

## Notes from the Club Car 50

is produced for KAPA mailing 96, by G. Patrick Molloy, P.O. Box 9135, Huntsville, AL, 35812, phone (256) 830-4471 email mephan@advicom.net.

Not knowing what to do with ourselves over Labor Day weekend (since Worldcon was early this year), Naomi & I decided to book a trip to San Diego. Why San Diego? Well it's a city I've heard a lot about, but never had a chance to visit. American Airlines, in competition with Southwest, was offering cheap fares out of Nashville on a non-stop flight to Los Angeles, and we found great rates from Alamo car rental and Marriott Suites (points!). What more reason did we need? In order to take advantage of the bargain rates, we had to fly out on Sunday morning and return on Wednesday evening (you'd think they didn't want too many people taking advantage of this special...), so I ended up taking my usual couple of days of vacation time after Labor Day instead of before.

This actually worked out well, because it gave us the opportunity to attend the CFG picnic at Steve & Sue Francis' on Saturday. Most of the "usual suspects" from Louisville and Cincinnati were there, and we were quite pleased and surprised to see Cullen Johnson and his wife as well. Cullen used to live in Memphis and was quite active in fandom. He moved to Cincinnati several years ago, got married, and mostly dropped out of sight except for MidSouthCon. It was good to have a chance to catch up on things with them. That night we drove down to Nashville and stayed at the airport Marriott (points!), where we could park the car during the upcoming trip. We caught the hotel shuttle over to the airport the next morning.

The flight out was very nice, particularly because we didn't have to change planes (or even land!) in Dallas. I didn't know American ran any flights to the west coast without an obligatory stop at DFW. This must be a popular weekend to travel, because we had to wait in line for an hour at Alamo to get our rental car. From there, we headed down the coast to San Diego, going along the coastal highway for most of the way instead of the Interstate. The scenery and the interesting towns along the way were well worth the extra time it took.

Two of our primary reasons for this visit were the San Diego Zoo and the San Diego Wild Animal Park. The two are affiliated, and a quick calculation told us that a year's membership for two would only cost a little more than the four individual one-day admissions we would pay otherwise. So we decided to go ahead and join up. Even if we don't get back there within a year to get free admission, I don't mind the little extra money going to such an outstanding facility. I was very impressed with both places.

The Wild Animal Park, which actually is well outside of San Diego, has numerous exhibits and walking trails throughout its thousand plus acres, with a monorail that goes out through the more remote areas where the animal herds wander. I think Naomi's favorite area was the rainbow lorikeet aviary, where you can purchase small cups of nectar for the birds to drink from. Many of the lorikeets end up perching on you to do so. We also ended up taking the monorail twice, once during the day and again at night. They have floodlights to illuminate the area during the night trips, and you really see things from a different perspective.

The zoo, within San Diego itself, is much more tightly confined, but is still one of the best zoos I've been to. They offer a couple of different tour buses that take you around to the different areas and give a narrative, which is a good way to get an overview. They are particularly proud of two exhibits: their pair of giant pandas, who were out and much more active than any pandas I've ever seen before; and their newest baby koala, the only known albino koala in the world. Koalas are cute. Baby koalas are especially cute. A baby albino koala is cute beyond description. He is also quite fortunate to have been born where he was. An albino koala out in the wild would probably

not stand much chance of survival. If a predator didn't get it because it stood out, it would be fried by the severe Australian sun. As it is, he will probably be the most pampered koala in the world.

We also spent some time exploring downtown San Diego, and had some fine meals while we were there. The shopping centers we explored were rather unlike what you generally see in our part of the country. One was a sort of village arrangement, with numerous buildings, each containing several shops, scattered about and connected by walkways. The other was very much like a standard mall at first glance, until you look up and realize that there is no roof. It is a multi-storied open-air mall. I guess it rains infrequently enough there that inclement weather is not a major concern.

On our last day there, we took a cruise around San Diego harbor, past the extensive Navy facilities, marinas, and upscale waterfront homes and hotels. It was a nice cruise, though we don't know if any of our pictures will turn out, because the camera started acting up, with the shutter sticking open about half the time. After that it was back to LA (this time via Interstate, since it was fastest), and our flight back to Nashville. It was a nice visit, though as usual it was over too fast, and left us wanting to return to see more.

Later that month, we took a one-night trip up to Chattanooga. We left early the morning of September 19, arriving in Chattanooga in time to catch the departure of the Tennessee Valley Railroad Museum steam special to Lafayette, Georgia. Naomi had surprised me with tickets as a present, after reading about the trip in the Clarksville paper. This was a special double-headed (2-locomotive) steam trip that visited the Lafayette airport, where an airshow was taking place. This trip would also mark the last trip for some time for one of the locomotives, as it is being taken out of service for extensive refurbishment. The trip was really great, and appeared to be a complete sellout. I was really intrigued by some of the equipment the TVRM uses on their trips, including an old open-section sleeping car, used in the movie **Some Like It Hot**, and an elegantly-appointed private parlor car available for rent at a very reasonable price. They also had a diner, and served lunch to all the passengers. It was a set menu, but it was very nice and well-prepared by a professional catering company. The slow speed over the secondary short line made for an all-day trip, but that was just fine by me! All in all, a fine day on the rails!

We stayed that night at the Chattanooga Marriott (points!), which was very comfortable, except for a fire alarm in the middle of the night. The next day, we planed to finally visit the Tennessee Aquarium, which we had been promising ourselves to do for years, and to see the Imax film **Everest**. We again performed a quick calculation and decided it would be worth it to spring for a membership, especially considering how close Chattanooga is, and that we are very likely to visit again within a year. The aquarium concentrates primarily on freshwater species, though there is also one large central tank devoted to sea life. A long escalator takes you to the top floor, where the aviary and river otter displays are. You then wind your way down a series of ramps past a wide assortment of displays on everything from alligators to zebra mussels. The setup broadly duplicates the progression of a drop of water, starting from the time it falls on the Tennessee hills as rain, down through the streams, rivers and bayous, and finally out into the Gulf of Mexico. There is also a changing exhibition area, which had an exhibit on jellyfish while we were there.

The Imax movie **Everest**, which has been getting rave reviews, is one we've been wanting to see for a long time. The Space & Rocket Center here in Huntsville stated that they would not be showing the film despite its popularity, because it is not space-related. (They subsequently booked in a film called "Storm-Chasers" or some such, which hardly sounds space-related to me! I suspect their real reason is that it costs more than they want to pay. But I digress.) **Everest** follows an expedition to the summit, including the preparations and planning beforehand, and introduces us to the team's participants. It takes viewers into a breathtakingly beautiful and deadly world, where even having air to breathe can't be taken for granted, and where windchill can drop the temperature to a hundred degrees below zero. I hadn't realized how the climb progresses through multiple stages, over the course of weeks, gradually ascending to zones where you would

say the human body simply couldn't survive. The movie was visually stunning, emotionally charged, and enough to convince me to never, ever take up mountain climbing.

Conventionwise, Con\*Stellation in Huntsville and Octocon in Cincinnati have taken place since the last mailing. Back when I was active in Huntsville fandom, I worked on Con\*Stellation, and even co-chaired a couple of them (as well as DSC25 in 1987). But a number of disagreements with club policies and some particular personalities caused me to drop out of NASFA (the local club that sponsors Con\*Stellation), so I haven't been a part of the convention for several years now. We didn't even attend that last couple of years (we did have some legitimate conflicts). This year, however, the guests included Mike Resnick as GoH, and Dave Miller as Fan GoH. We were asked to write the program book biography for Dave, and looked forward to seeing him & his family, so we decided to attend this year.

I'm sorry to say that I still can't recommend the convention as being particularly fannish. The tiny dealers room actually had a couple of book dealers this year, which is a vast improvement over the usual selection. There is still more of an emphasis on gaming and LARP than I would like. The con suite is dry, though there were occasionally some interesting munchies. There were only 2 open room parties the entire weekend, one each on Friday and Saturday. The programming was very sparse, though the Fannish Feud game was enjoyable (the team Naomi & I were on got swamped. The deciding question was to name a species from **Babylon 5**, which neither of us has watched!) I really dislike the facility they were in for the second year in a row. It is the airport Four Points Hotel, which is actually built into the Huntsville airport. This may be convenient for those few who fly in, but is way out of town for locals to commute to. It is also a pretty long drive to get to any restaurants if you don't want to settle for the hotel fare or the overpriced eateries in the airport. Although there is free parking for hotel guests (which was expanded to include convention members), the parking lot was a very long walk from the building, made worse by the current construction of an additional parking deck. One of the biggest inconveniences, however, was the elevator situation. The hotel is only 5 stories, but it is served by 2 extremely slow elevators, and you need a hotel key to get to any of the upper floors (i.e., where the con suite was). The convention tried to get around the problem by posting elevator operators, but they couldn't find people to be there at all hours. So if you weren't staying at the hotel, you sometimes faced the prospect of not being able to operate the elevator! There was usually someone around with a hotel key, but not always.

NASFA has announced a bid for the 2001 DeepSouthCon, and the bid chair, Mike Kennedy, hosted a bid party on Friday night of the convention (one of the 2 parties I mentioned). Last I heard, they had not decided on a facility. I feel strongly that the airport Four Points will be woefully inadequate for a DSC, and if they pick that hotel, I cannot support the bid.

A much better time was had at Octocon a few weeks later. Some may consider Cincinnati a long way to go for a little relaxicon of fewer than 100 people. It is at least a 6-hour drive, plus the extra hour for the change to Eastern time. I had to work almost a full day, so we did not get in until after 11:00. A lot of our friends were still up and about, though, despite the later hour. I was glad to see several current and former KAPAns there, including Jodie, Joel, and the Robes. Cullen Johnson also made it, which is the first time I'd seen him at a Cincinnati convention. There was plenty of good conversation, food and drink all weekend long. We also went out to a couple of interesting meals with other fans, as well as our usual visit to Safari Pets (where we found Stinker during the '95 MidWestCon) and Kenwood Town Centre (one of the better malls around). It was a fun, though short weekend.

Other items of note that I don't have the time or energy to go into detail on... My 1984 VW Rabbit, with over 184,000 miles on it, which had been demoted to my "in-town" car (mostly going to work, shopping, etc.) finally gave it up in September. I then purchased a new car (a 1998 Honda Civic), to serve as my "highway" car, and demoted the '90 Civic (with almost 180,000 miles) to be my in-town car. In mid-October, I was scheduled for a trip to France, which would

have been my first-ever overseas business trip. But since Congress putzed around in getting the budget passed, we were on a bare-bones continuing resolution at the time the funds needed to be committed, so the trip had to be canceled. Bah!

One other thing that may be of interest. I continue to put in volunteer work at the North Alabama Railroad museum, and usually end up being the passenger conductor onboard the train. (I even broke down and bought a replica conductor's cap to complete the look.) This Halloween, we ran our annual "Goblin Special" trains where we decorate the train for Halloween, lots of the kids show up in costume, and some of the crew dresses up as well. I decided not to go in costume, but I augmented my conductor's uniform with my leftover Boston/Orlando vest, which is black with a gold sun/moon/stars pattern on it. I thought it was appropriate for the occasion. One of the few "crossover" items of my two fandoms (besides the silly train hats I wear at conventions).

That about brings me up to date. Time to head into the...

## Mailing Comments

**Nicki** (*Vanish With the Rose*) — Midwestcon was fun, but I too miss the numerous parties. Attendance has dropped over the years as well, but it's still well worth the trip for me. Ω I still haven't seen **Armageddon** either. I agree with your review of **The Truman Show**. I plan to nominate it for a Hugo. Ω yct me: The London Underground is really a mixed bag. Some of the lines are noticeably older than others, with well-worn stations and equipment, while others appear almost new. Some lines have a mixture of older and new trains, as well as some refurbished stations and some in dire need of it. It's still a very efficient and safe mode of transportation, and the fastest way to get around London. ∞ I've detected noticeable deterioration in parts of the Washington Metro system in just the 10 years since I was first introduced to it. I guess they don't have the money to maintain it in top notch condition. Still much better than driving in the District. ∞ I agree that the NRA stance on training makes no sense. The Second Amendment is rather ambiguously worded, and Constitutional scholars have been arguing its meaning, probably since it was written.

**Betsy** (*Apple to Windows...*) — yct Naomi: SUV = Sport Utility Vehicle, those gas-guzzling enclosed trucks, loved by urban cowboys, that are taking over the roads (along with mini-vans). Ω yct me: To clarify, they no longer allow people to walk among the stones at Stonehenge, or get right up to them. There is a low, single-strand rope fence that doesn't impair the view, but that people respect (I can't imagine that working in this country).

**Tony** (*Sawdust and Caviar*) — Interesting food for thought. You may have something there - we've had truth distorted so many times by the powers that be, that we have just become numb to it. When we hear politicians debating two sides of an issue, we generally know that neither of them is right, that the truth lies somewhere in between, and it becomes a matter of figuring out who is exaggerating (or lying, if you prefer) the most. Ω The article you included from *American Cinematographer*, had several factual errors about shuttle launch operations, but mostly nit-picks. It was an interesting article, though much of film jargon went over my head. Ω As to your other article, I see Richard Hoagland and his followers are alive and well. These people are so convinced that NASA is covering something up, that they are not going to accept anything that conflicts with their beliefs. NASA is in a no-win situation with these folks. Fortunately, their numbers seem to be shrinking with the better-resolution images that are coming in from Mars Global Surveyor.

**Guy** (*Bluegras*) — I can understand your reluctance to fly, especially after such an experience as you describe. I, too, went more than ten years between flights, from my first at age 12 (after which my father flatly refused to ever fly again), until I began work at NASA. My first business trip was not on a comfortable commercial jet, either. They sent me off to Houston on a little 7-

passenger NASA turbo-prop King Air. The trip turned out okay for me, but I had white knuckles going down the runway. Now I fly so often I don't think twice about it, and am even considering taking lessons one of these days (maybe when I hit 40). Though I'd rather take the train, I rarely have the time for it. Ω Does your spellchecker have a personal dictionary? If so, you can add fannish words that it otherwise would keep tripping over. Ω I gather most of the references in your zine that I don't understand come from **South Park**, another TV show that I've never seen an episode of. Am I culturally deprived?

**Naomi** (*Transitional Phases*) — As I recall, the Uncle Bud's catfish used to be in a much bigger pond, but it seems they became popular enough that they had to expand their parking lot, thus forcing them to fill in about half the pond to make room. Ω A very sweet and thoughtful gesture you did for the Centennial Park squirrels. The ones in our yard certainly have no problem finding food! Ω Whew! That was a boring two months? I got tired again just reading about it. I wonder what you consider an "active" two months? Don't answer that! I think I already have a good idea. Ω yct me: Most of the **Far Side** and **Dilbert** cartoons I include are from my page-a-day calendars. Ω yct Nicki: Good analysis of the **Titanic** "salvage" operations. Do you know if it is still going on, or have they finished strip-mining everything of value they can find? Ω yct Guy: I wouldn't dare volunteer you for a Worldcon bid committee, even a hoax one, without your permission. If Guy thinks I did, he's mistaken. ∞ A fannish Committee to Load Lifeboats? *Shudder.*

**Sue** (*The Munie Bin*) — I'm glad you could make a contribution, and you are correct that yours is not the first hand-written zine. Was your computer on the blink? Ω The Vanderbilt appointment sounds exciting; let us know how it goes. Ω I'm still having difficulty getting used to the idea of Rocky driving, much less owning his own car! Ω Great photos, but how did they manage to make those cakes look so small!? I know they were much larger than that picture would have you believe. I guess it's because Naomi is positioned well into the foreground.

**Bryan** (*Sailing the Adnormalcy*) — Wow, talk about busy! I can certainly understand why you missed a couple of mailings. Has the workload slacked off any by now? Ω I'm very glad that Beth (and the rest of Nashville, for that matter) came through the tornadoes alright. Ω Great story about running into your high school friend at the Anime con. I assume you knew in advance he was going to be there (unless you are in the habit of carrying around your high school yearbook wherever you go...). Was that the main reason you went to that particular one? Ω I'm sorry to hear about your cat Vester. It's not easy to lose a pet, but when you know it's coming, you can pamper them and make their final weeks and days really special. When my black cat Moonshadow was diagnosed with inoperable cancer, we took her home and created a kitty hospice, letting her sleep on the bed all the time, giving her her favorite foods separate from the rest of the cats, fussing over her and petting her, and generally making her feel special, until she became too sick to enjoy life and we had to put her down. It was an easier decision, knowing we had done all we could to make her happy and comfortable. Ω I'd love to see both Robinson's and Bova's Mars stories turned into TV or movies, but what I'd most like to see is someone tackle Terry Bisson's **Voyage to the Red Planet**, though that's unlikely to ever happen. None of Terry's books would be easy to film, and I'm almost afraid of what would result from any attempt. Ω yct Naomi: Oh, so that's supposed to be Nathan Bedford Forrest? It's such an awful work of "sculpture" that I honestly couldn't tell. I mean, I figured out that it was a rebel soldier by the fact that he is painted completely gray (including the face). but that was about it. Who is this guy that has erected this tacky monument to the confederacy? Ω Ah, yes, the "used cows" sign. It's been hanging there for years, though I wonder how many people speeding past on I-65 even notice it. Ω The Executive West certainly does have its quirks. Rivercon will be there for both of its remaining two years, so enjoy it while you can!

**Jodie** (*Kentucky Nuggets*) — yct Guy: Too bad you decided not to come up to Baltimore for one day of Worldcon, or better yet, an evening. You could have hung around the CFG suite and probably seen a lot of familiar faces. Ω yct me: Janice & I got along great the entire trip. Our

cousin started to get on my nerves after 3 or 4 days, but that's another matter. Ω Yes, the views of the Mall as you emerge from the Metro can be breathtaking. Ω Wow! Here's a coincidence for you. Janice and I saw that same Monet/Manet railroad station exhibit in Paris, on its last day at the Musee de Orsay before it was sent on tour! I'm glad you were able to catch the exhibition too.

That about wraps it up for another edition. Take care, and have a safe and enjoyable holiday season. See you in #97, in 1999!

*Pat*

**Doonesbury**

By Garry Trudeau

