DOTTY'S DIMENSIONS: THE COLUMN Issue #11

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Greetings all! I hope 2017 has been good to you so far. Meanwhile, I've been watching a TV show that I have found fascinating called *Adam Ruins Everything* on Tru TV. In this series, Adam Conover, with writers and experts to back the facts on his show, tells the truth about many subjects that most of us either took for granted or didn't know about. Examples include food, hygiene, and real estate, as well as weddings, funerals, holidays, etc. It proved to be a real eye opener for me, and it justified some of my lifestyle choices.

Speaking of lifestyle choices, one of those choices is to travel, and in this issue, I wrote about visiting New York City; six places in Hudson County, New Jersey; and two science fiction conventions (SF cons): Lunacon 2017, Westchester Marriott, Tarrytown, New York; and Balticon 51 (2017), Renaissance Baltimore Harborplace Hotel, Baltimore, Maryland. If you wish to see your SF dreams become science-fact dreams, especially about humans living and working in space, then join the National Space Society (NSS), P.O. Box 98106, Washington, DC, 20090-8106, 202-429-1600, or www.nss.org. When the National Space Institute, founded in 1974, and the L-5 Society (Lagrange points), founded in 1975, merged in 1987, it became NSS, a very active organization with the goal of having people living and working in space. Yearly dues include a subscription to *Ad Astra* ("To the stars" in Latin), a quarterly magazine. They also organize an annual International Space Development Conference, take part in other activities, and have several local chapters that you can join as well—or not.

Saturday, March 25, 2017: The best price for admission has been free! On the date above, that applied to the place I visited in NYC: Theodore Roosevelt (TR) Birthplace National Historic Site, 28 East 20th. Street (212-260-1616). This has been the reconstructed boyhood home where TR was born in 1858—the only USA President born in Manhattan—so far. After I entered through the servants' lower-level entrance, a National Park employee, and a volunteer greeted me. Then they booked me for a tour, but at first, I watched a half-hour video about TR's childhood. Thus, I learned about TR's sickly and asthmatic childhood, his love of natural history, adventure, and learning in general. In time, through

exercising, his health became better, and he learned to defend himself by way of boxing. Years later, he attended Harvard University, held different political offices, and became the 26th President of the USA from 1901 to 1909. Next, it was time to take the 45-minute tour of the house, and starting on the main floor, I looked at three rooms: the mostly red-colored themed library, the green-colored themed dining room, and the blue-colored themed parlor. All of the rooms in this house contained many furnishings, items, and interiors that belonged to the Roosevelt family, circa 1860s. The upper floor included the nursery displaying scenic wallpaper; this was where TR, his siblings, and his nanny slept. I then noticed a marble sink in the center hallway before entering the master bedroom displaying a mostly light-blue décor. After the tour, I went back to the basement level to observe the small museum consisting of items that TR owned as well as texts and pictures that TR also owned or were about TR. Overall, I learned that Theodore Roosevelt (1858-1919) led a very colorful life.

Sunday, March 26: This was the first of the six places in Hudson County, NJ, that I visited: Port Imperial Terminal, 4800 Avenue at Port Imperial, Weehawken (800-533-3779). I've always wanted to cross the Hudson River by water, and the next day after visiting NYC, I had my chance. Using different forms of public transportation--1) NJ Transit Train from Princeton Junction, NJ, to Newark, NJ; 2) PATH Train to Exchange Place, Jersey City, NJ; and 3) the Hudson/Bergen Light Rail line to Port Imperial Station, Weehawken, NJ, I arrived at the ferry terminal and rode the NY Waterway Ferry to Midtown Manhattan. Beforehand, however, I noticed the mostly metal-and-glass modern ferry terminal containing a Japanese restaurant, a casual café, and a gift shop, but most of all, I saw the great views of the Manhattan skyline. Although the ferry ride took less than 15 minutes, I sat inside the ferry in comfort and watched the sights along the NYC side of the Hudson: *USS Intrepid*, the buildings, other ferries, and on the day I was there, an Israeli cruise ship. While other people mostly used this ferry for commuting, I found that it made for a good sightseeing vessel. Even though it was only a short ride, and it didn't include any food or commentary, it still cost a fraction of the price that those fancy sightseeing yachts wanted for a dinner cruise. Finally, on the NYC Midtown Manhattan side, free (I love that word!) busses run by NY Waterway took ferry patrons to different parts of Manhattan. I took the bus to W.34th St. and 7th Ave.—and later, back to Pennsylvania Station.

Friday, April 7: It's been three years since I've been to Lunacon, and as of this year, it has been located in a another hotel that was about 20 minutes closer to me than the former Lunacon hotel in Rye Brook, NY. I also liked the layout for the con better here because most of the programming was on one floor. Therefore, after I registered, I visited the 1) Dealers' Room. Although, the numbers of dealers were less than either Philcon or Balticon, one thing they had similar to the other two cons was that about 50% of the dealers sold reading materials of books, magazines, and some fanzines. The rest of them sold other merchandise: jewelry, costume accessories, games, spices, etc. I ended up buying a book written by the guest of honor (GOH): Ben Bova. Then, I attended my first panel: 2) Why the Future Matters: Our Future in Space, where Ben Parris, Jonathan P. Singer, Louis Epstein, and Ian Randal Strock tried to answer why humans should go to space. One of the answers was that resources have been limited on Earth. Other panelists mentioned government money versus private money, and how to convince investors to invest in space. Meanwhile, they also said that more school children need to study and learn more STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) subjects. Although we do have non-human missions in space going on, much of the panel agreed that human missions drew more attention from the public. Of course, most of the public

didn't realize that less than one percent of the entire Federal budget went to NASA. Finally, for this night, I went to the 3) Con Lounge or Con Suite where the committee used three bedrooms for this purpose. While they were still setting up, I had a soft drink and talked with a few other SF fans before retiring for the night.

Saturday, April 8: I decided to start Lunacon's busiest day by sitting in on the following panel: 4) Possible Futures. Here, Dr. Lawrence Kramer, Alexis Gilliland, Ben Bova, David Mercurio Rivera, Matthew Shean, and Greg Costikyan talked about how people should learn the difference between science and pseudo-science. They also stressed that students should learn critical thinking in addition to just learning facts in school. As for SF in literature and media, while many people were entertained by SF, others wanted to make changes because of SF, especially some fans of *Star Trek* (ST). Nevertheless, SF has not been about predicting the future as much as it has been about possibilities. While somebody said there has not been enough money to colonize space, Ben Bova pointed out that we do have the money, but it has to be spent on space, not on other things. After this, I spent the rest of the day in the main ballroom and the first event was the 5) Boogie Knights Concert. This group consisting of David Keefer, John Scheeler, Sharon Palmer, Kate Pakaski, Linda Swann, and Keith R.A. DeCandido, has been around since 1982, and they sang SF, fantasy, and historical parody lyrics to popular tunes. Then I listened to someone I was more familiar with: 6) Roberta Rogow: In Words and Music. In between singing both original songs and filk songs (SF and fantasy lyrics to popular tunes), Roberta told us about her life in SF fandom, her fan and professional writings, and bits and pieces about her non-fanish life. I first saw her in February 1979 at a ST con, and through the years, I have seen her at different SF cons. Let me put it this way: Roberta Rogow adds more life to a SF con. While listening to her comments between her songs, I realized how much SF cons have changed through the years, and I learned some facts about her that I didn't know before. In 2013, she was inducted into the Filk Hall of Fame. While I wasn't familiar with 7) Marianne Plumridge: An Artist's Journey, I enjoyed seeing her computer presentation of her SF and fantasy paintings, and hearing about her life in both Australia and later, in the USA as an artist and SF fan. She also spent some time talking about painting with oil and acrylics as well as the pros and cons of painting with either of them. The next person was an artist that I have seen at other SF cons, and he was the art GOH and husband to Marianne Plumridge: 8) Bob Eggleton. At first, I thought I would be disappointed that he didn't bring a computer presentation of his art, but after listening to him tell his life story about how he got into art and SF, I wasn't disappointed for long. He described his love of drawing since he was a child—especially of monsters, as well as his living in California and liking it; but when his family moved to Pennsylvania, he found his childhood there repressive. Later, things got better for him in Rhode Island. I especially liked his descriptions of SF fannish life and SF professional life before the Internet. Finally, the main GOH, 9) Ben Bova, came on stage and gave a very brief speech about why we must go to space. Then he spent most of the rest of the hour in a Q&A session with the audience. Even though this speech wasn't as moving as his 1980 speech, "Building a Real World" at the 1980 Philcon, where I first saw him, he still has an optimistic look at the future of humans going into space. In addition to answering questions about SF and space, he also suggested to the audience to buy his books.

Saturday Night: After dinner, I entered the smaller (compared to Philcon and Balticon) 10) Art Show room and noticed that around 90% of the art themes showed fantasy art, and the rest displayed SF and space art. Meanwhile, about 75% of the art mediums exhibited painting and drawings, and the remaining art presented other mediums: jewelry, sculptures, and quilts, as well as pottery, accessories, and holiday ornaments. Later, it was time for me to watch the 11)

Masquerade. At first, a dancer in a purple and black outfit that looked like across between a one-legged trouser and short skirt with a bra top danced for a few minutes. Then came the entries in the Masquerade: four altogether and all in fantasy costumes. I did notice some SF hall costumes throughout the day, but none of those costumers entered the contest. Personally, I think that instead of going through the hassle of setting up a tech crew for so few entries, why not mention in the pre-con literature and in the con program the following: "If there are less than 10 entries in the Masquerade, then the committee will have a Masquerade Party instead." I remember when the 1980 Philcon had a costume party on Saturday night, and the late Jersey Devil Cons had Roving Masquerades that were similar to what Philcon did in 1980.

Sunday, April 9: The one thing I planned to attend this day, 12) Be a Future Visionary! SIGMA Futurists, with Ben Bova, Dr. Charles Pellegrino, Paul Levinson, and Jim Belfiore, was described in the pocket program as a discussion about what SIGMA was and how they have been trying to solve future problems. This group of SF and science writers with different political views tried to figure out what the future might be like in five to 10 years. Then, they reported it to certain members of the government. Anyway, it started out as a discussion until a very bossy woman came in and told them that this event was her idea, and she wanted it to be a workshop. She also intended to break the audience up into groups of four. I left after this because if I knew in advance that this was a workshop, I would have been better prepared; and she should have worded it as a workshop in the pocket program.

Saturday, April 22: Many places had Earth Day events on this day, but I chose to attend the largest Earth Day festival in NJ: Earth Day at Liberty State Park, 1 Audrey Zapp Drive, Jersey City (201-915-3440 or njparkandforests.org), off of NJ Turnpike Exit 14B. One advantage to visiting this state park on this day was the free shuttle bus that took festival goers from the Liberty State Park Light Rail Station to the area of the Earth Day Festival; it saved a lot of walking! (The shuttle doesn't run on regular days.) Despite the shuttle, I still did quite a bit of walking: Therefore, I'd suggest that visitors to this park should wear their most comfortable shoes. Anyway, upon arriving, I made a beeline toward a more permanent attraction: the former Central Railroad of NJ Terminal. Here, in this 1889 structure, I learned about the history of this large train terminal where both commuters and immigrants passed through daily during the late 19th- and early 20th-centuries. Inside of this building, displays of texts, pictures, and a few exhibit items told the story of this area from the times of the local Lenni-Lenape Native Americans, to the early European settlers, onto the days when the railroads operated here, and up to the current time as a NJ state park. I also saw a slide show that gave more details about the days when the railroads used this terminal. Finally, a desk with plenty of literature about NJ and a few informative staff members completed my seeing this disused terminal. Then, on the way back to the festival, I looked at some great views of Lower Manhattan, Ellis Island, and the Statue of Liberty. As to the festival itself, I noticed a main stage where entertainers sang songs and others did demonstrations having to do with ecology. There were also tables with food vendors, home improvement vendors, and groups promoting their causes. Nevertheless, even without a special event, this state park is worth seeing because there is much to see and do here: many gardens with different flowers in season, ferry service to Liberty Island and Ellis Island, and picnic areas, as well as fishing, a boat launch, and walking through the different areas of this park.

Sunday, May 12: This was a town that I've heard so much about, but until the date above, I've never been to: Hoboken, NJ. After taking the two PATH trains from Newark, NJ, to Hoboken, I then rode the #126 NJ Transit Bus from

the terminal, up along Washington St. to 11th St. Next, I stopped for lunch at a luncheonette that has been around since 1931: Schnackenberg's, 1110 Washington St. (201-766-5533). Although this place could get a bit busy at times, I didn't have a long wait for a table. Once I sat down, a very friendly waiter handed me a menu, and shortly afterward, he took my order. Anyway, other members of this very friendly staff made sure that my water glass was full as well as the glass of soda I ordered, and the food proved to be good. (I ordered a well-done burger—and it was well done.) The prices were moderate, and the employees made me feel right at home in this old-fashioned looking luncheonette! What more could I ask? After lunch, I walked a few blocks over to the Hoboken Museum, 1301 Hudson St. (201-656-2240 or www.hobokenmuseum.org). Located in one of the oldest buildings near the waterfront, the former Bethlehem Steel machine shop, this small museum displayed two temporary exhibit areas at any one time. When I was there, the museum presented 1) Hoboken People & Places, 1976-1994: Photography by Michael Flanagan and 2) The Essence of Hoboken, Watercolors by Robert Nardolillo. Meanwhile in two small but permanent exhibit areas, I saw a room honoring native-born Frank Sinatra that showed displays of pictures, books, texts, and album covers, and in the other permanent area, I looked at picture books about Hoboken. In addition, the staff provided self-guided walking-tour maps covering different themes in Hoboken: 1) Historical tour, 2) Sinatra tour, and 3) On the Waterfront tour. (The movie was filmed in Hoboken.) For me, walking around Hoboken reminded me of parts of Greenwich Village or some of the streets of Brooklyn Heights.

Saturday, May 27: Even though Balticon has been a four-day con since 2001, this year, I chose to attend for three days and two nights. Therefore, upon my arrival on the date above, I visited 1) the Art Show room. This place was about the size of a small art museum or large art gallery. Here, I noticed that about three-quarters of the art showed fantasy themes, and the rest displayed SF and space art. Around 85% of the art mediums presented paintings & drawings, and the remainder exhibited other forms of art: knitwear, jewelry, and sculptures. After this, I looked at the 2) Dealers' Room where about half of the dealers sold reading materials of books, magazines, and semi-pro-zines. The other dealers sold other merchandise: games, costumes, and jewelry as well as accessories, sculptures, DVDs, CDs, bumper stickers, t-shirts, buttons, etc. I ended up buying a semi-pro-zine from the UK. Later, I went to the 3) Con Suite. In a setting about the size of a few panel rooms, I saw tables and chairs. At another table near one side of the room, the con committee offered snacks and soft drinks. Hence, I had a chance to sit and talk with other SF fans or just sit and maybe read on my own. So far, everything I've visited has been non-program rooms. Nevertheless, later on, I finally did attend a program item: 4) the Masquerade. Out of 22 entries, four of the costumers presented SF costumes, and the rest showed fantasy costumes. Lately, Balticon has had the largest masquerade in the Middle-Atlantic states compared to other cons such as Philcon and Lunacon.

Sunday, May 28: As an ordained minister of the Universal Life Church (www.ulcseminary.org), I conducted a non-denominational 5) Sunday Morning Meeting for Worship. In advance, I decided that the best way to conduct this meeting was in the style of an un-programmed Friends (Quaker) meeting for worship. About a half-dozen people attended, and two of them proved to be active in saying prayers and singing hymns. One woman there told me that she also attended a local Friends meeting house, and then, she mentioned to the rest of us a bit about the founder of Friends: George Fox (1624-1691). Next, I attended a science presentation about 6) Producing *Hubble's* Images and the Resulting Confluence of Science and Aesthetics. Thus, Zoltan Levay showed images of the *Hubble Space Telescope* (HST) and the pictures the HST took of the cosmos. Meanwhile, among other things, Levay explained that unlike earthbound

telescopes, the HST didn't have to deal with distortions in the earth's atmosphere. He also gave us a brief history about Edwin Hubble (1889-1953), and of how Hubble measured the distances between galaxies. At the science panel, 7) The Theory and Practice of FTL (Faster Than Light), John Ashmead, Jim Beall, David Silverman, and Catherine Asaro, tried to explain how FTL couldn't be ruled out, but it also couldn't be ruled in either. Then some of the panel mentioned how SF had "fudged-about" FTL in the past: warp drive, star gates, wormholes, and so forth. They also talked about how current physics didn't allow for going the speed of light, but current theories didn't forbid going at or past the speed of light. In addition, somebody else said that the lack of proof wasn't lack of evidence. On a much lighter subject, the next panel, 8) How Costume Ideas Happen, Barbara Mabie-McClain, Nutty Nuchtchas, Lindsey Bartleson, and Lady Ozma talked about how some costumers didn't care to go into the masquerade, but preferred wearing hall costumes. This panel also discussed how costumers got ideas from SF and fantasy TV shows, films, and books. Meanwhile, others would try cross-universe costumes: ST with *Star Wars* (SW), SF universes with fantasy universes, or two fantasy universes. Some costumers also got ideas from an item or fabric that they found and made up their own character. Another fun and interesting event was 9) All Knowledge Is Contained in Fandom where Janice Gelb discussed with others in the room how fandom changed with the Internet. Other topics included past SF cons, fanzines, clubs, and so forth—much of it quite humorous. The older SF fans hoped to gather these stories so that younger SF fans could learn from the past. In other words, maybe these young fans could do or not repeat doing based on what they read. Still in the subject of fandom, 10) Baltimore Genesis found Joe Siciari and Filthy Pierre (Erwin S. Strauss) telling the rest of us what sources on the Internet we could use to learn about Baltimore SF fandom. Then, they covered the history of the Baltimore Science Fiction Society (BSFS), founded in 1963, and Balticon, first held in 1966. Some of the stories and antidotes they mentioned were amusing, especially about keeping a kosher con suite in the days when Balticon used to be held on Easter weekend and it was also on or near Passover. They also passed out copies of a small article that reported on the first Balticon, a two-day con back then.

Up until two years ago, the 11) Sunday Night Film Festival would present different short films, both animated and live, rated G or PG during the first half of this event, and after each film, the lights would go on briefly so that the audience could give a numbered rating, with the higher number being a better rating. Then during the second half of the night, they would show some R rated films that were usually violent, and this allowed people to leave during intermission if they wished not to see those films. This year, however, and despite what was written on the pocket program book, they mixed in the R rated films for the whole event, and they expected you to remember during intermission, the only time the lights went back on, which animated and live film was your favorite by writing A and L. What a half-assed job!

Monday, May 29: Before going home, I sat in on this panel: 12) The House of the Future, where the panel, Sarah Pinsker, Gary Erhlich, Brick Barrientos, and Ada Palmer, mentioned "future" houses in SF such as the *Jetsons* house, and of a house in a SF story where the rooms were on different planets and the doorway acted as a transit portal to those different rooms. Then they discussed current trends in building and the changing family structures. Other subjects included the pros and cons of how secure a computerized smart house would be from hacking and building a smart house that could benefit both an able-bodied person as well as a handicap person. Finally, they gave a brief history of how certain rooms in houses changed through the centuries, especially the kitchen and bathroom.

Friday, June 9: It was back to Hudson County, NJ, but this time, I stayed

three nights in a hotel near Princeton Junction, NJ, and traveled for three days by NJ Transit Train, PATH Train, and the Hudson/Bergen Light Rail to three attractions. On the date above, I arrived in Weehawken and entered Lincoln Harbor, 1200 Harbor Blvd. (201-272-5201). To say it was a low-key attraction would be accurate, but it was also relaxing. The Lincoln Harbor "Mall" doesn't contain many shops, only a CVS drugstore and a gift shop as well as two places to eat in the food court: a Subway and a Middle Eastern food counter. Nevertheless, I ate my sandwich near a large window that offered views of the following: the Lincoln Harbor Yacht Club, the river traffic on the Hudson River, and the skyline of NYC. Outside, along the Hudson River Walkway, in the Lincoln Harbor Park, and the Pier Park, I enjoyed similar views a bit closer up. I also noticed four more restaurants nearby, but they were more expensive than the food court. Overall, this made for an interesting day, and like I said before, it proved to be relaxing as well. My sightseeing, however, wasn't over yet because while waiting for the light rail train, I looked at a small adjoining landscaped park composed of trees, bushes, and rocks. I have since learned that the Lincoln Harbor Mall has played host to concerts, plays, festivals, and other events throughout the year. Along its waterfront, the Spirit of NJ had been running tours and dinner cruises from here.

Saturday, June 10: The Liberty Science Center (LSC), Liberty State Park, 222 Jersey City Blvd., Jersey City (201-200-1000 or www.lsc.org), was an interesting museum, especially for children, but I've been to better science museums such as the Maryland Science Center, and in particular, the Franklin Institute. Much of it wasn't too different in its subjects in science, except that the LSC didn't have a section on space exploration; they only had some posters depicting the cosmos that the HST took, and there was nothing about human space exploration. Nevertheless, on the date above, I visited here, and as my usual pattern with most museums, I started at the top (4th) floor. One section that was unique to this museum was Our Hudson Home. By way of videos, texts, and pictures, as well as many hands-on exhibits, viewings exhibits, and aquariums of fish and other river and bay creatures, I learned more about both sides of issues having to do with the Hudson River Watershed. What was it like to work, live, and clean up the Hudson River? Dredge the river or not? Should environmentalists keep or remove flora not native to the area? And so forth because this led to other questions. Meanwhile, other subjects on this floor included energy, nanoscience, and pixels. On the 3rd floor, my favorite area was Eat and Be Eaten. This mini-zoo displayed different small live animals: some mammals and birds, but mostly reptiles and insects. The other sections on this level contained areas about communications, honeybees, and germs, as well as an infinity chamber, a pitch-black touch tunnel, different hands-on science experiments to try with giant bubbles, and a rock wall. Then, an expanding and retracting Hobelman Sphere seemed to be this museum's unofficial logo, and nearby on the 2nd floor, different exhibits explained the science behind this object. Finally, another interesting area in the museum for me was located on the 1st or ground floor: Skyscraper! Thus, via pictures, texts, videos, and hands-on exhibits, one could learn the history, arts, and science behind these tall buildings, as well as future plans that some architects have for the construction of new buildings. I also noticed a few girders from the World Trade Center. In addition, the LSC offered 3D films, IMAX films, laser shows, and a premium exhibit area for extra costs.

Sunday, June 11: A few people told me about the Hoboken Spring Arts & Music Festival (201-420-2207) and of how colorful it was. Therefore, this year, I attended. In reality, after I had lunch at a nearby bar & grill, I walked along the festival area: Washington Street from 8th St. to 14th St. At first, I noticed the prices of the food vendors, and I'm glad that I ate at that bar & grill. The prices for food were about the same, but the soft drink prices were higher from the vendors. As I walked up the blocks, I looked at dealers selling

fine arts and decorate arts. Next, I saw tables from other vendors advertising their regular businesses, especially home-improvement businesses, real estate companies, home goods, and so forth. Then I glanced at different organizations promoting their causes: environmental, scouts, and the Hoboken Museum. Two stages at either end of this event, near 8th St, and near 14th St., presented singers and bands performing a range of music from Latino, folk, and country, as well as blues, jazz, and rock. Through it all, I found this event colorful, but not unique; I've seen similar events in towns closer to home. While I wouldn't go a long distance to see this event again, if I'm in the area, it will be worth it. As for Hoboken itself, that town has been worth traveling a distance to see, especially along Washington Street, the main shopping street, and the parklands along the waterfront—almost anytime of year.

I find it hard to believe that the year is half over. Anyway, the next issue, Issue #12, should cover the next six places that I plan to visit in Hudson County, NJ; a visit to Philadelphia; New York state; Washington, DC; NYC; and Philcon. Enjoy the rest of the year. Goodbye!