



My Back Pages #20

Rich Lynch



My Back Pages #20

articles and essays by Rich Lynch

It was forty years ago that my wife Nicki and I went to our first Worldcon. It was the Phoenix Iguanacon of 1978, and what I most remember about it, other than the oppressive Arizona desert heat, was the non-stop nature of the event. Wherever you were (and whenever) there was interesting stuff going on, not the least being the convention's Guest of Honor ensconced in a clear plastic tent in a hotel lobby while writing a new short story.

Thirty years ago was another memorable Worldcon, this time in New Orleans. NolaCon II was actually our first visit to The Big Easy, and it was the start of a momentous few weeks which ended with us moving north to Maryland to start new careers with the Federal Government.

Twenty years ago was the 1998 Worldcon, Constellation, just up the road in Baltimore, which has been the closest-to-home Worldcon we've ever attended. And a decade ago was Denvention 3, which was held in Denver less than a month prior to a much larger event – the 2008 Democratic National Convention which nominated Barack Obama for President.

In looking forward to this year's Worldcon I've included three Worldcon-related essays in this issue of *My Back Pages*, one of them a lengthy description of our trip to Missouri for the 2016 Worldcon in Kansas City. But first, an essay about more oppressive desert heat. And also about some pretty impressive close-up magic – hey, you'd have to be a stooge not to enjoy that!

Rich Lynch

Gaithersburg, Maryland

June 2018

CONTENTS OF THIS ISSUE

It's a Dry Heat!	3
previously published in <i>Variations on a Theme</i> 117 (May 2017)	
If it's not broke... but what if it is?	10
previously published in <i>In Search of Enlightenment</i> (October 5, 2006)	
Keep Watching the Skies!	12
previously published in <i>Variations on a Theme</i> 121 (January 2018)	
Across the Sun	13
previously published in <i>Variations on a Theme</i> 119 (August 2017)	
The Day I Almost Met Roy Rogers	14
previously published in <i>Variations on a Theme</i> 122 (March 2018)	
The Road to L.A. Con (co-written with Nicki Lynch)	15
previously published in <i>Mimosa</i> 19 (November 1996)	
Missouri Meanderings	18
previously published in <i>Variations on a Theme</i> 113 (September 2016)	

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

It's a *Dry* Heat!

Prolog: I am not a stooge!

It's been a busy spring. The three month roll-up to a big carbon sequestration conference in Abu Dhabi turned out, in the end, to be similar to many of the previous ones over the past several years – there were a few weeks when not all that much was happening but most of the time it was an unending series of time-sensitive deadlines. I am, in effect, the project manager for the planning and organizing of these multinational events and there is no lack of details, both big and small, that I need to sweat. It was just one day before my trip, when I was sure that everything was under control, that I finally felt comfortable enough to relax a bit. So my wife Nicki and I went to the theatre to see a show.

It was *The Magic Play*, the story of a stage magician played by actor/magician Brett Schneider whose life has become upended by several personal crises, the plotlines of which are intermixed with some rather amazing close-up magic tricks. For this performance Nicki and I had front row seats which brought us very close to all the sleight-of-hand. For me, as it turned out, extremely so.



Several of the magic tricks involved audience participation and there was a disclaimer just prior to the beginning of the play that: “No actors or stooges are used as volunteers in the show.” For the very last trick of the show, Schneider came down into the audience, looked at me and said, “Come join me up on stage.”

The Country of Pearl Divers, the Island of Fast Cars

This was my first visit to the United Arab Emirates, a place whose history dates back thousands of years. Actually, make that *tens* of thousands of years. Some stone-age tools discovered at an archeological dig are evidence that the area was first inhabited an astonishing 130,000 years ago. For most of its history, what is now the UAE was occupied by a succession of nomadic tribes which formed civilizations centered around fishing and developing trade routes. During the 19th and early 20th centuries, pearl harvesting dominated the local economies of the Persian Gulf settlements. But that all changed during the first half of the 20th century when geological exploration revealed that the Arabian Peninsula contained huge reserves of petroleum. Because of this, the UAE has since been transformed into a thriving federation with a per-capita GDP about equivalent to that of the United States.

Abu Dhabi, I found out, is one of seven emirates which make up the country. It and Dubai are by far the most prominent, with Dubai being the business and financial hub and Abu Dhabi the industrial and political center. And even though the international carbon sequestration meeting was in Abu Dhabi, I actually got to see more of Dubai – the meeting was held out on Yas Island, about 20 miles from downtown Abu Dhabi, and ground transportation there from the Dubai airport passed by a succession of modern Dubai skyscrapers including the Burj Kalifa – the tallest building in the world.

I'm sure that Abu Dhabi must also have some very impressive tall buildings but the closest I came to any of them was a hazy view of the city skyline. Instead, the biggest building on Yas Island was Abu Dhabi's largest shopping mall.

The place is huge! So big that there are *three* different Starbucks in there. I almost immediately got lost and it took so long to find my way back to the main entrance that I recommended to other meeting attendees that they bring a pile of breadcrumbs with them if they went there. It all seemed very upscale to me, as filled with trendy stores as it was, but it still turned out to be a good place to eat with many different cuisines and more affordable prices than what the hotel was offering. And there was even a theme park attached to it – Ferrari World!



Yas Mall entrance to Ferrari World

Ferrari World, from what I can tell, is what Disneyland would be if Walt Disney had been a racecar driver instead of a media entrepreneur. It's partly housed in the world's largest space frame structure and features everything from a children's racing school to interactive motion simulator thrill rides. There are five different roller coasters, one of which is the world's fastest (at about 150 mph) and another of which features the world's tallest non-inverting loop. And there are even some live shows, including one that features "dancing, BMX biking, mega wheels and acrobatics". But I had neither the time nor the desire to experience any of it so I didn't go any further than the main entrance. I can get all the motor racing that I need from watching NASCAR on television and rollercoasters hold no charm for me. And besides, it was really *hot* outside.

Conveniences of the Modern World

There are many conveniences of the modern world which I dearly appreciate, but none more so than air conditioning. During the evening, outdoor temperatures on Yas Island hovered in the 80s but during the middle of the day it was hot, hot, hot – more than 100 °F. And this was in April! I did ask what it would be like in July and August and found out it *only* gets up to a bit more than 110. But it's a *dry* heat...

What I'm hoping will someday be a convenience of the modern world is carbon sequestration, otherwise known as carbon capture and storage (or 'CCS'). It involves capture of carbon dioxide from power plants and industrial facilities, and storage of the CO₂ deep underground in geologic formations where it cannot escape. Work on this technology has been going on for many years, and we're now to the stage where first-of-a-kind commercial demonstrations are happening. The so-called Paris Agreement on greenhouse gas emissions, negotiated in



2016 under the auspices of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change and signed by 195 different national governments, has set a goal of “holding the increase in the global average temperature to well below 2 °C above pre-industrial levels and to pursue efforts to limit the temperature increase to 1.5 °C above pre-industrial levels”. You can’t get there without large-scale deployment of CCS technologies.

Besides all the planning that went into the conference, I also had some direct involvement once it got underway. I am Secretariat of both the organization’s Technical Group (chaired by a Norwegian) and a technical task force (chaired by an Australian). I gave a presentation to each of those groups on the first two days of the conference, and after that I had the relative luxury of watching from the edges of other meetings to make sure everything went well.



during the meeting of the Technical Group

The one event of the conference that was not held in air conditioning was the site visit to the UAE’s large-scale Al Reyadah project, which captures and stores 800,000 tonnes of CO₂ per year – equivalent to the amount of CO₂ emitted by 170,000 cars. For that we were provided transportation to get there but when we assembled for the obligatory group photo the heat of the day caused many of us to quickly wilt.

I had not even thought to bring a hat with me, and the longer we were out there the more concerned I became about sunburn.

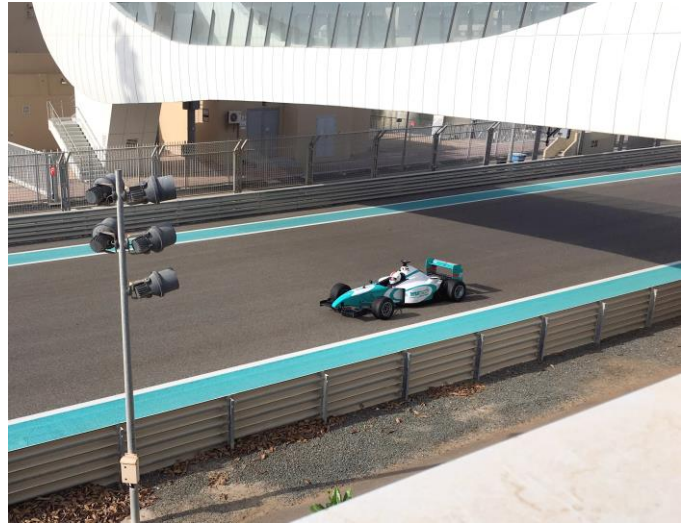


the group photo at the Al Reyadah project

There *was* plenty of water available, though, and on a whim I poured a half bottle of it over my head. It was really refreshing and not only quickly cooled me off, it also soaked my shirt. But less than five minutes later, it was as dry as a bone.

Around the Circuit

The hotel ballroom where the various meetings were held had a thick layer of sound insulation along its walls. And there was a very good reason for that. Yas Island is the site of the annual Abu Dhabi Grand Prix, one of the twenty Formula One auto races that are annually staged at various locales around the world. And the Yas Marina Circuit, a 5.5 kilometer meandering racetrack that cost more than \$1.3 billion to build, passes close by the conference venue hotel. Every day from morning through late afternoon there was the roar of automobile engines as racecars sped by.



the view from the terrace just beyond the hotel ballroom

I had initially assumed that even though there were no scheduled races the week of the conference, there probably were practice sessions that happened so frequently that the track was in more-or-less continuous use. But that is apparently not the case. Turns out that the Ferrari World theme park, besides all of its other features, also has a ‘Yas Driving Experience’ which puts Mario Andretti wanna-bes into high performance automobiles for actual driving sessions on the track. One of the conference attendees, a high-ranking manager from a Middle East corporation, did exactly that, saddling up behind the wheel of a Ferrari 458 GT which can top out at nearly 200 miles per hour on long straightaways. He told me he didn’t go *quite* that fast but it was still enough to take his breath away. As well as some of the padding in his wallet. The cost for the session? A mere \$1,000.

It turned out that I was also able to take a few laps around the Yas Marina Circuit, but for much less money and a whole lot slower. The auto racing ends in late afternoon and after that the track is opened to joggers and bicyclists. And so one evening, after the conference events for the day had wound down, I and three of my Norwegian comrades rented racing bikes and gave it a whirl.



Let the cycling adventure begin!

When I was a teenager back in the 1960s, I owned a bicycle which I rode for hundreds and hundreds of miles during those formative years. But that was then. It had been a very long time – fully a third of a century – since I’d last been on one. And that had been a one-speed easy-to-ride bike with standard ‘flat’ handlebars and a wide well-

padded seat. For this adventure, what I was faced with was a lightweight multi-gear speedster with a very narrow seat that was hard on the butt. It took a bit of time to get used to it, and even longer to knock the rust off 30+ years of non-cycling. I was fortunate that I had an able mentor in my friend Bjørn-Erik, who showed me how to shift up and down through all the gears and refreshed my memory on the rules of the road for cyclists. I'm glad he did – there were many, many riders on the track that evening, some with very expensive bicycles, and a few of them came uncomfortably close as they whizzed by me.



the view from the racing circuit

In all, we did three circuits, a total of slightly more than ten miles in the saddle. I had plenty of drinking water with me, to be sure, but the mid-80s temperature at the track gradually wore me down and by about the middle of the final time around it had gotten to the point where it seemed like just about everybody was passing me. The only person I remember riding past was a little kid with training wheels on his bike, and even that took a bit of effort.

Would I do it again? Sure! In a heartbeat, actually. It was a real adrenaline high to cycle around that track. And it was also a good way to decompress after two days of not setting foot outside the hotel grounds. Best of all, I met my goal for the evening – not to kill anybody, nor have anyone kill me. And for that I am grateful.

The Mosque that Unites the World

I'm also grateful that there was some free time during the conference. The Al Reyadah Project site visit got us back to the hotel by the early afternoon, which left enough time for a visit to a mosque. And not just *any* mosque – this one was one of the most magnificent buildings I've ever seen. The Sheikh Zayed Grand Mosque is *the* iconic image of Abu Dhabi. It is by far the largest mosque in the UAE and



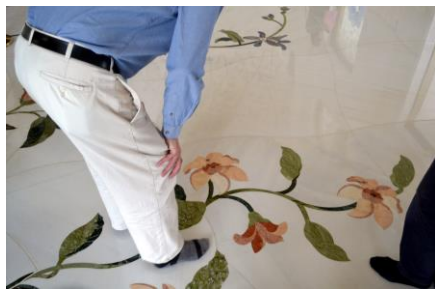
the Sheikh Zayed Grand Mosque

one of the biggest in the world, with the capacity of accommodating more than 40,000 worshippers. It was commissioned by the Sheik Zayed bin Sultan Al Nahyan, the UAE's first President, who had wanted it to be an example of how art and modern architecture can be gracefully merged. The design incorporated materials from many countries, with the idea of "uniting the world" by its diversity.

As spectacular as I found the exterior to be, what I saw inside the building was even more stunning. The interior courtyard has been described as "the largest example of marble [inlay] in the world". So much so that the most encompassing



the interior courtyard of the mosque



floral inlay inside the mosque

view of it is actually in Google Earth. Artistic inlay was visible practically everywhere you looked – floors, walls, and columns. And subtleties abounded – floral designs were so exquisitely inset into the marble floor slabs that the seams were nearly indiscernible, but when I looked closer I saw that the floor slabs themselves were all different in size and shape.

I came away feeling uplifted by my all-too-brief visit to the mosque. I had a sense of serenity in just being there.

Whether or not the building fulfills the vision of uniting the world through diversity, all that amazing workmanship on display certainly gave me a greater appreciation of the host country for this important conference. It helped make the long trip home much easier.

Epilog: Conjuring Up Some Humility

So there I was up on the stage, being mesmerized by some rather incredible close-up magic. At the end of the play, Schneider had invited everyone in the audience to text a message on their mobile phones, suggesting magic tricks they would like to see whether or not actually do-able. It happened that most of them weren't – there were several that wanted otherworldly help to assist the Washington Capitals in winning the Stanley Cup and many more along the lines of 'Make Trump Disappear'. Mine had been a bit more hopeful: "I would like to see you conjure up some humility in government."

He asked me to select a playing card from a new deck (which I was allowed to examine) and to write my message onto it. I inserted my card in the middle of the deck, but he turned over the top card and there it was! He then set that deck aside and did several other card switch tricks, framing them around a narrative of seeking and discovering 'greater humility' out there in the world. I was watching closely all the while and came away with no



my suggestion for a feat of magic

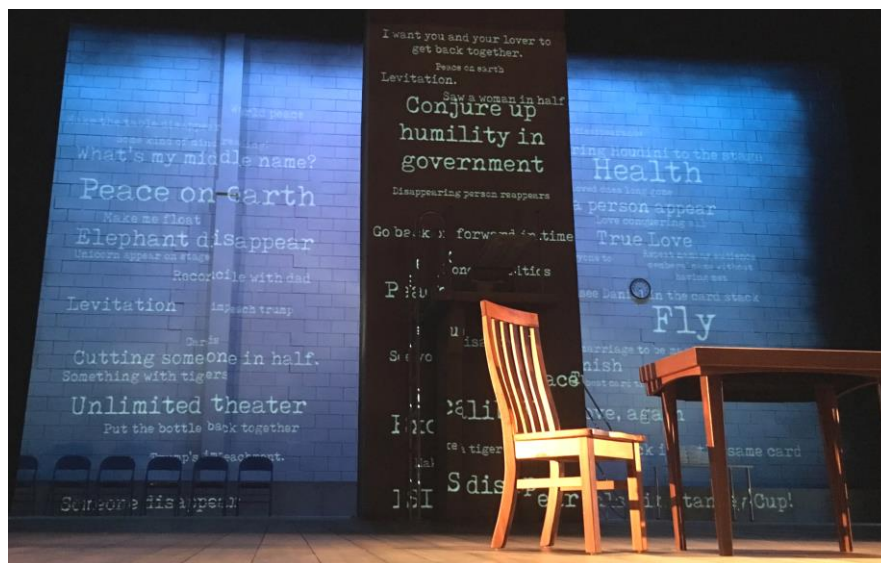
idea on how it all was done. It may be that conjuring up humility in government is too much of a challenge, even for a skilled magician, but having a near encounter with all that close-up magic sure instilled a sense of humility in me!

The best trick of all was the one that closed the show. Schneider turned face up and spread out the deck of cards that had been set aside, the one that included my marked card, and *every card in the deck* had been inscribed with the various magic trick suggestions of others in the audience. Simply amazing.

And so here we are, nearly midway through 2017, with one big meeting receding into the past and two more looming before the end of the year. And next year, three more including one all the way down in Australia. Even though I'll be nearly 69 years old when that happens, I'm going to, once again and with a sense of humility, postpone my retirement until at least then. It's even possible I'll keep working up to age 70, when my Social Security pension calculation maxes out. The work is very interesting and the body remains willing, but there's still a cost – there are things I would like to accomplish outside of work that I'm just not going to have time for unless I do retire.

This was all going through my mind as *The Magic Show* was nearing its conclusion. Before I texted my message, I had first thought of asking for more free time so that I actually *could* have it all. But then I thought, nah – for something like that to happen would be way too implausible.

It would be almost like magic. ☀



Afterword:

More than a year later, nobody has yet been magically able to 'Make Trump Disappear' but the Washington Capitals finally *did* win the Stanley Cup! And as I'd expected, there is yet to be any humility in government, at least as it relates to The Donald and his minions.

A dozen years ago it wasn't so bad. We were persevering through the final years of the George W. Bush presidency where the politicians and their partisan supporters were at least civil in tone. Back then I was sometimes able to attend luncheon seminars sponsored by conservative think tanks where I could channel my inner curmudgeon by asking pointed questions to the event speakers. Like what happened back in October 2006...

If it's not broke... but what if it is?

It's been a long time since I've been to a luncheon event at the Cato Institute. Gosh, three years! Back when I worked in D.C., it was an easy walk to get there. But now that I'm stationed in the Maryland suburbs the only occasions that I can go to luncheon events are when I'm down in D.C. for some other reason. Today was one of those times.

The Cato Institute is one of the many Washington think tanks and two or three times a week they have luncheon events, usually featuring some political pundit who has a book or some Big Idea to flog. This time it was one of the directors of the Institute, John Samples, and his book was titled *The Fallacy of Campaign Finance Reform*.

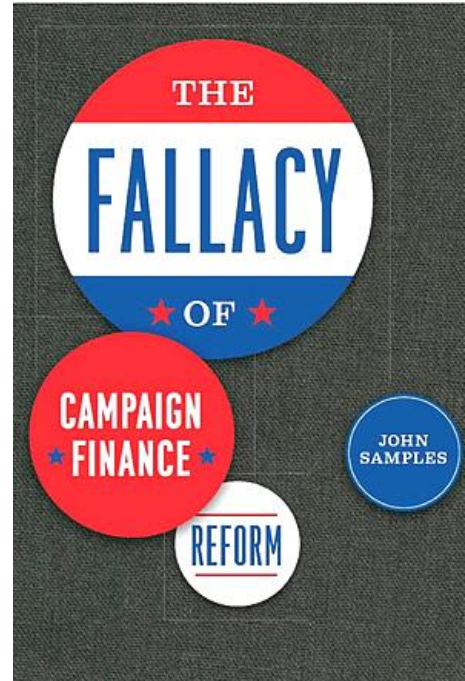
I should mention that the Cato Institute's politics are Libertarian, though not militantly so. Nevertheless, many of the positions they espouse are a bit out there (in my opinion), and this book forum looked to me to be a case in point. Samples spent most of his time damning Rooseveltian progressivism with faint praise. In his view, the Bill of Rights, especially the First Amendment that provides for freedom of speech and of the press, was a Madisonian construct, where the individual is the basis of government and has natural rights. The First Amendment places restrictions on government power – on types of activities that cannot be regulated. Libertarianism, of course, pretty much espouses the same thing – that people should be allowed to mostly do whatever they want as long as it doesn't infringe on others. The



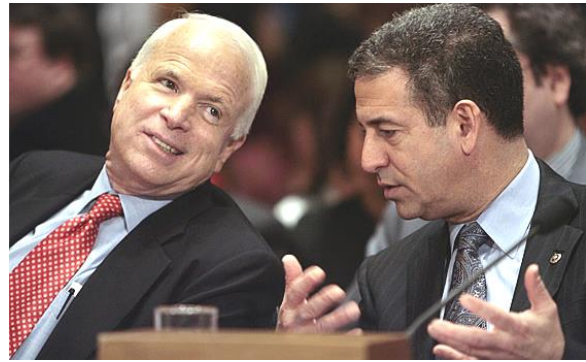
John Samples of the Cato Institute

Rooseveltian progressive vision, on the other hand, holds that government should be more concerned with collective welfare rather than individual rights, and some of the programs of The New Deal exemplify this. But to a true-believer Libertarian, government incursion into a person's life, no matter what the reason or justification, is often a Bad Thing.

The premise of the talk was that the collection of various campaign finance regulations that have been enacted since the mid-1970s are, in fact, a restriction on the free speech rights guaranteed by the First Amendment. Samples' opinion was that since insiders write laws, they cannot be expected to write benevolent laws toward challengers to their power. An example he cited was the 1974 (post-Watergate) congressional elections. The new Congress elected in 1974 enacted the first of the campaign finance reform laws, but subsequent analysis showed that 12 of 14 candidates who defeated incumbents would have had their campaign spending reduced by about one-third if that law had been in force for that election.



In other words, the so-called playing field for a partisan election is rarely ever level – incumbents have an inherent advantage in the election cycle and it takes a lot of resources to overcome this. So-called ‘soft money’ was used in the election of 2000 to attack vulnerable members of Congress. Banning soft money, as Congress did with the McCain-Feingold Act of 2002, meant that these new legislators were supposedly that much safer from being themselves beaten by challengers in later elections.



Senators John McCain and Russ Feingold in 2002

It went on like this for maybe half an hour before it finally came time for questions. Since Samples seemed to be favoring a complete repeal of all campaign finance reform laws, I tried to challenge him a bit. I mentioned that there were recent real world examples (William Jefferson of Louisiana and Duke Cunningham of California) where infusions of outside money had resulted in outright corruption – I conceded that campaign finance laws might be viewed as impacting the First Amendment, but pointed out that it cannot be viewed as a black-and-white situation. It’s more of a balancing act.

I admit that I don’t have the political science background to be more than a lightweight, so Samples’ lengthy answer seemed less elucidating to me than his original speech. But I was pretty much shrugged off – he stated that outside money changed people’s actions, but not so much their votes. And that this was by far the lesser evil as compared with shackling political challengers with resource restrictions that result in a Congress where it’s relatively easy, in most cases, to get reelected.

There were lots of other questions besides mine, but that was pretty much how it ended. We shall see if the upcoming election demonstrates him right or wrong – there are other factors, after all, that can influence elections besides the presence or absence of scads of negative campaign advertisements.

As for the luncheon, it wasn’t as good as the ones I remember from three years ago. The sandwiches were average and the cookies only slightly better. Maybe I should go back to the Heritage Foundation next time I can fit in a luncheon event. The cookies over there are probably still first rate. ☀

Afterword:

Twelve years later the influence of soft money into political campaigns has become even more rampant, thanks to a Supreme Court decision, but I stand by my observation that there are other factors which can influence elections. That was unfortunately too true in 2016.

That luncheon seminar was the end of an era for me – since then I have yet to return to the Heritage Foundation and I made it to only one other event at the Cato Institute. After I retire in about another year or so I’ll have enough time to pursue my next career goal of becoming a professional curmudgeon, and I’ll be looking forward to asking more pointed questions and stirring up trouble at future luncheon seminars. Until then I’ll content myself in writing essays about other things. And I’ll keep watching the skies!

Keep Watching the Skies!

It was 378 years ago that the first sighting of an unidentified flying object over North America was documented. On March 1, 1639, the Governor of the Massachusetts Bay Colony, John Winthrop, wrote in his personal diary about the account of three boatmen who had been startled by the sight of a bright and mysterious light in the sky which darted back and forth between them and the nearby village of Chestertown over the course of several hours.

Ever since then there have been numerous UFO sightings, so many that the U.S. Air Force for a while kept track of them in its infamous Project Blue Book which by the time of its termination in 1969 had collected more than 12,000 reports of UFO sightings, many of which were never explained away. So, of course, Hollywood stepped in to make its own attempt.

My favorite UFO movie of all time is *The Thing from Another World*, which didn't actually depict a UFO except by inference. It came out in 1951, at the beginning of the flying saucer mania that captured most everyone's imagination back then. I didn't see it until about a decade after that and I immediately liked it because of its polished ensemble cast depicting characters who were not caricatures. And, of course, for its sense-of-wonder final line: "Keep watching the skies!" Great stuff for a pre-teen who back then was on his way to discovering science fiction.

But if you bring into play the "gosh-wow" element of actually *seeing* a UFO on film, then I'd have to rank *Earth vs. the Flying Saucers*, which was released in 1956, as one of my favorites. True, it's somewhat cheesy in its plot and some of the characters *are* a bit caricaturish, but it had all that wonderful stop-motion animation of the flying saucers by cinematic genius Ray Harryhausen. Especially where the fleet of saucers attacked Washington, D.C.



Capitol punishment in
Earth vs. the Flying Saucers

I've seen the movie several more times over the past half century and you know what? It still captivates me, at least on that primal "gosh-wow" level. And whenever I take friends and visitors on a walking tour of downtown Washington, I always make sure to toss in a reference to the film: "...and here we have the U.S Capitol Building, one of the most dangerous places in all of Washington and not just for the politics! It was destroyed by Martians in *Mars Attacks!* It was nearly washed away by a huge tsunami in *Deep Impact*. It was pulverized by an alien spaceship in *Independence Day*. And it was wrecked by a crashing UFO in *Earth vs. the Flying Saucers*..."

I'm hoping that I'll never get tired of those 1950s flying saucer movies. They were certainly a big part of what made me an avid science fiction fan. I have some of them on DVD but with available time being what it is, they still sit on the shelf unviewed. But retirement now looms on the horizon so that may all change, and I hope it does. I'm really going to enjoy revisiting my childhood, where I can keep watching the skies. ☀

Afterword:

Science fiction cinema (and television too!) has gotten a lot better since that flying saucer era of the 1950s. But every so often there's an opportunity to keep watching the skies in real life. The most recent time was last August, when a long-awaited astronomical event happened.

Across the Sun

It had been a really disappointing day. I had been looking forward for, I mean, *years* to see a rare astronomical occurrence and the weather had just not cooperated. A thick cloud layer had covered the sky for hours and was showing no signs of clearing away as daylight turned to dusk. It turned out that the best I could manage was to watch videos of the event that had been uploaded to the Internet. But this wasn't the Great American Eclipse of 2017. It was an even rarer event – the transit of Venus in 2012, the last such one for more than a century.

Five years later, the disappointment of missing the transit has mellowed. So much so that in the end, I decided not to travel hundreds of miles, down to the Carolinas, for a solar eclipse where totality would last for less than three minutes. But that's not to say that I missed it entirely. Here in the Washington D.C. suburbs the moon didn't completely cover the face of the sun, but it did take a big bite out of it.



my view at about
mid-eclipse

Even with only a partial eclipse, the local media was still going all-in on it. The television stations here all had about three hours of coverage as the eclipse traversed across North America. And it was infectious. So much so that I decided, what the hey, let's take a few photos.

It didn't turn out to be as easy as I'd expected. I wasn't able to locate the home-made solar filter I'd made years ago from a couple of pieces of fully-exposed B&W film negative. You can't find that stuff anymore, especially on short notice, but my wife Nicki alerted me that we still had some medical x-ray images that were taken a few years back and it turned out that one layer of that, from a section where no body parts had intruded into the image, was *perfect* for solar viewing. So I cut a piece and taped it to the business end of my camera's telephoto lens and was able to get some reasonable images. Which is not to say they were *good* photos – no, not nearly. A puny 200-mm zoom lens is way, way overmatched when compared to professional equipment. The best photo of the event that I saw, and it was truly amazing, was of the partially eclipsed face of the sun at an image quality that showed many sunspots. Except that one of them *wasn't* a sunspot – it was a silhouette of the International Space Station, very tiny in comparison to the apparent size of the moon and sun, as it did its own solar transit.



my do-it-yourself
solar filter



Let's get awe-inspired!

Anyway, I was sufficiently awe-inspired by it all that I'm looking forward to the next one, which will be in just seven years! The path of totality will pass over the eastern shore of Lake Ontario, including the little village where I grew up more than a half century ago. I suppose there's synchronicity of some kind if I dig deep enough, but as for the Great American Eclipse of 2017... it had *not* been a disappointing day! ☀

Afterword:

Speaking of being awe-inspired, Nicki and I are really looking forward to going to a Worldcon this year – we'd missed last year's in Finland. This year's is out in California so next are a couple of essays related to two previous western Worldcons, in 1994 and 1996.

The Day I Almost Met Roy Rogers

It was 24 years ago that I almost met Roy Rogers.

I remember that day pretty clearly. It was mid-summer, a few weeks before the 1994 World Science Fiction Convention. Nicki and I were hosting a two-day stopover by our friend Alan Stewart, who was representing Australian Fandom as the Down Under Fan Fund delegate that year. He was visiting various fan centers on a sinuous itinerary which eventually took him to Winnipeg, the site of that year's Worldcon. And one of them was the Washington, D.C. area.

We did all the usual things, including attending one of the meetings of the local fan group WSFA and a walking tour of downtown Washington. And also one special thing – a drive out to Hagerstown to visit one of the most renowned science fiction fans of all time, Harry Warner, Jr.

And it turned out, on that day, that Harry was visited by myself and *two* Australian fans. Mark Loney, who in the 1980s had become known throughout fandom as co-editor of an entertaining general interest fanzine titled *The Space Wastrel*, was an Australian government employee who was most of the way through a two-year posting to the D.C. area. In that time he was moderately active in D.C. fandom and I was only too happy to invite him along to meet the fabled Hermit of Hagerstown.

Nicki had something else she needed to do that afternoon and didn't make the trip with us, but did point out to me that just up the road, in Germantown, on that very afternoon an even more renowned celebrity was making a short visit – the famous “King of the Cowboys”, Roy Rogers. He was there to promote the opening of the newest in the chain of Roy Rogers Restaurants, which specialized in upscale fast food including (as you might guess) roast beef. So my idea was that we would make a brief stop in Germantown on the way to Hagerstown, and I would find Rogers' publicity guy and tell him that I had two people with me who had come all the way from Australia to meet him! And that would get us to the head of the line.

I think it could have worked, but Murphy's Law intervened. When we reached the restaurant in Germantown we saw dozens of people milling around but no Roy Rogers. The word was that he was delayed and nobody knew when he would get there. We waited around for a while, but in the end we couldn't stay – we were on the clock and had to make it all the way to Hagerstown and back in time to meet up with Nicki for dinner.

By the time we got to Hagerstown it was very late afternoon but we still spent most of an hour with Harry at his home. He was friendly and cordial, as always, and we had a pleasant time talking about fandoms of all kinds, near and far, current and past.



Mark Loney, Harry Warner, and Alan Stewart
at Harry's home in Hagerstown

As I mentioned, that all happened close to a quarter century ago. I never did get to meet Roy Rogers – he died four years later, not (as far as I know) ever returning to the part of Maryland where I live. And Harry Warner, Jr. is also no longer with us, shuffling off this mortal coil in 2003 and leaving science fiction fandom a far less interesting place. As for Nicki and me, we had a good time at the Winnipeg Worldcon and even won a Hugo Award for our fanzine *Mimosa*. But that's gonna have to be another story. ☀

The Road to L.A. Con

It was a chilly night in San Francisco, as usual. We had intended to take the cable car back to our hotel but there had been some kind of breakdown in the system and the cars weren't running. After about ten minutes walking down the hill it was time for a rest stop, so we ducked into one of the large hotels on Powell Street and were surprised to find ourselves in the midst of a convention.

But this wasn't just *any* kind of convention. We'd arrived, apparently, right in the middle of the convention's Big Event. As we entered the hotel we heard music cascading out from one of the ballrooms, and then thunderous applause as the music ended. That event was closed to outsiders like us, but there was another room open, their equivalent of a Dealers Room. We poked our heads in there, and it took only a few seconds to realize what kind of gathering we had inadvertently crashed – it was the Worldcon equivalent for belly dancers.

###

San Francisco was just the first stop in a two-week California vacation that would eventually take us to Anaheim for the 1996 *science fiction* Worldcon. It's almost impossible to go to California and not want to spend a few days in San Francisco; the last time was during the 1993 Worldcon and we didn't have enough time away from the convention to enjoy the city. There were places we wanted to visit that we never got to; there were things we wanted to do that we never got around to. So when we arrived home, after what turned out to be a very enjoyable Worldcon, we were still disappointed that we hadn't planned the trip as well as we should have.

This time it was different. There was no convention as a distraction and we spent two days exploring the city, from the human kaleidoscope of Grant Street's Chinatown to the unhurried congeniality of Union Street's cafes and shops. We went to places that were almost deserted, like the old Victorian house where the only other people were two tourists from Germany, and other places like the `Stick where we shared a Giants baseball game and fireworks with thousands. When the time came for the drive south we felt it was probably too soon to leave. We promised ourselves we'd be back again in a few years, but in the meantime further adventures on this trip were still awaiting us.



entrance to San Francisco's Chinatown

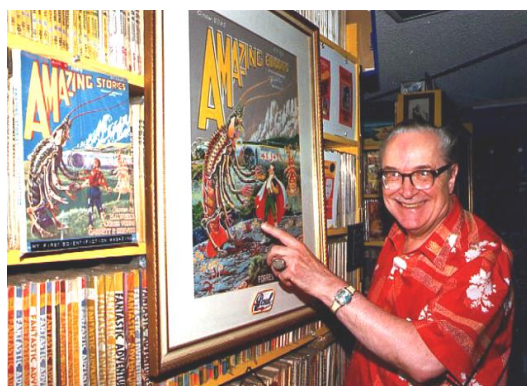
The road to L.A. Con did, eventually, take us to the Anaheim Convention Center, and yes, there were some adventures along the way. Before we even got to the Los Angeles area, we spent a very pleasant evening in Ventura with Lester and Esther Cole, whose essays about 1950s fandom have appeared in previous issues of *Mimosa*. Ventura is a lovely town, situated between the mountains and the ocean, with a main street lined with used book stores, antique shops, and cafes. The next day it was time to head down the coast again and then inland for Three Days in the Valley.

The San Fernando Valley, north of Los Angeles, seems to be one big bedroom community with its share of freeways, golf courses, and shopping malls. It's also the home of much of Los Angeles fandom, including our friend Bruce Pelz. When we were planning this trip, we'd asked Bruce for some help in finding a reasonably inexpensive motel while we were looking around the city for a few days. He didn't have to look very far, as it turned out there was such a place only about five blocks from where he lived. But since he obviously never had to stay there, he was blissfully unaware of the awful truth about the Granada Motel – it was the Hotel from Hell.

To be fair, it wasn't the worst place either of us had ever stayed at. There are much worse places in Eastern Europe, for instance. And the price wasn't bad – the nightly rate for a double was only forty dollars, pretty reasonable for Southern California. But that's where the good news ended. Our room air conditioner seemed to be The Little Engine That Couldn't, which made for two somewhat sweltering nights. The room was clean, but the carpet had holes, the beds were in a state of deconstruction, light bulbs were missing from about half of the lamps, and the towels were very threadbare (actually, it was more than just that – all the hotel linen had 'Granada Motel' printed in large letters on them, as if they were afraid that someone would actually want to steal any of it). The next day, when two guys driving motorcycles pulled into the parking lot they suspiciously eyed the place, then asked us how it was. We replied, "About what you'd expect for forty dollars a night." (A bit later, after they had checked out their rooms, we overheard one of them telling the hotel reception person, "You don't get much repeat business, do you?")

But you can stand anything for two nights, and we did. We used those three days before the L.A. Con to visit some places we'd always intended to go see someday, but never had until now. One of these was the statue on Sunset Boulevard of Bullwinkle Moose and Rocket J. Squirrel. (We're both Jay Ward fans, and Mr. Peabody's 'Way-Back Machine' is kind of a symbol of the fan historical nature of *Mimosa*.) Another was the Griffith Observatory, with its splendid location overlooking the city and nice view of the Hollywood sign in the surrounding hills.

The Hollywood Hills are actually home to a more famous site yet, at least to science fiction fans. Halfway up the twisty narrow road rather generously named Glendower 'Avenue' lies the Ackermansion. We visited Forry's house the same day we went to Griffith Park and, like the observatory, it lived up to our expectations. *Every* room was chock-full of books, paintings, posters, and memorabilia, even including the outdoor storage rooms (one of them is a huge library in itself, entirely of extra copies of books he has in his main library) and the roomy crawl space area under the house (which had been set up as a vampire cave). There was much emphasis on the movies, as you'd expect, but it was easy to see that Forry has not lost track of his fan roots; he has many mementos and artifacts from decades past and has probably the second- or third-largest collection of fanzines, including many from the 1930s when sf fanzines were first being published. To restate what Walt Willis wrote about Forry many years earlier, Forry Ackerman really is a true fan in a way that most of us don't come within a mile of being; he really *believes* in fandom. We are sold on Ackerman.



Forry Ackerman inside his Ackermansion

Finally, it was time for L.A. Con. We drove to Anaheim on Wednesday afternoon, spending part of the time playing our annual Worldcon First Fan Guessing Game (trying to guess who the first person we recognize there will be). When we rolled into the Anaheim Marriott, we didn't have long to wait to find out; almost immediately, a familiar face appeared at the car's side window, and asked, "Could you take me to pick up some party supplies?" It was our friend from New York (and that well-known party animal) Moshe Feder.

From then on, our memories of the convention are mostly a string of vignettes, like the interlude on Thursday when fellow fan publisher Andy Hooper, on the way to a fanzine panel, made the comment that *already* the convention seemed like something out of a David Lynch movie. And then, as he turned a corner, right in front of him was Michael Anderson, better known as The Dwarf from *Twin Peaks*.

It was that kind of convention, where the real often merged with the surreal. Even the dinner expeditions were unusual. One of them turned into a continuation of a fan artists panel, with five pens furiously scribbling and piles of cartoons mounting ever higher as the waiter looked on in bewilderment. The night of the Hugos, we made reservations with our friends Neil and Cris Kaden for dinner at a more upscale restaurant, The White House; we were pleased to find out that the restaurant supplied its own transportation, but we were surprised when it turned out to be a stretch limo. On the way back, we shared a ride in it with fellow nominees Scott Edelman and Allen Steele, wondering which of us, if any, would be fortunate enough to get one of the Awards this year.

It turned out that Allen Steele was the one. The fanzine category was actually one of the closest votes, but we (and *Mimosa*) finished second to Dave Langford, the scoundrel, by only eight votes. Just wait 'til next year!

One thing about Worldcons: they are maybe the best place to find people, especially other fans you've corresponded with but have never actually met before. This year was no different, and we were able to add many new faces to names, including... Roxanne Smith-Graham, who was holed up like a mad scientist for much of the convention behind a bank of computer equipment, furiously digitizing fan photos for an archival project... Noreen Shaw, co-chair of the 1955 Worldcon, who was able to spend only one afternoon at the convention; she looked so much like Rich's mom that he felt like a second generation fan while he walked around with her... Perry Middlemiss, the Down Under Fan Fund delegate, who spent two nights with us in Maryland a bit later in his North American trip... and Michael Burstein, who had lost a Hugo vote almost as close as ours had been. The convention was very much a positive experience for him, and he promised us a fanzine article to describe it all.

But there's not enough space for *us* to describe it all! So we'll take the opportunity to stop here, with hopes you'll enjoy this new issue of *Mimosa*. We think it's filled with entertaining things to read; we hope you think so, too. ☀

Afterword:

The 19th issue of *Mimosa*, where this piece appeared as our opening comments, did feature the essay by Michael Burstein as well as well as articles by both Forry Ackerman and Walt Willis. And a lot more besides that. It was one of our best issues. Anyway, as I mentioned, it's been two years since our last Worldcon. So to close out this issue, here's an essay about what happened during that trip.

Missouri Meanderings

Prolog: In Search of a Famous Missourian

The Missouri State Capitol has a splendid location close to a bluff overlooking the Missouri River and there is a really nice view of the building driving into Jefferson City from the north. I had been interested in seeing it not only because it would add to my personal collection of state capitols visited, but also because of what was inside.

The ground floor of the Capitol is the Missouri State Museum, with displays that exhibit the state's natural resources and its place in history. It was really well done, and included everything from a hands-on Civil



Missouri State Capitol



the Mark Twain statue in the Hall of Famous Missourians

War display to an impressive 20-foot long model of the Battleship Missouri. But what Nicki and I had really come to see was on the third floor of the Capitol, the Hall of Famous Missourians. It was there that we had hoped to find the bust of a renowned writer.

No, it wasn't Mark Twain. We had no trouble locating him; he was next to a pillar near the central rotunda. And he is certainly in equally famous company. Among the other Missouri residents so honored are such notables as Scott Joplin, Harry S. Truman, Walter Cronkite, Betty Grable, Ginger Rogers, Edwin Hubble, Stan Musial, Buck O'Neil, Walt Disney, Thomas Hart Benton, Laura Ingalls Wilder, Sacajawea, and Dred Scott.

The person we were looking for was the most recent inductee, and try as we might we just couldn't find him. After four circuits of the Hall we finally decided we needed some assistance, so I went over to a State Government worker in a nearby office: "Excuse me, can you please help me find Robert A. Heinlein?"

It may not have been the first time he had been asked that question because he didn't even pause before answering: "He's not here yet, and won't be until next Tuesday. The unveiling is on Thursday in Kansas City. At some event called MidAmeriCon 2." The 2016 World Science Fiction Convention.

The City of Fur Traders

Nicki and I would have already known that if we had more closely read some of the information that had been sent us by MidAmeriCon. But we still would have gone to Jefferson City anyway. As it happened, the State Capitol more than lived up to our expectations, even

without Heinlein's presence. And it was also an easy stopover on the way to Kansas City from St. Louis.

Several months earlier, while planning for the Worldcon trip, we had chosen to book our flight to St. Louis instead of directly into Kansas City. We had wanted to visit not only the state capital of Missouri, but the one for Illinois as well since Springfield is only about an hour and a half by car from St. Louis. But first we wanted to see what a city originally founded by French fur traders had to offer for us.

St. Louis as a settlement dates back to 1763, named in honor of Louis IX, the only French monarch who has been canonized. It and another 828,000 square miles of territory was acquired by the United States in 1803 as part of the Louisiana Purchase, and less than a year after that a small fort near St. Louis became the starting point of the Lewis and Clark Expedition. In the decades since then the city has become known as the place where the ice cream cone was invented, the first U.S. city to host an Olympic Games, the home of the second-most successful Major League Baseball team (in terms of championships won), the birthplace of T.S. Eliot and Chuck Berry...and the site of the tallest man-made monument in the western hemisphere. That would be the Gateway Arch.

The Arch is by far the most dominating feature of the Jefferson National Expansion Memorial, a 91-acre park along the Mississippi River in downtown St. Louis. It's a 630-foot tall steel catenary, originally designed back in the late 1940s by architect Eero Saarinen; next year will be the 50th anniversary of its opening to the public. The Arch is a hollow structure and there are trams that take visitors to the top where there is a very panoramic view of the Mississippi River on one side and downtown St. Louis on the other. I'd done that, back in 1980 on a previous trip to St. Louis, and being up there was a disconcerting experience. The top of the Arch is designed to sway as much as 18-inches in high winds and even on a day when there was almost no wind I could tell that the structure was not rock solid. As could most of the other visitors on that morning – I recall that only a very few of them seemed willing to linger very long before taking the tram back down.

For this trip, Nicki and I were content to view the Arch from ground level. It was a rainy day which had removed much of our enthusiasm for being outside, especially since the entire area around the Arch was under construction for a new museum and visitor center. Instead, the Old St. Louis Courthouse, at the west end of the Memorial, turned out to be a better option.

The Place where the Dred Scott Went to Court

The Old Courthouse is the most historic site in all of St. Louis. It dates back to the late 1830s and is the place where, in 1847, the slave Dred Scott had gone to court for his freedom. There were actually two trials, the second of which went in Scott's favor only for it to be overturned by the United States Supreme Court in 1857. That decision, later decried by legal scholars as the worst ever by the Supreme Court, became a catalyst of the Civil War.



Nicki and the Gateway Arch

The Courthouse is very grand, with its dome and rotunda more resembling a state capitol. Nicki and I took a docent tour from a National Park Service guide who was an expert on the history of the building and its times. She showed us some photos that indicated the place was a mess when the National Park Service first took control of it back in the 1940s – the roof leaked like a sieve and had caused severe damage to the interior. There have been several renovations since then which have restored much of the building to its original condition, including courtroom no. 4, where Dred Scott had sued for his and his wife's freedom.



the Old County Courthouse in St. Louis



the docent tour of the Old County Courthouse

It's now a wonderful building. A room of the Courthouse has been made into a museum of sorts that walks the visitor through the particulars of the Dred Scott case and what life in St. Louis was like back in the mid-1840s. Elsewhere are doors and woodwork made from common yellow pine where faux woodgrain had been added to make it resemble oak (signatures of the craftspeople who did the detailing are disguised as part of the faux woodgrain if you know where to look). At the exact center of the building, under the rotunda, there is a spot where orators once spoke – my voice was naturally amplified by the acoustical

design of the building when I stood there. Around the perimeter of the dome there are paintings that depict events in St. Louis history. The building is filled with stories about St. Louis and its past, as was recounted by our docent guide. And all of them were fascinating to hear.

The Newest Museum in St. Louis

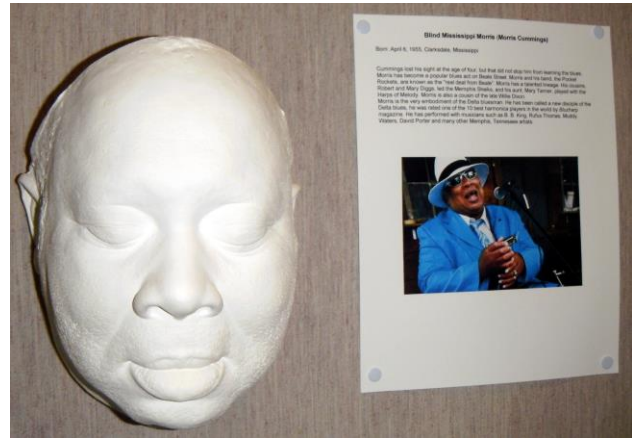
There are many other museums in St. Louis that are worth a visit, far too many for the one full day that Nicki and I had in the city. But the steady rain made the choice easy for us. The National Blues Museum, which had been open for only a few months, is the only American museum focused on that genre. We'd seen it on the taxi ride in from the airport and our interest in music immediately made it must-see. And it was also only a short walk from our hotel!

We found it a bit of a work in progress. Definitely worth seeing, but not as rich in content as it will someday be. For sure, there were some excellent exhibits including the only



the National Blues Museum

known film featuring the Empress of the Blues, Bessie Smith (it was a short 1929 talkie titled *St. Louis Blues*). After viewing that, hers is the definitive version of the title song as far as I'm concerned. There was also an exhibit of "life mask" sculptures of Delta Blues singers by Mississippi artist Sharon McConnell-Dickerson collectively titled "A Cast of Blues". In all there were 40 of them, and the intent of the display was to, in effect, make more 'real' some of the renowned people in this storied musical genre. The exhibit was designed to be accessible for people with disabilities, and in that regard I found it sadly ironic that the sculptor herself is disabled, having lost almost all of her sight from a degenerative eye disease.



life mask of blues singer Blind Mississippi Morris

The City where the Cold War Began

There was a continuing forecast for unrelenting rain in the central Mississippi River valley, so Nicki and I had to make a decision on what our two-day road trip between St. Louis and Kansas City would be. In the end, we ruled out going to see the Illinois State Capitol. The rain forecast looked, if anything, even worse for central Illinois than for St. Louis and we didn't want that to be what we remembered most from a visit there. So we headed west instead.

It was a good choice. The rain diminished noticeably in the first 50 miles, and by the time we had reached the Interstate exit to head south toward Jefferson City it had stopped altogether. Just ahead was the city of Fulton, where not long after the end of World War Two an important event in world history had occurred.

On March 5, 1946, British Prime Minister Winston Churchill and U.S. President Harry Truman came to Westminster College, in Fulton, on the invitation of the college's president. There was a parade through the center of town and afterwards, in the college's auditorium, Churchill delivered one of his most famous speeches, the "Sinews of Peace" address which portended the coming of the Cold War:

"From Stettin in the Baltic to Trieste in the Adriatic an 'Iron Curtain' has descended across the continent. Behind that line lie all the capitals of the ancient states of Central and Eastern Europe. Warsaw, Berlin, Prague, Vienna, Budapest, Belgrade, Bucharest and Sofia; all these famous cities and the populations around them lie in what I must call the Soviet sphere, and all are subject, in one form or another, not only to Soviet influence but to a very high and in some cases increasing measure of control from Moscow."



one of the historical displays at the National Churchill Museum in Fulton, Missouri

There is now a National Churchill Museum in Fulton, where a film of portions of that speech can be viewed. It's in the reconstructed Church of St. Mary Aldermanbury, originally designed by the famous British architect Christopher Wren. The building was almost destroyed in 1940 during the London Blitz, and in the mid-1960s it was dismantled, stone by stone, and shipped to Fulton where it was painstakingly recreated to its pre-war appearance.



the rebuilt St. Mary Aldermanbury Church in Fulton, Missouri

The museum is a commemoration of the life of Sir Winston, with exhibits that take you through the decades of his career as a military officer and politician. And also his legacy. On a plaza adjacent to the church is a sculpture simply titled “Breakthrough” which was created in 1990 by artist Edwina Sandys (Churchill’s granddaughter) from eight sections of the newly-fallen Berlin Wall.



the “Breakthrough” sculpture

So in the end, the misfortune of canceling the Illinois portion of the road trip led to an unexpected and fascinating visit to a place we didn’t even know existed until we happened across it on our way to Jefferson City. If we’d stuck to the original plan we’d have gotten to Fulton so late in the day that we would have had to

pass it by. Further reinforcement of my belief that there is a Law of Conservation of Karma.

The Road to MidAmeriCon 2

The drive from Jefferson City to Kansas City took us through the city of Sedalia, originally a railroad town that was once described by *The St. Louis Post-Dispatch* as “the Sodom and Gomorrah of the nineteenth century”. Back then it was a center of vice, in particular prostitution, which created enough trickle-down wealth in the city that there was no real need for taxation. Nowadays it’s the home of the Missouri State Fair, and it was in progress the day we passed through. If we’d had more time we might have stayed and enjoyed the fair, which is by far the largest attended event in all of Missouri. But there was another big gathering about two hour’s drive farther west that we were very much looking forward to.

Kansas City is actually the largest city in Missouri – westward looking in attitude, much more so than St. Louis. In the time since its founding in the 1830s it has become known as the City of Fountains, with more of them than any other city except Rome. And, oh yeah, there’s also some pretty good barbecue.

Nicki and I arrived in Kansas City in time to take in an early dinner at Arthur Bryant's, perhaps the most famous barbecue restaurant in the country if not the world. Over the many decades of its existence it has been patronized by renowned sports stars, media personalities (including Steven Spielberg and Harrison Ford), and politicians (including Jimmy Carter, Bill Clinton, and Barack Obama). As well as thousands and thousands of barbecue lovers, ourselves now included!



Arthur Bryant's restaurant in Kansas City

Bryant's is located away from downtown, over in the so-called "18th and Vine" district. That's where the Kansas City jazz scene was thriving back in the 1930s and 1940s. There are still plenty of jazz venues in the city, and since 1997 there has been the American Jazz Museum which we found to be an



inside the American Jazz Museum

interesting counterpoint to the Blues Museum in St. Louis. It occupies a smaller space, some of which has been made into an actual jazz club, and it has taken the approach of highlighting the careers of luminaries such as Duke Ellington, Louis Armstrong, and Ella Fitzgerald rather than trying to tell a more coherent story of the birth and evolution of the genre. I liked it a lot.

I also liked the Negro Leagues Baseball Museum, which is located in the same building as the Jazz Museum.

Unlike its neighbor, it *does* attempt to tell a coherent story. It wasn't until 1947 that the so-called 'color barrier' in Major League Baseball was broken when the Brooklyn Dodgers brought in a superb young infielder named Jackie Robinson. Prior to that, African-American players had to play in segregated professional baseball leagues. The museum, which was founded in 1990 by several of those players, is set up to chronologically follow the history of the era of Negro Leagues baseball. There are hundreds of photographs and memorabilia items, including uniforms and baseball gloves worn by some of its brightest stars.

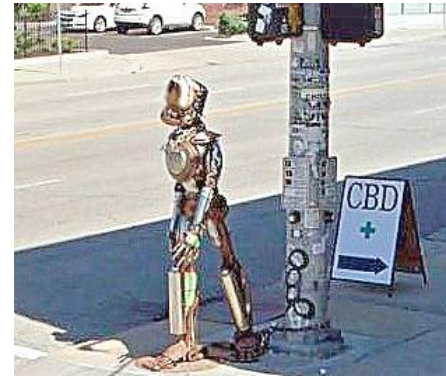
The highlight of the museum is its Field of Legends, a reduced-size baseball field populated by bronze statues of some of the Negro Leagues' best players, including Satchel Paige, Josh Gibson, Buck O'Neil, Buck Leonard, and Cool Papa Bell. It's possible to stroll out onto the field and even stride around the bases. Which I did.



the Field of Legends at the Negro Leagues Baseball Museum

The final stretch of the road to MidAmeriCon 2 was a short one, just a couple of miles to the Marriott Hotel where we were staying for the convention. But even that was not without a point of interest. The route to the hotel took us past the corner of Oak and 18th, where resides a robot that is chained to a light pole.

I'd known there was street art in Kansas City, but this took us both by surprise. As far as I could tell it's constructed from scrap metal, maybe even from found objects. And I have no idea who created it. There was too much traffic to stop and not enough time to circle back as I needed to get the car turned in before the rental office closed for the day. But no matter, just seeing it from the car was enough to put a coda on an enjoyable day. And, on the eve of a Worldcon, this seemed a right and proper way to end a road trip.



the robot of 18th Street

Thirty-one and Counting

MidAmeriCon 2 was the 31st Worldcon for Nicki and me, a long and continuing series which does not include the first MidAmeriCon. That one was in 1976, and back then we were only a very few years removed from college and did not have the resources to do much traveling. The Guest of Honor for MAC-1 was Robert A. Heinlein and even though he's been dead for more than a quarter of a century his presence still pervaded this year's convention.



viewing the Heinlein Guest of Honor speech from MAC-1

One manifestation of this was a series of videos recorded at MAC-1 which were shown in the Fan Room. The one I watched was his Guest of Honor Speech, which ran not quite half an hour. It was completely extemporaneous and rambled a bit from topic to topic, touching on areas that caused some of the more liberal people in the audience back then to boo him. Watching the video of Heinlein's speech was certainly timebinding for me. I had never gotten to meet the man and, indeed, until then had never even heard his voice. Times have changed to the point where I don't think he would have been booed by the current generation of Worldcon attendees. Some by comparison would probably make Heinlein seem like a liberal.

One other thing that has changed since 1976 is the size of Worldcons. MAC-1 membership has been estimated as high as about 4,200 which had made it the largest Worldcon ever, at that time. But Worldcons have grown so much since then that 4,200 members nowadays would constitute a disappointingly small convention. Back in 1976, the function space that MAC-1 used was contained in a single hotel, the Radisson Muhlenbach. For MAC-2 they needed the expansive Kansas City Convention Center.

There was a lot of space available. The breakout rooms for discussion panels were all down on the first floor of the convention center while the upper floor was made into one huge extended concourse, with the Fan Room on one end and the Art Show and Dealers Room way down on the other. In between there were dozens of displays of one kind or another and tables promoting various conventions and special interest groups. The place where I hung out a lot was the table for the Fanac Fan History Project, which is working to digitally preserve audio/video recordings, photographs, fan publications, and other materials from the current and past eras of science fiction fandom.

It's a noble effort, one that I hope to be very much involved with if and when I ever retire. In my opinion there is a crying need for a high quality "fair use" archive of photographs, for historical research and future publishing projects. What's out there now is a hodgepodge of lesser archives, often with very restrictive usage or with photos of such low resolution that they're not very useful for anything. That has to change.

For MAC-2 the emphasis was on fanzines, especially ones from the 1930s through the 1960s. Tens of



"Fred" the astronaut
in the concourse of MAC-2



at the Fanac Fan History Project table: (L-R) Teddy Harvia, Mark Olson, Joe Siclari, and Edie Stern

thousands of them were published during those decades, many of which contain historically valuable information about people and events, and all of them moments frozen in time that provide a window on what science fiction fandom was like back then. There are physical archives of these fan publications, at universities and in private collections, but access to them is problematic at best. The Fanac Fan History Project is trying to improve on that by creating a digital archive. The brain trust of this project has been three notable fan historians: Joe Siclari, Edie Stern, and Mark Olson, and I have great admiration for all that they have so far been able to accomplish. And great empathy for them about everything that still

needs to be done. Sisyphus had it really easy compared to this.

Colophons! Why did it have to be colophons?

I was on six different program items at MAC-2, a big improvement over last year at Sasquan when I wasn't on any at all. The very first one had the most interest, at least based on the size of the audience. For that, I was moderator of a panel that attempted to describe what a science fiction history library should be in terms of types of materials available and suggested content.

Nicki was one of my panelists along with Joe Siclari and Lauren Schiller, the latter an actual-by-god librarian who has previously worked at Harvard and Texas A&M. I am reasonably knowledgeable on the



“Building a SF History Library” panelists: (L-R) Nicki, me, Joe Siclari, and Lauren Schiller

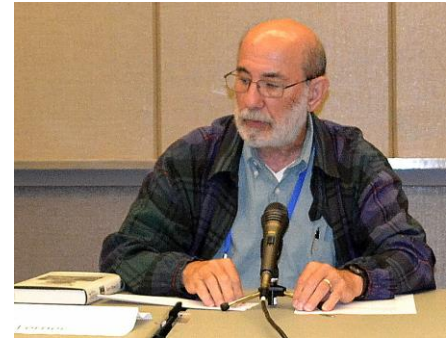
topic, but basically my job was easy – get the discussion started and have the panelists do most of the heavy lifting in terms of content added. I kept it snappy, letting panelists talk for up to a minute or so at a time and making sure everybody had ample chances to contribute. As for building a library, a lot of the usual stuff was suggested such as Sam Moskowitz’s *The Immortal Storm*, Harry Warner’s two fan history books, Dave Kyle’s two coffee table pictorial books, Damon Knight’s *The Futurians*, Rob Hansen’s *Then*, and Fred Pohl’s *The Way the Future Was*. But this is now the 21st century and the definition of what constitutes a library has expanded. I had wanted Joe on the panel so he could talk about what’s available on the World Wide Web, and there is a lot. And more coming online all the time. Someday, soon perhaps, it will be possible to have an entire reference library available at the swipe of a finger across the screen of a tablet computer.

I was about ready to take a swipe (a verbal one) during the next panel I was on. The topic was “What is a Fan Writer?” and from the description I guess I should have been a bit suspicious: “*Is it a professional writer doing some work for free? Is it a way of life? Some say that the Internet made us all fan writers.*” The moderator and two of the other panelists were professional writers and one an artist/writer, according to their descriptions in the program. The only other quote-unquote traditional fan writer on the panel besides myself was the convention’s Guest of Honor, Teresa Nielsen Hayden. But that wasn’t enough to keep the panel from almost immediately succumbing to topic drift. One of the panelists, a 2014 finalist for the Fan Writer Hugo Award no less, apparently decided that the main subject of the panel should be fanfiction, and in particular ‘genderqueer’ fiction in keeping with her interests as described by her bio in the convention’s program book. And the moderator allowed her to monopolize the panel – she went on and on and on, no kidding, for more than half of the available time all by herself.

I think I was called on by the moderator maybe two times for generic comments about the overall worth of fan writing, for about a cumulative twenty-five words total. I had wanted to bring in some historical perspectives about fan writing, citing the contributions of Bob Shaw, Walt Willis, and others who have entertained us with their words over the years. But to no avail. About two-thirds of the way through the panel I finally gave up and thought to myself, “Is this *really* what fan writing has sunk down to?” Steve Stiles, a damn good fan writer in his own right who was a Hugo Award finalist this year in a different fan category, was sitting in the front row and appeared to me as dismayed as I was. I looked at him and gave a resigned shrug, and he returned the shrug.

But it was my final panel that was the most difficult. For that one, Fred Lerner and I were given the task of expounding on “The Art of the Colophon” and for most of the hour it was just

me, Fred, and five hardy audience members. Fred is one of the founders of the Science Fiction Research Association and has written several books, while I was co-editor of a six-time Hugo Award winning fanzine. So we both knew something about colophons, but let's face it – it's a pretty narrow topic. It took us maybe ten minutes to discuss what the uses are, what kinds of information are usually included, and provide a few examples from both professional and fan publications to demonstrate stylistic differences. After we got through that, minutes started passing like hours as we attempted to find various nuances we could dissect. We didn't exactly run dry, but by the end of the panel we had not only beaten the topic to death, we had also smashed it flat, crushed its bones, and scattered its pieces to the wind. When I saw Fred the next morning in the Marriott concierge breakfast room, I pointed to him and said, "Colophons!" He just smiled and shook his head.



Fred Lerner

Giving the Puppies the Business

Nicki was a participant in five panels, one of them an improvement on that disappointing "What is a Fan Writer?" panel. It was titled "Fanfiction and Professional Writing" and had a much more capable moderator – herself. Other participants included freelance writers who had leveraged fanfiction and fan writing experience into pro-dom of one fashion or another, and one of them was a finalist for this year's John W. Campbell Award for best new professional writer. I missed seeing the panel due to a conflict and when Nicki described it to me, the first thing she said was that she had sat next to a television celebrity – *Jeopardy!* champion Arthur Chu.

There was enough to see and do at MAC-2 that I didn't sit in on all that many panels where I was not a participant. And, like last year, I spent several hours in the WSFS Business Meeting. But not all at once! No, that probably would have been debilitating.



the WSFS Business Meeting

There were enough proposed changes to the WSFS Constitution and Bylaws that this year's Business Meeting lasted, in total, about ten hours spread out over four days. The most controversial items were those that modified nominating procedures for science fiction's highest achievement awards, the Hugos. This was in response to the continued campaign by the so-called 'Rabid Puppies' faction who had objected so much to the recent trend of what they perceived as liberal-agenda stories, writers, and publications being nominated, that they had attempted to hijack the Hugo Awards by block vote nominating hand-picked slates which were in some cases ideologically conservative to the point of being Fascist. Or in other cases, just to be obnoxious, in ridiculously bad taste (an example of the latter being the short story "Space Raptor Butt Invasion" by the pseudonymous 'Chuck Tingle').

This was the second year of that kind of nonsense, and by now even the traditionalists who had resisted drastic constitutional rules changes had finally resigned themselves that enough was enough. There is a two year process for amending the WSFS Constitution and at MAC-2 a radically different way of tabulating nominees, using a statistical process that very few people completely understood, received its final approval. However, the decision was far from unanimous and a provision was added that future Business Meetings at the next five Worldcons can revert to the previous simpler system should the new method prove ineffective in preventing another block vote take-over. But as for this year, it was a different denouement...

Dinner and a Spanking

After hours entertainment at a Worldcon usually involves consumption of food, and that was certainly true for MAC-2. Nicki and I participated in several dinner expeditions with friends, with lots of good food and entertaining conversation. All of them were to restaurants within a reasonably short walk. Except for one.

It happened on the Saturday evening of the convention, right in most restaurants' prime time. The degree of difficulty had been high to begin with, because there were ten of us and we hadn't made a reservation anywhere. We ended up at a place called John's Big Deck, which wasn't our first, second, or even third choice – it was kind of the choice of last resort. The place turned out to be an open air sports bar, up on the roof of a building close enough to the Kansas City Stockyards that every so often a breeze from the north would waft in an odor that smelled like somebody had shit their pants.



dinner at John's Big Deck

The food was actually pretty good and the conversation even better. But the service, not so much. It took forever for the food to get to the table and nearly that long to get the check. By the time Nicki and I had stopped by the Marriott to briefly freshen up and then proceed over to the Convention Center, we'd missed the first part of the Hugo Awards Ceremony.



in the concourse at the Hugo Awards livestream

We arrived in the overflow area, up in the middle of the concourse where the event was being livestreamed, just in time to see the Best Semiprozine Hugo be awarded to the editors of *Uncanny Magazine*. Three of them came up to accept the award, and more than seven minutes later they were still there – each of them gave a long and drawn out acceptance speech. This gave us a chance to find out what we had missed, and to our dismay it turned out to include all four of the fan category awards.

All of these had been influenced by Puppies block voting in the preliminary nominating round,

but in three of the four categories that actually turned out to be a very good thing. Mike Glyer, who has been editing high-quality fanzines for more than 40 years, won in both the Best Fanzine and Best Fan Writer categories. His competition had been Puppies slate nominees which all finished below “No Award”. The same result happened for Best Fan Artist, with our friend Steve Stiles finally, *finally* getting his long-deserved Hugo Award, winning out over four Puppies slate nominees who all finished below “No Award”. Before the convention I had predicted this would happen, for both Mike and Steve, because it had *already* happened – a year ago, at Sasquan, the Best Fanzine Hugo went to the very deserving *Journey Planet* which had vanquished four Puppies slate nominees in the voting. But for the Best Fancast category (for fan-produced podcasts) there were no non-Puppies finalists, and so “No Award” was the voters’ overall choice. And no Hugo was presented in that category. Which had been the expected result.



Steve Stiles contemplating his Hugo

When the dust settled, the Puppies had been thoroughly spanked. None of their extreme slate-nominated candidates had won, and “No Award” had also come out on top in the “Best Related Work” category, where again there had been only Puppies finalists. We eventually did get to see Steve Stiles win his award, once the livestream of the Hugo Ceremony was made available at the **ustream.tv** website. But it was a much shorter wait than Steve himself had. This was his only win in fifteen appearances on the Hugo final ballot, the first of which was almost a half century ago when the Fan Artist category had originally debuted. He made reference to it as he told the audience, “You know, I had written an acceptance speech, but I wrote it back in 1967 and it got lost amid the fossils.”

Epilog: Convening with Heinlein

Unlike Steve Stiles, I was not yet a fan back in 1967. But as a senior in high school I was most definitely a science fiction reader. The village where I lived only had a small public library, and the science fiction books available were mostly by some of the giants of the genre – Isaac Asimov, Arthur C. Clarke, Ray Bradbury, Andre Norton...and Robert A. Heinlein.

I didn’t get to see the unveiling of the bust of Heinlein – it happened when I was participating in that surreal “What is a Fan Writer?” panel. But Nicki did, and she told me that a politician was there and read a proclamation from the Missouri House of Representatives, and that there was a scrum of people jockeying for position to get a photograph of the event. But nobody else was there when I went to pay my respects a bit later on. So I patted him on the head and told him, “I’m still a fan.”



the bust of Robert A. Heinlein

I think I’ll remember MidAmeriCon 2 as one of my favorite Worldcons, for the trip that surrounded it as much as the convention itself. About an hour into the airplane ride back home, I turned to Nicki and said, “Epic!” She nodded in agreement. ☀

