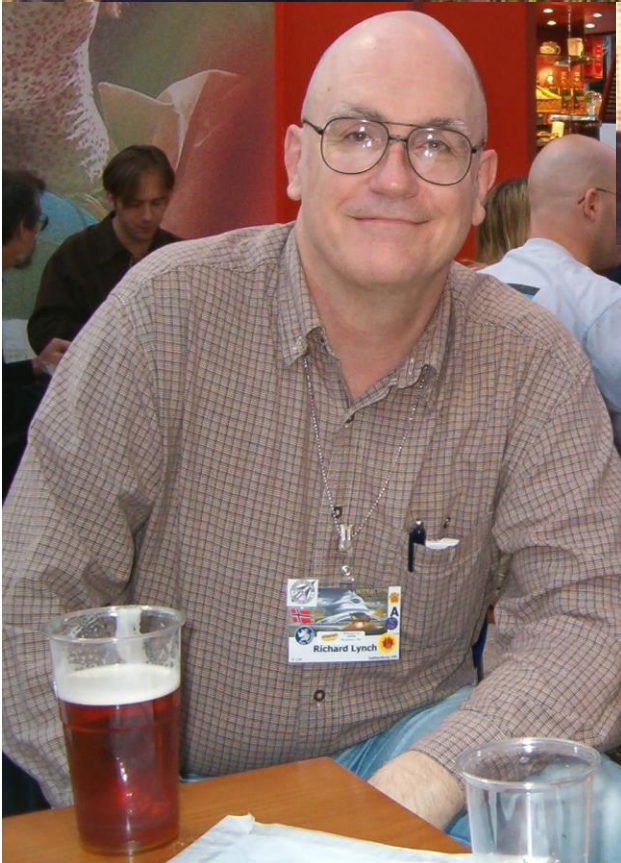
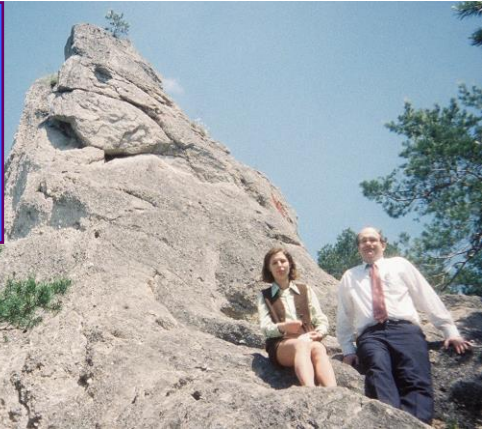


# My Back Pages #12

Rich Lynch



# My Back Pages #12

articles and essays by Rich Lynch

---

You know, I'd like to think of myself as someone who is pretty good at crisis management. This past year there's been no lack of opportunities to prove it, especially when I'm at work. Here I am, maybe three years from retirement, and for the past year-and-a-half, ever since the reorganization that reduced the number of people in my program area, my life has been an unending series of deadlines. Even when I'm home I'm finding that spare time is not as plentiful as it used to be, and sometimes things that I'm intending to get done end up being put off for a while. Such as this current issue, for instance. I had really wanted to get it finished before the end of June, but here we are deep into July with the beginning of August not very far away.

Normally, my wife Nicki and I would be planning a Worldcon trip about this time of year, but traveling to London for this year's event is just not going to be do-able. Instead, we'll look forward to reading all the reports and essays about the convention, of which I'm sure there will be many. And with that in mind, it seems appropriate to begin this issue with an essay about last year's Worldcon, LoneStarCon 3 in San Antonio, Texas. As you will read, it had been a full sixteen years since the previous time we had been to the Lone Star State.

*Rich Lynch*  
*Gaithersburg, Maryland*  
*July 2014*

## CONTENTS OF THIS ISSUE

Deep in the Heart of Texas .....	3
previously published in <i>Variations on a Theme</i> 96 (November 2013)	
Lost in the Sixties .....	11
previously published in <i>This is Not a Minaczine</i> 67 (November 1995)	
Memories of Dal .....	14
previously published in <i>Variations on a Theme</i> 92 (March 2013)	
Happy Birthday, Red Priest! .....	15
previously published in <i>In Search of Enlightenment</i> (March 4, 2003)	
Four Essential Protest Songs You've Probably Never Heard .....	16
previously published in <i>Variations on a Theme</i> 98 (March 2014)	
First thing we do, let's <del>kill</del> regulate all the lawyers... ..	19
previously published in <i>In Search of Enlightenment</i> (November 2, 2003)	
Half the Fun is Getting There .....	21
previously published in <i>Mimosa</i> 1 (January 1982)	
When in Rome... ..	23
previously published in <i>Variations on a Theme</i> 93 (May 2013)	

'Worldcon', 'NASFiC', and 'Hugo Award' are service marks of the World Science Fiction Society.  
(Thanks to Kerry Kyle for permission to use her photo of Bob Madle, Erle Korshak, and Dave Kyle)

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



# Deep in the Heart of Texas

## Prolog: History is Where You Find It

Our first visit to Austin, Nicki and I decided, had more than lived up to our expectations. The all-too-short day-and-a-half there had been filled with swarming bats, stately meeting halls, ornate accoutrements, aspiring musicians, presidential encounters, painted guitars...and some really *killer* barbecue!

But it wasn't until our final morning in Austin, when we were getting ready for the drive down to San Antonio, that we discovered the place where one of Austin's most prominent residents had lived. On my way to pick up the rental car, I noticed an unassuming stone plaque at the corner of the sports bar restaurant of the hotel where we had been staying. It conveyed the surprising information that this was the place where the famous writer William Sydney Porter, otherwise known as O. Henry, had resided between 1884 and 1895. Later on the house was demolished after real estate in downtown Austin started to become valuable, and all there is now to denote the location is that stone tablet. Little did Nicki and I know, the previous evening when we shared a dessert in that restaurant, we may have been sitting in the exact location where Mr. Porter had developed ideas for some of his stories.

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

## The City of Stevie Ray Vaughn

Austin is famous for its music, and that was one of the reasons we made it part of our late summer Texas trip. The PBS television show *Austin City Limits* showcases the best of it – everything from Texas Swing to Tejano, including Blues, Rock & Roll, and Progressive Country. Many famous musicians have played in Austin, including the great blues guitarist Stevie Ray Vaughn who lived in the city for much of his life. No concerts were scheduled for any of the larger venues while we in town, but there is a stretch of bars and restaurants on 6<sup>th</sup> Street where up-and-coming musicians ply their trade. At one of these, a guy-and-gal duo had set up near the door and were doing country rock to an almost empty room. The young woman, who was playing electric bass, stepped outside to chat with us and let us know where their next gig was, all the while not missing a note as the song went on.

Everywhere we looked we could see that Austin is *serious* about its music. If the 6<sup>th</sup> Street scene wasn't obvious enough there were plenty of other indications, including the results of a city-wide public art display – painted guitars! That *that*, Nashville!



outside Champions sports bar in Austin



one of Austin's painted guitars

## Keeping Austin Batty

One of the painted guitars, titled “Keep Austin Batty”, paid homage to another of Austin’s claims to fame – the Congress Avenue Bridge. Underneath it resides the world’s largest urban bat colony. They swarm about sundown, and that daily event is a big enough tourist attraction that it adds several million dollars each year to the local economy.



the evening swarming of the bats

The evening Nicki and I experienced the event, there were dozens of people on the bridge and even more in tour boats down on the lake. Everybody we saw on the bridge had a camera, but nobody was allowed to get very close. Those who tried to move over to the side of the bridge where the swarm was exiting got shooed away by a policeman. Even *he* had a camera, and from his location as bridge sentinel, he probably got the best photos of all.

## Under the Dome

A much better photo op was the Texas State Capitol. Everything is bigger in Texas, as the saying goes, and that includes its Capitol – it’s larger, in terms of floor space, than any other state capitol building. We had a very entertaining historical tour of the place by a lady who sounded a lot like the late Texas Governor Ann Richards. And she even had the same swagger.



at the Texas State Capitol Building



Texas Senate Chamber

But what impressed me most about the Capitol was the ambience of the place, and the amount of continuing care that it must take to preserve that sense. While we were in the two legislature rooms, it was as if we had stepped back to the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. I was not surprised to learn that the building has a place in the National Register of Historic Places.



The Capitol dates back to the 1880s, the land (very valuable even then) acquired by a public land swap that created the world's largest cattle ranch up in the Texas panhandle. The building was constructed using Texas red granite that almost seems to glow in the light of the setting sun. The overall splendor of the Capitol was truly



six nations floor mosaic in the Texas Capitol

awesome, right down to small details like the ornate brass hinges on the interior doors. There were many such niceties that practically implored you to take a photo, and we frequently did, but my favorite image from the



door hinge in the Texas Capitol

visit was the floor mosaic, situated directly beneath the rotunda dome, which depicted the seals of the six countries which have governed Texas during its long history. At about 30 feet across, it seemed larger than life. Just like many other things in Texas.

## Communing with LBJ

Four blocks north of the Texas Capitol is the campus of the University of Texas, and at the far northeast corner of the campus is an unassuming monolithic ten story building that houses the Lyndon Baines Johnson Presidential Library.

Nicki and I had wanted to visit this maybe even more so than the Texas Capitol and we found that



in the LBJ Presidential Library

we had arrived for our visit on a special day – what would have been LBJ's 105<sup>th</sup> birthday. There was cake!



Nicki has an LBJ photo op

There is more there than just a repository of the historical documents from Johnson's presidency. The top floor is a mini-museum of his years in the Oval Office, including exhibits on civil rights, consumer protection, the Medicare social insurance program, and the expansion of the U.S. space program. And there was also a big exhibit, with photos and video, about that day in late November 1963 that brought Johnson to the Presidency.

I'm a big fan of him; I believe he was one of our greatest presidents and accomplished more than Kennedy most likely could have. If Vietnam hadn't tarnished his legacy, there probably would be a large LBJ Memorial on the National Mall in Washington by now. As there should be.

## The City of the Big Pecan

The first thing Nicki and I did after we checked into our hotel in Austin was to follow our noses. We had been given directions to a very good barbecue restaurant down near the convention center but we really didn't need them because we smelled the tantalizing aroma of smoked pork and beef from several blocks away. The food would be equally good in San Antonio but first there was a memorable food stop, of sorts, on the drive south from Austin.



Iron Works Barbecue in Austin



Nicki in Seguin with the Big Pecan

“Pecan Capital of Texas”, and it was near enough that I felt obliged to pay an *actual* visit. When we got there we found a five-foot long concrete nut on a pedestal next to the county courthouse and even better, a locally-owned ice cream shop that was a nice respite on a very warm day. There was butter pecan, of course, and it was the best I’ve ever had.

## Down by the River

The hot weather in central Texas lasted all through the Labor Day weekend, which made being out on the streets in San Antonio during daytime a perspiration-inducing experience. But there was an alternative. Back in the late 1920s, a flood control project transformed a two-mile section of the San Antonio River that loops through the downtown area into a shallow canal about 20 feet below street level. It didn't take long for developers to



San Antonio's River Walk



realize the possibilities and in 1938 a local planner and architect, Robert Hugman, secured funding for the “San Antonio River Beautification Project” that has, over the years, created a network of walkways along the watercourse interconnected by many bridges and staircases. It was an ideal place for restaurants and other places of business to locate, and today there are dozens of them there. On holiday weekends the place is practically shoulder-to-shoulder with tourists, who have brought millions of dollars each year into the local economy.

Nicki and I certainly did our part. The heat of the day was a lot less down there than at street level and it quickly became the preferred place to find a meal. There are also boat tours, scheduled so often that it’s almost impossible to take a photo in the River Walk without having one of them in the image. A boat tour turned out to be a good way to learn more about the history and architecture of San Antonio, and we thought that eight dollars each for the half-hour was a bargain. But in the end, it turned out to be even less expensive than that when my mantra “Is there a seniors discount?” produced results. Proof positive that growing old doesn’t suck *all* the time!



during the River Walk boat tour

### Sixteen Years Between

The main reason Nicki and I had come all the way to Texas was to attend the 2013 World Science Fiction Convention, LoneStarCon 3. The previous time we had been to San Antonio was back in 1997 for another Worldcon, LoneStarCon 2, which was a *very* memorable convention, with dozens of interesting program events, many dinner excursions with friends, a multitude of evening room parties, and a Hugo Award for our fanzine *Mimosa*.



A lot has happened in the past 16 years. Several friends who were at LSC2 have passed on and others no longer attend Worldcons. And *Mimosa* is no longer being published – this year’s LoneStarCon was the ten year anniversary of its final issue. As for me, I’ll reluctantly admit that 16 years has taken its toll. My energy level is not what it was back then, and I’ve long since stopped trying to experience Worldcons in fast forward. This year I didn’t even go to the Hugo Awards ceremony – I rested in the hotel room to save some endurance for the evening’s tour of all the room parties. So instead of getting my blood pressure up when the Best Fanzine Hugo went to a non-fanzine that was somehow allowed to be eligible (and don’t get me started on *that*), I kicked back and instead got my blood pressure up while enjoying my latest TV sports pastime – NASCAR!

## Speak No Evil

Someone who still, at age 94, has a reasonable energy level is my friend Dave Kyle, who has attended Worldcons all the way back to the very first one in 1939. That 1939 Worldcon included a softball game of “fans vs. pros” and 74 years later, a recreation (of sorts) of that game was staged at LSC3. Dave, who participated in the 1939 ballgame, was given the honor of tossing the ceremonial first pitch.

There are not very many people left who attended the very first Worldcon. Dave and two other famous fans of that



Bob Madle, Erle Korshak, and Dave Kyle

three-quarters of a century has long since created a strong sense of nostalgia about that earliest era of science fiction fandom. Either that, or the three of them had decided it might be better after all this time if were “Hear no evil, see no evil, and speak no evil”.

## All Things Howard

Something else that occurred in 1936 was the death of fantasy author Robert E. Howard, creator of Conan the Barbarian and, by extension, arguably the entire sword and sorcery genre. Howard had lived in Cross Plains, a few hours drive to the north from San Antonio, so LSC3 had a track of programming specific to him and his writing. This included a screening of the 2011 documentary film *Barbarian Days*, which is described (on IMDB) as “a civilized look at the modern day fans of Robert E. Howard ... as seen at the annual Texas celebration known as Howard Days”. Several of these fans are actual scholars in all aspects of the life and literature of Howard, and three of them were at LSC3.

One of these guys is my friend Rusty Burke whom I’ve known for more than a third of a century, but I’ve only very recently become aware of his expertise in this area. They are very actively researching the life of Howard, and the annual Howard Days get-together in Cross



Dave Kyle (with umpire Joe Siclari) tosses the game’s ceremonial first pitch



R.E. Howard experts Mark Finn, Rusty Burke, and Bill Cavalier



Plains includes sessions where papers are presented and the Robert E. Howard Foundation Awards are given out for publications and writings. Rusty has been working on a new biography of Howard that will complement a biography by another of the Howard experts, Mark Finn, which was published back in 2006.

This was the closest I've ever come, or possibly will ever come, to attending an academic track of programming at a science fiction convention. There were no papers presented, but the program participants all had standing as R.E. Howard researchers. And it was fascinating to find out more about the man. Not quite enough for me to want to attend a Howard Days celebration, but enough for me to want to learn more about the types of research being done on the author and his work. I'll for sure be talking to Rusty about it next time I see him.

### **Dancing with the Lone Stars**

I found a lot of interest in the LSC3 program, but there are so many tracks of programming at modern Worldcons that it's almost impossible not to. I was on three panels, including a very well attended one on near-future energy sources which I moderated. Nicki also had three panels, including two media-related ones that looked to be standing room only. But for sheer entertainment value, it was the after-hours dances that were the most fun. There were three of them, each showcasing a different musical genre. The one that Nicki and I found most interesting was the Tex-Mex Conjunto dance, with music by the Los Paisanos de Chalito Johnson Band. Conjunto is the everyday music of the Mexican-American working class people. It doesn't have the brassy sound of a Mariachi band or the synthesized sound of a modern-day Tejano band. Conjunto has been described as a Mexican analog of Country & Western music, but in reverse – the dog doesn't die, the wife doesn't leave, and the truck keeps running. Conjunto has a happy, uplifting sound. And it's very danceable.



Los Paisanos de Chalito Johnson Band at LSC3

I like to think that I have many life skills, but dancing is not one of them. Nevertheless, Nicki insisted that we join the dozen or so people on the dance floor. It wasn't pretty and we weren't out there for very long, but it *was* fun and I think I managed not to embarrass myself very much. It was also enough to earn Nicki and me "Dancing with the Lone Stars" ribbons for our convention badges.

We observed dancers of various different skill levels, but if there had been judging for proficiency the top prize would have gone to a couple of young guys who were really, really good. They looked to be locals, possibly gamers who had been ensconced all day in the basement of one of the hotels away from the rest of the convention. They came in about halfway through the event, and it wasn't long before they were in demand as dance partners by women who had been struggling to dance with guys having about the same level of talent as me. It was

all very entertaining for this wallflower to watch, and it's one of the many pleasant memories of LSC3 that I brought home with me.

### Epilog: The Shrine of Texas

Nicki and I couldn't leave San Antonio without visiting the most revered place in the entirety of Texas. It's The Alamo, of course – the site of a famous 1836 siege where the Mexican Army, led by General Santa Anna, wiped out to the last man a much smaller garrison of freedom fighters led by William Travis, Jim Bowie, and Davy Crockett. Texans refer to the place as 'The Shrine', and it's so venerated that visitors are requested to remove their hats before they enter.

A very knowledgeable docent named Steve provided historical background of the battle and briefly showed us around the interior of the place



inside The Alamo with Steve the Docent

(it isn't very large), pointing out places where bullets had struck and defenders had died. Turns out that he is a direct descendant of one of The Alamo's defenders – Juan Nepomuceno Seguín, who, because of his fluency in Spanish, had been dispatched as a messenger prior to the closing battle and managed to make it through enemy lines unscathed. The city of

Seguin is named in his honor, and we had seen his statue in the town square when we were there a few days earlier.

It will probably be a long while before Nicki and I are back in Texas again, but I hope not another 16 years. There are just way too many other interesting things that we never got around to do and see, and it deserves another trip when there isn't a 4,000 person convention to absorb most of our available time. It will be pleasant to be deep in the heart of Texas once again. ☀



The Alamo at dusk



Nicki and the statue of Juan Seguin

---

### Afterword:

As I mentioned, no Worldcon trip for Nicki and me but earlier in July we *did* attend the North American Science Fiction Convention (the NASFiC), over in Detroit. I was co-moderator for a two-hour panel about Michigan fandom through the ages, and to help prepare for that I consulted an online fan history resource (described in the next essay) which I created back in the early 1990s.



# Lost in the Sixties

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

Back in 1991, I'd been persuaded to take charge of the *A Wealth of Fable* project. The Los Angeles Worldcon of 1984, it turned out, had been financially successful enough where there were funds available to cover a number of fan-related projects. One of their top priorities was getting Harry Warner's history of science fiction fandom of the 1950s into print in book form.

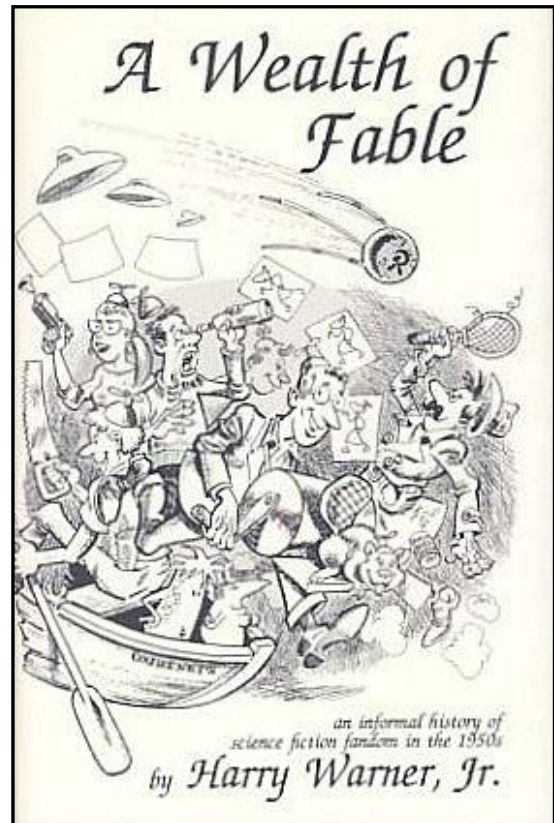
It turned out to be a bigger project than I thought. When I began, in 1990, all I had to start with was a fuzzy set of photocopies from the three-volume fanzine published in the mid 1970s that had been the manuscript's only other publication. There was much to do, and it took more than two years to finish. The result was a hardcover book of nearly 500 pages, complete with index and more than 200 photographs.

By far, it's been the biggest publishing project I've ever worked on, and I was more than a little pleased that the book won a Hugo Award for Harry at the 1993 Worldcon. But that was a couple of years ago. Now it's time to work on the 1960s.

Work actually began several years ago. Back at the 1991 Corflu fanzine fans convention in El Paso, I put together a one-page chapter outline of a book of the 1960s (mostly because of a challenge by Bruce Pelz), but nothing further happened until the first FanHistoricon, at



Bruce Pelz, Harry Warner, Jr., and Peggy Rae Pavlat at Harry's home during the first FanHistoricon (in 1994)



Hagerstown in May 1994. It was there in Hagerstown that the outline, which had languished as a data file in my computer for three years (the original handwritten outline having vanished into oblivion by then), finally received some comments.

A couple of other things happened at the FanHistoricon that affected the course of events. Forry Ackerman was there, and he contributed \$300

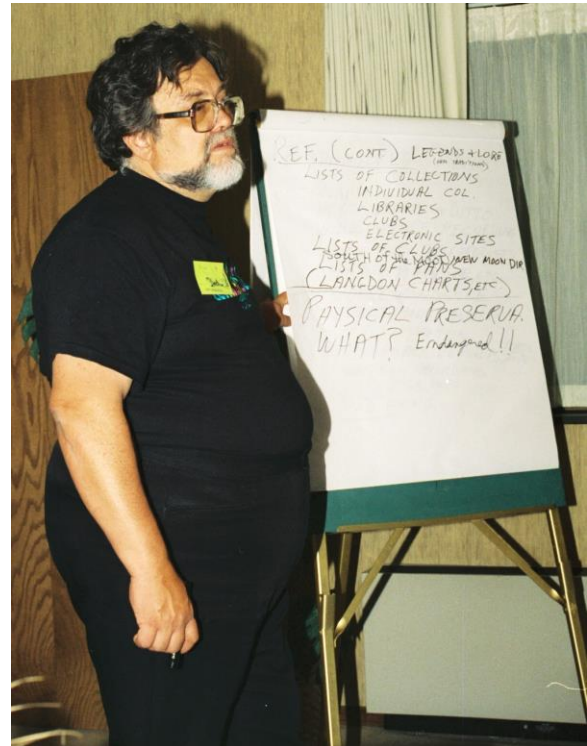
towards expenses for any copying and mailing costs. This immediately put the project financially into the black. The second was the formation of Peggy Rae Pavlat's brainchild, the Timebinders. Peggy Rae had organized that first FanHistoricon (there have been several since then), and had wanted some kind of umbrella organization created to oversee existing fan history activities and to come up with ideas for new ones. In fact, FanHistoricon wasn't really a convention at all; it was more of a workshop for hammering out the structure for the new organization, and for providing feedback on things that were already going on.

Anyway, the upshot from the FanHistoricon was twofold: the outline quickly expanded to about eight pages, and it officially became my project. So here I am. In the year and a half since that first FanHistoricon, the outline has greatly increased in size. It's now over 90 pages, and growing; the size of the computer file has passed a quarter of a million bytes. But it's still not nearly detailed enough for any book to be written; there are whole areas where I still have little or no information, and other areas where the information I do have is only enough to bring more questions to mind.

Luckily, there are plenty of people to ask them to. One of the reasons the 1960s Fan History Outline (or FHO, as it's come to be called) has grown so rapidly is because of the Internet. It has connected me with many other fans not only here in North America, but in Europe and Australia as well. And to make things even easier, Dick and Leah Smith, who were also at that first FanHistoricon, have set up an e-mail mailing list exclusively for fan history research and related purposes. Using email has allowed me to gather information at a much faster rate than I ever could have if I was limited exclusively to surface mail.

By now, you're probably beginning to believe that the evolution of this 1960s FHO is actually a group effort. You're right. Many, many people have played a role so far, by providing specific bits of information on people and events, or by commenting on information that's been collected in the FHO. Bruce Pelz, in particular, has provided much in the way of reprinted source material, and Rob Hansen has done much of the work on British fandom already in his own fan history project. But I'm still quite a long way from being ready to sit down and start writing – the FHO will have to be at least twice as long as it is now before that day will come.

But I'm not really in a hurry; this kind of fact finding takes time, and there's not much you can do about it. It will probably take about another year, at least, before I'm able to fill in most of the gaps in the FHO. Meanwhile, this kind of research is fun, especially when you run across an interesting bit of information or an anecdote that's been lost for decades. Here's an example:



Bruce Pelz at the first FanHistoricon





Jack Harness and Harlan Ellison at LASFS,  
sometime in the 1960s

In May 1965, members of the Los Angeles Science Fantasy Society had finally got fed up by the performance of their secretary, Jack Harness. Harness, who otherwise had performed exemplary service to LASFS, had become habitually late for the weekly LASFS meetings. So after being late for seven of the previous eight meetings, the club finally, and perhaps reluctantly, decided to hold a vote of impeachment of Harness, on the grounds of non-feasance of his elected duties. At the meeting where his impeachment was voted on, Harness was once again late – so late, in fact, that both the debate and final vote were over by the time he had arrived. When he asked the outcome of the vote, he was told the bad news: he had been thrown out of office, the

first successful impeachment of a LASFS officer in the decade. Immediately after that, an election was held to fill the now-empty office. The winner? Elected as the new LASFS secretary, by a large majority, was... Jack Harness.

Like I said, this is turning into an entertaining project. So entertaining, in fact, that I often find I'm ignoring other stuff I should be doing. Therefore, I'd better finish this essay pretty soon. You see, I'm expecting a package of information about 1960s Midwestern fandom I'm looking forward to sifting through. It's supposed to include a description of the epic Midwestcon where Bob Tucker brought a young fan to the convention, who then proceeded to embarrass Tucker by walking around wearing a lampshade on his head. (At the end of the convention, Tucker went around apologizing for him.) The young fan's name? Roger Ebert.

I'm looking forward to getting lost in it all! ☀



Roger Ebert (left center) with Ian McAuley and George Charters (top) and Walt Willis (lower right)

### Afterword:

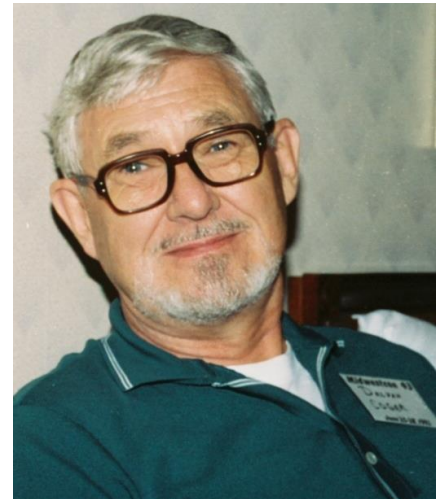
This is the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary year of that first FanHistoricon. In that time, many of the people mentioned in this essay have died, including Forry Ackerman, Bruce Pelz, and Harry Warner. The 1960s project is still a work in progress – the FHO has quadrupled in size but there are some gaps in knowledge. A book is still the goal, but the outline itself has seen some use over the years as a fan history resource...including helping me to prepare for that NASFiC panel!

One of the things described at the panel was the Slan Shack, which was perhaps the most famous fan dwelling of all time. It was located in the wilds of central Michigan and existed for only a short time during the 1940s. One of its frequent visitors was a good friend, and here's a remembrance of him.

# Memories of Dal

It was a bit more than ten years ago, on a warm October evening, back in 2002, when some bad news arrived via the Internet: “Dalvin M. Coger, a fan since the early 1940s, passed away on Wednesday, October 2<sup>nd</sup>, from a post-surgery antibiotic-resistant bacterial infection.”

Dal’s activity in science fiction fandom began in the midwest U.S. about 1942, when he attended the second Michicon in the fall of that year. He was only active for a couple of years before he went into the military for World War II, but in that time he became friends with Al and Abby Lou Ashley and other people in the Galactic Roamers fan club in central Michigan, and as a result, spent many happy days at the most famous fan abode of all time, the legendary Slan Shack of Battle Creek, Michigan. Of that place, Dal later wrote that “fan visitors from far and wide came by to enjoy the Ashley’s hospitality.” Because he became stationed thousands of miles away, in California, Dal wrote that “I was immensely unhappy that I couldn’t [often] share in this.”



Dal Coger at the 1992 Midwestcon

It was actually Dal’s good fortune to be stationed at Camp Haan, in southern California, for his basic training, and during the relatively short time he was there before being shipped off to France, he became friends with the LASFS crowd, including Jim Kepner, Forry Ackerman, and the enigmatic Francis Towner Laney. It was more than 20 years of gaffiation after that, first in the military and then in academia – Dal became a professor at the University of Memphis, where he was a notable historian and African Studies writer. He re-entered fandom in the mid 1970s, and became a sort of patriarch for Memphis fandom after that.

I met Dal not long after his re-entry into fandom, at a small convention in Arkansas where he was Toastmaster and introduced me to the convention’s Guest of Honor, Bob Tucker. Dal and I stayed in contact with each other after that; it was probably our common interest in history, especially the history of science fiction fandom, which helped make us friends.

Dal was also a great conversationalist, and the times we met each other at conventions usually resulted in a couple of hours of shared stories (mostly his), about travels and times past. After Nicki and I moved to Maryland near the end of 1988, Dal and I crossed paths only every year or two, usually at Midwestcons we both happened to attend. The last time was in June 2002, and I remember him looking very energetic and healthy, much younger than his 80+ years. For that reason, I don’t believe I ever thought it might be the last time I’d ever see him. More than ten years after his passing, I am still missing him greatly. ☀

---

## Afterword:

This year’s NASFiC honored seven guests, two of them musicians. I am not a musician, at least not since my Junior year in high school (more on that maybe another time), but I grew up in the golden age of 1960s rock and roll and developed an abiding interest in all things Beatles, Stones, Byrds, and Beach Boys. My musical interests have become a lot more eclectic since then, and (as you will read) it was a business trip back in 1997 that was a direct cause.



# Happy Birthday, Red Priest!

OK, time for a confession: I am a classical music fan. Didn't used to be that way – I was a child of the '60s and grew up on rock and roll. In the early 1970s, when I was in my last couple of years as a grad student, I was a DJ at the college's rock music station. (In fact, my last month there, in October 1973 when I was waiting for a job offer to come in and was down to my last few dollars, I was sleeping in the radio station's production studio. But that's another story.) Even as late as the mid '90s I was listening to the local "Classic Rock" station. So what happened?

Well, maybe nothing happened. When my friends ask me what type of music I like, I reply that I like *all* kinds, but nowadays I mostly listen to classical. Rock and roll is still fun, especially when a new Springsteen album comes out, but it works best in moderation for me now. I think I've gotten worn down, either by the relentless repetitiveness (both the playlists and the songs themselves), or maybe (horrors!) it's that I've finally outgrown it all.

If I had to point to a single moment when the change occurred, it would be in 1997 when I was in Prague on a business trip. Every night there, mostly for the benefit of all the western tourists who visit the city, there are at least 20 different classical music live concerts and recitals. The one I decided to attend that evening was a small string ensemble's performance of Mozart's famous serenade "Eine Kleine Nachtmusik" and Vivaldi's set of four violin concertos, "The Four Seasons". It was wonderful, and I decided I wanted more of it. Not long after that, I started buying classical CDs and I haven't looked back since.

Today, March 4<sup>th</sup>, 2003, happens to be the 325<sup>th</sup> birthday of Antonio Vivaldi. His biography is actually as fascinating as his music – he was a Venetian (the son of a musician) who was ordained as a Catholic priest in 1703, but instead of a career in the priesthood, became a music instructor at a school in Venice for girls who were orphans, indigent, or illegitimate. He is often referred to as the 'Red Priest' from his red hair, but was only a practicing priest for about a year; there is a story (probably true!) that he often left the altar before the end of a mass so he could write down some musical idea that had just come to him.

"The Four Seasons" are by far Vivaldi's most recognizable work; almost all concert violinist soloists include these as part of their repertoire. The four concertos are actually fairly descriptive of their names – in "Spring", for instance, you can imagine birds singing, in "Summer" insects buzzing and an afternoon thunderstorm, in "Autumn" a harvest celebration, and in "Winter" the stamping of feet and chattering of teeth. Each of these four concertos is fairly short; the entire suite (twelve movements total) lasts only about 40 minutes. There are many, many recordings available, many of them very inexpensive (like the one I'm listening to now). Definitely worth having in any music collection.

So happy 325<sup>th</sup>, Don Antonio! Would that we all can be as well remembered, through our own legacies, whatever they are, three centuries on. ☀

---

## Afterword:

This was one of first in a series of appreciations about classical composers that I wrote about a decade ago, mostly for my own edification. I still write the occasional essay about music, but the most recent one was about a different kind of music. Here it is again.

# Four Essential Protest Songs You've Probably Never Heard

I have always believed that anger is one of the greatest catalysts of creativity. For sure, it's a potent motivational energy source and it also often provides the mental focus needed for bursts of inspiration. Whenever I'm angry, my thinking is usually clearer and I work more efficiently.

On a larger scale, it seems obvious that anger has been, and still is, a major driving force for social change. And some of the products of these movements for change have been protest songs meant to incite the masses. Protest songs have been around for decades if not centuries, and many have transcended the social movements that spawned them. Purely from an artistic viewpoint, protest songs, removed from any social context, can be very fine compositions in their own right and, unsurprisingly, feature some of the best songwriting. One of the characteristics of a good protest song is its so-called "cognitive content", as described by the late Phil Ochs: "A protest song is a song that's so specific that you cannot mistake it for bullshit."

There are thousands and thousands of protest songs, encompassing all musical genres, and many of them are very familiar if not instantly recognizable. But what I want to do with this article is point out four exemplary ones that you've probably not yet discovered. The first is the most subtle: Joe Ely's "Not That Much Has Changed". Ely is originally from north central Texas and has built his career on the kind of music you might hear in honky-tonk roadhouses. The song is about a small town homecoming for someone who has been away in the military for a few years: "*The*



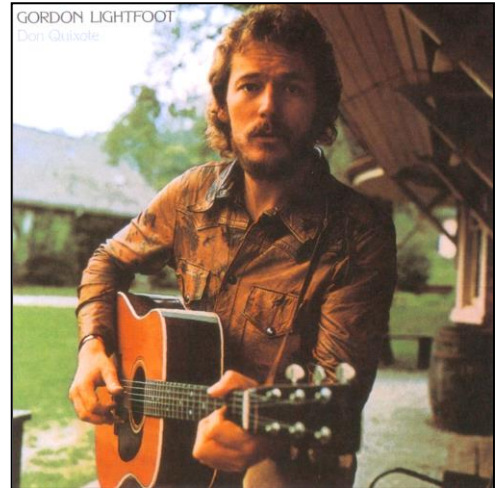
Joe Ely

*schoolyard seems smaller, the church steeple seems taller, but not that much has changed.*" There's pleasant and nostalgic imagery like that through most of the song until the very last verse smacks you right between the eyes: "*I think about the war and the price we had to pay and the lives that'll never be the same. And why for all these years no answers have appeared. Not that much has changed.*"

This is a fairly recent composition, written for Ely's 2011 album *Satisfied at Last*, no doubt alluding to the 2003 Iraq War and its aftermath. I heard a really nice version of the song during a 2013 broadcast of Garrison Keillor's *A Prairie Home Companion*, when Ely was joined by his friends Butch Hancock and Jimmy Dale Gilmore (as 'The Flatlanders'). Keillor noted, from the ovation the song received, that the audience that evening seemed to be people of like mind, to which Ely responded that "I can see you read it really well."



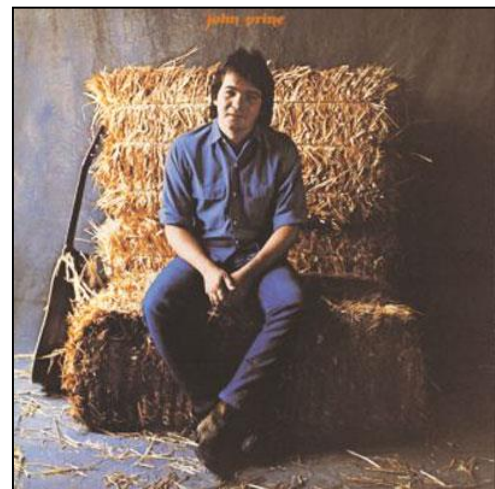
Wars are pretty easy targets for protest songs. There's a good one, "The Patriot's Dream", on Gordon Lightfoot's 1972 album *Don Quixote*, but that album also contains two other protest songs that are even better, one of them the album's title track. But my favorite is "Ode to Big Blue", an environmental-themed song nominally about the life and death of a giant Blue Whale ("...*the greatest monster that the world ever knew...*") that had survived numerous attempts at being 'harvested' by whalers. But it, also, does not really become a protest song until the last verse hits us: "*Now the Gray Whale has run and the Sperm is almost done. The Finbacks and the Greenland Rights have all passed and gone. They've been taken by the men for the money they could spend. And the killing never ends, it just goes on.*"



Gordon Lightfoot

The song is a product of its times, back in the early 1970s, which were turbulent to say the very least. The Vietnam War was still going on, there was civil unrest and rioting in parts of North America, and Watergate was in the news. It was also about then that the anti-whaling movement formed, something that obviously resonated with Lightfoot. This is a very skillfully constructed composition, with more than just the no-bullshit lyrics going for it. Lightfoot programmed in pauses between verses to let the ethereal instrumental arrangement have hold, including a bass line that was written to be evocative of whale calls. This is a quietly powerful song, and given the subject matter, it holds up as well now as when it originally appeared more than four decades ago.

The early 1970s was a great time for protest songs. One of my favorites, and one that I can personally identify with, is John Prine's "Paradise", about a small rural Kentucky town that no longer exists. Back in the 1950s, mining geologists for the Peabody Coal Company discovered that large and very profitable seams of coal lay beneath the town of Paradise in west-central Kentucky. So the coal company moved in and bought up all the land, then moved everybody out, razed the town, and strip mined the land for the coal. The lyrics pretty explicitly describe what happened: "*And the coal company came with the world's largest shovel. And they tortured the timber and stripped all the land. Well, they dug for their coal 'til the land was forsaken. Then they wrote it all down as the progress of man. And daddy, won't you take me back to Muhlenberg County, down by the Green River where Paradise lay. Well, I'm sorry, my son, but you're too late in asking. Mister Peabody's coal train has hauled it away.*"

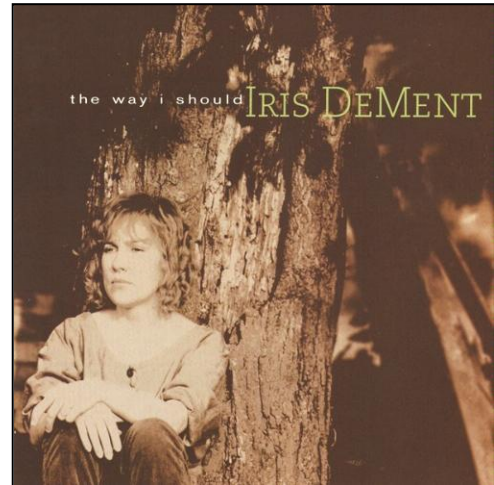


John Prine

I identify with the song because I've been there many, many times. What once was the town of Paradise is now the location of a very large coal-fueled power plant owned by the Tennessee Valley Authority (my employer from 1980 to 1988). Coal is still being mined in the area, though

the big strip mine closed down in the mid-1980s. The big shovel is gone, too. It apparently was cost prohibitive to move the machine to another mine, so the mining company salvaged all the electrical parts that were of any value, lowered the big boom one last time, and covered the whole thing over when they filled in the pit. I can imagine that some far-future paleontologist will think that metal monsters once roamed the earth, when the metal bones of this behemoth are uncovered again someday.

All of these songs are very powerful in their own way, but I've saved the most in-your-face one for last. It's "Wasteland of the Free" by Iris DeMent, a country-folk musician originally from Arkansas who sings with the voice of an angel. But there's nothing angelic about this song, which takes dead aim at the disingenuousness, dishonesty, and social corruption that she no doubt felt had become the new American way of life. A sample: *"We got CEOs making two hundred times the workers' pay, but they'll fight like hell against raising the minimum wage. And if you don't like it, mister, they'll ship your job to some third-world country 'cross the sea. And it feels like I am living in the wasteland of the free."* And: *"Living in the wasteland of the free, where the poor have now become the enemy. Let's blame our troubles on the weak ones, sounds like some kind of Hitler remedy. Living in the wasteland of the free."*



Iris DeMent

This is perhaps the angriest song I have ever heard, but it's also a very fine and melodic musical composition. If the lyrics were bland it might have made the *Billboard* Top 100. But instead, it was mostly badly received by the relatively conservative country music establishment when it was released in 1996 and saw very little airplay. The song even fomented a controversy in 1997 when one of Florida's state Senators, a conservative Republican, succeeded in zeroing out the state funding share for a Tampa community radio station which had aired it.

The song is certainly controversial and DeMent herself soon became the focus. One of her former fans denounced her as "a selfish, non-thinking socialist of the 1960s sort" while others commented that the song resonated with them and much of it even rang true from their experiences. But DeMent's position was that what she really wanted to do was to make people think, in a no-bullshit way: "I don't have all the answers but if my songs make people think more deeply and figure out solutions that I'm not able to, then this is what it's for. If people get upset and it forces them to stop and think, then the song has done the job."

Most likely Phil Ochs would have agreed. ☀

Excerpts from "Not That Much Has Changed" © 2011 by Joe Ely. Excerpts from "Ode to Big Blue" © 1972 by Gordon Lightfoot ([viewable on YouTube](#)). Excerpts from "Paradise" © 1971 by John Prine ([viewable on YouTube](#)). Excerpts from "Wasteland of the Free" © 1996 by Iris DeMent ([viewable on YouTube](#)).

---

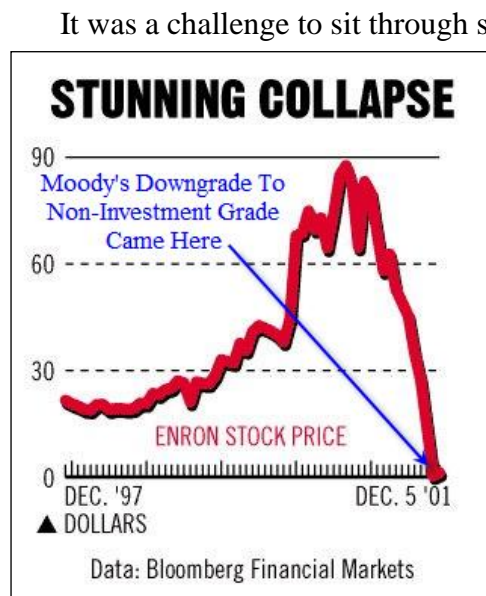
## Afterword:

The NASFiC was a very large convention, with more than 1,400 attendees. One of them was my friend John Hertz, who took time out from his day job as an attorney in Los Angeles to come to Detroit. It is for him that I am reprinting this next essay, which I wrote after attending a luncheon forum in Washington, D.C. back in 2003.



# First thing we do, let's ~~kill~~ regulate all the lawyers...

I was able to attend a Cato Institute luncheon forum for the first time in more than three months this past Friday. The topic was “Where Were the Lawyers in Enron?” and the three panelists were all lawyers, two of them law school professors. The actual topic covered, though, turned out to have relatively little specifically to do with Enron and its spectacular meltdown. Instead, the forum was more of a “How can we avoid a situation where law firms working for corporate clients can get sued in such situations?”



speaker attempted to provide some background as to what the U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission rules had to say about the duty of a lawyer or law firm in situations where they may be aware (as is strongly suspected in the Enron situation) of ongoing illegal activities of their client. Unfortunately, his narrative quickly became filled with legalese references to various obscure sections, amendments and other underpinnings of corporate finance law, and my eyes glazed over after about five minutes of the stuff. Luckily for all of us in the audience, the other two speakers were a bit easier to understand. What they told us is that there's a conflict inherent to the situation, of ethics vs. confidentiality.

A lawyer hired by a corporation must act to protect that corporation's interests, from an ethical viewpoint, when he is aware of misdeeds by any of its managers. But how to act? The lawyer is also bound by confidentiality that prevents him or her, in most cases, from becoming a whistleblower to outside regulators. The proper course, we were informed, was for the lawyer first to confront the wrongdoers in an attempt to get them to stop, and if that doesn't work, go up the ladder all the way to the Board of Directors. And if *that* doesn't work, then the lawyer is supposed to withdraw. But it's a subjective decision on just what exactly constitutes an illegal activity.



ENRON's Kenneth Lay and Jeffrey Skilling



Corporations are often under pressure to come up with innovative financial strategies for increasing profits, and there are gray areas in where the boundary lies between 'innovative financial strategies' and 'illegal conduct'.

Anyway, all of this made it fairly easy for me to come up with both a comment and question for the forum panelists. So when I got called on in the Q&A session that followed, I said:

*"I understand from the discussion today that the 'top of the ladder' for any action to protect a corporation's interest is the Board*

*of Directors. However, the Board does not own the corporation, the stockholders do. And it's the stockholders who do the suffering when a corporate meltdown occurs. The title of this get-together is 'Where Were the Lawyers at Enron?' but the content of the event shows that we're actually attending 'How Lawyers Cover Their Behinds Whenever Corporate Monkey Business Occurs'. So to get back on topic, let's indulge in a bit of role-playing: if you were an Enron lawyer, and knowing what you know now, what would you have done that was not done to prevent this corporate implosion?"*

The answer I got back was: "We are in no position to judge the lawyers who were advising Enron." So much for truth in advertising for these events, but I guess it's expected. After all, if the SEC and FBI haven't been able to find out everything that was going on behind the scenes, it's hardly likely a bunch of law professors would know. The one thing they *did* say was that there will be new SEC rules from all this that covers the conduct of corporate lawyers. They should feel grateful that Shakespeare won't be the author. ☀



### Afterword:

The trip to Detroit for the NASFiC was not an arduous journey – it was a shade over 500 miles by car, and Nicki and I do driving trips that far, or even farther, several times every year. But we do these long-distance drives only because we know we have a very reliable car. As you will read next, that was definitely *not* the case back at the beginning of 1980 when we were living in Tennessee.



# Half the Fun is Getting There

UpperSouthClave 10 in Bowling Green, Kentucky, was a convention I had been really looked forward to attending. Besides the usual partying, it was to be the debut of Joint Venture Enterprises, a small business Nicki and I had set up to agent artwork and, not incidentally, provide a small tax shelter, as convention expenses would become business expenses. So about 3 PM on Friday, March 14, 1980, we set out for Bowling Green, with auto filled with paintings, party supplies, and various personal belongings.

By 6 PM, we had gotten about 20 miles north of Nashville on Interstate 65 and I was driving, when on a steep downgrade the car gave a \*lurch\* and the engine stopped. We glided to a halt just in front of a sign advertising some gas station at the next exit, three miles ahead. The car would not start; the problem appeared to be something to do with the timing, so I took off the distributor cap and looked. Nothing looked to be wrong (the rotor was still there). I realized at that point that my level of expertise had been exceeded, so there was nothing left but to go for help.



our car in 1980 was a 1974 Ford Pinto

I didn't feel like hiking the three miles to the next exit, or retreating two miles back up the hill to the previous exit where I wasn't even sure there was a service station. We were on the side of a tall ridge, and down, off to the right, there were houses in some sort of settlement along a highway which paralleled the Interstate. It appeared that the shortest route to help was down the hill toward that village, so off I went. There was only one thing that could cause a problem, and I saw it when I reached the bottom of the hill.

There was a creek between me and the houses.

There was nothing to do except go through it, so I picked a shallow and narrow-looking spot and tiptoed through the water. Of course it didn't work; my feet got soaked and it was the only pair of shoes I'd brought for the weekend. After scrambling up the opposite bank, I walked briskly through the back yard of a run-down-looking house, past two junk autos silently rusting. I didn't want to risk getting shot at, so I passed by the house and instead went directly to the main road and headed toward the likeliest looking place to find or call a tow truck. This was "up the road a ways", according to the manager of a convenience store I stopped at, but was actually only about half a mile. I tried to go at a brisk jog, but soon discovered just how out-of-shape I really was. The place-of-hope turned out to be a little side-of-the-road used car place. The sign on the wall read: "All cars for sale as is. NO REFUNDS!" When I asked to use the restroom, I found they didn't have one, but it was OK to "go around the back and aim at the back wall". (I did).

A long 45 minutes later, the called-for tow truck arrived, and the driver and I were off down the highway to the nearest Interstate on-ramp. Nicki was still in the car all this time, and I had

visions of some other wrecker happening along, hauling the car, and leaving me. But it turned out that no one had stopped the entire time, even with the car hood up and a red bandanna tied to the driver's door handle.

The driver thrilled us with a U-turn complete with car-in-tow on a busy Interstate, and eventually we arrived at White House, Tennessee, and its main attraction, the Union-76 truck stop. It took the mechanic there about 30 seconds to diagnose the problem as a broken timing belt, so I followed him into his office to determine costs and repair time.

I entered just in time to see three one-hundred dollar bills change hands, between two seedy-looking characters who were in there at the time. Now, I'm not saying that anything illegal was going on, but who carries around one-hundred dollar bills to pay for repair work? The money quickly disappeared, and nothing was said. Then, the word came that the car couldn't be fixed until morning, and would cost about \$150 including the tow. Ouch! Nicki was about ready to call the whole thing off, if it were still possible. I didn't blame her; this trip was becoming nightmarish to me as well. Luckily, we were only about an hour's drive from Bowling Green, so I did the only thing I could think of – I called the hotel.

Unfortunately, the only phone was in the office where four greasy, dirty mechanics were loitering. Have you ever tried to explain over the phone to a hotel that your reservation was booked with a science fiction convention, with a bunch of hulking non-fans looking on? And have the hotel operator ask you to please speak much louder? In the end, I asked to speak with one of the con committee I knew. It worked out okay because a friend of ours, Andy Purcell, was also attending, and he called back almost immediately with the word he was leaving at once to come and get us. So we went into the dining room of the truck stop for dinner.

It must have been social night that night, because whole families complete with little kids were also in there; it was damn near standing room only. And they were all locals, from the look of things.

About an hour later Andy showed up with his camper truck (he is a book seller at conventions, so the truck is made good-use-of, hauling his inventory). However, it was a small truck, so there were only two seats. I figured, what the hell. If I was going to be wet, I might as well be sore and wet, so I rode in the middle, between the seats, on the last 40 miles to Bowling Green.

Word had spread quickly of our fate, because when we got to the convention at least two of the convention committee asked how things went. I think I recounted the whole sordid affair three or four times that night.

All in all, it was a night that I'll not forget for a long, long time. ☀

---

### Afterword:

It actually was a pleasant and fun weekend, made even more so when we reclaimed the repaired car the next day. UpperSouthClave 10 was the first of the series of annual ConCave conventions which are still being held. The first few ConCaves were organized by the Western Kentucky University science fiction club, and the legacy of that organization is that it brought several prominent people into science fiction fandom, including convention organizer Gary Robe and the 2001 Down Under Fan Fund representatives, Pat Molloy and Naomi Fisher.

One more essay before I close out this issue, a description of a much more recent trip.



# When In Rome...

## Prolog: In Search of the Perfect Photograph

One of my former upper-level managers is a very skilled photographer. While he was at the government agency where I work, once in a while he would critique some of my photos. That he often had favorable comments was flattering, but he also gave me good advice on how to make them even better.

I tried to take that advice to heart on my recent business trip to Rome. There is certainly no lack of places for photo ops there, but the challenge was to capture them in interesting ways. I had thought I saw one such opportunity the evening after the end of the multinational meeting on carbon sequestration. The meeting hosts had taken us to Rome's premier archeological museum prior to dinner. Afterward, while we all were walking past the *Altare della Patria* monument I saw that the Italian flag, when it billowed in the wind, nicely framed a statue of the winged charioteer on the roof of the structure.

But before I could get my camera ready, the wind died down and the flag stopped billowing. So for the next few minutes I took several photos, including the one shown here, while I waited in vain for the next gust. When I finally turned back to rejoin the others... they were gone! Including, to my dismay, the person who had the name of the restaurant. And the directions on how to get there.



my failed attempt for a 'perfect' photograph of the Altare della Patria monument

## The Eternal City

Rome is *filled* with signature images that attract visitors from all around the world. And you don't have to go very far out of your way to find them. The restaurant, after I finally found it, turned out to be located adjacent to a field of ancient ruins that date back more than two millennia. And this was for what is considered a *lesser* archeological site.

It was a very busy meeting, and I had just one free afternoon to see some of Rome's more famous places. One of them, the Spanish Steps, was just a few



the view at dusk from the restaurant's terrace

minutes walk from my hotel. This grand stone staircase is relatively recent to Rome, only dating back to the early 1700s. It connects one of Rome's many *piazze* (plazas) with the *Trinità dei Monti* church, and gained renown from its cameo appearance in the 1953 film *Roman Holiday*. The day I was there it seemed like it actually *was* a Roman holiday, at least for the hundreds of tourists hanging out there. As I wanted to – it's a pleasant place to be on a warm spring afternoon.



the Spanish Steps

But there were many other places to see. One of them was the Trevi Fountain, which also dates back to the 1700s but was built on the terminus of one of the eleven aqueducts



the Trevi Fountain

that supplied water to ancient Rome. It was made famous by another 1950s Hollywood movie, *Three Coins in the Fountain*, which originated the legend of tossing a coin into the Trevi to ensure another trip to Rome. But it's almost impossible to get close enough to the fountain to do that with the multitudes of people who are there. The Trevi gets about 3½ million visitors every year, ranking it as the third most visited tourist attraction in Rome. Only the Colosseum and the Pantheon are more popular.

I did go to the Pantheon in my afternoon trek across Rome, and it's much

more interesting from the inside. It dates back to the time of Emperor Hadrian and was the largest domed building in the world until the mid 15<sup>th</sup> century. To this day it still has the largest unreinforced concrete dome in the world. But you can't really see the dome from the outside – there is a large entrance portico which hides the dome when viewed from the *piazza* in front of the building, and the streets are too narrow to see the building from any other angle.



Piazza Navona and the Sant'Agnes church

Of all the plazas in Rome, my favorite is the very picturesque *Piazza Navona*, a large rectangular open space fronted on the west by the Sant'Agnes Church. In the center is the "Four Rivers" fountain and obelisk that was used by novelist Dan



Brown as a plot point in his overblown *Angels and Demons* thriller, but two millennia earlier this plaza was the site of a stadium that played host to gladiator competitions. *Piazza Navona* is one of the largest plazas in Rome, so big that many different things are going on there, day and night, and you don't have the claustrophobic congestion of the Trevi to contend with.

I ended my trek across Rome by passing through a place that isn't actually part of Rome at all – Vatican City. But to get there I walked past another of the places that had a cameo in *Angels and Demons* – the imposing *Castel Sant'Angelo*. It dates back to the 2<sup>nd</sup> century and was originally the mausoleum of Emperor Hadrian, but was converted into a military fortress in the 5<sup>th</sup> century. Throughout the ages it has been also been a Papal refuge at times when Rome was under siege, a prison, and, most gloriously, the setting for Act III of Puccini's *Tosca*. Nowadays it's Rome's largest and most important history museum, and to see it properly takes several hours that I did not have that afternoon. I had to settle for just admiring it from a distance and found that the best view is from the middle of Hadrian's Bridge, which also dates back to the 2<sup>nd</sup> century. From the crowds present, it was obvious that I wasn't the only one to think so.



Castel Sant'Angelo from Hadrian's Bridge

### The Place Where Daisies Won't Grow

This was a four-day meeting, and for three of those days we were cooped up in hotel meeting rooms. But on the final day there was a field trip. About two hours drive north of Rome is a hilly area in southern Tuscany that is also the location of several long-dormant volcanic calderas. In one of these there is a naturally-occurring release of carbon dioxide in several places along fault lines, and researchers from the Sapienza University of Rome are using this as a laboratory setting, of sorts, to test ways of measuring and monitoring the leakage. One of the locations where CO<sub>2</sub> was coming up out of the ground was a streambed, where you could actually see the gas bubbling up in several places through the swirling water.

It was obvious from the odor that more was coming out of the ground than just carbon dioxide. We were told that the CO<sub>2</sub> contained small amounts of other gases, including hydrogen sulfide, and these contaminants result in small localized zones around the vents where only the hardiest of plant species can grow. It was easy to tell where one of these was located from all the wild daisies. They were in bloom everywhere except in a twenty foot circle surrounding the vent.

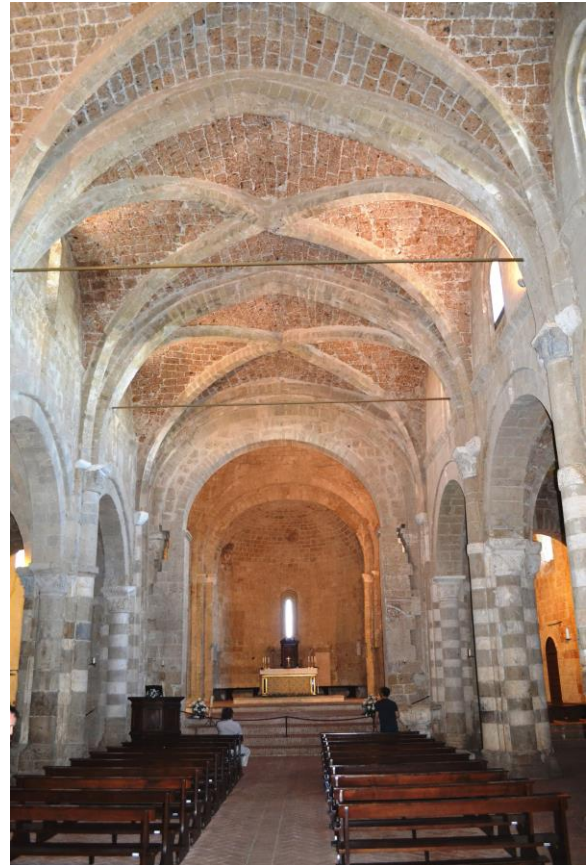


CO<sub>2</sub> bubbling up through a small stream

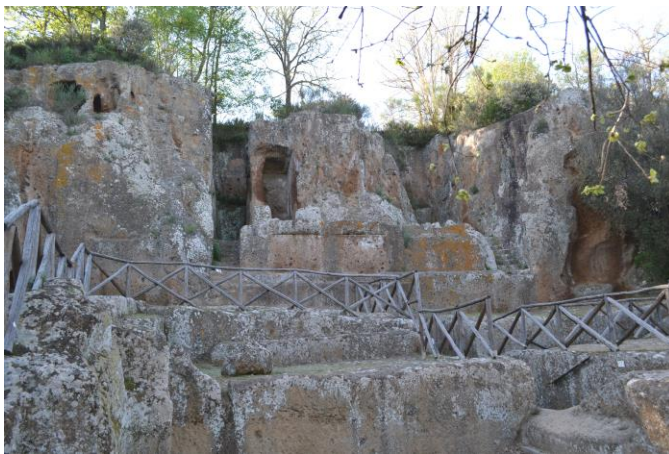
## Those Darn Etruscans

The technology part of the field trip lasted only half a day, so for the rest of the day we were provided a bit of local culture. Not far from the caldera is the ancient hill town of Sovana, which dates back to the Etruscan era in the 3<sup>rd</sup> century B.C. It became incorporated into the Roman Empire as a municipality and after the fall of Rome, an administrative center for the Lombards. During the middle ages it came under the control of a succession of powerful families, including the Medicis, and was even the birthplace of Pope Gregory VII.

There are many very old buildings in Sovana but the one I found most interesting was the Cathedral of Saints Peter and Paul, which dates back to the 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> centuries. It was built in the Romanesque style but has been heavily modified over the ages, the most significant being the conversion of the roof and ceiling from wood to brick and tile. This added weight almost caused the building to collapse and it was saved only by heroic measures, including reconstructing interior arches and the addition of buttresses along outer exterior walls to prevent the building from splitting in two.



interior of the Cathedral of Saints Peter and Paul



the "Ildebranda Tomb" of the Etruscans

But the cultural site of most significance at Sovana was the Etruscan Tombs, which date back more than 2,300 years. There are several of them in the area, the largest being the so-called "Ildebranda Tomb", named for the man who became Pope Gregory. It was cut from the pyroclastic tuff bedrock and originally included twelve columns, a few of which still remain. There is a lower level burial chamber and an upper level monument to the departed.

I could only marvel at what it must have looked like back then. Archeologists have determined that the monument was originally covered with colorful and decorative Etruscan art and stuccos, and was constructed to resemble a Greek temple. Its location, near one of the major north-south Etruscan roads of that era, must have made it a landmark for travelers. And it still is.



## Pizza in the Piazza

Apart from the afternoon of my trek across Rome, the only real free time I had available was for dinner expeditions. The most entertaining one was the evening that I, along with my friends and compatriots George, Mark, and Stefan (who is technically only an honorary compatriot, since he's from Canada), decided to grab a light meal and then see what Rome was like after dark.

We already knew we wanted pizza and beer, and there was no lack of places where we could get it. We settled on a trattoria in a nameless little plaza nearby to *Piazza Navona*, and it was not long before we were educated on the social structure of running a small restaurant in Rome. We were welcomed by the restaurant's host, who may have also been the owner, and were shown to our table out at the edge of the *piazza*. At that point we were handed off to the head waiter (and he may have been the *only* waiter, the place was that small) who took our orders.



with my friends George, Mark, and Stefan  
at the pizza restaurant

While that was going on, the restaurant host departed the scene – he hopped on the back of one of the two-wheeled Vespas that are so common in Rome and was outta there. And after that happened, the demeanor of the head waiter subtly changed – *he* was now in charge, and he became a bit more aloof. The pizza and the beer were very good, and when the bill finally appeared we saw that a gratuity charge had already been included. So we left exactly the right amount. Or so we thought.

As we were leaving the restaurant, the head waiter came *charging* over to us with the bill, and told us, very firmly, that we needed to leave another gratuity... *for him!* The gratuity shown on the bill, he explained, was only for the restaurant and *he also* wanted a tip. It was easier to just leave another five Euros than to get into an extended discussion about it, so that's what I did. But it was laughable – the way the restaurant was run, there was an underling who assembled the orders for diners and brought the food and beer out to where the head waiter was standing. From there the waiter brought it the final twenty feet to our table.

While we walked toward the *Piazza Navona*, Mark asked, “How much of that tip do you think will go to the guy who actually did the work?” It was a question that didn't seem to need an answer.

## Frescoes with a Side of Gelato

After that, you might think that the rest of the evening would have been perhaps a bit less memorable. But that's not how it turned out.

When we arrived at the *Piazza Navona*, we saw that it was, if anything, even more impressive after dark, mostly because of the Sant'Agnes Church. There was an evening mass in progress, which allowed us to see the stunning interior of the place. And it certainly is that. There are ornate frescoes and paintings that cover the walls, ceiling, and dome. Decorative features abound, everywhere you look. And the acoustics inside are wonderful. If this church were located almost anywhere else in the world it would be the superstar attraction of that city. But in Rome, it suffers the odd fate of being overshadowed by an even grander cathedral only about a mile away in Vatican City.

It was not, however, the visit to Sant'Agnes that made this a night to remember – it was the misadventure that happened afterward.

It's my belief that when the ancients referred to "the food of the gods" they had gelato in mind. It's what ice cream would be if it were denser, richer, and more intensely flavored. The best gelato in the universe is in the city of Florence and is to die for. The gelato in Rome, by comparison, is a step down from that (it's only "to be beaten up for") but it's still very much worth going out of your way to get it. We all wanted some before we traipsed on back to the hotel, and it turned out there were two gelato shops, located right next to each other, at the north end of the *piazza*. George and Mark went into the one with the long line because they figured that any shop with a wait that long to get served *must* have good stuff inside. Stefan and I, on the other hand, went into the one with no line at all because it had melon gelato that Stefan had been craving, and the other shop didn't.

But I didn't really know what I wanted, so while Stefan was being served I window shopped all the available flavors. And at the very end of the case there was a container of garish blue-colored gelato labeled: VIAGRA.

The shopkeeper noticed me laughing and offered me a taste. It didn't really contain any Viagra, of course, and it also wasn't very good – it tasted cloyingly sweet like the frosting of a store-bought birthday cake. But Stefan had noticed what I was doing on his way out of the store.

At this point I should mention that my friend Stefan can be an instigator. I eventually decided on a dark mixed-berry gelato, which was excellent, but by then Stefan had rejoined George and Mark, still in line at the other shop, and informed them that: "Guess what – Richard just ate some Viagra gelato!"



inside the Sant'Agnes Church



They were amused and nothing more might have come of it. But as I was walking over to where the others were waiting, a young American woman who had been talking to her Italian friend looked over at what I was eating and said, “Oooh, that looks *good*! What flavor is it?”

Me: “Mixed-berry. And it *is* good!”

Her: “What *kind* of berries?”

Me: “*I* don’t know... try some!” And she did. (I had been given an extra spoon by the shopkeeper.)

The other three were observing this exchange, and I could see from the way their eyes widened that I *might* have made a mistake. And I was right. All the way back to the hotel there were oblique references to Viagra causing me to hit on young women. *Very* funny. And the *next* day...

And the next day, during one of the breaks in the meeting, several of the delegates took me aside and asked, “What’s this about Viagra gelato???”

I don’t know for sure how they heard about this little misadventure, but across the room I could see Stefan smiling. I’ll have to find a way to get even, of course.

### **Epilog: Still in Search of the Perfect Photograph**

One place I *didn’t* visit on my afternoon trek across Rome was the Colosseum. But I did get a photo of it on the cab ride out to the airport with George and Mark. It’s by no means a perfect photograph – the place is so big that there was no way to get it all in the frame, even at the widest field available with my zoom lens.



the Colosseum as seen from the taxi

And not long after that, the taxi was involved in a traffic accident. I guess we should have been a bit apprehensive when the cabbie informed us, as we set off from the hotel, that he thought the cab was jinxed – it had been stolen and was recovered only a few days earlier. The accident could have been a lot worse. The cab hit a car that had turned across an intersection in front of us and spun it around. But nobody was hurt and the accident only damaged some sheet metal. Until that happened, the cabbie had been bright and cheerful, telling us all about Rome and its wonders. After that he was morose, and I hope the 20 Euro tip I gave him when we arrived at the airport helped revive his spirits.

As for me, my spirits were in fine form after the trip. Rome is a spectacular city, and I did my best to ‘capture’ it with many, many photographs, some of which I think are pretty good. But that ‘perfect’ photo is still out there, somewhere.

I am very much hoping for another opportunity to come back and try again. ☀



