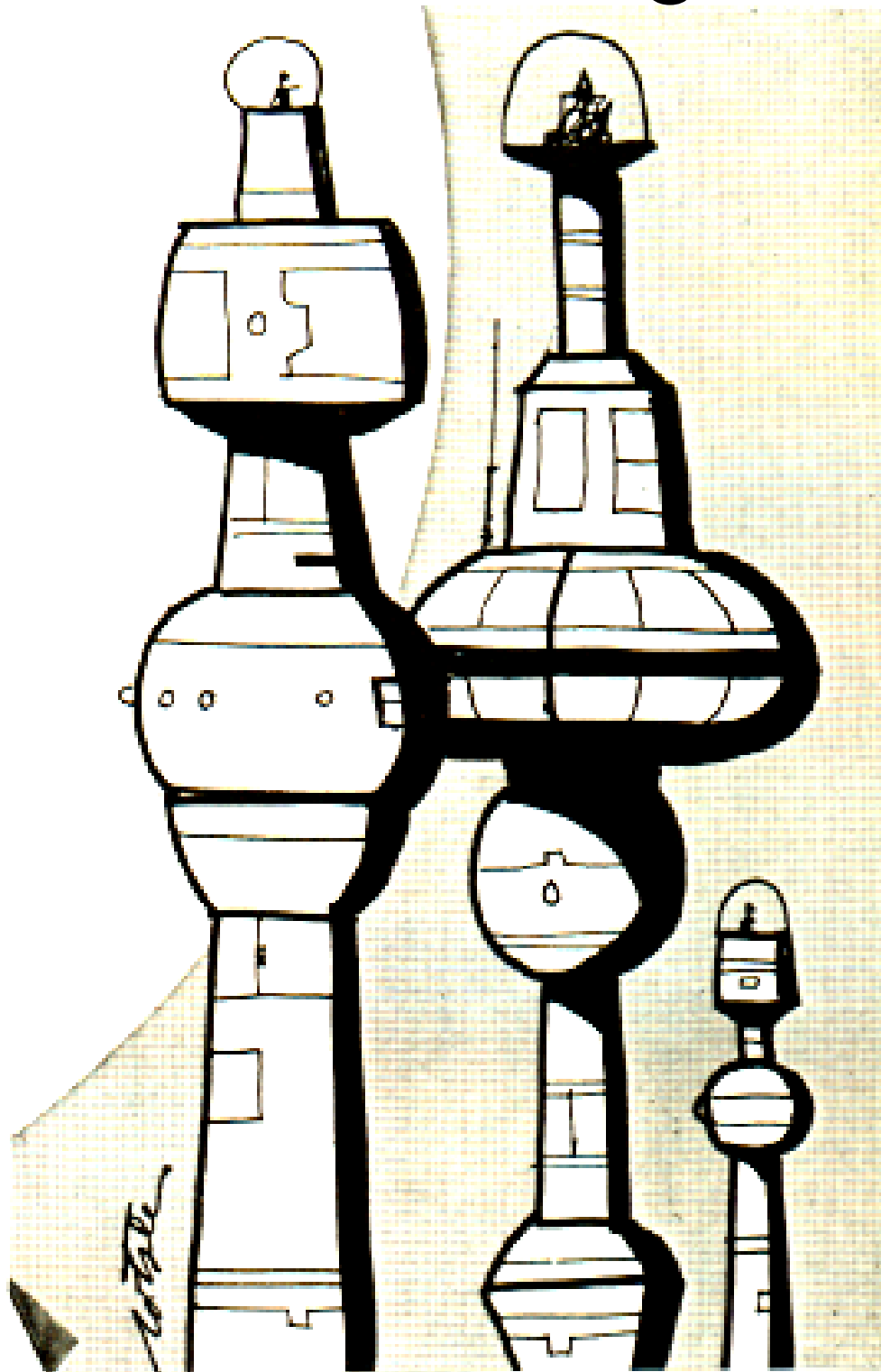


Feline Mewsings #14



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Feline Mewsings

#14

November 2003

* Editorial / Introduction

A lot has happened since my last issue. The gardening progressed well, and I finished all my summer planting. Starting in September, I have put in a few things for fall: new azaleas and rhododendrons, primroses, and some dwarf mondo grass. There is also the fall fertilizing to do. This year for the first time, I have been able to taste the persimmon from my tree. There were enough fruit that not all of them were taken by birds or other animals. Unfortunately, I am so afraid of having them stolen that I'm picking them before they are fully ripe. They would probably taste better if I picked them ripe. I have plans to put in a new persimmon tree that I will espalier. That should make it easier to protect the fruit from predators. The peach tree is on its last legs, and I didn't get any fruit worth speaking about this year. I also plan to put in a new peach tree that I will espalier as well. All the new fruit trees will be espaliered. I hope to do this in winter if everything goes according to plan. The other trees I'm thinking of putting in are orange, loquat, and cherry.

In mid-August, my computer suffered a catastrophic crash. It happened late Tuesday night -- 19 August. I was finally installing the software that came with my Wacom tablet. After the fact, it is impossible to know whether any part of the problem was caused by the software installation.

In any case, as I installed the software, my computer started running slower and slower, until a button push didn't respond for a minute or two. I finally decided that I needed to log out and log back in or restart. I don't remember exactly what I did in what order any more. However, eventually I came to a spot where I was unable to log in as myself. I have two user accounts on my computer; one is Administrator and the other is my personal user account. At that point, I was still able to log on as myself. Mike suggested running a utility that is supposed to correct ownership issues. Mac OS X is UNIX-based. The utility seemed to run. However, when I tried to restart and log on, it took fifteen minutes before the log on screen appeared.

On Mike's advice, I called Wacom first. They were absolutely useless. Then I called Apple Care. A technician there spent two hours talking me through various attempts to analyze and fix the problem. When nothing worked, his supervisor told him that I would have to return my computer to Apple for service.

The box for returning the computer arrived Thursday morning. I waited until Mike got home from work to pack it, since I wanted to make sure I did everything right. The package was picked up by Airborne Friday afternoon.

During the time that I did not have access to my computer, I was able to do some limited things on the server, where I routinely back up frequently updated documents as I edit them. The server has Microsoft Office software running on it and is connected to the printers. I kept my diary and some financial records updated. I was also able to create and print out an itinerary for our upcoming Alaska trip to send to my sister and parents. I usually e-mail them, but I had no assurance that my computer would be back before we had to leave.

The computer was returned the following Tuesday morning. The packing list showed that both my hard drive and combined CD-DVD drive had been replaced, along with the connecting cables. However, when I turned it on, I was confronted with a new system. Where was my software? After some panicky searching, I found a folder called "Previous Systems". All my setups were there, but I had no idea what to

do to restore my computer to its previous state. I called Mike at work, and he told me to call Apple Care. Apple Care gave me the basics but told me that if some non-Apple software did not work, I would have to re-install them. I was also informed that my operating system had been corrupted and that was the reason I did not get my computer back in the same state it had been in before the crash.

I was able to restore quite a bit before Mike returned home from work. At that point, I started testing the software to see what worked and what didn't. Most of it seemed to work. However, some key software did not. I had to re-install the Group Organizer client software. Group Organizer is the calendar program we use to track our schedule. The main database for the calendar resides on the server. I used Mike's computer to update some database files in FileMaker. The program for that does not exist on the server, although the data files do.

I also had to re-install the Palm Desktop software and Documents To Go, which allows me to edit Microsoft Office documents on the Palm. These re-installations required quite a bit of tweaking, however.

On Wednesday morning, I was finally ready to do some things on my computer. Via Voice, my dictation software, and the Wacom tablet software still had to be re-installed. However, I decided to wait to do that until after we returned from Alaska. I also didn't check out the games, but I don't consider them very important. I don't use them very much. I've gone back to doing crossword puzzles or reading when I'm waiting on hold on the phone or for something to finish running on the computer.

At that point, we were only days away from leaving on our Alaska trip. I was mostly interested in restoring the e-mail programs and other things that I wanted to take with me on the trip. We took Mike's computer, on which he set up an account for me. Some of the files went on my Palm.

Since we returned home, I have been unable to get Via Voice to work from my account. There is one more thing I might try, but I've decided it is not that important. I have decided to try to overcome the stiffness and pain in my fingers with exercise. It will take time. It took a year of physical therapy to overcome a frozen shoulder, so I don't expect any miracles. I have not had a chance to do anything with the Wacom tablet.

Actually, I probably have been quite lucky. This is the first time I've experienced such a crash even though I have owned a computer since 1986.

One of the benefits of having no computer access for about a week is that I got some things done that I usually don't get around to doing. For instance, I did some sewing. I also read most of the August FAPA mailing during that time.

Our Alaska cruise-tour was from 31 August through 14 September. The trip report is below.

On another front, one of our cats is sick. I took Shadow for his annual checkup at the beginning of October. The vet was concerned about Shadow's very loud wheezing, though he was happy that Shadow had lost some weight since last year. After running tests, it was determined that Shadow is hyperthyroid. I was given some pills to give him, and he is on a weight-reducing diet. Shadow seems to be doing well on the pills, but I would like to investigate a more permanent solution – radiation therapy. We will keep tracking Shadow on the pills to make sure the diagnosis is correct.

Happier news is that we finally have high definition cable. It arrived early in October. There are only a few stations being carried now, but negotiations are underway for more. We have the three major networks plus HBO and Showtime, since we are subscribers. I also added ESPN and Discovery HDTV.

* * *

*** Mike**

Shortly before our trip, we ran into a snag in our video editing. We were unable to burn our video onto a disk. It took a while to figure out the reason. We did not have time to correct the situation until after our trip.

In the meantime, Mike acquired a new program called DVD Studio Pro. He tried using that and succeeded in burning the DVD he had not been able to do with iDVD. However, it is a very powerful program with many options and it takes a while to learn. At least now he has a choice of software to try.

We managed to overcome the problems eventually, and we are back on track making DVDs of our vacation videos. We just finished making DVDs of our Millennium Philcon experience; it fit on three DVDs.

Mike has become a paid speaker on the amateur astronomy circuit. In early October he spoke to a standing room only crowd in an auditorium with seating for two hundred-fifty for an amateur astronomy group in Orange County, which is to the south of Los Angeles. His previous speaking engagements were

for the local South Bay group.

* * *

* Alaska Cruise-Tour

We got up at four the morning of Sunday, 31 August. The timing turned out to be pretty tight. The Supershuttle arrived within its agreed-upon window. It made only one other pick-up, so we arrived on the early side at LAX. Check-in went fairly quickly. The security check for our checked luggage also went relatively quickly.

The plane boarded on time and took off on schedule. Breakfast was served a short while after we reached cruising altitude. We both had ham and eggs, which came with hash browns and a blueberry pastry.

Mike took the window seat, so he took pictures with both our cameras.

A bit later we were served calorie-rich chocolate covered ice cream bars. I had one, but Mike ate some sugar free cookies he'd brought from home instead. This was essentially part one of lunch for me.

We changed planes in Anchorage. There was about a half hour between flights. The gates were adjacent. During the wait I had the second part of my lunch, which was Mike's blueberry breakfast pastry -- Mike doesn't like blueberry.

The flight to Fairbanks was about an hour long. The peanuts served on that flight were the third and final part of my lunch.

At the Fairbanks airport, we were met by Gray Line, who transported us to the Westmark Hotel. Fairbanks appears to be what I would call a hick town. The weather was grey and rainy and remained so for the next few days. The time in Fairbanks and the rest of Alaska was one hour earlier than Pacific Time.

We spent some time taking it easy in our hotel room before heading down to dinner in the hotel restaurant. I had Bering cod, and Mike had haddock with fries. Mine was pretty good, though a bit bland. Mike said his was too dry. We had peach cobbler and a chef's special for dessert, which was much better than the entree. The chef's special was a sandwich of piecrust filled with whipped cream and raspberry jam.

I bought three postcards and two hat badges in the hotel gift shop. During the course of the afternoon and evening, I wrote out all three postcards.

After dinner, we made out a short list of things we wanted to do the next day. I also updated my financial records.

We retired quite early. It had been a long day.

I hadn't set an alarm but woke up about 7h30 the next day. As Mike had predicted, my watch failed to get a time signal during the night. We have watches that automatically update during the night using a signal from Colorado. However, Mike said it usually doesn't work in hotels.

Mike went down to breakfast with me. We sat next to the windows at the front of the hotel. There is a flowerbed running along it. It seemed to be using two different types of cabbage as decorative plants.

After breakfast, we returned to our room to get our coats and cameras. Then we took a taxi to the Fairbanks Ice Museum. We were able to get in at the senior rate, which started at age fifty-five. Admission includes an introductory film as well as a look at the ice sculptures on exhibit and a look at an artist at work. Currently featured are pieces being made for an ice hotel that is scheduled to open next year. The walls will be made of snow. The building will be kept cool to keep it from melting. The bathrooms will be in a separate heated building.

We bought a number of souvenirs there -- postcards, a booklet, a video, and some photos of ice sculptures. In addition, one of the people working there gave us a souvenir booklet from a competition in which she had participated. She



also gave us a restaurant recommendation for dinner.

We also did a little shopping in the neighbourhood of the museum. However, many of the stores were closed for Labor Day.

We took a taxi back to the hotel and had lunch there. Lunch was better than the previous night's dinner.

We returned to our room afterward and took things easy for a while. We were able to connect to AOL using their 800 number, so we were able to retrieve and send e-mail.

For dinner, we walked to the Regency Hotel located about a block away, where we had a much nicer meal than the previous night. The restaurant there was decorated with aquaria about every two tables. The fish in the tank next to our table provided us with some entertainment. I had prime rib and Mike had grilled haddock. I had a glass of wine with my dinner and a hot rum toddy after. Mike had apple pie for dessert.

We got up at six on Tuesday and had our suitcases out in the corridor for pickup by 7h00. Then I went down so I could get a buffet breakfast. We returned to our room to gather our things and checked out.

We waited a while in the lobby for our bus to Denali National Park. We met some of our travelling companions. The bus ride was about two and a half hours long.

When we reached the McKinley Chalets, our luggage had not arrived. As it turned out, they still had not arrived at 21h30.

The McKinley Chalet is made up of a number of cabins, each with several suites on two floors. Each suite has a sitting room, bedroom, and bathroom.

After our arrival at McKinley Chalets, we had time for lunch and not much more before we left on our Tundra Wilderness Tour.



The Tundra Wilderness Tour was wonderful with the possible exception of the buses, which were basically refurbished school buses. The bus did have seat belts, which were very much appreciated, as most of the roads in the park are unpaved. Our guide, Bill Berri, was a retired schoolteacher with twenty-six years of experience conducting this tour. He was extremely knowledgeable about the area and its flora and fauna. The tour goes into the heart of Denali National Park, then turns around and retraces its route. There are rest stops about every ninety minutes. The basic drive takes six hours, but the bus stops whenever wildlife is spotted. We had many stops and saw ground squirrels, caribou, grizzly bears, eagles, and

moose. A benefit of going there this time of year is that we get to see a lot of fall colour.

A box meal was provided, which served as our dinner. We each also received a souvenir book of photos taken in the park by various bus drivers.

We had a great day that was spoiled by learning that our luggage had gone missing. When we returned to our room and discovered that our suitcases were not there, I called the front desk immediately. They began a search by calling the Westmark and other places. A while later a hotel guest called to tell us he had Mike's suitcase. While Mike was retrieving his suitcase, hotel staff found and delivered mine. They had both been delivered to the wrong rooms.

We got up about 8h00 Wednesday morning. I managed to sleep through the night except when Mike's alarm went off for his thyroid medication.

I breakfasted on the leftovers from the previous day's box meal that we got on the tundra tour.

We spent most of the morning shopping and bought jewellery, gifts, and souvenirs.

A little after noon, we went on the Husky Homestead Tour, which took us to a husky kennel. They raise Alaskan huskies, which are not a recognized pure breed. These dogs are raised as working sled dogs and are not suitable as household dogs until they are well past their prime. We were all encouraged to hold puppies as part of their socialization process. They must feel comfortable around people, as they will be constantly surrounded by strangers when they race.



After the tour, we returned to our room to thaw out, rest up, and write postcards. This was the only time during our trip when we got really cold, and this was only because we were standing outside for a long time looking at the dogs.

I didn't have a real lunch but just snacked on pretzels from the previous day.

We went to dinner in the hotel restaurant. Except for having my order initially messed up, it was an acceptable meal. I had an Alaskan style pizza made with caribou sausage and Mike had a fillet mignon. For dessert Mike had a chocolate cake with vanilla ice cream and I had a glass of Muscat.

Toward the end of our meal, a lot of clear sky was showing.

After dinner, Mike bought a jacket he'd been looking at since we had arrived at Denali.

I woke up Thursday morning at 6h30 and managed to have my suitcase ready to put outside by 7h00, except that we had to retrieve it a

bit later to get the room key out of my jeans pocket.

We went to breakfast about 8h00.

The day started out with clearer skies.

In the room after breakfast, I updated my records. We also saw part of a show on A&E that seemed somewhat science fictional. Maybe we will find out what the show was one of these days.

Then it was time to check out. We killed some time in the hotel lobby. I finished reading the novella "Breathmoss" on my Palm.

At noon we had lunch in the hotel restaurant. I had a large chowder, and Mike had meatloaf.

Then we waited some more. I played a few games on the Palm.

At 14h00 we boarded the bus for Talkeetna. Our luggage was on the same bus. The driver was very entertaining and sociable. Still I was very sleepy before the end of our drive, which was about three and a half hours long.

The Talkeetna Lodge is a short distance outside the small community of Talkeetna. It's a very nicely appointed facility with spacious guest rooms.

As soon as we got our rooms, we walked around a bit outside. It was too cloudy to see Mt. McKinley. Then we had dinner at the Base Camp Bistro, which is the hotel's informal restaurant. I had a small bowl of soup and crab cakes, and Mike had reindeer chili. I also had sorbet for dessert.

After dinner we were able to connect with AOL, so we downloaded e-mail.



Friday morning we had the buffet breakfast. Then we stopped by the gift shop. I glanced at a mirror over a jewellery counter and noticed an earring was missing. We retraced our steps but we didn't find it. Back in the room, I put on a different pair of earrings. Mike later found my missing earring in the hotel lobby.

The day had started foggy but cleared up nicely, and we got our first view of Mt. McKinley.

Back in our room, we wrote some postcards.

At a little after noon, we were picked up for our flightseeing of Mt. McKinley. The day turned out to be really beautiful with just some scattered clouds. We rode in a plane that could hold a dozen people, and there was one empty seat. We were flown to and completely around Mt. McKinley. The views were

fantastic, and I'm sure we all got great photos.

After we returned to the hotel, I got caught up with my e-mail.

In the evening we had dinner and then took a walk on a trail behind the hotel.

A little before sunset, we joined a large group of shutterbugs to take pictures of the colours of sunset on and around the mountains. There were just enough clouds in the sky to make it very interesting.

I woke up in the middle of the night and had some difficulty getting back to sleep. While I was still awake, the low battery indicator on Mike's cell phone went off and woke him as well. As long as he was awake, he went outside to check the skies. He reported aurorae. I asked him to take my movie camera out with him; I didn't want to go out because I had already missed quite a bit of sleep. I managed to get back to sleep before he returned.



I got up at 7h00 Saturday morning.

I went to breakfast by myself at 8h00. I left Mike to put out our luggage for pick up. I had omelette for breakfast. The view of the mountains was even better this morning than last night.

The bus to Anchorage picked us up at 10h00. We were shown a video about Alaska on the first leg of the drive. A little after noon, we stopped at the Alaska Native Heritage Center. The place looks relatively new. It has exhibits about the various indigenous tribes of the state. There were also dance demonstrations. We had lunch there. I bought a few souvenirs.

After we arrived in Anchorage, our driver took us on a short sightseeing ride. We arrived at the Marriott about 15h15. We had to wait a while for our room assignments. When we finally got them, we were still left waiting a while for our luggage. Our room had a nice westward view of water and mountains.

We went down for dinner a little after 17h00. I had venison, and Mike had duck. I also had Irish coffee for dessert.

I woke up at 7h00 Sunday, before the time I'd set on my alarm, and got out of bed shortly thereafter. The day was clear with a nice view of the mountains.

I went to breakfast by myself, leaving Mike watching a football game.

After breakfast I downloaded e-mail.



Our bus trip to Seward took about three hours. We stopped once to view the Portage Glacier. We reached dockside at Seward about 15h30. It probably took about half an hour for the security check and other processing to board Holland America's *ms Statendam*. Our luggage followed about a half hour later. We made several visits to the Front Office of the ship for various reasons. Our shore excursion vouchers were a little late coming, but they did arrive. We had made all the reservations on the

Internet for our shore excursions before we had left home.

We had dinner with two of the people we had met on the land portion of the trip. Dinner was casual and the seating completely informal that night. The food was excellent. The portions varied from small to large, depending on the selection. I probably could have handled more courses than I ordered. I started with a fruit cocktail and had duck for the main course. Mike also had the fruit cocktail, then soup and a pork dish. For dessert I had berries. Mike had cheesecake.

At 20h00 there was a lifeboat drill before we sailed. Then we did laundry.

We caught the end of the Welcome show. Then we got a snack before retiring about midnight.

In between things we spent quite a bit of time exploring the ship.

I woke up about 6h30 on Monday, although I hadn't slept terribly well. I had awakened in the middle of the night and had tossed and turned for quite a bit before I had been able to get back to sleep. After Mike got up, we went on deck to take pictures. We were in College Fjord for a short while. We were up close to a glacier. Many broken pieces of ice floated in the water as well.

Then we went to breakfast in the main dining room, where we joined an Israeli couple, with whom we shared a very interesting conversation. Seating for breakfast and lunch was completely informal throughout the trip.

We went on deck again for more pictures and then went back to our room to get Mike's computer. We went to the Internet Cafe to get a wireless account, but the ship's system was having problems.

I went up without him to the Crow's Nest bar for the Trivia Team Challenge. I joined a group of five others: Tom, Mitch, Jan, Janet, and Jim. We didn't start off too well but ended up winning. Each team member received a mug.

I went back down to the Atrium to fetch Mike for lunch. We ate with a couple from Idaho. I had a fruit cup, lentil soup, a Philly steak sandwich, and chocolate profiteroles for dessert. Mike had fish and chips and strudel à la mode.

We went outside briefly after lunch. After we returned to our room, I took a nap.

At 15h15 we attended a high tea, where we met a couple from Hawaii.

At 16h45, after another short nap and a change of clothes, we went to the Champagne Reception. This was followed immediately by dinner. We ate with a couple from Colorado and one from Indiana. The formal seating for dinner started this evening and continued for the rest of the trip. The first night was formal dress, which meant jackets and ties for men. There was one other formal night, and the others were either casual or informal dress. One interesting thing that happened at our table, which was set up for eight, was that one couple only showed up on formal nights and another couple only showed up on the other nights. So there were always only three couples at our table.

We didn't get up until 07h30 Tuesday morning. I had slept relatively well but had a bit of a sore throat and was a bit achy. The day started grey and stayed that way. It even rained.

We tried the buffet breakfast, but I didn't care for it.

On the bow we saw whales and birds. We were in Glacier National Park and Preserve for the day. I got a really good shot of an otter. While we were outside, Mike got some pea soup. The ship's crew kept us well fed.



For lunch we went to the dining room, but Mike didn't see anything he wanted on the menu. I had fruit cocktail and Wiener schnitzel.

We went back out afterward to see a glacier. It was raining, so we came back in briefly and then we went back out. The rain had stopped. We saw a whole bunch of harbour seals.

Later we went to play a trivia game. Mike and I were joined by Jane and Jim from the day before. Our team lost by just one point. We only had four members, so that was actually quite good.

After dinner I caught the end of the Match Game. There was usually an audience participation game after the early seating dinner. Players were randomly chosen from the audience. Mike went back to our room. I met him on his way to the Internet Cafe as I headed back to our room.

I didn't sleep too well that night. Consequently I didn't wake up until almost 07h00 to another overcast and wet day.

About an hour later, we went to breakfast. For a change Mike had a big meal.

Then we went for a stroll on deck to look around and take pictures. We were docked at Sitka. There were two other ships anchored here. One was the *ms Amsterdam*. While we were outside, it started to rain lightly. I was prepared with an umbrella.

On our way back to our room, I picked up a Daily Quiz. These were available every morning in the Library, but I only managed to remember to pick up a few of them.

We had an early lunch at 11h30. Then we took a tender to Sitka. We visited St. Michael's Cathedral, as admission to it was included with our Wildlife and Otter outing. We had extra time, so I was able to get a Sitka hat badge. We walked around a bit more, including Baranof Castle Hill, which offered a nice view. We discovered there were actually three other ships besides ours that were docked here. After we got to the pier, we found out that the white ships were part of Princess, which I believe is now also owned by Carnival (Holland America is owned by Carnival).

Then we went on the Wildlife and Otter tour. Despite the poor weather, we had a successful boat ride. We saw a large pod of humpback whales, pelagic cormorants, a lone grey whale, a raft of sea otters,





several bald eagles, and a few stellar sea lions.

The excursion boat brought us directly back to our ship. We had ample time to change for dinner, which that day had a Dutch theme with hats. I had shrimp cocktail, beef broth with vermicelli and meatballs, a green salad, and an Indonesian dish.

Afterward I accompanied Mike to the Internet Café. This may have been a mistake, as the area became very smoky at one point and caused me quite a bit of respiratory discomfort. The Internet Café was located near the Casino, which is probably the smokiest area on the ship. Unfortunately the wireless Internet system went down before Mike got much done.

Later we went to the Dutch Dessert Extravaganza.



Mike was still in bed when I left for breakfast Thursday morning. He was up when I returned. We went to the Internet lounge to use up his wireless connect time. I was able to download some of my e-mail.

Later we strolled the deck, taking pictures of Juneau, where we were docked.

We went to lunch in the Lido, the buffet restaurant, about noon.

Shortly thereafter we debarked for our helicopter tour. Unfortunately it was cancelled because of weather; it was too overcast and foggy. All we did on shore was shop for souvenirs and Mountain Dew.

At 15h30 we went to the Explorers Lounge for tea. Then we went up to the Crow's Nest for

a trivia game. There were only two teams, and we won.

Dinner was informal that night. One of the couples at our table shared a bottle of champagne with everyone at the table.

Afterward we went to a trivia game in the Van Gogh Lounge. This was followed by a magic show put on by Russ Stevens. He was quite good.

Later we went to see a show put on by the Indonesian crewmembers. By the time we got there, the best seats were taken. We had to settle for seats way over to the edge of the room. We enjoyed it, nevertheless.

Friday I had room service bring my breakfast.

About 09h30 we went on deck to watch as the ship approached and then docked at Ketchikan.

We had a buffet lunch at 11h30. I had stir-fry, which was passable.

In early afternoon we took a floatplane excursion to Misty Fjord National Park. Aside from beautiful scenery, we saw harbour seals and goats. Afterward we did some serious souvenir shopping.

We got back to the ship about 17h00. There was a long line, and it took about twenty minutes to board.

We just about had enough time to change for that night's formal dinner. The couple who hadn't shown up since the first formal dinner showed up, and the other couple was absent. We took pictures. Tonight was the farewell dinner and baked Alaska night.

After dinner we went to the Newlywed and Not So Newlywed Game. Four couples were chosen from the audience representing different lengths of marriage. It was hilarious.

A bit later we went to the Piano Bar to play Sherlock Holmes Musical Pursuit. We joined two other couples -- Jan and Mitch, two of the original Mukluks (our team name), and Di and her husband from Australia. We didn't do badly, but we didn't win.

That night we set our watches back to Pacific Time.

I got up Saturday morning at seven. As I was getting ready for the day, I started feeling queasy. I thought it was seasickness, since the seas were rough, but I developed severe abdominal pain. I thought it

was one of those short-lived stomach bugs. I felt much better after three hours, during which I dozed on and off. Later I decided that the symptoms were from stress and exhaustion. Although I mostly recovered that day, mild symptoms persisted for days afterward.

I finally left the room about two after I'd eaten some bread and crackers, which I ordered from room service. We made it to a trivia game and joined a group with Jane and Mitch and another couple. We won after a tiebreaker.

Then we went to tea.

We had our farewell dinner with the usual suspects.

Afterward we saw a juggling act.

After we got back to our room, we packed and placed our checked luggage in the hallway.

We got up Sunday morning at 06h00. We got up to the Lido for breakfast, and there was a long line. Still, we managed to finish by 07h30.

When we got back to our room, the cleaning crew was already at work. The crossword puzzle from the previous day that I had saved was gone. We should have used the "Do not disturb" sign. We finished packing up our carry-on luggage and vacated the room to go to the Encounter Lounge to wait for our debarkation time to Vancouver. Debarkation was organized by groups, depending on where one was going and when.

Transportation to the Vancouver airport was by bus. The security checks and other rigmarole at the airport took about an hour.

I felt a bit peckish at the airport, so I bought a bag of potato chips. I'm glad I did, because lunch on the plane turned out to be just a small Caesar salad with bread sticks and a cookie. I couldn't eat the cookie or take my vitamins, because we weren't offered seconds on drinks.

We had lousy service on the plane, and I started a letter of complaint on the plane on my Palm. None of the flight attendants bothered to respond to the call button. To top it off, Alaska Airlines lost our luggage. They blamed it on Holland America, but the ticket taker at Vancouver should have noticed the discrepancy. Our luggage went to Las Vegas, and we didn't get it until the next day.

* * *

* Local Activities

Live Theatre

Toys in the Attic: This Lillian Hellman play was the Colony's second selection for this season. I believe this is the first Hellman play I've seen. The tone reminded me a lot of Tennessee Williams. The overall tone is downbeat. It's a psychological study. The plot revolves around the Berniers family, which consists of two middle-aged spinsters and their brother and his wife. My first reaction was negative. After the play, I wondered what the point was. It seemed to be about a bunch of people doing stupid things and never learning from their mistakes. After further thought, though, I decided that the play is really about the nasty games some people play with the folks closest to them. See Eric Berne's *Games People Play*. When I read the book many years ago, I couldn't believe real people acted that way. However, closer inspection of my own life revealed that even I played some nasty games, though mine were rather tame by comparison to most of the ones described in the book. I tend to be a frank and candid sort, but I guess that's rarer than I'd like. One of the Berniers sisters twists everyone around her and manipulates events so that life will be the way she wants it to be. It's really quite nasty. The play is an excellent character study. The acting was wonderful as usual at this theatre. The brother was played by Donald Sage Mackay, whom I recently spotted on *Frasier*, which I tuned into because Patrick Stewart was a guest star; I've never watched the show before. On *Frasier*, Mackay played a bartender in a gay bar. We've seen him in two other plays at the Colony. He apparently does a lot of work on TV.

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Films

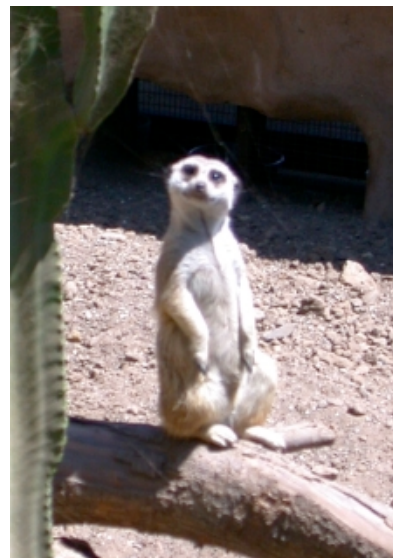
Seabiscuit: I wanted to see this movie for three reasons. We had seen one of the locations where it was filmed. Jeff Bridges was in it. I had also seen *The Story of Seabiscuit* starring Shirley Temple, which was made back in 1949. This new version is a lot closer to the true story, which I later watched on A&E. It's also a lot grittier. The Shirley Temple version was quite prettified. Jeff Bridges and Tobey Maguire, who are the two stars, were great. The story takes place during the depression. Seabiscuit was a racehorse that many didn't think had a chance. The only reason he wasn't raced in the Kentucky Derby, etc., was that by the time he was properly trained, he was too old. He proved his worth by winning against the 1938 Triple Crown winner, War Admiral. People during the Depression needed a hero, and Seabiscuit became that hero. Definitely a great movie for horse

lovers, but I would recommend it for just about anybody. I certainly liked it well enough that I'll probably buy it when it comes out on DVD.

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Other

Santa Barbara: We spent a day in Santa Barbara with a group of fans. We met at a restaurant for brunch then went to the zoo and the natural history museum. The zoo is not large and doesn't have a large collection of animals. A couple of hours sufficed to see most everything. The collection contains some interesting animals, though. The natural history museum is also small but has interesting exhibits covering just about everything. In addition, there was a special woolly mammoth exhibit. I was able to add to my skunk collection at the museum shop. The rest of the group were going on to dinner at a Cajun restaurant, but I have had problems in the past with that cuisine; so Mike and I went off on our own. Before dinner, we stopped at the Alice Keck Park Memorial Garden, which specializes in native species. Although it covers only a block, a lot is packed in to it. We had dinner at an Italian restaurant.



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Stephen Hawking: We attended his biennial public lecture at Caltech, where he spends a month each year. The talk this year was about "Gödel and the End of Physics". He talked about the search for a unified theory and whether it was really possible that we would ever understand everything about the physical universe. He concluded that we wouldn't. But he said that would be good for physicists, since they would always have work. Although his public lectures are aimed toward the educated public, some of it this time went over my head. Still it was fascinating and very entertaining. He has a great sense of humour.

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*** Mailing Comments on FAPA #264:** Note to non-FAPA members: FAPA is an APA of people in science fiction and fantasy fandom. It has a large membership, currently about fifty. There are openings right now. If you are interested in joining, let me know and I can send you the relevant information.

Fantasy Amateur: I'm impressed by the recruitment of new members. Keep up the good work, Robert. I'm in favour of amending the constitution to recognize online fanac as qualifying credentials.

Eric Leif Davin (A Different Drummer #1): I have read some of Edgar Rice Burroughs's Martian series, but I'm finding myself enjoying the Tarzan books much more. A free copy of the first book in the series came with my Palm. I liked it so much that I bought the remaining Tarzan books that were available. They were available for about \$2.50 each, so I thought they were well worth the price. I've read the second book and enjoyed it as much as the first.

Ray Nelson (Big Cat, Vol.2, No. 2): The punctuation in my first name is a hyphen, not a period. Thanks.

You said, "*Pour qua pas*". Were you making some kind of pun that I didn't catch, or did you mean "*Pourquoi pas*"? My French is so rusty, I actually had to check my LaRousse to make sure of the spelling.

I like your cartoon cats.

Ben Indick (Ben's Beat, 73): I'm enjoying your continuing autobiography.

Milt Stevens (Alphabet Soup #39): My first car was an Oldsmobile Cutlass, which I bought new in 1973. I believe it was the equivalent of the Buick Century, which is a car that, if I recall correctly, my sister had at one point.

I'll get a mobile phone when the dust settles and there's a model that will work everywhere. It would be nice if such a phone were incorporated into a Palm so that I wouldn't have yet another thing to carry around. The Palm has allowed me to dispense with carrying books around with me.

Roger Wells (Voice of the Habu): I hope your employment situation has stabilized since you last wrote.

Dick Eney (It's Eney's Fault): You'll have to enlighten me on the democratic tradition in Japan from the early part of the last century. I never learned about it. Of course, the only history course that mentioned Japan much was the world history course I took when I was in England. On the other hand, it seems to me that a lot of Japan's recent economic problems were caused by the fact that many feudal characteristics still existed and exist over there.

Fred Lerner (Lofgeornost #72): I enjoyed the account of your travels, as usual. Our travel styles are very different. I guess I'm not as adventurous.

Janine Stinson (Bird of Prey): Welcome to FAPA. Thanks for introducing yourself to us.

Tom Feller (The Road Warrior): I wish Anita good luck with her garden. I was hit and miss with my garden until I took some classes at the local botanical garden. There is a series of classes called "Successful Gardening" for each season, except summer. They were invaluable. The class is very popular, and people have to sign up way in advance. I also attended some single sessions on pruning trees and fertilizers. Everything I learned has been extremely helpful. I replanted a lot this past summer because of plants that died for various reasons. I don't expect to have to do that again.

You seemed to indicate that having all the parties on the second floor at DeepSouthCon/LibertyCon was a problem. It sounds great to me, as you would avoid all the hassles going up and down the elevators.

I do crossword puzzles on planes when we are ascending or descending. However, I'll have to take some of my own next time. I wasn't able to get a crossword puzzle on our flight home from Alaska. The ones in the magazines in the area around my seat had all been worked on at least partially.

I really liked the movie *Queen of the Damned* - enough to buy it, but then I haven't read the books it was based on. Or perhaps I have read *The Vampire Lestat*, but it's been long enough that I've forgotten most of it.

Helen Wesson: If you are still looking for a place for your dollhouse, I can suggest two possible places that might be interested. The first is the Boston Children's Museum. Contact them at info@BostonKids.org. The second place is the Strong Museum in Rochester, NY. Their address is One Manhattan Square, Rochester, NY 14607. Phone is 585-263-2700. Even if they are not interested, they may be able to refer you to someone who might be.

Moi: I seem to have lost my gardener. A helper he brought in August ruined two of my succulents. I didn't want a gardener I couldn't trust. I still need occasional help, though, with heavy work. He has helped me once since then. However, since our handyman has pulled a disappearing act, I think what I really need is a handyman who is willing to do occasional work in the garden.

We had some minor glitches in our DVD production before we went to Alaska, but we are back in production again. We are working on the video I took of the Millennium Philcon. I took three to four hours of video at the con.

Michael Waite (Trial and Air #14-15): We had some kind of Kodak Retina camera a long time ago. It belonged to my father. Then I used it for a while. I think he gave it to his brother, and who knows what happened to it after that? Mike and I both have fair-sized collections of slides. We haven't had a chance to look at each other's collections. We have a scanner that can scan slides, but I haven't had a chance to do more than a test scan. The slides I most want to scan in are the ones of my artwork to add to my web site.

Kodachrome, of course, is the long-lasting film. I also used Ektachrome later on, and I suppose I really need to scan those in first unless I want to spend endless hours using software to correct the colours.

Janice Morningstar (I May Be a Dinosaur, But at Least I'm Not Purple):

Thanks for the heads up on Elizabeth Moon's *The Speed of Dark*. I'm also interested in autism. I was a psychology major in college. I have a book or two written by an autistic scientist, and there was an article about an autistic alumnus from my college. I checked my database, and I actually have the Moon book but just haven't got around to reading it.

You may be right about LASFS membership not being an accurate representation of fandom in Southern California. On the other hand, many members don't live in the area at all and some don't even live in California. I only charted the "local" members. We don't get people from San Diego, but we do have many members in Orange County. We don't have many members outside Los Angeles County, but the surrounding counties are also less populated. A lot of fans move to be closer to the LASFS clubhouse. The San Fernando Valley, where the clubhouse is located, has generally been more affordable than many other areas in LA. I was thinking about this a while ago, and I really don't know that many fans in the South Bay area, for instance, where we live. Most of my fannish friends live closer to the clubhouse. Many fans definitely take the location of the clubhouse into consideration when they choose a place to live. I would love to find a club closer to home. It's a long hike for us, and we rarely go any more.

Robert Michael Sabella (Visions of Paradise #96: The Passing Scene): Fei's father should consider moving to California, at least long enough to become a US citizen. There is no language requirement here. Election ballots are printed in many different languages.

Jack Speer (Synapse): Yes, I'm a language purist (snob).

I do volunteer work for the Sime-Gen web site. Check out simegen.com. Currently, I edit a monthly newsletter, edit and post book reviews, do author interviews and post them, and occasionally do a book review. I will be giving up the newsletter by the end of the year. I find that trying to do something on a regular schedule is too stressful.

Leslie David's "city of lying politicians" is Washington, DC. She doesn't live there but in the suburbs in Virginia, which is close enough. I usually put the address from which letters of comment are sent; but I suppose I could add the geographical area, if it's e-mail.

Using "nonbeliever" in place of "pagan" doesn't necessarily make sense. Most pagans that I know have definite beliefs. An agnostic may be a nonbeliever. Even an atheist has beliefs. Believing in the non-existence of a god is a belief.

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*** Letters of Comment (For the uninitiated, these are letters commenting on previous issues of my fanzine [newsletter])**

My replies to the letters will be enclosed in double parentheses. I will also routinely make editorial corrections in punctuation, spelling, and so forth.

Lloyd Penney, Etobicoke, ON, Canada

5 September 2003

Dear Laurraine:

Thank you for *Feline Mewsings* 12. Torcon finished up a few days ago...reviews are mixed, and organization and awareness of Worldcon traditions and expectations were fairly low, but I still think you'd have to try hard not to have a good time at a Worldcon. And, it was in my back yard, so that was an added bonus.

We'll need all the good luck we can get with future space missions. I expect that NASA will be forced to follow the announced recommendations, and send fewer people into space. We'll have more unmanned robotic missions, whether we like it or not. At least, we'll be exploring, but it won't be the same. I hope we can generate the same excitement.

In Iraq, the United States has become just another foreign invader. I suspect France and Germany knew something the Bush regime didn't. Maybe Bush didn't need to clean out Saddam and the Ba'ath party completely, but just enough to turn the balance of power to let Iraqis do the rest themselves. Iraq is turning into a modern-day Vietnam...I'd say cut your personnel losses, and get out now.

From your viewpoint, how has Harry Warner's passing affected FAPA? Given how large a part of the apa he was, there's got to be more than a Harry-shaped hole in it.

Torcon...some said it was great, and others christened it Nolacon North because the publications were late in arriving. Many of the events weren't all that imaginative, but Spider Robinson proved himself the perfect Hugos host. He kept the pace going, and it was exciting. And Rob Sawyer finally got his Best Novel Hugo, and Canadian fandom had its brightest moment then. I had a great time, even in spite of the con at times, mostly because there were local fans and out-of-town fans and international fans, all friends, and all there at once. I saw people I hadn't seen in years, even decades. It was a family reunion, but people you really wanted to see! Five days of concentrated feelgood... it's the best therapy I can think of.

I had a job interview on Wednesday...wish me luck! This unemployment jazz is ridiculous. Why can't I win the lottery and be done with it?

((I have heard from one pair of Torcon attendees who had a great time. But they are pros who made a lot of good deals there. Another fan I heard from said she thought the con was terrible. So reviews definitely seem to be mixed.

((Our space programme will continue if only so that we don't get left out in the cold. China, after all, has a manned Moon programme in the planning.

((Bush has certainly made a mess in Iraq and Afghanistan. I'd like to see him try to get out of this one.

((As for Harry Warner, he was the sort of person you just get used to having around all the time. Things just don't feel the same without him.

((I wish you the best of luck with your job interview!))

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Jerry Kaufman, Seattle

6 September 2003

Dear Laurraine,

Thanks for sending *FM #12* and all previous and subsequent issues. Loved the color photos of the art, especially "Beauty of Brea". Enjoy the cruise – if you're in Seattle on your way there or back, give us a call ...

((We did not go through Seattle on this trip, but I will keep your phone number for future reference. We have family up there so will probably find ourselves in your neighbourhood from time to time.))

* * *

*** Closing Remarks**

Coming up on our calendar, we are looking at Loscon, which is Thanksgiving weekend. I am scheduled to be on two programme items, one Friday morning and the other Sunday morning. It would be too stressful to commute, so I have made a hotel reservation for the weekend. I am looking forward to seeing some friends I haven't seen for a few years and also to seeing Wil Wheaton (Wesley Crusher on *Star Trek: the Next Generation*), who recently made a visit to the LASFS, where he read from his first book. You can check out his latest activities at www.wilwheaton.net, where he keeps a web log. His entry for 23 October will tell you about his visit to the LASFS. His book is a collection of anecdotes from his life and very well

Then we will be in the midst of the holiday season with its attendant parties and other activities. I found the following in my files. It's old, but I kind of like it. I have no idea who created it.

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AND TO ALL

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GOODNIGHT!

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