

Frequent Flyer

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As I mentioned in the last mailing, Anita and I are building a new house. (Strictly speaking, we are paying someone else to build it.) It will have three bedrooms and a two-car garage on the first floor and a bonus room above the garage. It is located in the Pennington Bend area of Nashville by the Cumberland River in a newly developed subdivision. The main advantage of the location is that it is convenient to the airport and the main roads that lead to shopping and entertainment. The picture on the cover page shows me standing in front of our lot.

Work--

The state of Tennessee allows retirees to work 100 days a year without reducing their retirement benefits. Until this fall, no one called Anita about coming back to work under this program. First, someone called to have her come back for 5 days a week for 8 weeks. However, she was not ready to give up her part-time job at Weight Watchers, nor was she ready to get back on the 40 hour a week grind, even if it was temporary. Then another person called and invited her to work 2 days a week, and she accepted. It will take her 50 weeks to get her 100 days, so effectively she has a permanent part-time job. Anita will be working on TennCare, the Tennessee version of Medicare and Medicaid. She will not deal with the public in any way, but sit at a computer terminal and review cases.

The December issue of Lodging Hospitality ranked my company as the 43rd largest hotel management company in the U.S. After beating 2001 in revenues for September through November, we fell behind in December

and so far this month we are barely ahead of January 2002.

A Deutsche Bank Securities study found that total hotel room construction fell 37% from 2001 to 2002. Upscale room construction fell 33%. As a percentage of existing inventory, rooms under construction were 2% in 2002 versus 3.2%. The companies with the most rooms under construction are Marriott (including Fairfield and Residence Inns), Six Continents (Holiday Inns), and Hilton (including Hampton Inns). This bodes well for us if we survive until the next economic upturn, and I am 99% certain that we will.

Writing—

I've written 10 articles for Salem Press in the last year and one-half, and have started another one. (Arthur Hlavaty also writes for them.) They range from 300 to 3,000 words. Two of them were in the F/SF genre: one on *Stranger in a Strange Land* and the other on Terry Brooks. Last summer, an independent comics publisher I never heard of contacted me to generate 20 characters in a superhero universe. Using their guidelines, my experience in role-playing games came in handy as I had no trouble coming up with 20 characters. They were about three months late in sending me the check, so I was relieved when it did not bounce. Finally, I've been entering short story contests and received an honorable mention in one.

Advertising—

The October 31 issue of USA Today reported that a company called Government Acquisitions LLC of Charlotte is signing up cities to sell

advertising space on their police cars. The cities pay \$1 each for new cars, and Government Acquisitions pays for the cars and sells the ads. Among the 20 cities that have signed up are Springfield, Florida, a suburb of Panama City, and Ozark, Alabama. Government Acquisitions says they will solicit ads from both national and local business, including local bail bondsmen and criminal attorneys. Perhaps if Guy Lillian ever goes into private practice, he will advertise on one of these cars.

Unchained Doom—

We originally planned to make a weekend of this Society for Creative Anachronism (SCA) event. We were not planning to stay in a tent, however, as the site, Montgomery Bell State Park, has a motel on the grounds. Unfortunately, after we had sent in our money, Anita discovered that she had to attend a Saturday workshop for Weight Watchers.

We decided to go anyway for the Saturday night feast. When I dropped Anita off at the Vanderbilt Marriott, where the workshop took place, we realized that it just happened to be the day of the Vanderbilt-Alabama football game, so we could see that parking would be a problem. I proceeded to the downtown branch of Nashville's public library, where I did research for one my Salem Press articles. After I finished, I returned to the Vanderbilt area. They were playing the game at the time, so there was little traffic. After circling for a while, I found a space near a Borders bookstore near the hotel. After buying a book and drinking a cappuccino, I got a call from Anita on my cell phone to tell me the workshop was over. After picking her up, we got on the highway to the park, which is west of Nashville.

We arrived late in the afternoon and had no trouble registering. We were a little disappointed that none of our close friends were attending, but we found acquaintances from previous events and everyone was friendly. Because of the cold weather, we spent most of our time in the feast hall. It is a good facility for an SCA event with stone masonry and wooden beams. In one respect, it was a little too authentic, however, in that all the heat came from a fireplace at one end. We were too late to reserve a table by the fire so we had to wear blankets during the feast.

Speaking of which, the feast consisted of five removes:

- Mussels in a garlic butter sauce on a bed of pasta, with sautéed scallions. Anita doesn't care for mussels, but I found them palatable with the pasta.
- Cornish hens on a bed of orzo pilaf surrounded by pickled beets and spicy pickled eggs. We both liked the hens.
- Mushroom mélange with whiskey peppercorn sauce, served with crusted asparagus. Neither of us cared for it.
- Pork loin in a fruit and vinegar glaze stuffed with dried fruits on a bed of saffron and served with Jicama salad. This was good, although we were getting full.
- Ginger spice bread with whipped cream, bread pudding with rum sauce, cheese blintzes with raspberry sauce. I had only modest portions because of my diabetes, but they were good.

Shortly after dinner, we packed up and drove home.

Wedding in Wisconsin—

My brother Tim got married on Thanksgiving weekend, so Anita and I flew north that Friday. There was no snow on the ground, although there were flurries on Saturday. We took United Express via Chicago, so the newspaper articles about their impending bankruptcy made me nervous, but they didn't declare it until a few weeks afterward. In any case, their commuter affiliates are independently owned and may be in better financial condition than the parent company. The plane swung out over Lake Michigan as we approached the airport, and we had an excellent view of the Sears Tower and the rest of Chicago's downtown.

My parents met us at the airport and dropped us off at the Chalet Landhaus in New Glarus. This motel is notable for its Swiss chalet-like design. A few hours later they picked us up for dinner in Monticello, where my father, Tim, his children, and I all went to elementary and high school. There we all gathered with Tim's fiancée Wanda, who has the same name as my mother. I am now at the age when I can appreciate the fact that such gatherings with the entire family are precious, because each one can be the last. Afterward, my parents loaned us their car so that we could drive back to the motel.

We rested on Saturday morning and then performed our one chore for the wedding, which was to pick up my grandfather who lives in a nearby assisted-living facility. I was glad to do it, because it gave us some time alone with him. He will turn 90 this coming April and I'm told that his thinking gets fuzzy at times, but he spends his mornings playing cards and noticed that gasoline prices were different in Monticello and New Glarus.

The wedding took place at Tim and Wanda's house between Monticello and Albany, where my mother went to elementary and high school. (They had already been living together for two years and built a new house together.) Anita questioned my ability to find it, because we had only been there once before. However, I finally got my revenge for the time she gave me directions in Nashville to take the right fork at the sign that USED to show Reba McIntyre. I replied, "Well, it's between the farm where the Schneebergers used to live and the one where the Hundleys used to live," and had no trouble finding it.

It was a small ceremony attended by the immediate family and close friends of the couple. They had constructed a little arch and it was hard to keep a straight face while Tim recited his vows. They had placed cheat sheets above each other's heads. While Wanda rarely glimpsed upward, Tim had to raise his eyes for each sentence and was obviously reading the words aloud. The reception followed.



Then we all got in our cars and drove back to New Glarus for the wedding dance at Mike Flannery's. This was a dance hall when my parents were in high school and is now one of the better eating places in the area. Tim and Wanda paid for the band, a buffet, and an open bar. The band's drummer was the brother of the girl I took to the prom, and two of my classmates attended. I was especially glad to see all my living aunts and uncles and many of the cousins. Anita and I danced until we got tired.

The following morning we met for breakfast at the Landhaus and then returned to Tim and Wanda's house to open their wedding presents. Then we watched the Packers defeat the Bears before my parents drove us to the airport.

Feast of Lights—

Anita and I attended our one church service of the year, a Christmas music service at the Belmont United Methodist Church. Many of you know John Hollis, who is a member of one of their eight choirs. The format is to alternate readings of scripture with corresponding Christmas hymns accompanied by a 14-piece orchestra. The service alternated obscure ones with traditional songs such as "Go Tell It on the Mountain" and "Greensleeves", which the orchestra played during the prelude and the offering. At this end, there was a processional that included "The First Noel", "O Come All Ye Faithful", and "Silent Night". This was the 50th anniversary of the service, and they commissioned a new song especially for it.

Concave Party—

Since Christmas and New Year's fell on Wednesdays this year, they decided to hold it the weekend between. We drove to Horse Cave, Kentucky, on Friday and stayed the weekend. The party suite was well stocked with food, and Anita's contribution of chocolate truffles was well received. We had lunch with Gary, Corliss, and the boys on Saturday and then about 30 of us had dinner at the Bookstore Café Saturday night. It made for a nice, relaxing weekend.

New Year's Eve--

Since we still had New Year's open, Anita and I got a package at the Opryland Hotel. It consisted of a hotel room facing the Delta Island where Naomi Fisher and Pat Molloy got married, tickets to two dances, two drink coupons each, and breakfast the following morning. Adding up the time it took to drive over there, get stuck in a traffic jam on the Opryland property, find a parking place, stand in line for registration, and walk to the room, we figured we could have driven to Horse Cave in the same period. We found we could dance to the music at the rock and roll dance, which was provided by the hotel's in-house rock and roll band and a disk jockey when they took a break. It made for a very enjoyable and safe New Year's Eve.

UnChattacon report—

The Thursday before Chattacon we received seven inches of snow in Nashville, and it was all Anita's fault. She had mixed up the convention date and had obtained tickets to newly-elected Phil Bredesen's gubernatorial ball. When we discovered they were the same weekend, she decided, "Well, if it

snows, we have an alternative.” Well, it did, and so we went to the ball.

It took place at the Opryland Hotel. Along with our tickets, we received a parking pass to a lot across the street on Music Valley Drive. We arrived a little early, so we were on the first shuttle bus. It dropped us in the Garden Conservatory entrance. This is one of the atriums, and it contains two restaurants and a wedding chapel. We ate at one of them, the Café Ristorante, which is the hotel’s Italian restaurant. Then we walked over to the convention center.

There were three ballrooms open people like us who had ordinary tickets, and one reserved for a \$5,000 per couple private party, which we did not visit. One of them was decorated as an African jungle, but we could not dance to the music. They alternated an R&B band with African music. We spent most of our time in the rock and roll dance, which decorated liked a disco, and especially liked a singing duet called “Honey and Spice”. They sang a lot of hits made popular by the Supremes, Whitney Houston, Donna Sommer, and other black female vocalists. They took a break when Al Green and his band performed. (Green lives in Memphis.) The third room was for country music and was decorated as a dance hall. The governor and his wife made appearances in two of the ballrooms while we were there and danced to “The Tennessee Waltz”.

They estimated the crowd at 12,000-15,000, although 20,000 tickets were mailed out.

Movies--

- *The Ring*: This is a remake of a Japanese horror film. The gimmick is that if you watch a

particular video, then you get a phone call that says, “Seven days,” the end of which you die in an unpleasant manner. It is not a great movie, but it is an effective thriller.

- *The Santa Clause 2*: This is an OK movie, but not as good as the original. The key plot point is that Santa Clause has to get married within a certain number of years after assuming the job. However, the head elf forgot to tell him until a few weeks before the deadline. This is a rather dubious plot point, even if you buy into the original premise, that a normal person becomes Santa Claus whenever the current one lives out his lifespan or dies in an accident.
- *Autofocus*: This is a biography of *Hogan’s Heroes* star Bob Crane, who was murdered a few years after the show went off the air. I was a fan of the show, so I was particularly interested. The title refers to his videotaping of numerous sexual encounters usually without his partners’ knowledge. The story is a familiar one about someone who can’t handle success, and it is well done. It begins after the cancellation of *The Donna Reed Show*, in which Crane played the husband’s best friend and shows him living a normal life in the suburbs with his family, except that he already had an interest in pornography. Then he gets the lead in *Hogan’s Heroes*, leaves his wife for the actress who played one of Colonel Klink’s secretaries, and parlays his fame into a lifestyle of one-night

stands. The murder was never solved, although the film implies it was a cony played by Willem Dafoe who was the person who introduced Crane to home video.

- *Solaris*: I have never seen the previous film version nor have I read the book, so I did not have any preconceptions, except for the previews and what I had read about the earlier film and the book. We quickly realized, however, that those previews were deceptive. It was neither an epic space fantasy nor a romance, but rather a subtle, moody art film and should not have been released during the holiday season or to a large number of theaters. We could enjoy it on that basis, but a lot of filmgoers were disappointed. Even the celebrated scene in which George Clooney is nude did not satisfy them.
- *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets*: Although it was two hours and forty minutes long, it does not seem as long as *Solaris*, which is more than hour shorter. This second installment in the series does not bother to set up the premise, but plunges you into the action immediately. I especially liked Kenneth Branagh as Gilderoy Lockhart, who is a famous author whose claims to be an expert sorcerer are discovered to be fiction. I'm really sorry that Richard Harris (Dumbledore) died. I saw the first movie on HBO a week later and saw that the actors who play Harry, Ron, and Hermione are growing up quickly. If the filmmakers skip a year because

Rowling cannot produce the books fast enough, the actors will have to be replaced at some point.

- *Lord of the Rings: The Two Towers*: This is by far the best of the SF/fantasy movies of the holiday season. I haven't reread the book in a long time, but it seemed to follow the story closely. It also had superb special effects and good acting. I don't recall that Gimli the dwarf was as short as the film makes him to be, as it uses his height for visual humor throughout.
- *Star Trek: Nemesis*: It had been four years since the last film in the series that began in 1979, so it felt overdue. I thought it was too derivative of *The Wrath of Khan* to be considered one of the better *Star Trek* films, however. I would rate it as average. I did like it that they showed the politics of the Romulan Empire. I followed the box office results which showed it opened as number two nationwide, fell to number nine the second weekend, and then disappeared from the top ten list entirely. It is still in the theaters as I write this, but I suspect this will be the last film with the *Next Generation* cast.

Comments on #230

SFPA sightings—

I saw Gary Robe at the Concave holiday party between Christmas and New Year's.

Corporate scandals—

In a previous mailing, I wrote about the dispute between J.P. Morgan Chase and 11 insurance companies over defaulted oil and gas contracts with Enron. The insurance companies argued that the bonds covering the contracts were really disguised loans. The jury was about to begin deliberations when the two sides decided to settle. If Chase had won, the insurance companies would have owed them \$1.2 billion. If the insurance companies won, they would have owed Chase nothing. They decided to split the difference so the insurance companies will pay Chase \$569 million and assign Chase the right to go back to Enron for the difference.

The Elgin Marbles—

The December 19 electronic edition of The New York Times had an article about them. You may remember that these are 5th Century B.C.E. fragments of the Parthenon frieze that are in the custody of the British Museum. Greece is trying to persuade the museum to loan them for the 2004 Olympics. The museum is refusing to part with them, even temporarily.

George Wells—

I never watched the *Starman* TV series, but remember Erin Gray fondly from *Buck Rogers* in which she played Wilma Deering. She would make an interesting Mrs. Robinson.

Janet Larson—

I have intentionally NOT reread the Harry Potter or *Lord of the Rings* books so that I would not be anticipating plot points. However, I found that my memories are good enough that I still remembered them.

I always thought of *Raiders of the Lost Ark* as fantasy.

We live not far from the Dell facility where your son works.

Jeffrey Copeland—

Re Swiss neutrality during World War II: The Nazis simply felt it was in their interest for Switzerland and Sweden to be neutral.

1. They wanted someplace to flee if the war was lost, as the Kaiser fled to Holland after World War I. The practice of having numbered bank accounts also made Switzerland very attractive.
2. They could utilize Swiss and Swedish industry without them becoming targets of Allied bombing.
3. Occupation would require troops needed elsewhere, and neither was situated between Germany and a principal enemy as Belgium, Holland, Denmark, and Norway were, nor were they forced to bail out the Italians as in Yugoslavia and North Africa.
4. The Swiss cooperated with the Nazis with regard to arresting enemies of the Reich.
5. They considered both the Swiss and Swedish to be Aryan.

Henry Kissinger was not famous enough in 1962 to be Peter Sellers' model for *Dr. Strangelove*. I have read that his model was John von Neumann.

Rich Lynch—

Anita and I thought Dal Coger looked very good at Memphis's MidSouthCon in March of last year, so we were also surprised when we learned of his death.