

A ONCE IN A LIFETIME DAY

Like everyone, I have bad days and good days, and so-so days and great days, and then there are those rare days that remind me of why I'm so happy to be alive. One of the latter occurred on May 16, 2013. I flew to San Jose for the Nebula Awards weekend on the 15th. Tachyon Publications publisher Jacob Weisman and his wife Rina had invited me to stay with them in San Francisco before the Nebula weekend officially began. Jacob and Tachyon managing editor Jill Roberts were at the airport to welcome me to California. We went out for a delicious dinner at Baby Blues BBQ, and then, after coping with a flat tire, I went to the Weismans' home for a restful sleep in their guest bedroom.

The following morning, after tea and a chat with Rina, I piled my luggage into Terry Bisson's car. Terry is probably best known to *Asimov's* readers for his 1990 Hugo- and Nebula-Award winning story, "Bears Discover Fire." Although he is originally from Kentucky, Terry and his wife, Judy Jensen, spent years in New York City. I'd missed them since they moved to California to be closer to kids and grandkids. After sustaining minor damage from an inattentive driver who sideswiped my side of the car just as we departed Jacob's block, we headed off to Just For You Cafe for brunch and conversation.

While I could have talked with Judy and Terry for hours, I still had miles to go before the day would end. When brunch was over, I took a walk around the neighborhood with my two old friends and then we were met by Lisa Goldstein. Lisa's most recent story in *Asimov's* was the Sidewise-award-winning "Paradise Is a Walled Garden." I transferred all my bags into Lisa's car and we were off to the other side of town to meet Gregory Norman Bossert at the Presidio.

While I've known Lisa for thirty years, this would be my first chance to get to know Greg. Back in 2009, I found his story, "Union of Soil and Sky," in the *Asimov's* slush pile. Even though it was his first sale, I was struck by the story's professionalism. In short order, I bought two more and have continued to purchase his stories for the magazine whenever I get a chance.

Greg works for Industrial Light and Magic (ILM) and he had offered to take me on a tour of the ILM offices at the Presidio as well as Skywalker Ranch, the workplace of George Lucas, and to bring a friend. When Greg said "tour" I thought he meant we would be joining a group for a regularly scheduled excursion. Well, I was in for a surprise!

Apparently, group tours are rarely offered at the Ranch. Instead, Lisa and I had signed up for Greg's private tour. We set off immediately because Greg was afraid that they would stop serving lunch before we arrived. Signs that we were about to have an awesome adventure were auspicious. The weather was beautiful, we passed an obvious Heinlein reader whose license plate said something like "GROKON," and no more minor automobile mishaps presented themselves.

As we entered the property, we saw horses, cows, and a cowboy. We went from cattle country to a rolling vineyard, and finally ended up at the Main House. This fifty-thousand-square foot structure was designed to look like a Victorian mansion. The red-wood paneling that covers much of the interior walls is recycled from an old bridge. Before giving us our tour, Greg whisked us into the dining room. The staff knew we were coming, and had kept the food warm even though we were a little late. It was too windy to dine in the rocking chairs on the veranda. Instead, we had to make do by alternating our gaze from the view out the window to the original Norman Rockwell

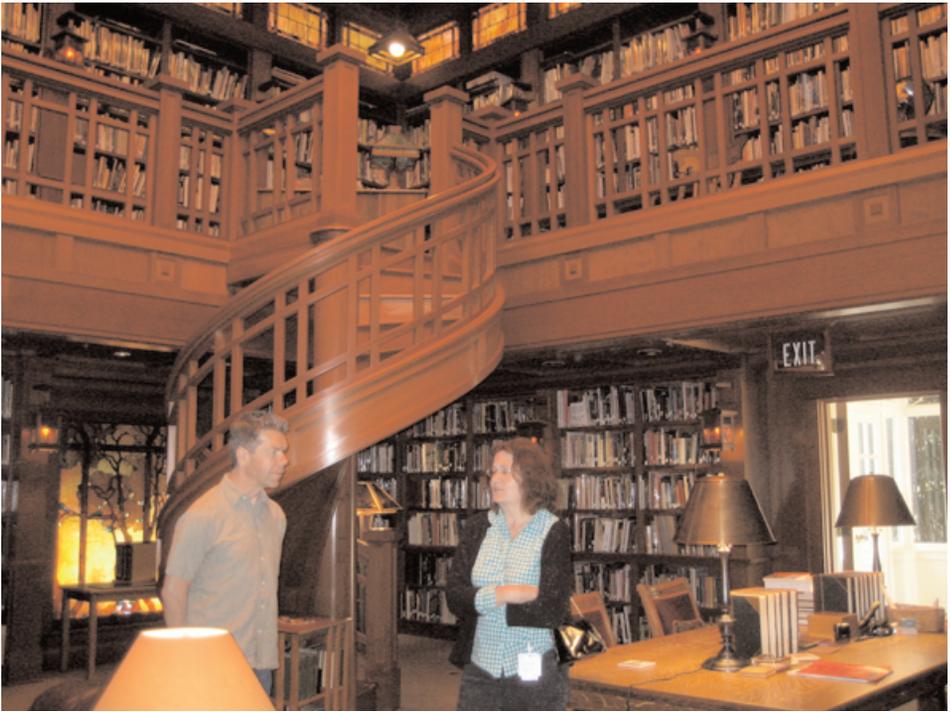


Photo by Lisa Goldstein

**Gregory Norman Bossert and Sheila Williams in
“The Best Room in the World.”**

painting on the wall.

Greg’s tour began as soon as we had finished lunch. A display case in one of the front rooms held some of science fiction filmdom’s most treasured artifacts. These included the Golden Idol of Fertility from the beginning of *Raiders of the Lost Ark*; Luke Skywalker’s lightsaber, which was flown into orbit aboard the Space Shuttle *Discovery* in 2007, and a Jabba the Hutt prototype from *Return of the Jedi*. Perhaps incongruous, but no less charming or thrilling to see, were Charlie Chaplin’s hat and cane.

Next, Greg took us to what he called, “The Best Room in the World”—the Library. According to the Lucas brochure, this room was “created in the style of the Arts and Crafts movement circa 1910.” The library’s nineteen-foot diameter leaded-glass dome, lanterns, and hanging lamps were all made by the Skywalker Art Glass Studio. Its spiral staircase was built at the Skywalker Mill Shop. The “Garden of Allah,” a Maxwell Parrish painting that hangs above the fireplace “was originally designed for a Crane chocolate gift box in 1918.”

Tucked away on a windowsill behind the librarian’s desk was a little gold statuette. I asked her if it was a “Maria” because from a distance it looked so much like the robot in *Metropolis*. Greg quickly informed me that it was a little C-3PO that marks an employee’s twentieth anniversary with Lucasfilm. The librarian added that the mistake was not an accident, though, because Ralph McQuarrie’s design for film’s most anxious robot was heavily influenced by Fritz Lang’s *Maschinenmensch*.

All too soon, we had to tear ourselves away from the Ranch and head back to San Francisco for Greg’s tour of Industrial Light & Magic at the Letterman Digital Arts



Photo by Lisa Goldstein

E.T. and Sheila Williams

Center. At the entrance, we were greeted by the agonized form of Han Solo caught in carbonite, which was pulled from the same mold as the one used in the movie. Vintage foreign cinema posters from George Lucas's personal collection lined the hallways. These were interspersed with the matte paintings that once formed many a motion picture's background image. Here hung scenes from *E.T.*, *Star Trek IV: The Voyage Home*, *Die Hard II*, and *Enemy Mine*. The magic of movie making made all these images seem utterly believable in their time. Nowadays, these masterpieces are no longer produced because the work is all done digitally.

Many other treasures, such as the *Red October* submarine, a flattened Judge Doom from *Who Framed Roger Rabbit*, Slimer the Ghost from *Ghost Busters II*, and production models of *Galaxy Quest's* *Protector* and *Falcon*, were on display. None of that quite prepared me for the awesome moment when I stood in a stairwell under E.T. and his flying bicycle.

Eventually, as the office closed down around us, we had to take our leave. Greg and I said goodbye to Lisa, and then set out for opening Nebula festivities. We arrived at the San Jose Hilton just as Grand Master Connie Willis commenced reading an enthralling "Work in Progress." Connie assures me that once done, this story will be heading our way. After Connie finished, the Science Fiction Writers of America's newest Grandmaster, Gene Wolfe read from one of his classic tales.

Later, a small group of writers headed out to Singlebarrel—one of San Jose's whiskey bars. Greg and I joined them for a cocktail, which was a perfect ending for a perfect day.