

# *You're Still on My Mind* #7

from **Rich Lynch** \* [rw\\_lynch \(at\) yahoo \(dot\) com](mailto:rw_lynch@yahoo.com) \* November 2024

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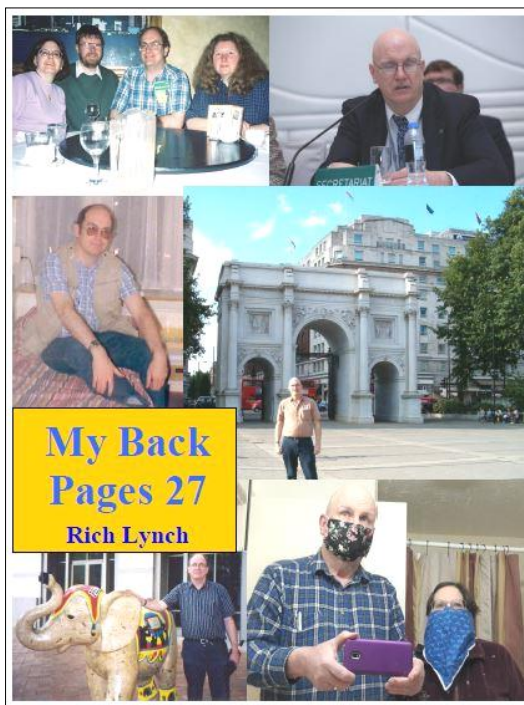
Back once again, this time with a logo that's as brown as fallen autumn leaves, comes the seventh in a continuing series of letterzines for belated conversations with fans who wrote me letters of comment about *My Back Pages*, my personal time capsule that masquerades as a fanzine. The first six issues covered through *MBP* 26, so let's see what readers told me about the next two issues...

There were several letters of substance about *MBP* 27, which was published in September 2022. One of the correspondents was [Alan Stewart](#), who observed that he was 'captured' in one of the photos on the issue's front cover.

I assume that photo on the front with Donna [Heenan] and myself was in 1999?

It was. It was taken in the restaurant where Nicki and I met up with them for dinner a day or so after the conclusion of Aussiecon Three. Boy, we all looked a lot different back then!

*MBP* 27 was somewhat themed around things that had happened to me during the first half of 2022 – two hospital stays (more about them shortly) and my retirement from the U.S. Government. Including my time at TVA and DOE, I'd ended up with nearly 42 years credited to my pension calculation. More than that, actually, since my year-and-a-half of unused sick leave was added to my time-in-service. But back in February 2022, the pandemic was still very much affecting everyday life with all the work-from-home and whatnot, and on my final day of employment the building where my office was located was nearly deserted. So instead of saying good-byes to co-workers I took one last walk around the place and made some draconian decisions about what stuff in my office to take with me and what to leave behind. One of the things that didn't make the cut was my 1969 edition of the *CRC Handbook of Chemistry and Physics*, which I'd bought way



back when I was an engineering student at Jefferson Community College in Watertown, NY. It nearly broke my heart to let it go – it was like an old friend – but I knew I’d never use it again and I thought maybe somebody at work would want it as a collector’s item or somesuch. In his email letter, Alan related that he also had been hanging onto some ancient reference books.

I still have a *CRC Handbook* on my shelf (64<sup>th</sup> edition, 1983-1984) right next to my *Perry's Chemical Engineer's Handbook* from my university days. Nearby me here are some other uni textbooks I haven't looked at in 30 years, so they will probably be hitting the recycle bin soon.

I'll probably never be back to my former workplace building, so I don't know if my *CRC Handbook* was claimed by anyone. Most likely it was consigned to the recycler, but since I'll never know for sure it's become kind of a personal modern-day thought experiment – Schrödinger's Handbook.

As for my two hospital stays, one was for a continuing heart condition that now has me on several meds, probably for the remainder of my life. And the other was the result of a cat bite which caused a worrisome infection in my right hand. That happened in a vet clinic on the final day of life for Nicki's and my feline pet Joltin' Joe. Joe had been in steep decline for several days – it had eroded his personality and at the end he did not go gently into that good night. Until then I'd considered Joe one of the meekest, sweetest creatures on the face of the earth (and I'm always going to remember him that way) so I was shocked at the degree of feralness that had been brought to the surface during his final moments. My frequent correspondent [Lloyd Penney](#) shared some insight on that.

Having to euthanize your Joltin' Joe reminds us all that in many ways, cats have a thin veneer of domesticity, and the wild animal is just below the surface, with sharp claws and teeth. And congratulations on retirement. I am almost there, but I will not go quietly. I may have some surprises ahead.

Lloyd did, indeed – I was pleasantly surprised when it was announced that he had become the new Editor-in-Chief of *Amazing Stories*. A belated congratulations! Another essay in the issue described “My Day at Discon”, where Nicki and I had spent a total of six hours at the 2021 Washington, D.C. Worldcon. As of this year, for various reasons, we've yet to go to another one. Maybe that will change next year for the Seattle Worldcon, and if not, certainly in 2026 when L.A. fandom gets its turn to host one. Nicki and I like being at a Worldcon, and as Lloyd related in his email letter, he does too.

I like Worldcons, too. It's the politics that turn me off. And, the money I don't have that keeps me away. I doubt I will ever be to another one. I haven't

been to a real, three-day convention in nearly three years...in the US and UK, SF conventions seem to be business as usual, but in Canada, not so. As far as I can tell, there are only three literary SF conventions left in the entire country, in Calgary, Winnipeg and Ottawa. Only the Winnipeg con, Keycon, might be described as fannish, the others are quite literary. For us, that means, finding other activities...we have been successful dealers so far this year, and we have gotten together with our anime friends to help them out, and build and stage a monster vendors' hall, and we have about seven months to make that happen. We have to keep our hand in somewhere.

Lloyd wrote that back in 2022, before he got the *Amazing Stories* gig. And although he's also in a Worldcon drought we did cross paths at this year's NASFiC in Buffalo. I'm hoping we'll have other encounters at future conventions as well. Concerning travel in general, my essay about the Smithsonian 'FUTURES' exhibition ("A Day at the Museum") inspired a comment from Lloyd specifically about the flying car that had dominated one cloister of the museum.

If we are able to travel, but not get back to the UK, we are thinking of various other places, including the Smithsonian. Yes, our flying cars were around us, and are only now being sold. I guess we were looking for teardrop-shaped flying cars, like what the Jetsons flew.

I think I'd settle for the energy source that made the Jetsons' compact aircar fly. Pretty potent stuff, whatever it was. The longest letter of comment that I received on *MBP* 27 was from [Heath Row](#), who had a lot to say about the issue. And about *MBP* in general.

Recently in email correspondence I complimented you on the issues of *Mimosa* that I've come across while doing research online. You thanked me for my comments and said, "Hope you're also enjoying *My Back Pages*." My Back What? I'm so glad you're still publishing and slightly sheepish that I was unaware of fanzines post-*Mimosa* – there've been at least 27 issues of *MBP*, so it's high time I catch up. I guess that's one risk of many mimosas.

Heath is one of the more prominent Los Angeles-area fans, and has become in effect the chief digital archivist of L.A. fandom. I can't remember exactly what he and I had been corresponding about, but I suspect it had something to do with his ongoing scanning/OCR activities that are digitally preserving back issues of the LASFS clubzine *De Profundis*. He's doing great work out there. Concerning my two health scares of 2022, Heath wrote me that:

Your story about Joltin' Joe made me think of our cat, Spooner. He recently turned 7, which led us to realize perhaps half his lifespan is up. Oddly, both

my wife and I are prematurely mourning the sure to be too-quick passing of the next seven years. That intrigues me, psychologically, but it's a not-so-gentle reminder to make the most of the time we have with them what we love. Your February 2022 shaped up to be quite the doozy, and I hope you're now well-past the worst of the deathbed-side ordeal (remember: Joltin' Joe *loved* you!) and health concerns. I'll be interested in learning more about how you've taken to retirement. It's now been a year! (After my most recent physical late last year, I, too, procured a portable blood pressure monitoring device; perhaps I'll remember to start using it weekly given the mention in your fanzine.)

I'm guilty of taking pets for granted. They become a constant in our lives...until they aren't. We'd lost Joe's companion cat, Mighty Maxx, about three years before Joe died, and yeah, it was sudden enough (it was a severe cardiac event) that we were in denial for a few days afterwards. Every night he had strode into the bedroom about a half hour before lights out, jumping onto the bed and curling up next to his best friend Nicki. The first night after Maxx was gone there eventually came a hard realization that he wasn't going to appear in the bedroom doorway ever again. It was only too easy to mentally beat myself up, trying to figure out if there was something we missed seeing that could have been treated by a vet to save him. But in retrospect, I don't believe there was.

Anyway, it's now been nearly **three** years since my retirement and I like it so much that I'm not going to try to get a consulting or contractor gig somewhere (which, with my specific skill set, I probably could do). I've got plenty to keep me busy what with all the digital archiving I've been doing for **fanac.org**, and a side benefit from that is getting to read lots of fanzines that were originally published as much as six decades ago. Timebinding is a very pleasant experience.

Besides my somewhat brief Discon report, *MBP 27* also included an essay about the 2017 DeepSouthCon. And that inspired Heath to write a comment about attending conventions during the closing months of the pandemic, and whether or not the ability to quickly recognize someone who's COVID-masked is a fannish superpower.

Your other con mentions – missing Chicon 8, attending Discon III, the recollections of DeepSouthCons past – energize me for this weekend's Gallifrey One Doctor Who con and OrcCon roleplaying game event. Loscon 48 last winter was a blast, and John Hertz and I enjoyed hosting the Fanzine Corner and collecting submissions for *Losconzine #48*, the conzine – which is available via eFanzines and the Los Angeles Science Fantasy Society. Your remarks on the challenges recognizing people while masked resonated with

me. I almost didn't recognize R-Laurraine Tutihasi at Loscon but still got up the gumption to ask if she was who I thought she was. It was a pleasure seeing her again. And another con member momentarily mistook me for Hertz because I, too, was wearing a propeller beanie. (In fact, I just put mine on. I wear it to cons and while writing letters of comment.)

It's good to hear that DeepSouthCon has risen again. Its ham-handed incorporation with another con in 2016 sounds dreadful, while the 2017 offering seemed more satisfying. Small world, smaller: You mention George Wells, with whom I was just messaging on Facebook. Years ago, he sent me some Nefzines from the 1970s, which I'll scan and upload to the N3F archives and offer to Fanac before sending them to one of the special collections I donate materials to. Is he, too, in SFPA? (He'd mentioned that the curator of the library that acquired Ned Brooks's collection was a SFPAn.)

The world became a less entertaining and interesting place back in June when George Wells passed from this plane of existence. He'd been in SFPA nearly a half century before fading health caused his activity there to become intermittent and then completely absent. Until his health started going downhill he was also an unvarying presence at DeepSouthCons, and having a chat with him at a convention was something always to be looked forward to. The final time Nicki and I did was at that 2017 DSC, Sitting in the hotel lobby and talking to him and his buddy Richard Dengrove (another long-time DSC attendee) seemed almost a program event in itself – I remember that the entertaining conversation ranged in many, often disparate, directions and that I felt bit worn down mentally by the time we finally moved on to other con activities.

Before I move on to the next issue, here's another comment about my "A Day at the Museum" essay, which originally appeared in Mike Glycer's **File770.com** newsblog. In the first part of the article I'd mentioned that the Smithsonian's Arts and Industries Building, which had housed the exhibition, was one of my favorite buildings in Washington. This got a reply from [Martin Morse Wooster](#), who provided a bit of genre-related historical minutia.

My trivia about the Arts and Industries Building is when I worked for the Smithsonian in 1987-88 there was a fantasy movie with Cybill Shepherd in which she played a Smithsonian curator. There was one scene where she walked out of the Arts and Industries Building, across the garden, and into her car. We all thought the movie HAD to be fantasy because she found a parking place!!

A sad afterword is that a bit more than seven months after he made this reply comment to me, Martin was killed by a hit-and-run driver. I've never been able to

find out if there ever was an arrest made of the perpetrator. Martin was certainly one of the more interesting people I've met in fandom and it's an understatement to say that he's missed.

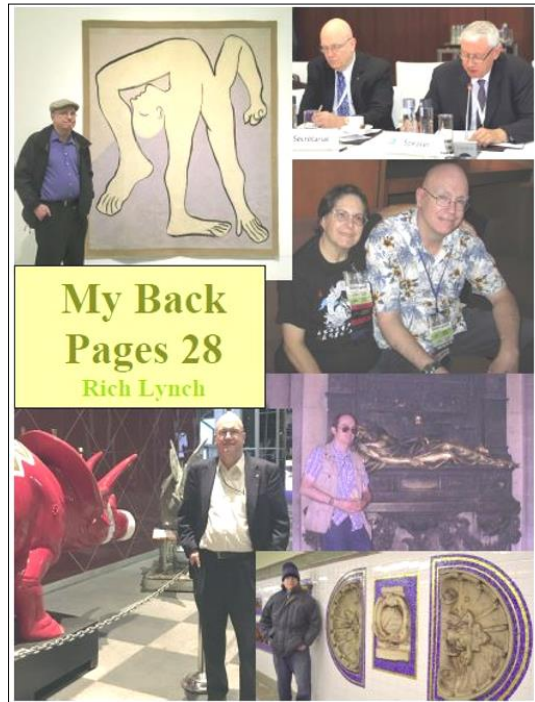
**MBP 28**, published in July 2023, consisted of eleven essays, only two of which had appeared in *Variations on a Theme*, my fanzine for the apa SFPA. (Up to then, *VoaT* had been the source of many if not most of the essays I'd reprinted in *MBP*.) Instead, there were six essays that had previously seen print (seen pixel?) at **File770.com**. Reader response, unfortunately, was light – there were only two email letters of any substance about the issue. I'll get to those in a bit, but before I do I'll reprint some of the replies that my essays received in **F770**.

One that received a lot of feedback was my remembrance of my friend Bruce Pelz, on the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of his passing. In it, I had described Bruce's many activities and achievements during his time in fandom – historian, fanzine publisher, fanzine collector, convention attendee to name just a few – and some of the people who posted responses added to that list. [Kevin Standlee](#) was one of them – he mentioned that:

Bruce was also a parliamentarian who presided over the WSFS Business Meeting and even more often over the Westercon Business Meeting. (In effect, I stepped into his shoes for Westercon's Business Meeting after his death.) His style was decidedly different than mine, and indeed influenced me to try to have the opposite of his take-no-prisoners attitude. His WSFS catchphrase was "Shut up, Robert," referring to Robert Sachs, which he shortened to "Rule 1." For Westercon, I was a sufficiently annoying parliamentary thorn in his side that Westercon Rule 2 was "Shut up, Kevin." Still, I do miss him.

Another was [Sandra Miesel](#), who briefly described one of Bruce's favorite Worldcon activities:

And let's not forget Bruce as a costumer, with many memorable masquerade appearances. Yes, he was an amazing man and fan, fondly remembered.



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And [Gary McGath](#) pointed out one of Bruce's fan activities that I absolutely should have mentioned in my essay:

Bruce Pelz was an important figure in filk, something the article doesn't mention. He helped to organize filksings at cons and published four songbooks under the title *The Filksong Manual*.

Besides these, there was an interesting comment by [Matthew Tepper](#) that described a teachable moment about convention running:

One of the best lessons I learned about running a convention was an encounter between Bruce and Chuck Crayne, when they were co-chairs of L.A.con (the first one) in 1972. It was a rather snippy argument between them, because Chuck felt that he had done all the work he had needed to do beforehand, and could then relax and indulge in other pursuits (such as the woman who was with him at the time). Bruce countered that that was not enough, and that the Chair had to be present and available at all times in order to address issues that needed resolution.

So, my takeaway from that was that both things were important. A simple lesson, to be sure, but one which I learned early on, decades before I would ever need it.

It was all summed up by [Randy Smith](#), who stated that:

[Bruce] always seemed to be involved in everything. He was tuned in to both fan history and fan politics. Mostly, he was just fun to be around.

I'd mentioned in that essay that not a week goes by where I don't think of Bruce, and that's still true. There are a lot of pleasant memories that I very much treasure. And always will. Another remembrance in *MBP* 28 was about the late, great Harry Warner, Jr., which **F770** published on the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of his death. This time there was only one substantive reply, by [Tom Becker](#), and it was succinct.

Harry Warner, Jr. was a legend, but I'm glad that he also was a friend.

That's absolutely true. As in any friendship there were a few times where we didn't see eye-to-eye on something, but in the end things were always resolved and I believe our friendship became even stronger as a result. Nicki and I feel privileged to have published six of Harry's essays in *Mimosa*. I wish there had been more.

Another of my **F770** essays that appeared in *MBP* 28 described pre-teen me, back in the very early 1960s, looking up to the evening sky and trying to see the newly-launched Echo-1 telecommunications satellite. I'd wondered, in the article,

if anybody else had remembered it. And it turned out that several of the readers had. One of them, [Linda Robinett](#), wrote that:

I was pretty young, probably First Grade and I remember people looking for it ... we did live in the desert where the sky was optically perfect but with my bad eyesight, this was not going to happen.

But [P. J. Evans](#), on the other hand, had much better luck at finding the bright balloon satellite.

I remember seeing Echo-1 – we were camping in the Yosemite back country, south of Tuolumne Meadows, so well away from lights.

And [Sam Long](#) described in some detail his experience in seeing it.

My Dad was a navigator in the Army Air Corps during WWII, and of course was familiar with the constellations 'cos he had to do celestial navigation. One evening in the late '50s or early '60s, we were on vacation in Florida, and he was sitting out on the lawn of our cabin, not long after sunset, when he saw a “star” that he didn't recognize moving across the sky. It wasn't an airplane. It turns out it was either Telstar or Echo-1 forget which – in orbit, high enough to still be in sunlight, visible against the dark sky among the stars. He called my brother and me and pointed it out to us. The satellite had been launched only a day or two before, IIRC. Very impressive at the time. (Fifteen years later I was stationed at Cape Canaveral myself....)

Lastly, there was a comment from [Jeanne Jackson](#), who related that:

I remember Echo-1 – I was nine years old and very excited about it and about the communications experiments they performed with it. Two years later, I was just as excited about Telstar, the first commercial experimental communications satellite. Thanks for the memory!

As I described in that essay, seeing Echo-1 was a sense of wonder experience. I was already, even at that young an age, a backyard amateur astronomer and I was fortunate the house where I lived had night skies so dark it was easy to see the Milky Way on a moonless clear evening. Not the case here in Maryland. Skies are dark enough, in this part of suburbia, where many stars are visible, but I've never once been able to see the Milky Way. It doesn't even show in stationary camera astrophotos, where (after a bit of digital manipulation) images of stars as faint as 8<sup>th</sup> magnitude show up. And as for viewing artificial satellites, there are now so many of them that it's become, if anything, an annoyance – streaks they leave in astrophotos ruin otherwise interesting images of the night sky.

One of the two emailed letters of comment I received was from [Lloyd Penney](#),



who commented on a different kind of sense of wonder experience I had – a ‘meet up’ with ChatGPT for a poetry-writing session. As I wrote in that essay, I came away mostly impressed by what the bot could do. But as Lloyd described it, he is much less so.

My current connection with ChatGPT is to try to avoid it. When I edit stories for *Amazing*, I run it through filters to indicate plagiarism and anything that might have been written by an AI. So far, scores for both in almost all the stories I look at are rather low, but I must keep an continual eye out for either.

The other emailed LoC was from [Richard Dengrove](#), who after reading the *Mimosa* reprint about the 1998 Baltimore Worldcon shared some of his memories about the event.

I remember [Bucconeer]. It was my first con. For some reason, I didn’t want to pay to get in. However, I drove to Baltimore so I would get a whiff of what it was like. This is my memory of it. Given that it has been clouded with age, I can only remember a few glimpses. ... Here is one memory. I went somewhere I should have been paying for. On an escalator, I met Alexis Gilliland. He just said hello and that he wasn’t going to tell anyone. I may have told him I didn’t pay but I forget. In fact, I didn’t really spend a lot of time where I wasn’t supposed to be. There were plenty of other places to go to around the harbor area. Here is another memory. At night, I remember being in a lighted room and seeing SFPA members. Among them, I remember Guy [Lillian] and Ned Brooks. You may have been there [as well]. ... It was the start of my career as a convention fan in addition to being a fanzine fan.

Richard seems to have a better recollection of that SFPA party than I do. *Much* better, actually, as I don’t remember it at all. But I think I must have been there – if I hadn’t, I never would have heard the end of it from Guy and Ned!

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And that’s it for this issue – a bit shorter than usual due to a looming year-end crunch of things I want/need to do. The next one, which will cover *MBP* 29 & 30, will be sometime early next year. (Hey, there’s still time to write me a LoC on one or both of those issues!) And in December there will be another issue of *My Back Pages*. Previous issues of *MBP* and *YSoMM* are readily available at both [efanzines.com](#) and [fanac.org](#). Thank you all for writing, and let’s all stay strong and do whatever we can to make it through the next four years.

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