I was in The City by the Bay for another in a continuing series of international meetings on carbon sequestration, which may *be* the future for coal-fueled power generation. This gathering was intended to pave the way toward the upcoming Ministerial meeting at London in October, and the



the view from directly beneath a wind turbine



view of Coit Tower and Telegraph Hill from hotel



with compatriots Scott and John during the meeting

all the intense planning sessions and painstaking attention to detail during the months-long run-up to the meeting had left me worn down before the trip even began.

I was there in my usual role as a cog in the wheel of the group that had organized the meeting. If I had to describe what I do, it would be similar to the head writer of a television show. I am often the go-to guy when an idea about something is needed or when something important needs to be written on short notice. But for this trip I was along to help the meeting run smoothly. And, thankfully, it did.

The Streets of San Francisco

There wasn't a whole lot of free time during the San Francisco trip to do very much on my own. The largest Chinatown in the western hemisphere was just a block away from the meeting venue hotel, so I spent a bit of time there doing some gift shopping and people watching. A good friend who lived nearby came into the city the day before the meeting started and we spent a few enjoyable hours in the afternoon walking the streets of the city.

There are some marvelous buildings in San Francisco. The most iconic is probably the Transamerica Pyramid (which was just two blocks from the meeting venue hotel), but my two favorites are both survivors of the great 1906 earthquake – St. Mary's Cathedral and the Sentinel Building. St. Mary's is located at the intersection of



Sentinel Building with Transamerica Pyramid in background

Grant Avenue (the Main Street of Chinatown) and California Street (where one of the cable car lines runs). It was the first cathedral ever built in California (in 1854) and it

survived the '06 quake with little damage only to be almost completely gutted by the city-wide firestorm that followed the quake. There are noontime classical music concerts on weekdays in the cathedral, but I didn't have anywhere near enough free time in my schedule to attend one. Instead, I took direction from the words of the Book of Ecclesiastes on the front of the church: "Son observe the time and fly from evil". I was never late for any of the meetings and I stayed out of trouble, so I guess it worked!

St. Mary's, though, is only my *second* favorite building in the city. The one I like the best I had never discovered prior to this trip because it's located on a corner I had never walked past in any of my previous times in San Francisco, when I had always stayed at hotels near Union Square. It's the Sentinel Building, a flatiron building clad in glorious green-patina copper located on



St. Mary's Cathedral

the corner of Columbus Avenue and Kearny Street. It was under construction when the '06 quake hit and it, too, suffered much damage, but the builders managed to get it completed the very next year. It even has a claim to fame – back in the Prohibition era, a restaurant that was located in the building was the place where the Caesar Salad was originally created. It's now the home of Francis Ford Coppola's American Zoetrope film studio offices and post-production facilities. It's the place where *Apocalypse Now* was written and edited.

The Best Sights of San Francisco

Some of the best sights of San Francisco are not necessarily from its streets. There is always a group dinner of some kind at these meetings, and for this one a couple of the deep-pocket stakeholder companies sponsored a dinner cruise on the Bay. I had been a bit dubious about going because I didn't want to be on a relatively small boat out near the Pacific Ocean when the evening breeze was just starting to



view of San Francisco and Bay Bridge from the boat



view of Alcatraz Island from the boat

freshen. But I was informed that non-attendance was not really an option, and in the end I was glad I went along. The views of the city were splendid, and the nearest the cruise came to the ocean was a close-up view of Alcatraz Island. I ate my fill of some very delicious Pacific salmon and there was enough conversation that the two hours of the cruise went by quickly.

My week in San Francisco also went by quickly, but not before I got to see another of San Francisco's best sights – the inside of the old Andromeda Saloon on corner of Columbus and Pacific Avenues. It also has a lot of history attached to it as a hub of Barbary Coast nightlife about a century ago. Jack Dempsey, who a few years later would become the world heavyweight boxing champion, even worked there as a bouncer in 1913.

The place is now the home of the San Francisco Brewing Company, which was one of the very first brewpubs in the United States. It's a very nice place to spend a couple of hours, as I did with the Australian delegation on the first evening of the meeting. There is an exquisite mahogany bar with columns and mirrors, and overhead is one of the most unusual ceiling fans I've ever seen, running sideways the length of the pub with blades like paddles. (I later found out that it was called a 'Pukka Walla' fan and dates back to 1916.) I had always thought that San Francisco's best brew



interior of old Andromeda Saloon with Pukka Walla overhead fan

was Anchor Steam Beer, but this place had several that were much better. My favorite was the Emperor Norton Lager and from what I could see, the Aussies thought so too. I heard they went back there a couple other times before the end of the meeting, so I guess for them this place was the very best sight of all!

Epilog: Welcome to the Future!

My flight back to Baltimore was uneventful, and the next morning Nicki and I began the two days of travel north to Altona. Along the way, in the middle of Pennsylvania, there were places where we could see the big rotating blades of wind turbines in the distance. A year or two ago they had not been there.

And yet, many of the sights of the trip, like the scenic Adirondack Mountains, are exactly the same as the first time I saw them a half century ago. Back then I often wondered what the future would bring. And now it's here – electricity is being generated from giant lawn ornaments and greenhouse gases are being stored underground.

Albert Einstein once wrote that, "I never think of the future. It comes soon enough."

He was right. ☀



Afterword:

Unfortunately, the future for the San Francisco Brewing Company was to be a short one. I went back to the old Andromeda Saloon the next time I was in San Francisco, about a year later, and found to my dismay that the owners had decided several months prior to cease business and sell off all the brewing equipment. It's now only a competently run bar that sells competently made beer and ale, none of which is brewed on-site.

San Francisco has always been one of my favorite destinations. It's a picturesque city and each time I go there I've been able to find new places to see and new things to experience. But it wasn't until late summer in 2010 that I was finally able to see the inside of a place I'd been wanting for *years* to visit – AT&T Park, the home of the San Francisco Giants which, as expected, turned out to be a great venue for baseball.



San Francisco's Bay Bridge

I had several other ballpark visits during 2010, including the annual Labor Day outing to Nationals Park in Washington, D.C. But the most eventful (and at the same time most disappointing) ballpark visit of 2010 happened in the middle of North Carolina at a minor league stadium that's home to what has become an iconic symbol of the game.

Baseball Stories and Other Connections to the Past

Prolog: Hit Bull Win Steak

I make no secret that I am a big baseball fan, but I'm not that much a fan of baseball-themed movies. I say this because there are precious few of them that are all that memorable. *The Pride of the Yankees*, for instance, was way too sentimental and melodramatic in its depiction of Lou Gehrig, while *The Natural* had far too predictable a plot and *Major League* was just one big bad cliché. I will concede that there have been several pretty good baseball-themed movies, like *A League of Their Own*, *Eight Men Out* and *Field of Dreams*. But they all seemed to lack enough verisimilitude which made them, in the end, not much more than just actors performing on film. There *is* one exceptional film, however, and that movie was so good it may never be surpassed as the No.1 baseball movie of all time.

I'm referring to *Bull Durham*, of course. What makes it great, besides some superb acting, is its sense of authenticity (mostly because the film's writer and director, Ron Shelton, played five seasons of minor league professional baseball in the Baltimore Orioles organization). Much of the filming took place at the (then) home of the Durham Bulls, a shabby little minor league

ballpark whose most noteworthy feature was a large sign featuring a belligerent-looking bull beyond the left field fence that invited ballplayers to "Hit Bull Win Steak".

In the years since the movie was released, the bull has become perhaps the most iconic symbol in all of minor league baseball; I had long ago decided that if there was ever a chance to see it, I would. That opportunity finally came on Thursday, August 5th, the first night of ReConStruction, the 2010 North American Science Fiction Convention (NASFiC) that was taking place in downtown Raleigh, North Carolina. There were no evening events scheduled, so I, my wife Nicki, and our friend John Novak from St. Louis made the 45 minute drive from Raleigh to Durham for a Bulls game.



entrance to Durham Bulls Athletic Park

When we got there we found that the team now plays in a newer and much nicer stadium, and as we entered we saw that the bull itself had been saved. We were enthused and it looked to be a fun evening of baseball, but we had no sooner than found our seats when our hopes were severely dampened.

It began to rain.



the Durham Bull

Reconstructing ReConStruction

ReConStruction was the 10th ‘Occasional’ NASFiC (as it was described in the convention’s program book), and that’s fairly accurate. The NASFiC is not held annually, only in years when the World Science Fiction Convention is outside North America. NASFiCs have sometimes been promoted as “Worldcons without the Hugo Awards” and as a result, NASFiC attendance is usually about a couple thousand. But not this time – for whatever reasons, only about 750 people were there. This probably made for a disappointing sales weekend for all the dealers and artists, but it did result in roomier evening parties that were non-claustrophobic and enjoyable.



ReConStruction's dealers room, concourse, and art show



me and John Hertz in the fan lounge

There was also some programming at the convention, but none of the discussion panels particularly appealed to me. Instead, I spent a lot of time in the fan lounge. It was ostensibly the convention’s designated area for display of older and current fanzines (including some of Nicki’s and mine), but it succeeded more as an off-the-beaten-track hangout for many of our friends who were also at the convention. For some of them, like John Hertz from Los Angeles, we cross paths almost every year. Others, like Mike Rogers from Chattanooga, we hadn’t seen in years. It was pleasant, and afternoons in the fan lounge became informal parties without all the food and drink.

And speaking of parties, there were no lack of them at ReConStruction. Except that, due to an imposition by the Raleigh Marriott management, they couldn’t be *called* parties. A few weeks prior to the convention, hotel management informed the convention committee that it would not allow any room parties because of all the noise and chaos in the hallways that accompany them. Instead, the convention could have what large business conferences often feature – so-called ‘meet-and-greets’, where private functions inside guest rooms were fair game, but only if the doors to the hallway remained closed. And that’s more or less what happened. There were some anecdotal reports that the hotel sent someone up to make sure the meet-and-greets stayed more or less under control, but nobody got closed down.

Connecting with the Past

Actually, ‘closed down’ is what downtown Raleigh seemed like for just about all of the convention weekend. The center of the city was almost comatose, it was so quiet. There’s a long boulevard that runs past the hotel to the State Capitol Building but there was so little automotive traffic that at first I thought it was a pedestrian mall. The distinguishing feature of rush hour was that you usually had to look in *both* directions before crossing the street.

That said, I found the city center quite pleasant. The State Capitol Building is a historic structure that dates back to before the Civil War. Inside there is a marvelous rotunda and two nicely preserved chambers where the North Carolina legislature once met. There is a great sense of history about the place. A self-guided walking tour of the building and surrounding grounds only takes about half an hour and allows you to make a connection with people and events that shaped the destiny of the state.

But it was a different way of connecting with the past that was one of the highlights of my time in Raleigh. My friend Guy Lillian recently did an Internet search on someone from his high school and found that the man is now “a seven figure toxic tort lawyer in Los Angeles”. Up to then I hadn’t really tried to keep track of the other sixteen people in *my* high school senior class, and it turned out that some of them could be located by Google and other means. One is a pastor in Watertown, New York. One is a retired grade school principal in Florida. One is an ex-Army Ranger (I think, from the description). One is a retired farmer, now mostly blind. One is dead (she died many years ago from ovarian cancer). And one turned out to be a Professor of Organic Chemistry at North Carolina State University in Raleigh.

He actually recognized me! It had been more than four decades since we’d last seen each other. He appears to have had a hugely successful career, and now has two research laboratories and a bevy of graduate and post-graduate students. I talked with a few of them, and they were all optimistic about eventually finishing up and finding careers in the outside world. And they could hardly believe that I’ve known their mentor and thesis advisor since we were both five years old in kindergarten.



North Carolina's Capitol Building



me and Prof. Comins in his office

A Giant Evening

A few weeks later, in San Francisco, I met up with another friend, but one whom I'd last seen much less than four decades ago. I was out there for a big and very high-profile U.S.-China energy meeting, filled with pageantry and symbolism, which kept me so busy that except for my first day there, I never got more than five blocks away from the hotel where the meeting was being held.

So when it became apparent that the afternoon I arrived would be the only time I would have free for the entire trip, my friend (and Scrabble nemesis) Staci graciously met me at the airport and drove me to the hotel so I could check in. And then it was off to AT&T Park for an evening of brats, beer, and baseball.

AT&T Park is the home of the San Francisco Giants baseball team. It opened only a bit more than ten years ago, and this was the first time I'd ever been inside. I've seen plenty of other Giants games in years past but they were all at Candlestick Park, a few miles to the south. That stadium was notorious for its weather conditions, especially during night games – as the ballgame went on the wind would get brisker and colder to where even clothing that would keep me cozy in the middle of a Maryland winter wouldn't be warm enough. Back then it was a real accomplishment to make it through an extra inning night game at Candlestick. Anyone who did was awarded, on the way out of the stadium, with a 'Croix de Candlestick' souvenir pin. You could tell who the *true* Giants fans were by the number of 'Croix' pins on their baseball caps.

But those days (and nights) are long gone. A few miles makes a world of difference in San Francisco, and AT&T Park is not nearly so fearsome a place to experience an evening of baseball. The night I was there the weather stayed balmy and warm and I never needed the jacket I'd brought with me. And the game itself? The Giants routed Cincinnati by ten runs. Afterwards, Staci *could* have teased me that the lopsided outcome mirrored some of her recent victories over me in our online Scrabble match, but she didn't.

That's what good friends are for.



Lion Dance exhibition during U.S.-China meeting



me and my friend Staci at AT&T Park

Epilog: Ten Things to Do During a Rain Delay

It had really seemed like a good idea, at the time, to go to Durham to see a Bulls game, but what had started as a brief shower quickly became a torrential downpour. Big, bad thunderstorms usually pass quickly, but not this time – the rain kept coming down steadily. So, as the minutes dragged on, Nicki, John, and I had to find other things to do than be entertained by live baseball. Here's how we managed to keep ourselves occupied.



a rainy night in Durham

- 1) Head for cover! When we bought our tickets, we had asked if the seats were under cover. The answer we got back from the ticket window agent was “partially”. Hah! The stadium roof ended about 20 seats to our left, so when the rain started to come down we skedaddled to some empty seats in the next section over that *were* under cover. (The ‘owners’ of those seats never did appear, but I’m not going to equate that to an intelligence test.)
- 2) Chow time! It happened to be a special \$1 hotdog night at the stadium, so that’s what I had. John asked if it was also \$1 beer night, but no such luck.
- 3) Admire the stadium! The rather pretentiously named Durham Bulls Athletic Park is a fairly modern retro-look ballpark that pays homage to some other parks. The left field fence is actually a wall similar to the one at Fenway Park in Boston, albeit a bit shorter. And it even has an embedded mechanical scoreboard like the one at Fenway. (Fenway, however, doesn’t have a spiffy digital screen embedded in *its* left field wall.)
- 4) Watch the storm! Just beyond that left field wall is the Durham Bull with its invitation to “Hit Bull Win Steak”. For a while it appeared that the thunderstorm was trying to do just that, from all the big bolts of lightning that were jumping around the sky.



John and Nicki in the ballpark

- 5) Baseball trivia! This happened about a half hour in, when the conversation began to lull. I was able to stump John and Nicki by asking them which major league team the Bulls were the Triple-A affiliate of. (Answer: the Tampa Bay Rays.) I'm keeping my "what is the theoretical maximum number of hits possible in a shutout" question for another time.
- 6) Movie trivia! This was actually more trying to remember some of the famous lines from *Bull Durham*, like: "I have been known on occasions to howl at the moon." And: "This is a very simple game. You throw the ball, you catch the ball, you hit the ball. Sometimes you win, sometimes you lose, sometimes it rains." This was definitely one of those latter times.
- 7) Sports movie trivia! We were starting to get desperate. Just what the hell *did* happen to the Hansen Brothers, anyway?
- 8) Speculate on how many minutes had passed since we'd last checked the time. Actually, no guesswork was really needed, as there was a digital clock on the facade of the stadium's upper deck we could see from where we were sitting. The expression "minutes seem like hours" has a lot of truth to it.
- 9) Wonder what was going on back at the convention. About an hour and a half after the rain began we had finally gotten to the point where we decided that coming to the ballpark on a night when the weather was iffy was maybe not the best decision we'd ever made, when the stadium announcer informed everybody the game was a wash-out. By then, about half the people who were originally there had left, having already come to that conclusion.
- 10) Figure out how to get back to Raleigh. We didn't do this until we'd gotten back to the car, and with all the heavy rain the first thing we did was make a wrong turn. (A very helpful gas station attendant pointed us in the right direction or we might have ended up in Greensboro.)



So we didn't get to see any baseball after all. The game was rescheduled as part of a doubleheader the next evening, but by then there were things going on at the convention and the weather forecast looked just as dire. Not only that, for me at least it was *being* there in the stadium that was *really* the attraction.

And that's no bull! ☀

Afterword:

You've probably figured out by now that baseball is my favorite spectator sport. Its overall popularity has waned a bit compared to more action-oriented team sports like smash-mouth American-rules football, but one of the reasons I like it is because it *is* more laid back. When you're attending a game, you have time to chat with people sitting next to you, take a bite of bratwurst and a gulp of beer, or just do some people-watching, without missing anything.

Actually, people-watching is another favorite spectator sport and I've found that a good place to engage in it is at big trade shows. No kidding, walking through the exhibit floors of these events is like being in a vast human kaleidoscope. I discovered this first-hand, back in April 2003, when I attended a huge computer trade show in Washington, D.C.

In Amongst the FOSE Lemmings

Today was the first day of an annual computer trade show, FOSE, which also happens to be the first event at the new Washington Convention Center. The place is *huge* – they were able to get the vendor exhibits into a single large room, where it had to be split into two rooms at the old Convention Center.

My free pass to the event only got me into the vendor exhibits, but that was quite enough – I was worn down after about an hour and a half of it. The big vendor exhibit hall is a huge kaleidoscope that assaults all the senses.

I don't really know why I come back each year; I guess I must have a fascination with people-watching. It *is* actually entertaining in a vaguely perverse way to see people act like lemmings. Why else would they be queuing up in a line half an hour long for the chance to win a mythical 'grand prize' when it was obvious that the most anybody was coming away with was a tee-shirt with a "Get It from Micro Warehouse" logo?



some of the FOSE vendor exhibits hall

There were many such schemes designed to get you onto mailing lists without the exhibitor putting up anything of worth in return. At the Plexton booth, for instance, they had a dart board set up: three tries to hit the tiny bullseye and *if* you did you'd get a raffle ticket for a *chance* to win a DVD player – but before you let fly with the darts they first did a swipe of your encoded exhibition ID card. I passed it by – they could have given me a hundred tries and I probably couldn't have done it. Some of the people who did try were bouncing darts off the wall and otherwise making it hazardous for bystanders to linger there.

The most interesting floor exhibit actually had very little to do with computers – the Segway company was there and it was letting people take their high-tech Segway scooter for a short ride around a roped-off course. There looked to be about a half hour line for that too, but at least it wasn't another deceptive come-on – the ride itself was the prize.

I decided early on that I wasn't going to be a lemming; I even turned down offers of complimentary plastic tote bags so that I wouldn't be tempted to collect a bunch of pens, buttons and other vendor tchotchkas. But that didn't stop them from trying – during a restroom stop I saw, with some amusement, that Barcoding.com had supplied bottles of soft soap festooned with their company logo and had put a post-it note over each urinal with instructions that we lemmings should come to their booth to get our very own post-it pad.

It was the first time I've ever known a trade show exhibitor to sponsor the Men's Room. ☀

Afterword:

Another annual harbinger of summer is the Maryland Sheep and Wool Festival in early May. But it's not really a people-watching event. As Nicki and I discovered in 2003, the most interesting and entertaining things to watch are the energetic four-footed shepherders.

No Baaaaa Humbugs

It's been a fairly quiet weekend, but this morning Nicki and I got out of the house for several hours to attend the annual Maryland Sheep and Wool Festival, held out in the country about a half hour's drive from here.

It was an event that more interested her than me, because she's the quilter. Turns out there really wasn't much about quilts at the festival, even though there were hundreds of craftspeople and vendors there. (If you were a weaver, though, you'd have thought you'd died and gone to heaven.) That only meant we were window shoppers; it was still fascinating to see all the variations of wool, fleece, looms, spinning wheels, sheep shearing equipment, and complicated-looking stuff whose function I have no idea. (Too fascinating, actually, because I quickly got sensory overload. I'm not much fun to shop with.)

The event was much more than just a huge craft-related flea market, though. It resembled, and more than a little, a county fair, as there were pens of livestock that had been judged, complete with the barnyard smell. There were also some demonstrations, the most entertaining of which was the sheep dogs.

You know, it's really amazing what a dog can be trained to do. Sheep dogs are actually Border Collies, which seem to have a herding instinct hard-wired into them at birth. The ones we saw were able to drive a small herd of sheep around a figure-8 course, through a small maze, and into/out of various pens in the fenced-off show ring – all by responding to their owners' whistled commands. Near the end of the demonstration they brought in a younger dog that was just starting its training. That was a mistake – once set loose, the dog took off at full speed, chasing the sheep around the ring. You could see that the pup thought this was really *fun*! The chase went on for a couple of minutes, much to the entertainment of the crowd (and probably the embarrassment of the dog's owner, who could only stand and watch the spectacle), and the pup finally settled on one sheep it wanted to chase. But after another circuit of the ring, the sheep found a place in the fence where it could squeeze through to the outside. The dog followed, and away they went, off towards the woods and out of sight. They might be running yet.



Border Collie exhibition

As for me, I also had a pretty good time. The festival was just the right size for a few hours of light exercise (walking) to see it all without being so large that it wore me down. It was all smiles and no baaaaa humbugs, so I guess next year we'll be back! ☀

Afterword:

Besides all this there were the usual food vendors and it turned out that you could get most anything you wanted, as long as it was lamb. Lamb is being marketed as “the other red meat”, so lamb burgers are probably in your future, somewhere up ahead.

Just a few days after the Maryland Sheep and Wool Festival, the roll-out toward the summer of 2003 included a celebration of the birthday of a classical music composer who was far from lamb-like in nature. Here's an appreciation I wrote about him for an online blog.

Joyeux Anniversaire au Premier Grand Compositeur Américain

Today, May 8th, the local classical music radio station has been featuring compositions by Louis Moreau Gottschalk (1829-1869), perhaps the first great American composer, who was born 174 years ago in New Orleans. I've just listened to his first symphony, descriptively titled "A Night in the Tropics", which pretty well exhibits the Caribbean/Creole influences on his music.



Louis Moreau Gottschalk

It's fascinating to learn about Gottschalk and his life as a composer and pianist. His parents were apparently fairly well off financially, and before he could become too contaminated by 1840s New Orleans they packed him off to study classical music in Paris where he remained for more than a decade. His first compositions date to his time in Europe, and there he also matured into a very fine pianist, one of the best in the world. When he came back to the United States in 1853 his life pretty much became a non-stop concert tour, taking him around the country and then to the Caribbean and South America.

Gottschalk left no doubt of his loyalties after the Civil War began – he not only swore an oath to the Union, he even wrote an orchestral piece titled "The Union" which incorporated small bits from "The Star-Spangled Banner" and "Yankee Doodle". He did not remain in the United States for the duration of the war, though – a scandal in 1863 involving a female seminary student caused him to head south and he spent most of the rest of his life in South America, eventually dying of yellow fever in Brazil when he was only 40 years old.

Gottschalk was as much an entertainer as a musician and apparently was enthused by the idea of performance transcending into broad spectacle. Some of his concerts were gargantuan, with hundreds of performers on-stage. Gottschalk's compositions probably can be described as energetic, very melodic, and even eclectic – besides the Caribbean/Creole influence, many of his works feature simple American folk music melodies, often with interesting variations and orchestration. Perhaps because of all this, Gottschalk is quite often and unfairly looked upon as a talented lightweight – the Naxos web site, for instance, describes his work as being "of varied quality ... [but] never profound or subtle, [with] a fresh and uninhibited atmosphere". As for Gottschalk himself, one of his biographers describes him as "both an arch-romantic and a rationalist, a sentimentalist and a pragmatist, at once America's first regionalist composer, its first multiculturalist, and its first true nationalist", which sounds a bit over-the-top to me, but on the other hand Gottschalk himself was most likely more than a bit over-the-top. He certainly knew how to entertain. His music still does. ☀

Afterword:

I've never been to places that Gottschalk visited, but I *have* taken trips to quite a few other out-of-the-way parts of the world. One of the most memorable happened in the early summer of 1994, when I was part of a ten-person Government team that spent two weeks in Russia to assess alternatives to a nuclear reactor that was scheduled for retirement. And about a week of that time was spent out in the hinterlands of central Asia where the unexpected was often commonplace.

On to Siberia!

June 9-11, 1994 – Krasnoyarsk, Siberia

“1st May 1994: Po Chan and Bjorn spent 4 nights in this airport.” I saw that message penciled on the wall in the departure lounge of Domodedova Airport outside Moscow on the night of June 9th. We had missed an earlier flight that day when we got caught up in a terrible traffic snarl on the way south out of the city, and the flight to Krasnoyarsk had already departed the gate by the time we arrived.

Domodedova Airport is actually the busiest airport in Russia. It has all the domestic flights, where Sheremetyevo Airport, where we arrived Russia, is the international airport. Domodedova is probably the most decrepit, poorly-lit, and dirty place I’ve ever flown out of. It’s falling apart in places and doesn’t look like it has been cleaned in years (the bathroom facilities, for instance, are too abominable to even describe). Abandon hope all ye who enter here! Po Chan and Bjorn certainly must have.

The airline we flew from Moscow to Krasnoyarsk was called ‘Air Krasnoyarsk’, one of the dozens of small airlines that were formed from the pieces of Aeroflot following its breakup a few years back. All of us were more than a little apprehensive, and with good reason: the jet aircraft we flew on would not have been allowed off the ground back in the States. Safety systems like emergency oxygen were either not working, or non-existent. The flight attendant’s safety instructions apparently translated into something like: “The emergency exits are over there, don’t open them during the flight.” The very day of our flight, the U.S. Embassy had issued a warning to travelers not to fly Aeroflot or any of its successors unless absolutely necessary, because of grave safety concerns. Actually, the gravest safety concern of all appeared to be the moldy-looking mystery meat that was part of the meal the airline tried to serve us midway through the flight. Eating that would have put me *in* the grave, I think!

We did make it to Krasnoyarsk without incident, however. It’s a city of more than half a million and is located in central Asia, about 400 miles from the border of Russia and Mongolia. The surrounding area has another few hundred thousand people, including the formerly closed city of Krasnoyarsk-26, our destination. The Krasnoyarsk airport, however, was much smaller than you’d expect for all those people. It was also located a very long drive from K-26, over some very uneven roads. I happened to be sitting in the very back of the small bus our Russian hosts had brought to pick us up at the airport. When we hit a huge bump on the road to K-26, I suddenly found myself covered with pieces of luggage that had formerly been stacked up around me. I yelled out, and one of our Russian hosts quickly helped free me from the avalanche. As he was moving travel bags away from me, he told me, apologetically but unnecessarily, “There is an old expression we have: In Siberia there are no roads, only directions.”



Krasnoyarsk-26 was one of the so-called ‘secret cities’ of Russia. Until only recently, these were closed to all foreigners – we were the first official United States Government delegation ever to visit K-26. The ‘secret city’ status has given the residents of K-26 a standard of living far above that of neighboring cities. Instead of huge ugly apartment buildings, townspeople lived in single family houses, and each house had an attached greenhouse. The nuclear reactor there, even though it produced weapons-grade plutonium, was a source of pride (as well as income) for the city. This was reflected in the spiffy K-26 city emblem: a Russian bear wrestling with an atom and tearing open the nucleus with its claws. It’s too bad the concept of marketing hasn’t penetrated this far into Russia, because if they put that emblem on tee-shirts and coffee mugs, they could sell thousands of them! Being a former ‘secret city’ presented some problems for visitors, though – there are no hotels in K-26. So we were housed in the only facility they had that was equipped to handle guests – a sanatorium. When a friend had earlier told me that I must be sick or insane wanting to go all the way out to the middle of nowhere, maybe he was right!



Krasnoyarsk-26 city emblem

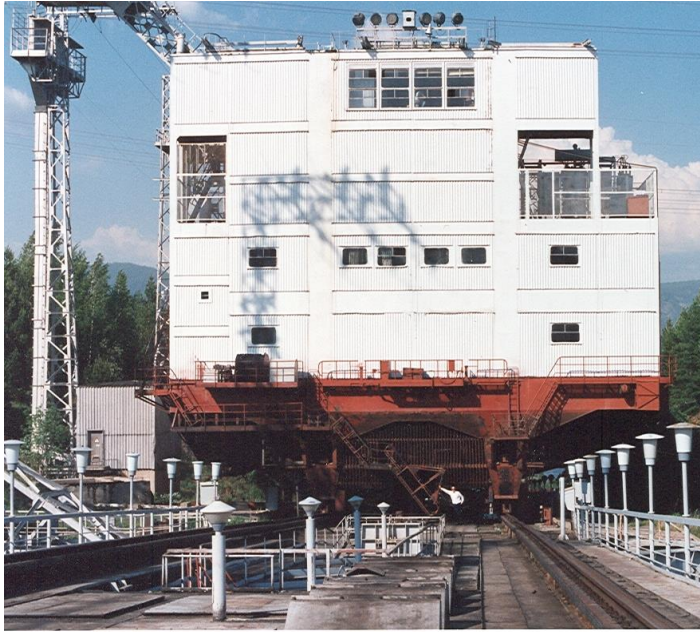
Anyway, K-26 was a pleasant-looking city with a very picturesque town square. Our meetings there were in the mayor’s office, which gave us a nice view of the square and the statue of Lenin at its center. Out in the hinterlands of Russia, Lenin appears to be still in favor, as there were statues and portraits of him everywhere. The statue in the K-26 town square showed Lenin standing in a dignified pose, with an arm reaching out toward... all we unbelievers, I guess. I was told that particular statue was referred to as a “cookie-cutter Lenin” – there were hundreds of exact duplicates all over Russia. Almost every city or reasonably-sized town had one.



relief sculpture of Lenin at Krasnoyarsk airport

There were other images of Lenin to be found in our travels besides those cookie-cutter statues. For instance, attached to a wall just outside the passenger waiting room at the Krasnoyarsk airport there was a relief sculpture of Lenin’s head. (One of the people in our delegation had his photo taken there stroking Lenin’s beard.) And on our last day in the Krasnoyarsk area, we were taken by bus upriver to tour a large hydroelectric power plant on the Yenesei River; at the entranceway to the dam there was a huge portrait (in ceramic tiles) of him. That dam, at over 400 feet tall, was one of the largest in Russia, so I guess they had to have a jumbo-sized image of Lenin to match.

It was during that visit to the hydropower project that the most surreal event of the entire trip took place. The dam is too tall for a conventional lock for barge traffic, so instead, there is an unusual cog railway transporter that carries barges and river traffic from the river up to the reservoir above the dam. I and another person in the delegation had walked to the end of the



me (tiny figure at bottom) and the mighty machine

railway to photograph this mighty machine, when all of a sudden two angry-looking women appeared and started gesturing wildly and talking very loudly.

At that point I decided the best place for me just might be back down the path with the rest of the group, but the two women followed me and were intercepted by our Russian hosts. More loud talking and gesturing ensued... a *lot* more. The gist of the conversation, according to one of our translators, was as follows:

Woman #1 (pointing toward me):
“This man is a *SPY!!!*”

Woman #2: “We *demand* that he be detained, and his camera confiscated!”

I got back on the bus and tried to look as innocent as possible. Evidently, I had annoyed the security people and now there was hell to pay. Thoughts of concentration camps in the dead of winter swirled coldly through my mind. I could almost *taste* the salt I’d soon be mining in Siberia. Suddenly, with horror, I realized that the *least* of my worries should be about being shipped off to Siberia – I was already there!

After a while, and much more agitated conversation, the two women stalked off with scowls on their faces. One of them glared at me as she left. Our Russian hosts got back into the bus, and as we drove off I started to breathe a little easier. It was all over, I thought.

I was wrong...

About five miles down the road, the bus was halted by the military. (One of the women had apparently radioed ahead.) The soldiers motioned our Russian hosts out of the bus, and once again there ensued a long, loud heated conversation with all kinds of arm waving and gesturing. And once again our Russian hosts proved to be silver-tongued, because we were allowed to proceed, though not before the head of our delegation bemusedly speculated, loud enough for the rest of us to hear, “Hmm... I wonder if they’ll let us go if we give him up?”

It was very warm that day. I was surprised to find out that, except for the jumbo-sized mosquitoes (which don’t take any prisoners), June in Siberia is very pleasant! I’d brought along a heavy jacket, but I never needed it, not even once. By the time we got back to K-26, we were all pretty much hot, sweaty, and more than a little tired, but our hosts had just the thing to perk us up before dinner – sauna!



Woman #1 on the warpath

At this point, I have to tell you that I am a sauna neo. I had a chance to try it once (in Finland), but I couldn't understand the local language well enough to tell which of the two saunas at my hotel was 'his' and which one was 'hers'. There happened to be a sauna at the guest house in K-26 where we had our meals, so I joined four others (all men) in disrobing. If you think that I was perhaps just a *little* bit apprehensive about this new experience, you're right. But surely, I thought, there was nothing that might happen that could even *remotely* compare with the misadventure I'd survived earlier in the day.

I was wrong...

On the way to the heat room, I missed seeing a half-open doorway, and walked buck-naked past it just when one of the guest house's attractive young female housekeepers was passing by on the other side. I'm not sure who was more surprised, and we both stopped dead in our tracks for about half a second before I hurried on past the doorway, out of sight. In that short half second, though, I saw her eyes get big and round, and her jaw gape open as she dropped what she was carrying and brought her hands to her face in surprise. Thinking back on that moment, I remember that I first felt flattered by her look of utter astonishment. (I have to wonder if I surpassed her expectation of an American male.) But then, as I was hustling away, she did something that completely deflated the moment for me.

She *laughed*.

* * * * *

June 12-14, 1994 – Tomsk, Siberia

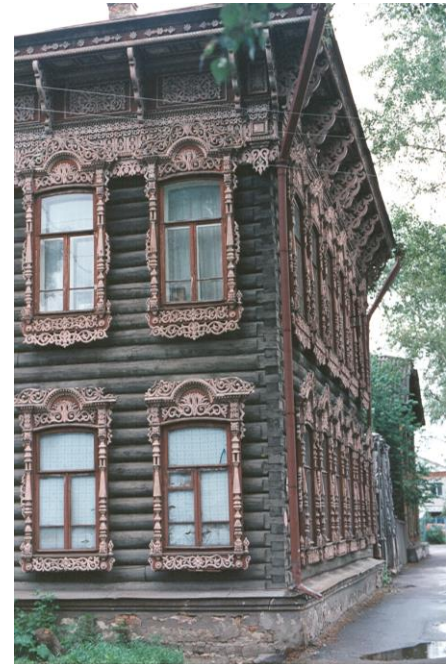
The other Siberian stopover on this trip was Tomsk, a city of about 600,000 people located some 300 miles to the west of Krasnoyarsk. To get there, we flew on a two-engine turboprop operated by Irkutsk Air, another of the myriad successors to Aeroflot. As we boarded the airplane, we sagely noted the completely bald tires and an oil leak onto the tarmac from somewhere on the fuselage. As we took our seats, we were dismayed to see that the plane's interior was also in terrible shape – the seatbelts couldn't be adjusted (I ended up tying the two ends together in a knot), the carpeting was not attached to the floor, and no attempt had been made to clean the cabin from any number of previous flights. The filth of the plane surpassed my worst expectations. There was all sorts of debris that hadn't been cleared out. In the seat pocket in front of me, I found a half-empty bottle of beer. Al, one of the other people in the delegation (and who had the seat next to me), told me, "Don't get rid of that! I've got a feeling I just might need it before this flight is over!"

But he didn't. In spite of its state of disrepair, the plane made it to Tomsk with no trouble at all. Upon arrival, I saw that the Tomsk airport was even smaller than Krasnoyarsk's – there was just a single main runway to handle all the takeoffs and landings. That might have been enough, though; there didn't appear to *be* any other takeoffs or landings, at least during the time we helped the ground crew unload our luggage from the airplane. Inside the passenger terminal, there weren't many travelers' conveniences to be found. All this led Al to conclude, "I bet they don't expect too many visitors here."

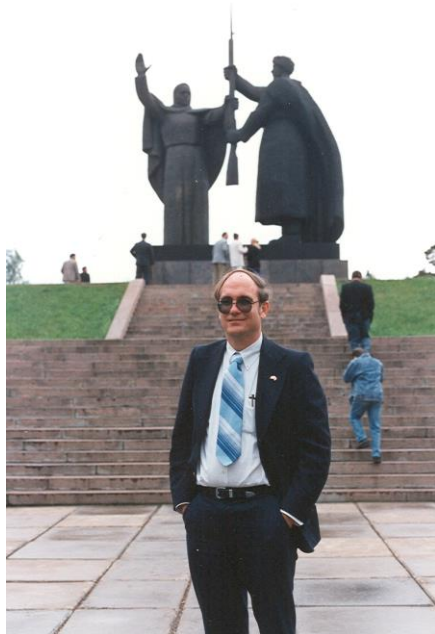
He was probably right. Like Krasnoyarsk-26, Tomsk had also been a closed city. Until recently, you had to have a very good reason before you'd be allowed to come here, and tourism wasn't one of them. Which is a shame, because there actually *are* some things in Tomsk that tourists would be interested in.

One of them is a wonderful old cathedral, The Church of the Resurrection. It's situated on a hilltop in the center of the old part of the city, and with its multitude of golden domes it's a spectacular sight on a sunny day. The church is similar in appearance to the cathedrals I saw in Moscow, but here there isn't any St. Basil's to overshadow it. Another feature of Tomsk that *doesn't* have any equivalent in Moscow is the large number of wooden houses, constructed entirely from logs, that date back hundreds of years to the founding of the city. These are not the rustic log cabins of the North American frontier days – far from it! These are large houses with intricate ornate carvings around the windows and along the rooflines. They are truly a marvel, especially considering the number of Siberian winters they've withstood. Whoever built these spent a lot of time getting all the details right.

Our Russian hosts in Tomsk also did a good job getting all the details right. Even though they were well aware that Tomsk is perhaps not the most exciting city in the world to visit, they made our stay there as interesting for us as possible, making sure there was time set aside for tours and



an ornate log house in Tomsk



at a Soviet-era statue in Tomsk

shopping. They were also excellent dinner hosts; the amount of money they spent on food for us during our visit must have been enormous, which led Al to propose, in a dinner toast to them, that the money spent wining and dining us might have been enough to fund all the power generating projects that Tomsk would need for years to come!

The very Russian custom of making long, involved, and entertaining dinner toasts was something that we all were expected to participate in, by the way. Without fail, *every* meal, including breakfast, featured bottles of vodka and imported French cognac. Without fail, at the conclusion of every meal, there was a round of toasts. We all learned pretty quickly to just take a small sip whenever there was a toast, instead of knocking one back each time. There were so many toasts that you didn't dare do more than that, a lesson that sunk in early on when Al made the mistake of trying to match our Russian hosts drink for drink one evening, and we ended up having to pour him into bed.

Al, it turned out, was very adept and clever at making toasts, always having something entertaining to say. The one time I had to follow him, it was well past 11pm, and my mind was totally blank after a long day of continuous meetings. I had just about 15 seconds to think of something clever but the only thing rattling through my tired mind, due to some quirk of free-association, were limericks. I'm embarrassed to admit it was all I had, but sometimes you just have to go with what you've got. So I said: "Due to the lateness of the hour, I'll keep my remarks short. I really wanted to educate our kind Russian hosts in the

fine art of the off-color limerick. But I see that I just don't have enough time. So I *won't* be able to tell you about The Young Man from Boston."

There were a few chuckles, and an audible sigh of relief from our translator who had been afraid she was going to be asked to do something beyond the call of duty.

I pressed on: "And I know we're all very tired after a very long day, so to shorten the evening's proceedings I'm afraid I'll just have to skip the verse about The Newlywed Couple from Goshen." More chuckles, and even some smiles from the Russians now.

I was starting to feel better about things now, so I continued: "I'm only too aware that things are really running late this evening, so I absolutely *regret* that there just isn't enough time left for me to tell you about The Argentine Gaucho Named Bruno."

Much laughter, including even the steely-faced Russian, the one reasonably fluent in English, who was seated at the end of the head table. I guess he must have thought I was making up these first lines, from their outlandishness. Or else, maybe...

My jaw dropped. Or else... *maybe* he'd already *heard* that one before! I wrapped up my toast by saying something nice about the hospitality we had received on the trip, and sat down, still wondering...

The realization was stunning. I had traveled almost halfway around the globe, only to find that as specific a bit of Americana as the dirty limerick just might be as familiar to some of the people all the way out in the middle of Siberia. It was a long way to go to discover that the world was a lot smaller than I thought it was. ☀

Afterword:

One of the things I took away from this trip was my realization of just how *big* the world really is. The middle of Siberia was a full 12 time zones away and it took three successive long-duration airplane flights to get there, which made it, for me, a very different and exotic place to visit. The other thing I gained was a realization of just how *small* the world really is. The places I visited might have seemed exotic, but the people there, except for language differences, were just like me. Many of them were memorable, but none more so than the precocious little girl who sat across the aisle from me on that surreal airplane ride from Krasnoyarsk to Tomsk. To her, the flight wasn't horrible at all – far from it! She was very excited to be able to try out the English she was learning in grade school on me, and spent much of the flight doing so.

At the end of the flight, as the plane was bumping along toward the Tomsk passenger terminal, she gave me one of the golden rosette Siberian wildflowers from the bouquet she was bringing to her grandmother. When I gave her, in return, one of the Russia-America flag lapel pins we'd brought along, I got back her brightest smile. Our translator, who was watching all this from the next row forward, told me, "She'll remember you forever for that." As I will her.



golden Siberian wildflower

Memories are much better than photographs; they don't fade with time. Another person I won't be forgetting is a friend from Tennessee who passed away on a warm summer day about two years ago. Here is a remembrance.

A Few Memories of Ken Moore

I recently learned about the passing of Nashville fan Ken Moore. I first met him way back in 1975 when, along with Nicki, I attended a small regional science fiction convention, Kubla Khan Khubed in Nashville of which Ken was Chair. Back then Nicki and I were two neofans living in Chattanooga who were attending our first convention. We had found an announcement about the event in *Analog* magazine and decided to attend when we saw that the Guest of Honor was the noted science fiction artist Kelly Freas and the Master of Ceremonies was Andrew Offutt (who had written what is still today one of my 10 favorite science fiction stories).

Ken was in his prime then, a true big-name fan who had been presented Southern Fandom's Rebel Award the previous year. I could see that the convention was keeping him very busy but he still had time to sit down and talk to us, perhaps because he didn't recognize us and wanted to make sure we were having a good time. He pointed us out to Irvin Koch, who was also living in Chattanooga at the time, and a few months later we had become part of Irvin's newly-formed Chattanooga fandom.



the irrepressible Ken Moore

After that there were many times over the years when we would cross paths with Ken, but they were almost always at the myriad of mid-South science fiction conventions of the late 1970s and 1980s. Ken would make his presence known to Nicki at conventions by quietly walking up behind her and snorting loudly, which usually caused her to jump. It became an unofficial greeting of sorts, one that we always looked forward to. Only once did we ever visit him at his house, and my lasting memory of that is the amazing amount of artwork he owned by renowned science fiction artists. Truly awesome. Ken had an encyclopedic knowledge about science fiction artwork, and he had personal contact with so many artists that the art shows of his Kubla Khans rivaled in quality those of much larger conventions.

Nicki and I moved to Maryland near the end of 1988 and we mostly lost touch with Ken. Sometime during the past decade his health began to deteriorate rapidly, and the last few times we saw him he was like a different person entirely – frail, spacey, and withdrawn. One of his friends kept us apprised on how he was doing, but it almost seemed that he had lost interest in remaining alive.

Southern Fandom has been populated over the years by many memorable personalities, but very few as irrepressible as Ken Moore. I feel fortunate to have known him as a friend. ☀

Afterword:

It's time to close this collection, but not before we take one more stroll through the door into summer. This one dates back to the summer of 2000 and describes two memorable conventions that Nicki and I attended that year, as well as equally memorable things that happened along the way in going to them.

Summer

*“Summertime an’ the livin’ is easy. Fish are jumpin’ and the cotton is high.” – DuBose Heyward (lyrics) from **Porgy and Bess***

On the calendar, summer here in the northern hemisphere begins on June 21st and lasts until September 21st, but we’ve always thought of summer as that part of the year between Memorial Day, at the end of May, and Labor Day, in early September. More specifically, we’ve always thought of summer as the time between Disclave and Worldcon, the two conventions we usually attended that occupied those weekends. Well, Disclave is no more, expiring in the aftermath of the Great Sprinkler Flood incident at the 1997 convention, and occasionally even the Worldcon itself wanders away from its usual weekend. When that happened in 1998, it produced some disorientation – subconsciously we knew that summer was ending way too soon.

It’s now been more than a decade since we moved from Tennessee to Maryland. Back then, we used to go to about ten conventions a year, most of them in mid-South cities not all that far from Chattanooga where we lived. One of them was Rivercon in Louisville, Kentucky, held each year in late July, the heart of summer. We feel a sort of a kinship to Rivercon because Rivercons came into existence in 1975, the same year we attended our first convention, and because we had been Fan Guests there in 1986. About a year ago, we received a letter from Steve Francis, the chairman, that the 25th Rivercon, in July 2000, would be the last in the series and the plan was to bring back all the guests from previous Rivercons who were interested in attending – would we like to come?

Louisville is a lot farther away now that we’re in Maryland. We usually make only one trip to the midwest each year and that’s for Midwestcon, which most of the people we’d want to see at Rivercon also attend; in the 11+ years we’ve been in Maryland, we hadn’t been back to Louisville even once. Luckily, there was no Australia Worldcon trip this year so there was enough vacation time available. And we didn’t want to see the convention pass into history without seeing the finale. We were only too happy to go to Louisville as two of their many Guests.

But there was more to do in Kentucky than just go to the convention. We had been wanting to visit the Museum of the American Quilter’s Society in Paducah for a long time (Nicki, who is a quilter, especially so), so we extended the trip all the way out to westernmost Kentucky. By the time the trip was over, about a week after we started, we had driven almost 2,000 miles.



American Quilter’s Society Museum in Paducah

The Quilt Museum was certainly worth a visit. If you consider the quilt as a work of art, there were some splendid examples in the museum. The contemporary collection, which was the largest of the three galleries, had many of the quilts that had been selected as part of the 100 best, or at least most significant, of the previous century. (Supposedly the selectees were determined by polling a number of well-known quilters.) Many of the ones on display certainly

were marvelous works of art and craft. The museum had on display the historic as well as the elegant – one of the other galleries displayed a collection of antique quilts, some dating back to the end of the 1700s. The Quilt Museum wasn't so large that it took more than a couple of hours to see it all, but it was without question worth the time and effort to drive the extra four hours out to Paducah. Besides, there were other things to see and do there, too.

You'd expect Paducah, by its location not far upstream on the Ohio River from its confluence point with the Mississippi, to be an important inland port. Not so. It's situated on a bluff that does a good job protecting it from floods but not so great a job providing access to the river itself. What Paducah seems to have become (at least the downtown area) is a home to antique dealers, little art shops, and lots of interesting cafés and restaurants. It survives on the presence of outsiders, apparently. Apart from the Quilt Museum, and the river itself, there really aren't too many reasons to come to the older part of the city. Other nearby communities have the same dilemma. But one of them, just across the river in Illinois, has found a unique way to attract visitors. It's become home to the Man of Steel!



It takes only about fifteen minutes to drive to Metropolis from Paducah. But the trip took us back more than 35 years, back to the 'Silver Age' of comics in the early 1960s. Once you find your way to the center of the town (which is more difficult than you'd think – there aren't very many road signs), the first thing you see, right next to the county court-house, is a statue of the



"He's big!"

Man of Steel on a rectangular stone that reads, 'Truth, Justice, The American Way'. He's big! We were unprepared for how large it was, probably 20 feet in height – *much* larger than life, just like our childhood memories of his exploits were.

Across the street is the Superman Museum, which is housed on the first floor of a somewhat rundown-looking storefront building, right out of the 1960s. Inside, it's a rabbit warren of Superman memorabilia, including costumes worn in the movies, toys and collectibles from decades past (now worth small fortunes, no doubt), and photos and stills from some of the movies and television shows. It didn't take more than about half an hour to see it all, but what memories it brought back – the 1950s and '60s were our childhood and adolescence. That time seems so very far away now, but the museum was a time machine to bring some of it back again. Being in the museum was like stepping into a large time capsule, which we guess in a way it was!

The way back to Louisville from Paducah took us along the Western Kentucky Parkway through lots and lots of wilderness, or at least what used to be wilderness. For the past several decades it's been turned into lots and lots of coal mines and you can see some of them from the road. At about the middle of the Parkway is Muhlenberg County, which Rich came to know very well during the eight years he worked for the Tennessee Valley Authority. The county seat is the optimistically-

named Central City (which has a population of only a few thousand). We stopped there on the way back to Louisville not so much to see if there had been any changes in the past decade (there weren't many), but because we'd seen a sign on the Parkway that mentioned there was an 'Everly Brothers Monument' and a museum there.

We got off at the exit and drove through the town (which didn't take long), but somehow missed the memorial; we had thought there would be another sign or perhaps a park with some sort of statue. No such luck. We even drove down the dirt road of the Everly Brothers museum-to-be (construction hadn't started yet) and didn't see anything. So we stopped at the Dairy Queen and the woman at the counter told us the memorial was back up the road, just past the stop light, in front of the City Hall. "You can't miss it," she said. "It looks just like a tombstone." And she was right!

Turns out that the Everlys were originally from Central City, or at least from a now nonexistent town that used to be near Central City. Land has been cleared next to the Parkway for a tribute museum, and there's now a one-day music festival each year over Labor Day weekend in Central City that features the Everlys and guests such as John Prine. The festival began the year after we moved to Maryland; about eleven years ago the Central City police and fire departments had been trying to raise money for new emergency radios and were having a hard time finding all the money they needed. Somehow, news of this reached the manager of the Everlys, and soon after that the Mayor got a telephone call telling him a check for all the money he needed would be coming to him soon. Apparently, the Everlys had been wanting to go back and Do Something for their old home town for a while. And it didn't stop there; the next year, the Everlys agreed to come to Central City for a benefit concert, and it has been continued every year since then.

We learned all this from the wife of the Mayor of Central City. The door to City Hall (near where the monument was located) was open, so we went in there for a look around. Turns out the Mayor's wife is in charge of the Everly Brothers Foundation that oversees the Festival, the planning for the museum, and sales of postcards, tee-shirts, and other souvenirs. She seemed happy to talk to us for a few minutes and tried to convince us to come back for the Festival (we told it we couldn't because we had another commitment that weekend, in Chicago). As we got back in the car and headed back to the Parkway, we agreed that this is the kind of thing that would make a great independent film documentary – loads of human interest on the struggles and successes of a small rural town.

We had time the day before the convention began to do one more bit of touring. In the decade since we'd moved to Maryland, the Hillerich & Bradsby Company had moved their main baseball bat production facility to downtown Louisville from where it had been across the river in Indiana. And they had also opened a museum next door to it – the Louisville Slugger Museum. You know when you're near the place because the world's largest baseball bat is in the plaza outside (with the world's largest baseball 'breaking' a large mural of a window at the plate glass company next door).



at the Everly Brothers Monument

The museum itself was somewhat interesting, but would have been more so if it stuck more to the topic of baseball bats instead of trying (and not really succeeding) to be more of a general interest baseball museum. On the other hand, the tour of the bat production facility was fascinating. You could see, right there in front of you, each step of the process for converting a wooden cylinder into a finished baseball bat, right down to the ‘autograph’. (In fact, for all the hard-core baseball fans and for a not-too-unreasonable fee – about \$50 – it’s possible to get an honest-to-god Louisville Slugger wooden baseball bat, major league quality, with *your own* signature engraved on it! Rich was tempted, but it seemed just a bit too self-reverential in the end.)



the Louisville Slugger Museum

Rivercon itself was a nice, pleasant convention, and with over 1,000 people, the most well-attended one of its run. We were only on a few program items, which left lots of time to talk to people (our favorite convention activity). We’re starting to get to know the fans from NESFA pretty well, and many of them were there promoting their Boston-in-2004 bid, which looks to be a good one. It was a fun convention, especially the parties and dinner expeditions. There are some very fine restaurants in Louisville, and meals with friends like Joel Zakem, Bob Roehm, Dave Rowe, Carolyn Doyle, Ned Brooks, Ken Moore, and Ben Yalow, made the dining all that much better. Two of our friends, Mike and Christa Sinclair, gave one last “Say ‘Da’ to Moscow” party, which featured flavored vodkas and all the trappings of (formerly) communist Russia; Mike, Christa, and some other friends had once run a series of these parties, at conventions across the midwest, promoting Moscow in a semi-serious bid for the 1995 Worldcon. By the time that the bid, such that it was, had run its course, the L.A.Con people had copied some of the shtick, such as a passport-style book holding stickers from various convention parties, in their successful bid for the 1996 Worldcon. And there was even a surprise for us – at that party Mike and Christa presented us certificates, signed by Jefferson County Judge/Executive Rebecca Jackson, which proclaimed us Honorary Captains of the Belle of Louisville riverboat!

This was likely to be our last trip to Kentucky for quite some time – there just isn’t anything, especially now with the demise of Rivercon, to bring us back there again anytime soon. The friends we have there we’ll see again in other places, but the city has always been a pleasant place to visit. We’ll miss that.

* * * * *

“Are you going to drive this car all the way back to Maryland?” – Bellman at Hyatt Regency Chicago

It seemed like an odd question to be asked as we packed our car in preparing to leave the Worldcon in Chicago. We weren’t sure if he was commenting on the condition of the car or our ability to endure a long trip. Later we realized he must have meant to ask if we were going to make the trip in one day. Many people seemed surprised that we had driven to Chicago rather

than fly, but we were bringing along an electric mimeograph and an electrostencil machine to give to Dick and Leah Smith, and those are not the type of things to take on a plane. And if we'd flown to Chicago, we also wouldn't have been able to make all the stops along the way that we'd planned.

This year, we've made our vacations do double duty. Instead of just driving to a convention and back, we've been seeing sights along the way and taking side trips while we're "in the area". Our trip to Midwestcon in Cincinnati at the end of June included a side trip to the Bob Evans Farm in southeastern Ohio for its annual Quilt Exhibition. In July, the drive out to Louisville for Rivercon took us well out of our way to Paducah before heading back to Louisville for the convention. But on the drive at the end of summer to Chicon 2000, we didn't have to detour miles and miles to see the sights – they were right on the way. And the one we wanted to see most was the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame and Museum in Cleveland.

The most obvious thing about Cleveland is that it's a city in transition. Shiny new buildings belonging to computer companies and health care groups shoulder up to abandoned buildings on the route into downtown. The waterfront area is different, though; the renewal has already taken place. There's now a big new stadium for the professional football team. And there's also the Museum.

If you haven't seen pictures of it, the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame and Museum is housed in a spectacular glass pyramid on the shore of Lake Erie. It's not large by Smithsonian standards and, being a



the glass pyramid of Cleveland

pyramid, the above-ground exhibit space gets smaller as one ascends. At the bottommost level, where the main exhibition area is located, there are many displays filled with historical artifacts. Snippets of rock and roll are everywhere, bombarding you and constantly overlapping – every ten steps, what you were listening to gets drowned out by the next piece of equally loud music. The artifacts, though, were pretty interesting, and included such things the Beatles' Sergeant Pepper uniforms and the suits they wore on the cover of their debut album cover, as well as music play lists from various concerts, guitars galore, and stage costumes from Madonna, David Bowie, Kiss, Michael Jackson, and many, many others. But the continuous assault on the senses takes a toll and sensory overload happens quickly; it's not long until the next costume or piece of sheet music doesn't mean much.

One thing that we quickly noticed is that the museum seemed to use pretty much a scattergun approach, with bits of this and some of that. There looked to be a lack of coherency and connectivity; perhaps it's because trying to capture the whole of rock and roll in one place is a bit futile. And that leads to a larger question: how is it decided what belongs in the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame? Maybe this was captured somewhere else in the museum; to see everything, to sit through all the videos and listen to all the recordings, would have taken far longer than the time we spent there. You could spend the entire day just in the various video venues and in soaking up the music. But there are other things to see.

The actual Hall of Fame itself is on the third level, but it mostly consists of a hallway where signatures of the honorees are on display; it was kind of disappointing. There was quite a bit on some of the more famous Hall of Fame inductees, like Springsteen and Billy Joel but not so much on others. There was also a theater where you could view the best moments from some of the past Hall of Fame Induction concerts, and even a computerized listening station where you could bring up digital recordings by everybody who had been inducted. We'd thought it would take only an hour or two to see the museum, but after four hours, had managed mostly just a superficial look at much of what was in there. After that, it was mid-afternoon and time to head farther west.

Seeing all those artifacts from rock and roll's earlier days in such an expensive and magnificent setting, though, made us a bit envious. The closest thing to it in the science fiction world are personal collections like Forry Ackerman's that are made available for public viewing only because of the largesse of their owners. Someday, perhaps, SF will get its own museum where we can see its roots and marvel at original manuscripts from famous writers and historical memorabilia from all the Worldcons. Until then, we'll have to settle for temporary traveling historical exhibits like the one at Chicon 2000.

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"This is the oddest but most entertaining event I've ever been to." – **Galaxy Quest** director *Dean Parisot*

Chicago is an interesting city to walk around in. There's always lots to see and do there, more so when there's a Worldcon in town. As you might expect, there's lots more to do in Chicago than in Cleveland. Chicago is much like New York, in that the downtown area is active and interesting well into the night (even on a Sunday night), whereas in Cleveland, the whole downtown area pretty much shuts down after dark. We arrived on a Wednesday, which happened to be the free-admission day at the Field Museum, so that's where we went. We wanted to see Sue.

The Field Museum is a Natural History Museum, similar in many ways to the one here in Washington that's part of the Smithsonian Institution. But the Field Museum has something the Smithsonian doesn't – a nearly complete fossil skeleton of a Tyrannosaurus Rex. It's the largest and most complete one ever found; it was discovered about a decade ago in Montana, and ever since then it's been called "Sue", after the first name of the paleontologist who made the discovery.



Nicki meets "Sue"

There was more at the Field than just dinosaurs, of course. The *Star Wars* display we'd seen at the National Air and Space Museum more than two years ago was there, and there was *no* line! There was a roomful of jade from China that was interesting (but dimly lit), and a recreation of an Egyptian tomb – actual stones with hieroglyphs, a display of burial objects, and a Book of the Dead. The museum is pretty large, and there were alcoves and displays we didn't

have time to explore. The Field is part of an extended museum complex that also includes the Shedd Aquarium (which we also visited the last day we were in the city) and the Adler Planetarium. The scenic park area they occupy becomes a peninsula that extends out into Lake Michigan; the day we were there it was windy enough where impressively large waves were crashing up against the breakwater.

Another place in Chicago where the wind often blows is 1060 West Addison Street on the north side of town – Wrigley Field. Rich had been there only once previously to see a baseball game, back in April 1988, when it was so cold that there was a threat of snow that day. This time it was almost the opposite – it was so hot a day that the public schools stayed closed; if we'd had tickets in the bleachers or down the left field line where there was full sun, it would have been very unpleasant. Chicon had purchased a block of seats and resold them to the Worldcon attendees; there were maybe 15-20 other people from the convention there, enough where we even got scoreboard recognition! As for the game itself, it was a bit of an anticlimax; the Cubs played poorly and were routed. Sammy Sosa, who was leading the majors in home runs, struck out twice. It was just our luck to catch him on a bad day; if we'd been able to attend the previous day's game, we'd have seen him hit two homers.



in the friendly confines of Wrigley Field

The Worldcon itself was as Worldcons usually are, a human kaleidoscope – a whirl of activity, parties every night and friends everywhere. It's something that's sure to wear you down after a few days, but on the other hand, you never really get tired of it. And, admittedly, we look forward to it. Worldcons are the only place where we are likely to see many of our friends each year. Lowell Cunningham and Dorothy Tompkins from Knoxville were there; we've known each other for probably close to twenty years, long before Lowell gained fame as the creator of the *Men In Black*. Many of our contributors for *Mimosa* were there, such as Dave Kyle, Julia Morgan-Scott, and Teddy Harvia, and some of our time was spent trying to line up contributions for the next issue.

Mimosa was not the Best Fanzine Hugo winner this year, as it turned out. That went to Mike Glycer's newszine *File 770*, his first win in more than a decade. We were not all that disappointed that we didn't win; Mike has been publishing some very fine issues and finished second (behind *Ansible*) in the category last year in Australia. But wait til *next* year!

If we had to single out any particular highlight of Chicon 2000, we're not sure we could do it. Neither of us was on a single programming event, the result of not receiving the program questionnaire that had apparently been sent out much earlier. Not that it really mattered; there didn't seem to be many, if any, panels that we were much interested in or felt we could contribute to in any meaningful way. Much of our time was spent in the Fan Lounge in the Concourse area, which, for once, was well-designed (and also well-located, not far from the convention registration area). It was set up to look like a fan's living room. The couches and overstuffed chairs were suitably old and tacky (especially the green slip-covered chair and footstool combo) and the section was bounded by cinder block and wood bookshelves which held paperback books and prozines. There was even some programming there – Dick and Leah

Smith gave a get-your-hands-dirty show-and-tell about fanzine reproduction methods of old, including even the now-legendary hectograph. It made us nostalgic for the past, but at the same time grateful we live in the present.

The Fan Lounge was also used for other impromptu events, such a “Meet the TAFF and DUFF Representatives” party. But we managed to do neither. Neither Sue Mason, the Trans-Atlantic Fan Fund delegate, nor Cathy Cupitt, who represented the Down Under Fan Fund, made Washington, D.C., part of their travel itineraries, and our paths just didn’t seem to cross with them during the convention. On the other hand, Janice Gelb, the North American representative of the DUFF, was omnipresent and scored a coup by overseeing one of the most financially successful fan fund benefit auctions ever at a Worldcon. Outcomes of auctions like these are hard to predict; even though there are more people at a Worldcon than a regional convention, much of what gets donated for a fan fund auction is usually more suitable for a more select audience that might be found at a regional convention.

The auction at Chicon 2000 included the usual aggregation of books, fanzines, and collectibles that had been donated (and which found new homes for a few tens of dollars), but much of the success resulted from the auction of two big-ticket items – authors Mike Resnick and Harry Turtledove each agreed, on very short notice, to use the name of the respective winning bidder as a character in upcoming science fiction stories they would be writing. Bidding was brisk and after all the dust had settled, the two auctions netted \$650 and \$666, respectively. It led Rich to wonder aloud, “Why are we even bothering with all this other penny ante stuff?”

On the other hand, the parties at Chicon 2000 were hardly ‘penny ante’. Some significant money was spent over the weekend by all the various Worldcon bidders. Hot barbecue was available every night at the Charlotte-in-2004 suite, while the rival Boston bid had wonderful desserts and microbrew beer. The Scotland-in-2005 bid had single malt Scotch whiskey. The most interesting of the parties, though, was by the Japan-in-2007 bid. At every Worldcon there’s a contingent of fans from Japan, including their mentor, Takumi Shibano. Japanese fandom is so highly regarded at Worldcons that they are allowed to present their Seiun Awards, for best science fiction story and novel translated into Japanese during the previous year, at the Hugo Awards Ceremony. They have enough knowledge and experience on what happens at and is expected of Worldcons that it seemed only natural that they would one day bid for one. They held bid parties two nights at Chicon, giving out samurai headbands and Sake to bid supporters; they were actually a bit too successful – hundreds of people signed up as pre-supporters and by their second night they ran out of headbands and had to close down early.



Nicki with Japan party souvenir

After five frenetic days of Chicon, we finally reached the point where we were about ready for it to be over. The last party on the last night of a Worldcon always seems to signal the end of summer and the beginning of autumn, and it was time to go home. We took back with us pleasant memories of friends and good times, and the desire to do it all over again next year. After all, it was only 51 weeks to the Millennium Philcon! ☀

