

## DeepSouthCon 50

I *almost* missed the airplane to Huntsville.

It was late Friday afternoon and traffic in the D.C. area was even more horrendous than I had expected. My flight back to the United States from Europe had gotten me into Dulles Airport about 1:30pm, but it took about an hour to clear customs and corral my luggage, and the drive home, 35 miles by auto, took about two hours. By the time I had finished unpacking and getting a much-needed shower, I was in a rush. The flight to Huntsville was at 8:30pm out of BWI Airport, and there was a commuter bus that I had expected would get there in plenty of time. But with all the traffic tie-ups, the bus was nearly an hour late in arriving the commuter parking lot where the pickup point was.

In spite of all the encouraging words of the other bus passengers, I was sweating bullets for the entire ride to the airport. Many of the others on the bus were headed for the new casino that had opened a few weeks earlier not far from BWI and when it finally became evident I would get to the airport in time, I told them that they had probably earned lots of karma points for all their positive thoughts. I only hope that translated to good luck with the slots.

I was able to make it to the departure gate with about ten minutes to spare before the flight closed out. It had helped that I had pre-packed a suitcase that Nicki, who had driven to Huntsville, had taken with her. We'd done that so I could avoid a \$20 luggage fee charged by AirTran but in retrospect, having a pre-printed boarding pass and *not* having to check baggage made the difference between making the flight and being marooned at the airport.

After all that, the flight and its aftermath should have been relatively uneventful and it was, mostly. But it turned out that the hotel's shuttle bus driver had more immediate priorities than going to the airport so I spent most of an hour sitting on a bench outside the baggage claim area, talking to two elderly cabbies who were between fares. We entertained each other with stories about past experiences and misadventures, and we had such a good time that there was some genuine and mutual sadness when the bus finally arrived.

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The DeepSouthCon is one of the oldest annual science fiction conventions, dating back to the early 1960s. This year was the 50<sup>th</sup> DSC and because of this the convention committee had invited, for their Fan Guests, David Hulan and Larry Montgomery, who were the Chairmen of DSCs 1 and 2, respectively. Those first two DSCs, back in the early 1960s, had both been held in Alabama – the first one in Huntsville at the home of Hulan. His house turned out to be more than roomy enough, as only five people, including Hulan, attended.

Since then, DSCs have grown quite a bit, setting a record at the 2011 convention in Texas when about 1,300 were in attendance. This year's convention was smaller than that, but still sizeable enough to fit snugly into a large hotel. And it was a good venue – the interior was an open atrium that went all the way to the roof, more than ten stories up, and all sleeping floor

hallways bordered that huge open space. As a result, the convention seemed much less crowded than it was. And it made figuring out where the evening room parties were located pretty easy.

Besides the room parties, and there were many of them, there was also a convention suite with snacks and beverages that served as a hangout for many of those present. But the most popular gathering place turned out to be the hotel lobby. It was there that Nicki and I found old friends from more than two decades ago. Back when we lived in Tennessee in the 1970s and 1980s, we always took it for granted that we would see them, frequently, at all the various regional



looking across the hotel atrium at a room party several floors down



Nicki with our friend Charlotte Proctor

conventions that were held each year in the mid South. Our paths ceased crossing, for the most part, after we moved north to Maryland in 1988. There's no way that half an hour's pleasant conversation can catch you up on many years' absence, but we tried. Here's hoping our next foray to a southern convention will be much sooner.

This was the first DSC for me and Nicki in a decade. Our previous one was also in Huntsville, back in 2002, when we were the Fan Guests. Neither

of us was on any programming items this time, but we did find some things of interest in the program. Nicki enjoyed the offbeat "SF Song Revue" by the convention's special guest, Dr. Demento, and I found the illustrated talk about the life and times of scientist and science writer Willy Ley by University of Alabama-Huntsville librarian Anne Coleman to be a fascinating hour. But my favorite part of DSC 50 was the visit to the 'Straight to Ale' microbrewery that was



Anne Coleman's illustrated talk about Willy Ley



Pat Molloy goes 'Straight to Ale'

organized by our friend Pat Molloy. It's located about ten minutes by car from the DSC hotel and about a dozen of us went there on a pleasant Saturday afternoon for a tour and tasting. Mostly tasting, actually, as it took less than half an hour to see the entirety of the place. But in spite of its relative smallness, Straight to Ale produces at least a dozen craft beers and ales, all with catchy names inspired by Huntsville's prominence as a NASA space and rocketry center. My favorite was a malty dark ale named "Wernher von Brown", a riff on the name of the

famous astronautics engineer who lived in Huntsville. Delicious, and proof positive that you don't need to be a rocket scientist to make good beer.

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Speaking of rocket scientists, it would have been nice to stick around Huntsville for another couple of days to visit the Space Center and its amazing display of rockets from the beginnings of the space age. But modern-day responsibilities dictated that we leave on the two-day drive north even before DSC's Sunday afternoon closing ceremonies. And also before Guy Lillian's "Podcasting vs. Print Fanzines Smackdown" panel. I'm sorry I missed that, but I've got a pretty good idea how it went.



my friend Guy Lillian and me

So, several hours later, Nicki and I were surveying the lobby of the Fairfield Inn at the Sevierville exit of I-40 in Tennessee. There were big electric blower fans all over the place directing air up toward the ceiling, and there was also a musty smell of lingering dampness.

I asked the hotel's front desk attendant what had happened, and she rolled her eyes and gave an expansive wave of her arm toward all the chaos. "Someone in a fourth floor room did something very stupid a few days ago," she said. "They pulled the sprinkler head off, and a flood came down through the third and second floor rooms into the lobby." Those of you reading this who attended the 1997 Disclave convention\* might find this amusing, or maybe appalling. Or possibly even both. For me, I'm taking it as evidence that history is destined to repeat itself about every fifteen years. I'm hopeful that it won't be that long before I'm able to make it to another DSC. ☀

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\* <http://www.wsfa.org/journal/j97/6/index.htm#tdh> or just Google "Disclave flood"