

My Back Pages #10

Rich Lynch



My Back Pages #10

articles and essays by Rich Lynch

I remember back when I was ten. It was 1960, and I was in sixth grade. For me, being ten was more than just reaching a double-digit age. It was when I started to realize there was a pretty big world out there that I *might* just get to explore some day. And, most of all, being ten was when people stopped treating me like I was a little kid. Being ten was an *achievement*!

For this publication, being ten is also an achievement though I'm not going to be any more self-congratulatory than that about it. I'm more concerned about making it to eleven. I do have enough material to continue beyond this issue, but much of what I'm now reprinting is relatively recent.

It's been more than half a century since my tenth birthday and since then I've found that the pretty big world out there was filled with adventures. The opening essay for this issue describes one of them, a business trip to France in the Spring of 2010 for a big international meeting about carbon sequestration. But it turned out to be more than just that.

Rich Lynch
Gaithersburg, Maryland
June 2013

CONTENTS OF THIS ISSUE

We'll Always Have Pau	3
previously published in <i>Variations on a Theme</i> 75 (May 2010)	
I'm Only Here for the Food	8
previously published in <i>Argentus</i> 10 (November 2010)	
Out on the Border, Walkin' the Line	14
previously published in <i>Variations on a Theme</i> 49 (May 2006)	
January 3 rd (co-written with Nicki Lynch)	16
previously published in <i>Mimosa</i> 17 (October 1995)	
Invasion by Brood X!	20
previously published in <i>Variations on a Theme</i> 31 (July 2004)	
Lost in the `50s	21
previously published in <i>Mimosa</i> 10 (July 1991)	
Worldcon 2012	24
previously published in <i>Variations on a Theme</i> 89 (September 2012)	

'Worldcon' and 'Hugo Award' are service marks of the World Science Fiction Society.

P.O. Box 3120, Gaithersburg, Maryland 20885 USA; [rw_lynch \(at\) yahoo \(dot\) com](mailto:rw_lynch@yahoo.com)

We'll Always Have Pau

Prolog: The Realm of Giants

Pau, in southwestern France, is a little gem of a city, with a downtown so compact that it's not more than about a five minute walk to go anywhere there. Pau is usually described as the 'Gateway to the Pyrenees' and for good reason. It's located in the northern foothills of the mountains, and on a clear day they are a spectacular sight. Or so I had been told, many times, during the three days I was there in the middle of March.

It usually went like this.

Shopkeeper: "If it weren't so hazy today you would have a spectacular view of the mountains," followed by an expansive wave of his/her arm. It happened often enough that I was reminded of my visit to Seattle, back in 1988, when I had been told many times how impressive the view of Mount Rainier was, if it only weren't so cloudy/rainy/foggy/hazy/etc. Before the skies finally cleared on my last day there, I had just about come to the conclusion that Mount Rainier was a colossal hoax being perpetrated by the Seattle Chamber of Commerce.

But the Pyrenees were indeed out there, and they did live up to their description. I was told that tours are available for the adventuresome that can provide up-close views of some of them. Not that I was even remotely tempted – those giants already looked plenty intimidating from 20 miles away.

Is it "Pow", "Poe", or ...?

The Pyrenees may have looked intimidating, but the international meeting on carbon sequestration that I had come to Pau for seemed at times even more so. I am part of the Secretariat that organizes and stages these meetings. The workload leading up to and at the meeting was at times overwhelming, partly because we were down a man – only my compatriot John and myself had gotten approval for the trip.



view of the Pyrenees from Pau



at the carbon sequestration meeting

The reason the meeting was in Pau was because the French meeting hosts were involved in a pilot-scale demonstration project not far from there. The final day of the meeting was a field trip to the site. It looked to be an interesting event. But before bidding the office *adieu* for a week, John and I decided we'd better figure out the correct pronunciation of where we were going. My first guess was "Poe", and if that wasn't right, "Pow". But then John, after talking to one of the French delegates, told me he'd heard it as "Poo". That didn't sound right to me – if I'd told my wife Nicki that I was going to 'Poo', she would probably have laughed and told me be sure to flush afterwards. Turns out that John hadn't heard it *quite* right – the correct pronunciation is "Poe-ooo".

In the Land of Bernadette

For a relatively small city, Pau has a lot going for it. It was originally settled back in the 11th century and was the birthplace (in 1553) of the French king Henry IV. There is an elegant old château where he was born, and which was much later used as a summer home by Marie Antoinette and a vacation home by Napoleon. Just a short



the Pau Château



the Saint Martin Cathedral in Pau

Pau appears to get its share of tourists and might have become the biggest tourist destination in the French Pyrenees region. But in 1858, a teenage girl named Bernadette Soubirous, in the nearby city of Lourdes, reported that she saw 18 different apparitions of what people believed to be the Virgin Mary in a grotto just outside the city. A subsequent canonical investigation by the Catholic Church eventually declared these claims credible, and the apparition became known as

walk from there is a magnificent old gothic cathedral, complete with flying buttresses, that doesn't seem to be used as a house of worship, or for that matter, much of anything else. And there's even a funicular! Pau is mostly located on a bluff that overlooks a small river to the south of the city, and the inclined railway runs from a plaza near the cathedral down to near where the train station is located. There is no charge for passengers, but since the change in elevation between the top and bottom is only about 75 feet or so, the ride lasts for less than a minute.



the Pau funicular

‘Our Lady of Lourdes’. The grotto, and the basilica that was built adjacent to it, are visited by about five million religious pilgrims each year. There is a spring at the grotto, and water from it is believed by the devout to have healing properties.

John and I, along with three others from the meeting, visited Lourdes the day before the meeting began. The area around the basilica is a sanctuary where thousands of people can and do gather. The day we were there it was mostly empty except for a steady stream of pilgrims leaving with jugs of the healing water.



Basilica at Lourdes and religious pilgrims carrying jugs of healing water

There’s more to see in Lourdes than just the basilica and grotto. The center of the city has another gothic cathedral, not quite as nice as the one in Pau but at least seeing everyday use. My favorite part of the city was the imposing



the imposing fortress at Lourdes

medieval fortress on a hill overlooking the city. It’s now the Museum of the Pyrenees, with displays about the arts and traditions of Pyrenees life, but all that was overshadowed by the splendid views from the castle’s ramparts.

The five of us spent a relaxing lunch at an outdoor café before heading back to the train station, and I thought our adventure for the day was over. But I was wrong. Our roundtrip tickets from Pau were on the regional slow-speed rail service, where you can sit anywhere you want. We were able to catch an earlier train back to Pau than the one we were ticketed for,

but it turned out to be a Eurostar, where all seats are reserved. John and two of the others were able to find seats that had *not* been reserved and were able to escape the notice of the busybody conductor. Not so for me and my friend Clinton, an Australian delegate to the meeting who was with us. When it became obvious to us that we were in someone else’s seats, we had moved to jump seats near one of the exit doors. But when the conductor discovered us there he started giving us the business, and that it was in French made it all the more colorful. It was fortunate there were no stops between Lourdes and Pau, or we might have been hitchhiking the rest of the way.

The Key to a Successful Meeting

The carbon sequestration meeting, as I mentioned, was at times a bit overwhelming because of many different things, all happening at once, that required attention. The one consolation was that the meeting time seemed to fly by. By the time the first day's session had adjourned we were all ready for an opportunity to decompress. And the French hosts provided us one.

It was an evening dinner at a 17th century château, way out in the country to the northeast of Pau. The bus ride took the better part of an hour



the old men's singing group and the château



appetizer chefs at the château

It went on like that for some time and it wasn't for about an hour until it sunk in that all this food and wine was only just the appetizer. The main event was actually a four-course sit-down dinner. It was nearly midnight by the time we got back to the hotel, all of us very mellow indeed. Anyway, turns out that the key to success for a meeting like this is more than just having encyclopedic knowledge of carbon capture and storage technologies – you also have to have a good appetite!



me, dinner host Pierre, and John having way too much of a good time

All Roads Lead to Paris

A trip to France of any duration will sooner or later bring you to Paris, and that's what happened for John and me. The train from Pau arrived in Paris early enough where we had an afternoon to ourselves before the early flight back to Washington the next morning. So we went to Montmartre.

Montmartre is the highest point in Paris, and there are some very scenic vistas of the city visible from there. The magnificent Sacred Heart Basilica is the big tourist attraction there, constructed in memory of those who were killed in the Franco-Prussian War. I was surprised to learn how relatively recently it was constructed, relative to other famous churches in Europe – it won't reach the centenary of its completion for another four years. Nearby is a small plaza where artists congregate, and several sketch artists there were doing cartoonish caricatures of some of the tourists. One of them accosted me, but I was able to escape after telling him that some people believe I am *already* a caricature...



the Basilica of the Sacred Heart in Montmartre

Epilog: The Sparkling Tower

It was just before 10:00 pm, and John and I were in the Trocadéro plaza across the river from the Eiffel Tower. There were dozens of other people there as well, and we were all waiting for the same thing.

A decade back, during the year 2000 celebration, thousands of strobe lights were installed on the Eiffel Tower and ever since then, for five minutes at the top of every hour in the evening, they are all strobed at random intervals to give a rather amazing light show. It's quite a spectacle, and if you're leaving the next morning (as we were) it's *the* signature image of the city to take with you.

But I have a lot of signature images from this trip – nearly 150 photographs, by far the most I've ever taken for any trip. I may never be back there, but now I'll always have Pau. My friend Stefan, one of the delegates from Canada and who has become a fan of my 'unofficial' trip reports, asked if there would be one for this meeting.

I smiled and told him, "Count on it!" ☀



at Trocadéro Plaza

Afterword:

Ah, the wonders of digital photography. It took only about a year for me to surpass that personal record of 150 photos. And that new record lasted about another year before *it* was bettered. If 'bettered' is an apt way to describe it.

At any rate, I feel blessed that I have experienced many adventures in my adult years. Quite a few have been in far-away places like Pau, but some of the most memorable ones, involving social discourse instead of scenic wonders, happened much closer to home.

I'm Only Here for the Food

A few years back, in this fanzine, I described a series of mid-day events I attended near my office in downtown Washington D.C. that were hosted by some of the think tanks that populate the city. Anyone could attend, as long as they were dressed in business attire, and the overt lure in the promotional announcements was that there would be catered luncheons afterward. It seemed pretty effective, but while nobody ever outright declared “I’m only here for the food,” it was obvious from the body language of many of the people who attended that the auditoriums would have been much sparser populated without the promise of free chow-downs.

I admit that I was one of those mooches, at least at first. But it soon became evident that there was also an opportunity for some discourse – this, after one of the speakers events at the first event I attended almost immediately set off my “Aw, come on!” alarm. For some reason these events were invariably hosted by the more conservative groups, and since my politics are anything but that it became almost a game to think up pointed questions to ask when the time came for audience interaction.

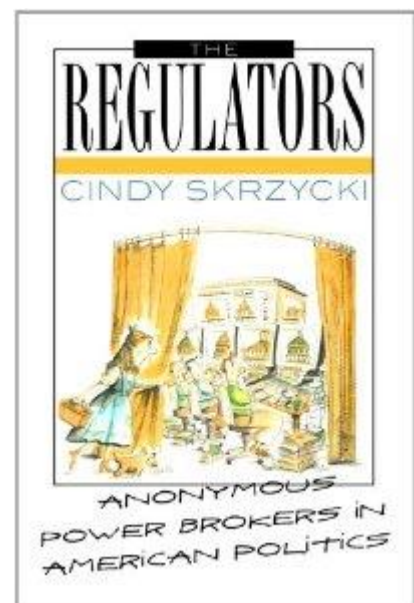
It turned out to be almost too easy.

Chaos Theory in Action

At first the events I attended were hosted by one of three conservative-leaning organizations, the Cato Institute, the Heritage Foundation, and the George C. Marshall Institute (which I count as conservative because they get a significant part of their funding from Big Oil). But I soon found out there were others. The gold standard for conservative think tanks is probably the American Enterprise Institute, which (according to their web site) “... is dedicated to preserving and strengthening the foundations of freedom – limited government, private enterprise, vital cultural and political institutions, and a strong foreign policy and national defense.”

Pomposity aside, they *did* appear to have some interesting events so I reluctantly decided to forgo the competing Cato Institute luncheon event titled “Saying Yes: In Defense of Drug Use” (which might have actually been entertaining) in favor of the AEI one, “Understanding the Regulation Game”, that seemed a bit more relevant to what I was doing at work. The event turned out to be a fairly lively panel discussion, though at first it did a pretty good job masquerading as a shill for the new book one of the panelists had just gotten published that attempted to describe the politics and machinations of the governmental regulatory process (i.e., how various governmental regulations are decided). The author of the book was a *Washington Post* columnist, and in her comments she said that the role of the press, besides acting as a gadfly, is also to make the regulatory process easier to understand by “ordinary” people.

One of the other speakers picked up on this, noting that public interest in regulatory activities is not usually very high, except for when the occasional scandal happens. Regulation is usually a behind-the-scenes activity, very much the product of



“To me, the cost-benefit analysis is an example of chaos theory in action. I’ve actually worked on a few of these back when I was in private industry, and you can make them show whatever you want them to simply by tweaking the various inputs. And everybody knows this! But yet, it’s still the primary tool used to determine the worth of any proposed project or regulation.”

Staying within the rules, I phrased my comment in the form of a question by asking what, if any, alternatives existed to that approach.

[illegible]

C-Span was there taping the event, so I guess that means I was a national TV celebrity for 15 seconds. As for the luncheon, it was excellent, with baked salmon and roast beef, and I'm not the only one who thought so – a freelance science writer friend of mine was also there enjoying the cuisine. If not a small world, it's at least a small city.

The World in Grayscale

Just a few days later I was back at the American Enterprise Institute for its mini-conference about “Prospects and Politics of a U.S.-Taiwan Free Trade Agreement”. I got there just as the second session was beginning. The session I’d missed was a panel discussion about the economic considerations of any such FTA, which would have been interesting; the session I sat through concerned political and strategic considerations, which turned out to be a study of how people perceived the world. The presentation of first speaker, who was from some Taiwan think tank, could best be summarized: “Taiwan good. China bad. Taiwan good. China bad. Taiwan good. China bad...” and so forth, as if a phonograph record had been left skipping since the 1950s. The others weren’t that much more subtle, either, but one of them at least had a bit of insight on the situation: “The United States doesn’t have much leverage against China because it is unwilling to try to use any.”

In case you’re wondering: Yes, this was a right-wing conservative-oriented event. The Republican back-benchers in Congress had been very vocal about sticking up for Taiwan and bashing mainland China, and the Chief Basher himself came to the event as Keynote Speaker.

Yup, it was Congressman Tom DeLay from Texas. He spoke for about 15 minutes, and after you eliminated all the self-serving flag-waving about Truth, Justice, and the Republican way, I found to my astonishment that I was actually mostly in agreement with him about the worth of a U.S.-Taiwan FTA, damn the political torpedoes. It was a surreal moment, and it was made more so when I noticed that the Anglo guy sitting next to me was taking notes in Chinese!



Congressman Tom DeLay

The black-and-white world of the 1950s is long gone. Welcome to the 21st century and the world of the grayscale.

Let’s Hear It for the Blue, White and Red

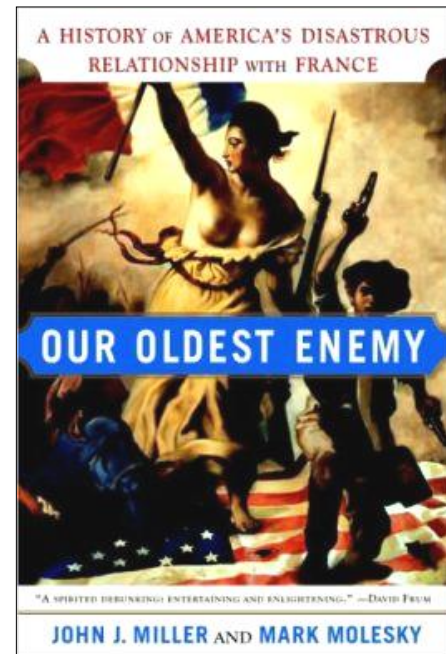
Many of the most memorable luncheon seminars took place at the Heritage Institute, possibly because the politics of the place are so conservative the speakers tended to posture a lot. An example of this was an event, during the middle of the George W. Bush era, that took dead aim at one of America’s free world allies and was titled “Our Oldest Enemy: A History of America’s Disastrous Relationship with France”. I expected it would be entertaining and I wasn’t disappointed.

The speaker was an author and political reporter for the conservative *National Review* and he wasted no time getting right to the point. France, we were told, has had a long history of animosity and betrayals toward America, starting way back at the Deerfield Massacre in 1704 when a band of French and Indians wiped out a town of colonial settlers in Massachusetts. Not only that, France came to America’s aid at the end of the Revolutionary War only to advance its own interests, nearly intervened in the Civil War on behalf of the Confederacy for the same reason, and fought a ‘Quasi-war’ against America at the end of the 1700s. Even today, we were told, France’s Prime Minister, Jacques Chirac, had tried again and again to advance France’s self-interest in Europe and the Middle East at the expense of the United States – he quite clearly

tried to thwart America when the United States decided to invade Iraq “...to get rid of the outlaw regime of Saddam Hussein”.

He was reading from a prepared speech, but it nonetheless devolved into a vicious ideological rant, complete with cheap shots about France’s position in history as an often conquered nation: “The French flag is a very good symbol of the country, but they should get rid of the red and blue stripes.” And: “We might think of returning the Statue of Liberty to France, but it only has one arm up in the air.” After about half an hour of this he finally wound down and then it was time for the questions. Mine was first:

*“It seems to me that just about everything you blame France for could equally, if not more so, be used to describe the behavior of Great Britain. For instance, the British committed their own massacre against colonial settlers in 1770. Britain had also at least considered intervening in the Civil War for the Confederacy, and fought two actual wars against America, going so far as to torch the White House and U.S. Capitol in 1814. I’m led to believe that the only reason that you haven’t written a book titled Our Oldest Enemy: A History of America’s Disastrous Relationship with Great Britain is that Britain supported George Bush’s war against Iraq while France didn’t. Also, I note that you have indulged in some revisionist history – the actual stated justification for the war against Iraq was, and let’s say this together, Weapons of Mass Destruction. I do have a question, by the way, and this is it: Do you **really** expect us to take you seriously?”*



There was a small snicker from the audience, which kind of surprised me given that events at the Heritage Foundation are largely attended by true-blue ultra-conservatives (one of the founders of the Heritage Foundation was Joseph Coors).



There was about a two or three second pause while we eyeballed each other, and then he replied to the effect that (and I paraphrase) “You may disagree with me, but I’m right about this.” The next person was called on and I expected that would be that, but I was even more surprised (and pleasantly so) that none of the comments and questions after that even remotely supported his position. The most eloquent was somebody with a French-sounding accent who said that despite what the speaker asserted, France was actually a good friend of America and a good friend will question you when he believes you are doing the wrong thing.

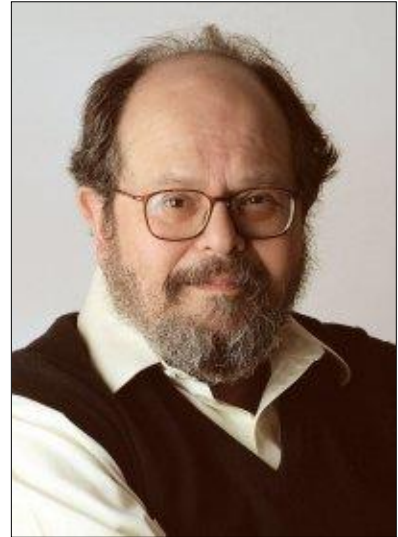
The event was being recorded for broadcast on the C-Span Book Channel, so once again I gained part of my cumulative 15 minutes of fame. But, given the political nature of the event and who was in charge of our government at that time, I made sure not to mention who I worked for. After all, if they investigated me, they’d have found out that my wife’s family are descended from...the French!

Science by Consensus is a Bad Idea, Do We Have a Consensus on That?

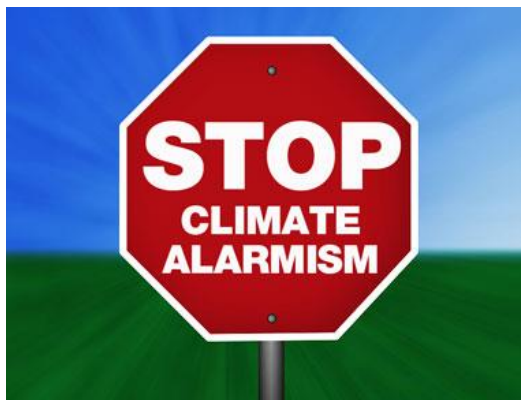
Once in a while a luncheon event turned out to have a topic I knew something about. That was the case for one sponsored by the George Marshall Institute that was provocative titled “Climate Alarmism: The Misuse of ‘Science’”. The description of the event stated that “... when public policy becomes highly politicized, ‘science’ all too often becomes a tool for support instead of illumination. ... As a result, the debate over policy options has become divorced from a factual foundation and is characterized as a choice between inaction and a battle between skeptics and consensus scientists.”

From this, I had expected the event would take some potshots at all the research into climate modeling that is attempting to prove that human-caused greenhouse gas emissions are causing a noticeable and undesirable effect on the world’s climate. And I was right – the moderator for the event set the stage by saying that: “In climate change debates, science has been victim of misuse and abuse.” The event’s speaker was Professor Richard Lindzen of MIT, and his main thesis was that whether or not climate change is actually occurring, all the high-profile climate modeling activity was actually just a bunch of hogwash.

He might possibly have been right, or at least had a point. Up to then the climate models had not agreed very well with what had been observed and extensive tweaking of inputs had happened to try to make them better. Also, he said, there had been such a small overall average increase in global mean



Prof. Richard Lindzen

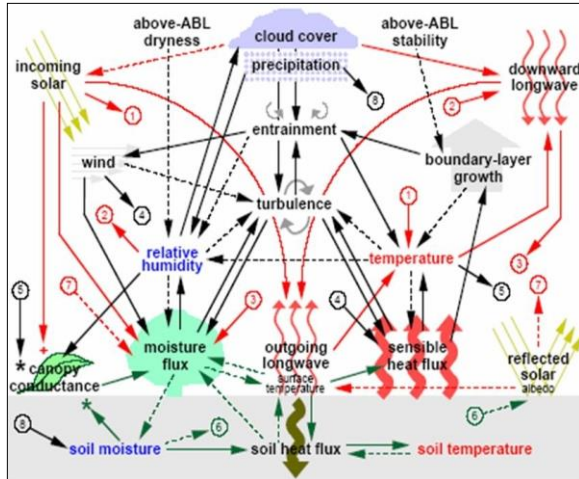


temperature that the statistical error was much greater than the change. In other words, the data being gathered just did not justify all the alarm that had resulted and we should not be spinning our wheels about possible greenhouse climate change without just cause, because “...victims of proactive public policies are the consumers...” who end up paying for the cost of regulation. He went on to state that, as far as public policy goes, we were caught in a vicious cycle – because of the problems with accuracy, scientists can only make ambiguous statements about climate modeling; zealous advocates immediately translate

those statements into alarmist declarations about the upcoming global warming calamity; politicians respond to these declarations by feeding the scientists more money. And then the cycle repeats.

This sounded to me a bit oversimplistic (though it did appear to be a formula for job security for all those climate scientists). When the time came for questions, I tried to point out what seemed like an obvious flaw in this argument:





“Your presentation informed us that there is nothing in the climate models that should give us any sense of urgency about climate change. However, from an economic risk management viewpoint, would doing nothing be a prudent course of action? There is, after all, a chance that the models will be, in the end, mostly correct. Waiting until the horse has run out before closing the barn door, so to speak, would really cause consumers to become victims.”

The response wasn't all that enlightening, unfortunately. The speaker went back to the idea that the models were unreliable, and how can you

make any plans based on that? After that the discussion headed into arcane statistical matters such as response time of surface temperature, and I think we were all a bit thankful when the moderator finally called an end to the event.

In the end, I don't know if the speaker really proved his contention that science is being misused by the proponents of climate change. But he did leave us with an interesting quote: “With respect to science, ‘consensus’ is often a sop to scientific illiteracy.” Meaning that all too frequently when consensus is reached about anything, it is often taken to mean that there is agreement on everything. Far from it.

As for the luncheon, the sandwiches were average but the brownies were superb. On *that*, at least, we had consensus.

The Results of Change

Change happens. My job was eventually transferred from downtown Washington back out to suburban Maryland, near where I live. The commute to work became more than an hour shorter, but the opportunities to attend luncheon seminars became far fewer. Nowadays my luncheon events are mostly ‘planning sessions’ with one of my co-workers (often in places where there is a sports channel on TV), and instead of verbally sparring with some think tank representative my lunchtime discourse has been more toward speculating on things like how many more seasons Brett Favre is likely to play for the Minnesota Vikings.



my latest social discourse topic

You know, if he were ever to join us for lunch, I bet I could ask him a pointed question about that! ☀

Afterword:

It turned out that I was still able to attend luncheon seminars (albeit infrequently) even after my job was relocated out to the Maryland suburbs. One of these happened in April 2006, when I had to be down in Washington for a day of meetings, and it resulted in a ‘Washington moment’ for me.

Out on the Border, Walkin' the Line

Hey, it's the end of April, and the weather has become nice enough that I think I can officially say I've survived another winter. It was a pleasant spring day yesterday, just the kind of day when it's nice to be out of the office for a while. A day of meetings in downtown D.C. gave me that opportunity, but it happened that there was also a luncheon seminar at the Heritage Foundation, and I was able to fit that in, too.

The title of the event was "Securing Our Borders: What is the Administration Doing?" and the speaker was David Aguilar, who is Chief of the United States Border Patrol. The first thing we learned about Aguilar is that he is *not* a political appointee – he has more than a quarter century's experience as a career law enforcement officer, and he knows his stuff. The second thing we learned about him is that he is truly dedicated to the job, even apart from his can-do attitude – he stated that threats to the nation's security is the thing that keeps him up at night, and he wanted his first grandchild, expected into the world soon, to live the same quality of life that we in the United States now enjoy. And the third thing we learned about him is that he is a straight talker with no agendas to serve other than the well-being of his Agency – no easy task, given that it's part of the Department of Homeland Security. He mentioned that the Border Patrol, in spite of its rapid growth over the past few years, is still very much resource-limited. If a political appointee had said that at a public forum in defiance of the President's budget, he or she would most likely soon be an ex-political appointee.



David Aguilar



Most of the talk dealt with numbers and statistics – the large number of miles of essentially unwatched border, the relatively small number of officers who actually do the patrolling, and the large and growing number of detentions each year of people illegally crossing into the United States. Most of these, by far, are along the U.S.-Mexico border, but each year there are several hundred detentions of people from the so-called "special interest" countries.

Aguilar said that the Border Patrol is now starting to get away from its "catch and release" mode of operation, where it's not been unusual for the same person to be detained three, five, ten, or even twenty different times he attempts to enter the United States from Mexico. *CSI*-like technology improvements now make it more likely that the Border Patrol can detect those who have previously been convicted of crimes or numerous illegal entry attempts. Other technology improvements will soon make it possible to patrol the border more efficiently, with less dependence on officers on the ground to do the actual patrolling.



All this is part of the so-called Secure Border Initiative, and has supposedly made us safer since 9-11. That, of course, suggested an obvious query, so when it came time for questions, mine was first:

“This past weekend I saw several previews of the new motion picture, United 93, which will be opening in theaters soon. If today’s increased resources, improved technology,

and especially the heightened awareness had been in place five years ago, would 9-11 have been prevented?”

It was probably a somewhat unfair question, but Aguilar didn’t hesitate to answer. He went on at length a lot longer than I thought he would, even, but the short answer was that yes, it might have been – even though the 19 hijackers had entered the country legally, there was enough information out there where their entry into the United States could possibly have been prevented. There’s no way of knowing whether or not this is actually true, but with his answer, Aguilar impressed me as being willing to walk a pretty fine line – as we well know, not everybody in the current administration is willing to admit that we did not do as much as we could have.

I should mention that the moderator for the event, and the reason I was somewhat interested in attending this at all, was Edwin Meese, former presidential advisor and Attorney General during the Reagan era. Perhaps not unexpectedly, he has found a life after politics at the conservative Heritage Foundation, and I have to admit it seemed a bit surreal to be called on for a question by Ed Meese.



the event’s moderator

But that’s Washington for you! ☀

Afterword:

I like Washington! Nicki and I have now lived in the D.C. area for nearly a quarter of a century, more than seventeen of those years in our current home, a single-family house in a quiet neighborhood on the west end of Gaithersburg. Before that we lived in a townhouse on the other side of the city.

We were able to afford this house when the Washington area passed through the bottom of one of its real estate boom and bust cycles. But there was also a traumatic event at the beginning of January 1995 that helped us make up our minds.



our house

January 3rd

Richard:

I remember the day only too well. It was one of those crisp afternoons that early January brings to this part of Maryland. I had just arrived home from work for the day, trying to spend some use-or-lose annual leave that would run out at the end of the week. Nicki and I were just getting ready to go shopping at the grocery store; we were on our way toward the front door when she stopped, looked around inquiringly, and asked me, "Do you smell anything burning?" I opened the front door, and just across the courtyard black smoke was pouring out from around the next-door neighbor's front door.

####

Date: Tue, 3 Jan 1995 21:15:06 0500 (EST)
E-mail to: Fan Friends Distribution List
From: Richard Lynch
Subject: Fire

Not sure if this is the best way of passing on some news, but it's probably one of the quickest. About six hours ago, today (Jan. 3rd), there was a fire in the townhouse next door to us. We smelled the smoke before we saw it billowing out from under the front door of the neighbor's place (10 feet across the small courtyard, facing our front door). The fire departments (several of them) arrived pretty quickly, but the neighbor's place was a total loss.

In the process of putting out the fire, our home was severely damaged. The fire brigades had to chop open roofs, break down firewalls, etc. to make sure the fire did not spread.

I guess I should say that nobody was hurt. I was on annual leave today, and Nicki, I, and the two cats got out without any harm at all. Apparently nobody in any of the townhouses damaged was hurt, either. The guy and his girlfriend who lived in the one that burned out had just left for shopping, and returned about ten minutes after the brigades arrived.

The fire marshal let me back in our home, briefly. It was pretty discouraging. Ceilings and walls were down in all rooms. Don't know if the computers are damaged. I couldn't find the Hugo Awards at first, but they had apparently been moved (by the firemen) away from the fireplace mantle where they had resided. I saw where they were before I left, and I think they are ok. Don't know if any of the back issues of MIMOSA we have left survived, including the extras from M16 that we mailed only 2 weeks ago.

We're staying in a hotel now (the Holiday Inn in Gaithersburg). We are down to the clothes on our back for tonight, at least. I reek of wood smoke, and have two meetings I can't cancel out of tomorrow *sigh*. It will be several weeks, perhaps months, before we can return home to live. Insurance will probably handle everything, but I expect there might be some things that we won't be able to replace, fanzines and the like among them.

Oh well, life goes on...
Best regards for the new year for everyone,
from Richard and Nicki Lynch

####

Nicki:

It was a terrible fire. Three fire companies were called in, and it took over four hours to put it out. The townhouse where the fire started was totally destroyed, and the next day, a large crane and oversized dumpsters were brought in to remove all the debris. It turned out that there had been one casualty in the fire. A large, friendly black Labrador Retriever named "Bear" who lived in the neighbors' townhouse had no escape when the fire started. His remains were never found.

We were allowed in our home the next day, and it was pretty discouraging. There was fire damage in the attic, on the deck, and in an upstairs bedroom. Everything in the house had smoke and/or water damage. Amazingly, relatively little had actually burned, but every window had been smashed, many of the walls had been chopped open to look for fire, and wood char and assorted debris from the ceiling and walls were everywhere.

Interestingly enough, many things that you would think might be damaged in a fire were not. The fireplace mantle, directly on the other side of the firewall from where the fire next door started, was mostly cleared off by the firefighters, but the glass unicorn we got in 1986 while being Fan Guests at Rivercon was still there untouched. Likewise, the framed Hugo Award nomination certificates and artwork over and near the fireplace (including the original watercolor cover of KAPA 61, by Naomi Fisher, that celebrated our 1992 Hugo Award) were unharmed.

On the other hand, just about everything in the second bedroom, including dozens of books, was heavily damaged or destroyed. We found most of my stuffed animal collection, which was formerly on a shelf that now no longer exists; they were all wet and very dirty, and the clothes restoration expert wouldn't take them. So I retrieved them, dried them out, and washed their surfaces. They now look somewhat better, but the Coca-Cola polar bear will never be white again.

####



Nicki showing off some of the burn damage

Date: Wed, 4 Jan 1995 15:36:05 0500 (EST)
From: Richard Lynch
Subject: Fire update

Well, it was worse than what I had thought. By light of day (this morning, when I was able to enter our home again) I saw that the fire had indeed gotten in. The spare upstairs bedroom was partially destroyed, as was the outside deck. Where the firemen had cut through the roof and ceiling upstairs, I could see that the fire had been active in the attic area, and had been there (5 feet above my head) while we were busily trying to corral the two cats and get them into their animal carriers. One of the fire investigators told me that the fire had probably been active in the attic even before we had first smelled the wood smoke.

On the other hand, many things I had thought might be destroyed came through it just fine, including the three Hugos (soiled and need of cleaning, but otherwise looking ok), all the back issues of MIMOSA (they were on shelving in the basement, on the side of the room away from where the fire was), most of the clothes (they all need cleaning and dry cleaning), and the computer (at least, I hope so -- the firemen moved it to the interior bathroom -- from some quirk of fate, only the bathrooms came through it all undamaged).

Insurance is covering the entire loss, and is also covering expenses we have with temporary housing and the like. It will be at least two months before we can return there.

Best regards,

...from Richard (& Nicki) Lynch

####

Richard:

We stayed in the hotel for about a week, then moved into a two-bedroom apartment, a fourth-floor walk-up. A contractor that specializes in restoration of fire damaged homes, hired through the insurance company, was put in charge of everything that needed to be done -- rebuilding the house, cleaning the clothes, restoring the computers, etc. It turned out that the cause of the fire was a faulty fireplace in the townhome that was destroyed. However, the people living there had not had a fire in the fireplace that day. That, in itself, is a bit scary, since all other townhomes in the subdivision have that same fireplace, installed exactly the same way.

It will be a while yet before we can recover from this. What was originally expected to be a two month disruption has become well over half a year. Reconstruction on our townhouse has been very slow, due in part because, until very recently, no construction had started on the next-door townhouse that was destroyed. Much of its structure had to be rebuilt before the firewall between the two homes can be replaced. This is just now happening as of this writing.

Meanwhile, normalcy has returned, to a certain extent. Things have settled pretty much into a routine, and we hope that the worst is behind us. Looking back at events, from some nine months distance, it seems like a bad dream. It's still hard to believe that it really happened...

####

Date: Sun, 8 Jan 1995 17:38:48 0500 (EST)
From: Richard Lynch
Subject: Fire update no. 2

It's been only five days, now, since the fire, but it seems like it happened a lifetime ago. Since my last e-mail update on the 4th, everything that was worth saving has been packed and removed from our home. All that remains needs to be documented (by me and Nicki) for insurance purposes. There are lots of books, including software manuals, that can't be saved. A TV and VCR are goners. There will be some things that can't be replaced, including souvenirs from various trips and photographs.

There was TV news coverage of the fire, by the way. Both Nicki and I were interviewed, though I can't say we were very coherent (thank goodness for good videotape editors!). Part of the tape footage showed firemen standing on a wooden deck, fighting the fire as the flames worked their way up the back of a townhouse. Turns out it was our deck they were on, and they were fighting (successfully!) to save our home. (They had given up on the other home.) It was a near thing. I'd previously written that the roof timbers in the attic were burned the entire length of the attic. The floor joists between our downstairs and upstairs had caught fire, too. I figure that we were within about 10 minutes of losing everything.

Anyway, since my first e-mail report of this mishap, Nicki and I have received *much* support, in terms of e-mailed messages, phone calls, and other acts of friendship. We are truly grateful. We will not forget. ☀

Afterword:

We never lived in that townhouse again. It was sold as soon as it was fully repaired. But the restoration, due to a series of interminable delays, kept us in that apartment for a full year. And it also marked the end of an era for us as publishers. We could not access our mimeographs and printing supplies during that year, so the commercial printer who had reproduced some of our covers offered us a deal on printing *Mimosa*. The appearance turned out to be so much better that we deemed it worth the cost. And so we never used our mimeographs again.

It didn't take long for us to know that the house we bought at the end of 1995 was a huge improvement over the townhouse. There was much more room, and there were no longer any noisy neighbors on the other side of the wall. But the place *did* need improvements, many of them, and nary has a year gone by without us doing something to make the house nicer and more livable. These have included re-habs of all bathrooms, a new back deck, a new driveway, a new heating/air conditioning system, replacement of the roof shingles and gutters, replacement of the exterior siding, and re-hab of the garage. But the biggest (and most traumatic) improvement was a complete kitchen remodel, and I am happy to report that Nicki and I lived through it.

This spring we also lived through an invasion of sorts, though you'd never have suspected it if not for news reports. This was the year for the emergence of a new brood of cicadas. It turned out that Maryland was mostly spared, but that was not the case back in 2004 when the "Brood X" critters made their appearance.

Invasion by Brood X!

Here we are in the early part of June and the cicada invasion is still in progress. When the news reports began about a month ago of the coming of the 17-year cicadas, it almost seemed like we should be preparing for a swarm of biblical proportions. It didn't really work out that way, though; at first there were only a few of them here and there in the neighborhood but as days and then weeks went by there have been more and more of them. This past week may have been the peak; tonight, for instance, there have been several of them crawling around on the back deck (including the one shown here), much to the consternation of the cat (who seems to be entertained by it all, from her view on the other side of the window). Whenever I look out toward the backyard, I can see about a dozen of them at any time, flitting among the foliage.

The little beasties are each about an inch-and-a-half long and (as you can see) look like a cross between a horsefly and a grasshopper – not really ugly at all. And I guess I was pleasantly surprised that they are perhaps

the politest insects I've ever seen – they don't eat anything, they can barely fly and then only slowly and more or less in a straight line, and they don't bite and aren't prone to bothering people the way mosquitoes do. But the noise!



one of the "Brood X" cicadas of 2004

The cicada is the loudest critter in the insect world, and I believe it. All day, every day, thousands of them emit a kind of screeching drone that up close drowns out just about every other sound in the neighborhood, including lawnmowers. Even if you're lucky enough not to have a mini-swarm of them in a nearby tree their sound from a distance is still all-pervading – at first I thought it sounded like a car with a very bad wheel bearing, but then, after somebody else pointed it out, I realized I'd heard it before – it's the 'flying saucer sound'!

Think about it – the cicadas live in a 17-year cycle. That means the previous time they appeared was in 1987, and the time before that in 1970, and the time before that...

It was 1953, right in the heart of the era of all those flying saucer movies. Perhaps some enterprising folio guy, who was trying to find a good sound for a flying saucer, went outside one morning in 1953 and thought to himself, "Hey! ..."

A case of life imitating art... or vice-versa? ☼

Afterword:

The 1950s are a fascinating era to read about, and not just because of all the flying saucer movies. That decade was arguably the golden age of science fiction fandom. And in 1991, I was asked to edit a book about the history of the fandom of that era. It turned out to be a 'fabulous' experience.

Lost in the `50s

Let me tell you about a project I've been working on.

Some time ago, way back in *Mimosa* 4, we printed a letter from Robert Lichtman, who listed titles of some of the books on the history of science fiction and science fiction fandom you'd expect to find in a compleatist's library. Among the books Bob mentioned were Damon Knight's *The Futurians*, Sam Moskowitz's *The Immortal Storm*, Fred Pohl's *The Way the Future Was*, and two books by Harry Warner, Jr.: *All Our Yesterdays*, a history of science fiction fandom from the late 1930s through the decade of the 1940s, and *A Wealth of Fable*, a narrative history of science fiction fandom of the 1950s. Unfortunately, not many if any of these are currently in print; to find them, it'll take some effort perusing through used book stores and convention huckster rooms. But for those of you who, like us, are fascinated with what has gone on before, all of these books are still acquirable. Except one.

It turns out that Harry Warner, Jr.'s second fan history book, *A Wealth of Fable*, has never been published in book form. Up to now, the only version available has been the three volume mimeographed fanzine that was published in the mid-1970s.

Well, that's going to change soon. For those of you who haven't already heard, I'm happy to announce that the good people out in Los Angeles who brought us the 1984 Worldcon have decided to underwrite costs for publication in hardcover of *A Wealth of Fable*. I've been asked by them to be editor for the project. If you're familiar with Harry's other book, *All Our Yesterdays*, this book will have a very similar appearance; it'll be the same width and height, and each page will have the same area of text. I also expect that the book will have plenty of photographs from the 1950s, which will be inserted into the text as was done in *All Our Yesterdays*. My intent is to make *A Wealth of Fable* appear as if it is the second volume in a two volume set. A year (or maybe less) from now, we'll all be able to see if I was successful.

If you're thinking that this project is going to take a lot of work, you're right. It already has, in fact, from both Harry and myself. The way we chose to translate *AWoF* to a computer disk file involved optically scanning the best available copy of the original mimeographed edition. To get rid of the errors that creep in from this type of operation, we've gone through a word-for-word check of the entire manuscript. And we're also going back and verifying the accuracy of various sections of *AWoF*, getting comments from people involved in some of the events described by it.

That part of the project is actually turning out to be interesting and enjoyable, and not just because we've been able to add a few new names to our *Mimosa* mailing list because of it. Several times, letters I've received in response to queries about past events covered by *AWoF* have contained descriptions of events not covered by the book. Some of these are pretty intriguing. For instance, did you know that Albert Einstein once had a letter published in a fanzine?



Harry Warner, Jr.

It's true. It was in the 34th issue of *Cry of the Nameless*, back in August 1952. How it came to happen is at least as interesting as the fact that it did. Wally Weber, then co-editor of *Cry*, gives this explanation:

"The early Nameless Ones had ties to the University of Washington, and actually discussed matters of science and science fiction openly at our club meetings. Our program at one of the meetings featured Mark Walstead, a (now deceased) physics major, lecturing on Einstein's assertion that nothing could exceed the speed of light. If true, this would hamper our plan to someday have Nameless meetings in distant galaxies, so he was lecturing to a hostile audience. We got Mark to agree that Einstein would permit our hypothetical spaceship to go, say, $\frac{3}{4}c$ the speed of light. We didn't tell him until he had committed himself that our spaceship was carrying a second spaceship that was also capable of $\frac{3}{4}c$. Once Spaceship A established a $\frac{3}{4}c$ velocity to the University of Washington's frame of reference, it released Spaceship B, which promptly attained $\frac{3}{4}c$ with respect to Spaceship A's frame of reference, or $1\frac{1}{2}c$ to the University's frame of reference. Nyah, Nyah Einstein and Walstead! Mark floundered, but he was sure Dr. Einstein would have an explanation if only he were available."

Jack Speer, who lived in the Seattle area at that time, then wrote a letter to Dr. Einstein, posing the hypothetical question and requesting a theoretical answer but not really expecting a response. According to Wally, "The whole club was stunned and delighted when Albert actually answered the letter." Einstein's note read, in part:

"The argument is faulty for the following reason. The 'earth' is the whole time at rest relatively to an inertial system, the rocket is not; (it is in acceleration before beginning the trip down)."

Wally remembers that, "I'm not sure that any of us understood the answer. In my case, I thought he answered an entirely different question than we had asked."

Jack Speer evidently thought so, too. His postscript to Einstein's letter in *Cry* read: "I wonder why we can't get some of our geniuses who are taking physics to apply the equations and tell us what really happens when a spaceship approaches the speed of light."

Another reference to Einstein appears later in *AWoF*. This also related to hypothetical implications of the Theory of Relativity, apparently a popular topic back then, but it involved Sam Moskowitz this time: In Chapter 21, reference is made to the second Disclave convention (of 1952) where Sam, pressed into service at the last minute, "told about corresponding with Einstein over faster-than-light travel."

Information on this one turned out to be even easier to track down, as Sam had written about it in the Spring 1953 issue of *Fantasy Commentator*. He had read a magazine article which stated that galaxies at a sufficiently far distance from us would have speeds of recession exceeding that of light, something supposedly prohibited by Einstein's Special Theory of Relativity, but permitted in the General Theory of Relativity. So he dashed off a letter to Dr. Einstein to inquire about this, since there were possible science-fictional implications. Unfortunately, Einstein was not a science popularist; his response talked about coordinate systems and inertial systems, and in general made little sense to the layman. However, as Sam relates, "I became a sort of celebrity over this. The local press decided I was challenging Einstein, and devoted a full column to the matter with a photograph of me and part of my science fiction collection."

Just as interesting, albeit less theoretical in nature, was information in correspondence received that sheds new light on more fannish matters like Worldcon site selections. Chapter 23 of *AWoF* provides the following information about the contest staged at the 1953 Philadelphia Worldcon between Cleveland and San Francisco, for the right to hold the 1954 Worldcon:

“There was jockeying for votes on opening night between the only two groups known to be seeking the next year’s convention, San Francisco and Cleveland. The California city had a problem, the presence of only one representative in Philadelphia. ... Eventually, San Francisco defeated Cleveland on the final ballot, 187 to 157. A late start on preparations by Cleveland fans and the fact that three straight Worldcon had been held east of the Mississippi were generally considered major reasons for the outcome.”

It turns out, though, that there was more to it than that. San Francisco’s bid was almost not even entered at the business session. Howard DeVore gives these details:

“At Philadelphia, the word was that San Francisco deserved to win; because they’d been shafted the previous year. Apparently only one Frisco fan was in Philadelphia, and when the voting started he could not be located, so Don Ford of Cincinnati made the bid for him. The fan’s name was Hans Rusch, who may not have been on the committee. He’d played poker till daylight and was in a nearby hotel, but no one knew where. When he finally showed up, San Francisco was already the winner.” Howard, it might be added, was part of that poker game, and was probably the person who convinced Don Ford to make the proxy bid for San Francisco.

Then there was the episode from the 2nd Midwestcon (1951), from Chapter 21 of *AWoF*:

“Fans bought or pretended to buy a tiny patch of ground on which a tree grew, dedicating it as a shrine to a fannish couple who had found true love under its branches the previous year.” Howard DeVore was able to, er; flesh out this escapade as well:

“The ‘shrine’ was dedicated with an imitation bronze plaque reading ‘Under This Bush a Great Fan Love Was Born’, with the previous year’s dates, and initials of Ben Singer and Nancy Moore with intertwined hearts. Singer claimed it was the wrong bush.”

It’s only too easy to get carried away in all this; research into the past doings of fandom is, well, *fun*, and I find that all too often I’m getting lost in the ‘50s when I should be devoting more time to doing other, more pressing matters. Like finishing this fanzine, for instance.

So I’d better get at it. Midwestcon is only a few weeks away as I type this, and we want to have most of the work on this issue done by the time we leave for Cincinnati. This year’s convention might even turn out to be more memorable than most. You see, Ray Lavender is driving in from the west coast. And when you get him and Bob Tucker in a room together talking about fandoms past, just about *anything* is likely to happen... ☀

Afterword:

The book version of *A Wealth of Fable* was published in the summer of 1992, just in time for that year’s Worldcon. It was indeed successful, winning the Hugo Award for Best Non-Fiction Book twenty years ago at the 1993 Worldcon.

And speaking of Worldcons, it’s now only a few months until science fiction fans from all over the globe gather in San Antonio for the 2013 big event. So before I end this issue, here’s a look back on some of the things that happened last year at Chicon 7.

Worldcon 2012

Prolog: My Big Fat Indian Wedding

Sunday mornings in downtown Chicago are anything but serene. I was loitering on the sidewalk across Michigan Avenue from Millennium Park, waiting for Nicki to return from church, when I was nearly sideswiped by a horse. I had to duck out of the way to avoid being smacked in the face by its tail. A woman who was leading the horse by the reins apologized and told me that it was going to be part of the big, noisy Indian wedding procession that was forming up over at the entrance to the park.



the Indian wedding procession crosses Michigan Avenue

As I was being entertained by all the chaos of the wedding procession, I was accosted by a middle-age woman and her male companion. “Excuse me, you are eager?” she asked. Her accent seemed Russian.

“Pardon me?” I replied.

“I said, you are *eager*?”

I gave her a quick once-over. “Not especially.”

She gave me an exasperated look and said to her companion, “He is *not* eager.”

Bewilderment. And then it dawned on me. The Russian accent... Not ‘eager’... ‘*Igor*’! They were apparently meeting up with someone named Igor and she had thought that I might be the guy.

I shook my head as they wandered off. But you know, in a way she was right. I actually *had* been eager...to come to Chicago. Very much so.

The City of Wild Onions

There’s certainly a lot to see in Chicago, and a good place to start is where Michigan Avenue’s ‘Magnificent Mile’ crosses the Chicago River. That’s the site where a trader named Jean Baptiste Point du Sable built a homestead in the late 1700s and became the first non-native permanent settler, and in doing so also became the founder of the city. Prior to that the area was intermittently inhabited by a series of various Algonquin tribes, and had come to the attention of French explorers Louis Jolliet and Jacques Marquette in the late 1600s because of the extremely

short canoe portage from the south branch of the Chicago River that connects the Great Lakes to the Mississippi River system. It was these explorers who came up with the name ‘Chicago’, which is the French version of a Native American word for the wild onions that grew along the banks of the river.

Nowadays, tall skyscrapers of many different architectural styles line the Chicago River. Nicki and I were ‘introduced’ to many of them by a very knowledgeable Chicago Architecture Foundation docent during a Labor Day river cruise. The guy was amazing – he had an encyclopedic knowledge about every significant building in the city, and during the 90 minutes of the cruise he described in great detail the design and history of dozens of them. It was both highly entertaining and educational, and I came away enlightened that buildings, just like people, have stories to tell. I’m happy that I got to listen to some of them.



the Merchandise Mart, and kayakers, from the cruise boat



some of the many fragments from famous buildings that are embedded in the Tribune Tower

I think that my favorite building, of all those we saw during the cruise, is the 1920s-era Tribune Tower. It’s neo-Gothic in architectural design, complete with flying buttresses at the uppermost levels, and was the result of a design competition meant to create “the most beautiful and distinctive office building in the world” as the headquarters of the *Chicago Tribune*. But what really makes the Tribune Tower unique and distinctive is the collection of fragments from famous buildings and structures around the world that have been incorporated into the outside wall of the Tower. These pieces had reportedly been scavenged by *Tribune* correspondents in the years before the Tower was built. But not all of them. The newest one dates back only a bit more than a decade. It’s a small piece of steel recovered in 2001 at Ground

Zero from the destroyed World Trade Center in New York.

Seventh in a Continuing Series

One of the buildings that was *not* described during the cruise was a rather pedestrian-looking twin tower structure that was constructed back in the mid 1970s – the Hyatt Regency Hotel. It was the site of the event that had brought me and Nicki to Chicago for the first time in a dozen years – the 2012 World Science Fiction Convention. This was the 7th time that Chicago has hosted a Worldcon, and the





Dave Kyle (left) and Erle Korshak

number of people who have attended all seven is now down to just a single person – Dave Kyle. That, in itself, is a real accomplishment, seeing as how the first Chicon was way back in 1940. One of my favorite program events at Chicon 7 was listening to him talk about the earliest Worldcons with Erle Korshak, who was one of the organizers of that very first Chicon.

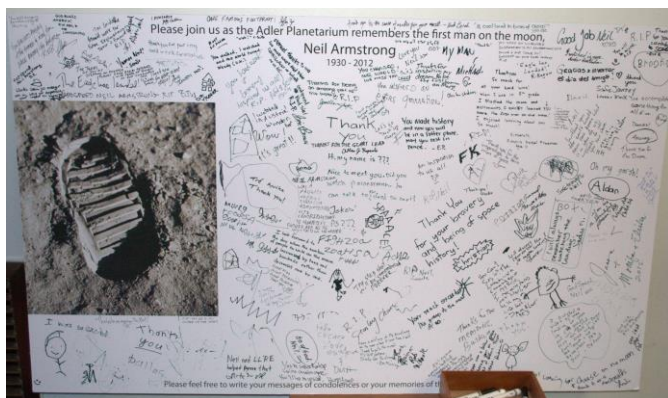
Nicki and I were also on a few program items. The one I had looked forward to the most was titled “Who Do We Honor Next?” and had been intended to single out notable science fiction professionals and fans who had not yet been

honored as a Worldcon Guest of Honor. I and my fellow panelists came up with many deserving candidates, but the panel took place at a time and location that resulted in just a handful of people in the audience, none of whom were part of any future Worldcon bid committees. Nicki did somewhat better in her first panel, about British science fiction television shows. The room was so full that people were sitting on the floor.

The most unusual and memorable program item of the convention happened the very first evening. It was an reception at the Adler Planetarium. The weather was perfect for the event, and there was a long line of people lined up to look through telescopes that had been set up out on the Planetarium’s exterior deck for a sky-viewing session. The big attraction, though, was *The Searcher*, a 30-minute short film about a visitor from another galaxy who is traveling through time and space to seek out his lost civilization. There were some very impressive visuals – a supernova explosion, a supermassive black hole, and the collision of two galaxies – that when projected in high definition on the inside dome of the Planetarium made it almost seem like we were in space.



the Adler Planetarium



in memory of Neil Armstrong

The entrance foyer to the Planetarium had a large placard, for visitors to sign, in memory of someone who once *had* been in space. The first man to set foot on the moon, Neil Armstrong, had passed away just a few days earlier, and from the various short notes I read it was obvious that he was on everyone’s minds. I wrote what I believed all of us who were visiting the Planetarium that evening were thinking: “Thank you for the sense of wonder you gave us all.”

A Century of Futility

The very next day there was another memorable event, but it wasn't actually a part of the convention. My friend and fellow baseball fan Janice Gelb had secured a block of tickets for the Friday afternoon game between the Chicago Cubs and San Francisco Giants, and nine of us made the easy subway ride north on the Chicago Transit Authority's Red Line up to 1060 West Addison Street for a visit to the friendly confines of Wrigley Field.



in the friendly confines of Wrigley Field

Wrigley Field is the second-oldest ballpark in Major League Baseball and it has been the home of the Cubs since 1916. And it has never, ever, been the home stadium of a World Series winning baseball club, because it has been more than a century since the Cubs have been one. To give the proper sense of temporal perspective, Halley's Comet has appeared *twice* since the Cubs last won a World Series title. The last time the Cubs were champions, start of construction on the *RMS Titanic* was still a year in the future. The Indian Head Penny was still being minted. Mark Twain was still alive and Roosevelt was President – *Teddy* Roosevelt!

It's been decade after decade of futility, and this year was no different – the Cubs had one of the worst win-loss records in the National League with no chance of making it into the playoffs. But for *this* particular game, the Cubs were invincible. Their pitching was baffling the Giants, and their batters were hitting the cover off the ball. By the time the seventh inning stretch had arrived, the game's outcome was no longer in doubt. And by then, neither was Nicki's and my decision to head back to the convention early, before the subway cars could become crammed with people heading home from the ballgame.

Don't Try This At Home! (Chicon 7 Edition)

I've been attending science fiction conventions a long time, more than 37 years as of Chicon 7. Back in the day, most of the people I met at these events were strangers to me. But after more than a third of a century there are now many, many familiar faces and indeed, one of the reasons for attending Worldcons is to cross paths with friends Nicki and I don't see at



me trying to look intelligent on the "Magical Musicals" panel

other times of the year. Two such friends were Guests of Honor at Chicon 7 – writer guest Mike Resnick, and fan guest Peggy Rae Sapienza. And, as it happened, I was on programming events with each of them. Peggy Rae was part of my "Who Do We Honor Next?" panel, while I joined Mike and several other knowledgeable theater goers for a panel on "Magical Musicals", about

the use of fantasy-related themes in musical theater. I wanted to be on the latter not only because Mike was on the panel, but also because I have a strong interest in and enjoyment of Broadway musicals, and I had thought I might have something to add. But as it turned out, I was way, way out of my league. All the other panelists, including Resnick, had immense knowledge of the topic; one of them, Laura Frankos, had even written a *Broadway Musical Quiz Book*. I did the best I could not to embarrass myself, which largely consisted of letting the other panelists do almost all of the talking.

But I wasn't able to indefinitely avoid making a spectacle of myself. My friend John Hertz had assembled a display of book covers by the distinguished artists Leo and Diane Dillon, and had asked me to take a few photos of the display for his upcoming Chicon 7 convention report. But to get a photo looking straight down on the display, I had to stand on a chair that had been set atop a noticeably wobbly table. It was the only way to get the shot, but it certainly wasn't the sanest thing I've ever done – all the time I was standing on the chair lining up the shot I was telling John, “This is stupid ... this is stupid ... this is stupid...” From all the way across the concourse Nicki saw what was going on but decided not to intervene. She told me that she saw John, who is an attorney out in Los Angeles, was standing next to me and if the table collapsed he would prevent me from crashing. Or else he would know who to sue.



with my friend and troublemaker John Hertz

Epilog: Ruminant Curses and Dreamscapes

There were two Chicago landmarks that Nicki and I made sure to see before we came home, mostly because they were only a short walk from the hotel. One was the Billy Goat Tavern, located on the lower level of Michigan Avenue. It was the inspiration of a famous *Saturday Night Live* skit back in the late 1970s where customers were only able to order “cheezborger, cheezborger, cheezborger, no Pepsi...Coke”. It even has a place in Chicago Cubs lore for the so-called ‘Curse of the Billy Goat’ which some die-hard Cubs fans claim is responsible for their team’s continuing bad fortune. Back in 1945, the Tavern’s owner, Billy Sianis, had brought his pet goat to a World Series



the Billy Goat Tavern

Game at Wrigley between the Cubs and the Detroit Tigers, but had been shown the gate when the offensive odor emanating from the goat annoyed people seated near him. Sianis was livid at being ejected from the stadium, and on his way out he shouted, "Them Cubs, they ain't gonna win no more!" And they didn't, losing the '45 Series in seven games. It may come as no surprise that the Cubs have yet to make another World Series appearance since then.

A much newer attraction is a shiny sculpture located in Millennium Park just to the south of the hotel. Its official name is 'Cloud Gate' but it's commonly known as 'The Bean' because of its shape. What makes it so popular is its ability to distort reality by the weird and wonderful dreamy reflections of Chicago's cityscape from its brightly polished surface.



in Millennium Park with The Bean

Cloud Gate was not yet in existence the previous time Chicago was host to a Worldcon twelve years ago. The way the bidding cycles run, it might be another dozen years or so before a Worldcon returns to this great city, and there's no telling what even newer things Chicago will have to amaze us all by then. But I know I'll be eager to find out.

Very much so. ☀



