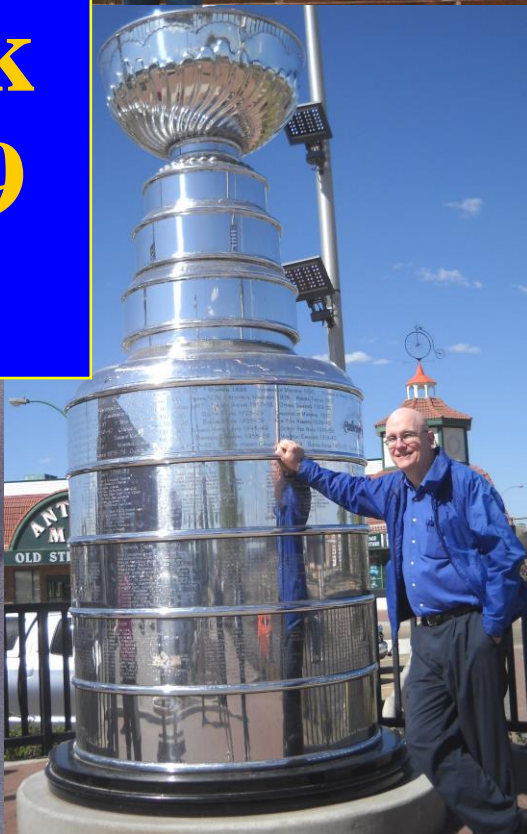




My Back Pages #9

Rich Lynch



My Back Pages #9

articles and essays by Rich Lynch

When I began this personal anthology I never thought it would ever extend as far as an issue #9. Since it did, this would seem a good time pay homage to some of the famous #9s, and there are a lot of them: Gordie Howe, Bobby Hull, Maurice “The Rocket” Richard, Ted Williams, Roger Maris, Bill Mazeroski, Roy Hobbs, Bob Pettit, Tony Parker, “Awesome” Bill Elliott (his car, anyway), Ronaldo, Mia Hamm, Sonny Jurgensen, Drew Brees, Tony Romo, symphonies by Dvořák and Beethoven, a fabled Love Potion, and, far from least, an unusual audio collage that was part of the Fab Four’s White Album (“*number nine... number nine... number nine...*”).

This #9 will not aspire to such greatness, but I *do* hope it will be entertaining to read. So let’s start with an essay that originally saw print in `09, about a memorable late summer trip that my wife Nicki and I took to Montréal for the 2009 Worldcon.

Rich Lynch
Gaithersburg, Maryland
December 2012

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‘Worldcon’ and ‘Hugo Award’ are service marks of the World Science Fiction Society.
(Thanks to Kevin Standlee for use of his photo of Warren Buff.)

Due North

Prolog: The World's Largest Chinatown

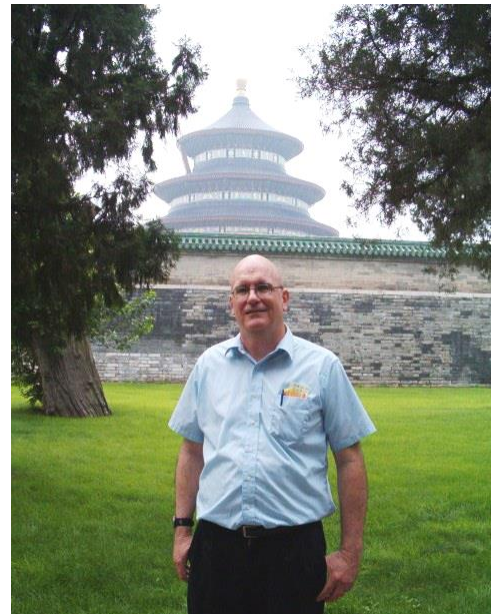
A week away from a Worldcon vacation is not the most opportune time for a big business trip, but I don't get a say when these meetings are scheduled. I had been looking forward to being in Montréal, not just for Anticipation '09 but also for, well, being in Montréal. I had been there several times previously (I went to college only about 100 miles away), but not since 1995. It's a great city, filled with splendid cathedrals and a commercial riverfront where ocean-going ships are a frequent sight. There is even a small Chinatown.

But it was a much, much larger Chinatown where my business trip took me – the city of Beijing. It's not quite yet the largest Chinese-language city in the world (Shanghai is still a bit larger) but the way it is expanding in a very few years it will be.

I was in China for just three days and could only get a half



at the entrance to the Forbidden City



at the Temple of Heaven in Beijing

day to myself, but it was enough to see two of central Beijing's most visited attractions, the Temple of Heaven and the Forbidden City. The Temple of Heaven is a complex of a dozen or so buildings in the middle of a peaceful green space. The Forbidden City, in contrast, is a huge complex of more than 900 buildings covering about 7.8 million square feet, almost all of it paved in stone. Today The Forbidden City is an extended museum of ancient Chinese culture, but hundreds of years ago it was once the center of several Chinese dynasties – in effect, the world's largest Chinatown.

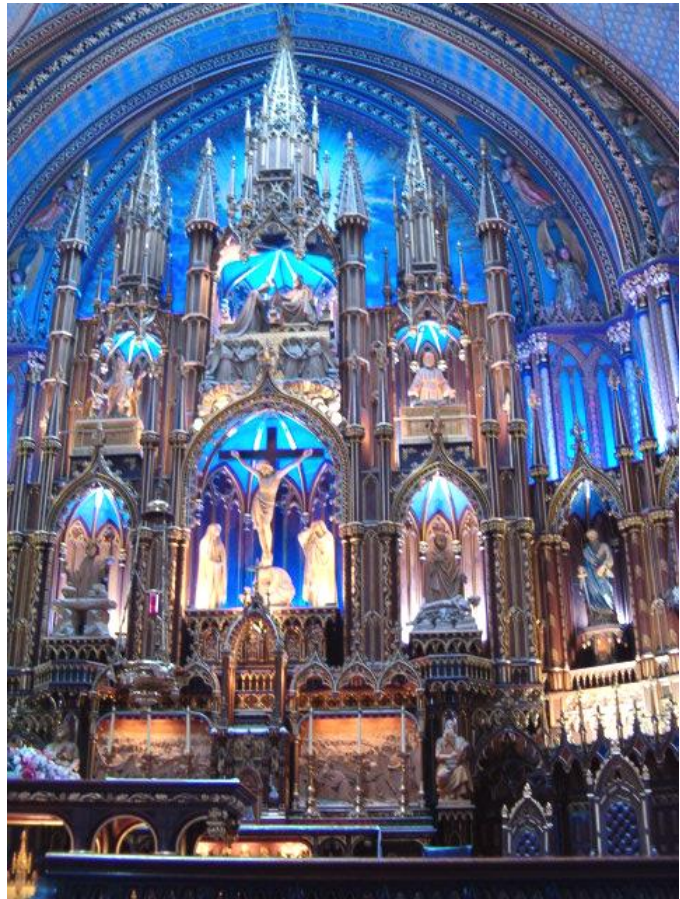
A River Runs Through It

There were far fewer people in Montréal's Chinatown than who visit Beijing's Forbidden City on any particular day, but to me it was just as interesting a place. Some of the people who live there are descendents of the Chinese 'navvies' who helped build Canada's transcontinental railway back in the 1880s. The railroad was vital to the settlement of western Canada, but in eastern Canada, the railroad runs alongside an equally important means of transportation – the St. Lawrence River. Montréal (most of it anyway) is actually an island in the middle of the river. Ocean-going vessels traverse through a set of locks in Montréal on their way to and from ports on the Great Lakes. The city was originally settled as a French fur trading post in the 1600s, and

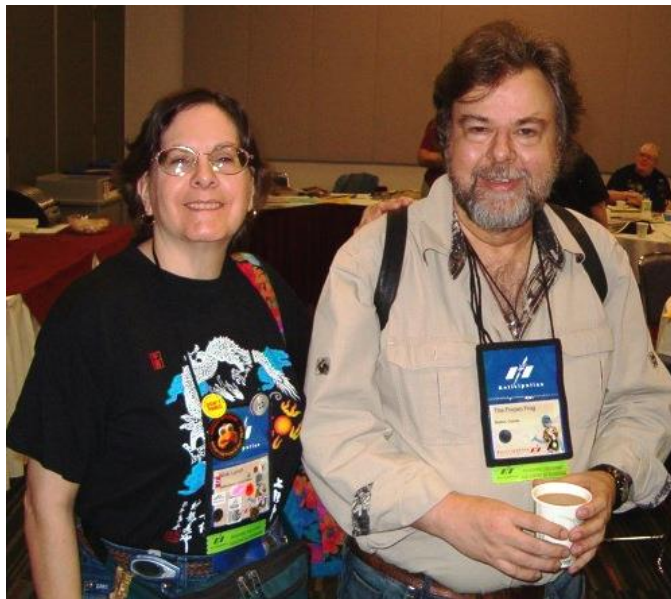
the area between the convention center, where Anticipation `09 was held, and the waterfront is the old part of the city with cobblestone streets and wonderful buildings.

The most magnificent of all is the Notre-Dame Basilica which, when it was completed in the 1840s, was then the largest cathedral in North America. It is a superb example of Gothic Revival architecture, but the reason it is so impressive is its ornate and colorful interior. Truly spectacular.

Even though the Basilica is one of Montréal's best tourist attractions, it is also still a place of worship and, as you might expect, a very popular place for weddings. It is so popular, in fact, that there is a two year waitlist, with no exceptions for celebrities. The tour guide explained (with a straight face) that the most efficient way to proceed for anyone who wants to get married there would be to schedule a date and then use the two years to find someone to marry. Everyone in the tour laughed, but you know, it almost sounds believable.



interior of Notre-Dame Basilica



Nicki and Benoit Girard

The People of Anticipation `09

But the reason of coming north to Montréal was not just to be tourists. There was a Worldcon to attend and friends to see. One of them is Benoit Girard, who lives in Québec City. A decade or so ago Benoit was very active in fandom and published an entertaining personalzine titled *The Frozen Frog*. He has pretty much dropped out of fandom except for the occasional Worldcon. But I'm beginning to think the same description is starting to apply to me.

Anticipation `09 was the 70th anniversary of the first Worldcon. There are now only a very few people left from the 1939 Nycon, and one of them, Dave

Kyle, was in Montréal. Nicki and I have known Dave since 1979, when we met at a big convention in Louisville that year. It was at that convention that Dave had made an offhand comment to us that he didn't think there was enough fan history being published in fanzines. Two years later, Nicki and I took that idea to heart when we began publishing *Mimosa*, which became deeply involved with the preservation of the history of SF fandom. Dave contributed 22 autobiographical articles of fanhistorical interest to *Mimosa* during its run, and I feel honored to have been his friend for these three decades.



with my friend Dave Kyle



the ever-industrious Guy Lillian

There were many other friends at Anticipation '09, some who we cross paths with fairly often and some who we would probably not cross paths with at all except at Worldcons. One of the latter is Guy Lillian, who Nicki and I have known for even longer than three decades. Guy and I have shared many adventures together over the years, including getting thrown out of a K-Mart. He and his wife Rosie drove all the way from Louisiana, and after the convention continued on downriver all the way to Prince Edward Island. In a *Mini Cooper*! Now *that's* having a sense of adventure!

And it wouldn't be a Worldcon without the presence of Robin Johnson. He will be the Fan Guest of Honor next year, when the Worldcon heads down to Melbourne, and it will be an honor that is well-deserved with even a bit of closure, since Robin was the Chairman of the first Australian Worldcon back in 1975. Nicki and I had a enjoyable dinner with Robin and his wife Alicia the evening before the convention began but it was the conversation that was pleasant; the food (at an overrated Lebanese restaurant in the convention center) was much less so.



Alicia and Robin Johnson

A New Metric for Fandom

At last year's Worldcon in Denver, I was not on a single programming item, so it was a bit of a surprise when my program participant email showed me on six panels this year, including one I was moderating. The one most fun was the "Sixty-Seven Worldcons" panel, which was filled with entertaining stories from decades past. I've now been to 26 of the 67 Worldcons, but it turned out that I had the least 'seniority' of anyone on the panel!



"Sixty-Seven Worldcons" panelists: Mike Walsh, me, Roger Sims, Mark Irwin, Dave Kyle, and Milt Stevens

Four of my six panels were related to fan history in one way or another, but there were also two others in the 'Science' track that were related to energy and global warming. The one most controversial was titled "The Pathology of Climate Change Denial" and included three people who were strong believers that global warming was being caused by anthropogenic greenhouse gas release into the atmosphere and one person who was just as fervent in his belief that it was all hokum. But there were also three other global warming deniers in the audience, and they were seated in the front row. I was moderator, and my one goal for the panel was to prevent a fight from breaking out! There *was* a bit of snarkiness at times, but in general everyone was civil and respectful though I doubt that any minds were changed.

Nicki's panels, on the other hand, were all calm and serene. The "Why I Fan" panel, which she moderated, featured several well-written and thought-out essays by the panelists, while at the "Eh? The Revival of Audio SF" panel, she discovered (not really to her surprise) that there are many fans who now prefer audiobooks to the written word. But it was on her "Encouraging Readers and Fans" panel that she and her fellow panelists were able to add a new unit of measurement to fandom. When the panelists were introducing themselves, North Carolina fan Warren Buff stated that

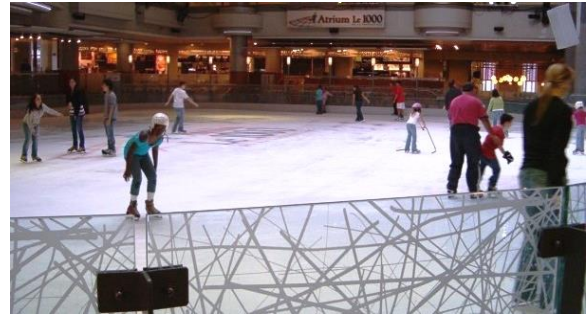


Warren Buff at the Anticipation '09 Business Meeting

he was 26 years old and had been a fan for all his life. Upon hearing that, Nicki (who was next) told the audience, "I've been a fan longer than Warren has been alive!" This must have amused the other two panelists, because when it came their turn for their self-introductions, they made the same declaration. A bit later in the convention, Warren became the Chairman of the 2010 North American SF Convention when his Raleigh bid won the site selection vote. But his true claim to fame, at least at Anticipation '09, is that he is now a metric.

Things We Didn't Do in Montréal

If we'd had more free time there were a few more things I would have wanted to do in Montréal. We discovered that the office building right next door to the hotel where we were staying had an ice skating rink. It has been more than 35 years since the last time I was on ice skates, but I found that, even after all that time, I was still jonesing to lace them up again.



ice skaters at Atrium Le 1000 De La Gauchetière

We also did not go inside the Queen Elizabeth Hotel, which is one of the more famous locations in the history of pop music. It was there, in one of the corner suites on the 17th floor, that John Lennon and Yoko Ono, at the end of May 1969, held a week-long 'bed-in for peace'. During that week they were visited by all kinds of celebrities, and in that suite on June 1st of that year, along with a roomful of people that included Tommy Smothers, Dr. Timothy Leary, and Petula Clark, they recorded "Give Peace a Chance". Every year on December 8th, the anniversary of Lennon's death, a dozen red roses and a dozen white roses are left by the door.

And one other thing Nicki and I didn't do in Montréal was be present at the beginning of the Anticipation '09 Hugo Awards Ceremony. But we had a good excuse! On Sunday evenings during the summer of 2009, the Notre-Dame Basilica has been hosting a "Festival des Grandes Orgues" (the Basilica has one of the largest pipe organs in the world), and the recital that evening was not to be missed. The Hugo Awards Ceremony was already underway by the time we returned to the convention center, and we were back in time to be disappointed that the Best Fanzine Hugo Award went to someone other than Guy Lillian. I do believe that he will someday win the award, but I was hoping this would have been the year. Of all the things Nicki and I did not get to do in Montréal, seeing Guy win a long-deserved Hugo Award was at the top of the list.

Epilog: Life at 6 Miles per Hour

On the long flight back to Washington from Beijing, when there wasn't much else going on, I tried to do an estimate on the total distance I had traveled in my life. My best guess, including all the airline miles, trains and driving, and with an average of somewhere around a mile or so on foot for each day of my life, is that I have traveled more than 3 million miles in my sixty years. Or, to put it another way, I have been living my life at about 6 miles per hour.

It was a considerably shorter distance home from Montréal than from Beijing, and on the drive back south to Maryland, we passed several places where, in a few years from now, it might be nice to relocate after my days as a government bureaucrat are over. It will take several more years, but I know how I will eventually want my life to be.

Slower. ☀

Afterword:

Prior to the Montréal trip, my previous visit to Canada was back in 2003. It was an equally memorable odyssey, with a side trip to pay respects to a famous author, a day at a fabulous museum, and a reunion with an old college friend. And besides that, there was also a Worldcon to attend!

Torcon Odyssey

I realized earlier this year that it's been a long time since I've been to Canada. The last time had been back in 1994, when the Worldcon made it way north to Winnipeg. When we were planning the trip to Toronto for Torcon 3, the 2003 Worldcon, Nicki and I tried to think back to the last time we'd been to that part of Canada – it had been more than 25 years!

Toronto was much closer than Winnipeg, so we decided to save some money and drive to the convention. We could have made it in a single day, probably, but decided to take an additional day getting there so we could make a stopover in southern New York State. That's where the city of Elmira's most famous resident, Samuel L. Clemens (a.k.a. Mark Twain), can be found.

His grave is in the Woodlawn Cemetery on the north side of Elmira. Clemens' wife was from Elmira and the grave site is of her parents' extended family. It didn't take very long to find the place, and after a few minutes for some photos we were back on our way. Visiting Mark Twain's grave was actually something I'd been wanting to do for many years – I'd been to Elmira several times when I was a college student back in the early 1970s, but I'd been totally clueless back then about the 'presence' of Mark Twain. Getting there now took us a bit off the beaten path and we wouldn't have made the detour to Elmira at all if it weren't for its closeness to Corning, where we were spending the night.



Nicki at the Clemens gravesite



glass armadillo at the Museum

The reason Nicki and I wanted to stay over in Corning was so that we could visit the very wonderful Corning Glass Museum. And "very wonderful" is not an understatement, as it's on a par with any of the Smithsonian museums. The place exceeded my expectations, and not just from all the glass-as-an-artform artifacts and creations that were on display (and some of them dated back to pre-Roman times). It was also a science museum, with several exhibits devoted to the chemistry and scientific uses of glass (such as in optics). The most popular demonstration was a glassblowing display by two expert 'gaffers' that went way, way beyond the usual county fair stuff – it was an hour and a half of technically difficult craftsmanship, in multiple stages, that resulted in an object of art worthy of display in its own right.

There was craftsmanship of a different kind to be discovered in Toronto. The view from the hotel room window was dominated by the city's most iconic structure, the CN Tower, which appeared from our viewpoint to stretch upward to infinity. The Steam Whistle Brewing Company is located in a former railroad roundhouse near the base of the Tower and it turned out that it had a visitors center and offered tours, so I spent part of one afternoon learning more about how a commercial brewery works. There was also as much free beer as I could drink (I'm glad I

wasn't driving anywhere!) and at the end of the tour, I received a complimentary beer glass with the brewery's logo. All this for just two Canadian dollars! (I got much more than my money's worth in beer alone.)

That wasn't even the biggest bargain of our stay in Toronto. Our friend Stephen Boucher was staying at the Renaissance SkyDome Hotel, and his room had a big window that looked out onto the baseball playing field. (Stephen was the convention's hotel liaison for the Renaissance, and the hotel had given him a free upgrade to the field-view room.) It came in useful, because on Labor Day afternoon the New York Yankees were in town for a game against the Toronto Blue Jays, and Nicki and I were among the fans Stephen invited over to see the game. It was an interesting perspective, way up high and way out in the outfield. I'd always wanted to see a game at the SkyDome, but didn't imagine it would be from a private sky box of sorts. And it was free!



watching the game in comfort



with Lord Stanley's Cup

Anyway, there's a lot to see and do in Toronto, and with five days of convention we unfortunately didn't get to experience all that much of it. One place made sure to visit, though, was the Hockey Hall of Fame where I had my photo taken next to the Stanley Cup. Toronto is very pleasant, especially when the weather is nice like it was during the convention, and after the economy improves we'll want to come back to see the city when there's no distraction like a Worldcon going on.

And speaking of the economy, I only was on three panels during the convention but the most interesting of them actually pertained to the economy, sort of. The title was, "The Economics of Innovation", and one of its purposes was to skewer some ideas for new technologies, such as the solar power satellite, which seem reasonable on the surface but which actually make no economic sense. It was held at 10 o'clock on a Sunday morning, but it drew a crowd of about 150 people! I remember that, years ago, it wasn't possible to get any significant audience at a convention much before noon. (Is it because times are changing or that we're just getting older? Both, I guess.)

Times *are* changing, though. It's been more than 21 years since Nicki and I started publishing *Mimosa*, and in that time we've had more than our share of success. *Mimosa* won its sixth Hugo Award at Torcon 3, about two weeks after the 30th and final issue was published. When Nicki and I accepted the award, we thanked our readers and contributors, and then I read what has become an increasingly long list of contributors we can no longer thank – Martha Beck, Bob Bloch, Vincent Clarke, Dal Coger, Robert "Buck" Coulson, John Foyster, Ian Gunn, Chuck Harris, Lynn Hickman, George "Lan" Laskowski, Joe Mayhew, Bruce Pelz, William Rotsler, Bob Shaw, Walt Willis, and Harry Warner, Jr. They were some of the most creative people I

have ever known, but they were also friends, and their friendship was uplifting. We have all been diminished by their passing.



Torcon Best Fanzine Hugo Award

Having a Hugo in your possession, especially when navigating parties, is like having a key to the city, or maybe even a magic staff. Crowds part for you, and doors to private parties will open if desired. Many of the attendees to Torcon had never seen a Hugo so up-close before, and it was interesting to see the looks on some of their faces when we offered to let them heft the trophy, and even photograph them with it (with their cameras) for their own personal souvenirs of the convention.

For me, though, my personal souvenir of the convention will be a new set of memories I'll add to the ones I have of other Worldcons I've been to. Once and perhaps future fanzine publisher Benoit Gerard attended; the last time we'd seen him was back at the 1996 L.A.Con when he was still publishing *The Frozen Frog*. He told us he never goes places much anymore; he

said this was the first time in years he'd spoken so much English (he lives in a suburb of Québec City). John Hertz from Los Angeles was there as well, though he attends every Worldcon. This year was special, though, because he was used as an on-stage prop by Dave Kyle for the Big Heart Award presentation during the Hugo Awards Ceremony, only to be astonished that *he* was this year's recipient. Guy and Rose Lillian were also there, fresh from their recently completed Down Under Fan Fund trip. Listening to them describe their Australian adventures was a particular delight, and I'm looking forward to their trip report.



Guy and Rose Lillian at Torcon

And then, on the way home, there was a reunion with my college friend Jeff Mahr. I hadn't seen him in 30 years, losing track of him a long time ago and only recently locating him with a simple Google search. (Why it took me so long to even try that, I have no good answer, though the link that led me to him turned to be only a year or two old.) He and his family now live in a suburb of Syracuse, and it wasn't at all out of our way to stop by to visit and have dinner with them. We were only there for a few hours, but it seemed much longer and it brought back many good memories of when we were all so much younger.

So, another year and another Worldcon. This was our 21st total and 16th in a row, dating back to the 1988 NolaCon. Somewhere during that time we segued from being relatively young to being middle aged and then to being older middle aged. It happens. ☀

Afterword:

In the years following our reunion, my friend Jeff and I stayed in touch and exchanged yearly holiday cards. Until last year, when a letter from Jeff's wife informed me that he had contracted and not survived an aggressive form of cancer. I am still in denial.

And I think I am also, even now, in denial about a horrible event that happened back in 1994.

17 Years On

It's now a couple of days before the 10th anniversary of the September 11 attacks in New York and Washington. I could write about that day – I was less than two miles from the Pentagon attack when it happened – but instead I'll spend a few moments remembering several good friends and another horrific event whose 17th anniversary was yesterday.

I guess I'm fairly lucky that the positions I have held in the course of my professional career have allowed me to work with many interesting people. Some of them have been interesting in a negative sense, of course, but mostly it has been a series of fascinating personalities I have been privileged to know as friends.

Thomas Arrigoni, for instance, was a free spirit – even in a crunch time he had an amusing outlook on things, and he had a top-notch analytical mind I often called on when we were evaluating proposals for demonstration projects back in 1989. We were always planning a pub crawl of mythic proportions in downtown Pittsburgh some evening, even though he claimed to be mostly a teetotaler.

Robert Evans was one of the nicest people I've ever worked with. He was far more knowledgeable than me about some of the technologies featured in one of those proposed projects, but it was not his way to act superior. I remember that I once gave him a Pittsburgh Pirates game ticket that it turned out that I couldn't use for him to take his young son to a late season game. He was always telling me about interesting places in the Pittsburgh area that I ought to check out.

Manville Mayfield was my upper-level boss back when I worked at TVA in the mid 1980s. He and I both left TVA in 1988, and he wound up at the Morgantown, West Virginia office of the Department of Energy while I came to Maryland to work at the headquarters office. He never really acted like an upper-level manager back then; he was always just a regular guy who always had kind and supportive things to say, and that continued even after we both moved on.

Sandy Webb was almost my boss – I had interviewed him about the same time I interviewed for the Maryland job. He offered me a position at Morgantown, but took no offense when I opted for the one in Maryland instead. Whenever I visited the Morgantown office I made sure to stop in to see him, and he always had an amusing story. Working for him would probably have been entertaining.

They say that vivid memories are actually better than photographs because memories are holographic and they don't dim with age. That's certainly true for these friends, and I can say, truthfully, that not a week goes by that I do not think of them. They were all passengers on USAir flight 427, which crashed near Pittsburgh on September 8, 1994. ☀

Afterword:

It took a 4½ year investigation to conclude that the crash was caused by a problem with the airplane's rudder. The legacy from this disaster is that the rudder control system for Boeing 737s was redesigned and the problem that caused the crash has never recurred.

I have traveled in that kind of airplane many, many times since then and have never been worried about safety. But for a recent such flight, to Alabama, I had a much different concern.

DSC50

I *almost* missed the airplane to Huntsville.

It was late Friday afternoon and traffic in the D.C. area was even more horrendous than I had expected. My flight back to the United States from Europe had gotten me into Dulles Airport about 1:30pm, but it took about an hour to clear customs and corral my luggage, and the 35-mile drive home took nearly two hours. By the time I had finished unpacking and getting a much-needed shower, I was in a rush. The flight to Huntsville was at 8:30pm out of BWI Airport, and there was a commuter bus that I had expected would get there in plenty of time. But with all the traffic tie-ups, the bus was nearly an hour late in arriving the commuter parking lot where the pickup point was.

In spite of all the encouraging words of the other bus passengers, I was sweating bullets for the entire ride to the airport. Many of the others on the bus were headed for the new casino not far from BWI that had opened a few weeks earlier, and when it finally became evident I would get to the airport in time I told them that they had probably earned lots of karma points for all their positive thoughts. I only hope that translated to good luck with the slots.

I was able to make it to the departure gate with about ten minutes to spare before the flight closed out. It had helped that I had pre-packed a suitcase that Nicki, who had driven to Huntsville, had taken with her. We'd done that so I could avoid a \$20 luggage fee charged by AirTran but in retrospect, having a pre-printed boarding pass and *not* having to check luggage made the difference between making the flight and being marooned at the airport.

After all that, the flight and its aftermath should have been relatively uneventful and it was, mostly. But it turned out that the hotel's shuttle bus driver had more immediate priorities than going to the airport so I spent most of an hour sitting on a bench outside the baggage claim area, talking to two elderly cabbies who were between fares. We entertained each other with stories about past experiences and misadventures, and we had such a good time that there was some genuine and mutual sadness when the bus finally arrived.

###

The DeepSouthCon is one of the oldest annual science fiction conventions, dating back to the early 1960s. This year's convention in Huntsville was the 50th DSC and because of this the convention committee had invited, for their Fan Guests, David Hulan and Larry Montgomery, who were the Chairmen of DSCs 1 and 2, respectively. Those first two DSCs, back in the early 1960s, had both been held in Alabama – the first one in Huntsville at the home of Hulan. His house turned out to be more than roomy enough, as only five people, including Hulan, attended.

Since then, DSCs have grown quite a bit, setting a record at the 2011 convention in Texas



when about 1,300 were in attendance. This year's convention was smaller than that, but still sizeable enough to fit snugly into a large hotel. And it was a good venue – the interior was an open atrium that went all the way to the roof, more than ten stories up, and all sleeping floor hallways bordered that huge open space. As a result, the convention seemed much less crowded than it was. And it made figuring out where the evening room parties were located pretty easy.



looking across the hotel atrium at a room party several floors down

Besides the room parties, and there were many of them, there was also a convention suite with snacks and beverages that served as a hangout for many of those present. But the most popular gathering place turned out to be the hotel lobby. It was there that Nicki and I found old friends from more than two decades ago. Back when we lived in Tennessee in the



Nicki with our friend Charlotte Proctor

1970s and 1980s, we always took it for granted that we would see them, frequently, at all the various regional conventions that were held each year in the mid South. Our paths ceased crossing, for the most part, after we moved north to Maryland in 1988. There's no way that half an hour's pleasant conversation can catch you up on many years' absence, but we tried. Here's hoping our next foray to a southern convention will be much sooner.

This was the first DSC for me and Nicki in a decade. Our previous one was also in Huntsville, back in 2002, when we were the Fan Guests. Neither of us was on any programming items this time, but we did find some things of interest in the program. Nicki enjoyed the offbeat "SF Song Revue" by the convention's special guest, Dr. Demento, and I found the illustrated talk about the life and times of scientist and science writer Willy Ley by University of Alabama-Huntsville librarian Anne Coleman to be a fascinating hour.



Anne Coleman's illustrated talk about Willy Ley

My favorite part of DSC50 was the visit to the Straight to Ale microbrewery that was organized by our friend Pat Molloy. It's located about ten minutes by car from the DSC hotel and about a dozen of us went there on a pleasant Saturday afternoon for a tour and tasting. Mostly tasting, actually, as it took less than half an hour to see the entirety of the place. But in spite of its relative smallness, Straight to Ale produces at least a dozen craft beers and ales, all with catchy names inspired by Huntsville's prominence as a NASA space and rocketry center. My favorite was a malty dark ale named "Wernher von Brown", a riff on the name of the famous astronautics engineer who lived in Huntsville. Delicious, and proof positive that you don't need to be a rocket scientist to make good beer.



Pat Molloy goes 'Straight to Ale'

###



my friend Guy Lillian and me

Speaking of rocket scientists, it would have been nice to stick around Huntsville for another couple of days to visit the Space Center and its amazing display of rockets from the beginnings of the space age. But modern-day responsibilities dictated that we leave on the two-day drive north even before DSC's Sunday afternoon closing ceremonies. And also before Guy Lillian's "Podcasting vs. Print Fanzines Smackdown" panel. I'm sorry I missed that, but I've got a pretty good idea how it went.

So, several hours later, Nicki and I were surveying the lobby of the Fairfield Inn at the Sevierville exit of I-40 in Tennessee. There were big electric blower fans all over the place directing air up toward the ceiling, and there was also a musty smell of lingering dampness.

I asked the hotel's front desk attendant what had happened, and she rolled her eyes and gave an expansive wave of her arm toward all the chaos. "Someone in a fourth floor room did something very stupid a few days ago," she said. "They pulled the sprinkler head off, and a flood came down through the third and second floor rooms into the lobby." Those of you reading this who attended the 1997 Disclave convention* might find this amusing, or maybe appalling. Or possibly even both. For me, I'm taking it as evidence that history is destined to repeat itself about every fifteen years. I'm hopeful that it won't be that long before I'm able to make it to another DSC. ☀

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* <http://www.wsfa.org/journal/j97/6/index.htm#tdh> or just Google "Disclave flood"

Afterword:

It had been more than a decade since I had previously had a chance to sit and talk with my friend Charlotte Proctor. Back in the 1980s and the first part of the 1990s she had edited the Hugo Award-nominated fanzine *Anvil*, and for a few years I had pseudonymously written fanzine review columns for it. Here's one of them.

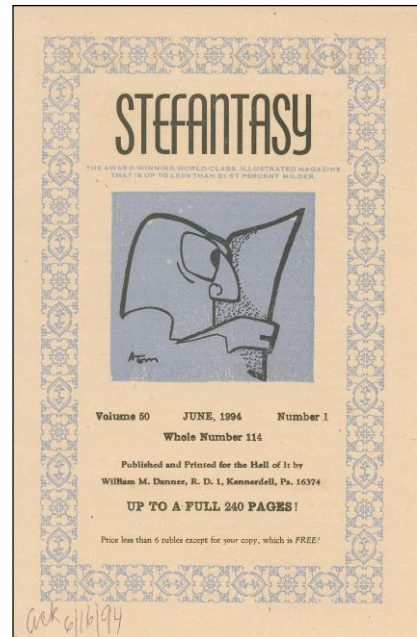
Let's Get Small!

Boy that was a long nap! It feels like I've been asleep for over a year... My good friend Charlotte just woke me up with a phone call, snapping me back to reality with a reminder that it was time for another fanzine review column. I hadn't heard from her in so long, I wasn't entirely sure that it wasn't a dream. While I was asleep, I'd been having this other weird dream that I was out west visiting my uncle Hugo in a small town in the wine country near Glen Ellen, California, when all of a sudden, just like Magic, I fell through a Trapdoor, and wound up in a small town near Washington, D.C., sitting on a branch of a Mimosa tree. Just what in the hell could it all mean?

Anyway, speaking of small towns, I've got to tell you about the small town I live in. It's *really* small – you can't even find it on the map. It's so small that there isn't even a little league ball park here – the nearest thing is a sandlot over near the cemetery, with the field aligned so that whenever some kid hits a long home run, he can brag that he "hit one over the Monuments". This town is so small, in fact, that there isn't even a Lions Club or an Elks Club. Instead, we've got a Lion Club and an Elk Club. Now *that's* small!

After all that, I sort of feel obligated to review some small fanzines this time. The first of them is the current issue (number 110) of *Stefantasy*, from William M. Danner. At first glance, there doesn't seem much here to review – a short remembrance of a vacation trip, some humorous and nostalgic reprints from various sources, and a few pages of letters. All pretty ordinary. A second look, though, shows me that this is really an *unordinary* fanzine. For one thing, *Stef* is maybe the last fanzine reproduced by letterpress from hand-set type. This provides a different and eye-pleasing appearance that you just don't find in typewritten fanzines. Color is also used to nice effect on the cover, bringing to life an old ATom illustration. Inside, Danner's vacation trip remembrance turns out not to be from the 1960s, 1950s, or even the 1940s – it's from the years 1924 and 1925 (at 85 years, he may be the oldest active fan). Reading this essay is like taking a trip through time, back to the era before Gernsback even invented science fiction fandom; it must have been a different world in every way, then, and you get the flavor of it in Danner's writing. *Stefantasy* also provides a link to the past in the letters section, in that there are amusing snippets from many previous-era fans, like Walter Willis, Lee Hoffman, Robert Bloch, Wim Struyck, Alan Dodd, Ethel Lindsay, and Dean Grennell.

On third look, though, *Stefantasy* is still a pretty small fanzine. Danner is an entertaining writer, but there's only about a page-and-a-half of him each issue. The letters seem to dominate the issue, but they have been edited severely, maybe too severely, which makes me wonder how many witticisms of Willis *et al.* that could have entertained us further have been left on the cutting-room table (actually, many fanzine editors would love to have this kind of problem). Nevertheless, *Stef* is an amusing, comfortable read, even given that you won't probably spend more than ten minutes going cover to cover.



A zine that'll take you at least a little longer to read is Chris Nelson's *Mumblings from Munchkinland*, the most recent issue being billed as "the only West Australian fanzine published in India". Whereas *Stefantasy* seems to be a window to the past, *Mumblings* is a window onto other cultures. Nelson has been involved for the past few years (from what I surmise) as a Peace Corps volunteer (or whatever the Australian equivalent is) in Pakistan. This issue features a fascinating description of Nelson's travels, from Sri Lanka and a visit to Arthur C. Clarke, to Afghanistan just before Kabul fell to the Mujahedeen, and also includes a related short article about science fiction in India. I'm presuming this is pretty much outside most people's range of experience; it was for me, which is one of the things that makes certain publications memorable to me. Added to that, Nelson is a pretty talented writer who takes advantage of the limited space in the issue. The result is a very tight, very good fanzine.

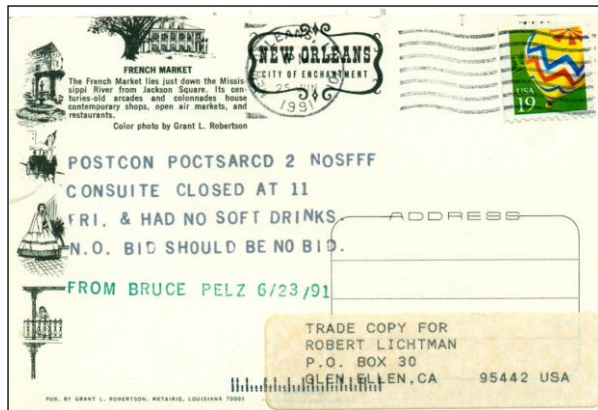
Could it be better yet? Possibly. There's no obvious way to measure the interaction between Nelson and his readers because there's no lettercol (possibly due to lack of space). Also, the travelogue stops halfway through his excursion through India, and will be continued next issue (to my anguish). It would have been nice to read it in one piece. The article about science fiction in India runs only two pages, which doesn't do more than hone my interest for more. The one piece of SF-related artwork doesn't seem to really relate to anything in particular in the issue. In short, the brevity which resulted in succinct quality, may also be a weakness in that the material needs more room than it's getting in a 12-page irregularly-published fanzine.

Lest you start to believe that 'small' always equates to 'superior', there's Rob Sommers' *Peripheral Visions*, a well-meaning and nicely reproduced, but unfortunately, lackluster fanzine. What made *Stefantasy* and *Mumblings from Munchkinland* such delights to read is the root of the problem in *Peripheral Visions* – the strength of writing (or in this case, the lack of it). An example of this is in Sommers' editorial, "The Quest", which talks about changes in his life that have occurred over the last ten years, covering the period he's been in fandom. After a full page of build-up, describing his ascent through the Heinlein juveniles through good and bad TV science fiction, to his involvement with the Atlanta 1995 Worldcon bid, he concludes with: "Changes are scary. But they're going to happen whether you want them or not, so you have to decide if you're going to sit there railing against them or use them and learn from them. I don't always act like it or even believe it all the time, but I do think change can be good for you if you're not afraid to stand up and face it." While I'm not prepared to argue with this assessment, I *can* say that the point here seems somewhat trivial, almost a truism – "change happens". Seems to me that a promising bit of writing was wasted on such a tiny payoff.

Another thing I found disappointing about the issue is that there were two very sub-standard pieces of fiction in it. Once again I'll say it, at the risk of people complaining that I'm beating this issue into the ground: the chances of high quality fiction being submitted to a fanzine publisher have just got to be pretty slim; if the fiction were any good, the authors would have sold it to a paying market. So why not look instead for the types of non-fiction where paying markets *don't* exist, and where's there's a much better chance that you'll find good writing? The two stories here were even worse than ones I've come across in other fanzines I've reviewed over the past couple of years – one is about two blue-collar workers who, while demolishing an old warehouse on an Air Force base, break through into an underground chamber that contains *surprise* a UFO. The second story is even more god-awful; as an example, I'll quote the opening sentence: "The hammer sword was spliced to his side; he shambled like a mammoth,

with tusky beards, thickened lips, thumper nose and a frown fit enough to irrigate a greater dome even than his head.”

I’m not trying to be cruel here, really. In fact, there were even a few things in this issue that were handled fairly well – there was a two-page fanzine review column that went into at least some detail about several fanzines (rather than just listing their titles) and the letters column looked to be at least somewhat edited, which puts *PV* one-up on *Fosfax*. I should also point out that previous issues have been more readable than this current issue. It’s obvious that Sommers has talent as a fan editor, but that talent is going to go to waste without better contributions to showcase.



Finally, I don’t think a review column about small fanzines would be complete without pointing out what’s probably the smallest fanzine currently being published. This zine is actually even too small to review, so I’ll merely mention that it exists. It’s *Postcon Pocketscard* from Bruce Pelz, an apparently limited-edition mailing of picture postcards from whatever city and convention Bruce happens to be at. Printing is by rubber stamp, and the number of words seems to be limited by the number of letters available in Bruce’s rubber stamp lettering kit.

There’s no indication how to get on the distribution list, but in any event, this fanzine appears to be for completist collectors only. ☀

Afterword:

Some readers may be scratching their head about that first paragraph, so here’s an explanation. The “asleep for over a year” is a reference that the previous issue of *Anvil* had appeared 15 months earlier, while “just like Magic” refers to what was then the upcoming 1992 Worldcon, Magicon. “Uncle Hugo” refers to the Hugo Awards, and specifically two of the nominees for the Best Fanzine Hugo that year: the very excellent *Trapdoor*, edited by Robert Lichtman out in Glen Ellen, California, and *Mimosa*, which Nicki and I edited. The vignette from the second paragraph is actually mostly true, though it describes the village up in the wilderness of northern New York State where I grew up.

This was the sixth of seven review columns I wrote for *Anvil*, and appeared in the next-to-last issue of the run. (I’d like to think my review column was not responsible for its demise!) I used a pseudonym for these reviews so I could inject a bit of fictionalizing into the narratives that set the themes for the columns. It’s probably the closest I’ll ever come to writing fiction.

In the twenty years since this review was written, we’ve lost Bruce Pelz and William Danner. I don’t have any idea what happened to Rob Sommers, but Chris Nelson is still publishing *Mumblings* and Robert Lichtman is still publishing *Trapdoor*. And both are continuing to produce superior fanzines.

That 1992 Worldcon was perhaps the most memorable convention I have ever attended, and not just because *Mimosa* won the first of its six Hugo Awards there (and the circumstances on how it happened). It was also the only time that Nicki and I got to meet a friend from Australia.

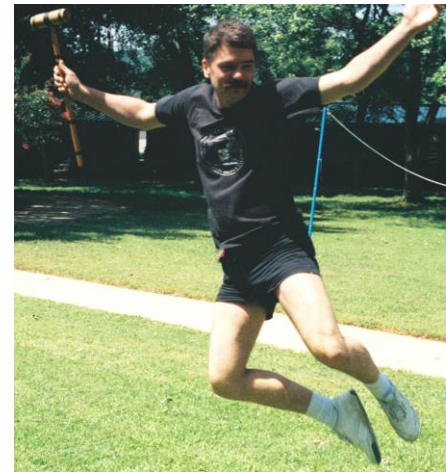
Remembering Roger

Memories can be wonderful things. They are moments, frozen in time – much better than photographs because they are three-dimensional rather than flat, holding so much more than just isolated bits of scenery. They don't fade with the passing of years, either.

Nicki and I had been corresponding with Roger Weddall for several years, but had only met each other for the first time the weekend before Magicon. It was then that we found out he was having health problems, and wouldn't be able to visit us in Maryland as he'd originally planned. As Down Under Fan Fund representative, Roger had wanted to spend six months in North America, visiting all the centers of fan activity at least once. But instead, he now could only spend four weeks here (most of which had already elapsed at that point), and would have to return to Australia right after Magicon to continue chemotherapy treatments for lymphoma.

Roger had assured us that the cancer was controllable – *had* been controlled, in fact – and nothing, but *nothing* would prevent him from returning in 1993 to complete his DUFF trip. As the convention closed, we bid each other farewell, hopeful that we'd see him again, fearful that we wouldn't. And now, just three months later, we've received that long distance telephone call we were dreading would happen, the news of Roger's death.

It is difficult for us to accept that we're not ever going to hear from him again. But we're fortunate that in the relatively short time we knew Roger, we managed to accumulate many memories of and about him that we'll continue to treasure: Roger had an unpredictable side where he would do memorable things from out of the blue from time to time, like his "telephone call from the future" to us one New Year's Eve (he was on the other side of the International Date Line, where the new year had already arrived). We also knew him as someone who would gladly go out of his way to do something for you that he knew you wanted; we've lost count of the number of times we've received letters from Roger where the envelope was almost completely covered with different postage stamps – all because he knew that Nicki collects Australian stamps.



Roger celebrating life on the weekend before Magicon

And lastly, there was the Roger we knew from this past summer – he was so hyperactive at Magicon that hardly anybody had the energy and stamina to keep up with him. That's the way we'll remember him most – full of life and enthusiasm. Roger was that special kind of person who could brighten up your day whenever he wrote or called; the world will be a less friendly place without him. We will miss him, a lot; we already do.

He was our friend. ☀

Afterword:

The sad truth is that a lot of friends from 20 years ago are no longer here. One of them was a prolific author that I had known for nearly three decades. He was always entertaining, and his memorial service turned out, in an odd way, to be equally so.

Jack Laurence Chalker (1944-2005)

It wasn't unexpected, and the news spread rapidly through the various online mailing lists:

It is with great sorrow that the family of Jack L. Chalker announces his death at 11:12am on Friday, February 11, 2005.

Jack had fallen ill near the end of 2004 and had been hospitalized in an intensive care unit. But his condition had slowly deteriorated instead of improving, and by the beginning of February he was no longer responding to outside stimuli. There were several obituaries that were written about Jack; here's part of one that appeared in one of the local newspapers:

Jack L. Chalker, 60, science fiction writer

BALTIMORE (AP) Jack L. Chalker, who wrote more than 60 science fiction and fantasy novels, died of kidney failure Feb. 11 in Baltimore. He was 60.

A Uniontown resident, Mr. Chalker was one of Maryland's most prolific authors and won numerous awards during a career that began in his early teens.

"He was one of the greats in our field," said Catherine Asaro, of Columbia, Md., president of Science Fiction and Fantasy Writers of America Inc. "He always had something provocative to say, his creativity in imagining different universes."

When Mr. Chalker was a teen, he started a literary magazine, Mirage, that he produced on an electric mimeograph machine and assembled with friends in his home.

"He would write famous authors and see if they wanted to write free nonfiction pieces for his magazine, and a surprising number did," said his wife, Eva C. Whitley.

The magazine earned the 14-year-old Mr. Chalker a nomination for the Hugo Award, the genre's highest honor, presented by the World Science Fiction Society. Mr. Chalker would be nominated for three more Hugos in his career.

Mr. Chalker was 13 when he took a bus from Baltimore to the District for his first science fiction meeting. He was hooked. Several years later, he and a high school friend founded the Baltimore Science Fiction Society, holding regular meetings in friends' homes.

Mr. Chalker later organized the society's first Balticon, an annual conference, now in its 39th year, that has grown from a few dozen attendees to as many as 2,000.

"It's a relatively small field, and because science fiction has so many conventions, it's very hard not to meet 90 percent of the writers," author Mike Resnick said.

Mr. Chalker traveled as far as Australia for conventions, and on his Web site he proclaimed plans to attend this year's World Science Fiction Society convention in Scotland.

A funeral service is planned for Monday, Feb. 21, at Marzullo Funeral Chapel in Baltimore.



Jack Chalker

Nicki and I attended the memorial service for Jack, and it seemed a bit surreal to us (and not just because most of the attendees were science fiction fans). The minister was one of Eva's co-workers and was also the head of a black Baptist church somewhere in Baltimore. He brought along two of his associates from the church, but they seemed so inexperienced that neither of them could get through a scripture reading without stumbling over every fifth word or so. (One of them kept getting prompts from a fan standing nearby, who gave him correct pronunciations for some of the words.) The two readings, both lengthy, seemed not to have all that much to do with the subject of loss and bereavement. And then there were the songs...

The first one was sung *a cappella* by one of Eva's friends, and she definitely had a good voice. But the song seemed more than a bit out-of-place for someone whose ashes would soon be scattered: it was Billy Joel's "I Love You Just the Way You Are". (Nicki thought a better choice would have been Warren Zevon's "Keep Me in Your Heart for a While".) A bit later, the same woman sang a more appropriate song for the evening, "Amazing Grace". It was familiar enough that most people joined in, at least for the first verse. She decided to sing all four verses, though, and the number of voices dropped off as the song continued on – many people sang with her for the second verse, some sang the third verse, and a few stalwarts made it all the way through the fourth. There was an organist present (another of the pastor's associates), and partway through the first verse he jumped in as accompaniment to all the voices. Unfortunately, he chose a different key than the woman singing, so for the first two verses the singers and the organist fought a grim battle for supremacy, with the singers finally giving in and dropping into the organist's key at about the beginning of the third verse. The recessional song was "I'll Fly Away" (an uplifting traditional country-folk song you may remember from the movie *O Brother, Where Art Thou?*). About half of the people there sang it that way, but the rest sang it as a dirge and the result sounded a bit, well, different. I think Jack would have been amused.

To be fair, there were some parts of the service that were memorable, and in a good sense. Jack and Eva's younger son Steven read some of the many short notes and remembrances emailed from fans around the world. One of the fans present spoke for a few minutes about Jack's contributions to local fandom. Jack and Eva's older son David told some anecdotes about his dad. Afterwards, Eva arranged for a reception at a downtown hotel ('Jack L. Con I'); it would have been nice to spend a few hours there with fans we don't get to see very often, but by then it was after 9:00pm and it was more than an hour to get home from there (with work the next day). So I'm hoping there will be a Jack L. Con II next year.

I can think of many conversations we had with Jack over the years. Right now I'm choosing to remember back to a happier time, when Nicki and I had lunch with him and his family at Noreascon this past Labor Day, not long before we headed our separate ways down the road back to Maryland. There was lots of smiles and pleasant talk. No way I could know that would be the last time I'd see him. ☀

Afterword:

If there was ever a Jack L Con II, Nicki and I never heard about it. Eva Whitley still lives in Maryland and we cross paths with her every so often, usually at conventions.

This brings me to the subject of family reunions, which for my family are often the equivalent of a very small convention. We've been doing them since 2000, usually in Florida. The one in 2003 was especially entertaining, as you will read.

To Florida and Back!

I suppose I should write something about the annual Lynch Family Reunion. This was our fourth annual, once again held in the northern Tampa suburbs. We were there because it's a fairly central location for many of the major league baseball spring training sites. We only went to two games this year – the Phillies and Pirates in Clearwater and the Yankees and Blue Jays in Dunedin. No foul balls were hit our way this year, but on the other hand, the seats were out of the sun. *More* than a fair trade!

Nicki made the trip this year; it was her first time to a reunion – one of the few silver linings from a job layoff is that you no longer have to ration annual leave. Anyway, the drives down and back were uneventful, though very, very long. According to my car's odometer, it's 580 miles from the Maryland suburbs of Washington, D.C. down I-95 to the Georgia state line. The first day of the drive south covered 575 of those miles; we elected to stop (after a successful hard-sell by the South Carolina welcome center lady) at Hardeeville, South Carolina, which actually had more and cheaper motels than any of the Savannah, Georgia exits a bit farther ahead. And it also had one of the World's Great Restaurants, as it turned out – the Cripple Crab, where we had a meal of grilled shrimp that was just excellent. Or maybe it was just that after a long day of travel, *any* good restaurant meal would seem larger than life. The meal was by far more memorable than the motel where we stayed – a very inexpensive place that was quiet enough but not an inn we'd be willing to go back to. Really, the best thing you could say about the place was that it was cheap – the restaurant meal was more expensive than the hotel room!

Nicki and I weren't the farthest travelers to the Reunion. My brother flew in from Phoenix, Arizona, and this year one of his five daughters came with him. I'd last seen her about nine years ago, and remembered her as a sweet little girl; she's now grown up into a nice young lady. And so a new set of memories will now supplant the old ones.

Spring training baseball games are always a featured event of the Reunions because my mom is a major baseball fan (always has been, actually); she's a fan of both the New York Mets (yay!) and Atlanta Braves (boo!). She subscribes to the Braves tabloid publication *Chop Talk*, and even has had two letters of comments published in it! Who would've thought my mom was a letterhack?

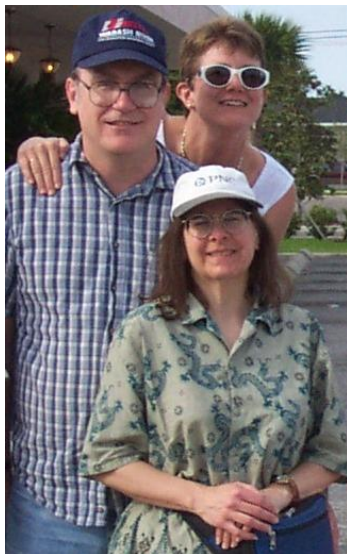
At any rate, both games were fun and it was interesting to get a look at future major-leaguers. The star of the Phillies-Pirates game (though in a losing cause) was a Phillies infielder named Buzz Hannahan, who had three hits, drove in two runs, scored twice himself, and even stole a base. This, from a player who apparently didn't have enough pull to get the Phillies to give him a uniform with his name on it, like the rest of his teammates had. Nobody even knew who he was at the beginning of the game, but after his final at-bat he received a long, loud ovation. Based on a sampling of one game, this guy could be a future Hall-of-Famer! (But it turned out that he didn't make the Phillies opening day roster. Oh well.)



Lynch Family Reunion in Dunedin

It was kind of the same situation the next day, at the Yankees-Toronto game. I don't know enough to tell if the Blue Jays were playing any of their non-roster players, but the Yankees certainly weren't – at least, at first. The Yankees started all their big-name (and big-salary) regulars, and for about four innings it was like a real regular-season game, with some good power hitting and some *really* good fielding plays. But after that, they all came out of the game in favor of a bunch of no-names and the most entertaining thing was one of the beer vendors.

Anyway, that's spring training for you – a chance to see big-league players close-up and at a reasonable ticket cost. But you usually only get that for the first few innings in a spring training game; after that, it's an entirely different ballgame as team managers and coaches try to see if other players have the talent and desire to make the team. Many who attend spring training games only stick around for that 'first' game; in Florida, the days are hot even in March and the stadiums are filled with retirees who tire easily. By the middle innings, there's a steady stream of people heading for the exits. This apparently included middle-age people sitting next to me; they left their seats in the fifth inning and never came back. Or maybe they found that the stadium's beer garden was much more interesting than watching the 'second' game.



with Nicki and my sister Beth

We did the drive home in one day – the thought of spending the night in our own bed was the, er, driving force. It turned out to be a 900-mile trip, and we made it in just about 17 hours, including all stops. It was a bit of an ordeal, not only because of a nasty cold I'd picked up, but also because of the weather – there was rain from about the middle of Georgia to about the middle of North Carolina. I think that maybe the most discouraging moment of the trip was when we'd stopped in central South Carolina, just south of Lake Marion, and realized that we were still not quite halfway home.

How best to summarize the event? It was, in some ways, not unlike a small convention – there was a hospitality suite and even some rudimentary programming (one event of which was me and my brother facing-off in a music trivia contest, which he won on the third tie-breaker question, the dirty rat. He got all the easy questions, I'm telling ya!). My baby sister Beth, as usual, was the star of the Reunion. She's a humorist, whether she knows it or not. Her job as receptionist at an Ocala medical office gives her lots of stories to tell, and she's never failed to cause great amounts of laughter when she does.

We're going to do it all over again next year, of course. ☀

Afterword:

This year's Reunion will be back in the Tampa area, but I'm not yet sure I can be there! I just found out that the Reunion weekend, in mid-March, conflicts with an important business meeting in Norway that I'm supposed to be covering. My sister told me we can reschedule if none of the others who are coming have non-returnable airline tickets, so I'm hoping for the best. I guess I should have mentioned that Lynch Family Reunions are not without drama.

If the Norway trip does happen, it will be my second time there within a year. My first ever visit was in the middle of June for a big multinational meeting, and it was a trip that was filled with good food, cool breezes, and long, long days.

Bergen 2012

Prolog: Son Observe the Time

It was my fourth day in Norway and I was finally feeling that I was getting used to the six hour time zone difference between Bergen and the eastern United States. The day's very long meeting had gone really well, and those of us who had come to the conference had been treated to a very fine dinner by our Norwegian hosts to get all of us in the right frame of mind for the next day's project visit.

A few of us were not yet ready to call an end to the day, though, so we had convened in an outdoor bar near the waterfront. After a couple hours of pleasant conversation, I made a point to get one of my compatriots to take the out-of-the-ordinary photo of me you see here on this page. What made it special was not the tall ship in the background, nor the beautifully clear skies in a place where it rains more than 200 days a year. No, what made this photo a keeper was the time of day. It was taken at one minute after midnight.



at Bergen's historic inner harbor

The League of Extraordinary Traders

Bergen, at latitude $+60^{\circ}23'$, is not the most northerly place I've ever been but it's close. It's not quite far enough north to experience the 'midnight sun', but during the middle of June the skies never get darker than an early evening twilight. Bergen is also Norway's second largest city and largest seaport, and its location on the eastern shore of the North Sea has made it strategically important throughout Norway's history.

Bergen dates back to the end of the Viking era in the late 11th century, but it was in the 14th century that it became prominent as one of the *kontors* (i.e., trading posts) of the Hanseatic League. Because of this, UNESCO in 1979 listed the historic old town of Bergen as one of its World Cultural Heritage Sites, and there are several history museums in the city that have preserved some of the past glory of the city. The picturesque waterfront along the inner harbor is itself a museum of sorts. It's lined with wooden row houses, many of them alas reconstructed after a fire in 1702, that once served as warehouses and administrative buildings for the Hanseatic merchants and traders.



one of Bergen's many history museums

Nowadays, Bergen is one of the most popular tourist destinations in all of Europe, and because of that it's a very expensive place to visit. I had come there because of a multinational meeting on carbon sequestration I had helped plan and organize, and my first impression of the city was that I was going to need a lot more cash than I had expected. Taxis charge about \$85 for the 12 mile ride from the airport into the city. Museum entrance fees range from about \$30 upwards. Even something as minor as a souvenir refrigerator magnet cost about \$12. And then there was the cost of food.



my meal at the fish market

I realized early on that I shouldn't be having angst over how much money I was spending on meals, but it was still amazing to behold how much they cost. Even the fast food was high-priced – a foot-long sandwich at Subway that costs about \$5 in the United States would set you back about \$11 in Bergen. On my first day in town I ate at the outdoor fish

market at the inner harbor, where some of the vendors had hot grills going. I had baked salmon, two skewers of shrimp, potato salad, some steamed vegetables, a slice of bread, and a bottle of the locally-brewed beer. Very delicious. When I figured out the cost, it came out to about \$35.

It was the most expensive meal I've ever had served to me on a throwaway plastic plate.

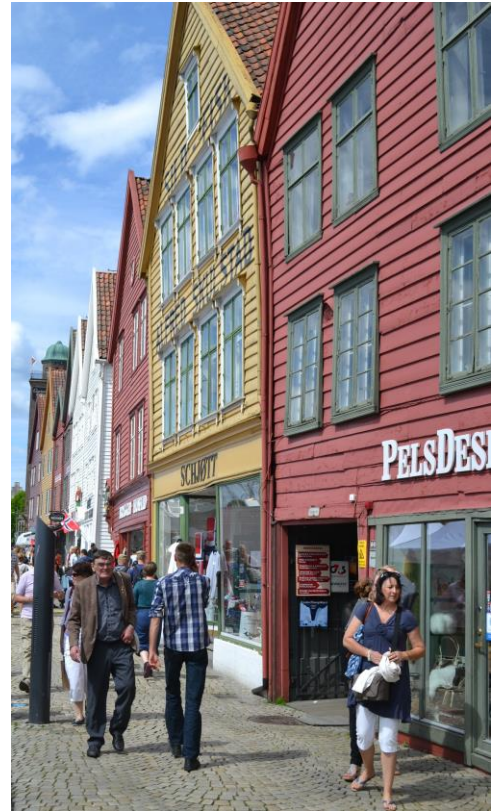
There are No Trolls at Troidhaugen

As I mentioned, I was in Bergen on business and the four-day meeting left very little free time for exploring. I only had a single afternoon available, just prior to the meeting, and there were way too many options to choose from. Two of my compatriots decided to see the aquarium, which was a short walk from where we were staying. As for me, I went to Troidhaugen.



the view from Troidhaugen

Troidhaugen was the home of the great 19th century Norwegian composer Edvard Grieg. It's about ten miles south of Bergen's inner harbor, on a bluff overlooking Nordfjorden. I almost didn't get there at all because the bus service from Bergen to Troidhaugen turned out



row houses at Bergen's historic waterfront

not to be in operation that day. So I and five other tourists, two ladies from Brazil and three from Germany, shared the cost for one of those expensive cab rides to get there.

It was worth it. There are no trolls at Troidhaugen, but there certainly was a lot to see there. It's now a museum, and the entrance fee included a live half-hour piano recital of some of Grieg's more familiar works. The home of Grieg and his wife is a pleasant but somewhat ordinary house located up on the hill overlooking the lake, but the structure that drew everyone's attention was the small



in Bergen with my Troidhaugen traveling companions from Germany



Grieg's composer's cabin

out-building down toward the water. We were told it was actually a converted henhouse, but it was the place that Grieg 'sequestered' himself when he was composing music. The peacefulness of the place and the view from the cabin, down toward the water, no doubt presented a marvelous setting for writing music. Inside, the desk and chair are the same ones that had been used by Grieg when he had written many of his famous lyric pieces for piano. There was also a manuscript laying on the desk, as if Grieg had gone to Bergen for a bite to eat. As did we soon afterward.

Top of the Rock

The view from the bluff at Troidhaugen was pretty spectacular but there was an even better one a couple of days later. One of the features of these yearly meetings is that the hosts seem to try very hard to out-do the previous year's conference in how memorable it was. So just prior to the conference dinner we were given the signature view of Bergen from Mount Fløyen. It's about a thousand feet to the top, and luckily there's a funicular to get there.



the view from Mount Fløyen

This is a good place to mention that I *really like* funicular railways! I had never even seen one until I moved in Tennessee in the early 1970s, and since then I've made a point of riding on them wherever I find them. The one in Bergen is a bit unusual in that there are several intermediate stops between the bottom and the top. That's because it's become part of the city's public transportation system. Bergen has expanded its way partway up Mount Fløyen, and the easiest way to get to some of these outlying neighborhoods is by the Fløibanen Funicular. So just like a conventional railway, there are station stops for the trains.



the Fløibanen Funicular (bottom center)
from the top of the rock

But the funicular was not the only way to get to the top of the rock, or back down. For the energetic there is also a wooded path with many switchbacks. I had been enjoying the panoramic view of Bergen when the woman who our meeting host's representative called out, "Who wants to walk back down the mountain with me?" It almost sounded like a challenge, so no way was I going to wimp out. (It's a guy thing, you know?)

I was relieved to see that there were a few others who were up for the hike, and even more relieved, after about half an hour, when the winding path brought us back to civilization. Walking down a steep hill is as much a strain and exertion as going uphill, just in different parts of the legs. All the way down we saw people going the other way back up the mountain, and many of them were jogging. The one who was the most jaw-dropping to behold was an old white-haired guy who was *running* up the mountain!

If I had to do it over again I'd probably have taken the funicular back down the mountain instead of doing the hike. Those who elected to ride got to the dinner a lot sooner than I did, which meant they got an extra glass or two of the wine before we hikers arrived. And they weren't drenched in sweat.

Call Me the Breeze

There was more sweat the next day during the project visit. About an hour's drive north of Bergen is Mongstad, where a consortium of energy companies, along with the Norwegian government, have built the world's largest facility to test technologies and chemical processes for capturing carbon dioxide from industrial and utility fossil fuel power plants. For the past nine years my work has been in the area of carbon sequestration, where the captured carbon dioxide is permanently stored in underground geologic formations. Sequestering carbon dioxide in this manner could someday play a large role in global greenhouse gas emission reductions. The technologies involved are now ready for large-scale demonstration, so this new test facility is a very important development.



at the CO₂ Technology Center
in Mongstad



on the boat ride back from Mongstad

Even as far north as we were, June days in Norway are warm. And the heavy protective clothing required by the test facility's safety procedures made it unpleasantly so. By the time the project tour was over we were all ready for a cool breeze. And we found one.

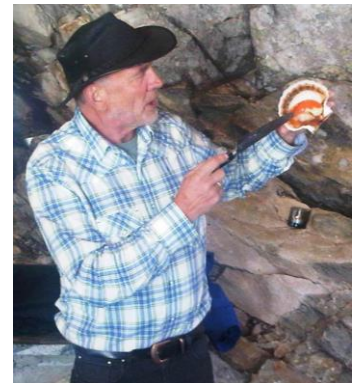
We'd been transported to Mongstad by bus, but the way back was by boat. The ride lasted about an hour and a half, and it took us by quaint little villages, under majestic suspension bridges, and past many, many other watercraft, from small motorboats to commercial ships.

It was such a pleasant day that many of us went up on deck to feel the wind in our faces. And then we went back down into the cabin to put on jackets. June days in Norway may be warm, but out on the water they're not *that* warm!

Epilog: Half of What I Said...

Alf Roald Sætre is one of the more memorable people I've ever met. He's the owner of the Cornelius Restaurant, located on a small island near Bergen, where the boat ride from Mongstad brought us for dinner. And by boat is the only way to get there. The restaurant is successful because it gets its business largely from tourist groups and conferences, and there is no lack of either of those in Bergen. For us, it was a great way to end the day. The view of the fjord from the main dining room was superb and the seafood was terrific.

What made Alf memorable is that he is a great humorist. He makes a point of personally greeting all the groups who come to the restaurant, and he does it by entertaining them with a long, drawn-out shaggy dog story about his other occupation as a shellfish farmer. We were laughing all the way through, and it seemed all too soon that he ended his tale with what is probably his favorite catchphrase: "Half of what I said is almost true."



Alf showing how to eat a scallop from the shell

Anyway, it was a good trip. Even though I only had a smidgeon of free time to myself, I found some enjoyable things to do and also some interesting people to meet. One of them was the delegate from Russia. This was his first meeting and he had brought his wife with him. They had both joined the group hiking down the mountain, and it soon became obvious that it was a bit more than she had bargained for. I hung out at the end of the group to make sure they were okay, and when we finally reached the restaurant he came over and thanked me for watching out for them.

I'm not sure I will ever be back to Bergen, but I do look forward to seeing the Russian delegate again. Next time I meet him I hope we'll be able to sit down and talk for a while. No doubt he's got some entertaining tales of his own to tell. ☀

Afterword:

Before I close this collection there's just enough room for an end-of-the-year essay. Washington is a great city with much to discover, even in December. But look out for the UFOs!

A December Day in D.C.

Prolog: A Very Dangerous Place!

I guess I should start this essay with a confession – I am chronically incapable of managing my annual leave. *Every* year it happens – I don't take enough of my leave allotment during the warmer weather months and have to fit it in as best I can during December.

I've finally come to understand that this isn't such a bad thing because I usually have a lot of things I want to get done that have been put off from earlier in the year. And, even though Nicki and I don't like to stray far from home in December, the time off lets us spend a leisurely late December afternoon walking around Washington.

A good place to start is the U.S. Capitol Building, if nothing else for its notorious science fictional heritage. It was destroyed by Martians in the movie *Mars Attacks*. It was blown up by a nuclear bomb in *The Last War*. It was nearly washed away by a huge tsunami in *Deep Impact*. It was pulverized by an alien spaceship in *Independence Day*. And it was wrecked by a crashing UFO in *Earth vs. the Flying Saucers*. Cinematically, it's one of the most dangerous places in the city. Against all that, the bitter political war currently being waged in the Capitol between Republicans and Democrats is small potatoes by comparison.



the Capitol Building, star of many B-grade sci-fi movies



landscape architect Paul Busse's
miniature recreation of the U.S. Capitol

Smaller than Life

Nicki and I had originally planned to check out the new Capitol Visitor Center, which had taken the better part of a decade to complete. But we gave it a pass because we were dismayed by the amount of airport-grade security screenings we'd have to contend with, including discarding the snacks and bottle of water we'd brought with us. But it turned out there was a quite different and more whimsical way to 'visit' the Capitol Building. And we didn't even have to go through any security to do it!

The U.S. Botanic Garden Conservatory, just a short walk from the Capitol Building, was filled with a seasonal display of ornamental plants and flowers. But it's also home to miniature versions of Washington's most famous buildings, each created by designer and landscape architect Paul Busse using dried plant materials for all the distinctive architectural details. They

are really a marvel, and it's not all that apparent, until you really take a close look, that the columns are really constructed from willow branches, domes are surfaced by pine cone scales, and ornamentation is made from things like grapevine tendrils, bean pods, and acorn caps.

Replicas and Originals

But the ultimate in scale models, at least within the Washington city limits, is the one-to-ten billion scale replica of the solar system, which stretches about half a mile in length starting near the National Air and Space Museum. The Sun is represented by a gold-colored sphere about the size of a grapefruit, while the earth is about the size of the head of a pin. At that scale, the distance from the Sun to the earth is about twenty steps. Just for the fun of it, I did a quick calculation on how far a walk it would be to get from the sun to the next nearest star, Alpha Centauri. The answer: very, very far. At the scale of this model, a replica of the Alpha Centauri star system would be located somewhere in California. Douglas Adams was right – space is really big!



one-ten-billionth scale model of the Sun

The Air and Space Museum is really big, too. It's the largest and also the most visited of the Smithsonian museums, ranking #2 most popular in the world (after The Louvre). Inside there are replicas many of the robotic craft that were sent out into space on missions to explore the solar system, as well as many historic aircraft from the early days of flight. Charles Lindberg's "Spirit of St. Louis" single-engine airplane hangs suspended from the ceiling of the great hall entrance of the museum, not far from Chuck Yeager's "Glamorous Glenn" rocket-powered plane that broke the sound barrier a mere twenty years after Lindberg's historic flight. And on the floor in the middle of the great hall is "Columbia", the command module for the Apollo 11 mission, just 22 years after Yeager's historic flight.



the Wright Brothers Flyer

It had been a several years since I'd last been in the museum so it took me a few moments to notice that perhaps the most historic airplane of them all had been moved. The Wright Brothers Flyer now has its own alcove on the second floor of the museum. And *that* historic flight was only 24 years before Lindberg's. From the first heavier-than-air flight to the moon, in just four generations. Now *that's* progress!

Of Horses, Iron and Otherwise

And speaking of progress, there has been a *lot* of it on the National Mall in the past decade, including completion of the new Smithsonian Museum of the American Indian. It's very spacious inside, which allows plenty of room for special



part of the "A Song for the Horse Nation" exhibit

exhibits. The one featured at the end of 2011 was titled "A Song for the Horse Nation", which was a fascinating description, complete with many historical artifacts, of the story of the relationship of

Native American peoples and horses – from the reintroduction of horses to the new world by the Spanish conquistadors to the present.

A different type of horse, the 'iron horse', was on display at Union Station. It's a busy place – more than 12,000 passengers per day pass through on their way in or out of the city via Amtrak or one of the regional commuter railroads – but many more tourists visit the place for its retail shops and impressive architecture. In fact, there are so many people (more than 37 million per year!) who come to Union Station that *Travel + Leisure* magazine ranks it as the #3 most popular tourist attraction in the world!

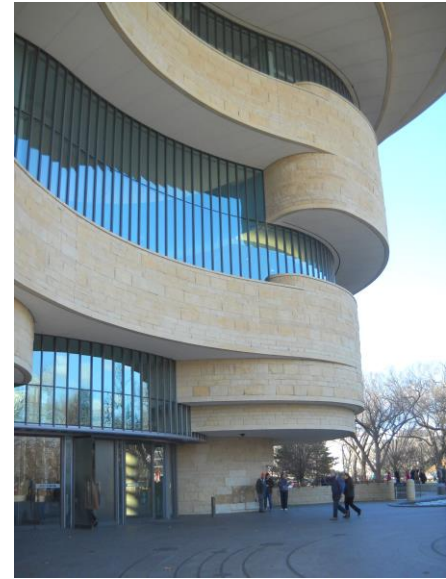
Nicki and I joined that teeming crowd so that we could take in the seasonal model train display. As usual it was pretty impressive, but for whatever reasons it had been downsized this year. There were only two areas in the Great Hall of the Station where the small trains were running, and in one of them there had been a mini-disaster – one of the trains had crashed at the entrance to a tunnel, spilling freight. I was half expecting to see a miniature figure of a train conductor lying in a small pool of red next to the derailed train engine. Oh, the humanity!



model train display at Union Station

Epilog: Small but Not Miniature

There are many other things worth seeing on a December day in D.C., but in the end there just wasn't time. The National Mall is two miles long, and pretty early on Nicki and I decided that things like the new Martin Luther King, Jr. Memorial down at the far end would have to wait



Smithsonian Museum of the American Indian

for another day. The way back to the Metrorail station took us past another of Washington's most dangerous places, The White House. It was also blown to smithereens by aliens in *Independence Day*, it was attacked by terrorists in the TV series *24*... Well, you get the idea.

The National Christmas Tree is located in The Ellipse, fairly close to the White House but hopefully far enough away to be safe from all but the most egregious of alien attacks. Unlike the one in Rockefeller Center in New York, this is a live tree but fairly small in size. Last year a different live tree, more than twice its height, was there. It had been planted during the Jimmy Carter presidency in the 1970s, but back in February it was broken and toppled by a big windstorm. It will take some years before this new tree grows to be as impressive in stature. Nicki and I will be back again, next year, to check on its progress. ☀



The White House and the National Christmas Tree



Paul Busse's recreation of The White House



Paul Busse's recreation of the Smithsonian Castle



Paul Busse's recreation of the Lincoln Memorial



Paul Busse's recreation of the Botanic Gardens Conservatory

