

# Feline Mewsings #49





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#49

August 2012

*Feline Mewsings* is a personalzine / newsletter published more or less quarterly by R-Laurraine Tutihasi, 2081 W Overlook St, PO Box 5323 (an absolute necessity for postal mail), Oracle, AZ 85623-5323; 520-896-2058, Laurraine@mac.com, <http://www.weasner.com/>. It is distributed through StippleAPA and sent to other friends and family. It is available for the usual (a response of any kind, including letters, e-mail, and phone calls of comment; trade; contributions of illos, fiction, or articles; or even money: \$5.00 per issue or \$15 per year). A slightly modified version will be placed on the web shortly after paper publication; please let me know if you prefer just to read the web version. I can also e-mail this in Word or rtf format. Kattesminde Press #428. ©2012 R-Laurraine Tutihasi. Permission is granted to reprint or forward any part or all of this newsletter created by the editor provided that it carries the following statement: "Copyright 2012 by R-Laurraine Tutihasi. Originally published in *Feline Mewsings* #49, <http://www.weasner.com/laurraine/Felinemewsings/index.html>." All other material is copyrighted by their respective creators, and they should be contacted for any reprint permission. This issue finished 5 August 2012.

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Photos—trip report by Mike Weasner, others submitted by article authors

Contributions of art, reviews, articles, fiction, letters, even poetry welcome. Publication not guaranteed, but all submissions will be given due consideration. Deadline for next issue: 15 October 2012.

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## \* Editorial / Introduction

Since the last issues, I've had some dental misadventures. I had two problem teeth. They both had to come out, and one of them has been extracted. I hope to be getting an implant to replace it. I'm hoping I can wait until it is done before I get the other tooth taken care of.

The major event, though, was our extended trip to attend Westercon in Seattle and to visit friends and family. The report of the trip is included in this issue.

Another important development is that we adopted a cat to be a companion for Mercury. As of now, Gateway is still mostly in hiding and still getting used to his new surroundings. Mercury was upset for a couple of days and off his feed, but he seems to be okay with having a new cat around. I saw them touching noses recently. Gateway looks a lot like Mercury but is about half his size. I hope to have a more extensive report next time.

\* \* \*

## \* Local Outings

**Chasing Manet:** This play by Tina Howe was presented by the SPATS Theater, a community theatre in Oracle. This is the 33<sup>rd</sup> season for the SPATS Theater. A couple of people I know were in the play, so we got together with neighbours and attended a performance. The play takes place mostly in a nursing home. An elderly painter tries to talk a Jewish woman into running away with her. This is an uproarious comedy, and the amateur actors did very well.

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**Men in Black 3:** We've seen the entire series of this comedic science fiction movies. It teems with aliens created with lots of help from special effects. I thought this was the best one of the series. The story was quite touching.

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**Prometheus:** There was a lot of talk about this movie. It was supposed to be a prequel to *Alien*. It was in a way, but it disappointed. At the end we had more questions than answers. Certainly the quality was far short of *Alien*. And the end was left wide open for a possible sequel, which I'm sure we'll see if it's made.

\* \* \*

## \* Where Have All the Pufferbellies Gone? by Taral Wayne

*"Down by the station, early in the morning, see the little pufferbellies all in a row."*<sup>1</sup>

The very earliest thing I remember of my life was lying at the bottom of a dark well, looking up at an ancient lady who greatly resembled Queen Victoria, dressed all in layers and layers of black. Above her were the glass panes and iron girders of a train station ceiling. Much later in life, I puzzled out that this must have been my great-grandmother Fenton, my father's grandmother, and one of the local elite of his tiny hometown of Gananoque, Ontario. We had taken the train to visit her, but I remember nothing else except for that one moment when she bent down to look at me in the perambulator on the station platform. I never saw her again. Or rode in a train for many, many years.

It's funny what you remember. My family and I once lived next to the main railway tracks leading downtown through west Toronto, in a one-floor bungalow at 100 Florence Crescent. My father worked for the railroad then. Strangely, I don't remember exactly what year it was.

It might have been 1954, the year in which Hurricane Hazel lashed out at Toronto in the failing moments of its rage, washing away Raymore Drive and thirty-five residents in their sleep. I remember being held up in a pouring rain to look over the parapet of the Humber River bridge, down at the rushing water. The dark Humber River should have been twenty or thirty feet below, but the torrent of water was so near the top of the concrete arches that it's a wonder the bridge didn't crumble. Others had. The river

swept by like a frothy chocolate milkshake, seemingly just out of finger's reach. It's as well that it wasn't quite that close. I'd have been plucked away by the gleeful torrent.

But I think it was more likely 1956 that my dad got his job with the railroad – the year when I began kindergarten.

I'd like to say it was his career, but my father never had a career in anything. Jobs were only jobs to Dad. He liked them to be easy and to give him as free a hand as possible. And he liked to look cool. Of course to my five-year-old eyes, who could look cooler than Daddy in his striped cap, brass buttons, vest, and big gold turnip watch? Sadly, as we get older we often learn how very mistaken we were in our first, naïve judgments. Just when Dad began working for the railroad and why he stopped, I have no way of knowing. I don't even know quite what it was he did on the job. Or whether it was the Canadian National or Canadian Pacific Railroad!

I possess only three pieces of evidence that this phase of his life ever happened. Two are photographs. One is of my father, Ronald, standing next to his father, Mac, holding me in his arms and dressed for work. The other shows him on the platform of a caboose, stripped for action. From the photos, I conclude he must have been a brakeman or yard worker of some sort and not a conductor or engineer, which would have been unimaginably more glorious to my five-year-old mind.

The third bit of hard evidence is a gold watch made by Elgin, "Benjamin W. Raymond" type, open-face model 571, 21 jewels, 8 adjustments, and mounted in a 10k case. It hasn't run in decades. This is altogether appropriate for my father, who frequently didn't work either in his later years ... but is still something of a disappointment, all the same. I have often wished to reach into my pocket or pull on a chain to extract a gleaming metal turnip in answer to someone's request for the time. But, where do you find watchmakers anymore? The last I had any knowledge of confirmed my fear that it would cost as much as \$100 simply to clean a watch of that sort, let alone make any repairs it might need. A quick search online suggests this sort of watch is likely to be worth rather less than that amount.

The last year that model of watch was made was 1954, according to the Elgin data base. Oh, well, it would have been like my father to buy a used ticker from another worker.

Still there's hardly more evidence for the existence of Jesus than there is for my father's brief term of walking the yards. If that little is enough for nearly 1,000,000,000 believing Christians, it's good enough for me.

My mother never approved of Dad's job. It brought home the bacon, to be sure. But it also gave the old man an excuse to be away from home for days at a time. He was supposedly on the Toronto to Montreal run; I have a dim memory of this lodged somewhere between a couple of infrequently accessed brain cells. In theory he would leave home on a Monday, be gone Tuesday, and be home again Wednesday. But that's not always as it happened. Sometimes Dad would be gone longer, as much as a week; and there would be a rancorous fight when he got home. Dad blamed schedules and last minute changes. Clearly Mom didn't believe his excuses and suspected her husband of deliberately staying away from home to play cards, drink, and behave in an unacceptably sociable way with strange women. He would have been only about twenty-five then and was handsome enough that I knew I got my looks from Mom's side of the family. If I had to guess from Dad's clumsy philandering in the '60s, I'd lay odds with my mother's side of the story.

His work for the railroad might have been the cause of marital disillusionment for Mother, but for me there were perks. What kid doesn't want his father to work on a train after all? He might let you board a locomotive!

Dad didn't disappoint me either. He took me to the yard one day; and next thing I knew, I was boosted up the ladder into a "car body" type diesel-electric engine. It was one of the elegant, streamlined diesels that are rarely seen these days. Practical considerations forced a gradual changeover to "hood units" with the boxy cab up front or behind (it didn't matter which way it faced) and no attempt at aerodynamic efficiency whatever.

The first thing I noticed was that everything inside was a shade of black or dark grey. The reason for this was simple. Everything about a train is constantly exposed to diesel oil exhaust, which is just about the filthiest, stickiest, smelliest substance this planet has to offer. If ever given the choice between being coated with the residue of diesel combustion or crude oil, pick crude!

Second the windows were awfully high up. But I was probably five, remember? Everything higher than a man's knees is an imposing altitude to a boy who is five years old. I'm not sure whether or not the old man let me sit in the engineer's seat – that favour was not his to dispense – but, more important, my pants would surely have been ruined by the layer of gunk on the cushion.



One thing about which I was burning with curiosity was the “nose” of the engine. I had some idea of what to expect from my father’s remarks, but I wanted to see for myself. Those of you who have never been in a diesel locomotive probably don’t appreciate how wide the cab is. Between the two seats provided for the engineers, there is a gap of several feet. In the gap is a short flight of stairs leading down to a door. The door opens into a cramped compartment with beds, a light, and an assortment of cheesecake pin-ups. This was the engineer’s home away from home. Perhaps I am creatively reconstructing the part about the pin-ups, but it would seem entirely consistent with the unsupervised masculine character of the job.

The tour didn’t finish with the engine. Gosh, no. I had to see the caboose too!



Dad wouldn’t have spent much time up front in the engine, if any. The caboose would have been his bailiwick. The traditionally red-painted van at the rear of the train would have been where the men spent most of their time, playing cards, snoozing on one of the bunks, or watching from the cupola as the train snaked its way up the rails ahead. There was much of the nineteenth century about the caboose, and one could imagine the gandy dancers who laid the tracks from sea to shining sea living in cabins not very different from this in the 1880s. The interior walls were unfinished boards with all the elegance of a packing crate. Furnishings were minimal and cheap. An iron stove in one corner provided all the heat the railroad thought a man needed in twenty-below-zero temperatures, as long as you never moved farther from it than five feet. As hovels go, most shanty Irish would have found it endearingly familiar.

The cupola was a different matter entirely. Despite the shortcomings of construction and the discomfort of the seat; there was no denying that any kid would have felt like God on

His throne perched up there, head and shoulders through the roof, watching over His kingdom.

All too soon, the tour was over. I felt disappointed; though after so many years, I’m not sure why. Perhaps I expected Dad to start up the diesel, then let me open the throttle and pull the train out of the yards?

Because we lived right next to the tracks, it snowed in summer. It snowed black in summer. It was a several-times-daily occurrence in fact.

I watched awestruck whenever a locomotive thundered by, followed by boxcars, cattle cars, flatcars, tankers, hoppers, and finally the rust-red caboose bringing up the tail. Although we were sheltered from the tracks by a solid ten-foot fence, it might as well not have been there for all the good it did to contain the noise. First the air rumbled as the train approached; then there was a swelling roar of the steam engine or diesels, and finally the ground shook ominously. Over the top of the fence, a huge plume of smoke shot into the air; and then instantly the source of all this commotion had passed by, leaving behind the echo of steel wheels clacking on steel rails for log minutes afterward. But the smoke still hung over the tracks. Tumbling and rolling, the plume spread out over our front yard and snowed sticky flakes of carbon and diesel oil that covered everything. The grass. The front porch. Me. All too often black snow settled on my mother’s freshly hung laundry, triggering a sudden rush to pull it all from the line and get it inside.

It was just my good luck, too, that there was an abandoned station not far from home. Behind our row of cinderblock bungalows was an empty swath of land that stretched as far as I could toddle. The tracks were long torn up; but the station house stood surrounded by unmown grass, looking for all the world like a haunted house. We kids were told on pain of death not to go into it; the floor might collapse. We went in it anyway ... not that there was anything to see there but warped floorboards and dust.

Dad quit the railroad – for what reason I never knew. Maybe it was too much work. Maybe he was losing too much at poker. What job he had after that, I hardly remember. We moved north of the city for a time; and he worked in a factory that made plastic knick-knacks, doing something unskilled until he got tired of it and quit. We moved even farther north of Toronto, and he seemed to have no job at all then. Next, we were in a house on a dirt road near Gormley, Ontario, a town that would have looked right in place on a map between Hooterville and Pixley. Mom and Dad oversaw a dog kennel for a businessman who bred poodles. We fed them on Mink-o-meat, picked wild asparagus from an abandoned corn field, heard Elvis on the radio for the first time, and I nearly froze to death one winter when I locked myself out of the house while my parents were away; but all that’s for another story.

While the year we lived in the country on Rural Route 1 was among the dullest periods of my life, there are a handful of memories that still fill me with a rare feeling of peace and contentment. One of them was a late night when I was taken outside after bedtime. Dad pointed up at the inky black sky and said, "Watch". I watched and saw nothing; then all at once one of the thousands and thousands of diamond-bright stars seemed to detach itself from the heavens and wander away to the dark line of the forest, northward. "That's Sputnik," he said. On another sublime occasion, I recall hanging in a tire-swing as the sun set for the day. I had nothing to do as usual but to stare at the darkening line of black pines and the Van Gogh canvas of red and yellow the sun painted behind them. Somewhere far beyond the forest and maybe even beyond the sunset, the horn of a diesel called across the miles. Its long bass note lamented that nowhere was ever beyond the steel highway traveled by the train.

Funny how that comes back to my mind, many years later. I probably thought nothing of it at the time.

In the mid-1970s, my friends and I often took long hikes around the city, often far into the hours of darkness. One of our most frequent routes was from wherever-we-met downtown to Victoria's place in the West End, or from somewhere in the West End to Bob and Janet's place downtown. If it was too late to take a subway home, I'd crash overnight at one end of one route or the other.

Whichever direction we happened to be going, we had to cross the main tracks leaving Toronto at The Junction. It was a shabby neighbourhood whose homes were humble to begin with and whose rents were driven lower still by the proximity of heavy industry, particularly paint factories and chemical plants. The tracks cut straight through a double row of sprawling, smoking, clanking factory sites; the tracks are in fact why industry developed there. Although The Junction is a couple of miles away from Parkdale, I can still lean out from my balcony and look right up the tracks and even watch distant freight trains coming down the line. Although The Junction has changed quite a bit since the '70s – the old station was a heritage site but was illegally demolished anyway by the railroads that no longer needed it – giant residential towers have sprung up to either side of the tracks, and property values have imperceptibly gained as the industrial plants closed and the neighbourhood struggles to revitalize. But the lines of track still cut through the heart of the West End as straight as the wake of a ship cutting grey seawater.

The major roads all crossed the tracks, but our favourite spot was a steel girder footbridge just a little north of Bloor Street, the city's main east-west drag. We usually crossed late at night when the lights in houses were out and traffic had disappeared from the side streets. We climbed two courses of wooden stairs to get to the top, making enough noise at that quiet hour to be heard for a city block. Often as not, we'd see a light off in the distance – a train approaching – and wait while it slowly bore down on us. Faster and faster it would seem to gain speed, but it only seemed so because it was closer and closer every moment. Then almost without warning, the diesel engine shot under our feet, vanishing suddenly under the planking of the bridge. The noise was terrifying. Little glowing sparks even managed to dart up between the wooden planks, and the entire rickety steel framework that supported us above the thundering train shook as though it were matchsticks. The black snow rolled around us, all but invisible in the darkness.

In a minute, the last car had vanished south, and again we were just a gaggle of misfit fans all by ourselves in the middle of the night with another mile or two to trudge before we broke up and went our separate ways.

I hadn't actually ridden a train at any time in my life since that dim memory of great grandmother Fenton bending over me in the station. In fact taking the train seemed like an almost laughably antiquated thing to do. One might as well wax a moustache or light a gas lamp. The railroads would have agreed; they were too busy moving profitable freight to bother luring money-losing passengers back to their coaches. Amtrak and Go-Train had to be subsidized by government money to operate a passenger service at all and served as little more than a glorified streetcar for urban commuters.

Nevertheless it was that glorified streetcar that finally got me back on rails.

On an extended visit with Marc Schirmeister in California in the 1980s, he proposed we take the train down to San Diego, then cross over the Mexican border to visit Tijuana for the day. I had never been to Mexico of course; so this sounded like a civilized sort of adventure. I wasn't arrested at any point for smuggling dope. Nor was Mexico the land of sombreros and mariachi bands that I had envisioned. We had a pleasant enough afternoon poking through souvenir shops, had a bite to eat in a cantina (which gave us the trots), and then we went home.

It didn't seem like a trip by train at all. I don't even recall if there was an engine up front or if there was just a motorman's cab in each car and the cars run by electric motors, as the subway did back home. The spacious standing area and cheap bench seats facing each other certainly suggested urban transit.

A few years later, I needed a cheap way to get to Baltimore. I'd been doing good business as a dealer at furry cons in the '90s, and for the first time I was unable to bum a ride with fans who were driving the whole way. I made arrangements to go by Amtrak instead. I had few expectations of this mode of travel, and Amtrak certainly did nothing to live up to them. If the train to Tijuana was a glorified Toronto

streetcar, Amtrak's coaches were a run-down dirty New York subway that just happened to run above ground. The coach I rode in crawled through the industrial sprawl of Toronto, Hamilton, Niagara Falls, and every godforsaken industrial burg in three northeastern states before finally pulling into Baltimore. At the American border, we were stopped for nearly an hour while customs officials questioned the passengers in their seats; and to my astonishment, I was taken off the train and nearly arrested!

It was only a case of mistaken identity fortunately; and once it was established that I was not a wanted killer on the West Coast, the cops fell all over themselves to make it up to me. I was driven at least 10 mph over the speed limit by a helpful officer to overtake my train at the next station. Still the experience did nothing to endear me to taking the train again.

That was pretty much the last word I expected to have on the subject of the Romance of Rail.

Fortunately my impressions of train travel changed entirely on the trip back from Montreal. In 2009 – and I'm sure most of you are sick of hearing about it – I was Fan GoH at Anticipation. They asked me how I wanted to travel; and I said that, as it wasn't a long journey, I would be content with going by train. The threat of a rail strike dictated a last minute change of plan, and I flew to Montreal by a local air service. The strike was averted however, and the way was clear to return home by via rail.

Traveling with me was Marc Schirmeister, cartoonist extraordinaire; and we travelled like princes. The seats were comfortable and private. We had superb service the entire way with drinks and snack food offered before we could even think of it. We had a full meal. Our luggage was carried by a porter. Above all was a sense of railroadness that is impossible to explain. It might have been because we left from an honest-to-goodness station and not an outdoor platform with a cheap shelter from the rain. Maybe it was because we had to step up into the coaches. Maybe it was because no space at all was provided for standing commuters. Everybody could sit down in comfortable seats.

Perhaps none of this is more than window dressing. Fundamentally, Schirm and I rode a carriage on steel wheels, pulled along rails by an engine, no different from any flimsy LRT or rickety streetcar. But the experience was a world apart. If I had never ridden the train again after Amtrak, I would have been content. The journey home by via rail left me wishing to hear the call "Alllll Aboooard?" again as soon as possible.

The pity is that I don't foresee another such trip in the near future. Probably none at all. I neglected to mention that my trip back was paid by the con and I traveled business class. Like travelling by air; travelling by rail is strictly segregated between ordinary passengers and those who can afford executive or business class rates that may be twice those of regular fares. I'm not likely to be able to fork out that kind of money on my own any time soon.

At one time trains were a part of everyday life, as well as the subject of High Romance. It was the train that won the West, not the Colt .45. The train is the stage on which Hercule Poirot solved his most famous case and by which Sherlock Holmes was swept out of the warrens of London to the Great Grimpen Mire, to Shoscombe Old Place and the Musgrave family seat. The great metropolises of the Jazz Age were strung out on diadems of railroad steel. Ringling Brothers and Barnum and Bailey's Circus arrived in town by train. Desperately unemployed or adventure-seeking young men rode the rods. Trains were held up by Jesse James – and also by migrating herds of North American bison. 007 wrestled with a Soviet-trained assassin in a railroad coach. The Three Stooges made us laugh by falling out of sleeping berths. Abraham Lincoln arrived in Washington for his inauguration by train, wrote the Gettysburg Address on his knee in a train, and was carried back to Springfield to his final rest by train.

But where are the trains now? Mostly pulling freight, out of sight behind billboards and junkyard fences, or moving uncaring commuters back and forth in their daily tides.

From my balcony I sometimes watch the slowly approaching headlamp of some freight train up in The Junction. The track bends east eventually; and once the light enters the bend, it blinks out and is gone ... still more than a mile-and-a-half away. I think back to when I stood with my friends on a footbridge over those tracks – some twenty-five years ago – but; from where I watch today, I hear nothing of thundering diesels. My concrete balcony doesn't shake. Cinders don't burn pinholes in my pants. The black snow doesn't roll and tumble over my head. What have I seen, actually, but a light moving on the horizon in the darkness? Was it ever really there?

"Down by the station, early in the morning, see the little pufferbellies all in a row."

1 The popular children's song, "Down by the Station" was written in 1948, by Lee Ricks (whom I know nothing about) and Slim Gaillard, a black-Jewish jazz musician. Gaillard also wrote, "Flat Foot Floogie (with a Floy Floy)". Most people are more likely to be familiar with the Tommy Dorsey cover or Barney the Purple Dinosaur's.

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## \* ConClusion: Westercon 65 Trip

Saturday, 30 June 2012, I got up before dawn, using my alarm, to enable us to leave the house early. We had a long drive ahead of us.

We were on the road by 07:00 as planned. Two hours later we stopped at our usual Shell station stop in Gila Bend. Mike started stopping here when he took monthly astronomy trips out to our land before we moved and built our house. It's convenient, and there are always interesting pottery and sculptures for sale. He only ever bought one of Marvin the Martian. Unfortunately the sculpture, apparently made of plaster of Paris, didn't survive our move from California. Sometime late in the morning, I discovered that we were on the 8! I had been dozing on and off so hadn't noticed before. Mike had somehow got the idea that I wanted him to take the 8 instead of the 10. We had to slow way down for two Border Patrol stops that slowed us up at least half an hour and possibly more. Shortly after we entered California, I saw a group of century plants in bloom. Too bad I couldn't take a picture.

I ate my packed lunch sandwich about 10:30. I make or buy sandwiches for the first day of our trips to avoid having to stop for lunch.

After we passed through San Diego, we made a fuel and rest stop at a Shell station in San Clemente. Driving on the 5 and 101 through LA was slow. The freeways in LA are just about always congested. We arrived at the Comfort Suites in Tulare about 19:15.

We went to a nearby Chili's for dinner. I had ribs and a margarita. Mike had a chicken sandwich. Food was impressively good.

I slept pretty well and got up to my alarm Sunday, 1 July 2012.

Mike joined me for a prepaid breakfast at the motel. He usually doesn't eat breakfast.

Shortly thereafter we checked out. We stopped at a Chevron station to top off fuel and air up the tyres; the air machine kept cutting out before the job was done, but the proprietor turned it back on for free. Our new tyres, which we'd bought a couple of months before the trip, lost pressure very quickly. Either we were sold really bad tyres or Precision Toyota of Tucson did a really poor job of mounting them. (Since this problem went away shortly after we returned home, it must have been a mounting problem.) A few hours later just outside Stockton, I saw an egret flying; I'd never seen one in the air before. North of Sacramento, there were lots of egrets sitting in farm fields; I think they might have been rice paddies.

After I decided to look for a lunch stop, it took about an hour before I managed to locate one in Yuba City. Mike stopped at a Shell station first to refuel. I got my lunch at Wendy's; I had a half size almond strawberry salad; it had sliced strawberries, blueberries, and a soft creamy white cheese on a bed of lettuce; the almonds and raspberry vinaigrette came separately in bags; it was the best fast food salad I've had to date and better than many salads in regular restaurants. We arrived at the Fairfield Inn Medford just about exactly 17:00.

Although there was a restaurant right next to our motel, it was not gluten-free friendly. We found an Olive Garden not too far away. Unfortunately our experience at Olive Garden was not the best. On the other hand, we got results for reporting on the mediocre quality of the food. When the waiter came by to check how we were doing, I mentioned that the food was mediocre. The manager came to talk with us. I mentioned our dissatisfaction with the last few Olive Garden meals we'd had. I also mentioned that we had been pleasantly surprised by the quality of food at Chili's, which I'd always regarded before as being of lesser quality than Olive Garden, the last few times we'd eaten there. Chili's apparently has no presence in the Northwest, but the manager was acquainted with the chain. To my surprise the cost of our main courses was totally deducted from our bill.

Our hotel room was also not great. We had a suite, which was nice; but the AC had a problem. I think there must have been a mould problem. There was a slight musty odor, and I think I was allergic to whatever it was.

I used my alarm to get up Monday, 2 July



2012, morning.

I had the free motel breakfast. Then we checked out. I slept on and off during the drive to Salem, OR.

We reached Salem early but arranged to meet Jenny, Mike's niece, for lunch at 11:30. That gave us time to refresh ourselves. I had never met her before. She seemed quite nice. After we ate, Mike and I took pictures with Jenny. She had to leave to go back to work. We finished up lunch a bit later.

I slept on and off on the drive to Federal Way, WA, where my sister and mother live and where we would be staying. We reached there about 16:45, a bit later than we expected because of rush hour traffic. Mother has shrunk down to a ghost of herself. She could really use more exercise, but I'm under no delusion that she will get any. She's just a few months shy of being ninety.

Mimi's house is two stories with the main floor being the second floor. The guest room is on the first floor, which is half underground. It was a bit chilly for us. It's a pretty large house, which Mimi bought after my father had a stroke. She wanted to make sure it was spacious enough to accommodate both our parents. Unfortunately my father has been stuck in a nursing home.

Mimi is a paediatrician at a hospital in Tacoma and usually works very long hours, usually not getting home in the evening until fairly late.

We took Mother to dinner at McGrath's Fish House, which is a chain in the Northwest; they have a gluten-free menu. The food was quite good. I had skewered prawns and scallops. Mother had crab cake, the leftovers of which made dinner for Mimi after she returned home from work. I also had a strawberry daiquiri. Mike just had dessert; he often eats only one full meal a day, and he'd had lunch. After dinner we got gas at an Arco station.

Mimi was right behind us when we got home. I spent quite a bit of time talking with Mother and Mimi. I talk to Mother every week on the phone and frequently also talk with Mimi; but it's very different talking in person.

I woke up before my alarm Tuesday, 3 July 2012. I made my usual breakfast of bacon and eggs; Mimi had bought both for me. Then I called my friend Alice and arranged to meet her and her husband, Mike, that evening at a Japanese restaurant in Seattle.

In mid-morning we went to the nursing home where Dad is and stayed there for a short while until Mike and I had to leave for my friend Amy's. My father no longer talks much at all. He seems to be aware when we're there, though I'm unsure whether he realizes which of us is which. He is able to feed himself at least. He was ninety in March. The nursing home is one of the nicer ones I've been in; back in California I saw the insides of a number of them when a bunch of us went Christmas carolling.

We arrived at Amy's at the agreed upon time. She showed us her recently renovated kitchen. You can get custom-made tiles for a reasonable price; she'd had several tiles made up with science fictional illustrations. These are interspersed with the regular tiles. Then she introduced us to her husband, Ed. She also showed us her chickens and gardening effort. She recently acquired some hens for their eggs and built a shelter for them herself. She has several garden plots with herbs and flowers. I was impressed. Afterward we all, along with Amy's daughter and her friend, drove to an Irish pub style restaurant.



After lunch we picked Mother up at the nursing home and drove back to Mimi's. It turns out Mimi now has DSL, so Mike turned on wi-fi for us. Eventually we showed Mimi how to use wi-fi on her iPod Touch and her iPad. After I did some reading, I did some catching up on Facebook. I also looked through the books and recordings that Mimi wants to get rid of and came up with quite a pile, enough to fill two boxes. Most of the books belonged to Dad, who is unfortunately no longer in any shape to appreciate them. Mike said that we

could fit the books in our car when we leave for home.

In the evening we met Mike and Alice at Azuma Sushi in West Seattle for dinner. Alice called me just as we reached the restaurant to give us much-needed pointers on parking. We had a very pleasant meal with very enjoyable conversation. They very nicely treated us. The restaurant had gluten-free soy sauce, so we didn't have to shop for any.

Mimi got home shortly after we did.

Wednesday, 4 July 2012, Mimi was still at home when I went upstairs to make my usual breakfast. Her departure had been delayed by having to help Mother make her bed. Mother is too weak now to do it herself.

About 10:30 we took Mother to the nursing home. We continued on to get some takeout for lunch at Panera Bread. Mike didn't want anything, but I picked up food for Mother and me. Dad's lunch arrived while we were eating. Mimi arrived a short while later.

Mimi drove us to a Fourth of July party at a friend's place in Tacoma that overlooks water, probably Commencement Bay. From the deck of her house, you could see an air show in the afternoon and fireworks at night. We went there to see the air show (see photo p. 7). It was quite nice, considering it was free. We, except Mother, also went down the hill to a crafts fair; but it wasn't that great, and it was too crowded. We had a nominal dinner at her friend's house.

Thursday, 5 July 2012, I got up relatively early and made my breakfast.

After breakfast I got my Kitt Peak bag ready for Westercon. The bag is one I picked up at Kitt Peak a few years ago and is perfect for the stuff I usually carry around at conventions. Mother and Mimi left about mid-morning. Mother had a doctor's appointment, and they wanted to do some shopping.

We left for lunch shortly after noon. We ate at 13 Coins, which Mimi had recommended. While the food was good, it was rather pricy and the service was rather lackadaisical.

Then we proceeded to Westercon, which was at a Doubletree hotel just down the street from the restaurant. There was another couple entering the building at the same time, and they directed us to the con registration area. Registration opened earlier than indicated on the convention web site, and we had time to look through the programme booklet at leisure. Then I looked over the various bid and other tables. We also looked through the dealers room, which was mostly set up. While wandering around, I got involved in a conversation with my friend Amy. When I got back to Mike, he was involved in a conversation with another friend that continued long enough that we missed most of the "Closing Ceremonies". The theme of the convention was "the end of this cycle of time". The Dead Dog party had been the night before.

At that point we got dinner at the hotel restaurant. I had some salmon done right (unlike at Olive Garden), a ginger margarita that was interesting, and a crème brûlée. Mike just had dessert (strawberry shortcake).

Afterwards I ran into artist Elizabeth Berrien in the restroom; she makes wire sculptures (see photo previous page), and I had met her in LA. She said she had dropped out of fandom for a while but was now returning. She had items in the art show. She's hardly ever seen without a project in her hands. Mike and I went up to the hospitality suite briefly to kill some





time. Of course I eventually became involved in a conversation that I discovered included the science guest of honour, Art Bozlee; he is an investor in XCOR, which is designing commercial spacecraft. A bit later we went up to the penthouse floor, where most of the parties were located. We were too early for the party we wanted to check out, but we were welcomed in and ended up talking for quite a while, mostly with Lynn Boston Baden. Eventually we decided to go back to Mimi's.

Mimi and Mother were just starting to retire for the night when we got back to their house.

I used my alarm to get up Friday, 6 July 2012, morning.

Then I made my breakfast. I had time afterward to read e-mail and catch up with Facebook before we left for Westercon.

The first thing we did at the con was vote in site selection for the 2014 Westercon. Then after a short circuit of the dealers room, we looked at the art show. After that we attended a very short business meeting. Its brevity allowed us time for lunch. It was short, because there was essentially no business to discuss.

When we got to the hotel restaurant, friends Glenn from northern California and Mike from Phoenix were seated. I asked to join them, and they were agreeable. I had a pretty good salad. The company was greatly appreciated.

Afterwards we discovered that the Regency dancing was to start later than we had thought. This gave us time to update our notes. I also took a short cat nap on one of the comfortable chairs in the hallway area. Eventually we returned to the room where the Regency dancing was scheduled. John Hertz arrived late, and dancing started even later. We did participate in the teaching portion of "Hole in the Wall", but eventually I left for the "Fannish Inquisition", where I arrived when the proceedings were almost over. The "Fannish Inquisition" was about future bids for Westercon. On the way out from there, I talked with friends James from Nevada and Michael from the Bay Area. I got to the room for "Our Guests of Honour Build a Spaceship" way early and caught up with my notes.

The panel itself was Art Bozlee and artist guest of honour, Frank Wu, interweaving talks about the XCOR Lynx spacecraft and Frank's paintings of fictional spaceships.

We had about an hour to kill after that, so we went to the room where the next panel would be. This was the discussion about *A Canticle for Leibowitz* presented by John Hertz. It went well, though the moderator did most of the talking. After that we attended "Mathematics in Science Fiction", which was an excellent panel presented by Corry L. Lee, Jessica K. Sklar, and Amanda Plemmons; many good examples of mathematical fiction in books and on the screen were brought up.

We finally had time for dinner after that. I had a pomegranate martini that really hit the spot and a filet mignon done to perfection, followed by frozen bananas covered in chocolate and accompanied by almond brittle.

Then we checked out some parties until Mike got tired. I saw friend Allison and had a chance to talk with her. Mimi and Mother were sleeping when we got back about 23:00.

I woke up with the help of my alarm Saturday, 7 July 2012. I had some chores to take care of this morning, including laundry. Then I had breakfast as usual.



We left for Westercon about 09:00. The first panel we attended was "The Art and Science of the Frank Wu Spaceships"; part way through the talk, I lost the use of my video camera; apparently a new cassette I had inserted got jammed. Then I took off to a reading by writer guest Robin Hobb, which was in progress; in fact she had finished reading, but the talk part was interesting. After that I attended "The Art of Frank Wu", which was basically a slide show featuring his art. We stayed in the same room for "Into the Black: the Lynx Spacecraft and How You Can Go to Space" presented by Art Bozlee (see photo previous page). I left about half way in to hear a reading by David Brin; he read out of his new book, *Existence*, which sounds intriguing. A preview of the book is presented on <http://www.davidbrin.com/>. After that I walked across the hall for "Classic Science Fiction: *Double Star*"; Mike managed to get my camera working again during this panel. We stayed in the same room for "Private Space Travel", presented by Joel Davis, Jon Rogers, Kahboi, and Art Bozlee.

Then we had dinner. Service was off tonight. We waited a long time to get seated. Then we weren't given place settings and salt/pepper until we asked. Towards the end of our meal, a fellow fan sat down at the next table; and we ended up talking.

Shortly after dinner was the masquerade. As is usual these days ever since the advent of Costumecon, there were very few entries. One of the most impressive entries was "Henry VIII and His Six Wives"; see photo below. The half time show featured some very good singers, so we stayed until the awards were



given out.

After the masquerade we went up to the party floor. They weren't quite ready yet at the Utah in 2014 suite; Westercon will be in Salt Lake City in 2014. I waited until someone was available to upgrade our membership; I want to go, because Cory Doctorow is the guest of honour. Then I went to three other parties. One of them featured Kevin Roche's drink machine; I had a Cape Cod; all the drinks were tiny, which was fine with me since I'd already had a martini at dinner. I also went to David Brin's launch party for his new book; we got to see the preview for the book.

In the meantime Mike went to a stargazing event that ended up in the parking lot near where we were parked. At a prearranged time, I headed out to meet him at the car. He kept calling me before then, but I generally couldn't hear the phone in the party suites. I only found out accidentally that he'd called.

Sunday, 8 July 2012, I used my alarm to get up.

When I went upstairs for breakfast, there was no one about yet. Mother was the first to appear.



After breakfast I used up time downloading two Audubon apps for the iPad/iPhone and had no time for anything else before we left for Westercon. We got there in plenty of time. The first panel we went to was "Classic Science Fiction: *Flatland*"; it was moderated by John Hertz and Jerry Kaufman.

During the break before the next programme item I was interested in, I had a large mocha latte that kind of served as my lunch.

Then I went to a concert of music performed by the Jeff and Maya Bohnhoff, who are professional musicians. I have seen them before at another convention, and I really like

them. There was a short wait until "Rocks from Space", an interesting discussion of stuff that falls from the sky, presented by Melinda Hutson, Ted Butler, Steve Gillet, and Joel Davis. There was another break before the opening ceremonies, which lasted for about half an hour. We left the con about 16:30.

Shortly after we got back to Mimi's, the four of us went out to dinner at McGrath's Fish House.

I woke up to my alarm Monday, 9 July 2012.

Mimi had left for work by the time I had breakfast.

About 09:00 we left for Bremerton to visit Mike's sister-in-law Janet. It took us about an hour to get there. Mike showed her a bunch of photos on his iPad before we left for lunch at Anthony's. Unfortunately her son, Jeff, was sick and couldn't join us. After lunch we went back to Jan's for a while. She gave us a box and bag of papers that had belonged to her late husband for Mike; this made it trickier to take the books from Mimi's. (We managed though.)

I kept falling asleep in the car, so I napped for about an hour back at Mimi's. Then we took Mother to dinner at Olive Garden, which was okay. Mother likes Olive Garden.

Mimi got home shortly after we returned from dinner.

Tuesday, 10 July 2012, I slept in for a change. I really needed it. I got up relatively early considering. Since I'd used up the bacon, I had a breakfast omelet that Mimi had bought for me.

We left Mimi's about 10:00 and dropped Mother off at the nursing home. We went on to the UPS Store to send Mimi's old computer to a friend of ours in LA. Then we went to Walmart and found practically everything on my shopping list for my next visit to Mimi in October; I'll be flying then, and I want to reduce the amount of liquids and similar items I'll have to take with me. After that I picked up lunch for myself at Panera Bread. Then Mike went to an Arco station to gas up the car and air up the tyres. I called Mother to let her know we were on the way.

I had my lunch at the nursing home. Mother had a lunch served by the nursing home. After Dad finished lunch, we took him outside to take pictures. There was some sun, so it was a good day for photos. Then we pushed him on his wheelchair once around the enclosed garden area before returning him to his room and leaving.

For dinner we went to The Rock Wood Fired Pizza for dinner. We all had pizza. They serve gluten-free pizza there and some great martinis.

Mimi didn't get home until nearly 21:00. I retired early, being rather tired.



I used my alarm to get up Wednesday, 11 July 2012, morning.



I had another omelet for breakfast.

We left Mimi's about 09:30 to meet friends Tom and Marina at the Point Defiance Zoo and Aquarium. As we approached the park, Tom called to say they'd be late. We were a little late ourselves so didn't have a long wait for them. Fortunately the place is relatively small and doesn't take a long time to see; my right hip started bothering me after a while and didn't really feel better until we got back to Mimi's. We had lunch with Tom and Marina before we left the zoo.

The hip problem dates back to this winter, but the problem was barely a problem then. I'm still not sure exactly what's happening, but I'm trying out a few things. If I can't solve the problem on my own, I will see my doctor.

In the evening we set off for the Melting Pot in Tacoma to meet Mimi for dinner. We had a very large fondue dinner with four courses.

Thursday, 12 July 2012, I got up in the middle of the night to ensure a timely arrival in Eureka.

I made myself breakfast and put the dishes in the dishwasher afterward. Then I helped Mike finish put everything in the car. I said good-bye to Mother and Mimi, who were not quite up yet.

We were on the road by 06:30 on a chilly and somewhat foggy morning. By the time we reached Olympia less than an hour later, the fog had largely dissipated.

About one we stopped at a Wendy's, where I bought another salad for lunch, in Grants Pass, OR, where it was 90°F. This salad wasn't quite as good as the one I had previously; they used rather ordinary cheese.

About one hour out from Eureka, I tried to call our friend David; but there was little to no cell signal. I was finally able to call about half an hour out.

We reached the Red Lion Hotel Eureka about 16:45, but there was a line at registration and only one clerk working the desk. My right leg started aching while I waited. It seems to feel better when I put weight on it.

David Schlosser came to the hotel about 17:30; and we walked over to a Cambodian restaurant nearby, where it was relatively easy to eat gluten-free. We walked back to the hotel when Mike started turning into a pumpkin, but David and I continued to talk in the lobby for a bit while Mike went up to our room. Being on the coast, Eureka was cool and overcast.

I used my alarm to get up before dawn Friday, 13 July 2012.

I ate breakfast at the hotel restaurant.

Then we checked out. First we stopped for gas at the Shell station across the street.

We made a lunch stop in Livermore. I picked up a pretty good bunless burger at Jack in the Box. It was about ninety degrees there.

From there we drove straight on to Bakersfield. There were a few traffic issues around San Francisco but not too bad. I slept on and off but not comfortably. There were books behind my seat that kept my seat from reclining. I got a headache from being all cramped up. Later on I rearranged the books to allow the seat to recline.

Bakersfield was definitely hot--about 108°F. Shortly after we checked in, we had dinner at the hotel. The food was quite good.

Saturday, 14 July 2012, some jerk woke me up at 01:30 with a wrong number phone call. It took me a while to get back to sleep. Eventually I got up to my alarm before dawn.

I had breakfast at the hotel. I opted for the menu rather than the buffet. My right leg was already bothering me, and there were many people lined up for the buffet. There was a tour group there apparently from Korea; I can't understand why anyone would visit Bakersfield. I spoke to a couple members of the tour group. It sounded like they'd be visiting an old silver mining town today and then go to Vegas tomorrow. There was also a peewee baseball team from Agoura playing a game today. One mother said it was hotter and more humid in Bakersfield.

We left about 07:30.

We stopped in Santa Fe Springs at an Arco station with the sorriest AMPM store I've ever seen. Instead of restrooms there was just one bathroom in the employee area.

I managed to connect with friend Ed a little after 10:00; he planned to come to our hotel about 13:00.

We arrived at Comfort Suites Marina in Oceanside about 11:30. There was as yet no room ready. After some discussion of various options, we unloaded the luggage onto a cart. Mike walked to Oceanside Photo and Telescope for an astronomy event; I waited in the lobby with the luggage. I got checked in about 12:45. Ed and Judy arrived at the motel after 14:00. They drove me to a restaurant called Sammy's in Carlsbad; they have a gluten-free menu. We had an enjoyable lunch and good conversation. They brought me back to the motel about 16:30.

I picked Mike up about 18:30 after he called me from OPT. We went straight from there to the Fish Market restaurant in El Solana to meet friends for dinner. We thought we were early, but Scott and Jane were already there. We had a very enjoyable dinner there with great conversation. They don't have a gluten-free menu, but it's easy to have a gluten-free meal there.

It was fairly late when we returned to the motel. Mike turned in almost immediately. I puttered around for a while.

Sunday, 15 July 2012, I awoke to my alarm shortly before dawn.

I had the complimentary motel breakfast.

We were on the road about 07:30 as planned.

We made two stops in Gila Bend. The first was at McDonalds where I bought lunch. Then we refuelled at Mike's favourite Shell station.

It rained on us a bit after we left Gila Bend. We made it home about 14:30 and almost immediately detected a loud sound coming from the house. It turned out to be the smoke detector in my work room. We don't know what set it off. There was nothing wrong with the battery. Eventually Mike got it to stop making the ear-piercing noise. (We later replaced the smoke detector, so apparently the old one had gone bad.) It was also obvious that there had been at least one power outage, possibly of some length since the backup battery in the clock that Mike keeps in the observatory had died.

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## Amy's Motley Media Musings

Reviews by Amy Harlib



Message from Amy: For the foreseeable future, "Amy's Motley Media Musings" will resurrect all the reviews in my files in alphabetical order, for they are not readily found anywhere else any more. I hope these will contain some interesting perspectives to amuse and enlighten on various genre and popular culture offerings in the past several years—opinions from a curious, feminist, inquiring, and, I'd like to think, culturally educated, mind. I hope *Feline Mewsings* readers find what I have to say worthwhile. Thank you very much for your attention.

***Cat Stories* by Michael Marshall Smith (Earthling Publications, 12 Pheasant Hill Dr., Shrewsbury, MA 01545, [www.earthlingpub.com](http://www.earthlingpub.com), Sept. 2001, \$13.00, softcover chapbook).**

If this new, independent small press, Earthling publications continues to produce reasonably priced, limited editions by first-class writers of this excellent quality of production and literary value, then they are off to a great start! Their most recent offering, *Cat Stories*, a sturdy, softcover chapbook featuring a gorgeous, eye-catching, full-colour, impressionistic cover rendering by Patti Kaufman of one individual example of the subject matter, contains three nearly novella-length genre works by UK writer of fantastic fiction Michael Marshall Smith. With a World Fantasy Award, the August Derleth Award, and the Philip K. Dick Award to his credit, one would have high expectations of Smith and his output and the 71 pages herein don't disappoint.

Of the trio of tales on hand written over the span of a decade, two have been anthologized previously while the third appears here for the first time. In a short charming introduction, Smith elucidates the eternal appeal of cats---their grace and elusive natures so full of independence and quixotic affection, then briefly describes his household companions of the species, and without much ado proceeds to the main events.

"The Man Who Drew Cats", a dark fantasy set in Kingstown, a contemporary archetypal rural American small town, and told in a folksy conversational voice by a keenly observant local hanger-on, concerns the arrival of the itinerant eponymous street-artist, Tom, who possesses an extraordinary gift for rendering preternaturally life-like animals, especially cats, in paints or pastels. The story, a vivid recollection of ten years past, describes events that occurred over the course of one long summer when Tom's creations, beloved by nearly all, served as a catalyst in resolving an abusive relationship. Tom, whose talent helped him to survive a marriage gone bad in his past, so he told the narrator, uses it again to deal with the alcoholic mechanic Sam McNeill, whose young wife, Mary, and pre-adolescent son, Billy, have suffered one beating too many. If the connection between the drawing of a particularly fierce feline predator and the fate of the abuser can be too easily foreseen, it doesn't spoil the distinctive, authentic-sounding narrative voice that so sympathetically and clearly delineates the memorable characters and their milieu; the story packs a powerful emotional punch throughout and at the bittersweet climax. This tale distantly and fascinatingly echoes the classic Lafcadio Hearn early twentieth century adaptation of a Japanese folktale, "The Boy Who Drew Cats".

"Not Waving" features a contemporary London setting and a cat-friendly narrator, Mark, a work-at-home computer graphics designer unhappily married to Nancy, a dynamic go-getter corporate-climber who hates cats. When Mark falls in love with responding-in-kind Alice, a motorbike messenger with a great interest in computers and a mysterious and mystical connection to the local stray feline population and one in particular whose presence near the protagonist's house makes Nancy exceedingly nervous and irritated, events come to a crisis. With wit and irony, the development of Mark and Alice's relationship gets beautifully described, as does the parallel deterioration of Mark's marriage to Nancy. A sense of foreboding builds effectively, leading to the fate of this triangle, the resolution of Mark and Nancy's difficulties coming at a cost made more shockingly gruesome by hints and indirection in a powerful gut-wrenching ending to this story.

Last but not least, the far-future space-faring science-fiction yarn, "They Also Serve" skilfully uses the



third person omniscient viewpoint to focus on two characters. We have David Torrence, for thirty years the lone sentry officer manning one of one hundred forty sentry station craft scouting the space-ways defending the home system from enemy ships in a seemingly endless on-going war. Keeping Dave sane and providing full maintenance, tech support, military, housekeeping, and nearly full social services, home supplied the sentry officer with the other major player, the perfect companion, Cat, a Varitronique C71, "a compact rectangle only 18" long, 4" across, and 8" high".

This sophisticated voice-capable, AI device, programmed with the motto, "to serve, and to protect", the only mobile unit among the other sentient machines on the scout, carries out its duties in far more effective efficient and surprising ways than Dave ever suspects or imagines. Dave and Cat's interactions and the denouement, interesting indeed, make this mini space opera an engaging read.

*Cat Stories*, three examples demonstrating Michael Marshall Smith's range and diversity in wordsmithing, offers ample imaginative thought-provoking character-driven and emotionally satisfying genre entertainment in shorter form. Well worth ordering from its independent publisher source, this finely produced chapbook must not be missed by aficionados of the author's excellent track record of novels and stories. Fine for newcomers and veterans alike, *Cat Stories* will whet their appetite for more. Whilst seeking such, readers will purr with pleasure to read and treasure the trio of tales on hand.

-- Amy Harlib

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## Jonathan's Science Corner

by Jonathan Vos Post



### My High School Teacher Who'd Taught Feynman

At Stuyvesant High School (NYC), in the late 1960s, Mr. Leseur taught us electrical engineering and what went on, as he put it, "out back behind the out-house".

He was a practical man who gave us exams in which we had to put real wires through real conduits. Plus he made us think. If one has these wires running through conduits between the ground floor and the second floor, how can you minimize the number of times you need to run up and down the stairs, to test pairs of wires with a continuity-tester, in reverse-engineering what a previous electrical contractor had done?

He seemed impossibly old, to us teenagers, like our principal, "The Flea" – Dr. Fliedner, who was a cold, impersonal figure who interacted with the student body in nothing but formal and perfunctory ways. His face was set in the perpetual grimace of someone who had come in contact with an unpleasant smell. Rather than encourage (much less congratulate) these high achieving sons of working and middle-class families, he chose the role of disciplinarian and administrative bureaucrat.

I recall the roars of laughter from my classmates at the assembly where the speaker was Jean Shepherd. Jean Parker Shepherd (26 July 1921 – 6 October 1999), the American raconteur, radio and TV personality, writer and actor who was often referred to by the nickname Shep. With a career that spanned decades, Shepherd is best known to modern audiences for the film *A Christmas Story* (1983), which he narrated and co-scripted, based on his own semi-autobiographical stories. But I'm remembering his glancing at "The Flea", taking the microphone, and asking "Ever wonder why the principal always wears grey suits? Ever wonder if he wears grey underpants?"

"Shep," as he was known, settled in at WOR radio New York, New York, on an overnight slot in 1956, where he delighted his fans, including myself, who also listened to Fred Pohl as a frequent talk-radio guest on New York/New Jersey airwaves by telling stories, reading poetry (especially the works of Robert W. Service), and organizing comedic listener stunts. The most famous of the last involved creating a hoax about a non-existent book, *I, Libertine*, by the equally non-existent 18th century author "Frederick R.

Ewing” in 1956. During a discussion on how easy it was to manipulate the best seller lists, which at that time were based not only on sales but demand, Shepherd suggested that his listeners visit bookstores and ask for a copy of *I, Libertine*, which led to booksellers attempting to purchase the book from their distributors. Fans of the show eventually took it further, planting references to the book and author so widely that demand for the book led to it being listed on The New York *Times* Best Seller list. Shepherd, Theodore Sturgeon, and Betty Ballantine later wrote the actual book, with a cover painted by illustrator Frank Kelly Freas; and it was published by Ballantine Books. I later became friends with Theodore Sturgeon, Frank Kelly Freas, and Fred Pohl; but that's another story.

Nobody but me believed that Mr. Leseur was telling the truth that he'd had a student once, Richard P. Feynman [1918-1988], who'd gone on to win a Nobel Prize.

So when I first spoke with Feynman in September 1968, I asked.

“Oh, yes,” said my fellow Brooklyn boy made good, like Carl Sagan, with whom I later worked on the Voyager program at JPL, “Mr. Leseur was teaching at Far Rockaway High School when I was still in grammar school. He let me come into his lab after my school day was over. I'd wash test tubes for him, and that sort of scut-work, while he'd perch on this very tall lab stool; and he'd pontificate about subatomic particles and the cosmos and so forth. And he asked me good questions, just like my father did.”

You get your mentors where you find them.

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-- Jonathan Vos Post

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## \* Kritter Korner

### **Tigger: The Cat Who Came To Dinner** by Clif Flynt (Part 1 of 3)

Once upon a time, almost 20 years ago, there was a young lady named Carol who lived in Chicago. She had a friend named Pamela who, with her husband, owned a duplex in one of the Chicago suburbs. They rented the upstairs apartment to a single father with a couple of very young children.

The upstairs kids managed to acquire a little kitten. Their dad, who was not a cat person, said they could keep the new cat as long as they'd take good care of it.

The kids, being young kids, took such good care of their new kitten, Tigger, that Tigger decided to take a run off a second floor balcony to escape them. This was a clever idea, and it would have worked perfectly if Tigger hadn't broken her hip when she hit the ground.



This resulted in a furball in a cast and Dad being given instructions to restrict Tigger's movements until the hip had healed.

About a day into Tigger's convalescence, Pamela went upstairs to do landlady stuff and discovered that Dad's best idea for restricting a furball's movements was to put it under an upside down plastic laundry basket. With no food, water, or litter box.



Thus ended Tiggers's days with that family. Her brief encounter with the family upstairs cemented her distrust of small children but did not leave her emotionally scarred with regard to laundry baskets. At least not ones full of warm, dry clothes.

Pamela took the cat downstairs to her apartment and blockaded her into the kitchen with some unused DEC Microvaxen (the first time someone has found a use for a MicroVax I). Tigger decided this was a distinct improvement over the two kids and she wouldn't even

try to escape. Having her hip in a cast and a couple pins embedded in her bones didn't really figure into this decision.

About this time, Carol came by for dinner and borrowed a book. In the course of the evening she said hello to the pathetic little bundle of fluff and bandages and gave it a scratch.

A few days later, Carol returned the book. As soon as she said "Hello" at the far end of a Chicago Railway Car apartment, Tigger recognized her voice and very nearly re-broke her hip trying to climb over the Vax-Wall to get to her.

Pamela declared that Tigger had found her human, and Carol was obviously it. Carol declared that she already had one cat, and that was obviously enough. Tigger declared that she'd be very happy if Carol would hold her, scratch her, and feed her Tuna; and she'd love to be the Cat in Carol's life and this was obviously meant to be.

In the end, Tigger was triumphant. Once she recovered she went home with Carol.



### **Meeting the Family**

As soon as Tigger got to Carol's apartment, she met Penny, the then current cat in residence; no cute little half-kittens need apply.

Penny had entered Carol's life when she attacked Pamela's 20-pound Tomcat and scared him so badly that Pamela declared a need to get this 8-pound terror out of the house.

At that time, Penny was half grown, half starved, and half civilized. By the time Tigger arrived two years later, she'd become fully grown, well fed, and barely civilized. Mothering a new kitten was not part of her instincts.

To make a long story short, Penny and Tigger eventually came to terms; Tigger would defer to Penny on all matters, and Penny would let Tigger live. Until tomorrow. Maybe.

### **Born to Move**

Tigger came into Carol's life just as Carol was selling her co-op apartment and looking for a house to



buy. While the apartment was being shown, it was decorated with some lovely, flowing floor-to-ceiling draperies that looked brand new and perfect. The draperies were filmy, almost transparent, and, needless to say, fragile.

The second morning after Tigger arrived, Carol got up to go to work and discovered that Tigger had learned a new trick - "Look, Ma, I can run right up the drapes all the way to the top!"

Tigger left for work with Carol that morning, by way of the vet's office. Carol continued on to work while Tigger remembered more about why she didn't like to visit a veterinarian.

A day later on the way home from work, Carol picked up Tigger, now lacking her front claws and slightly spayed.

Despite this indignity, Tigger forgave Carol. Tigger was so grateful to be taken away from the vet that she'd have forgiven the Marquis de Sade. As soon as they got home, Tigger displayed her affection by showing Carol her new trick again. Up the drapes she went. About three feet. Then suddenly she went backwards and landed on her tail.

She glanced back at Carol with an "I meant to do that" expression and scaled the drapes again, just like she did the day before when she had claws.

And again landed on her tail.

She looked at the drapes for a moment and contemplated them. Then having taken their measure, dashed again for the ceiling.

And again landed on her tail.

Another cocked head examined the drapes. Glanced at Carol to see if she were doing anything with the drapes. Checked the drapes again and once more launched herself towards the heavens.

Again she failed to reach them.

She did this several more times, while Carol laughed harder and harder. Tigger finally gave up and decided that these drapes were obviously defective, and some folks had way too much time on their hands if they could waste it with such involved practical jokes on a poor putty tat.

In time, the co-op sold, but Carol had not yet found a house. She moved in with her folks while she looked for a house. Since her folks did not care for cats, Penny and Tigger were kept in the basement and only got to see Carol when she descended into the depths of the dungeon to be with them. Neither cat liked these few months of captivity.

Eventually Carol found a new house; and as soon as the papers were signed, she, a sleeping bag, and two cats moved in. There was no worry about Carol being chilled that night - it was a two cat night, with one on each side as close (and happy) as they could get after having to sleep all alone in a cold basement for so many weeks.

Thus started several happy years for Penny and Tigger. Carol was at home frequently watching television in the evenings with a cat in her lap, or she had small dinner parties with friends who would pet the cats. The only thing that would have made life nicer would have been if she had 2 laps. And perhaps a bit more tuna.

Carol's friend Pamela had a young daughter about the time Carol got Tigger. One day, when Pamela and Alexi were visiting, Alexi was given a short length of ribbon to play with Tigger (thus getting two pests out of the way at once.)

Carol's house had 3 rooms and a hallway that shared a common wall, making a fairly long circular walk from room to room to hall to room. It turns out that a Two year old girl with a Two foot ribbon and a Two year old cat can walk for Two hours with the cat chasing the ribbon before they get Too bored and Too tired to continue.

Ribbons were always Tigger's favorite toys. Whenever we got a present, Tigger got the wrapping paper and ribbon. Some ribbons lasted for a year or more before they were too bedraggled to be killed again.



### **The Eternal Search for a Scritch**

According to books, cats are easily overstimulated and can only be petted for a few minutes before

they've had all they can take.

Tigger never read these books.

Many cats feel that if you wish to give them the pleasure of a scratch, you should be inconvenienced in some way.

Tigger never learned that either.

Tigger's attitude was always that in an infinite universe, there is barely enough scratch to go around. As a kitten, she figured out that if it's easy to scratch the furball, the furball gets scratched more often.

She was always willing to put herself in the proper position to make it easy for a human to scratch her. There might have been limits to how far she'd go for a scratch, but we never found them.

One trick that Tigger never outgrew was the willingness to figure out where you are going, and be there first in an easy position to be scratched.

In her first apartment, Carol had a hamper in her bathroom. Tigger quickly learned that being at hip-height was also being at hand-height, and this made it easy to get a scratch. So whenever Carol was heading for the bathroom, Tigger would trot ahead, check Carol's bearings, and then leap for the top of the hamper to be there in time to collect a scratch as Carol walked by.

One day Carol decided to collect the dirty towels, clothes, etc from the kitchen and bedroom. So she opened the hamper and went to the kitchen to fill her arms with dishtowels, hand towels, and similar offerings to the gods of laundry.

As she headed for the hamper, Tigger realized that she was heading towards the bathroom. This meant a scratch on the hamper! So with frequent over-the-shoulder checks to be sure Carol was going to the right place, Tigger preceded Carol. And then leaped to the top of the - oops - OPEN - hamper.



She landed on the not-there top. Paused for a Warner-Brothers moment, feeling for where the top wasn't, and plummeted into the hamper.

Like Tigger and the drapes, this misfortune did not discourage Tigger from attempting to figure out where you'd be next and being in the proper location to receive a scratch.

After Carol and I were married, and moved into our new house, Tigger discovered that if she stood on one of the dining area chairs, and put her paws on the back of the chair, she was in a good position for a nice, vigorous scratching.

Whenever you stood behind a chair, she'd make a leap and put herself in position. When we had guests, I'd pull out a chair, and before Tigger could jump, tap the back of the chair (to get her attention), and say "Assume the position, furball!". Tigger would promptly jump onto the chair, arms and legs splayed for support, just like a punk up against a wall in a Clint Eastwood movie.

Once to amuse my mom (and get Tigger some exercise), I walked around the table tapping chair after chair, and Tigger gleefully bounced to each new chair to receive a frisking (in the form of a down-the-side scratch).

In her later years, this got harder; and she stopped being willing to "assume the position". I had to coax and hold her to get this photo (above).

The only better spot for scratching was the back of Carol's overstuffed green recliner chair. In her old house, this chair was at the doorway between the living room and kitchen. Conveniently enough, it ended up in the same relative location in our new house. This being a prime spot for receiving scratches from people in two rooms, Penny promptly claimed the back of the chair as her personal territory.

Tigger regarded this as a rule of life, not to be violated, unless Penny wasn't there to defend her turf. After Penny died, Tigger claimed this as her prime scratching spot. Whenever a conversation paused between kitchen and living room, you could depend on the brown blur bounding onto the back of the green chair to receive a scratch.

I did not have to coax her to get a photo of her being scratched on the back of the chair.

If you neglect to scratch the furball, she would gently place her head under your hand, lift the hand onto her shoulder and bump you with her head.

Tigger is not subtle.

While meeting with some co-students to design our class project, Tigger decided that one friend would

scratch her. Now. She forced her way under his hand and butted against his chest with a fair amount of force. He described Tigger as "Agressively Friendly", and the monicker stuck.

### Life's A Treat

Part of the training Tigger and Penny got when they moved in with Carol was that they never ate off the same plate she used. They didn't beg at a table, and they didn't beg in the kitchen.

To drive the message home, Carol got four small cheap china plates at a garage sale that were very different from the plates she ate from. These were treat dishes for Tigger and Penny.

Once in a while just because the gods were feeling kind, Carol would open a can of tuna, make herself some tuna salad, and share a bit of the leftover tuna with the cats.

On their very own, special, used only for treat, dishes.

When we got married, Carol neglected to mention this little fact.

So in the first week in the new house, I decided to make myself a sandwich, reached into the cabinet, grabbed the first sandwich-sized plate I saw, and dropped it onto the counter.

The treat plates were a different thickness from the people plates. They make a different sound when they hit a counter.

I suddenly had two fur anklets, looking up at me and crying, "You promised! ,But, YOU PROMISED!" Carol, meanwhile, laughed herself silly and informed me that we *\*never\** take those plates from the cupboard unless we intend to use them.

So instead of peanut butter, I had a tuna sandwich (on a people plate); and the cats got some leftover tuna (on their treat plates.)

Over the years three treat plates succumbed to the laws of entropy, and we only had one treat plate. This wasn't a serious problem until we started giving Tigger twice a day medication and needed to clean the plate before giving Tigger the post-medication treat.

We couldn't clean the plate before the medication, because that would mean the plate would make a noise, and Tigger would be underfoot demanding her dane-geld. Couldn't clean it after the medication; because once she'd endured the bad stuff, Tigger was ready for a treat; and she was ready *\*now\**.

So a trip to Meijer's, and Tigger had some new Corel treat plates that would last a good long time even with daily usage.

And we could clean one dish while she was face first in her treat on a clean dish.

\* \* \*

## \* Reviews

***Supervolcano: Eruption* by Harry Turtledove**, currently available in hardcover from Roc, mass market paperback expected out in December.

I read Turtledove's *Supervolcano: Eruption* halfway expecting Charlton Heston to enter stage right and stand parting the lava. It is actually a decent book, leaving aside my feeble attempt at wit, thou it barely qualifies as sf; it's rather more in the nature of what-if natural disaster films and books. All that considered, Turtledove does a good job on this one, making one want to read the next in the series.

-- anonymous

#

***Sisterhood of Dune* by Brian Herbert and Kevin J. Anderson**, available in hardcover from Tor.

Movies on to series, *Sisterhood of Dune* by Brian Herbert and Kevin J. Anderson is well done and fills in some more back story, but with this one I'd recommend waiting until it hits paperback.

-- anonymous





#

**Echo** by Jack McDevitt, available in mass market paperback from Ace.

One fairly good combination of sf and mystery has been Jack McDevitt's Alex Benedict novels. *Echo* retains all the better sides of the series; and even though I had thought the secret telegraphed, I didn't quite unscramble it all. It's a good take on just what form the amusements of rich and new rich may take in the future.

-- anonymous

#

***The Steel Bonnets: the Story of the Anglo-Scottish Border Reivers*** by George MacDonald Fraser, available in trade paperback from Skyhorse Publishing. ***The Twilight Lords: Elizabeth I and the Plunder of Ireland*** by Richard Berleth, published by Roberts Rinehart as a trade paperback and still available from Amazon. ***Bloody Mohawk: the French and Indian War and the American Revolution on New York's Frontier*** by Richard Berleth, available in trade paperback from Black Dome Press. ***Empire of the Summer Moon: Quanah Parker and the Rise and Fall of the Comanches, the Most Powerful Indian Tribe in American History*** by S. C. Gwynne, available in trade paperback and hardcover from Scribner.

"Our ancestors are very good kind of folk, but they are the last people I should choose to have a visiting acquaintance with" from *The Rivals* by Richard Brinsley Sheridan, playwright 1751-1811.

Having recently re-read Fraser's *The Steel Bonnets* and Berleth's *The Twilight Lords* and just polishing off Gwynne's *Empire of the Summer Moon* and Berleth's *Bloody Mohawk*, one can ask, just how do they fit together and do they have any relevance for the present?

They are all about frontiers and conflict along them. For the past ten or so years, the U. S. has been waging war on and in countries that are frontiers, i.e. Iran and Afghanistan and other places. All of the four books deal with what happens when a nation comes up against tribal cultures. Two of the books, *Empire of the Summer Moon* and *The Twilight Lords*, deal with a complete clash of cultures; the other two with what happens when a community, tribal or otherwise, is torn apart by forces from far away. In addition they are linked by the ethnic factor in all four--Scots, Scots Irish, Irish, and English. One gets the feeling after reading them that most of the people would have got the feel of any of the frontiers that they might have been dropped in. Plus there is a tale of assimilation of "civilized" ways by various Irish lords and Native Americans and of the reverse, especially in Ireland, of stout Britons going native. Once again nothing in fiction can be as strange as fact.

-- anonymous

\* \* \*

## \* Letters to the Editor

The text of letters received will be in brown. My replies to the letters will be enclosed in double parentheses and will be in black. I will also routinely make editorial corrections in punctuation, spelling, and the like. Deadline for next issue is 15 July 2012.

**Bob Jennings, 29 Whiting Rd, Oxford, MA 01540-2035**

**21 June 2012**

Received Feline Mewsings #48 today. It seems like a thicker issue this time round. I was immediately struck by the envelope, even before I looked at the fanzine itself. I do this with all new fanzine arrivals these days, since the US Post Office, in its infinite wisdom, often does not cancel stamps on mailing envelopes or only partially cancels some and leaves the others untouched.

I feel it is my duty as a cheap-skate sf fan of long standing to take advantage of every oversight on the part of the postal people and make full use of any uncanceled stamps that come thru. Since all stamps nowadays are the self-stick variety, it is quite easy to hot-iron them off with no damage to the stamps at all.

Unfortunately there were no uncanceled stamps on your mailer, but I did note that you used a \$1.05 stamp. I was struck speechless. Actually I was all alone here, so I suppose that's the wrong terminology.



I was awe-struck in my silence, let's say. I have never even heard of a \$1.05 stamp. I didn't know the Post Office even made such an odd domination; yet there one was, right there on your mailer, cancelled nearly across its face so only the monetary domination was clearly visible.

((As a somewhat lackadaisical stamp collector, I receive a monthly, I believe, philatelic publication from some branch of the USPS. I tend to order stamps of practically all denominations that I think might be the least bit useful. Sometimes I don't use these stamps for years, and then they suddenly become useful. The weird denominations are especially useful the overseas mailing, since one cannot use the "forever" stamps for those.))

I took this as a sign that this was going to be a unique and special issue of *Feline Mewsings*.

Thumbing thru the issue, I was immediately drawn to the photo of your cat, Mercury. This cat was clearly calling out to me and to anybody else within psychic range, saying, "This stupid collar is choking me--- why doesn't somebody take it off?" Really, loosen the thing up a notch or two; or if not, put kitty on a diet. It's clear the collar is creating a wasp-waist effect around the cat's neck.

((I'm pretty sure you were funning. However, for the sake of people who might be genuinely concerned, I will clarify. His collar is actually quite loose. His hair is so long that, if the collar were tight, you probably wouldn't be able to see it at all. I have tried to tighten it, but it becomes loose on its own. The collar doesn't have notches. It just sort of slides to tighten or loosen.))

Looking over the issue, I noticed part 2 of an article on hyperpublishing. I have no memory of reading a part one. A glance over the letter column makes references to other material of which I also have no memory. It appears to me that I never received a copy of *Feline Mewsings* #47. Perhaps it was lost in the mail, or perhaps you did not send me a copy. Well, at least I've got #48 to peruse.

((I did send you #47, so it must have become lost in the postal system. I can send you a replacement.))

I never heard of StippleAPA. Had I know you were looking for a new apa to join and send your zines thru, I would have pitched the joys and benefits of SFPA (The Southern Fandom Press Alliance), one of the oldest and most active apas in sf fandom, a group of which I happen to be the current Official Editor. I would be very happy to send you a sample mailing to show you what we are all about if you are interested. Just let me know.

((StippleAPA was created by wait listers for MinneAPA in the days when there were wait lists. I was there at the start. Later I dropped out; but I rejoined after the most recent Devention, whatever number that was. StippleAPA might be subtitled "the friendly APA". It's members write more mailing comments than other APAe I've been a member of. This is something that I really enjoy. It seems like a sort of group pen pal. I've recently dropped two out of four APAe I was in and am not looking to join any more. ))

I dunno there kid; a couple of issues ago you were complaining about all the operas with down-beat and depressing endings, and now you have a short review complaining that *Orfeo ed Euridice* has a happy ending. There is apparently no way of pleasing opera fans. Maybe your real complaint is that the opera was too short and did not truly present a coherent flow of story and adequate music. I feel you need to provide more depth and detail in your reviews of the operas you are seeing. Your current overviews seem inadequate to the production values or the artistry of the singers. I realize you are making comments on a live performance that has completely vanished by the time you get around to writing about it, but still a review should provide more commentary and opinion and background that you are currently offering, at least in my opinion.

((My short articles about the plays, operas, movies, and other events I attend are not meant as reviews. I didn't go into much detail on *Orfeo ed Euridice*, as I felt the readership would be familiar with the mythological story. I didn't object to the happy ending *per se* but because it was changed from the actual myth. Changing the ending, I felt, changed the entire point of the story.))



Your long travelogue across America going to the NYC wedding of your friend was interesting. I think you really should have anticipated that the weather heading up to New England in March was going to be cold. After all you used to live in this region, so this should not have been any great surprise to you. I think you lucked out with the amount of good weather you actually did encounter. No blinding snow storms, no ice on the highways, no roaring wind storms of sub-zero weather that cut thru the car frames of modern autos like a steel knife thru fresh lard. I think you folks lucked out pretty well.

((Of course I'm familiar with how cold it gets in the Northeast. In fact we were quite prepared to cope with cold and inclement weather. However, I am no longer used to coping with cold weather.))

What's with the 19th century depictions of names? You visited your friend Ken F\_\_\_\_\_ or Lisa P\_\_\_\_\_. known to be located at such and such a place, but whose last name must be carefully protected? I felt like I was reading some pompous old espionage novel from the 1850s or maybe a mouldy old secret document that related events and personalities from the Under Secretary of Subversive Suspicions and his/her attempts at following those orders for seducing the counter-revolutionaries and the efforts at generating Secondary Mayhem, as per the secret instructions from Minster K\_\_\_\_\_.

Really, were all your friends on the run from the FBI or something? Did you worry that somebody was going to rat them out and collect a fabulous reward if Robert R\_\_\_\_\_ was revealed to actually be Robert Reed of Irvington? It seems very strange to me. Also, you passed thru Sturbridge MA and didn't bother to give me a telephone call over here in Oxford? I think I should feel slighted.

((Had I known Oxford was close to Sturbridge, I would have contacted you. I apologize for not knowing.))

Around this part of the world the towns and cities (and the state governments as well) are in sure dire financial straits that

they are encouraging builders to use up every parcel of land, however large or small it might be in order to generate income from new dwellings and commercial structures. God forbid, with the Tea Party loonies lurching around the landscape, that local governments do something reasonable, such as raising taxes slightly to deal with the problems. The very mention of taxes creates a siren scream of anguish that can be heard across the entire nine state region. We are living in strange and not very reasonable or comfortable times nowadays.

I found the article on hyperpublishing a bit wordy but quite interesting. I think that most people who are actively involved with the fanzine side of sf fandom probably are afflicted with hypergraphia, altho I don't think afflicted is really the right word. I think most of us who feel a compulsion to write would not view this as an affliction or a problem of any kind. Perhaps it's another one of those cases where the insane person feels there is absolutely nothing wrong with him, that it's just a situation where the world at large does not understand the situation. From the person's viewpoint, it is the world that is out of whack, not the patient.

Still, what awful harm does hypergraphia do anybody? Even assuming this is some kind of medical condition that could be diagnosed and somehow or the other treated, why bother? I won't even get into any deep thoughts of how this condition might be treated or if it could indeed be treated. (Strapping the



poor deluded sap into a chair and forcing him to watch endless hours of *Gilligan's Island* reruns until he promises never to write another thing as long as he lives would probably work.)

I would disagree with the contention that paying a writer tends to decrease creativity. Paying a writer might cause the person to turn out mostly material that has potential for commercial success, but I don't think that would stop the creative streak from being expressed. Think of the stereotypical (and often very true) picture of the hard-driving newspaper reporter, who, while not covering the latest love nest slaying or the travel plans of currently popular movie stars, is also working on *The Great American Novel*. Don Marquis wanted to be a poet and a playwright dealing with subjects of religion and faith, yet the public loved his *Archy* and *Mehitabel* books. It didn't stop him from trying to write poetry, and I don't think commercial success or paying an author will stop the author from creating what the author really cares about. People with definite creative and literary interests may pause in their quest for self expression to earn a living, but they seldom stop trying to achieve their ultimate creative goals.

Earning a living is desirable and necessary. If you can earn a living writing, so much the better; but whether the writer gets paid or not, the writer must still find a way to provide food, clothing, and shelter in order to survive. After meeting the basic necessities, the remaining time can be used to create, to write whatever the person is most interested in. It may be poetry, or drama, or just long friendly letters to science fiction fanzines; but you need the time to do these things, and adequate time allotments come only after the essential necessities of life have been met.

So far as permanence, how permanent is anything written? Old books and magazines fall to pieces. Some are saved and may be reread over the years, but most are not. Who reads the popular novels of the past century? Who has access to or really reads old publications, let alone old amateur journals and letters written among friends, no matter how well crafted or witty they might be?

Professional writing is a lot like the cliché about professional gun-slingers in the old west. There's always a faster gun; and in the world of literature, pop lit, classical lit, serious, humorous, frivolous, or deeply philosophical, there is always somebody who can write it better, say it better, present the words more clearly and more succinctly than you can. People who desire to write also desire to have their words read by somebody; but it seems unlikely that many people, even great writers of the current time will be read anew as the decades roll by. And the interesting thing about that is that people who want to write don't really care either. They will continue to write anyway.



The letters section was interesting this time round but provided almost no comment hooks. I was amused by Rodney Leighton's ire directed at me for daring to use "truncated versions" of words, such as thru, tho, thot, enuf, and the like. As has been mentioned many times before by many other people besides myself, the English language changes. Those "truncated" forms are in very wide use and will continue to be seen in even more venues as the years pass. If Mr. Leighton is outraged by something as widespread and casually popular as this, I wonder what he must think of the fannish vernacular that turns up in so many fanzines, including my own. Since he is already H&OOI, perhaps the current impact might cause his total GAFIation. I faunch to Lnz.

Sorry to read that Lloyd Penney is abandoning some of his old tape and CD players. I try to keep my old media technology in working order. I still have lots of VHS tapes, a myriad assortment of cassettes, and plenty of OTR on

reel-to-reel tape; so I like to have everything in working order. I have some suspicions about CDs and digital disks due to the ease with which they can be scratched, demagnetized, or otherwise damaged, altho I've got plenty of both of those things around here too, along with mountains of books and comics and magazines. Actually I live in a damned warehouse; however it does provide an extra layer of insulation on those dark winter nights when the Montreal Express comes roaring thru, dumping four or five inches of snow and ice on the area.

((Mike has reel to reel tapes too. He's been saying he's going to fix his reel to reel tape player ever since we met back in 1994. I'm not holding my breath. I also have LPs, cassette tapes, and VHS tapes I really should do something about, such as go through them and transfer or replace any important content. The tricky part is finding the time.))

Another nice issue. I look forward to #49. Oh, once again, if you ever decide to print any part of my LoCs in your letter section, please *do* include my complete address. I want people to contact me, and I have no fear of dark monsters seeking to somehow do me terrible damage by picking up my address information that is easily available in dozens of other places. I don't have time for paranoia these days,

#

**Brad Foster, Irving, TX**

**26 June 2012**

Issue #48 of *Feline Mewsings* showed up this past week. Only a couple more to go until the big half-century publishing mark!

Loved the cover illustration by Amy. The signature line was -very- tiny; is that piece really from way back in 1977? Very nice piece of art... hmm, and Amy is in the issue with her reviews again, though this is also an older piece. But then, with all the yoga performance stuff, that would probably explain why she hasn't got time to do anything new just now. Still, love to see what new artworks she might do again.

Your sighting of the three dead armadillos on your trip reminded me that, Texas-boy that I am, it wasn't until I was in my late thirties that I saw my first actual live one. Up until then, it seemed to me that the natural state of the armadillo was lying by the side of the highway with its legs up in the air. Then saw one zooming across a field one day and was amazed at just how fast the little sucker could run!



I may not suffer from hyperpublishing, but I think I have a touch of run-on doodling.

Thank you for the photo of Mercury. I did indeed enjoy it. While there seem to be a million pictures of cats out there, I'm of the opinion one can always use just one more at any time.

No fillo attached with this one since you've still got "Octo Ballet" on hand, and kind of tight right now with time to draw up anything new. Working on some fun but incredibly time-consuming game app drawings, so the drawing for fun of it stuff has had to be put aside for several weeks.

#

**Rodney Leighton, Tatamagouche, NS**

**30 June 2012**

Another good issue ... interesting trip report. Part 2 of the scholarly paper on hyperpublishing by Jonathan Vos Post was also interesting albeit a tad off track in my view.

#





First of all, happy Independence Day! We had our own national party a few days ago, and it was a great time. I will go through *Feline Mewsings* 48, and see if there is anything I can say about it. I expect about a page's worth.

Your "Trip Back East"...I can imagine you're not used any more to the humidity Back East. Right now I am in an air-conditioned room, and the temperature is 35°C/95°F with humidity that makes it feel like in the 40sC/100sF. Ick.

I wouldn't have guessed that anyone could possibly surpass the late Isaac Asimov for book productivity, but looks like Jacob Neusner (and so many more!) makes Dr. A. look like a piker. It's a select group who can not only write short stories and novels, but

write them [well]. I think we thought Dr. A. was perhaps the most prolific because he kept reminding us of the fact.

Rodney Leighton's observation is the same as my own, that John Hertz has stopped sending out past issues of *Vanamonde*. I guess John just wasn't getting the feedback he was hoping for. John, they are missed. Same goes for *The Original Universe*, Jeff Boman; but I certainly understand that you've been in bad health.

((John has assured me that this is not the case.))

My letter...another big local convention, Polaris, starts in a couple of days; and like Ad Astra, we will be there for Saturday only. Sheryl, a little more detail about the restaurant list I supplied...I believe the Nickel's chain is owned by Céline Dion. I had hoped to be working again soon, but it hasn't happened.

More from Rodney...I never set out to become a letter hack; but as a journalism student, I wanted to find a way to contribute to fannish publications and found that letters of comment were the best way for me to do it. Eventually I asked for more and more fanzines and then got zines anyway; and while I certainly don't get all sf zines extant, I do get most of them; and I do respond. Not everyone likes what I do or how I write, but it is the responsibility of the editor to print what I write or not.

Amy Harlib is right in that the Internet is enhancing communications, but I have to wonder how many people are actually communicating. Electronic ways of communicating, such as Facebook and Twitter or even just plain e-mail, are in many ways communicating without content. Another note to Amy...I found out years ago that Lois McMaster was an aspiring Star Trek fan writer who wanted to write about Klingon society...she stripped out all Trek references and started writing the Vorkosigan books. Miles Vorkosigan was originally a Klingon.

Franz Miklis has dropped out of sight? I just sent him some e-mails to find out what's happening with him. Let's see what happens.

Just made the page, and I ran out of zine too, so I guess I am done. Many thanks, and stay cool...it hit 36°C/96°F in Toronto today, so it must be horribly hot further south.

((Hotter sometimes but mostly much drier.))

#

Here is my late LoC on two issues of *Feline Mewsings*. In #47, you write that you had joined a church choir and it was fun. I wondered of the choir being part of a church got complicated with religious beliefs and rules.

((That's a fair question. I've sung in a church choir before. It wasn't a problem then, and it isn't a problem now. Then I had little to do with the services themselves other than singing during them. It's a bit different this time, seeing as the pastor is a tenor in the choir and also chooses the songs we sing. However, the pastor is a very open-minded and scholarly person. I have enjoyed a number of interesting conversations with him about a variety of topics. He's very knowledgeable about many things.))

You mentioned getting a new take on *Madama Butterfly*. What was the new take? It is that Pinkerton is a heel, what was the old take?



((I'd never seen the opera with supertitles before, so I'd made a lot of assumptions that proved not to be true. Actually Cho-Cho san was quite complicit in her misfortune though not totally at fault. Her family were poor and needed to marry her off to someone who would take care of her. That she and her family misunderstood American custom and that Pinkerton misunderstood Butterfly's situation are not any one person's fault. I had always assumed that he was just a heel. He was, but the situation is a lot more complex. I always thought the Japanese were portrayed as just being stupid. They were in some ways, but it's a lot more complicated.))

Jonathan quotes "creativity in one domain does not necessarily extend into another" and claims to refute it with "one name: Omar Khayyam" as an example of a person creative in both writing and mathematics. I don't know anything about Khayyam's mathematics, but a proposition that some people are creative in one domain but not both is not contradicted by a fact that some (other) people are creative in both domains.

Ed Meskys wrote of Disney Corp always successfully lobbying to make the period of copyright longer. Things have gotten to the

point that I think it would be wise to pass a law that everything that was copyrighted by Disney (whether Corp or Walt) while Walt was still alive will remain under copyright forever. Then the copyright law that covers all other creations could be discussed for what would be best for society or art--what is moral and so on without interference from the feat of Mickey Mouse going into the public domain.

Everything should go into the public domain eventually. Walt Disney himself couldn't have made *Snow White* if the fairly tale still belonged to some corporation. In the very next LoC, Murray Moore mentions the musical *Camelot*. There wouldn't even be a *matière de Bretagne* if medieval poets and storytellers hadn't elaborated and added to the original story that there was a great Kind Arthur who had many knights who did great deeds.

How sad to think of Mercury looking all over the house for Fluffy.

Nice trip report in #48 with white and pink flowering dogwoods. I recognized some of the names you disguised as an initial. On page 3 you wrote of the Clinton Library, and there was a photograph without a caption. I confess that I stared at that photo on several occasions, wondering why there was a dog in what seemed to be a cat museum until suddenly it clicked that that was Buddy and Socks!

I'm not sure what to say about the tragic misadventure of the Thousand Island dressing except that it made a big impression on me. I'm glad the jacket was able to be restored.

Jonathan goes on and on about temporal lobe epilepsy (I liked the hypergraphia example of the patient who wrote "Thank God no seizure" over and over endlessly in his journal). I'm trying to steer everyone to another example of brain and creativity, the very beautiful and very sad Radiolab podcast "Unraveling Bolero." Go to [www.Radiolab.org](http://www.Radiolab.org).

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The next few letters are comments about Taral Wayne's article in this issue.

**Ned Brooks, Lilburn, GA**

**23 May 2012**

Interesting essays - what is a "pufferbelly" anyway, that there would be a lot of them in a row at a train station? I never knew that the diesel engines included living quarters. I never rode the train much, and no one in the family worked for the railroad that I know of. In Chile in the late '40s, I rode a train from Santiago to Concepcion once or twice. For the New Orleans worldcon, I rode the Southern Crescent from Charlottesville VA to New Orleans - about all I remember is that the seats were uncomfortable and the food was bad.

I have the gold pocket watch that belonged to my mother's father - it may be well over 100 years old. It's a Hamilton made in Lancaster, PA, #205731. I gave it a wind, and it started to run.... I see there is a website that knows it was made in 1903 and that it was "Grade 941" - but no explanation of what "grade" means in this context.

I have read that the exhaust of a properly tuned diesel engine is just lampblack, that is, pure carbon particulate. I doubt they are often that well tuned.... The tree butchers were down the street this week, and their shredder was very noisy and must have been diesel-powered from the stink.

But one of the few pop songs I really like is "The City of New Orleans".

#

**Andy Porter, New York, NY**  
**26 May 2012**

Really evocative. I remember visiting the National Railway Museum in Ottawa; and of course I've often visited both Montreal and Toronto by train, the most recent trip to SFCOntario. But now I get the Old Age discount on Amtrak, so it's lots cheaper.

Did you know that where the CN tower is now was a roundhouse once?

((Taral explained that Andy was incorrect. He says the roundhouse is still there and is the home of the Steamwhistle Brewery. Taral also adds, "This is sort of ironic in that the strict no-alcohol rule the company enforced when it was a working roundhouse is why it still stands. I understand its either the only or one of very few such places left, because most were cheaply made and burned down at some point -- all that fire and coal is an excellent accelerator, and the workers were often likkered up!"))



I've also taken long distance trains in the USA—for instance, from NY to Chicago for a worldcon (a trip I'm duplicating this year for Chicon); NY to New Orleans, last year the California Zephyr from San Francisco to Reno; and in 1975 the CP Rail (pre-VIA) east from Vancouver to Regina, staying one day with Eli Cohen in Regina, then a flight back to NYC from Regina. I had a Canadian Pacific credit card in those days from my frequent visits north of the border, and no one on the train had ever seen one. I think they thought I



was a very youthful CP Rail executive. I charged everything on the trip and had a great time. I picked up one memorable souvenir, which I still have: in Golden, BC, I got a silver-coloured 10 fluid ounce pop-top can labeled "Pasteurized Drinking Water. Only additive Ascorbic Acid (Vitamin C). Packed for CP RAIL". Of course it says the

same thing in French on the other side. Thirty-seven years later, and it's a little dusty; but it still sloshes, still full of vitamin-packed water, for use by rail workers; so they won't get vitamin deficiencies working on the line in mid-winter.

My best long-distance trip was in 1994, en route to Winnipeg for the worldcon. I took the train from NYC to Toronto and was met by none other than John Millard at Union Station. He took me to dinner and then I stayed overnight at the Royal York. The next morning I took the train west to Winnipeg, getting a roomette—one of those tiny, one person private rooms with a toilet under the seat, the bed that folded down for the night—which as usual I paid for using the Canadian money in my CIBC chequing account.

The view, alas, westward from North Bay until just an hour or so before we got to Winnipeg of undulating muskeg—little hollows with stagnant water in them, marsh, occasional larger lakes, an Indian settlement every now and then. The world's most boring view. Apparently some time after my 1975 trip, they merged the CP and CN passenger routes; and instead of keeping the CP route, which travels along a glorious and windswept Lake Superior, they chose the CN route, which allows you to reach a zen-like state of ennui as you see the same damned view for days at a time.

I flew home, Winnipeg to Toronto to NYC.

Then there are my trips in the UK, including the one from Birmingham to Edinburgh, in those old coaches you see in the old movies with three seats facing three seats, individual reading lamps over each seat, the compartment with a sliding door and glass window with a shade for privacy, and the compartment door to the outside with the window that opens, and the handle so you can kill yourself by exiting while the train is moving. That train got into Edinburgh a mere eight hours late, but the route was up through the Lake District and lots more great scenery.

The next long train I took in the UK, they'd gotten rid of those wonderful old coaches and replaced them with poor copies of Amtrak coaches, so poorly made that when you went into tunnels, everyone's ears popped. I never saw those coaches again until I visited the National Railway Museum in York (where I stayed at the Royal York Hotel, a station hotel).

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**Eric Mayer, somewhere in PA**

**4 June 2012**

Great article on trains. It's been years since I thought about that pufferbelly song. I must have heard it as a child. How distressing to know it was covered by Barney.

I had a new pocket watch when I was in grade school. Thought it was much cooler than a wristwatch. Do they make digital pocket watches? Come to think of it, yes. Cell phones. My nephew told me he never wears a watch because he just checks his cell phone.

Your mom probably had reason to suspect your father's long periods away on the railroad job. My ex-wife's grandfather was an engineer on the Scranton to Buffalo run, and he had a mistress in Buffalo. It didn't go over well at home. After he lost his job, thanks to derailing while drunk and retired, he and his wife lived on opposite sides of the house. There was a line painted down the middle of the living room.

A tour of a train must have been almost as amazing as a spaceship tour. I never knew 'til now that there was a room beneath the nose of the engine. Not a home I would want to be in if there was a crash, and I'm taking it's a room with no windows. I thought the living quarters for everyone were in the caboose.

Trains only rarely ran through town when I was growing up. The main attraction of the railroad track was as a wonderful hiking path through the woods. However occasionally a train went through; and if we could get there on time, we liked to put pennies on the tracks and marvel at how thoroughly squashed they were after the they'd been run over.

I've only been on trains a few times. The longest journey was from Rochester, NY, to New York City. I didn't find it unpleasant. I could read without feeling dizzy, which I can't do on a bus. Mostly you see the backs of things from a train.

Some terrific descriptive writing here too. Nice piece.

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**WAHF:** Kevin Doddy, Taral Wayne

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## **\* Closing Remarks**

Mike and I have separate travel plans before the next issue. In late September Mike will be driving out to Myrtle Beach, SC, to attend a reunion of his Air Force squadron. I will be flying up to Seattle in mid-October to be with my mother while my sister attends a medical school reunion in Rochester, NY. If there is anything worth reporting about these trips, I will include them next time.

*Laurraine*  
5 August 2012