

# Up the Coast

## **Prolog: Here is where it begins.**

It really wasn't all that long ago that I was a cellular Luddite. I didn't get my first mobile phone until I was in my fifties, and even then it was one of those cheap flip phones which were good at making telephone calls but not much else. My first 'smart' phone, several years later, was an ancient Blackberry that I got as a hand-me-down. And it wasn't really all that smart – it did have a few built-in apps, but they were all either useless to me or else difficult enough to use that they might as well have been useless.

And then the world changed for me. My next phone after that was an honest-to-god iPhone and right out of the box it had what seemed to me an *amazing* amount of really useful apps and the ability to customize the device to add even more if I so desired. (Which I did.) And now, after just five years of being i-connected, I find that I've become a nomophobe. There are many apps such as my email that I use several times a day and others such as the airline and hotel apps that are really useful when I'm preparing for a road trip. But the one that I've grown to really depend on when I'm actually out on the road is the maps app, and in particular its GPS capabilities. It's found me alternate routes around detours and traffic jams and kept me from getting lost (on foot as well as behind the wheel) any number of times.

The most recent case in point happened in August, when Nicki and I were out in California for a vacation which would eventually take us to San Jose for the 76<sup>th</sup> World Science Fiction Convention. We had gotten into LAX just in time for the Friday afternoon glacially slow Los Angeles rush hour and had originally intended to take our rental car out the 101 freeway toward Ventura. But my iPhone somehow 'knew' that would have been a big mistake because of all the rush hour traffic and routed us up the incrementally faster Pacific Coast Highway instead. We soon realized that we'd never been that way before – which in itself had been a big mistake – when we came upon a marvelous ocean vista which seemed to be unending. The beaches went on and on for more than twenty miles – most of an hour at the speed we were able to maintain. And along the way there were thousands of people along those beaches taking in the late afternoon sun in various ways – cycling, walking, swimming, and surfing. *Especially* surfing. In addition to all the surfers on the water, we saw dozens of boards of various size and design atop or hanging out of vehicles of various size and design. They were everywhere.

It was twenty miles of *The Endless Summer*.

Now, I've never been on a surfboard and, indeed, have no desire to ever do so. But after vicariously experiencing the California beach life as we slowly wheeled past it, I can well understand its allure. People that I observed who were enjoying the late summer sun as the world went by all around them – they all looked like they'd found serenity. If I'd been brought up in southern California instead of the icy New York north country, I might well have been one of them.

Every so often we emerged from beach-induced sensory overload when traffic ground nearly to a halt while we slowly eased our way through busy intersections. Nicki pointed out to me the street sign for one of these: the famous Sunset Boulevard. "So here is where it begins," she said.

In more ways than one she was right.

## In the Land of the Chumash

The area around what is now the city of Ventura has been inhabited for more than 10,000 years. In 1769, an expedition led by Spanish military officer Gaspar de Portolá established the first European settlement there. Prior to that it was populated by the indigenous Native American Chumash people.

There is a small but informative exhibit about the Chumash at the Museum of Ventura County, one of the places that we visited during our two days in the city. The gallery seemed mostly aimed at school kids with visual depictions of the Chumash culture as well as artifacts and interactive displays, but elsewhere on the museum grounds there is a recreation of part of a Chumash village including one of their houses – it's vaguely dome-like in shape, built from tree branches and covered by bundles of reeds with a hole in the top where light could enter and smoke could escape.



inside the Chumash gallery at the Museum of Ventura County

The Chumash civilization flourished prior to its first contact with Europeans, ranging along the Pacific coast from Los Angeles all the way north to San Luis Obispo including several of the Channel Islands offshore of Santa Barbara. The Chumash culture was mainly that of a hunter-gatherer people, though they were known for shell beads which became the currency for a thriving regional trade network. But the coming of the Spanish colonists mostly meant the end for the Chumash as a nation. The indigenous population declined due to disease brought by the settlers and by displacement away from areas that had become occupied by the Spanish. And many of those who remained were converted into Christianity at the Spanish missions which were built in the late 1700s.



Mission San Buenaventura

One of those old Spanish Missions is in downtown Ventura, right across the street from the museum. It was founded in 1782, the ninth and last one established by the Franciscan friar Junípero Serra. The building that's there now is a bit younger than that, completed in 1809 to replace the original structure which had been destroyed by fire. It's very striking in its appearance, and Nicki and I found it even better on the inside. The Mission has its own museum, as you might expect, and even though it was pretty small it still contained dozens of religious artifacts that date back to the early 19<sup>th</sup> century and fragments of items, from the original church, which had been carved and gilded by the resident Chumash people.

The one that I found most interesting was a wooden bell. It's one of two that the museum has on display, dating back to the mid-1860s and originally residing up in the Mission's tower. As for why a bell should be made out of wood, there have been several theories, the most colorful being that the original bells (presumably made from metal) had been stolen earlier in the 1800s by one of the pirates who prowled around the Pacific coast back then. But the best guess, from what I've been able to research, is a much more mundane explanation – the bells were made from wood because it was much less expensive to do so. Back then, cost certainly mattered.



one of the wooden bells in the Mission Museum

There was a lot to see and do in the relatively short time that Nicki and I were in Ventura. The Museum of Ventura County had several other galleries which interested us, including one titled “Black and White and Read All Over”, which was an



George Stuart's quarter life-size figurine of Giovanni Borgia

exhibition of comic art by local artists who “shaped the development of the American comic strip and comic book during the past century”. One of those featured was Sergio Aragones, who was a winner of the 2002 Eisner Hall of Fame Award.

But the gallery that really drew our attention was an assemblage of one-quarter life-size figurines, created by sculptor and historian George Stuart, which were themed around the Renaissance and Reformation eras. Stuart, who lives up in the hills overlooking Ventura, has created these figures to augment monologues he has written and performed about notable historical eras of the past 400 years. The collection that we saw on display featured really detailed recreations of many famous and infamous personalities, including the Borgias, Martin Luther, Pope Leo X, and the notorious puritan fanatic Girolamo Savonarola. And there was also a short film on how Stuart constructed these amazing recreations. When we mentioned to the museum staff how impressed we were by what we saw, they told us that it was a permanent installation but the themes were changed several times a year to feature different collections of figurines. Just another example of “what’s old is new again”.

Ventura is old, but also new again from what we could see. It had been more than a decade since our previous time there and even though the downtown looked about the same it was pretty obvious that the city was growing, especially in areas away from downtown. There were a lot of large shopping centers that looked to be only a few years old. There were also many new places to eat. And gone were citrus groves that used to back up to housing subdivisions – in their place were more subdivisions. But the opportunity to rediscover Ventura was really not what brought us there. It was friendship.



## Why we came to Ventura

It was back in 1991 that I first became acquainted with Lester and Esther Cole. I was doing some research for a new edition of Harry Warner, Jr.'s book *A Wealth of Fable*, an informal history of 1950s science fiction fandom, and had contacted them to gather additional information about the 1954 World Science Fiction Convention, which was held in San Francisco that year. (Lester had been co-chair and Esther the treasurer.) It was two years later, at the 1993 Worldcon (also in San Francisco), that Nicki and I got to meet them – they had attended to participate in several discussion panels about fandom from that fabulous decade of the 1950s. I was moderator for the panel about the '54 Worldcon and I remember that it was highly informative and also really entertaining, so much so that I am hoping that an audio recording will someday surface.

Nicki and I became friends with the Coles at the 1993 Worldcon, and following the convention we persuaded them to contribute essays to our fanzine *Mimosa*. Esther's appeared in the 16<sup>th</sup> issue, in December 1994, and described the half century that she and Lester had been science fiction fans. It was titled, appropriately, "I Married a Science Fiction" and evoked a comment from another fanzine publisher that this was the kind of article he would want to build an issue around. But it was Lester's article, which appeared in the 18<sup>th</sup> issue in May 1995, which was of even greater historical interest because it provided an inside story about the time, in February 1952, when the Little Men's Science Fiction Club of Berkeley, California (of which he was President) had staked a claim for a tract of land on the moon. It resulted in mainstream news coverage around the world.



Nicki with Esther Cole at her home in Ventura



Esther and Lester Cole  
at the 1954 Worldcon

By the time we had met the Coles they had long since moved down to Ventura. Esther described it as a charming little city and a good place to live, and invited us to pay them a visit. We did that in 1996, as part of our trip to the Worldcon down in Anaheim that year, and saw them again in 2002 and 2006 when we were back in California for other Worldcons. When it came time to plan for this year's Worldcon we had many options for places to go and things to do before we ended up in San Jose. But all of them included a visit to the Coles in Ventura. They are both in their nineties now and even though neither they nor we wanted to acknowledge it, this might well be the last time we'd see them.

It turned out that Lester was not feeling well and had just returned home from a short stay in the hospital, but Esther was as buoyant as we'd remembered her from a dozen years earlier. It was all

so very pleasant to see them again. We sat around the dining room table with Esther, bringing back some of the memories from the past quarter century of our friendship and telling her about some of what was going on in current-day fandom. She talked about things that had happened and were happening in her life, including a feud with her next door neighbor that had started when she had put signs supporting left-of-center political candidates in her yard. Time passed too quickly, and then it was time to go – we took our leave just as a health care specialist was arriving for Lester. Esther accompanied us to her front gate and as it closed between us I told her gently that I wasn't sure we'd ever see them again. This could be the last time.

But she just smiled and told me, “We won't let it be.” I'm hoping she's right.

### **A Tale of ~~Two Cities~~ Four Wineries**

By the time we ended our two day visit to Ventura we had decided that Esther was correct – it really *is* a charming place. The main street through downtown has all kinds of interesting shops and restaurants, all in close proximity to the Pacific Ocean. Nicki and I are both East Coast people and I don't see us ever moving out to California. But if we did, Ventura is the place we'd want to be.

But Paso Robles might come in a close second. That was the next stop in our journey up the California coast, and it seemed to have almost as much charm as Ventura. The city center is dominated by a large green space unimaginatively named ‘Downtown City Park’ which is home to the Paso Robles Historical Society, housed in a magnificent old building that was formerly the Carnegie Library. Nearby is a statue of the famous Polish pianist and statesman Ignacy Jan Paderewski, who settled in Paso Robles during the period between the two World Wars. In his honor Paso Robles hosts a four-day festival every November with concerts and recitals, lectures, a youth piano competition, film screenings, and wine tasting. Probably *lots* of wine tasting – just in the perimeter surrounding the park there are many storefronts which offer wine tastings. And there is no lack of wines to taste because in and around Paso Robles there are more than 200 wineries.



the old Carnegie Library and Paderewski statue in Paso Robles

And that was the reason we had come to Paso Robles. The previous time we had been through there, back in 2006, we had come into the city by Highway 46 from the west, which goes up and over a mountainous ridge that separates the southern end of the Salinas River Valley from the Pacific coastal plain. The two things that were memorable about that drive were the magnificent views we had of the ocean before topping the ridge and all the wineries we passed by which populate that highway on the way down into Paso Robles. Many of them had tasting rooms and we'd been sorely tempted to stop and check some of them out, but there just hadn't been time. For this trip, it was a different story.

This time we had allotted a full day in Paso Robles so that we could take a winery tour. There are several available and the one we had chosen took us out the other side of Highway 46, up into the hills to the east of the city. Besides the minibus driver, it was just us and two others, a married couple from down in Temecula who apparently do winery tours for their vacations.

The day consisted of visits to four wineries, ranging from the very small to moderately large. The first one was the smallest but it was also the most interesting. The Ranchita Canyon Winery has been in existence only since 1999 when the owners, Bill and Teresa Hinrichs, bought the land and planted the grapevines. There are only about 50 acres total, but it's enough to produce 1,000 cases annually in ten varietals plus custom blends. We didn't see grape harvesting or actual wine production – August is too early for that – but we did get a behind-the-scenes tour of the winemaking process as well as the storage area where wine is being aged in oak barrels.



Ranchita Canyon Winery owner Bill Hinrichs extracts a wine sample for tasting

Ranchita Canyon is a boutique winery. They don't sell commercially, only to those who come to the place – they apparently get all the visibility they need through word-of-mouth and from various festivals and tasting events down in Paso Robles. The wines they sell are premium priced, and they apparently have found the right business plan to be sustainable. I asked Bill how he got started and he replied that the winery is his retirement project. He'd been near the end of a successful career at IBM when he and his wife had bought the place. It was a fixer-upper and they'd had to do a lot of work and invest a substantial amount of money to make the buildings that were there suitable for use. Bill said it had been worth it, and from the wines he offered for tasting I can well believe it. He presented us eight different varietals and blends to taste, plus a sample from one of the barrels to demonstrate the difference in taste for wine that was not yet fully aged.

We were there about an hour longer than had been scheduled but it was so pleasant and with such good conversation that we could easily have stayed all day had there not been three other stops in the tour. Before we reboarded the minibus I took one last look around of the hillsides covered in grapevines. There wasn't another house in sight. I commented to Bill that it must get so dark at night that millions of stars would be visible. He smiled and said, "Yes, it does." I'm envious.



the view from the tasting room at Ranchita Canyon Winery



The other three wineries we visited were equally memorable in their own ways. Next was the Graveyard Vineyards Winery, situated adjacent to the Pleasant Valley Cemetery with a fish pond just down the hill from the tasting room and a nearby picnic area where we had lunch. It also was relatively small in terms of yearly wine production but had added a gift shop to augment its income. Among other things there were some exquisite and colorful ceramic tiles for sale, depicting ghouls and goblins in Halloween-ish graveyard scenes, which probably sell pretty well in October. After that was the Riverstar Vineyards Winery, which was owned by a woman and her daughter. And also a friendly black Labrador, who seemed happy to provide his opinion on things whenever someone petted him. And we ended the tour at the biggest place we visited – the LaVigne Winery, which had an expansive tasting room that actually seemed more of a commercial storefront. And with good reason – there was more than wine for sale there. We snacked on some excellent cheeses that were paired with the wines we tasted, and were informed that the winery makes a substantial part of its income from sales of these cheeses.



the owners of Riverstar Vineyards Winery

By the end of the day I had sampled more than thirty different wines, and I was pretty much wasted. Each tasting room has small spittoons where you can pour out from your glass any wine you don't want to consume, and that's what Nicki did. But for me...well, if somebody is going to pour a sample of fine wine into my glass, I'm going to drink it. All in all, it was a great day, really memorable and a highlight of the trip. But it's probably a good thing we didn't have a fifth winery on the tour schedule.

## The Spirit of 76

I am now convinced that Paso Robles is going to be, and soon, the wine center of California, surpassing even the Napa and Sonoma areas of the state. The wines are that good. And the amount of land being used for growing grapes is enormous. For miles and miles along the 101 freeway coming into and leaving Paso Robles there was nothing but the green of grapevines to be seen. There are also wineries about a three-hour drive farther up the coast, in the San Jose area, but they were not what we went there to see. We were there for this big science fiction convention.

San Jose was previously host to a Worldcon back in 2002 and what I mostly remember about that convention was not so much the programming or the special events (which included a well-attended talk by actor Patrick Stewart), it was the chance to reconnect with friends – some of whom we'd not seen in a long time and one, as it turned out, we'd never see again. Worldcons are like that and the current one, generically-named "Worldcon 76", was typical in this regard. As the name implies, Worldcons are international events. There are people we know who live in far-flung places in the world (as well as only slightly less far-flung places across the United States and Canada), and the only times we ever see them are at Worldcons. This also is true for

some of our more elderly friends we see at Worldcons, and each time we do it's hard not to wonder if there will be a next time. But not for all of them. The oldest person at the convention was in his mid-nineties and I think he must have a hidden portrait of himself somewhere which is doing all the aging. He looked in better shape than I am.

The previous time I'd been to a Worldcon, back in 2016, my convention schedule had kept me busy – I had participated in six discussion panels, one of which I moderated. But for Worldcon 76, I wasn't on any at all. And Nicki did only slightly better, participating in one cryptography-themed panel. We took it as just another example of the relentless passage of time – fifteen years down the road from winning a sixth Hugo Award and we're now chopped liver.



Nicki (at left) in the "Contemporary Cryptography" panel

Nevertheless, there was still a lot going on that attracted my attention. Even though I wasn't a participant in any of the hundreds of panels over the five days of the convention, there were many that I attended and several that were of sufficient interest that Nicki and I made audio recordings for the fan history YouTube channel. One of these was the panel commemorating the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the legendary 1968 Worldcon, which had been held over in Berkeley. The panelists were some of the attendees of that convention and described a time back when multi-day cross-country trips to get there and back in a car packed with people were no big deal. The panelists described in loving detail much of what happened at the convention – a Guest of Honor speech which seemed to go on for days, an anti-war protest going on outside the convention hotel that was dispersed by police tear gas, a convention hotel without air conditioning in the middle of a heat wave, and a demonstration by the Society for Creative Anachronism that was interrupted by a swarm of wasps. Compared to all that, Worldcon 76 was downright prosaic.

There were panels at Worldcon 76 which were so popular that the audience filled every seat, took every standing room place around the room, and even spilled out into the convention center hallway. For those you had to get there early, as I found out to my dismay a couple of times. The one that possibly had the greatest audience overflow happened on the middle day of the convention – it was a remembrance of Harlan Ellison, who had died just a few weeks earlier.



the Harlan Ellison remembrance panel

As most of us know, Ellison had a very outgoing and at times provocative personality (to say the least!), and he often interacted



with fans throughout his life partly because he was a science fiction fan before he became a professional writer. A show of hands indicated that most of the people in attendance had a personal Harlan story of some kind (Nicki and me included), but given how packed the room was and how limited the available time was (just 55 minutes were allotted) it was only the panelists who shared their memories about Ellison with the most entertaining ones, no surprise, coming from Robert Silverberg, who had been friends with him for more than 60 years.

Ellison was depicted as one of the great science fiction writers of all time, which he certainly was, and also someone who wasn't averse to stirring up some controversy by his words and actions from time to time. Which he certainly did. The panelists appeared to me to show catharsis with all their Harlan stories, and in the end there was consensus that there was a pedestal somewhere out there that Mr. Ellison's career and reputation would reside upon. He was unique, and that was emphasized at the end of the panel by Silverberg when, after hearing the moderator say that we would not see Harlan's like again, responded: "One was enough!" It brought the house down.

Just about all of the convention's program was sited in the expansive San Jose Convention Center and even if some of the breakout rooms turned out to not be large enough, the convention's concourse was plenty big for everything it contained. That's where the dealers area and art show were located, but it also had more than enough room for all the other features that Worldcons are known for – fan tables promoting conventions and special interest groups, site selection for a future Worldcon, and a fan



one-tenth scale recreation of the San Jose Electric Light Tower



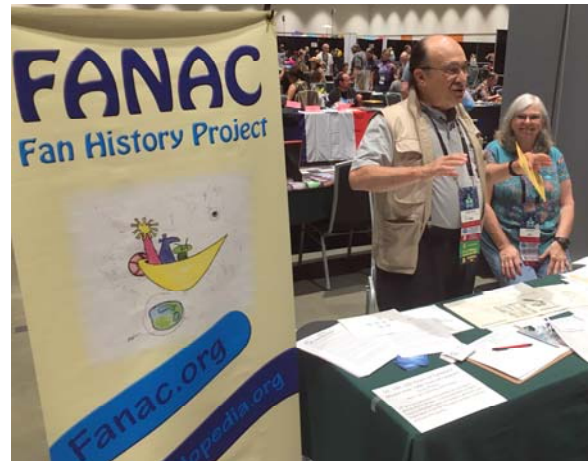
Callahan's Place during the pun-off contest

lounge where honest-to-god

fanzines were available for reading. There was also a stage area with table seating called 'Callahan's Place' that was inspired by a fabled bar featured in stories by the convention's Guest of Honor, Spider Robinson. Throughout the convention it was used for mini-concerts and special events such as pun-off and tall tale contests.

There was a unifying symbol to all of this – a one-tenth scale retro-future recreation of old San Jose Electric Light Tower, created by the convention chairman as a homage to the original tower which had existed for only about 30 years around the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup>. It had been erected over the intersection of two downtown streets, making San Jose the first electrified city west of the Rocky Mountains, and to this day it remains one of the symbols of the city. It's even been memorialized by a local brewing company with its Electric Tower IPA.

Of all the fan tables in the concourse, the one that interested me the most was hosted by the FANAC Fan History Project. Originally, FANAC was the organization which bid for and ran the 1992 Worldcon, Magicon, which was held in Orlando that year. But following the convention it has devoted its resources over the past quarter century to the preservation of information about science fiction and science fiction fandom. The **fanac.org** website and the FANAC Fan History YouTube Channel were created for this purpose and as a whole contain a large archive of fan publications, photographs, information about past conventions and fan organizations, as well as audio and video recordings of speeches, interviews, and scripted productions, many of which were taped decades ago.



Joe Siclari and Edie Stern at the FANAC Fan History Project table

Arguably the most important accomplishment to date by the organization has been the publication of a third edition of the ‘Fancylopedia’ which is best described (according to the FANAC website) as a place “where you can find articles about all aspects of SF fandom: people, places, things, events, honors and awards, conventions, slogans, clubs and most of the *et ceteras* that occur to you”. And, as it’s been published as a Wiki, it’s still a work in progress.



Brad Lyau and I account for 93 years of fandom!

The FANAC Fan History Project was represented at Worldcon 76 by three of its founders: Joe Siclari, Edie Stern, and Mark Olson. They do special activities at each Worldcon where the Fan History Project is represented, with the one for Worldcon 76 titled “1,000 Years of Fandom”. This was based on an idea by Mark Olson, with the objective of documenting, through photographs, a cumulative 1,000 years of fandom by those who were attending the convention.

It was mostly a word-of-mouth undertaking, with people coming up to the FANAC table throughout the convention to have their photos taken holding cards showing their years of involvement in science fiction fandom. Mine (as well as Nicki’s) was 43 years, which probably put us in the upper echelon of those who were photographed for the project. But not even close to the most – there were many fans with 50 or more years, and one person (Tony Lewis of the

NESFA club in Massachusetts) displayed a card that showed 70 years! In spite of the relative lack of publicity it took only a few hours to blow past the 1,000 year goal and by the close of the convention the total had reached an amazing 6,707 years. In the end, for many of us who had our pictures taken, we did find out what 1,000 years of fandom looks like. It looks old.

“Being old” could actually have been a subliminal theme of Worldcon 76. Worldcon Guests of Honor are normally selected as a career honor, which usually means they are senior citizens. That was true for three of this convention’s guests, with another two honored in absentia because they were deceased. But there was something else at Worldcon 76 which uniquely qualified as being old – it was the time capsule from Magicon.

At the closing ceremonies of the 1992 Worldcon, its chairman, Joe Siclari, had assembled a time capsule which was filled with publications, mementos, and other keepsake items from the convention. Since then the plastic box has resided in Joe’s garage. The original plan had been to open it on the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of its creation but that became unfeasible when site selection for the 2017 Worldcon awarded that convention to Helsinki, Finland. So instead, the big reveal happened in San Jose.

There was a lot of stuff in that plastic box! Either it was a miracle of packing or else there’s an unknown feature about time capsules which make them bigger on the inside than the outside. The first thing removed was an extra Hugo Award trophy from 1992, and boy did that bring back some memories! Nicki and I have an identical one of those which we won at Magicon for Best Fanzine. It was our first Hugo Award, and it has the additional historical significance of being the only time that a Hugo was presented in error. The Hugo Award Administrators for that convention had made a major screw-up (there’s really no other way of putting it)



the opening of the Magicon Time Capsule



There was a lot of stuff in there!



I do my Han Solo in carbonite imitation

and the wrong person was called onstage to accept the award. And when the mistake was finally corrected, it happened at exactly the wrong time. But that’s another story.

There was one other old thing of note at the convention, this one originating a long time ago in a galaxy far, far away. It was a Lucasfilm Ltd. movie prop from the original *Star Wars* trilogy – Han Solo encased in carbonite. It had been set up in the concourse as a magnet for photo ops, and many people were only too happy to oblige. Me included.



The highlight of any Worldcon is the Hugo Award Ceremony which for Worldcon 76 took place on the final evening of the convention. It's interesting enough that Nicki and I wanted to see it, but not quite so much that we wanted to be in the large ballroom where the awards were being presented. Instead, we made our way over to Callahan's Place where the ceremony was being live streamed. And that was the place to be – instead of a crowded dark room where you had to speak in whispers, we were able to relax and have normal-voice conversations with friends who were seated nearby. There were even snacks for sale, and I was enjoying an ice cream sandwich when the proxy acceptor for Mike Glycer's popular fanzine-turned-newsblog *File 770* (which had just won the Best Fanzine Hugo for the eighth time) informed the audience that Mike is recusing himself and *File 770* for the rest of eternity. Mike was not there in person to tell that to the audience because of a medical emergency which landed him in the hospital for most of the convention, and that resulted in him acquiring a heart pacemaker a few days later.



the live stream of the Hugo Awards Ceremony at Callahan's Place



at the SFPA party

Nicki and I were relieved that no calamities struck any other people we knew at Worldcon 76. And that covers a lot of ground – after four decades of attending Worldcons, we knew a lot of people at the convention. A few of them are members of the Southern Fandom Press Alliance apa (as are we) and we'd all taken the opportunity earlier in the convention to have a room party for the SFPAn who were in San Jose. My friend Guy Lillian was there – he and his wife Rose had driven to San Jose all the way from Cape Canaveral, Florida. With their two Yorkies! That seemed like almost too big of an adventure to me, so I had been calling him daily to check in on his progress during the trip. But when Nicki and I finally met up with them, he and Rosie looked no worse for wear. Me, I'd have been a blubbery mass of protoplasm I think. Kudos to them and their stamina.

Nicki and I cross paths with Guy and Rosie about once a year on the average, but there were others at the SFPA party we hardly ever get to see. Sheila Strickland, for example. She lives near Baton Rouge, Louisiana, and this was one of the few Worldcons she's been to. She *does* go to DeepSouthCons, as do we, but lately we've been out of synch with Sheila on which ones we've attended and which ones we haven't. So I really enjoyed talking to her outside the pages of SFPA – she had been part of a choir trip to New York City earlier in the year, an excellent

excursion just in itself, but had also found the time to visit a few of the places that Nicki and I have been to in our annual January mini-vacations in The Big Apple. There's some synchronicity there somewhere.

David Schlosser was also at the SFPA party. It was a much shorter trip for him, as he resides up in the wilderness of way northern California. He was central to the big accomplishment of the party – we *de facto* elected him to be the next SFPA official editor. That brought a sigh of relief from me, as I'd been afraid that a united front would form and look in *my* direction. Ruth Judkowitz and Kyla – just Kyla – were there too, and it had been years and years since the last time I'd seen them. But they looked just the same as before, as far as I could tell – maybe they also have pictures hidden in attics which are doing all the aging. And we were also happy to see Jeff and Liz Copeland, who had made their way down to San Jose from their home in the Seattle 'burbs. Worldcons are really the only times we get to cross paths with them, the previous time being three years ago (for Liz) and the time before that back in 2008 (when they'd both been able to attend). The SFPA party was the only time we saw them, though. Jeff told me that he and Liz had to leave San Jose on Sunday to fly down to San Diego for a wedding. That meant he missed seeing the Hugo Awards Ceremony. Unless, of course, he surreptitiously live streamed it during one of the wedding events. I guess I'll have to wait for his next SFPazine to find out.

### Epilog: What we did (and didn't) get to do in San Jose

A couple weeks before our trip I discovered that I had messed up our airline reservations such that we had to return home from San Jose a day later than we'd originally planned. In the end that worked out okay, as it gave us the opportunity on that extra day to see the Computer History Museum. It's been in existence since 1996 and in its current location since 2002, but as it's more than 10 miles from downtown San Jose it wasn't one of the places we visited during the previous San Jose Worldcon.



during the docent tour of the Computer History Museum



the docent describes ENIAC

There was a lot to see and we had a really informative tour, led by a docent who had attended Worldcon 76. The

museum has the largest collection of computers and computing accessories in the world, dating all the way back to the very first general purpose programmable electronic computer, ENIAC, which was used starting in the mid-1940s to help design the hydrogen bomb and after that on less destructive projects. And there was also a Cray-1, dating back to 1975 and at that time the world's fastest computer in terms of operating speed. But that was then. I found it ironic that my iPhone, which I used for photographs during the tour, is a thousand times faster.

There were also museums we visited in San Jose prior to the convention which were only a short walk from our hotel. One of them was the San Jose Museum of Art, which had on display exhibitions as varied as “Rise Up! Social Justice in Art” to “Crossroads: American Scene Prints from Thomas Hart Benton to Grant Wood” to “The House Imaginary”, the latter a selection of sculptures, paintings, films, photographs, and drawings of dwellings by various artists which were intended to “explore memory, identity and belonging in an increasing itinerant world”. We found it thought-provoking and definitely worth the visit, though it didn’t take a great amount of time to see it all.

And then there was the San Jose Museum of Quilts and Textiles, housed in a building so small that it didn’t have any of its permanent collection on display. Nor any quilts, either, to Nicki’s disappointment, except for a few in the gift shop. But what they did have was interesting. The best exhibit had nothing to do with either quilts or textiles – it was all about paper cutting, a homage to an art form which dates back to the 4<sup>th</sup> century.

As for what we didn’t do, probably the most obvious was a visit to the Winchester Mystery House, a large mansion that was once the residence of the widow of firearms magnate William Winchester. It’s filled with architectural quirks and has been claimed to be haunted by the ghosts of those killed by Winchester rifles.



Nicki contemplates the ornate paper cutting “Morning Warm Ups (optic games)” at the Museum of Quilts and Textiles



my long-lens photo from the convention hotel of Lick Observatory

Next time for that. The one place I *really* wish I could have visited was actually visible from the convention hotel – Lick Observatory, located atop a mountain ridge to the east of San Jose. It dates back to the 1880s

and is the site of one of the world’s largest refracting telescopes. An amateur astronomer friend of mine who was at the convention did make the trip and the photos he sent me afterwards made me wish that I had planned differently.

But, you know, you can’t do everything. What we did do in our time in California was certainly memorable – it turned out to be one of our best vacation trips. And yet, when it was over, we were happy to be home again. That’s our best destination ever. ☀

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