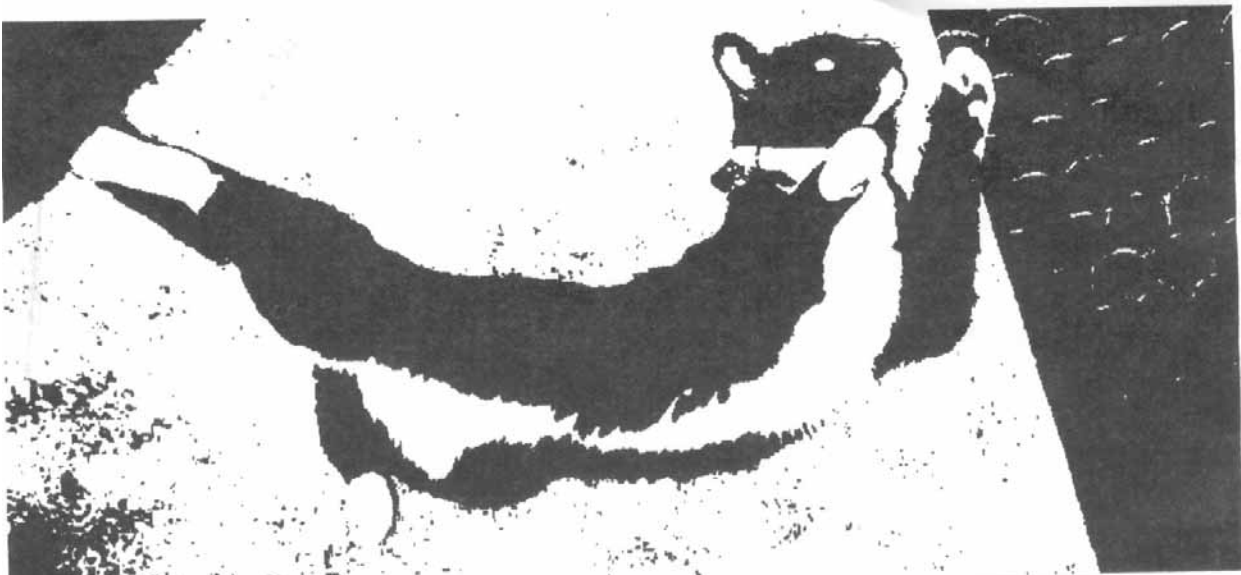


Visions of Paradise

120: The Passing Scene



Visions of Paradise

#120: *the Passing Scene*

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Artwork

Trinlay Khadro cover, p. 9

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Out of the Depths

I have been reading science fiction most of my life, beginning as soon as I was old enough to walk to the library and take out the *Oz* books and something called **The Light At the End of the Tunnel**, whose author I do not recall and cannot find anywhere online.

But before science fiction there were comic books, which I began reading at the age of 9 with an anthology comic called *Tales of the Unexpected*. It consisted of punchy little science fiction stories, sort of a cross between *The Outer Limits* and *The Twilight Zone*. They were great stuff, but a few years later DC Comics underwent their superhero revival with the return of Green Lantern, Flash, Justice League of America, and endless others, so I naturally drifted in that direction as the anthology comics gradually faded away.

A few science fiction comics continued, such as *Mystery in Space* and Jim Starlin's fabulous *Dreadstar*, but they were much fewer than previously. Recently DC Comics has begun issuing a series of 500+ page books with the overall title *Showcase Presents* containing collections of stories mostly from the 1960s, and a few of them have sf themes. Today I received *Adam Strange*—which was a science fiction comic about a character influenced by Edgar Rice Burrough's John Carter of Mars—and *Challengers of the Unknown*, which was equally parts non-super-heroes and sf. I have also bought—but not yet received—*House of Mystery*, which is more horror than sf, but featuring many of DC Comics' best writers and artists. I am also considering buying *The Great Disaster*, featuring post-apocalyptic stories.

You can take the comic books away from the boy, but you can never truly take the boy away from the comics!

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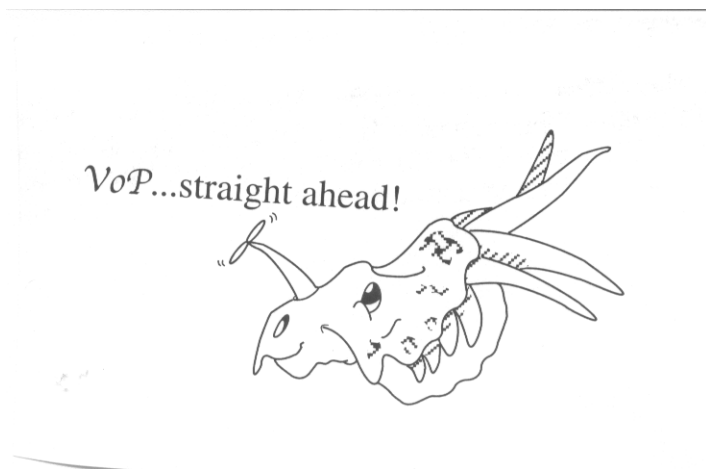
Here are some random thoughts in alphabetical order:

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|---|--|
| A | I was definitely a child of the New Wave, favoring writers such as Roger Zelazny, Robert Silverberg and Samuel R. Delany when I was in my most impressionable reading years. That was one reason I tended not to read much fiction by more traditional writers such as Poul Anderson . In some ways that was a good thing, since now that I realize how well-rounded a writer he actually was, I still have several dozen books of his unread which I can enjoy for the first time. |
| B | My brother recently bought a 55+ house near the Jersey shore in Barnegat , one of those towns which are becoming overrun with seniors. I like their house, and the community seems fine with a lot of options for retirees, but I have one complaint: the houses are so close together a person could literally stand between two neighboring houses and touch both of them simultaneously! That's a bit too close for me. |

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| C | <p>Clifford D. Simak was my first favorite science fiction writer. I discovered him in the pages of <i>Worlds of IF</i>, January 1963, the first sf prozine I ever read, and again in <i>Galaxy</i>, February 1963, my second prozine. A few months later came the serialization <i>Here Gather The Stars</i> (a much more evocative name than its book title <i>Way Station</i>) and from then on I have loved Simak's fiction.</p> |
| D | <p>>From a very young age, I wanted to be a professional writer, and I never really had any other specific career interests. I selected math as my college major because the two areas I enjoyed most were english and history, but neither seemed particularly practical except to teach, and I wanted to be a writer. I went for a Masters Degree for lack of anything better to do, and I was accepted into a doctoral program before I realized that devoting my life to researching mathematics would seriously interfere with writing. So I thought I would try teaching math for a few years while I was writing, and somehow I turned out to be a considerably better math teacher (I think...) than I was a writer.</p> |
| E | <p>My entire family is now working in Parsippany, which is twenty-five miles away directly in the flow of rush hour traffic. Jean and I work at Parsippany High School, Andy works at Embassy Suites, and Mark works at Prudential. Maybe we should consider selling our house and moving closer to work.</p> |
| F | <p>While many purists claim that <u>all</u> rock and roll descended from blues, there is a large aspect of r&r that evolved from folk music, both the American version (Dylan, Simon & Garfunkel, Loving Spoonful) and the British version (Fairport Convention, Richard Thompson, Strawbs). Folk-rock is distinctive in that there is usually nothing bluesy about it.</p> |
| G | <p>I love reading comic books, but except for <i>Green Lantern</i>, most of my favorites are not super-hero comics but sf or fantasy: Jim Starlin's <i>Dreadstar</i> and Mike Grell's <i>Warlord</i> were two particular favorites, as was Roy Thomas' <i>Conan</i> (and, no, I do not particularly like reading sword and sorcery books also).</p> |
| H | <p>I have never considered myself one of Heinlein's children. I did not discover science fiction through his juveniles, nor did I read them until I was well into my second decade as a science fiction fan. By the time I discovered Heinlein, I was taking all his supposed innovations for granted since they were pretty much being used by all the writers who were indeed his children. Instead I got to read him first at his post-1960 worst.</p> |
| I | <p>In the 1960s <i>Galaxy Magazine</i> dominated the Hugo Awards with more nominations than any other magazine. Yet it never won a single <i>Best Magazine</i> award while its adventure-oriented stablemate Worlds of IF won three consecutive awards. I never understood why that happened until recently reading a memorial of Robert Heinlein by Frederik Pohl. He mentioned that <i>If</i> won those three awards following the publication of three Heinlein serials in 5 years, and immediately after the publication of his last acclaimed novel <i>The Moon is a Harsh Mistress</i>. Heinlein's children are a loyal family.</p> |
| J | <p>John Cleese is my choice for the funniest person in the world. Some scenes from <i>Monty Python's Traveling Circus</i> or <i>The Holy Grail</i> or <i>Fawlty Towers</i> still make me laugh no matter how many times I have seen them.</p> |

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|---|---|
| K | My pantheon of favorite rock performs include famous artists such as the Beatles and Pink Floyd, and more obscure artists such as Chris de Burgh, Richard Thompson and the Strawbs, but my very favorite artists are still the Kinks , who were sadly underrated for twenty-five years. |
| L | I was in college during the Vietnam War protests and the Summer of Love , but I was so immersed in science fiction that I hardly even noticed either of them taking place. In the aftermath of Kent State, protests took place on the Seton Hall campus a short distance away from where I was taking classes; I finally realized what was happening when final exams were cancelled my senior year. |
| M | I have serious doubts about mankind when many of the most renowned historical persons are a bunch of mass murderers. After all, doesn't most of the fame of Alexander the Great, Julius Caesar, Charlemagne and Napoleon Bonaparte come from their success at invading countries and slaughtering millions of people? Should these people really be held up as icons of "greatness"? And isn't it revealing that while European conquerors are considered great heroes, Asian conquerors such as Attila the Hun and Genghis Khan, whose careers were very similar, are considered savages? |
| N | Isn't it ironic that I have devoted a large portion of my life to reading and writing about science fiction, yet any small recognition I might have outside Parsippany is due to a nonfiction book about the Nanking massacre? |
| O | Ocean City , MD, is a very nice place to visit, but were I to retire in that vicinity, I would probably select neighboring Fenwick Island, DE, which is much less touristy, has virtually deserted beach access, and resides in a state with incredibly-low taxes. |
| P | Most polls for the past few decades have shown that one of the leading concerns of most Americans is high taxes. Does this mean those people are not worried about the country's infrastructure falling apart, millions of people dying from lack of medical coverage, or the fact that America has more crime and poverty than many non-Third World countries? Apparently so, since handling all of those problems would require paying more taxes, which is precisely the opposite of what most Americans want. |
| Q | I have been a member of the SF book club on-and-off for 40 years, and I have enjoyed their omnibus editions and original anthologies. I do not understand the politics behind their forcing Ellen Asher and Andrew Wheeler out, but I will reserve judgment on new editor Rome Quezada until he has had some time to prove himself. |
| R | I am not a big fan of genre mysteries, but Steven Saylor's <i>The Judgment of Caesar</i> was a wonderful book, primarily a good historical novel with the mystery as an incidental aspect of it. It convinced me to buy Saylor's acclaimed new novel about ancient Rome called, fittingly, <i>Roma</i> . |
| S | There is only one reason why teaching is a wonderful profession: students . True there are obnoxious students, ill-tempered students, and arrogant students who consider disruption their right as Americans. But other students take learning seriously, and consider teachers their mentors and role models. Those are the students who make up for all the other ills of the profession. |

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| T | Tales of the Unexpected was the first comic book I ever read, and its sfnal stories were wonderful for somebody on the cusp of teenagedom. In a way, I regret that I gave up anthology comics for the more popular super-hero comics, such as <i>Green Lantern</i> and <i>Justice League of America</i> . |
| U | For me, the most important part of a story is often the universe in which it is set, and the background history of that universe. At times I can be so enthralled by the background that I lose interest in the story itself. |
| V | My new Jeep Compass came with a year of Sirius Radio pre-paid, so I have been listening to better music in the car than I have heard since the heyday of WNEW-FM in the 1970s. My favorite station is Sirius 16, the Vault , which plays classic rock but not vastly-overplayed hits, dipping into album tracks instead. In a single day I heard The Kinks' "Celluloid Heroes," the Moody Blues' "The Actor," and Jethro Tull's "Thick as a Brick." I realize Sirius is vastly overpriced, but an entire year of music like this might convince me to change my mind about that. |
| W | When I turn on the computer every morning, the first thing I do is check the latest science fiction news. <i>Locus Online</i> is my homepage, but the website I enjoy reading the most is <i>SF Signal</i> , a highly-recommended site for up-to-the-minute sf news. |
| X | I always thought that a large part of Marvel Comics' success came from mimicking DC Comics' characters (Superman begat Spiderman; Batman begat Captain America; Legion of Super-Heroes begat X-Men), so their success was based far less on the originality of their heroes and villains, but on the human characteristics given to them. |
| Y | I am not a country-western fan by any stretch of the imagination, but I <u>really</u> like the music of Dwight Yoakim , who is as much rockabilly and rock and roll as he is country. Unfortunately, straddling genres that way is usually career suicide. |
| Z | I am a huge fan of progressive rock, whose vast majority of artists are non-American, mostly British (Yes, ELP, Pink Floyd, King Crimson) or European (The Flower Kings whom I discovered through Frank Denton). Frank Zappa is probably the outstanding American artist, although the new Decemberists are certainly a very promising band. |



The Passing Scene

June 2007

Saturday, June 2: Jean's knee is swollen from her arthroscopic surgery and it still hurts a lot, but it has not stopped her from getting around downstairs very slowly either on her crutches or sitting on her wheeled-office chair and rolling around the kitchen and rec room. Mark is very helpful, since he is home while waiting to start his new job in July.

I have been having problems with my magazine subscriptions. The past three issues of **Locus** have not arrived. They sent me a replacement issue for April, and today I requested a replacement for May. I have never received the April/June issue of **Archaeology** either, nor the first issue of my subscription to **Athena Review**. I wonder if the problem is the magazines themselves or—more likely—the post office. It's weird.

Wednesday, June 6: Monday night was the annual *Target Teach* celebration, which was nice, but afterwards the assistant superintendent insisted we teachers accompany her to a nearby restaurant/bar for our own celebration. Chris and I left at 10:00pm, so I went into school late at 8:30am Tuesday morning, a rare treat for me. Normally I arrive at 6:50am but do not start teaching until 9:42am, after which I teach 5 of the next 6 periods. Tuesday night I was out again until 9:30pm because of a scholarship dinner for Bei. Fortunately, I know his mother very well so I spent most of the evening chatting with her.

Yesterday Jean had an appointment with her surgeon who seemed pleased with the progress of her knee. He told her to go for physical therapy for 2-4 weeks. Already she feels improvement in her knee's range of motion, which is a good sign.

I got a letter in the mail today from my doctor who is retiring and transferring all his patients to a nearby group. The only reason I travel 20 miles is because of him, so Jean and I will try to find a local doctor to replace him.

Thursday, June 14: Another busy week, typical for the end of the school year. Tuesday was our *Target Teach* grading session followed by *Senior Awards Night*. I gave 4 students *Excellence in Mathematics* certificates and the **Math Student of the Year** went to the first non-Asian winner in the 12 years since I created that award in 1995 when Fei Fei was its first winner.

Last night Alan & Denise wanted to go to the Chinese Buffet, so Jean, Mark and I went with them. Jean had a little trouble manipulating her plate with crutches, but Mark and I helped her. She is so much like Ceil in not letting anything hold her down, which is a good incentive for me as we get older (assuming, of course, we both live that long!).

I am in the midst of giving exams, which keeps me busy grading. I am trying very hard to grade one exam each day, which would leave me 2 exams to finish Monday, the last day. Senior failures are due at 1:00pm Monday—and, of course, my 10:00am-noon exam is a senior class with several potential failures for the year. It is incredibly short-sighted to expect an exam to be graded in one hour. The administration claims they need to know the results that soon because

of the first graduation practice that afternoon, but I see no reason why the failures cannot practice once before pulling non-graduates out of practice the next morning.

Andy had his first 9-week evaluation, and his boss told him he got the highest first evaluation he had ever given. I'm not surprised, since Andy tries very hard to make a good impression, plus he is bright and hard-working on his jobs.

Saturday, June 15: Yesterday was the annual Math Department barbecue at Adrienne's house. Adrienne is 28 years old in her 6th year teaching, but I still treat her like a daughter, which is ironic since her mom visited school last week and we talked about Adrienne like she is still a kid. At the barbecue we played croquet and bocci, and after everybody else left Adrienne and I played pool awhile while waiting for her husband to come home.

Since we never went out for dinner for either Jean or Mark's birthdays, today Jean chose IHOP for brunch. This evening we went to our neighbor Pat's 60th birthday party, which was a dinner party. I was fortunate enough to finish grading my Honors Algebra 2 and AP Calculus exams today, giving me a free day tomorrow on Father's Day.

Tuesday, June 19: Yesterday was the last day of final exams, so I spent the afternoon, night, and morning finishing my final grades. I finished everything by 9:00am this morning in time to submit them along with the rest of the department's grades. Now I can basically relax. At noon we had the annual Sunshine Club luncheon, after which I drove home and worked on the Math Dept room schedule for next year. Unfortunately, the head of guidance took 2 rooms away from me next year, so I have 14 classes with no rooms available for them. This is a major problem.

Saturday, June 23: *free at last!!!!!!!!!!!!* Summer vacation sneaked up on me very quickly again this year, which is almost always true. I guess that's an indication how much I really enjoy teaching and am not ready to retire yet. Some wonderful students spent time in the math lab this year (faithful daily regulars were Alyssa, Ruchi, and Priscilla, plus I had frequent visits from Foram and Dhara too), plus there is a core group of teachers with whom I am friendly, and my classes were enjoyable as well. Plus—and this is probably my ego talking—I enjoy being a valuable person at school. Most people seem to respect me, the administration seeks me out frequently for advice, and many teachers and students solicit my guidance. It is a very rewarding job.

I got several gifts from students, mostly Barnes & Noble gift cards, since my students know how much I love to read. Anjana gave me a wonderful letter about how I was her first friend when she arrived at the school in the middle of her sophomore year and did not know anybody for several months. Yang came back after her first year at Cornell and gave me a gift card. Miheer gave me an Indian trinket which his grandmother brought from India. Isaac told me how influential I was on him. All of this made me feel very good, assuring me that I must be doing something right. I also had visits from the ever-faithful Rabbit and Gabriela, who comes back every year and always promises to keep in touch via email, but who, like me, is lax doing so.

Monday, June 25: Andy has been working overtime recently, so his paycheck was higher for the last two-week period than it was previously. He had to deal with a fairly obnoxious couple

this weekend, but he must have done a good job since they gave him a \$20 tip. Andy definitely has the personality to deal with the public, much moreso than I have ever had.

Wednesday, June 27: When Jean went to the physical therapist Monday, a painful cyst-like piece of cartilage beside her knee “popped out,” as it has done a few times since her knee operation. The therapist wrote a report for the surgeon whom Jean is seeing Thursday. Hopefully the surgeon can deal with it soon enough so Jean will be recovered this fall when she starts teaching all day. Her knee was a major problem teaching last winter.

I spent yesterday organizing things that I have been putting off for several months, including my mother’s papers, and my annual computer file backup cds. I also burnt copies of all my old floppy disks, which I have finally thrown away. I have so many backup copies of every file—both on flash drives and cds—that I am prepared for any emergency, including the house burning down since I keep one backup flash drive in our safe deposit box and one set of cds at school.

Friday, June 29: Yesterday Fei Fei and I spent the afternoon editing the Tibet book. Then she, Jean, Mark and I ate chicken cacciatore which I had made in the crockpot before she arrived. Jean made brownies, her favorite dessert, all wrapped around several hours of conversation.

Saturday, June 30: *Some end-of-the-month thoughts:*

- Mark went with Drew today looking at cars; he is leaning toward buying a Honda Accord;
- I definitely need to lower my expectations for I want to accomplish this summer, since already I am beginning to feel a bit stressed rather than relaxed as I should be;
- I am reading Dan Simmons’ two-book series **Ilium / Olympos** which is very interesting; I should examine his plotting closely since that is the hardest part of my own fiction writing;
- I made pea soup in the crock pot this morning and plan to make pizza this afternoon, using the leftover chicken cacciatore sauce which I made Thursday; *yummy*



July 2007

Monday, July 2: Jean was working with the two planters on the front of the shed when she noticed baby wrens in both of them. There are also baby wrens in two birdhouses in the backyard. Apparently wrens have selected our property as their breeding grounds this year.

Wednesday, July 4: Last night Mark, Kate, Jean and I went to the fireworks over Lake Hopatcong. We paid \$5 to sit at the state park which gave us a good view of the fireworks. Today Mark and Kate drove to Pennsylvania to visit her family who are camping for the week.

Friday, July 6: Mark bought a new Honda Accord, using some of the money he saved during college. He has one more full week home, then he starts working at Prudential.

Sunday, July 8: Yesterday morning, Jean, Mark and I dug up the septic so it can be pumped. After lunch Jean, Janel and I went to the pool, Andy went to work early at 1pm, and Mark went out with Kate. Afterwards Jean and I met Alan & Denise for dinner at the Chinese Buffet. Jean and I had planned to go someplace different for our anniversary, but they love the buffet, plus we enjoy their company. Afterwards the four of us drove an hour to Bethlehem, PA, to watch more fireworks. Along with thousands of people we sat on the sidewalks of the city overlooking the river where the view was fabulous. They were the best fireworks I have seen since we sat high in the bleachers of Shea Stadium 15 years ago.

Tuesday, July 10: Yesterday I got the new issue of **Locus** in the mail, the first issue in 4 months that I did not have to request a replacement issue for. The fact that I went to the Post Office two weeks ago and complained about not receiving 3 consecutive issues might have something to do with it. I am still convinced somebody in the post office was stealing the issues. The probability of 3 consecutive issues getting lost in the mail is way too small.

Summer vacation is now 1/4th over and I am enjoying it so far. My typical day consists of getting up at 7:30am, eating breakfast, taking a 30 minute walk, then spending the morning writing/editing on the computer. After lunch I either go to the YMCA (3 days per week) or do household chores, after which I usually read for an hour. Then I cook dinner, after which I spend another few hours on the computer before playing guitar, doing my abdomen/back exercises, then reading for another 2 hours. All in all, this is a rather ideal life.

Friday, July 13: I golfed with my brothers fairly regularly in the early 1990s, stopping about 1995. Now I want to get a bit more active than just taking a 30 minute walk in the morning and going to the YMCA three times a week. While golfing is not the most strenuous activity, consisting mostly of walking, it is also a social activity which is something I rarely do either. So last night I played 9 holes with David and his friend Mark. When I finished, my back was stiff and my right knee was throbbing, but I think the cure for that is to golf more rather than less. I did enjoy myself in spite of the fact that I was very rusty and only had a handful of decent shots.

The last time Jean and I ate at Olive Garden we were very unhappy with the service, so Jean complained to the manager. In return we got a \$30.00 gift certificate which we used tonight.

Monday, July 16: Mark started his job at Prudential today, although he spent the day at their regional headquarters in Newark for orientation, including 3 meals. Too bad he does not get free food every day; any job would be better with food, haha. Andy gets a free dinner at the Embassy Suites restaurant every evening.

Jean has a second surgery scheduled for Thursday to remove the loose cartilage from her knee. This should be considerably easier than the first surgery, with a much shorter recovery time as well, because he will not be cutting, drilling or probing.

I have a huge pile of unread magazines on my desk. I subscribe to too many magazines (although I'm sure the number pales compared to some readers): 12 **Locus** per year, 6 **Archaeology**, 4 **Historical Novels Review**, 2 **Solander**, 12 **Smithsonian**, and 4 **Athena Review**. While I do not intend to renew the last 2 magazines, that will still leave me 2 magazines per month plus a huge pile of unread back issues. Having limited reading time ten months of the year means I cannot keep up with both magazines and books, a dilemma (and another reason why retirement is looking better and better ☺).

Wednesday, July 18: We had a violent thunderstorm at 5:00am so Misty sat in the bathroom crying. It is ironic that as a predator she has virtually ridden the entire neighborhood of voles, moles, bunnies and chipmunks and even some birds, but she is terrified of thunder and lightning. Tiger, however, is an incompetent predator who has no qualms staying out in hurricanes.

Thursday, July 19: Jean and I arrived at Dover General Hospital at 6:30am for her second arthroscopic knee surgery at 7:40am. The surgeon told both of us afterwards that he definitely found the loose piece of cartilage, showing us a picture of it measuring 1cm on a ruler. The recovery from this surgery should be a lot shorter than the 4 weeks last time. Jean only needs to be on crutches until she has no swelling and is not limping, maybe as short as a few days. The real concern is whether she will have any problems standing and teaching all day, but since we still have nearly 8 weeks until teaching begins, we are optimistic everything will work out.

Saturday, July 21: Mark and Kate went down the shore for a graduation party, while Jean and I went to Rick & Barb's house. While there we discussed Barb's recent year in a foot brace because of an achilles tendon problem (which was never really solved, just eased), Rick's prostate cancer surgery, and Jean's knee surgery. I think I was the only healthy one sitting there! This type of conversation is sure evidence of aging, and I mentioned that we are likely closer in age to dying than when we taught together in the 1970s. Jean, Rick and I all left Paul VI in 1979, 28 years ago, and we are now in our late 50s. That spooked Rick as much as it spooked me, but we are both glass-half-full type personalities.

Our new air mattress arrived yesterday, a much-improved version of the one we have used for 20 years. Ironically I woke up this morning with a half-dozen bites on my back, which I assume is due to some critter Misty brought into the bed with her. I've had these before, and they always have gone away in a few days, but right now I am itchy.

I tried to go to the YMCA and PHS yesterday morning, but my car had trouble starting when I left the chiropractor. I drove it directly to our repair shop but Matt has not been able to find the problem with the electrical system plaguing the car since the accident last winter. Previously it had been an annoyance, but when the car becomes unreliable it is a serious problem. Jean suggested that if Matt cannot find the problem, we take the car to the dealer. If they cannot find it, then I should buy a new car. My car is a 1998 model with 145,000 miles that cost us \$17,000, so we got our money's worth from it. Still that's an expense I don't want to make.

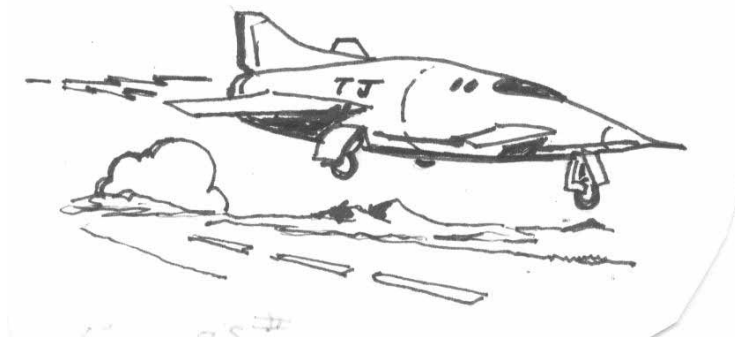
Tuesday, July 24: Our neighbors' dog Rusty had an operation to remove a 10.5 pound tumor from his stomach which had grown around his testicle which the veterinarian could never find. Hopefully this will improve his health since he has been not eating well for awhile.

Thursday, July 26: Andy's 24th birthday! We went to dinner Tuesday to celebrate. We had planned to go to Enzo's Pizzeria, but Alan & Denise again asked if we wanted to go to the Chinese Buffet, and Andy agreed immediately, so we all celebrated his birthday there. Sometimes it seems as if we go to that buffet more than all other restaurants combined.

I went with Jean to the pool yesterday and spent a few hours reading **Roma Eterna**, which I am enjoying. Jean and I have been spring-cleaning the house room-by-room, so this afternoon I shampooed the rugs in our bedroom and hallway.

Sunday, July 29: Yesterday we went to Barnegat for a barbecue at Stephen & Doreen's new house in a 55+ community. Jean and I both liked the house, which is certainly large enough for two people. Stephen told me there are 8 different models, which is good since their house does not use its floor space most efficiently. It has a room with enough wall space for a half-dozen bookcases, which would be a necessity for me to buy a house. However, the houses are so close together there would be hardly any land for Jean to landscape and garden, which is important to her. Jean does like the fact that the community is 20 minutes from Long Beach Island, since the boys would visit us frequently there, but we would not buy in that particular community because of the crowding. Jean would rather retire to central-southern New Jersey than Pennsylvania or Delaware, although these are just speculations now. Anywhere a bit cheaper and less congested than northern NJ within driving distance to Andy and Mark would be fine.

Tuesday, July 31: Matt has had my car nearly two weeks ago but he is still been unable to fix the electrical problem. 5 of those days it has been at a dealership which has been supposedly re-programing the computer. *sigh* ☹



August 2007

Thursday, Aug 2: Yesterday Jean traded in my car and bought a new Jeep Compass Sport for \$21,000. Strangely, it is cheaper in the long run for us to finance the car than to pay it off using money we have invested, so that is what we did. It is a very nice car compared to my last one which had absolutely no features at all (no power windows or mirror, no cd player, no electronic key, etc.) This car has all those features plus a sunroof and one-year pre-paid Sirius radio. It is a bit smaller, but not much, still very comfortable with ample storage space.

I went golfing again this evening with David and his friend Mark. I was terrible, not surprising since I am so out of practice, plus it was 90+ degrees all day. I need to practice more if I am going to try to golf on a semi-regular basis, but I have not made that decision yet.

Saturday, Aug 4: Jean and I went to the YMCA this afternoon, then directly to the pool. Afterwards we went to Fuddruckers for supper, a change of pace from always eating healthy. ☺

Monday, Aug 6: Today is my 59th birthday. I say this every year, but where the heck has the time flown? Only yesterday Andy and Mark were babies and Jean and I were living in Hopatcong. Now they are both college graduates working fulltime and we are planning our retirement.

I got two nice birthday presents from Andy and Mark. Andy gave me a cd carrying case for the car, and Mark ordered Richard Thompson's *Front Parlour Ballads* from Amazon.com. Five former students sent me birthday wishes online: Marwa, Rabbit, Antonio, Anjana and Fei Fei, so that was nice of them.

Yesterday we had a huge group at the pool: Jean, Mark, Kate, Andy, Alan, Denise and me. We had a good time there, then we came home for a dinner of chili, garlic bread and salad.

Our neighbors are on vacation in Virginia this week, but we have no dog-watching duties since Rusty is staying at the animal hospital. His stitches were removed after his surgery to remove the tumor, but he has not been eating well and even ran a fever one day. The vet offered to keep him in her hospital at no charge for the entire week. Jean and I did not want to be responsible for a sick dog, especially if something happened to him overnight while we were not there. So we only have to feed their cat Taffy twice a day until they return.

Thursday, Aug 10: I've been spending most of this week editing the Tibet book. Three times each day I have been visiting Taffy. She is much less fussy than Misty and Tiger whom we have spoiled a bit by always catering to their wishes. Taffy eats whatever I give her. Afterwards, I let her out on the porch for a few hours. She is 18 years old and rarely wanders far from the porch, so I never have any problem finding her when I go back.

Saturday, Aug 11: Jean and I were discussing what we should do when we retire in two-to-three years. We have considered part-time jobs, but I do not really want to work in a bookstore, nor do either of us particularly want to teach at Centenary College (since CCM is a public college and not possible because of our pensions). What we would like to do—and probably should do—is find some volunteer work. Jean is interested in working either for the county

parks department, the same group for which she maintains a trail at Schooley Mountain Park, or for *Habitat for Humanity*. I should research volunteer groups while I am working. I have always believed that those who are not part of the solution are part of the problem. It is easy ignoring that to some extent when I am so busy at school, and justifying my inaction by pointing out all the work I do with students, but I will not have any excuses when I retire except laziness.

Sunday, Aug 12: We drove 5 hours to Oriskany, New York today, stopping for lunch at an Arby's on Route 12. When we arrived Ceil took us to dinner, as she usually does whenever we visit her. Jean ate roast ham, and I ate roast turkey with stuffing. Ceil ordered liver and onions (and how many people other than my brother David would actually order that in a restaurant?!?)

Monday, Aug 13: Jean and I sanded and painted the front of Ceil's house today. Jean also did some gardening while Ceil and I cleaned out a lot of junk in her garage. We attempted to take it to a recycling center in Utica, but Ceil got confused following the MapQuest directions (which Jean decided afterwards were incorrect). Ceil is very sharp and agile for an 87-year old, but she does have some senior moments. Still, as I have said previously, if Jean and I could sign up right now to be as good as she is at that age, we would do so unhesitatingly. After Ceil cooked chicken-and-rice casserole for dinner, the three of us went to see *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix*. It was enjoyable, but did not make me want to run out and read all 7 books.

Tuesday, Aug 14: I painted a second coat of Ceil's house, while Jean bought mulch and finished gardening. We spent the afternoon at Sylvan Beach on Oneida Lake. Jean swam a bit, and we ate dinner at Eddie's Restaurant (Jean had fish and chips, while I had clams and chips).

We drove past the camp which Jean's grandfather built in 1907, and which Jean and her brother Peter owned after their Aunt Mary signed it over to them in the 1980s. They sold it when Jean's father died in 1993, since it needed so much work and was not close enough for any of us to visit regularly. It looks worse now than it did 20 years ago. Both the small camp and decrepit garage have been torn down, but the camp needs to be replaced as well.

Wednesday, Aug 15: Jean and I cleaned out Ceil's refrigerator in the morning, then we drove her to Syracuse Airport for her flight to Colorado where she is spending three weeks with her son Billy. She has 3 grandchildren and a few great-grandchildren there. Jean and I met Andy at Crossings Outlets in Pennsylvania where we all shopped. I bought a new stereo system, a Bose self-contained Wave unit, as well as *sigh* a book. I had eyed Harry Turtledove & Noreen Doyle's collection of historical short fiction **The First Heroes** for a long time when it was released in paperback, especially since the reviews were primarily positive. Now I bought the hardcover at a remaindered book store. The three of us ate dinner at Pizza Hut. Their buffet was pretty good, even though their pizza is quite Americanized.

I did my annual ordering of cds at BMG's *Buy One-Get 5 Free* sale. The Decemberists' album **The Crane Wife** is an absolutely wonderful progressive rock album. I am anxious to listen to more of their music. The other albums I got were Fleetwood Mac's two-disc extended **Tusk**, ELO's **On The Third Day**, Jethro Tull's **Songs From the Wood** and **Minstrel in the Gallery**,

and the Moody Blues' **Every Good Boy Deserves Favour**. ELO and Jethro Tull are two groups I like much more now than I did 30 years ago, so it's fun buying their albums.

Wednesday, Aug 22: We cut two new shelves for my stereo case, so as soon as Jean and I sand and paint them, I will have expanded space for my cd collection. I am giving away all my records, so I will have some expanded space for my books as well. Monday I stopped at former student Marwa's apartment and gave her a dozen Billy Joel-Elton John-Beatles records. I posted an invitation on my blog for people to ask for free records, but she was the only taker. After my brother David takes what he wants, I will donate the rest of them to the local church thrift store.

Friday, Aug 24: Wednesday Jean, Marilyn, Frank and I drove the entire length of Route 46 from its start at the Hudson River to its end at the Delaware River. Along the way, Frank and I discussed the historical significance of places along the road. It was amazing the differences from Fort Lee, the location of the George Washington Bridge and a New York City-type city with numerous high rise apartments, to Belvedere at the Delaware Water Gap leading into Pennsylvania which was so rural it did not feel like NJ at all. We stopped for lunch in Garwood at a spin-off of the famous Callaghan's in Fort Lee which bordered Aunt Chris & Uncle Bill's former house, but which recently closed after the owners sold the land for \$2.3 million! Too bad they did not keep that house, since they might have gotten good money for their property too.

Jean and Andy discussed Route 46 last night, and he knows a lot about the origins of the highway. He has always been fascinated with roads and maps, so that even when very young people consulted with him before going on trips. I asked him if he would like to help me research the book about the history of Route 46, and he seemed agreeable to doing it. Frank is sending me copies of all the 300+ photographs he took to help me start planning.

Sunday, Aug 26: I spent a lot of time at Jillian's birthday party chatting with Karen's sister Rosemary and her husband Marty. Marty is one of the few people I can actually hold an interesting conversation with about interests we have in common, because he is as nerdy as me, reads a lot, and loves to discuss what he learns.

Tuesday, Aug 28: Yesterday morning I went to Dr. Gottlieb for my annual eye checkup, and they were fine. He said I have a slight bit of fuzziness which might lead to cataracts eventually, but it is nothing to worry about now. Afterwards I edited two chapters of the Tibet book, and first-drafted a scene of "Adamo's Tale," part of my far-future sf series. After cooking dinner-corn fritters-I read 140 pages of **The Engines of God**, going to bed with only 20 pages left.

Jean went to school yesterday for a meeting of new teachers. She will be there the next four days as well for district-wide New Teacher Orientation, which is unnecessary for an experienced teacher like her. I will go with her tomorrow and spend the day opening boxes of math books and supplies, as well as showing her different routes across town since she will be traveling to the other high school for one class every morning.

The assistant superintendent invited all Distinguished Faculty to be introduced to the new teachers Friday, but it would be somewhat foolish for me to be introduced with Jean sitting

there, which is why I am going to school tomorrow instead.

Wednesday, Aug 29: It took me several hours at school to open all the boxes in the math lab which were filled with text books and supplies (mostly lined paper, graph paper, and portfolios). Afterwards was an association luncheon encouraging all new teachers to join (the food was pretty good ☺), then Jean and I drove to the other high school to get a car sticker for her (and showing her how to get there after dropping me off every morning), then to the Board of Education for her ID picture.

I have been reading **Sailing From Byzantium**, the history of the Byzantine Empire, about which I actually know very little except that it survived in some form until the 15th century. Already I have learned a bit about the Goths who were much more civilized than they are usually portrayed in history books. Interesting.

Friday, Aug 31: Andy was as *Employee of the Month* at Embassy Suites, which is an honor for somebody who has been there less than a year. He is doing well there.

Tuesday I finished the majority of my summer chores, so I have been doing odds and ends these last three days. Tomorrow Jean, Mark, Kate and I are going to Ocean City, MD for a week of fun and relaxation before school starts next Friday.

Cast of Characters

| | |
|----------------|--|
| Alan & Denise | our closest friends who were our neighbors when we lived in Hopatcong |
| Andy | our older son who works at Embassy Suites |
| Ceil | Jean's 86-year old aunt who is the spryest senior I know |
| David | third Sabella brother who teaches math with me; his wife Karen, daughter Jillian |
| Drew | Andy and Mark's best friend from high school, now a family friend |
| Fei Fei | former student of mine, a close family friend I refer to as my "daughter" |
| Janel | my niece, a junior in college, and her sister Michelle, a college sophomore |
| Jean | my wife |
| Mark | our younger son who works at Prudential; his girlfriend Kate |
| Rick & Barb | our friends from when Jean and I taught at Paul VI High School; their son Chris |
| Stephen | second Sabella brother, his wife Doreen, sons Chris, Kyle and Ryan |
| Steve Nicolich | our neighbor, his wife Pat |

On the Lighter Side

Here are two jokes I enjoyed so much I stole them from Rich & Rita Shader's Celtic Seasons:

When Angus bought a dead sheep from a neighboring farmer, he was asked what he was going to do with it.

"I'm hard up, so I'm going to raffle it," said Angus.

"You can't raffle off a dead sheep!" replied the farmer.

"Aye I can. I just won't tell anybody it's dead..."

A month later the two met up and the farmer who sold the animal asked, "Whatever happened with that dead sheep?"

Angus smugly reported, "I raffled him off just like I said I would. I sold 500 tickets at £2 a piece and made a net profit of £998."

"Didn't anyone complain?" said the farmer.

"Just the bloke who won. So I gave him his two pounds back."

*

Colin was riding in a taxi and leaned over to ask the driver a question and tapped him on the shoulder. Hamish, the driver, screamed, lost control of the cab, nearly hit a bus and lorry, drove up over the kerb, and for a few moments everything was silent in the cab. Then the still shaken driver said, "I'm sorry, but you scared the daylights out of me."

Colin, frightened and shaking in his boots, apologized to Hamish, and said he didn't realize a mere tap on the shoulder could frighten him so much.

Hamish replied, "No, no, I'm sorry, it's entirely my fault. I'm new to this. Today is my first day driving a cab. I've been driving a hearse for the past 23 years."

Here's a joke from Lloyd Penney:

A man and his wife were having an argument about who should brew the coffee each morning. The wife said, "You should do it, because you get up first, and then we don't have to wait as long to get our coffee."

The husband said, "You are in charge of cooking around here and you should do it, because that is your job, and I can just wait for my coffee."

Wife replies, "No, you should do it, and besides, it is in the Bible that the man should do the coffee."

Husband replies, "I can't believe that, show me."

So she fetched the Bible, and opened the New Testament and showed him at the top of several pages, that it indeed says....."HEBREWS" God may have created man before woman, but there is always a rough draft before the masterpiece.

Finally some Church bulletin bloopers from Sally Syrjala:

These sentences actually appeared in church bulletins or were announced in church services:

1. Announcement in a church bulletin for a national PRAYER & FASTING Conference: "The cost for attending the Fasting & Prayer Conference includes meals."
2. The sermon this morning: "Jesus Walks on the Water". The sermon tonight: "Searching for Jesus."
3. Our youth basketball team is back in action Wednesday at 8 PM in the recreation hall. Come out and watch us kill Christ the King.
4. "Ladies, don't forget the rummage sale. It's a chance to get rid of those things not worth keeping around the house. Don't forget your husbands."
5. The peacemaking meeting scheduled for today has been canceled due to a conflict.
6. Remember in prayer for the many who are sick of our community. Smile at someone who is hard to love. Say "Hell" to someone who doesn't care much about you.
7. Don't let worry kill you off _ let the Church help.
8. Miss Charlene Mason sang "I will not pass this way again," giving obvious pleasure to the congregation.
9. For those of you who have children and don't know it, we have a nursery downstairs.
10. Next Thursday there will be tryouts for the choir. They need all the help they can get.
11. Barbara remains in the hospital and needs blood donors for more transfusions. She is also having trouble sleeping and requests tapes of Pastor Jack's sermons.
12. The Rector will preach his farewell message after which the choir will sing: "Break Forth Into Joy."
13. Irving Benson and Jessie Carter were married on October 24th in the church. So ends a friendship that began in their school days.

14. A bean supper will be held on Tuesday evening in the church hall. Music will follow.
15. At the evening service tonight, the sermon topic will be "What Is Hell?" Come early and listen to our choir practice.
- 16 Eight new choir robes are currently needed due to the addition of several new members and to the deterioration of some older ones.
17. Scouts are saving aluminum cans, bottles and other items to be recycled. Proceeds will be used to cripple children.
18. Please place your donation in the envelope along with the deceased person you want remembered.
19. Attend and you will hear an excellent speaker and have a healthy lunch.
20. The church will host an evening of fine dining, superb entertainment and gracious hospitality.
21. Potluck supper Sunday at 5:00 PM _ prayer and meditation to follow.
22. The ladies of the Church have cast off clothing of every kind. They may be seen in the basement on Friday afternoon.
23. This evening at 7 PM there will be a hymn sing in the park across from the Church. Bring a blanket and come prepared to sin.
24. Ladies Bible Study will be held Thursday morning at 10 AM. All ladies are invited to lunch in the Fellowship Hall after the B.S. is done.
25. The pastor would appreciate it if the ladies of the congregation would lend him their electric girdles for the pancake breakfast next Sunday.
26. Low Self Esteem Support Group will meet Thursday at 7 PM. Please use the back door.
27. The eighth graders will be presenting Shakespeare's Hamlet in the Church basement Friday at 7 PM. The congregation is invited to attend this tragedy.
28. Weight Watchers will meet at 7 PM at the First Presbyterian Church. Please use large double door at the side entrance.