

Variati©ns ©n a Theme #17

from Rich Lynch, for SFPA 230 • written in October 2002

California 2002

Doesn't seem that long ago, but the last time Nicki and I had been to California was back in 1999 when we were the fan guests at the Anaheim NASFiC. We didn't get to see very much outside the Anaheim Marriott then, so the last time we actually got to do a bit of vacationing in California was back in 1996, just prior to L.A.Con III when we spent a weekend in San Francisco, then drove down to L.A. via Ventura.

That was a pleasant week, so we decided to do it again, more or less, but in the opposite direction (starting in Los Angeles this time), since the 2002 Worldcon was in San José, not Anaheim. Things did not get off to a good start. The United Airlines flight from Baltimore was more than an hour delayed due to some kind of mechanical problem with the airplane (they ended up using a different airplane for the flight), so we missed our connecting flight from Chicago. Luckily, there was another flight to L.A. about an hour later, but it turned out our luggage didn't make that connection, and arrived at LAX about another hour after we did. And when we finally tracked down the luggage, one of the suitcases had been badly damaged en route.

By that time, it was about 8:30pm, so we decided to take it up with United after we got to San José; we needed to find our hotel in the Van Nuys area, then meet up with Craig Miller and Genny Dazzo, who were going to give us directions to their home for dinner the next evening. We didn't make it to the LASFS clubhouse until only the last few hangers-on were still there, but one of them, the writer John DeChancie, offered to lead us to the after-the-meeting restaurant where LASFS members often went. For once, the timing was good – most people were just getting their food orders, and Craig and Jenny were there. They told us they weren't too worried, as they figured we'd find a way to contact them if we didn't show up. I told them they have more trust in my people-finder abilities than I did!

At any rate, we only spent the next day in the L.A. area, mostly in the Beverly Hills area. We spent a few hours at the Museum of Television and Radio, then had a nice lunch at a nearby sidewalk restaurant. I bought some ceramic pie crust weights at Williams and Sonoma (though the glass container broke inside my pack a few days later). And then it was time to go visit Craig and Genny.

They live a few miles south of Beverly Hills, in L.A. proper, and it didn't take too long to get there. Genny and I had been talking about lasagna recipes when they were at Midwestcon, back in June, so they decided to invite us over for a lasagna dinner the only other night (besides the night we arrived) we'd be in the area.. And, since you can't bake lasagna for just four people, they also invited some of their friends (all of whom were involved at some way with the television and film industry). There were many interesting stories that night, and we had such a good time listening to them I never did get to tell any of my eastern Europe adventures.

It turned out that Genny had been preparing the lasagna for about three days! (Some things,

including a good lasagna meat sauce, you just can't rush.) She also collects teapots, something we'd known for a few years (we've contributed several, in fact), but this was the first chance to see the collection. It was huge! She must have at least 500 of them, probably more, and they are all on display on shelves and bookcases in her dining room. They range from the large to the tiny, from the prosaic to the ornate. On the way north to San Francisco, we found her a teapot that looked like a pumpkin in a second-hand consignment store in Ventura. It was different enough to be interesting, but after seeing her collection, I wasn't entirely sure she didn't already have it!

A day and evening in Ventura visiting our friends Lester and Esther Cole was next on our schedule. We first met them back in 1993, at the San Francisco worldcon, and both of them have written essays we've published in *Mimosa*. Ventura's downtown area has been transformed mostly into a touristy area of antique shops and restaurants, with a regional attraction of one of the Spanish Missions that were built along the California coastline back in the 1600s. Definitely worth a day there, but our schedule didn't allow us to stay longer than that.



Lester & Esther Cole and Nicki,
at the Coles' home in Ventura

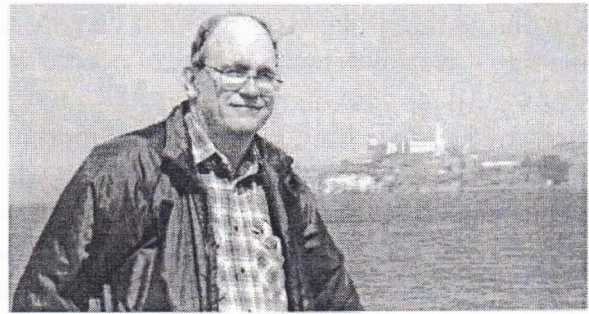


at the Hearst Castle

Next on our itinerary was a visit to the Hearst Castle, about three hours drive north from Ventura. The nearest town to the Castle is San Simeon, but we decided to stay the night instead about 10 miles south, in Cambria, which had more hotel options and looked to be a more interesting place. And it was! The main street was lined with lots of little craft and antique stores to explore, and there were also many good places to eat. At one of them, where we stopped in for an evening snack, we were introduced to a local delicacy, the olallieberry, which seems to be a cross between the raspberry and blackberry – chocolate olallieberry bread pudding with whipped cream is just too good, actually, to adequately describe in print.

As for the Hearst Castle itself, it greatly exceeded my expectations, and I don't think I've been in a building that's comparable – it's a mansion that aspires to be a palace. The building and grounds now belong to the State of California, and it's not run like a typical state park – there's an IMAX theater in the welcoming center that shows a 40-minute dramatization about the construction of the place and there are several guided tours to choose from to see the place (you can't just get a grounds pass). We chose the Hearst Castle 101 tour (or whatever the name of the introductory tour was called), which took us through most of the ground floor of the main building. Some of the larger rooms, like the banquet room, are comparable in splendor and furnishings to those I saw at Schonbrunn Palace in Vienna back in April.

And from there, it was on to San Francisco. The **hotels.com** web site found a good deal – \$65 per night double at the Renoir Hotel just off Market Street, the same place I stayed the last time I was in San Francisco, in 1997 when I had four Slovak visitors with me on a business trip (but back then, the best we could do was \$110 a night for a single). Unfortunately, the Giants were in Colorado, so we didn't get to see the new PacBell Park, but we had more than enough other things to do to fill the two evenings and a day we were in the city. One problem with having just two evenings in San Francisco is that you can only go to two different restaurants for dinner. One of them was The Stinking Rose, the garlic-themed restaurant, which was as good as we remember it from 1993 and 1996. We'd intended to go to Des Alpes, a limited-menu Basque restaurant (where we'd taken Guy Lillian and some other fan friends, back in 1993 during the San Francisco Worldcon), but to our dismay it was gone! Where it had been was now occupied by some Chinese-owned business; San Francisco's Chinatown has continued to expand in the time since we were last there. Change is inevitable, but I'll miss Des Alpes – I'd gone there for dinner many times, and it was like an old friend.



at the waterfront (Alcatraz in distance)

And then, finally, it was time for ConJosé. This was the 20th Worldcon we've attended (our 15th in a row). I guess that means we're no longer neos, but subjectively, the 1970s don't seem *that* long ago.

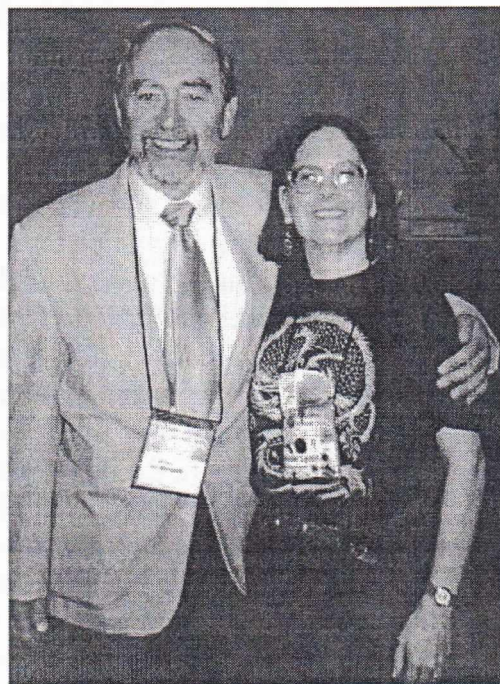
It was not the most smoothly-run convention we've ever attended. We'd decided to stay at an outlying hotel, mostly due to waiting three months after the hotel blocks were opened before booking a hotel room (but we never thought that \$130-a-night hotel rooms would sell like hot-cakes). But if we'd successfully gotten into what would have been our first choice, the Hyatt St. Claire in downtown San José, we'd have most likely have gotten a rude surprise – some screw-up with the convention booking service had resulted in a large overbooking for the St. Claire, and many people who'd thought they would be staying there instead found themselves at the Hyatt out near the San José airport, the better part of an hour's commute away by the county's slow-moving light rail. The convention itself didn't do too much better than that the first day – the registration people had apparently had some kind of problem with their membership database which resulted in them not having membership badges for any pre-registers whose last name began with the letter N. Pocket programs weren't available until that afternoon, either, which made it difficult for a while to figure out which events were going on where.

Originally the convention was to have been held in San Francisco, but problems with hotel and/or convention center availability resulted in the venue shift a few months before the site selection vote back in 1999. I think I would have probably preferred San Francisco, but downtown San José is not a bad place to be. Many of the convention attendees took some time off to see some of the local attractions, like the strangely-constructed Winchester Mystery House and the Tech Museum of Innovation. The one we went to see was the local Museum of Quilts and Textiles, which had a display of quilts (almost indistinguishable from portraiture paintings from farther away than about ten feet) on the topic of "The Last Year" – some stark images of the

elderly during their final weeks. But it was not really morbid; the images were actually quite compelling – worthy remembrances of people who had accepted death, and were meeting the ends of their lives with dignity.

Parts of San José itself seemed rather morbid, but in a dignified way. There were many empty and abandoned storefronts along the street where the light rail ran, presumably where dot-com companies had once been located before the bubble burst, awaiting new life when the economy turns upward again. The local economy had other ways of coping, though – there was large street craft fair in downtown San José the weekend of ConJosé, similar in scope and content to the Sugarloaf Craft Festivals here in the Washington, D.C., area, with hundreds of vendors. Thousands of people braved the hot weather to browse, and eat, and buy. We bought a silver armadillo pin for a friend of ours from a craftsperson who told us he liked to read science fiction, and who was amazed to find out that the World Science Fiction Convention was taking place just a short distance away from him. A bit earlier, I had talked to another craftsperson who was selling ornate little wooden boxes of the kind I'd seen during my Russia trip back in 1994. When I told her that, she asked me where in Russia I'd been, and was rather surprised when I mentioned that one of the places was the Siberian city of Krasnoyarsk – originally her home. It really **is** a small world.

There were many friends at ConJosé from all around this small world. Janice Gelb, who lives maybe 15 miles from San José, was trying her best (with mixed results) to stay out of convention operations long enough to attend much of the convention. Adrienne Losin, who lives south of Melbourne, Australia, stayed hidden so well that we didn't cross paths with her until near the end of the convention. Martina Pilcerova, who I'd first met on one of my trips to Slovakia, had arrived in San José after an epic transcontinental automobile trip with some artist friends of hers – something I have yet to do. One unexpected treat, on the last day of the convention, was the discovery that British fan Ron Bennett, the 1958 TAFF delegate (and *Mimosa* contributor), was at the convention for that one day. He was actually in the States to visit his son, who edits a silicon valley-based computer trade journal of some kind, and just showed up unannounced. The only reason I found him at all was because of a chance remark of a bookseller friend of ours who'd sold him a book in the dealers room.



Ron and Nicki

It was a chance remark of a different sort that led to the most-repeated story of the convention. Australian fan Stephen Boucher, who comes to the U.S. so often that he's become part of midwest fandom, had been asked, in jest, if he was interested in bidding Australia for the NASFiC convention. Stephen replied that, if he was going to bid for a convention the scale of a NASFiC, he'd rather bid for a Worldcon instead. Bingo! Twenty-dollar bills for pre-supporting memberships immediately began piling up in front of him. Before another day had passed an

'Australia-in-2010' bid shirt had been produced and a web site was online. A somewhat dumb-founded Stephen was later heard to remark, when asked if he was going to be the chairman, "I'm just the hood ornament on this bulldozer." And thus are worldcon bids born and fan history created.

ConJosé seemed to do a better job of creating fan history than showcasing it – there seemed to be fewer fan history-related programming items than other recent worldcons. In fact, maybe the most interesting fan history-related hour (for me, at least) of the convention happened at a room party, where I and Ben Yalow took the opportunity to describe some of the things that happened in fandom of the 1940s, '50s, and '60s to an interested fan named Janis Ian. After the convention, I sent her a copy of the 1950s fan history book I had edited, and she sent me back two of her CDs. Fair exchange.

Five days for a worldcon seems a long time, but it usually goes by in a flash, and ConJosé was no exception. The last major event of the convention was the Hugo Awards; Nicki and I had been nominated in the Fanzine category, for *Mimosa*, for the twelfth year in a row, but lost by 19 votes to Dave Langford's *Ansible*. We weren't really expecting to win, as it's been a few years since the last time we had, but we *were* a bit surprised that *Ansible* was the winner – California resident Mike Glycer, who had won the award (for *File 770*) the past two years, seemed the clear favorite. (And will probably be again next year, when he's the Fan Guest at Torcon 3.)

There are many memories we'll keep from ConJosé. Patrick Stewart's unpublicized event the Friday night of the convention was one of them; he came to ConJosé primarily to promote the upcoming *Star Trek* and *X-Men* movies, but the 45 minutes he was on-stage showed him to be engaging and entertaining – somebody who was much more than just a talking head. Another was the Bruce Pelz remembrance event – Bruce wasn't a religious person and there was no memorial service for him after his death in May, so instead his friends held informal secular wakes for him at this year's Westercon and also at ConJosé, where we had a final opportunity to say good-bye.

Saying good-bye to California is never easy to do, but after two weeks of vacation and convention, we were ready to come back home. It may be several years before we'll be back. The trip home was uneventful, but it was almost midnight by the time we got home, and we both had to go to work the next day. By the time we'd gotten fully caught up with the real world, ConJosé had receded several weeks into the past, and the only mention we saw of it was the occasional review we saw in fanzines and online.

It came as a surprise, then, when a big cardboard box appeared on our front porch one day; when I opened it, I found... my suitcase! – the one that was damaged on the way to Los Angeles (the zipper had been mostly torn out) and that I'd eventually left with the United Airlines luggage service people in San José. I'd almost forgotten about it, but there it was, repaired and ready to go. Maybe I'll bring it to Torcon 3...

On Safari With the DC Party Animals

As I mentioned in my previous SFPazine, the "Party Animals" art exhibition that took place in Washington earlier this year was the largest public art exhibit ever held in the city. There were 100 elephants and 100 donkeys, each customized in various whimsical ways by some of the region's artists. The results were entertaining, and many people (Nicki and I included) went out

of our way to see as many of them as we could. I've made a web page that shows some of our photos: <http://www.jophan.org/safari/> After the exhibit ended, many of them were sold at auction which raised several hundred thousand dollars for the DC Arts Commission. Some of them will still be around, as some of the auctions were won by DC residents and businesses. I hope so, because even after three 'safaris' to go out and find some of them, I only managed to see maybe a quarter of all the beasts!

Mailing Comments – SFPA 229

Sheila Strickland

On Fanthologies: "I understand these readings have been done before, but this was the first time I had seen them." Yes, we did a three-hour Fanthology event at the 1999 NASFiC – but even then, we only got through about half the material we'd tagged to be read. The DSC Fanthology was only an hour long, which made it a lot easier to manage, but even so, if everybody had shown up at the event who said they would (hi, Guy!), we couldn't have fit it all in.

Thanks for the nice comment on my Postcard Diaries!

Toni Weisskopf

On vacation travel: "I love train travel, too. I'm trying to talk Reinhardt into a trip to Prague next year." If you've never been to Eastern Europe, that's the best place to start – lots of English now spoken in the city, and there are thousands of tourists. It's a spectacular city. From there, it's an easy train ride to many other places, including Vienna or Bratislava (about 5 hours each) and Berlin (maybe 6 hours), and a bit longer (or overnight) to Warsaw (about 9 hours) and Budapest (maybe 8 hours). I've already written about how inexpensive the trains are; it's one of my favorite ways to travel.

Ned Brooks

On postal security: "I have yet to receive any mail that appeared to have been irradiated." They're only doing it for U.S. Government recipients, I think. None of the mail we get at home has been treated, but all the mail I get at work has been. They even rubber stamp it 'Sanitized'.

Jeff Copeland / *Historical Hugo Hysterics*

On the nominees: "I have been unable to find the nominees lists for 1953, 1955, 1956, or 1958." That's because they didn't exist – the 1959 Worldcon was the first one to have a preliminary ballot to select nominees. (The 1957 Worldcon didn't have one either, but, as you mentioned, didn't hand out any awards for fiction.) It's interesting to look through the listings, to see what stories didn't win awards. Connie Willis, lately, wins more often than she loses the times she's nominated, but that wasn't always so – she was a three-time loser in 1992. And that her first nomination was way back in 1980 (she did not have a good track record until after 1992, winning only twice in her first 12 nominations – take heart, Guy!). I also see than some of my favorite stories (such as Kim Stanley Robinson's novella "Green Mars") were nominees, back before I'd read them.

Richard Dengrove

More on postal security: "In a few more months, I think it will be forgotten. Your letters will no longer be discolored or brittle. And your mail will be received as close to on time as before." They've improved things so there's only a week or so delay in mail delivery at work now, but I don't think they're going to stop irradiating and autoclaving the mail any time soon. What I really need to do is find out how to have perishable things sent to me, like CDs, for instance. Stuff like that right now is limited to Fedex and other courier services, but that seems a waste for things that are not really time sensitive.

Guy Lillian

On Hugo voting: "Something definitely needs to change ... Frank Wu had a margin of *fifty first-place votes* over his nearest competitor in the Fan Artist category – but because he didn't have a majority, the Australian ballot system kicked in and he eventually lost. This isn't the first time this has happened, and it ain't fair." Actually, it is fair. So fair, in fact, that it allows you to cast your first place votes for who you want to, without fearing that you're handing the election to somebody you don't want to win. If the 2000 Presidential Election had been run in this format, Al Gore would now be President.

On classical music and composers: "Do classical music enthusiasts ... think of [Salieri] as mediocre, just because he was a contemporary of the nearly divine Mozart – and *wasn't* Mozart?" It's all relative. That Salieri is remembered at all, and that his music is still being performed and recorded, shows that he was a true talent. I don't think he's in the top 100 composers of all time, or maybe not even in the top 200, but how many people have composed and performed classical music since the 1600s? Millions! If you use that as a yardstick, Salieri is one of the elite few who was successful enough to become immortal through his compositions.

Jeff Copeland

On movies: "I'd forgotten how cool a caper movie [*Bound*] was." Yep. It was made by the Wachowski brothers, the same guys who later made *The Matrix*. Very slickly made, and it even has Joe Pantoliano in it.

On NASFiC site selection: "I seem to remember that the NASFiC site [used to be] selected by packing the business meeting." Correct. That's how Louisville was selected for the 1979 NASFiC in 1977, after Brighton had first beaten New Orleans for the right to host the 1979 Worldcon.

David Schlosser

On auto mileage: "The [Toyota] Prius is working out just great. It runs in the 45-50 mpg range pretty consistently." Good mileage, but I don't think it's great mileage, seeing how the Prius is a hybrid. Those things are supposed to get 55-70 mpg, according to the hype that's come out about them. Nicki's new Toyota Echo gets between 30 and 40 mpg, and it cost only about half of what the Prius costs. But that said, I think hybrid vehicles may well be the way of the future, if the operating costs are truly as low as they are claimed (and if the automobile manufacturers continue to give blanket warranty on the batteries). We'll know it for sure if they ever introduce a hybrid SUV.

Janice Gelb

On baseball: "Sorry the Giants were out of town during worldcon. Someday you'll have to come to this area while they're here so you can see PacBell Park, which is a really beautiful place." Yeah, they were in town until just before we arrived in San Francisco, then they came back the day we left for home. It's a conspiracy, I tell you!

On worldcon dining: "Glad we finally got to eat a meal together." Me too, but next time I'll remember to enquire about the cost of the wine first!

Eve Ackerman

On ConJosé highlights: "The other highlight of the con was Janice's Fannish anniversary party." I see that I forgot to mention it in my narrative; yes, it was one of the better parties of the convention, and I was happy to be part of it.

On California weather: "I remember ConFrancisco as being chilly and figured ConJosé would be similar." It was actually pretty warm in San Francisco too; we'd brought sweatshirts for the day we'd be there, but never really needed them. Even if we had, though, the weather in San Francisco can be quite different from places just a few miles away – I remember that on one of my business trips there, back in the 1980s, the temperature one day in Palo Alto, in the middle of the summer, was about 90°. By the time I reached San Francisco about an hour later, the temperature had dropped by almost 40°, and there was a brisk wind. No fun at all for somebody dressed in summer clothes!

Gary Robe

On the Smithsonian Folklife Festival: "We never saw Yo Yo Ma!" He performed as part of the Silk Road Ensemble, which had two one-hour performances each day of the Festival. "It was a very impressive fair. What was even more impressive was that it was all gone within a day of closing." One of the event announcers, on the last day of the Festival, said that at the day's close the Festival would sink back into the ground like Brigadoon and emerge again next summer for another two weeks. And he's right!

Dal

This was posted to several online mailing lists and the rec.arts.sf.fandom news group. I'm reprinting it here for those who knew Dal, and for those who didn't:

Dalvin M. Coger, a fan since the early 1940s, passed away on Wednesday, October 2nd, 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."

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 enigmatic Francis Towner Laney. Dal later wrote about that time, mentioning that "I was permitted to flop over the weekend in the [LASFS] clubhouse [on Bixel Street], and frequently spent Saturday nights there while on a weekend pass. Forry Ackerman and Morojo had made me welcome."

It was more than 20 years of gafiation after that, first in the military and then in academia -- Dal became a professor at the University of Memphis (Tennessee), 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, that helped make us friends. And even though most of his time was still absorbed by academic interests, both before and after his retirement sometime in the 1990s, he still found time for some fan writing; I am pleased that Nicki and I were allowed to publish two of his fan history-related articles in MIMOSA. He 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, that were fascinating to listen to.

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 most recent time was this past June, and I remember him looking very energetic and healthy, much younger than his 80+ years. For that reason, I don't think I ever thought that might be the last time I'd ever see him. Unfortunately, I won't, and I am still trying to come to grips that. I am going to miss him greatly.

He was my friend.



Howard DeVore and Dal Coger, Midwestcon 43 (1992)