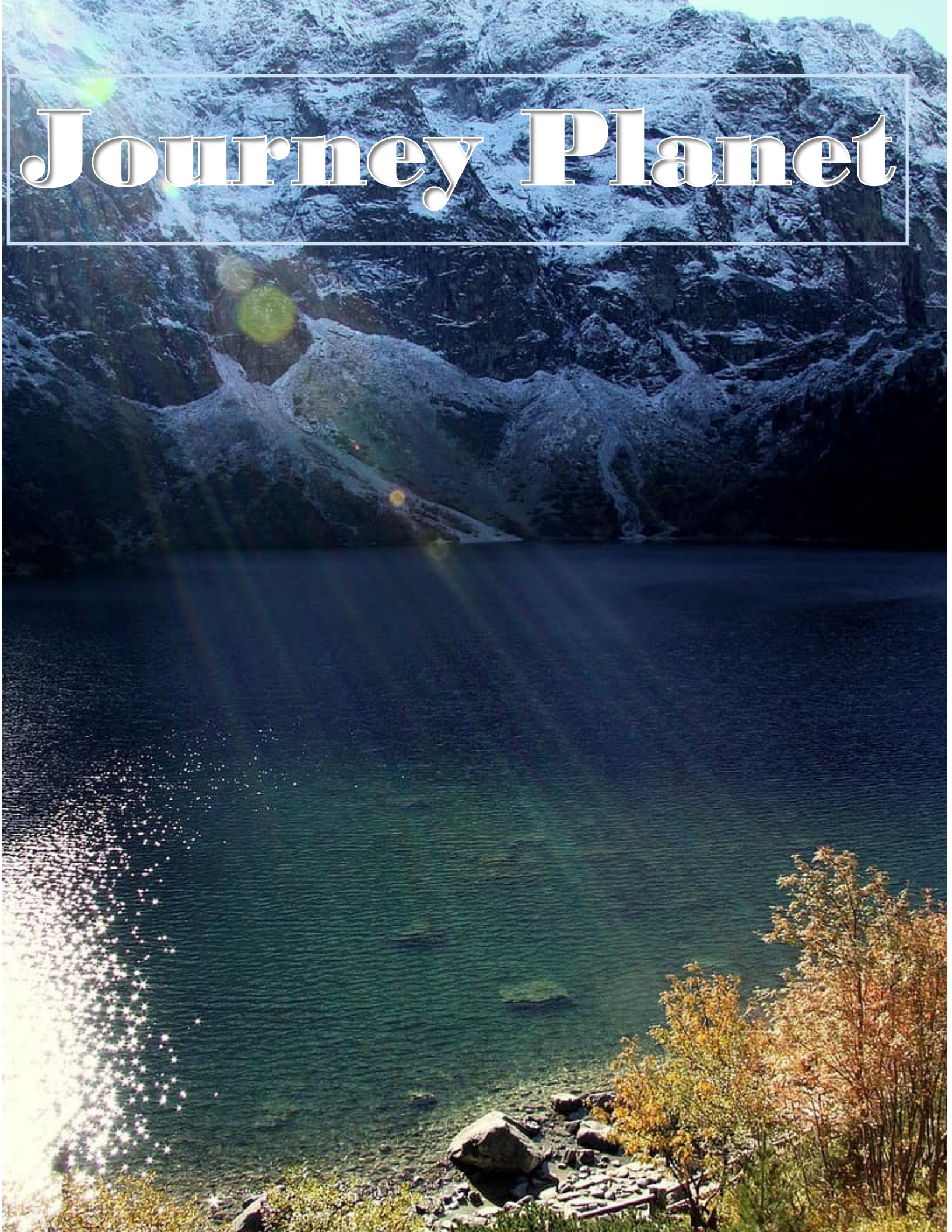


Journey Planet





Issue 51—August 2020

~Editors~

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Introduction by Steven H Silver

When I first pitched the idea of this issue of *Journey Planet* to James and Chris, we all had plans to travel, whether it was to New Zealand to attend the Worldcon, Columbus to attend the NASFIC, or even just to the next town over to hang out with friends. None of us could have predicted that we would instead find ourselves sequestered in our houses by a global pandemic that is still raging and even countries that seem to have it under control risk new flare ups. The inability to travel makes this issue even more pertinent as it opens a window on the world that is currently denied to us.

Anyone who travels has the experience of stumbling on a place that has an otherworldly feel to it. A location where you stumble into a world which can convince even the most skeptical among us that there is some form of magic in the world. This can take the form of ghoulies and ghosties. And long-legged beasts. And things that go bump in the night. It can open up the majesty of nature in a way the traveler has never seen before. It can offer a sense of déjà vu or belonging, and instant rapport with the place being visited for the first time.

In ancient Roman times, there was the concept of *genius loci*¹ where it referred to a protective spirit of a location. The term has survived for the past two millennia and now is often taken to refer to a distinctive atmosphere of a place, that very sense of magic that James, Chris and I were seeking when we invited authors to send us their stories of discovering magic in the real world.

I've found the magic of ghosts in the ruined walls of Kenilworth Castle in Warwickshire, the first place I found myself thinking, "I don't believe in ghosts, but if they existed, they would surely haunt this place. I found the magic of nature in the vast, expansive landscape of Þingvellir in Iceland, the original home of the Alþingi, the oldest surviving parliament and a site of magnificent beauty. I found a sense of belonging the first time I arrived at Harlaxton Manor.

Throughout these pages, you'll find the magic in the seemingly mundane, a visit back to the town where one of our authors lived several years earlier or a walk in the woods. You'll find a sense of magic



brought about by a fateful juxtaposition of the ancient and a modern invention that appeared completely separated from its rightful time. Others look at their ancestral homes or the furthest reaches of the world.

We hope these articles will allow you to visit, even at second hand, places that you've never been and introduce a sense of magic and wonder into your days, perhaps while you plan for that first big trip once COVID-19 has been conquered and travel can begin in earnest.

When I was young, my grandparents moved into a new house in suburban Cleveland. There was a small wooded area behind their house. It wasn't large, and that area has now been developed for houses, encompassing, perhaps, two additional suburban streets. But when I would visit them, that area was a forest primeval, stretching for miles in every direction and worthy of exploration. When I picture nature encroaching on civilization (or more properly, civilization encroaching on nature), images of that wooded area always inform my mental image. —SHS



Great Uncle Ivan's Woods

Alma Alexander

There are two kinds of places in those spots that Faery puts out a presence into our own world.

There are places of Cardinal Magic, the kind where everyone who walks near or through a place gets affected by it in the same way; sometimes the accounts given of the experience, by people who don't know one another and are sometimes separated by vast geographical or historical chasms, are given in disconcertingly similar words, as though these strangers had somehow got together out of space and time in order to "get their stories straight".

The other kind is the Ephemeral Magic, the kind that will touch you with the breath of a summer breeze—no two pairs of eyes will ever see the same thing, nor can it ever be described in the same way twice even though every individual account given can be brilliantly clear with details standing out as though etched into the memory. It's just not the *same* details. Not ever. It's Faery magic, their humor, their joke, and if you listen carefully you can hear them laughing in the whisper of the wind in the leaves.

When I was young, my family would go and visit the weekend cottage of my Great-Uncle Ivan. (Oy, this already sounds like a Russian fairy tale. There are no Baba Yagas lurking in the woods, though. Promise.) The place itself was pretty basic—a two-roomed hut, one of which was the kitchen, with an out-house out back, surrounded by fields of corn, my great-uncle's tiny vineyard, and his beehives out on the small stretch of greensward and underneath the shadow of the summer trees. I used to play with the half-ripe corn cobs that were plucked from the corn and handed to me, the cornsilk hanging down like some princess's luxuriant tresses, a cartoonish face drawn on the cob by untutored but loving hands in order to make me a corn-dolly. The dusty grapes had a peculiar heady, musty smell if left on the vine too long, and I watched them shrivel and turn to raisins sometimes, out there in the baking sun. The somnolent hum of the bees was everywhere.

The cottage had no running water as such, and the water needed for cooking and drinking had to be fetched from the well down in the village. Pairs of us would set off, bearing containers—sometimes larger plastic ones, often the elegant glass carafes with a nest of woven and plaited rattan which cradled their rounded bowled bottoms and which (when full of water) were heavy and difficult to carry. We would pad up the narrow road leading up from the village to great-uncle's cottage—no more than a track with worn dusty bits where the car tires, when the occasional car drove this way, went, and a dandelion-infested grassy Mohawk in the middle—like modern-day water-bearer nymphs, dangling water jugs from our hands, panting under the summer sun, imagining the cool lemonade that was waiting for us under the shady trees at the back of the cottage.

You could gain this rural road by going out of great-uncle's front door and then, gaining the road, taking a sharp left—which would take you, following the road itself, straight down into the village.

But there was another way to go—the road less travelled, as it were, of which I knew long before I had read Frost's famous poem. If you didn't turn left but crossed the road and followed the path across the

meadow and into the wood...but here, the Ephemeral Magic begins, and no two people quite remember this place the same way.

In my own mind's eye, it was a cathedral of beech and silver birch and maybe young oak, and perhaps aspen. There was barely a path to be seen in the undergrowth, and the whole was wreathed in that kind of unearthly green-gold light such as is filtered through leaves into the woods, and it smelled of tree bark and sap and lush green growing things, and it was full of birdsong—things I couldn't identify, a high sweet warbling song that was a choir of small woodland winged creatures, and some that I could, the solemn call of a mourning dove which we in that time and place and with our own brushes with history interpreted as saying "U-TUR-SKU! U-TUR-SKU!" (literally, "To Turkey! To Turkey!").

It wasn't a great stand of forest, not by any means, and you walked through this light and this heavenly choir of birds and you came out on a hillside, a green slope covered in soft grass and full of those tiny sweet white daisy-kind flowers which I used to sit there and cheerfully murder (i.e. pick great handfuls of them) and then thread into endless necklaces and wreaths to hang upon my small person. I can close my eyes and see it now—this greensward slope covered in a galaxy of tiny white stars, with these ruins (I believe I was told they had once been a monastery of sorts) standing guard over to the one side and the fairy woods behind me, and a view of the quiet and settled and pastoral fields in the shallow valley beneath me, full of corn and hops and sweet green peas and spreading crowns of apple trees and walnut trees and the cherry trees laden with ripe red fruit, somnolent in the lazy golden sun of summer...lying there on my back in the grass covered in crown and necklace of white flowers and staring up at those tiny cotton-wool-puff white clouds that like to hang out in hot and vividly blue summer skies.

It was easy to think that I was no longer in the same world as that which contained a dreary autumn rain in the city, or a mound of homework in a subject I did not like at school, or a quarrel with a friend or some member of one's family who was utterly incapable of "understanding" me, or being hungry, or being cold. This was the world of a quiet summer happiness, where nothing could possibly go wrong and thus nothing ever did, and it was like lying in a bower strewn with rose petals and being sung anthems to by creatures who wore wings and did not look in the least ridiculous while doing so.

It is quite easy to *believe* in the magic of the Ephemeral Places while you are there. They surround you and envelop you and creep inside of you with every breath that you take, and you become part of them, and they a part of you...and when you leave them, they vanish, and what's left behind is just a memory, like a taste on your tongue of some sweet and potent and heady drink that you will never have again.

My woods, my birds, my ruins, my meadow, my daisy-chains made from white stars—they are a part of the Ephemeral, now, lost to me, left behind in that golden childhood that once was. But here's the thing about places like this, and it is something that the Faery never quite understood. When you take that memory of the Ephemeral Place away with you, in the time-honored way of Faery exchange, you always leave a little bit of your own self, a tiny scrap of your own shadow, behind in your place. The Fae might like to think that they tease and then expel and then refuse you the right of return—but it isn't true, and that anchor piece of you can always take you back to where you were. And the Fae themselves are sometimes troubled by uneasy dreams because what they did, when you stepped through that veil and walked in their world, ties them to *you* as much as it ties you to *them*.

Magic binds.

True magic binds strongly.

Believing in true magic binds completely.

Sometimes it's just a child's unwavering faith, preserved in memory like a fossil insect in amber, perfect and beautiful. But it's enough. You've walked in the enchanted realm, and you remember it, and you believe...and therefore it is real, it will always be real, and it will always be there. Just close your eyes for a moment and pretend that you feel the warmth of summer sunlight on your hair and the softness of the white petals between your fingers, that you hear the song of birds in the treetops and the hum of insects in the grass, that you can sense the quiet breathing of the past in the ruins which bear mute witness that others have walked this way before you came here.

It's real.

Push aside the veil, and step back into a childhood dream.

All you need to do is believe.



Instant Fanzine Gonna Get Ya

We asked several people to tell us about the place where they discovered magic in only a few words. Here are some of the responses.

Felicia Herman: The Badlands National Park: The landscape is otherworldly, and the difference between rainstorms is incredible.



Patrick Harvey: Hocking Hills—Ash Cave. 100 feet high, 900 feet wide, and a waterfall. The small white dot is my wife, Donna.

Amy L. Woolard: Disney World—before Epcot, they were still building Space Mountain, it was fantastic!

Ellen Rawson: The Chalice Well Gardens in Glastonbury, Somerset. There's spirituality there. It's not religion nor at least any sort of organised religion; it's too magical for that. I can feel the spirituality, peacefulness and centredness there, and the more time I spend at the Chalice Well, the stronger those feelings become.

Lisa Hertel: The Western Wall. Full of mystique.

Mary Burgess: Heart Rock in the San Bernardino Mountains. I used to ride my horse back in to this location and then swim there.

Sandra Levy: Yellowstone National Park. It was as if you were in another world. The geysers are awe inspiring.

Coral Pitkin: Palenque. Such strong spiritual & magical forces there. First there in 71 or 2, before tourism was much.



Steven Pitluk: Guelta d'Archei in Chad. Brackish water in a narrow pass between rocky mountains, an oasis that bears no resemblance to the stereotypical garden in a desert and surrounded by a gazillion camels and crocodiles.



Moshe Feder: The Marin Headlands overlooking the Golden Gate and its bridge. For sheer topographical scale and beauty at the wonder and awe level. What the Romantics called the sublime. I never imagined being able to look down at the bridge. (Thank you Patricia Peters and Gary Mattingly!)

Lisa Deutsch Harrigan: Devil's Tower. You go because of *Close Encounters*, you leave inspired by the incredible spire of rock it is.

Robert L. Rede: The ruins of Kirby Muxloe Castle. They aren't particularly large, but when I visited, I was the only one there. Several doves have turned one of the remaining rooms into a dove cote and when they took off *en masse*, I was convinced the ghosts of Kirby Muxloe were coming for me.



John Purcell: I have difficult choices: Arches National Park in Utah is magical for its rock formations; Voyageurs National Park in Minnesota (along the Canadian border) is magical for its serene, lush beauty and incredible fishing). Or I could go with places I saw during my TAFF trip: Stonehenge, the view of Paris, France from atop the Arch de Triomphe, walking along the windmill-lined canals of Netherlands, etc. I could go on forever.

John Sapienza: The Duomo in Saragosa, Sicily. The Cattedrale metropolitana della Natività di Maria Santissima, more popularly known in English as the Cathedral of Syracuse. Both Peggy Rae and I felt awed by how we felt when we visited in 2001. Attribute it to the Virgin Mary or to Athena, it felt like a divine presence.

"The cathedral stands as the most decadent and spectacular building on the aptly named Piazza Duomo. The building was originally turned into a Christian church by Zosimo, Bishop of Syracuse in the seventh century, who was later canonized.

Zosimo, however, did not create this new sanctuary ex nihilo. The new cathedral was built using structural elements belonging to the earlier temple of Athena, part of which was still standing. Although the church has gone through a number of changes, including its conversion to a mosque after the Arab conquest of Sicily, and the addition of a new façade in the eighteenth century, you can still see how the earlier Hellenic temple was used in its construction.

The most prominent reminder of the building's Greek past are the Doric columns which are visible both within and without the structure. Their size makes them feel imposing, and it is obvious why Zosimo would want to reuse them in his new cathedral." –[Ancient World Magazine](#)

Henry Balen: You are asking us to choose, there are so many to pick from. This planet has many magical spaces of different kinds. I can not decide whether it is being amongst the redwoods of the pacific north west, the great barrier reef, or walking the hills of Scotland or the Lake District in England. Then there is the built environments: the canyons of New York, the old streets of Lisbon...

Joe Bergeron: New Zealand. Pretty much anywhere there. Gorgeous landscapes abound. The air feels and smells different. The light is different. The stars overhead are different. Much of it feels suffused in peace, remote from the tension and madness afflicting so much of the USA. And I've only seen the North Island, so far.

Lettie Prell: My parents' attic when I was growing up. It was populated by magical objects and fairies, and I could become anyone I wanted.

Michael Capobianco: Uluru and Meteor Crater.



Mozelle Atwood Funderburk:

A giant kapok tree in the undeveloped Amazon jungle off the river and up a tributary 75 or so miles north of Iquitos. With a guide friend we took black jungle tobacco and perfume as gifts to the spirits of the tree which had flutes rising 25-30', small trees growing between and the very soul of the jungle all around

Priscilla Olson: The Sagrada Familia basilica in Barcelona. I am neither Catholic nor particularly religious, but the main section floored me the most magical/sacred places I've ever been. Combo of the colored light and arching inside forest, maybe.

Leslie Turek: Skellig Michael: When I first saw this place in a movie, I thought it was on another planet. Then I found out where it was, and that I was going to be fairly near it, so I arranged to see it. Don't regret it, in spite of the seasickness.



Michael Blair: A place in Germany called the Witch's Kitchen. A friend sent me a photo (he visited there from time to time). The magical thing about it (thought it has its reputation) was that I recognized it instantly, having been there in a vision quest.

Manya Myers: Standing at the Mall during the Folkways Festival dancing with fireflies in DC

Denise Cardos: Mesa Verde Cliff House. The group I was with was quite small and in such awe that the silence was profound. Yet I could hear the laughter of children (there were none in our group), smell cookfires, and almost see life as it must have been. Then just as the spell was broken by the guide's voice, I turned to make eye contact with a hawk hovering on a thermal just a couple of feet away. It never occurred to me to raise my camera for a photo—and as it turned out, I was the only one who saw the hawk. It was like a gift meant only for me.

Another experience was near the Wounded Knee Cemetery by that was not a happy magical moment...

Mike Scott: Horse riding by the light of the full moon over the desert sand dunes in the United Arab Emirates.

Andie Blair: Stonehenge. The history and magic just hum in the air. It's a beautiful place.

Heather Gladney: Valley of Fire State Park, Nevada, is mile after mile of variations on stark desert eroded stone formations that do not become easy and familiar. They look increasingly strange, and the local geology seems the more strange, the more you learn about it. Also, as in Utah, the different bits of rock in different areas have vastly different character, not the "seen one you've seen 'em all" effect you might anticipate ahead of time. Also, caves and outlaws.



Blind Lemming Chiffon: It was a toy store, in 1960, in Denver. Anderson's Toy Land. It made me feel a sense of wonder and belonging that has happened very rarely since then, for me.

Caryl Owen: The Rollright stone circle, Oxfordshire/Warwickshire. Meditating there was like sitting within a geyser of light.

Carolyn Ericson: Upper Calf Creek Falls, Escalante, Utah. There was no one else on the trail in and I walked over to put my hand in the falls. The water shifted and I was soaked with the icy water. It was powerful and almost knocked me off my feet. It was awesome. I felt like I had been baptized.



Buzz Dixon: More spiritual than magical, Mont St Michel is an abbey / fortified village that becomes an island every day when the tide rolls in. Though it has its tourist shops, for me it exuded a sense of peace and serenity that I found greatly refreshing.

Richard Doherty: Most magical place... That means a lot of different things to different people, but I'd have to say it was going to New Salem, Illinois when I was still a very little kid, and then seeing Starved Rock State Park on the same trip. Both places awakened something in me, making it possible for me to almost experience a feeling of what it was like to live in the times of the events that made those places famous and significant. At such a young age I wouldn't have expected something like that. I've never gotten over those places.

Jennifer Dodson: Dolly Sods, West Virginia. It's a wilderness area in the Appalachian Mountains. I camped there years ago with friends, and watched the fog roll across the grey sandstone boulders and through the spruce trees and blueberry bushes. The area is part of the national forest, but unfortunately many more people visit than when I was a teenager and it doesn't have quite the same mystique.

Bonnie Jones: Seeing the terracotta statues in China partially uncovered. When they are uncovered, they lose their colors quickly, so they are mostly still covered. A large room of dirt, with the front rows of people like statues.

Alice Bentley: I didn't see your earlier post, so this response comes unconsidered (and I need to leave for work shortly): I face a tumbling of too many choices. There's a back alley in New Orleans in 1988—I'm sure it's not there now, but it was quite the experience. There's a spot in my backyard (3 acres of woodland), faint but steady. Muir Woods for sure. The Sonoran Desert in Arizona. On the water in the middle of Puget Sound. So many more...

Janna Maria Fröhlich: The standing stones on top of a hill one mile outside Keswick, England. Not as large as Stonehenge, but so peaceful with beautiful green hills all around as you turn in the circle. Just magical. I felt a connection with all who'd been there for millennia.





James Beaver: There have been many in my long life from natural springs, to mangrove forests, and quiet oak hollows. Here is a location in Norway I visited last year. It is near Gudvangen a village in Aurland Municipality in Vestland county, Norway. It is located at the end of the Nærøyfjord Valley where the Nærøydalselvi River empties into the fjord. The entire cliff enclosed valley has many multiple veiling waterfalls dropping into it and feeding the Nærøydalselvi River. Within the valley is the Viking village Njardarheim, dedicated to the northern god Njord. In Njardarheimr the people live as authentic village lived 1000 years ago. They are not dressed up actors, but volunteers of all ages who have the era as a lifestyle. They know their history and have unique knowledge about the Viking and Nordic life and share it with you. The energy of the entire valley is very magical and it has a micro-climate different from the surrounding flanking mountains, much like the concept of Shangri-La.

Reading about Beth Cato's visit to the West Kennet Long Barrow reminded me of my visit to Cornwall. I decided I would walk from Penzance to Land's End, a twelve mile route that took me through the villages of Mousehole, Boleigh, and Treen. Not knowing what to expect on the route, I picked up lunch before I left Penzance and shortly after passing through Boleigh I came across the Merry Maidens stone circle, standing alone in a field, protected only by a herd of cows. Just down the road is the Tregiffian Burial Chamber, an entrance grace from the Neolithic period. It seemed like a good place to stop for lunch and, unlike the more famous Stonehenge, completely accessible. —SHS



In

2019, I fulfilled a life-long dream of traveling to England and Scotland. I'm a history geek firmly steeped in the logical, but at the same time, I've never lost my childhood yearning for real magic in the world. On my trip, I was eager to soak in the gothic mood of the misty Dales, and feel the coarse ancientness of Hadrian's Wall beneath my hand. However, I never expected to slip through time and reality the way I did at West Kennet Long Barrow.

I traveled with my husband as part of an archaeologist-led small tour group. Our morning included stops at Woodhenge and Stonehenge. Sadly, the most ethereal thing about tourist-packed Stonehenge was that the rain included both water and miniature spiders. Our drive to our lunch destination of Bath required a circuitous route, our driver said, because Benedict Cumberbatch was filming a movie in the area and roads were closed.

Fortunately, by midafternoon the rain tapered off. We had incredibly pleasant weather to trek across a wheat field and a cow pasture to reach West Kennet Long Barrow.

The United Kingdom is covered with Neolithic sites. Stonehenge is the most famous, and also the most restricted. West Kennet Long Barrow is not only public, but you can freely wander inside the ancient burial chamber atop a hill.

A small offering of flowers outside the entry reminded me that the place is still of modern pagan significance, though no one is sure of the full role that West Kennet had in the context of its time. What is known: the short tunnel with flanking chambers was used to bury humans and animals over several centuries, and is likely Early Neolithic (between 4500 and 3800 BCE) in construction.

Even with a modern skylight built into the end of the short tunnel, the inside of the barrow was dark and spooky. The close walls made of massive sarsens made me feel as if I was deeper underground. Even with the bodies and artifacts long gone, oh yeah, it felt like an ancient tomb. My fingers glanced a rock, and I couldn't help but shiver. This was not a place I would want to hang out in for any length of time, or visit at night.

With a sigh of relief, I stepped out into the gray afternoon light and recognized the bold, loud buzz of an old biplane. "Do you hear that?" I asked my husband as I pivoted around. To the north, a busy highway lay on the other side of the wheat field, but this sound came from the south. Over the rolling green hills, I spied the swirling specks of two distant biplanes.

Our guide and some tour mates joined us to take in the odd sight. "Have you ever seen anything like this on previous tours?" I asked our guide.

"No, never," he said, voice soft in curiosity.

"Is there an airfield down that way?" I asked. "Maybe they are practicing for an airshow." I've lived near airstrips over the years and have seen some pretty neat fly-bys.

"I don't know," he said.

I glanced at the barrow just behind us. "Well, if anyplace could cause us to slip through time, it'd be this place." I wished the old planes were close enough to capture on film. I knew this would make a funny story for later.

Oh, how little I knew.

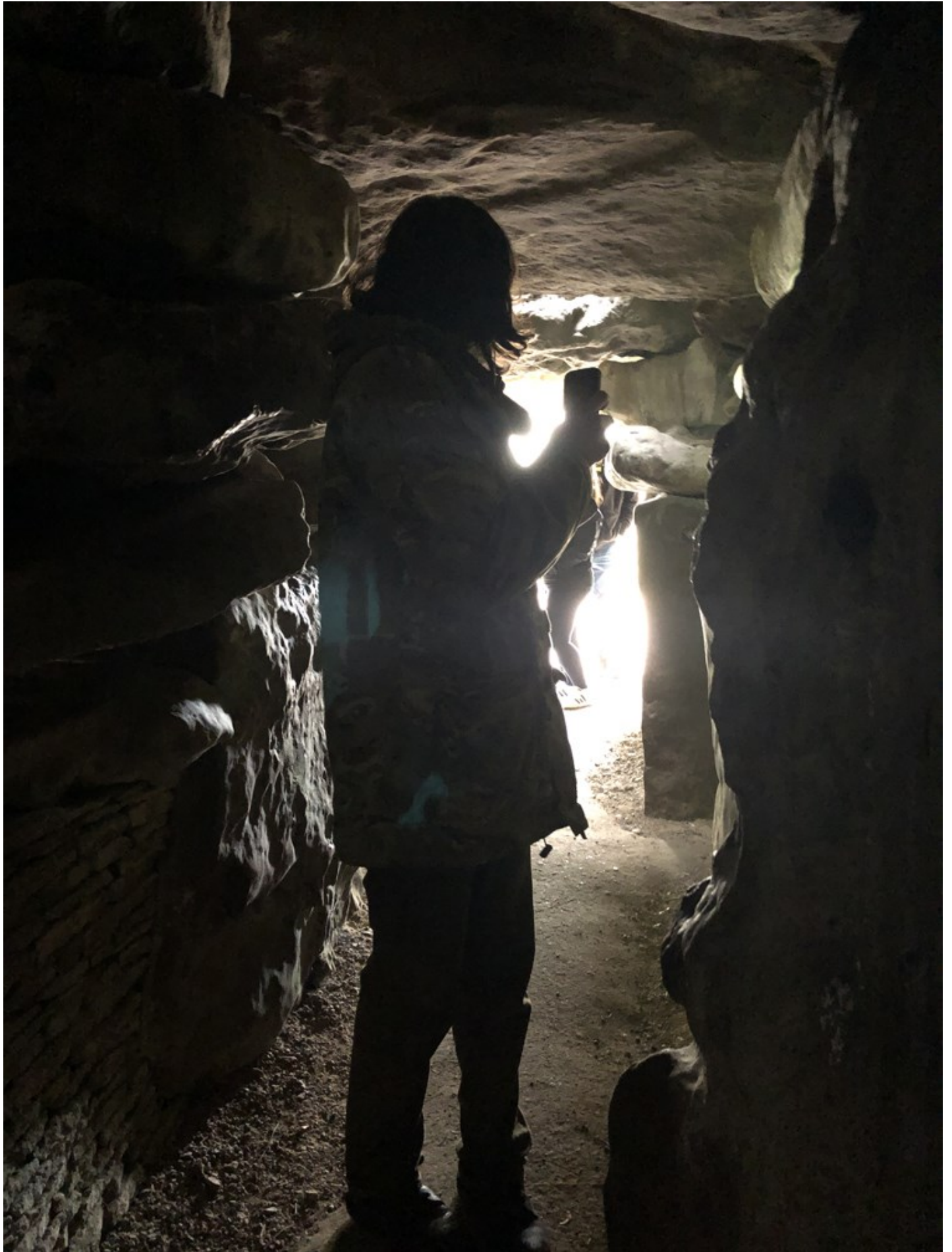
Fast forward six months. I sat in a theater in Arizona watching the World War I movie, *1917*. The action moved to a farm tucked among rolling green hills. Weird prickles of déjà vu traveled down my spine.

"That looks like the area around Stonehenge," I whispered to my husband.

Then three biplanes began to dogfight. My jaw dropped.

That day back in June, I had never considered that the biplanes were connected with the Benedict Cumberbatch movie that caused our detour near Bath. Now, the pieces came together in a way that looked painfully obvious. A quick internet search at home settled all doubts. Sure enough, the farm scene was filmed on Salisbury Plain in Wiltshire—an area right to the south of West Kennet. A lot of the trench scenes were filmed just two miles from Stonehenge, too.

We truly had experienced a time slip within the ancient barrow, thanks to some very modern Hollywood-style magic.



I've never been to Maine, but I have several people who tell me I need to go. As I write this, one couple has left Chicago to drive to Maine during COVID-19, planning ahead so they only need to stop for gas during their trip. A cousin got married there a couple years ago, although I couldn't make it to the wedding. And Jessica Guggenheim has been regaling me with stories ever since her first visit when we worked in adjoining cubicles. Her husband, Ryan, explains why Maine is so magical. When I'm travelling again...—SHS



Magical Maine

Ryan Guggenheim

Hobbies

are magical things. They are important to us because we love them, whatever they are. When Steven Silver asked me to write about my most magical place, I realized that, to me, a magical place is one where I can exercise those hobbies. I have a number of what I consider hobbies.

I love to read. Reading has been part of my life since I was very young—I was reading at the age of 4—and I never stopped. When I was 11, my cool older cousin suggested I read a really scary book called *Pet Sematary* by Stephen King—it blew my mind. I started reading everything I could find of his—and there was a lot out there. I was entranced by the weird book about a man who pursued a man/phantom through the desert, was gloriously freaked out by the short stories about a man forced to self-cannibalize in order to survive on a deserted island, and scared shitless reading about a family man slowly succumbing to madness while caretaking at a Colorado hotel. But the stories that enthralled me the most were those about life in little towns in Maine, and the people who lived there. *Needful Things*, *Insomnia*, *Bag of Bones*—these and so many other novels, novellas and short stories brought Maine to life in my mind. I set myself a goal—to visit this near-mythical land for myself.

Another hobby of mine is photography. I have always been aware of photography—my father was the one in my family who chronicled the family vacations, milestones, and get-togethers. My parents have dozens of large photo albums, each crammed full of memories. My dad owned a Canon AE-1 35mm SLR camera and

of large photo albums, each crammed full of memories. My dad owned a Canon AE-1 35mm SLR camera and a few lenses, and the mechanics of how it worked—and how to use it—always intrigued me. Once my dad upgraded (autofocus!), I got the Canon, and began to learn to use it. I took a few classes, and practiced a lot, but never got very good. Photography was an expensive hobby for a kid—film cost money, wasting shots was sacrilegious, and developing the photos was expensive. And learning was hard—you had to note each photo's settings, and then after they were developed, decide what you should have done differently—it was a very difficult process. I put down the camera for years, reacquainting myself with the hobby again in 2006, when I purchased Sony's first DSLR. Since then, I've had two more Sony cameras—the last a mirrorless full frame beauty—and I think I've gotten pretty good at photography. (At the least, I am able to get some decent photographs—the two are not necessarily connected.) The hobby is more expensive than it was, not less—camera equipment is not cheap—but the immediate feedback of a digital camera makes it easier to hone your craft as you go, instead of having to wait days or weeks to see the results. Taking landscape photos is my favorite, so my wife, Jessi and I started looking for picturesque locations to visit on vacation.

My last two hobbies go together—food and beer. I've always liked good food and was introduced to beer by my good friend, Deanna Sjolander. Going to breweries and restaurants is fun for me—I learn so much exploring a location through its food, and breweries and taprooms are simply fun places to be.

All of these hobbies came together when Jessi and I took our first trip to Maine in 2008. We flew from Chicago to Boston, and then drove up to Wells Beach, on the southern coast of Maine, to stay at a hotel just feet away from the ocean. The views—especially those at sunrise—are breathtaking.

Figure 1 (Top of the Article) - The Union Bluff Hotel on a snowy day in March 2018

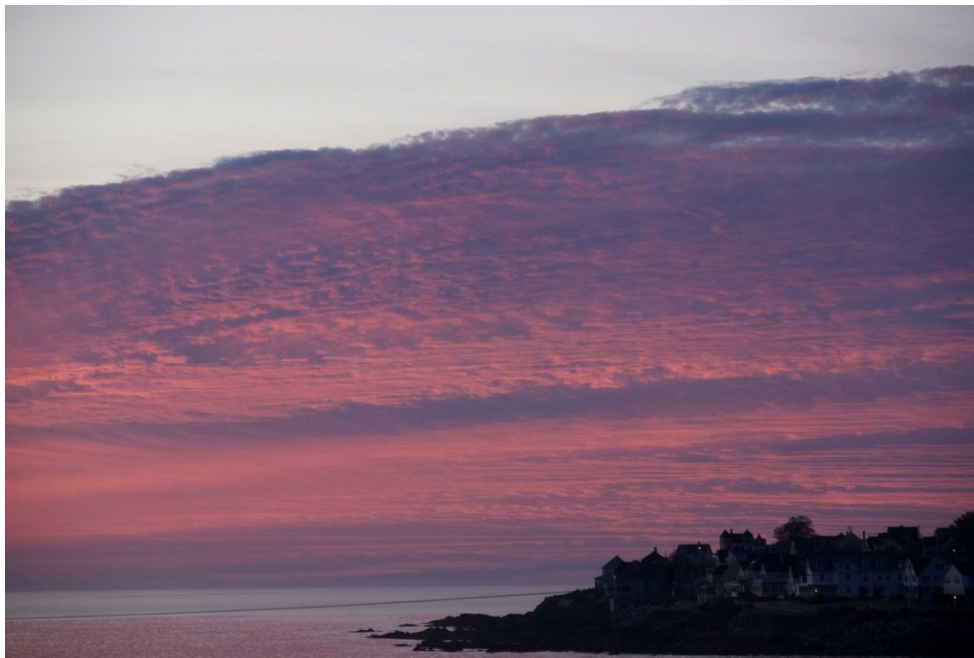
Maine: The Way Life Should Be.

Tourism Slogan

Built in 1868, the hotel boasts 2 restaurants—one serving pub food, one serving fine Maine dining. We were able to chat with the locals in the bar, who were just as nice (and some, just as creepy) as characters in King's books. And I've taken some of my favorite photos on Short Sands Beach, just steps from the hotel, and of the Nubble Light, a short 5-minute drive away.

After a few days in southern Maine, we drove north, stopping in Bangor on the way. Bangor is home to Stephen King, and was home to an amazing Stephen King bookstore called Bette's Books, where I bought a unique Lythway Supernatural Large Print edition of one of my favorite short stories, "The Birthing Method." We stopped by Stephen King's home to take a photo at the gate (stalker, much?) and then drove to Bar Harbor and Acadia National Park.

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Sunrise on Short Sands Beach



Sunrise on Short Sands Beach



Nubble Lighthouse



Sand Beach, Acadia National Park

After enjoying the park, we returned to Bar Harbor, and strolled past the various shops, ate lobster and oysters in little pubs, and snacked on taffy and Maine blueberry cobbler with homemade iced cream. Heaven.

Bar Harbor is home to the four-masted *Mary Todd*. This 91-foot wooden schooner sails through Frenchman Bay and is available for three cruises a day. Jessi and I took this cruise during our stay in Bar Harbor, sailing through the islands of Frenchman Bay. We saw bald eagles, lobster boats, and gorgeous vistas. Plus, you can help raise the riggings—an exhausting but exhilarating way to spend your cruise! Both Jessi and I have done this on different cruises, and it is a lot of fun.



[The Mary Todd, Bar Harbor, ME](#)



Jessi raises the riggings.

Disembarking the *Mary Todd* puts you at the Bar Harbor Inn. Built in 1887, this beautiful, sprawling hotel looks out over Frenchman Bay. The suites have balconies overlooking the water and the dock where the *Mary Todd* is berthed, and the Bar Harbor Inn is the place to eat. It is there I had one of my favorite meals of all time. Eating lobster ravioli outside at the Terrace Grill is one of my happiest food memories. The atmosphere and the company of my beautiful wife made the meal unforgettable.

All in all, our first trip to Maine was an amazing trip—one that we have repeated a half-dozen times since. We have been to York Beach over Valentine's Day, watching surfers brave the icy waters in 35 degree weather, and have braved a Nor'easter which uncovered a shipwreck—just this year identified as a colonial-era cargo ship called the *Defiance*, it shows up every 30 years or so after a major storm. We have also found new locations—on our second trip, we found a B&B in Fryeburg called The Oxford House Inn, which has 4 rooms above an amazing restaurant. Located in western Maine, it sports amazing mountain views and is home to Jockey Cap, an enormous rock deposited by glaciers. Jockey Cap is crowned by a monument to Robert E. Peary, one of the first men to the North Pole. The monument shows all of the visible peaks in a compass-like diorama, allowing you to identify all of the nearby mountains. And last year for New Year's—our last trip pre-COVID—we went to Portland, staying in the Old Port district. The buildings from the 1800s are full of bars and restaurants, allowing us to nosh our way through the city. We had days where a hoodie was good enough to walk around in, and days with 6 inches of snow on the ground. I cannot wait to go back.



The Peary monument on top of Jockey Cap, Fryeburg, ME





Shipwreck on Short Sands Beach, with Jessica for a sense of scale



Through most of this, I haven't talked much about one of my hobbies—beer. Maine is home to more than 200 breweries, including two of the country's best: Allagash and Maine Beer Co. These breweries not only brew great beer, but they are exceedingly interested in their environment. Maine Beer has covered their brewery with solar panels and they are part of the organization 1% for the Planet. Members—including Maine Beer—donate 1% of their annual sales to environmental nonprofits. Allagash has a program where, each month, all tips earned in their Tap Room go to a charity chosen by the staff. Both breweries are sharply aware of the importance of their water supply and donate heavily to various water-based charities such as Sebago Clean Waters, which works to protect the waters of Sebago Lake, the source of half of Maine's drinking water and one of the reasons Maine breweries are able to make such amazing beers. Both of these breweries are fun places to visit and provide some of the best beer you can drink.!



Maine Beer Company in Freeport, ME



The interior of Maine Beer's new tap room. The bronze willow tree is a fountain created by a British artist



Maine Beer Company



Boxes of Allagash's flagship White roll off the bottling line

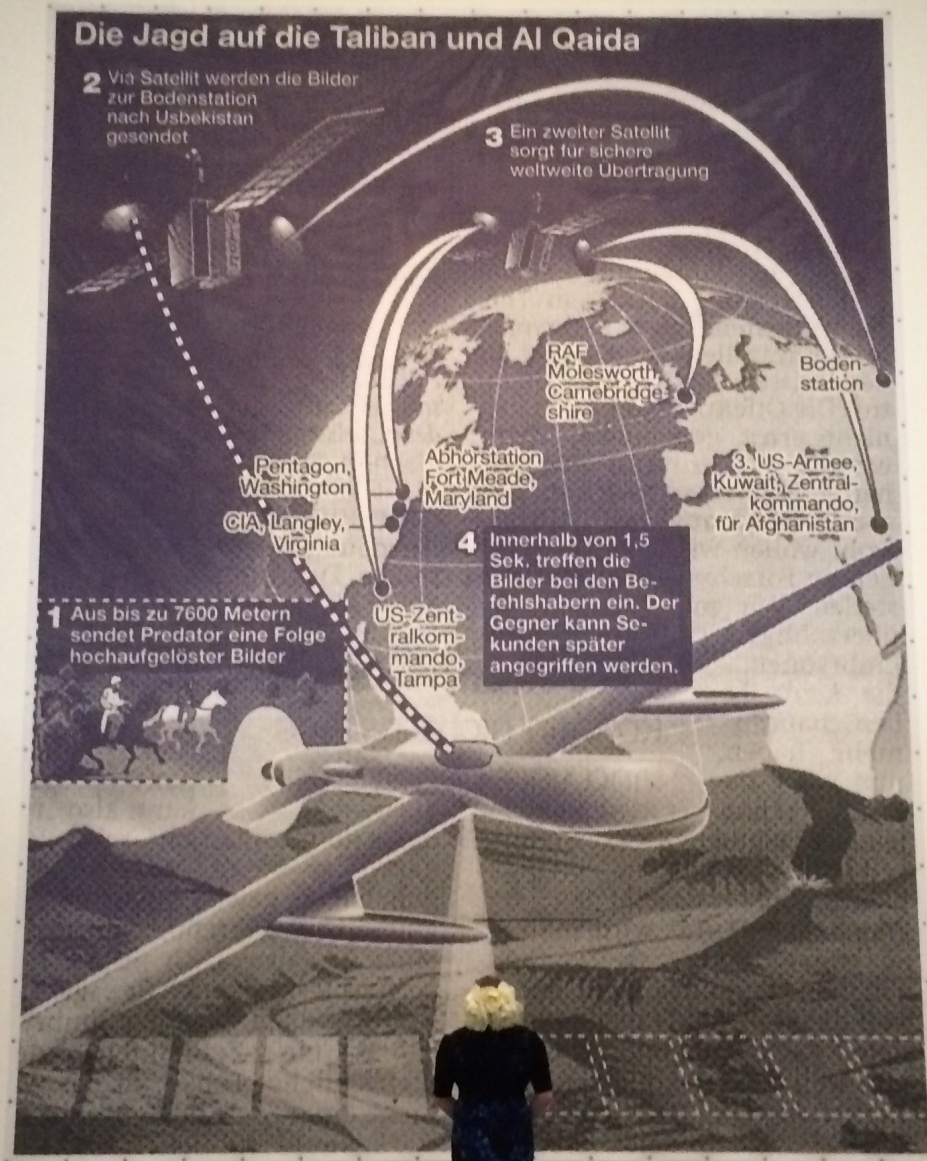


Allagash Brewing Company's Coolship, an open-air fermenter used to make spontaneously fermented beer, was the first in the US



So, when Steven asked me to write something about my most magical place, Maine came immediately to mind. It is somewhere that allows me to partake in all of my hobbies. I have been lucky to visit some beautiful locations all over the world, with Scotland and Utah being high points, but none check all of the boxes as completely as Maine. I cannot wait until we are able to safely visit again.





MoMAgical by Chris Garcia

As with most people at the end of the twentieth century, I've been familiar with the art of Salvador Dalí, most notably *Persistence of Memory*. On a trip to Venice in 1987, I happened upon the Scuola Grande S. Teodoro, which was advertising an exhibit of Salvador Dalí's three dimensional art, which is every bit as surreal as his more famous paintings. While I didn't have the same sort of epiphany Dalí provided Chris, it did give me a renewed appreciation for Dalí, especially for his three dimensional work. —SHS



To me, a magical place is a place of transformation. There aren't a lot of those, honestly, where you walk in one end as something, and out the other as something much more else. There are fewer still that don't do it once, but every time you walk the halls, traipsing through. There is a place that does that for me, has since my first visit—the Museum of Modern Art in New York.

In general, art museums are places of magic. The talent, the vision, the impact of the work, all presented in a single place, often with all the accoutrements needed to bring the power of each work all the way to the surface. I love them, and being a West Coast kid, and growing up not-quite-poor, I only experienced the local museums.

The first time I visited MoMA, I was in college. I already loved Modern Art, specifically the work of Louise Nevelsen and Jackson Pollock, but walking in, I wasn't interested in much other than those. I literally don't remember anything until I got out of the bathroom, and turned a corner, and there was a tiny painting, too tiny to be at all interesting.

Then I looked closer.

Persistence of Memory.

I knew Salvador Dalí's work, how he represented the dream/nightmare world in his paintings, but I didn't know it was so tiny, and when I saw it up-close, I realized there was so much more to this painting.

The scale was based not on the dripping clocks, but on the ants.

That alone made me have to reconsider everything I had believed about art. I had built this image, one I knew from posters and t-shirts and media references, into something massive, but encountering it as an actual piece, I was forced into a new point of view, and I literally don't remember anything else from that visit, because it had transformed me so thoroughly.

In 2004, I walked in wondering what I was going to do with the rest of my life. It was, in fact, the mid-life crisis I have every ten years. It all washed away with a few minutes of wandering among the POP Art works. There was something that soothed the roughest edges of my fears away, standing in front of the Rosenquists, the Hamilton, the Warhol, the Lichtensteins. I literally stopped in the middle of the gallery, and slowly turned. It was in that moment I knew it really didn't matter. I was going to just move forward, find something, and work with it.

And I did.

I visited in 2011. It was a beautiful, leisurely walk through the museum, and something odd happened—I found myself talking about the paintings to myself. I must have looked like I had something wrong with me, as I was literally talking to myself, I think mumbling, about every image, every painting, every sculpture. I had to talk about it, and I had no one with me to do it.

That was when I became an art podcaster.

Literally being surrounded by the art I had spent years reading about, staring at photos of in art books, turned me into an art podcaster. It was something that might have happened anyhow, but the fact that I was staring at *Canyon* by Robert Rauschenberg, able to smell it, and not being able to stop stage-whispering "It's a

My wife.

The wife I married in the Sculpture Garden of MoMA.

Leaving, I felt something wash over me, as if I was pulling myself out of a reality that was infused with energy, light, love. The love walked with me, but there was something in that building as it faded and we walked towards Central Park, and it's something that I've comment on rarity, on the scarcity, and the artificiality of art" and digging into every nook-and-cranny of my memory. I wondered through the entire museum, and I left with so much more than I walked in with.

That is certainly true of May 17, 2014.

Vanessa Applegate and I decided to get married. She had to go to New York for a month. I joined her there, and we got hitched.

We got hitched in the MoMA Sculpture Garden.

We got hitched in the MoMA Sculpture Garden while it was closed and the Mayor of Zurich was wandering the museum.

We didn't have permission, we just kinda walked in, with Vanessa's uncles and my friend Natasha with us. We took tons of photos, and the moment was so magical that the security guard who was sent to throw us out waited until we were done. I later realized Vanessa and I had gotten married on a piece of Isamu Noguchi installation. That was an awesome moment!

Now, anywhere the love of your life dedicates themselves to you is going to have a lot of magic to it, but walking through, the art over-whelmed. There was a 20 foot tall work of Sigmar Polke's that had me searching it for something like 20 minutes. There was a 6 foot tall piece that was a Frank Lloyd Wright drafting of The Illinois, the proposed Mile-High building. There was work from Pollock, from Dalí, from Stuart Davis, Frida Kahlo, Brancusi, Schwitters, and on and on, and the whole time, I was with the Vanessa, and every painting was something magical, as if they were brought to life from the fact that I was holding the hand of my beautiful wife. never felt otherwise...

...and it calls to me, every now and again.

When I attended school in England, I lived in a manor house about 100 miles north of London. The village and manor house quickly became one of my favorite places in the world, a place I felt at home almost immediately and a place that still calls to me more than thirty years later. As I write this, a photo I took upon my arrival hangs on the wall overlooking my computer. Olav Rokne knows this feeling of having a place he once lived still be home, years later. —SHS



A Place Called Home: Grenoble

Olav Rokne

Grenoble is not a place whose magic looms large in the public imagination, but it looms large in mine.

It is nestled in the French Alps, about an hour and a half's drive from the border of Switzerland. There are slightly fewer than 200,000 residents in the city proper, with another 400,000 in the surrounding metropolitan area. It's known for hosting the Winter Olympics in 1968. Jacqueline Kennedy went to university there. It is the birthplace of Andre the Giant.

In 1984, my father took a secondment to the University of Grenoble. My parents, my older brother and I moved into an apartment at 1 Quai Stéphane Jay, on the banks of the river Isère.

My brother and I went to school there. We walked up to the top of the mountain almost every second weekend. We played marbles in the park. Some of my happiest childhood memories were in Grenoble.

Then, a bit more than a year after arriving, we left.

And my family didn't go back.

More than three decades later, driving from Marseille to Grenoble with my partner Amanda, I kept getting lost in memory: the Bastille fort, “*les bulles*,” and Jardin de Ville elementary school.

Looking out of the window as Amanda drove, I’d notice what had changed and what hadn’t, and some egocentric part of my subconscious kept getting offended that the city had moved on without me.

The road was faster and more direct. Gone were the winding detours and single-lane slowdowns. It was safer, more convenient, faster, but left me ill at ease about the city we would find.

When I saw a dark green 1970s Citroën D Super driving behind us, it felt like we were being chased by the ghost of my childhood.

My father bought a Citroën the first week we were in France. It was green like the leaves of the walnut trees for which Grenoble is known—in fact the French name for walnut is *noix de Grenoble*.

That Citroën took us on road trips Switzerland, to Pont du Gard, to Nîmes, and to Voiron, where the monks of the Carthusian order make the liquor “Chartreuse” (from which we get a name for a bright shade of green). That was the only car I ever recall that had a record player, rather than a tape deck.

One day, while my brother and I were at home, we watched from an apartment window as the Citroën was stolen from in front of the police station. We never saw that car again.

Driving in from the west, the highway curves around a mountain and the city is suddenly spread out before you. To my eyes, it was a patchwork of memory and dislocation. I could see my apartment, and the cable cars that cross the river two blocks from where I lived. But the city was so much bigger than I remembered. It sprawls down the valley to the south, and climbs up the surrounding mountains.

Amanda had booked us a room in the hotel Caserne de Bonne on Rue Marceau. It’s an area of the city that has undergone extensive reconstruction in the past five years. It was almost a relief to be in a part of the city that new, as there was nothing to haunt me. We had dinner at an American-style burger joint, and relaxed.

The next morning, we walked to the park in the centre of the old city. Beneath the graffiti and wear, I could see the bones of a place that had been such a central part of my youth. The concrete where my friend Bastien and I played marbles was cracked and worn. The trees I remembered weren’t there.

I often wondered what happened to Bastien after I returned to Canada, though I failed to keep in touch with him. The years after we returned to Canada were difficult years. Trouble at school. Difficult friendships. Turmoil with my grandmother, her second husband, and my aunt. I spent almost every day wishing we could be back in Grenoble. My life became defined by my yearning to return. Grenoble represented all that we had lost along the way.

From the park, Amanda and I retraced the path I would have taken to and from school, wandering the old streets until we found our way back to the apartment. There was a light on inside, and movement. I wondered who lived there now.

The neighbourhood has changed, and a lot of it for the better. About a block away, the older buildings were torn down to make way for an expanded museum. There’s now a light rail system that angles through the neighbourhood we used to go shopping. The river is much cleaner.

As we crossed the river, I couldn’t help but remember the refuse, the grime, and the brackish waters it had in the 1980s. On numerous occasions, my brother and I would watch carcasses of dead cows floating in it.

As Amanda and I crossed it, I was stunned that the water was clear enough for me to see the bottom of the river.

We quickly found the footpath that led to the top of the Bastille Fortress. It takes about two hours to climb to the top of the Bastille, and most tourists take the cable car that has been operating for almost 100 years, but I have never done so.

As Amanda and I started the climb, I realized I was older now than my father had been the last time he made the trek up to the top. Under the arcing oak branches above the path, I thought back to my grandmother doing the climb in light pink high heels. She would not stop climbing, despite the fact that she was clearly struggling physically and in pain from the shoes.

My grandmother was an indomitable force. Having served at Bletchley Park during the Second World War, she was stationed in Kohat, India when her husband died and left her alone with a one-year-old daughter.

ter in 1947. She refused to bend.

She was 60 when she visited us with my aunt, who in her mid-20s was quickly withdrawing from the world. The hike up to the fortress was one of the last times I remember spending time with my grandmother without the interaction being coloured by how intergenerational trauma was playing out through her actions. It was the last time I had a complete conversation with my aunt.

My aunt died in 2005. My grandmother in 2016.

Walking up the concrete steps near the top of the mountain, I could feel their memory weighing down my every step.

Amanda and I sat on a buttress for more than an hour, having a quiet snack and staring out across the valley and the city that I had loved.

She understood what I needed from that place, and shared the magic of Grenoble with me.

On our way out of town, we stopped at the Château de Vizille.

My family must have visited Vizille at least a dozen times when we lived in Grenoble. It's the largest royal palace in Southeast France, and is just a few kilometres from the city. There's a 320-acre park with fountains and ponds and verdant old trees. My family would feed the ducks, and sit under a tree and read my grandfather's old green hardcover copy of *The Hobbit*. (That copy of the *Hobbit*—which I'm told was first edition—was swept down the Isere River due to a deeply unfortunate accident.)

Neither castle nor park had changed in the decades that had passed. Families were there, enjoying the beauty of the area. A young mother and her child were feeding the ducks.



Ann Gry's magical place is far from the fields we know, but, given that we are publishing this issue of *Journey Planet* on the centennial of the birth of Ray Bradbury, one of the prophets of Mars, it is an exceedingly appropriate place to find magic. —SHS



Walking down Gogol Boulevard
—my favourite part of Moscow—
all the roads I've taken
in the shadows of the trees
or on the dappled pavements,
remembered and half-forgotten
in my mind—through heavy clouds—
I revoke familiar stars and planets...

IV

It is raining on Venus
and the sun is scarce
so I don't like it there
I would rather go to Mars
to plant an apple alley
in the name of Michurin
(like the street I live on—
honouring Ivan Vladimych,

the selectionner/geneticist).
I'd structure them in a gist
watch them maturing,
delighted with their
overnight blooming.

Whoever said
he who plants a tree
does not enjoy its shadow—
they never planted a tree
on this red barren planet.

[I have nurtured smaller trees,
yet they've not seen eternities...
How do you even qualify
as a bonsai?]

I will make Mars the Emain Ablach.
Maybe all along it was that
but we simply didn't know
and thought we'd better grow
potatoes in the land of Youth.

If you drink from the hidden spring
you might fall under the spell
of a blood magic ring;
Three times circle the well
for luck; travel for months
like Echtrae and Immram
heroes mingling with sidhe
who just might appear
to be aliens.

With Phobos and Deimos
Mars is a fearful father,
but instead of war
we'll bear gifts of the Magi
to fill to the brim *canalli* dry
demanding so much more.

Mars we all know
is a magical place
made up completely
of crimson dreams.
Distant but close
it shines in the night
but it's yet prohibited
for our folk to enter
the fairytale land.

we answer its calling

If we drifted in the matrix
it would still lure us out
of the constructed universe
towards the unknown.
We would overheat the hivemind
expanding the solar system
to reach the promised realm
which is obviously
dry and dusted
somewhere
on Mars.

Ann Gry is a poet/writer, Irish film festival director and lecturer from Moscow, Russia. Ann is currently working on several poetry and prose projects. You can find more of her writing and art at AnnGry.com.

When my oldest daughter was three years old, I came home from the American Booksellers Association conferences with a small globe from Rand-McNally. I explained to her what the globe represented and she looked at it and immediately commented that she wanted to go “to the blue place,” to Antarctica. She was very insistent and very persistent. It was a place I wanted to go to as well. Neither of us have made it yet (she has since grown up, hates the cold, and no longer wants to go to “the blue place”), but I have visited virtually through friends who have been. This article by the late Baron Dave Romm was first published in my fanzine *Argentus* in 2006. —SHS



Best Birthday Present *Ever, or, What I Did On My Winter Vacation*

Baron Dave Romm

So this penguin comes up to me, cocks his head quizzically and stares, silently pondering, “Are you food?”

I visited Antarctica from November 27 to December 7, 2005 as part of a Lindblad Expedition. Penguins weren't the only attraction. None of the animals behaved like they were in a zoo; none of them behaved like they were in the wild. They behaved like it was their home and we were trespassing.

Which we were. Not many humans get to The White Continent. It's estimated that around 10,000 people visited Antarctica in 2004...which may be too many. The place isn't designed for humans, and there's nothing to see except everything.

I went on a Lindblad Expedition with my mother: It was her 50th birthday present to me. Best birthday present ever! We were aboard a working National Geographic ship, and we had undersea camera people and scientists counting penguin rookeries and naturalists who had written books about the area and wildlife experts. At 50, I was below the average age of the expedition members, though there were several youngsters (including a few children).

We were part of a scientific expedition, but it was still a luxury cruise. The food was great: Despite all the exercise I gained weight. We were never more than two hours away from a bathroom, if necessary, and never out of sight of a crew member.

We flew from Miami to Santiago, Chile, spent less than 24 hours in Santiago, then down to Ushuaia, Argentina. Ushuaia bills itself as the “Southernmost City in the World,” and has a burgeoning tourist trade and a growing population. From there, we steamed down the Drake Passage (passing smaller villages in Chile) and onto the open sea. We had a good crossing, according to old hands, and rarely needed to hang on to the ropes strung through the middle of the Dining Room or Lounge areas. I gambled and didn't take any of the anti-motion sickness pills provided free, and didn't need them. But I knew better than to brag about it.

Once on board, mom and I settled in our cabin. One of the best parts about the trip was the people. The crew was very experienced, and lived up to the adage about Antarctica: First you go for the adventure, then you go for the money, then you go because you don't fit in anywhere else. I'd never been on a cruise before, and expected a bit of decadent ennui, but no. It's not like jaunting to Hawaii or the South of France to meet with the elite. If you go to Antarctica, you *want* to go to Antarctica. Out of 110 tourists, almost everyone went on almost all the landfalls and kayaking.

Antarctica is very specifically *not* a country. By the Antarctic Treaty of 1959 (and amended several times since), no country lays claim to the continent. Not successfully, anyway: Some countries have gone so far as to import pregnant women so their child would be born on Antarctica and the country could lay claim to it. Such attempts by Argentina and Chile have not persuaded the international community.

There are two ways to tell you're in Antarctica. The first is physical: When you cross the Antarctic Convergence, or Arctic Polar Front, the temperature of the water drops 2-3 degrees Celsius, the chemical composition of the water changes, and the sealife changes. For a strip about 40 kilometers wide, all the way around the continent, the Antarctic Circumpolar Current meets the warmer waters to the North. This is usually about 55° south latitude but moves around somewhat, and global warming is affecting the currents. Much sea life doesn't cross the Convergence. This is why whales and larger animals have to migrate south: for the krill blooms. This is also why the passing is so treacherous: The temperature differences create fog and hazardous weather.

Crossing the Antarctic Convergence, we saw various birds, of which I'm not an expert. I'm told they were albatross and kestrels, among others. The expedition crew lectured us on the biology of the area. The captain offered a magnum of champagne to the first person to spot a whale. I stayed up the first night to see the Southern Cross, but gave up on the whale about 2am. One was spotted about 3:15am, and subsequent sightings were cause for all of us to rush to the bow. The whales were usually in small pods of two or three the few times we encountered them. They were curious about with us, at a distance, then left when we weren't food. The sonar on the ship's bridge could spot krill “blooms,” when massive amounts of the krill, a small shrimp-like creature which is the whale's major food source, would come close to the surface. That's how we knew to look for whales: look for krill.

Individual krill are small, but they are one of the most important links in the world-wide food chain. It's estimated that the biomass of the krill population outweighs the biomass of human beings. A small change in krill density or breeding grounds due to climate change will have far reaching consequences for all life on the planet.

The second way to tell you're in Antarctica is actual land. I was in the area of the continent that looks like a tail known as Graham Land. The immediate islands in the area are part of the continent; outlying islands such as the Falklands and South Orkney Island are still in dispute by Britain, Argentina, and Chile. Tourists are sometimes caught in the middle of political disputes; Lindblad charters a plane from Santiago, Chile to Ushuaia, Argentina because this is not a reliable commercial route.

Antarctica is described by many superlatives: It's the highest, driest, coldest, loneliest, emptiest, and windiest continent. About twice the size of the US, not counting some of the surrounding islands, and is much larger in the Southern hemisphere's winter. Antarctica contains 70% of the world's fresh water and 90% of the world's ice. (The Greenland icecap contains 8% of the world's ice. That doesn't leave much for the rest of the world, no matter how much we have during a Minnesota winter.) While I was on the fringes and never ventured more than a hundred yards or so away from the sea, most of Antarctica is on the inner plateau, at an average of around 7,500 feet above sea level. Add the ice and the average height of Antarctica is 14,000 feet. This is three times higher than any other continent.

And after all this, it's a desert. Antarctica—the inner plateau which makes up most of the continent—averages less than 2 inches of precipitation a year. Less than the Sahara. The plateau gets an inch or two of snow *from the ice freezing out of the moisture in the atmosphere*. And that's most of where those extra 8,000 feet of altitude come from. Much Antarctic ice has been undisturbed for 20 million years. And now, large parts of it are melting.

Despite—or because of—the pristine purity of Antarctica, it's easy to get mad at all those lying bastards who rudely condemned global warming to us hippy treehuggers. If there's one issue you can state for sure that the conservatives were wrong and the liberals were right, it's global warming. Climate change is here. Close up, the effects are hard to notice; you have to be aware of more icebergs and changing migration patterns.

We saw some icebergs calving. Nothing major, and we were never in danger, but every now and then some ice would slide off some other ice. My eyes were always elsewhere at the critical moment of calving, but I could see the effects, as large chunks of ice and “bergy bits” were expanding in a circular pattern.



The most common question I get is: "Was it cold?" The answer is no. We never went up the plateau or were close to the pole. It was summer, and we never got as far south as the Antarctic Circle. We were in the peninsula and islands closest to South America. Not in the center; it was never much colder than freezing, and often much warmer. Heck, it was warmer in Antarctica than it was back home in Minneapolis.

The other major question I get is about the movie *The March of the Penguins*. The answer is yes. We saw the penguin cycle in action. It was early in the breeding season, so there were no chicks, but I tried very hard to take pictures of eggs. We did see the penguins going to and fro, and diving in the ocean.

The movie is about Emperor Penguins, who have to march 70 miles to get to their rookeries near the pole. We were much farther north, and saw Chinstrap, Gentoo, and Adelie penguins. I brought along my iPod and iTalk, and interviewed the birds...well, I captured some of their chirps. The different types of penguins are distinguishable by their sound, and individual voices are so unique that baby penguins can find their parents by sound. I'm not that good on either level. But I do have the soundfiles. I've included one or two in Shockwave Radio broadcasts, and will add more Antarctica soundfiles to my audio site and podcasts.

Penguins look awkward on land because their natural habitat is the water. In the water, they're beautiful, graceful, and *fast*. It was quite a sight to see penguins porpoising: a whole colony of penguins would briefly surface, arcing in the cold blue and white. They were having fun.

And so was I.



A lot of what makes a place magical for someone are the memories that the space encompasses. I've visited this next location numerous times and the pizza and breadsticks are good, but it doesn't hold the magic that it does for my wife, for whom the building has very specific connotations. But that just demonstrates that the magical feeling a place can give is very observer dependent, but not less real. —SHS



Joe Bologna's, Lexington, Kentucky
Elaine Silver

We moved to Lexington, Kentucky when I was less than one year old. My family joined the traditional Jewish congregation (choices were limited to classically Reform or Traditional). We were active members of the synagogue spending a lot of time in that building in downtown Lexington on Maxwell Street. I attended pre-school, Sunday school, and Hebrew school there in addition to regularly attending services. I chipped my front two teeth on the marble floor outside of the sanctuary in elementary school while we were playing Monster Tag after the service one night, while our parents chatted in the social hall. My dad was president of the synagogue and my mom was active in the sisterhood. It was an old building, but it was home.

Sometimes as a treat, before or after services, we would go out to dinner at the Italian restaurant down the street. As a kid, I'm not sure I realized there were different kinds of pizza (thin, thick, stuffed, deep dish, pan, etc.), but it was clear the pizza at Joe Bologna's in Lexington, Kentucky was really good. This isn't about good though, it's about magical. The oversized bread sticks at Joe Bologna's come in a dish full of garlic butter...these bread sticks are magical! But it's not just the garlic bread sticks that make "Joe B's" magical.

My Bat Mitzvah, an event that I spent many years prepping for, was in 1979. Although it was not the first or last time I had stood on the *bima* (dais) to lead services, it was the most momentous time for me. The sanctuary was built for Maxwell Street Presbyterian Church and they occupied the space for about 20 years before that congregation outgrew the space and sold it to Ohavay Zion Synagogue (OZS).

The sanctuary was beautiful. Large blurred stain glass windows allowed light in on the sides during the day without seeing the distractions of what existed outside and large chandeliers hung from the ceiling lighting the room at night. The *bima* at one end of the space was a centerpiece decorated with an eternal light and the arks that hold the Torahs. The high ceiling and wood pews all aimed toward the *bima* enhanced the spirituality and ambience that was created in that room.

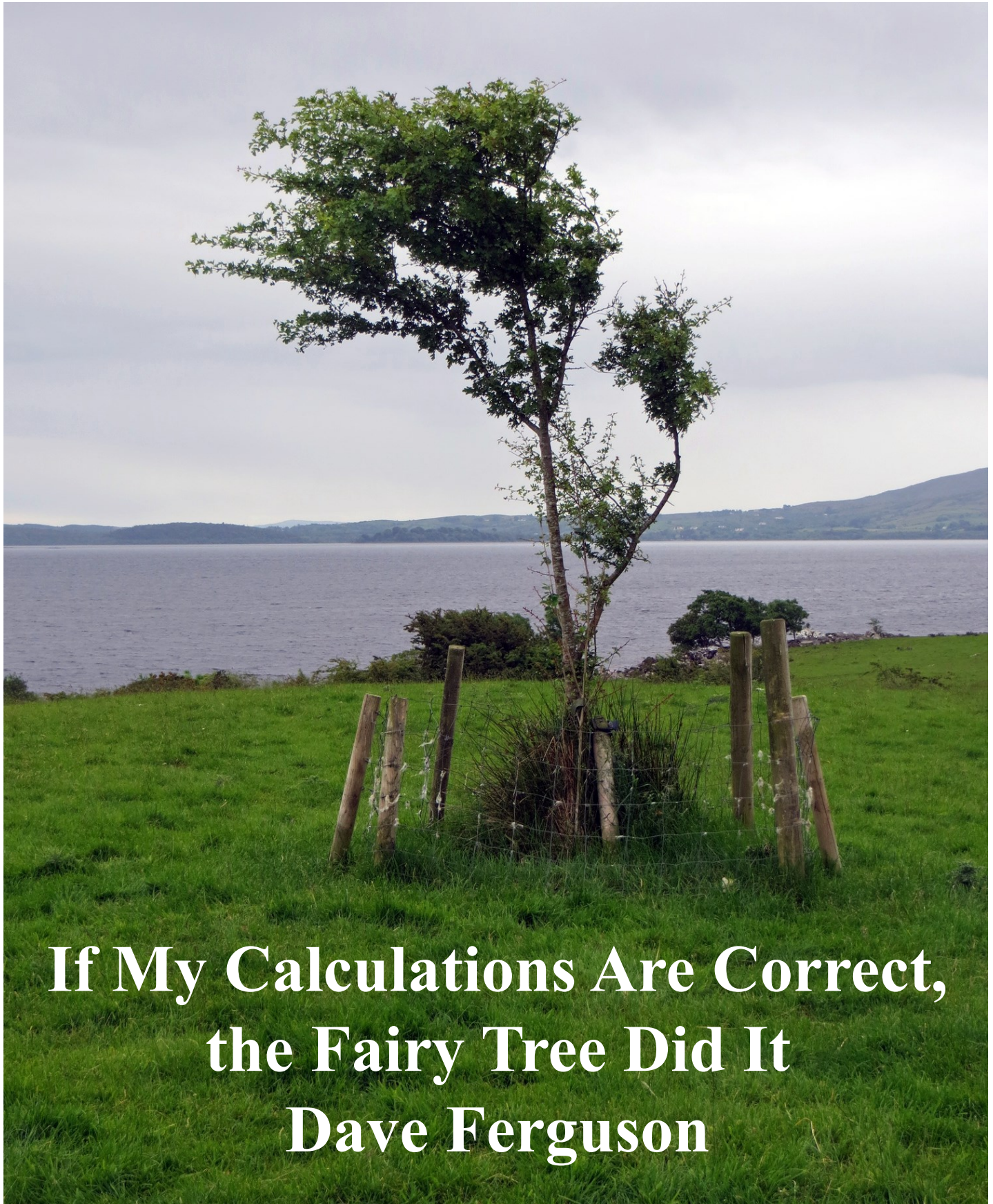
In the mid-80's while I was in college, OZS made the move out of downtown to be closer to where the Jews were living now. I love to visit the new congregation which is much closer to where my mother lives, and sit in the beautiful new sanctuary, but it doesn't hold my memories.

Shortly after OZS moved, the synagogue was remodeled and the space broken up (the social hall and school building were separated and turned into multiple businesses). The sanctuary became the new home of Joe B's! As part of the renovation, they cleaned up the stained glass windows and even built a loft to allow for additional seating. Even with those major changes, the one that makes me hit me hard every time, is seeing the *bima*. The *bima* where I stood leading prayers for my Bat Mitzvah service has been turned into a bar with a big screen TV.

If time allows, a visit to Lexington always includes a visit to Joe B's, most recently a couple weeks before the COVID-19 shutdown. Walking in the door is like magic. My childhood memories flow over, I'm surrounded by the years spent growing up in that synagogue. Being in that space, with the memories, and especially once the garlic breadsticks are delivered to the table... it's like magic.



Dave Ferguson talks about taking one of those most mundane modes of transportation, a bus, to see a fairy tree, which one must never disturb. I recall a bus journey of my own through the winding roads of Leicestershire so I could walk to a field that is steeped in history, and also contained a hawthorn that may or may not have ties to the fae, but which, according to Shakespeare, did have a link to the downfall of a powerful man. —SHS



**If My Calculations Are Correct,
the Fairy Tree Did It
Dave Ferguson**

G'm

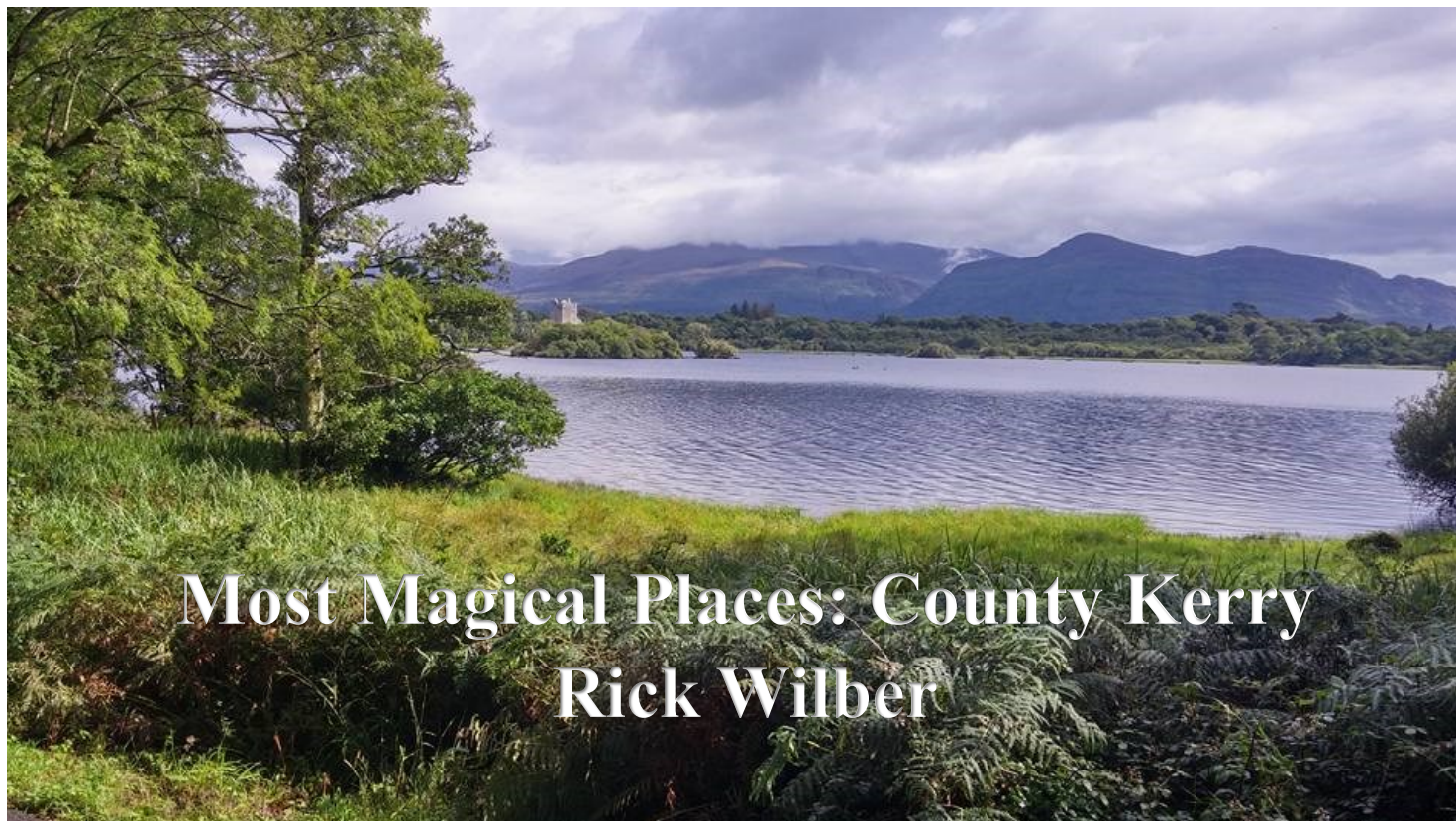
not an overly superstitious person. Sure I might look side eyes at a black cat, avoid walking under a ladder, spit when I see a magpie...maybe I am a superstitious guy. Well the one thing I am clear on is that I don't mess with fairy trees. I think it something ingrained from local tradition. A tradition that tells us that a lone hawthorn tree growing in the middle of a field is a fairy (or faerie) tree. This tree is a gateway or portal to the world of the faeries. Fairies are very protective of their portals—and legend or just local tradition has it, will severely punish those who damage, cut down or bulldoze their trees. (More on that last one later). The kind of story that might be thought of by some as fodder for tourists. Funny thing is: that is where my most recent source about the fairy agenda comes from.

I married a Vietnamese guy a couple of years ago and we did the non-traditional thing of having the honeymoon before the wedding (Vietnam—another country steeped in folklore). Anyway, we decided that we should have a little trip after the wedding. My husband wanted to see some of Ireland's natural beauty spots so we decided on a Galway stay with a trip to the Cliffs of Moher. Not being drivers ourselves, this meant a bus tour from Galway. (I think this is actually a better way of seeing the countryside as it takes away the stress of driving and you get to hear about some of local history and background information about some of sites). Our bus driver was quite a character and he kept us very entertained talking about the local spots. This included pointing out the odd tree in the middle of some farmer's field that was surrounded in wire. They didn't want cursed livestock. You may think that is wonderfully silly but I have heard stories of roads and motorways being diverted to avoid such trees. In 1999, Clare County Council and the National Roads Authority acquiesced to the wishes of locals, led by folklorist Eddie Lenihan, and agreed to re-route the Ennis by-pass away from a sacred hawthorn. The big news item from our bus tour though was the fairies' most famous victim: the DeLorean.

The DeLorean is most notable for appearing in the *Back to the Future* movie trilogy (first in 1985) where eccentric scientist Doc Brown transforms one into his time machine. However, the company that produced them was already in trouble long before the first movie was made. John DeLorean founded the DeLorean Motor Company in Detroit in 1975. As well as the usual investors, he sought out lucrative incentives from various government bodies to help pay for building his manufacturing facilities. He ended up taking an offer from the Industrial Development Board for Northern Ireland. The British government was keen to reduce unemployment in the North to help curb sectarian violence and reportedly covered \$120 million of the \$200 million start-up costs. A lack of demand, cost overruns, and unfavorable exchange rates to the dollar saw the company's downfall begin in 1981. The company had estimated its break-even point to be between 10,000 and 12,000 units, but sales were only around 6,000. Economics? Nope. The fairies! In order to facilitate the building of his manufacturing plant in Dunbarry, County Belfast, John DeLorean *himself*, rather spectacularly, bulldozed a lone hawthorn tree, against the warnings of local workmen. As our driver told it, a local elderly woman walked up to him at the factory opening and gave him a stark warning about his transgression.

John DeLorean was later targeted by the FBI in a sting operation in relation to drug trafficking. He was eventually acquitted so maybe the fairies thought destroying his business was enough punishment for destroying their door.

While sitting with Rick Wilber at a American Library Association Conference in Orlando several years ago, he looked at my computer and saw that my background displayed an English manor house, a place I attended school in England that has always felt like a place I belonged. Rick mentioned that he had taught at the school at one time. When I invited Rick to send me an article, I knew that it wouldn't be about the place we shared, but rather Ireland, a country I've never visited, but which has a grip on Rick's psyche. —SHS



I am easily awestruck, and I've been lucky enough in my pre-pandemic travels to encounter any number of places and things that brought me to a halt as I tried to fully absorb the moment. They're straight out of Maslow, these moments, these peak experiences that stick with you forever. The first time I walked up from the depths of Waverley Station in Edinburgh and saw that great castle looming over the city, the first sight of Pike's Peak in a memorable cross-country road-trip this flatland Midwesterner took in my twenties, my first visit to the Muir Woods north of the Golden Gate Bridge (and heck, even that first time crossing that magnificent bridge!), seeing the offshore Grand Cayman Wall with friend Joe Haldeman when we sat crowded up against the front viewing class of a small submersible and went down some eight-hundred feet to the other-worldly sea bottom.

All of these and many more are safely ensconced in my memory, there for me to conjure up at any time, like this moment as I write this little essay. But from a lifetime of travel for conferences and pleasure and work, the most magical for me, time after time, is Ireland, and especially County Kerry. The place calls to me (and to my wife, Robin, who shares my love for the place) with its history, its scenery, its people, its mists and moods and mountains and lakes and rugged Atlantic shoreline. All of this, from the magnificence of the Dingle coast along the Wild Atlantic Way to the more peaceful and, yes, magical places and history of Killarney and its surroundings, the lakes and mountains and history wonderful National Park, calls us back time after time. And I'm not even Irish.

Ancestry.com tells me I'm a lot more English and Scottish than Irish. The Wilber name seems to be more Yorkshire than County Kerry, with a good dose of Scots genes from my mother's side of the family. And I've been to Yorkshire and to Scotland and felt some connection to those places. I once crossed the

Pennine Hills into Yorkshire in an old open Morgan sports car. My friend and I were miserably cold and absolutely awestruck by the drive. As for Scotland, if you've been to Inverness, in particular, you've probably felt the magic as I have at Urquhart Castle on Loch Ness, or at Culloden Moor with its mass graves of the Highlanders who died in 1746 for Bonnie Prince Charlie's cause; or near there the moody standing stones of Clava, a Neolithic circle of standing stones.

But it's Ireland that calls to me the most, perhaps because of the deep roots of myth and storytelling in the whole country, and the ease with which any writer, or at least this one, can sink right into that sense of wonder when you pay these sites a visit. Bru na Boinne, north of Dublin, arguably offers the moodiest magic in all of Ireland, with its passage tombs, Newgrange and Knowth and Dowth, all of them built five millennia ago for reasons we're not quite sure of, for all our technology and science. At Newgrange, when pandemics don't get in the way you can walk a narrow passage deep inside the five-thousand-year-old structure to a small central room with three altars where something deeply magical takes place every winter solstice as the dawn sunlight travels up that passageway to shine on the central altar and announce, in its own way, the renewal of life in the new year. My wife Robin and I have taken student and writers groups there more than twenty times to walk that narrow passageway and to see a simulation of that light rising onto that altar and I



can tell you it doesn't take much imagination to feel some connection to those ancients who spent decades building that site just to see that moment once a year.

And then there's County Kerry, in the southwest of Ireland. It's our favorite part of Ireland. And Killarney, the sparkling tourist town that takes full advantage of the naturally moody and misty mountains and lakes that surround the town, is our favorite place to spend a week or two in County Kerry every year (but this one, sadly, as we stay home). Yes, Killarney is touristy, with bustling streets, plenty of shopping and restaurants, street performers, music in the pubs and the inevitable pints of Guinness at Hussey's (our favorite pub, where we meet our favorite locals each year) or the other pubs.

But there are several sites we see each year to remind us of the deep myth, the storytelling, the magic that is so much a part of the social fabric of Ireland. I'll tell you of just one of them.

Innisfallen Island in Lough Leane, which lies at the edge of Killarney. The island is reached by boat from the docks at Ross Castle, a 15th-century fortified tower built by the O'Donoghue clan and recently care-

fully renovated and filled with period furniture and guided tours. It's worth a look in its own right.

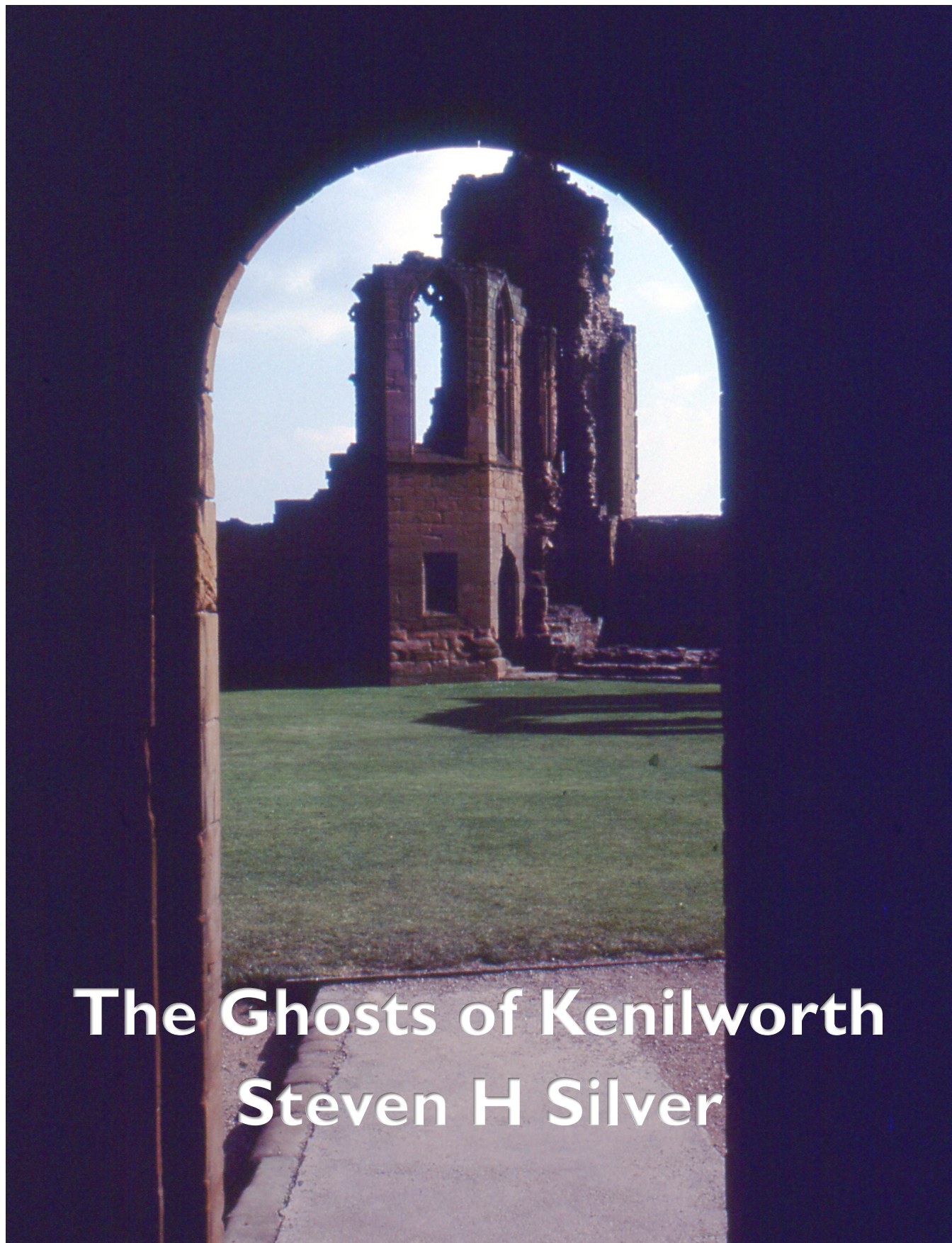
But it's Innisfallen that holds the magic. An abbey was built there in the 7th century and it became a seat of learning, where monks preserved knowledge and students came to be taught. It is one of those isolated places where Irish monks held onto the knowledge that was threatened by the so-called Dark Ages. Innisfallen was a seat of learning and the monks there wrote the famous Annals of Innisfallen, with more than two-thousand entries from the earliest days of the abbey until the late 15th century. The Annals of Innisfallen are now held in the Bodleian Library in Oxford. You can imagine how the Irish would like to have them back. The buildings on the island have long been in ruins, with most of the walls still standing but the roofs long gone. To walk into those ruins and think of those monks at work transcribing the history they'd found elsewhere and preserving it here is to be deeply moved by that history. In these times of our isolation it's worth considering theirs, off in what was then the middle of nowhere, at the very edge of the known world, on a small island in a large lake, working away by daylight or candlelight to laboriously transcribe histories they'd found or had brought to them. It makes writing a short story or a novel on a laptop in an air-conditioned workspace absolute child's play by comparison.

My favorite part of the island's magic, though, is a small Romanesque oratory that stands separate from the other buildings and closer to the lakeshore. There is a splendid Celtic cross in the middle of that oratory and an amazing archway across the top of the entrance with grotesque heads carved into the stone. A lot of effort went into building that oratory, and carving those heads, and it was a work of faith and devotion.

I try to visit this oratory every year, take pictures of the grotesque heads, wander through the ruins, and pretend, for an hour or two, that my life isn't so soft, that I'm not so distanced from nature and reality, that I'm closer to the magic than I really am. And then I climb back into the small boat that's been hired, and they crank up the outboard, and we putter on back to Ross Castle and thence to Killarney's hotels and night-



There isn't a whole lot to say about this article by way of introduction since it is my contribution and I pretty much cover it in the article itself. But it is the experience that led to me suggesting the theme of this issue. — SHS



The Ghosts of Kenilworth

Steven H Silver

G'm

a skeptic. Despite inviting people to write about their experiences with magic in the world, I don't believe in magic. I don't believe in UFOs. In fact, the things I don't believe in can rival the list John Lennon sings about in the song "God." I want empirical proof. However, as Douglas Adams writes, "'I refuse to prove I exist,' says God, 'for proof denies faith and without faith I am nothing.'" However, I have had one experience that made me think, "If ghosts exist, this is where they would be."

In 1984, my family went on a trip to the United Kingdom. One of the stops we made was to visit the ruins of Kenilworth Castle in Warwickshire on the same date that we visited Warwick Castle, two fortresses a little more than six miles away from each other as the car drives, but significantly distant in their presentation and feel.

The castle at Warwick has its roots in the reign of William the Conqueror. Two years after he invaded England, he ordered the fortress to be built on the site of a tenth century Anglo-Saxon burh. Twenty years later, the constable of the castle, Henry de Beaumont was made the first Earl of Warwick. The castle was built up and replaced with a more modern fortress in the twelfth century, during the reign of Henry II. The castle continued to grow throughout the centuries and achieved its greatest importance during the Wars of the Roses, when it was in the hands of Richard Neville, the 16th Earl of Warwick, known as the King-maker for his varying support of both Lancastrian and Yorkist claimants to the throne. With Neville's death in 1471, the castle passed to his son-in-law, George, Duke of Clarence, the brother of King Edward IV, and eventually to the crown, itself. By the late sixteenth century, the castle was worn down when it was given to John Dudley, a newly created Earl of Warwick.

Over the next few centuries, the fates of Warwick Castle waned, but the current castle is in quite good shape, having been built upon and renovated over the years. It is now a museum and has been run by the Tussauds Group since 1978, which has done even more renovations.

While I got a sense of history at Warwick Castle, I did not get a sense of the supernatural.

The earliest castle at Kenilworth, just down the road from Warwick, was constructed in the early twelfth century by Geoffrey de Clinton, Lord Chamberlain to King Henry I. Located so near to Warwick and the Earls of Warwick, Henry raised Clinton to the title of sheriff of Warwickshire in an attempt to balance Roger de Beaumont's power in the area. The castle was built up over the years and in the thirteenth century, Simon de Montfort, Earl of Leicester was granted the castle and used it as a base during the Second Barons' War, against the monarch who had given him the castle.

On June 21, 1266, Prince Edward laid siege to Kenilworth Castle, leading to a six month siege, one of the longest in English history. The success of the castle's defenses were used as a model for the various castles Edward eventually built throughout Wales during his reign. The siege ended on December 13, 1266 when the defenders accepted the Dictum of Kenilworth, which had been issued in October, which offered the rebel barons the opportunity to buy back their seized lands. Kenilworth Castle passed in and out of royal hands until 1553 it was given to John Dudley (the same Earl of Warwick above).

When Dudley was executed later in 1553 (he had married Lady Jane Grey, who attempted to usurp the throne from Mary Tudor and both were executed for their efforts), both Warwick and Kenilworth reverted to the crown, although Dudley's son, Robert, regained Kenilworth ten years later during the reign of Elizabeth I, who restored the castle as part of his failed attempt to woo the queen.

Kenilworth Castle was an important royalist stronghold during the early years of the English Civil War, while Warwick Castle was in parliamentary hands, but by 1643, both castles were in parliamentarian hands. In 1649 Parliament decided to slight Kenilworth Castle, draining the moat that had proven itself so effective in the Barons' War and destroying portions of the great tower, the battlements, and outer bailey. Following the Restoration, the castle was given to Edward Hyde, who used the lands as a farm.

Since the seventeenth century, Kenilworth has been an empty shell of a ruin, with occasional efforts to preserve what is there, but not restore it. In 1984, the year I visited the castle, it had just been turned over to English Heritage to manage.

Our tour at Warwick Castle had been crowded. It had been a tourist attraction for years, was readily accessible, and designed for crowds. Kenilworth was the opposite. English Heritage hadn't managed it long enough for it to be an established stop on tour routes, there weren't any real exhibits to offer the casual tourist any real value. It looked like broken down red walls surrounding a grassy commons.

And it was wonderful. I wandered away from the rest of my family to explore the castle on my own, moving up and down staircases as far as the masonry and warning signs would allow, entering chambers that may have once been opulent, but were now open to the elements, wandering through the ruins without anyone else in sight as my parents and siblings were in other parts of the ruins.

Every time I turned a corner or entered one of those chambers I felt a frisson that there would be someone else in that room or staircase or hallway. Even more, when I entered and found myself alone except for an occasional bird, I still had that feeling I wasn't alone.

As I wrote earlier, it was the only really time in my life that I felt that if ghosts existed, this is where they would hang out.

I've visited other ruins since then, sometimes with groups, sometimes as part of a class, and sometimes alone, but I've never had that feeling of ghosts in any of those visits. I can't figure out what it was about Kenilworth that gave me that feeling. I've been to similar ruins where I was even more isolated, the only person on the site when I was there, and I didn't get that feeling of ghosts. I've been to sites that, like Kenilworth, hadn't been turned completely into tourism sites, but there was no sign of the supernatural. Perhaps it was because Kenilworth was among the first ruins that I've visited that gave me that feeling. I haven't been back since 1984, so I don't know what upgrades English Heritage has made, nor if the castle would have the same impact on me. In any event, it doesn't really matter.

I don't believe in ghosts, but for a few moments nearly forty years ago, I found myself entertaining the idea that ghosts and magic might be able to leak through into our world.



I've never visited Mongolia, although I would like to one day. My interest in the country dates to my undergraduate days. I was registering for classes and discovered that one of the history classes I wanted to enroll in was full. I asked my then girlfriend (now wife) to pick a history class that met at a specific time and was a certain level. She gave me a course number and it was only after I registered for it that I discovered I would be taking "The History of Inner Asia before the Mongol Conquest." When she realized I had actually registered for the class, she was mortified and apologetic. The class was so awful that the following semester I took the next class, "The Mongol Conquest," although I never did enroll in the final class of the trilogy, "The History of Inner Asia after the Mongol Conquest." —SHS



Mongolia, Land of the Eternal Blue Sky: Sand, Steppe, and Shamans Alan Smale

Mongolia rocked my soul, and changed my life.

Firstly, because of its physical grandeur and sheer immensity. The impossible panoramas of the steppe, the barren desert vistas of the Gobi, the dark mysteries of the Siberian taiga forests that reach down into the country from the north.

Then: the historical resonances. Genghis Khan's Mongol army, nomads and conquerors forged in this demanding environment, sweeping across Asia and Europe eight hundred years ago. Bloody and brutal resonances, but powerful. And the Mongol influence wasn't entirely destructive. The Khan played a major role in reestablishing and stabilizing the Silk Road, and in laying down consistent legal codes over a wide area of Asia. For better or worse, the Mongols helped create the world we live in today.

Finally: the heart and character of modern-day Mongolia, a fascinating blend of past and present. During our visit Ulaanbaatar, its capital, was still struggling to escape from its Communist past. And beyond the big city, the Eternal Blue Sky. The Gobi grit. Gers, *ovoos*, *airag*, *khoomi*, prayer flags, deer stones and shaman trees, and those crazy, crazy horses.

Mongolia's potent blend of images and influences inspired and guided *Mongolian Book of the Dead*, one of my favorite short fiction pieces and my first sale to *Asimov's Science Fiction Magazine*. And Genghis Khan plays a major role as the ultimate antagonist in the third volume of my alternate history series, *Clash of Eagles* (Del Rey). It's safe to say that I wouldn't be on my current path as a writer if I hadn't spent two weeks touring Mongolia a dozen years ago.

So, let's jump in and unpack all that.

When I was a kid, "Outer Mongolia" was casual slang for "the furthest the hell away from anywhere that you could get without being launched into space." Honestly, that's still not far wrong.

Back then I was a big *Thunderbirds* fan. No, not the USAF air demonstration squadron. International Rescue! Rocket ships and action, in Supermarionation! In other words, a show with cutting-edge puppetry, innovative storylines, and a quirky sense of humor. I watched it on TV, and read the books. One book has Scott Tracy landing Thunderbird I in the Gobi Desert in Mongolia on the trail of a mind-bending meteorite. I had to stop reading to resolve that. I'd vaguely thought the Gobi was in the middle of Red China, but now discovered it spanned the border: part of it was in China, the rest in (Outer) Mongolia. But that outer part, Mongolia-the-country, was in the Soviet sphere of influence. Well, either way: this was the 1960s, in the height of the Cold War, and the Gobi was about as far behind the Iron Curtain as you could get. I might go to a lot of places in my life, but I knew for a fact that I'd never go *there*.

Flashforward to July 2008, and I'm standing in the chilly dark outside my *ger*—Mongolian for "yurt"—deep in the Gobi Desert, waiting for dawn to turn the landscape golden around me.

Mongolia is huge. Its position on the globe between Russia and China makes it look modest, but in fact it has a land area about a fifth that of the contiguous United States. If you were to overlay Mongolia on the US you could traumatize Americans from Salt Lake City to Cincinnati on an east-west line, and from Dallas to way north of Omaha. Or you could use it to cover Europe from the westernmost tip of France all the



way past Moldavia to Odessa on the Black Sea, and on a south-north line from Rome to Berlin.

And for all this space, Mongolia ranks 136th in the world in terms of population, just above Armenia, Jamaica, and Puerto Rico (see worldpopulationreview.com). In 2020 Mongolia has a mere 3.3 million people, almost a million and a half of whom reside in Ulaanbaatar.

Hence the wide open spaces. Mongolia has the lowest population density of any country in the world, with only around two people per square kilometer. And a massive 30% of its population is still nomadic or semi-nomadic, so the famous horse culture is still a big deal there.

Obviously, Mongolia was the logistical and spiritual center and originator of the Mongol Empire of the 13th century. The largest contiguous land empire in the history of the world, if you neglect the fact that most of this area wasn't centrally administered, or even administered at all beyond being plundered. After this Empire fractured, the Chinese Qing dynasty took over the Mongolian heartland for about three hundred years. Mongolia declared independence when the Qing collapsed in 1911, and was ruled over by the Bogd Khan until 1919, at which point China once again occupied the country until defeated by an alliance between the Mongolians and the Soviet Red Army in 1921. Mongolia then became the Mongolian People's Republic, a satellite state of the Soviet Union, until 1992, ruled over by the Mongolian People's Revolutionary Party (MPRP).

We arrived in Ulaanbaatar only sixteen years after the end of Mongolia's Soviet era, and its legacy was still very evident. Signs in shop windows were in three scripts: Mongolian, Cyrillic, and English. We heard Russian spoken occasionally. And our main non-quadruped forms of transportation were also Russian, but I'll get to those shortly.

Outside the Ulaanbaatar Hotel stood a four-meter-tall bronze statue of Lenin. It was discolored by age, and four years later in 2012 the Ulaanbaatar city council had it removed. Lenin was still revered by some older Mongolians for supporting their fight for independence from China, but since 30,000-40,000 Mongolians were killed under Soviet-style Communism, Lenin's legacy is considered...somewhat mixed.

The Ulaanbaatar Hotel itself was vintage 1959 and had a blocky, Soviet feel, with tall ceilings and large but poorly-furnished rooms. But the burned-out building next door made a bigger impression.

Two weeks before our trip, rioting broke out in Ulaanbaatar following allegations of fraud in their parliamentary elections. The unrest left five people dead and over three hundred injured, with over seven hundred arrests. The Central Cultural Palace building was wrecked, and the MPRP building set aflame—the same MPRP mentioned above, the former Communist Party. The military were brought in, a four-day state of emergency was declared, and the city was placed under curfew. By the time we arrived the furor had passed, the city had reopened, and the Mongolians we spoke to seemed distinctly embarrassed by the whole thing.

However, to our dark and possibly unhealthy delight, it turned out that this gutted MPRP building was immediately adjacent to our hotel, and our rooms looked out upon a blackened and charred shell. This seemed quite a thrilling way to begin our trip.

The Zaisan Memorial, on a hill to the south of Ulaanbaatar (hereafter UB), is a war memorial to the allied Mongolian and Soviet soldiers killed in World War II, a striking circular monument with an inner mural showing scenes of friendship between the two countries. Both the monument and the mural have that classic brutalist Soviet style, and gave us the chills.

As the relics of the Soviet era wane in significance, Genghis Khan is once again on the ascendant. Remembered in the West largely due to his rampage of slaughter and destruction across thousands of miles, he's effectively both the father and the patron saint of modern Mongolia. After you land at Chinggis Khaan International Airport and go into Ulaanbaatar to take a selfie with his massive golden statue in Sukhbaatar Square, you can head off for lunch at the Grand Khaan Irish Pub. His image is on the five highest-value banknotes, on buildings, in advertising, and plastered on a bewildering array of products. At least in UB, he's inescapable. His eyes watch you everywhere you go, and may drive you to sink a chaser of Chinggis Gold premium vodka after you've drained your Chinggis beer.

However you spell him, Genghis Khan is a hero rather than a villain to Mongolians, a key figure in their culture and national identity. By unifying the warring tribes and taking them on tour, Chinggis created Mongolia as a national force and masterminded its emergence onto the world stage. His control of the Silk



Road facilitated communications between Asia and Europe, to everyone's benefit. He gets the credit for introducing Mongolian script (*hudum Mongol bichig*) and Mongolia's first written legal code (the *Ikh Zasag*), based on equal protection under the law and ruthless punishments for corruption and bribery.

And hey, his proponents say: in terms of genocide and cruelty he wasn't really much worse than other kings and warlords of that era. They're not wrong, though the nations in the path of the Mongol Horde might be forgiven for seeing things rather differently.

Outside Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia is impossible to explore on your own. You need local help. Preferably, local help with a Purgan.



Purgans are decommissioned Russian military vans of the UAZ-452 series, built at the Ulyanovsk Automobile Plant in the 1960s and '70s, and tough as boots. Tougher. Rugged and durable, and you can fix them with a hammer. A Purgan has no frills, no comfort and no suspension, and you'll need to shout to have a conversation, but it gets you where you're going, over terrain where roads don't exist. (The name? Apparently "Purgan" doesn't really mean anything, but since the vehicle looks distinctly like a loaf of bread it got the name *bukhanka*, "loaf" in Russian, and that name morphed along the way.) Allegedly they can be driven through rivers, though we didn't test this. Some parts of the desert are flat and Purgan-ready. And then, there are the other parts. On a typical Purgan ride you'll be thrown out of your seat to slam your head into the roof a whole bunch of times. (Seat belts? Seriously? No.)

So, there we were: barreling through the Gobi Desert in a Purgan.

The Gobi Desert was so flat and vast that, just by existing within it, I felt utterly insignificant and really crucial at one and the same time.

It was a bleak, bone-dry expanse: a desert often not of sand but of hard, fine gravel. In this July, tiny sprouts of scrub grass poked their way out of the rough soil beneath, sparse enough to be almost invisible. In the distance the sun-baked plain shimmered with an almost mirage-like glint of green, the grass only evident at an angle, with massive foreshortening.

Never once did our driver pull out a map. Obviously, there were no signposts or mile markers... because there were no roads. Occasionally he seemed to study the ground, and then stare thoughtfully around him. As far as navigation went, that was about it.

The endless dry sea of the Gobi stretched away in all directions. The mountains in the distance changed almost imperceptibly. Accustomed to the rapid pace of twenty-first century life, the sheer lack of mental stimulation weighed on me after a while. My mind went on standby for long periods as the gravel plain bumped under the Purgan's wheels.

But after a while, patterns started to become evident. When we stopped for water, or to take in a sight, we'd notice the faint track of the vehicle we'd ridden in to get there, and see the even fainter tracks of the Purgans that had passed this way before. Robbed of our usual indicators, our sensitivity to the desert environment grew. We became aware of the rare and almost imperceptible trails, traces of thoroughfares that had previously escaped our notice. By the time we left, we marveled that we'd ever thought the Gobi was featureless.

The Gobi is a long way from UB. You could drive all that way in a Purgan, but it would be a slog. Instead we flew to Dalanzadgad, capital of Omnogovi aimag, the least populated *aimag* in the least populated country in the world. (*Aimag*: administrative district. Mongolia has 21.)

Once UB fell behind us we saw few signs of life from our thirty-year-old Fokker 50 turboprop plane. Just mountain rilles, green-covered. Full creeks, the air heavy with water vapor. No roads; merely a variety of tracks crisscrossing and heading in different directions. As the landscape changed to a dusty reddish and the tracks faded out we appeared to be flying over Mars, aside from the rare white dot of a *ger*, or the reflection from an occasional pool of water.

We landed on a disconcertingly small airstrip, piled into a Purgan, and set off. For our nights in the desert, our home was the Gobi Mirage camp. We were greeted by locals in traditional dress with bowls of milk, then ushered to the dining *ger*. Accommodations were rudimentary but perfect; anything grander than a wood-framed, felt-covered circular tent with a bed on each side, a table, and two stools would have seemed out of place. ("We do not have WiFi. Talk to each other. Pretend it's 1800." Seriously, if you ignored the bare electric light bulbs strung up on wires and powered by a car battery, that pretense wasn't difficult.)

The Gobi is desolate, but far from empty. Even on the excessively bumpy ride across the gravel desert from the airport we'd seen gazelles, camels and goats, gerbils and pikas, and the nearby Gurbansaikhan National Park held a variety of sights to explore in the days to come.

Yolyn Am, the Vulture's Mouth, was a canyon area with ibex and big-horned Argali sheep leaping across its walls, and a glacier in a narrow gorge. We reached it by means of a long camel ride led by herders





wearing the traditional Mongolian *deels* (caftans, tunics) with wide sleeves, held closed with green or yellow silk sashes.

My camel was stately but aloof. Hitting one of the beast's forelegs with a stick, my herder got it to kneel so he could install me on a blanket between its two humps. Then he hit it again. The camel stood with an alarming lurch, and now the ground was surprisingly far away. My trusty steed turned to regard me with disdain, reminding me that camels can spit bile quite a long way. This one merely sighed, farted, and plodded off on its way.

Later, a strong wind blew at the dunes of Moltzog Eb, sand abrading our faces as another set of camel nomads provided the beasts of burden for our second ride of the day, up and around those dunes.

Bayanzag, the Flaming Cliffs, red-tinted badlands, mark the largest features in a painted desert landscape where the 1920s naturalist and explorer Roy Chapman Andrews discovered the bones of many Cretaceous dinosaurs, including the first known nest of fossilized dinosaur eggs. We saw no dinosaur parents, just rocks, red sand, saxaul scrub trees, glaring sun, and emptiness. It was glorious.

On the way home across desert gravel rutted with dry streambeds, we stopped at a camel-breeder's *ger* where its owner answered our questions and offered us snuff. I was the only one to suck it up: it exploded in my nose and made me cough and my ears ring. Everybody laughed, but suddenly all the colors were brighter and I felt...really alert, really alive, and very, very far from civilization.

From the desert south, we traveled to the steppes and forests of the north. After a brief interlude back in UB we flew to another tiny airport at Murun and piled out into, god help us, a Purgan even more battered than our previous *ri*. Once we set off, it wasn't hard to figure out why. We bumped over terrain so pitted, striated, and rocky that my bones felt jolted out of their sockets after the first half hour, and my skull gained a few more bruises. Punishing country, even for a Purgan.

But what a terrain! This was true Mongolian steppe, grasslands that rolled right over the hills and undulations in their path. And as the hills grew more substantial, suddenly there were trees as well, but in a peculiar pattern: the south-facing slopes of the hills were grassy, while the north-facing slopes were forested.



The difference is apparently connected to soil dryness? Anyway, it was an oddly addictive landscape, and empty. We drove mile after mile without seeing a single ger.

It was an area as different from the Gobi as it could possibly be. And the further we drove, the thicker the tree coverage became.

The ride got even worse, if that were possible, and at a boat quay in the village of Khatgal we dragged our aching bones out of our Purgan and climbed aboard our next Russian conveyance: a beaten-up clunker of a trawler that took us north along the shoreline of Lake Khovsgol to Toilogt, a ger camp in the forests. The boat ride was much smoother than the Purgan, but came with its own disconcerting facts. (“Life jackets? Not worth it because the lake is so cold.” Oh. Okay.)

In the coming days we canoed on the clear waters of Khovsgol, took long rides on alarmingly spunky horses, and saw yaks being milked, but let’s talk about the shaman instead.

The first Mongolian shaman I met was dressed like a cowboy, and lived in a tent that looked a whole lot like a teepee.

Lake Khovsgol is up in the northwest of Mongolia near the Russian border, on the edge of the Siberian taiga forest. It’s a freshwater rift lake, the “younger sister” of the larger Lake Baikal, which is a little over a hundred miles away. The Dukha reindeer herders (*Tsaatan* in Mongolian) have lived a nomadic life in this region for millennia, though the closed borders now prevent them from returning to the parts of their ancestral homelands within the Tuvan Republic. They migrate with their herds, spending summer on the high steppe and winter in the sheltered forest, and the Dukha diet is based primarily on reindeer milk, very rich in butterfat. They live in birchbark *urts* (not a typo), conical tents that bear a very strong resemblance to Native American teepees.

Our shaman wore a white long-sleeved shirt, cloth pants, reindeer-skin boots, and a wide-brimmed hat. Not his traditional shaman-wear, he assured us—those clothes were not to be casually worn in the presence of *gataad* (outsiders). However, while we drank reindeer-milk tea and ate flatbread with cheese curds,



he showed us an array of ceremonial scarves, furs, and other items, and told us of his relationships with the *ezen*, spirits of the mountains, trees, and rivers. Although his words came to us via a translator, he seemed a solemn and profound man, who thought carefully and spoke with conviction. The *Tsaatan* shamanistic practices, he told us, were the oldest of any, and the most closely tied to the land. With the help of the spirits, he could change the weather. His people had domesticated reindeer even before horses, and felt a stronger affinity with them. He also spoke a great deal about *ovoos*.

By now we were familiar with *ovoos*. We'd seen our first near Ulaanbaatar, next to (and perhaps providing an antidote for) the Soviet Zaisan memorial. *Ovoos* are sacred cairns, stone heaps often found at the peaks of mountains or high passes, and serve as sites for the worship of Heaven, and for other traditional ceremonies. Some are huge and elaborate, draped with prayer flags and the blue ceremonial scarves (*khadag*) that represent the Eternal Blue Sky (*Munkh Khukh Tengriin Oriri*) and its sky spirit, Tengri/Tenger. But the more moving *ovoos* are those that are smaller, more personal, and come across by accident in the wild places. We found several along the way. Forming the center of one conical mound of rocks would be a tent-post wrapped in *khadag*. The Mongolians in our group would circle the *ovoo* reverently, three times clockwise, and then one would dedicate the site by flicking *airag*, fermented mares' milk, to the four cardinal points using a carved wooden spoon.



That night we learned a lot more from our guide about Mongolian folk religion, or Tenggerism: the animistic and shamanic religion practiced in these and surrounding areas since time immemorial. Named after its

greatest god, Tenger (Heaven), it's a broad-based system of belief that encompasses medicine, religion, a reverence for nature, and ancestor worship. He confirmed that these were the lands where shamanism first developed, and that the *Tsaatan* shaman's costumes were almost identical to those used by the Ojibwa people in what's now eastern Canada and the northern US Midwest. This is difficult for a *gataad* like me to research, and even after a great deal of reading, I'm still no expert. But as best I can determine from available materials, the Ojibwa, Chippewa, Ottawa, and Potawatomi peoples of North America had (and for all I know still have?) secret Grand Medicine Societies (*Midewiwin*). The sacred spirits and rituals, the clothing, and the bundles sometimes termed Medicine Bags of the North American peoples do, to my superficial gaze, seem similar to those in Mongolia. And many of these items have a long heritage: medicine bags five thousand years old have been discovered in North America.

If true, these similarities imply an enormously long—and very detail-specific—cultural continuity between the peoples of Asia and North America, over periods of millennia. However, I'm also well aware that while the term “shamanism” is used freely by some to describe ancient beliefs and activities on both continents, many North American native peoples and groups object strongly to the term being used in connection with their cultures.

All I can say is that I found this fascinating and moving, and wouldn't find it hard to believe that powerful threads of belief, custom, ritual, and the associated clothing and materials, could link the ancient peoples of Asia and North America.

Any downsides to Mongolia? Well, the food is terrib...Wait. Let me back up.

Nobody visits Mongolia for the fine dining. Since the steppes, mountains, deserts and forests contain almost no arable land, the Mongol nomads of old sustained themselves largely from their domestic animals, the Five Snouts: horses, sheep, goats, cows (or cattle, which includes yaks), and camels. (*Tavan hoshuu mal* = “five kinds of animals”, where *hoshuu* literally translates as “muzzle.” Horses and sheep are considered warm-muzzled, while cows, camels and goats are cold-muzzled.)

Which means that their cuisine is traditionally based around meat and dairy, with no vegetables to be seen. Cooked mutton and steamed dumplings (*buuz*) filled with meat are found everywhere, along with a sour yoghurt, and rock-hard lumps of dried cheese curds. You can find horse meat in grocery stores, but why would you want to? Drinks-wise you're looking at salted milk tea—my, so much tea—and *airag*, which is mare's milk traditionally fermented in a leather pouch. It smells bad and tastes sour, but there's no mistaking the low-pitch alcoholic buzz that permeates your skull once you manage to swallow a couple of glasses. Really, these days most Mongolians seem to drink vodka (that insidious Soviet influence again).

What about Mongolian barbecue, you ask? Well, Mongolian barbecue is neither: it's essentially a stir-fry invented by a Taiwanese chef and later comedian, Wu Zhaonan, that only got its Mongolian association because his original name, Beijing barbecue, was considered too politically sensitive in the 1950s. In 2008 there was only one such restaurant in all of Mongolia: BD's Mongolian Barbecue, founded 2006. Except that BD's is a US chain: its inaugurator, William “Billy” Downs III, was an alum of Michigan State University, and has dozens of restaurants in ten US states. The BD's in Ulaanbaatar is a nonprofit restaurant that Downs established to benefit youth programs there. It's popular with tourists, and produces good food and even better food theater, but the actual Mongolians we spoke to found it all a bit perplexing.

The final area we visited in Mongolia was the Terelj Valley, part of the Gorkhi-Terelj National Park east of UB, an area different yet again from those we'd seen previously: rolling meadows, well-watered and green, amid granite crags and ridges. We were there to hike and ride more scary horses, but also for Naadam, the Mongolian traditional festival—*eriin gurban naadam* means “the three games of men,” Mongolian wrestling, horse racing, and archery, though these days women and girls participate fully in the latter two. The National Naadam takes place in Ulaanbaatar. We'd chosen not to come then—who wants to visit Mongolia when it's at its most crowded?—but we had our own personal Naadam out in the countryside, with a spectacular mountain backdrop, a cloudless Eternal Blue Sky, and all the *airag* we could drink.

Fun as it was to see an archery exhibition featuring the national champion of Mongolia using a traditional recurve bow, many rounds of competitive wrestling by men in very tight shoulder vests and pants, and

a lightning-fast and heart-in-mouth horse race where all the riders were under ten years old and riding bare-back...let's jump ahead to the musical entertainment.

We'd already been entertained by several musical groups in Mongolia, including a private concert at the home of Tserendorj Tseyen, a traditional musician famed country-wide. Perhaps the most recognizable aspect of Mongolian music is *khoomi*, or throat singing, where the singer somehow manages to produce a fundamental tone and an overtone simultaneously. When done well it's a spooky, unearthly sound that's enough to make you believe in ancestral spirits then and there. But Mongolia also has several distinctive and ancient instruments. The *morin khuur*, or horsehead fiddle, is what you'd get if you made a small cello from scratch with a square body, and gave it just two strings: the "male" string, traditionally made with 130 hairs from a stallion's tail, and the "female" string, 100 hairs from a mare. There's a Mongolian-style guitar (*tovshuur*), a kind of jaw harp (*tumor khuur*), an end-blown flute with just three to five holes (*tsuur*), and several others, including various drums. The combination sounds hypnotic and highly original.

Then, throw in a shaman dance.



According to our guides, the clothing our shaman dancers wore was authentic and culturally accurate. Would this be true, for what was basically a private Nadaam show for a small group of *gataad*? Well, I don't know for sure, but it closely matched the descriptions we'd received in the *Tsaatan* north, and is also a close fit to what I've researched since coming home. Here's how I described a similar shaman dance in "Mongolian Book of the Dead:"

Chagatai pulled out a drum and began to lay down a low, throbbing pulse. The *morin khuur* was a small boxlike fiddle with just two strings of plaited horsehair, which Gerel-Huu played with its base to the ground like a cello, creating a moody violin sound with the soul of the steppe woven into it. Batjargal sang, his voice a wailing atonal cry. Minutes into the first song he somehow shifted registers and began to sing two notes at once, a bass grating moan from his throat superimposed with a high whistling overtone that seemed to trace the outline of the

distant mountains against the sky. It was *hoomei*, Mongolian throat-singing, and the combination was an alien yet hypnotic din that tugged at Tanner's heartstrings.

And then Dzaya flung wide the door of the *ger* and leaped out at them, a crowd of a woman with tassels awhirl, her face obscured behind a headdress fringed with black knotted cords. Bells and the skins of small animals hung from her shoulders, metal pendants and rounded mirror fragments from her waist.

Her banshee screeches sliced the air. Chagatai stepped up his drumming, speeding his pace to match the ascending fervor of the shaman's dance. The air grew thick with juniper smoke from the fire. Dzaya jumped higher, whirled ever faster.

Even though the demonstration dance in the Terej Valley took place in broad daylight on a very hot afternoon, cool shivers went up my spine as I watched it, and I got the same shivers retyping the words for this article. I couldn't help feeling that we were watching something deeply spiritual, deeply old, and very Mongolian, that might just have had its roots thousands of years ago in deep time, and formed the basis for other dances and other belief systems that then spread across the world.

And I've been thinking about that ever since.



Photo credits: Purgan long shot, with mountain backdrop; gnarly camel, and camels on dunes; landscapes of trees and hills; *Tsaatan* shaman collection; Terelj shaman dancers; sunset ger endpiece: Karen Smale. Remaining pictures are my paltry efforts.

Soundtrack for this article: *Blood Sacrifice Shaman*, *Cavalry in Thousands*, and *Ancient Call* by Tengger Cavalry (Chinese Mongolian folk metal, incorporating throat singing and traditional instruments); *The Gereg*, by The Hu (Mongolian heavy metal, again with *khoomi* and traditional instruments); *Melodies of Great Steppe Musical Instruments*, by Tserendorj Tseyen and Soyol-Erdene Tserendorj (father and son, traditional).

One of the really cool places in my home state are the mounds at Cahokia that are a remnant of the Mississippian culture that flourished a millennium ago. The largest, Monk's mound, can easily be seen from the top of the Gateway Arch in St. Louis, eight miles away. I've dragged my family to Cahokia enough times that they've informed me that they'll only visit St. Louis if I promise not to stop in Cahokia. I raise this because Cahokia and the Mississippian culture play a huge role in Alan Smale's novel *Clash of Eagles*. I will note that my daughters' favorite part of Cahokia is the sign next to Monk's mound announcing that sledding is not permitted. —SHS



“My most magical place is a museum.,Any Museum”

Jay Crasdan

Part of the quality of discovering magic in a place is the unshareable aspect of it. All of the authors in this issue describe places where magic has touched them (or they've touched magic), but although they may share photographs or describe their experiences, there is no way that we, as readers, can experience the lighting, the smells, or the sounds that contributed to their encounters with the borders between worlds. —SHS



The Ghosts of Canyon de Chelly

Roby James

Silence is always more complete in darkness. During the day, we are more aware of the small sounds of daily living—a distant bird singing, leaves tapping against their twigs, the sigh of the wind. In the dark, it seems you can hear your heart beating if you listen really hard, but if you stand still, there are times when you have to question your ability to hear at all.

Keith and I left the motel in Chinle in the total darkness of a moonless late night. We wanted to be at the White House Ruin when the sun rose over the rim of the canyon. The trail to White House is the only one in Canyon de Chelly that you can use without a Navajo guide. It's the trail the public uses in large numbers, only about two and a half miles long, with a manageable 600 foot drop to the canyon floor. We knew it got crowded early in the day, and we didn't want to be part of the crowds. We carried flashlights to light the trail as we descended. The lights made small circles of visible land in the otherwise deep black of the rest of the world.

We felt at home in a canyon. We'd done a number of trips through the Grand Canyon in the past, both on the river and on the trails, and though I'd done more than Keith, he had some Sioux blood in his background and was always easy with the land. We both knew that trails take vigilance, and we were alert to

the sound of our footfalls echoing back at us as we went closer to the canyon floor. In the moments we stopped to listen, we heard nothing except once, the whoosh of wings as a large bird, likely an owl, swooped close over our heads.

When we were about half a mile from the ruin when we began to see the dim outlines of the terrain around us and the scrub oak and juniper bushes near the trail. By the time we reached the canyon floor, we had shut off the flashlights and stowed them in our day packs. After the quarter-mile walk northward on the flat land, there was more than enough light to see the shapes of the ruin, both on our level and in the soaring cliff above that.

We had been told that there were going to be touristy booths selling Navajo jewelry at the end of the hike, but we were early enough so that no commercial activity was going on; the hawkers had not gotten up yet, and the stillness was still lying softly on everything. We stood unmoving, unspeaking, only memorizing the shadowy skeleton of what had been a living community long before.

We'd read the brochures and knew that half the lower ruins had been destroyed, while the upper ruin, where the ceremonial kivas were, was still largely intact, sheltered by the cliff above them. The cottonwoods around us looked like sentinels, leaves just at the cusp of fading into colors

As it grew lighter, I reached into my pack for my camera, but stopped as Keith asked, "Do you hear that?" The sound was gentle, at the edges of perception, like the shuffling of feet, and we smiled at one another. "Must be a critter waking up," I said. But even as I said it, we didn't believe it. Then we heard a very quiet, rhythmic noise.

"That's a drum," said Keith.

"Some of the Navajo have land down here," I said. But we knew from the brochures that those people lived on the rim. Still, they might have been staying on their land overnight, and the canyon walls could make sounds bounce around, even distant ones.

We listened a while longer, and then, together, as if we'd rehearsed or discussed it, we both turned and looked at the upper ruin. I had felt a presence, as if someone was watching us from one of the square windows in the tallest of the towers, the one closest to the stained sweep of the cliff above us. Of course, we saw nothing, but I could tell that Keith felt it, too. We didn't speak to one another or to the presence, just stood unmoving, unafraid, waiting to see if we were wanted for anything.

I don't know how long we stood there, and then Keith reached over and took my hand. It was full dawn now, and everything was clearly visible: trees, sandstone, the pebbles at our feet, the adobe in the pueblo walls. The morning breeze touched us, and the presence was gone as gently as it had come. It was as if a spell had been broken.

We sat on the ground, drank some water and ate some trail mix. As we finished, we heard voices and realized there were people on the trail, the first of the visitors to the site. We started back up. Our experience at the ruins was not to be shared with anyone visible, but it had been shared. And we knew it.

Having looked at specific places that elicited the sensation that magic exists in our world, Alethea Kontis now offers her hints for discovering magic in the most mundane places, every day, no matter where you are. Peter Pan may have said, “All it takes is faith and trust...oh! And something I forgot--Dust! Yep! Just a little bit of pixie dust,” but Alethea makes it clear that pixie dust may be much more prevalent than Peter expected. —SHS



In 2004, when I started my blog at aletheakontis.com, I worried that I wouldn't have enough interesting things to talk about on a daily basis. The Universe, accepting the challenge, turned me into a bona fide Story Magnet. I couldn't open my front door without stepping right into a story.

Not long after, Mom asked me what my guardian angel's name was. "Murphy," I answered flippantly. (Yes, that Murphy.) Since then, the Universe has both helped me and mocked me in equal measure. I have witnesses to some of these strange coincidences—my mother being one of them. I've written essays and even books based on my strange adventures. I smile and thank Murphy every single time.

If you follow these seven steps—whether you name your Guardian Imp of the Universe or not—guarantee you will find the magic in your life as well!

1.) Open Your Eyes

It really is this simple. There's a cardinal in the bush behind your house and a new bloom on the flower by your front door. There's a letter in your mailbox, a shooting star, a spring in your step you didn't have yesterday. The cloud overhead looks like your high school mascot, and you just had a strange dream about that last night. It's Mother's Day, and you miss your grandmother, and the barista at Starbucks asks if you'd like a cookie sample. They're madeleines. Your grandmother's name was Madeleine.

Yes, this last one actually happened to me.

Keep yourself open to messages from the Universe. Pretend you're Siri, always listening for the next command (or the adbot listening to your next online order). You can't expect things to happen—that's not the way the algorithm works. You have to look for the things that are already there for you. Pay attention. I promise, you'll find them.

2.) Make Decisions

I've told many a teenager, "You want the secret to being popular? Here it is: Make a decision."

People hate making decisions. They will give up massive amounts of power in a heartbeat just so they don't have to decide where to go for lunch or what to eat for dinner or what to do when Aunt Sally arrives.

If magic is power and power is what you're after, try being the one who makes decisions. Guess what happens? You always get to eat at your favorite restaurant. You always go where you want to go and do what you want to do. The more decisions you make, the more people are happy to defer to you, because it makes their lives easier. (*Beware: This is a powerful move, and I'm talking crazy powerful. Be careful with this one and please use it responsibly.*)

3.) Say What You Want

It really is incredible how many people in my life expect me to be able to read their minds. (I often laugh and say, "I'm psychic, but I'm not that psychic.") It's like that old relationship trope, where the girl wants candy and flowers but she can't tell her boyfriend she wants them, he just has to know. Ugh.

Know what? I wanted flowers for my birthday once, so I told someone about it. When flowers showed up at my office on my birthday, I was super happy and bragged about them to all my friends. Which is exactly the same outcome that would have happened if I'd received the flowers without my saying anything. Only this way, my chances of actually getting flowers was multiplied by a million. The difference in those two scenarios? *Me.*

So...get over yourself. Take your nonsense out of the equation. You want something? *use your words.* (There's a reason your parents told you "please" was a magic word, y'all.) You'll find the results amazing.

4.) Thank the Unexpected

Then there was the time I didn't want my college boyfriend to waste his money buying me flowers for Valentine's Day, and I told him so. After cleaning the auditoriums that night (we both worked at the local movie theatre), he brought me a beautiful bouquet. I frowned. He told me somebody left it in one of the seats. I smiled then. Because the Universe had apparently decided I deserved to have some flowers anyway.

When magic starts to find you, smile about it. Give thanks, silently or out loud. I do believe that, somehow, the Universe is listening to that, too. I mean, aren't *you* more willing to do stuff for people who say "thank you"?

5.) Make Little Signs

When I was a teen I had a SARK poster in my bedroom entitled "How to Be an Artist." It included the line, "Make little signs that say 'YES!' and post them all over your house."

When I worked in a cubicle, I covered the wall over my phone with tons of tiny sticky notes that contained inspiring quotes from my friends, family, song lyrics, and sometimes even myself. They made me feel less alone. When I moved to my house in Florida, I wrote a few important things on little pieces of paper and taped them to my mirror. Things like, "Forgive Yourself Today" and "You Are Not Cursed" went up right away, followed by uplifting quotes that friends sent me in emails, or left in comments on social media.

The first year Tempest Bradford and Monica Valentinelli visited me at the same time, post-its started appearing all over my house. The one on my wall calendar said, "Remember On This Day: Tempest Loves You." Monica left one on my sliding glass door that says, "Good Morning, Princess! We need your next story. Please write it. Love, Everyone." It's still there. When Erica Cameron and Cait Greer came to visit, they added to the collection. Every time I see one it makes me smile. And then I leave it exactly where it is, so I can find it again later.

Magic is in you, but it's also in other people. Listen to them. Embrace, honor, and remember their words. They are a magic spell of love.

6.) Smile Therapy

"Smile Therapy" is a real thing of the fake-it-till-you make it variety, and I'm here to tell you that it actually works. Just try it. It feels silly at first, but after a while you'll start to notice the times in your day when you naturally smile. When this happens, take note of exactly what it was that made you smile.

Things that make me smile all the time: Rainbows cast by prisms in a window. The tiny soap bubbles that pop out when you squeeze the dishwashing liquid. Flowers (cultivated and wild). Butterflies (real and window clings). Candles. Twinkle lights. Vintage movie posters. Gargoyles. Glitter.

Maybe your thing is *Doctor Who* bedsheets, or gemstones, or fake spiders. You're bound to know a few off the top of your head, but there are many more that will surprise you. Make a list. Then try to put something that makes you smile in every room of your house. Even the bathroom! (For instance, taping little signs with quotes from friends on your mirror...) I even have a tiny prism hanging from the rearview mirror of my car. Every time I drive on a sunny day, I'm surrounded by rainbows.

7.) Take the Smiles Online

No one says magic can't exist in the Wild Wild World Wide Web. Go back through all the previous steps and apply them to your virtual life as well. Are you subscribed to newsletters that fill your inbox with joy? Are you following people who make you smile every day? Have you tried going outside your bubble to discover something new today? Or maybe it's *you* who needs to bring some joy to the world today. Share the love! Share the magic! Bring it on!

Magic is everywhere, folks. It's a song on the radio. It's the smell of magnolias on the wind. It's the connecting flight you caught because everything that happened before it was late, including you. It's the car accident you didn't have or the hole you didn't step in. There is so much magic in this world, big and small. The Universe is talking to you; you just need to listen. The best part is, you don't have to look very hard to find it! But you do have to look. And if you can't find any after reading the list, I reserve the right to say, "Are you looking with my eyes



Enditorials

As this August came by it was amazing to see those Facebook memories, all the things I have done and been part of every year in August, mostly the Worldcon, which I have been privileged to work and travel to over the years, and of course, meeting friends, contributors, and readers and the honour with which we have received being as we have been, Nominees and Finalists of the Hugo Awards.

The Worldcon has been a magical place, not magical like my back step supping on coffee and day-dreaming as rain falls on a coldish day, or magical like getting married during Covid 19 despite so many challenges, or weirdly eerily magical like Paddington station devoid of people at 8.30am on a Monday morning, a different magic, a gathering of the fannish clann. The magic was truly felt by many, who wished to connect virtually, using zoom, and discord to at least engage, listen and see friends. In this year of terrible tragedy and historical occurrences it is not surprising people wanted that, and that it was the best we could do. A real challenge to manage.

I am incredibly grateful to all our contributors, all our co-editors, and readers for helping make Journey Planet what it is. While very grateful indeed to all those involved with CoNZeland for their hard work. It is amazing how much effort, fan expense and time goes into helping make the Hugo's work. I was very pleased to see so many worthy winners, to see great works recognised or moments remembered, such as Jeannette Ng's award, and hear so many eloquent and forthright acceptance speeches. I am pleased for the winners.

Proud that I contributed as a member to helping make that happen, in such a small way, and grateful to all the volunteers who did and do their best. Every year Worldcon's make errors, that is the wibbly wobbly wonder that is Worldcon, it doesn't belong to anyone, it is not leveraged or tied to a given place or city, it is the amazing magical moving convention, that has a fully democratic decision making process on where it goes, you, or I, can decide to run a Worldcon in our neighbourhood, and then try to do that. And that is powerful. I can't run San Diego Comic Con, or Dragon Con or Boskone in Dublin, but I sure as hell can bring a Worldcon there. That is magical.

And you can bring the Worldcon to your City. I do not wish to trivialise how hard, the years of work are, but believe me, you can do it. OK, you need a venue. Some fans. Incredible determination, but you can.

Each new Worldcon, thousands of miles apart at times, have new and different teams, sure, some people will work multiple Worldcon committees and that can be beneficial, but also a problem as they spread too thin, and so one does not always have the build up of experience and knowledge that one might like, and Chairs rarely chair twice. Of course there are some outliers like Vinent Docherty that one can aspire to. So the journey is truly existential, figuring out so much as you go, and conjuring up solutions that need to work, even if drawn from a creative imagination. And so there are failures, and even though one may not be involved, one can always be sorry, regretful, if not truly understanding the impact of any failure, for those directly impacted or who feel, well just let down. There is the balance. How to be sorry for mistakes from the sidelines, but without blaming the volunteers, and of course some people really struggle with this when they are the focal point or pinch point of the error, when they are encountering the fail, that impacts them and quite rightly. Kindness and forgiveness are gracious.

Journey Planet will now have a copy-editor designated for every issue. We have had some amazing copy editors over the years, but we see now that we want to empower those who write brilliantly, but technically maybe are a bit imperfect, like myself, and wish to ensure things are right. Occasionally they will be a co-editor, sometimes not. The *Journey Planet* co-editors from 2019 were fully listed as individuals in this years Hugo Awards, and we appreciate that. It is one of the wonderful things about the Hugo's and Worldcon, we recognise the fans, fan writers, fan artists (Sorry Ian and Sara - was hoping for you both). The Hugo Administrators and the WSFS Division were kind to ensure we were listed correctly, as co-editors, and as I wrote in a *Banana Wings* some time ago, I feel that recognising fans and their effort is vital to the community.

Likewise, just like copyeditors, we often need to recognise when we make mistakes ourselves, I was a bit impressed when the CoNZealand souvenir book showed up before the con, and as myself and fellow finalists, dressed up and joined one another for a group zoom, it never dawned on me that we had made an error. In the Souvenir book we were meant to have a piece about JP and Chris was to send in 4 covers and a piece but it languished in the draft box and we failed to check it went (*note: SORRY!!! My bad! CJG*). Of course I apologised to our fellow co-editors, Alissa, Ann, Chuck, John and Steven, who all kindly let it slide. We have made mistakes, and we make mistakes, errors, or in the heat of a moment, we get excited and get something wrong, and we have been grateful for the generosity of both understanding and forgiveness, not that we do not strive then to ensure we do not make the same error again.

We can do more, and we will. Pen and Ink will be ready real soon, but as you read this, our Future of Policing Issue is starting to come together. 2019 saw Ann Gry being the first Russian fan that we know of being a Hugo Finalist, I am proud that we have many diverse voices, co-editing or contributing, but we welcome more, and you can always write for us, or pitch an issue idea and our email is journeyplanet@gmail.com

Finally, once again on behalf of Chris, our thanks to co-editors, contributors, voters and readers, we greatly appreciate your support and are humbled and honoured to have been Hugo Finalists and to the volunteers who strive and do their best to work hard and make things brilliant, I express our thanks and appreciation.

During these times, we wish you the very best
James



In 2018, as I was MCing the Masquerade at Con Jose II: The Quickening, there were issues. Technical issues, one of which knocked out my mic, so the places that the Masq was being beamed to couldn't hear anything, even if they could see what I was doing. I vamped the very best that I could, but I had run out of schtick, and thus took the route that every flailing comic goes for—

-The Truth.

I told a story, a true story it turns out, about the very exact spot where I was standing at that moment.

You see, back in the before times, that location had been the site of the San Jose Public Library's Main Branch. The old building was a Mid-Century Modern masterpiece in my Brutalist-loving eyes. My mother, and my Uncle, both worked there while I was a kid, and I spent a lot of time at the library. Usually for school work, but also for much much more.

The location of the Main Stage for the WorldCon, where the Masq and the Hugo ceremonies were held, was on the second floor, exactly where the old stacks would have been. In fact, it was exactly where the Science Fiction and Fantasy stacks would have been. It was there I dug into *Dangerous Visions*, into Sturgeon, into Farmer and Vonnegut and Hesse and LeGuin and on and on and on. It was there that I learned to become a reader, and not just a reader, but a lover of books, and not just stories.

And there I was, decades later, standing on a stage, talking to a massive room full of people, telling them this story without amplification, as a way to pass the time.

That place was magic, even if the reason for the magic was gone daddy gone.

We all have magical places in our lives; some physical, and some in our heads, our eyes, our hearts, our fiction-induced imaginings. There's magic in story; there's magic in experience. We all can think of places we've been or made to feel like we've been, that give us feelings, immortal and unforgettable, and we are taken back to them. I'm so glad that we get to share these stories with y'all.

We all take these trips, and it feels like this is the right place to talk about them because we are, after all, *Journey Planet*

We lost another Hugo, but also, **WE WERE NOMINATED FOR ANOTHER HUGO!!!!!!!!!!**

Last year was a good one, and I'm so glad we got to bring on so many wonderful people. John Coxon, Ann Gry, Chuck Serface, Steven H Silver, and Alissa McKersie, all came along on this wild ride. Apparently Ann Gry was the first Russian woman ever nominated, which is amazing! I can't say thank you enough to everyone who helped edit (Go Team Journey Planet!) and who wrote for us, did art for us, and those of you who found it to vote for us. You're amazing, and I'm so glad you're along for the journey. We'll keep 'em coming, and I can not wait to show you what we've been working on.

We want your stories, or comments on the stuff you've read – journeyplanet@gmail.com is the place to send them. We've also got an Instagram (@journeyplanet) and we'll be looking at new things in the future. One thing is for sure; we're a long way from being done!

Chris

PS— 8/22/2020: I write this as I'm evacuated from my home in Boulder Creek. We're OK, staying in what used to be the Bay Area's Fan Central Station, the San Jose DoubleTree. We don't know about our house, currently under threat from the CZU August Lightning Complex Fire in the Santa Cruz Mountains. So many of you have reached out and I wanted to say thank you! I'll have more to say about this experience in the future, but this is the first zine I've completed in the San Jose DoubleTree Hotel since 2009!

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