



GUFF Trip Report 2017

Donna Maree Hanson

An account of the fannish adventures of a Canberra fan who went into the wilds of northern Europe, starting in Helsinki, at Worldcon 75.

GUFF report

Donna Maree Hanson

GUFF delegate 2017

Trip to Helsinki, Finland, Worldcon 75

I am so grateful for the experience I had to represent Australian Science Fiction Fandom at the 75th Worldcon in Finland. It was an honour. These pages recount my adventures and present many photos of people and places I visited. This report is derived from the blogs I posted during my GUFF trip and have been edited and embellished.

As you know, Australia is a long way from Finland and as I was heading to Northern Europe I thought I'd check out the place and visit fans and see how they 'do' fandom. My adventures took me from Finland, with a side trip to Estonia, to Sweden, Norway, Iceland, Scotland, Ireland and England.

Highlights include: presenting a Hugo award, which is the closest I'll ever get to that mighty rocket; along with attending the pre-Hugo cocktail party; and the famous loser's party. The trip has been full of fabulous people and interesting sights.

I met fans, some lovely people, who took time to talk to me or to meet up with me to show me their wonderful cities or their usual SF get-together. I have made some new friends. I hope I did Australian fandom proud.

I really did take a lot of photos and did some exceptionally Dweeby things, so I hope you will bear with me.

I was seven weeks from home and I didn't want to come back. Actually, I did, but not while I was being spoiled overseas. I wanted to keep the journey going, keep the buoyancy

alive and I wanted more. Alas, there was only so much time and money to keep me there.

I hope you enjoy reading my GUFF report.

Your donation will help to keep the fan fund going and will hopefully be a good read.

Donna Maree Hanson

What is GUFF?

GUFF was created as The Get Up-and-over Fan Fund in 1978, to complete the triangle whose existing sides were TAFF (the Trans-Atlantic Fan Fund, which sends SF fans between Europe and North America) and DUFF (Down Under Fan Fund, running between North America and Australia). Of necessity, the name changes to Going Under Fan Fund for southbound trips.¹

The fan funds are supported by fan donations, fan fundraising, such as fan fund Auctions at SF conventions and through other fundraising activities such as selling trip reports like this one.

A delegate undertakes the fan fund trip and then usually takes on the administration of the fund for two years (or two races) and undertakes to write a report on the trip. This means that I will be the Australasia GUFF administrator for two years. There is also another GUFF administrator in Europe, currently Jukka Halme, who was the Chair of Worldcon 75 in Helsinki, with Marcin 'Alqua' Klak due to take over after his trip. Mihaela Marija Perković stood in for Jukka during 2017 and 2018, due to the amount of work he had to do as the Worldcon 75 con chair.

How did I feel about winning the GUFF ballot?

¹ Taken from <http://taff.org.uk/guff.html> (4 November 2017)

My running mates were Belle McQuattie, Sam Hawke and Alexandra Pierce. I was up against amazingly good competition and I remember thinking why did all these excellent fans stand for GUFF when I did. I figured I wouldn't worry about it because I had no chance of winning the ballot.

My first thought when I heard I won was surprise, and then I was chuffed.

Years ago I had been approached to run for GUFF or DUFF but I felt then that I earned enough money to pay my own way. Now I'm retired and a student and on a fixed income, the GUFF win was a ways to get me to Helsinki. I'm not sure I would have gone without winning the ballot. However, my previous thinking was false. Whether I could pay my own way was not the important thing. I realised this when I talked to people about GUFF, and about becoming a candidate. They told me the same thing that they could pay their own way.

You know, that's totally not the point of GUFF. Admittedly, some delegates have been fiscally challenged but usually not. There are some expenses that it might not be reasonable for GUFF to cover. If you are hosted by fans all the time you are away then you're pretty set and will have some incidentals that GUFF might cover, like travel costs, but essentially you need some of your own money.

I dipped into my savings. I made a big trip and not all of it was GUFF related. I had some 'me' time mixed in. This is also totally acceptable.

The important thing is representing fandom and meeting fans and sharing fannish experience. If you get voted in, your home fandom wants you to represent them. That's my take on it. It's not an all-expenses-paid tour. You have duties and there are expectations—like this report, for instance. So

just because you have some money doesn't mean you can't run for GUFF.

Also I have to say that I was very inspired to run for GUFF after meeting the 2016 GUFF delegate Jukka Halme. I hosted him when he visited Canberra and I met him at the Natcon, Contact, in Brisbane. He is such a great guy, so dry and witty. As the chair of the 75th Worldcon, he convinced me that I really wanted to go to Helsinki. Who knew meeting a GUFF delegate can change your life.

I've yet to meet anyone that I have affected in that way. My jokes are not so good.

This report would not have seen the light of day so quickly without the help of the following people; Claire Briarley for the extremely quick turnaround on copy edits; Gillian Polack for her edits and comments on this report; and Paul Weimer who also had a look at the report and provided comments. Thank you from the bottom of my heart.

Day one

Friday, 4 August 2017

It was a long, long journey to Helsinki from Canberra. It started with a bus. Why did we do that? Why did we start with the bus? This is what my daughter, Beans, asked me. My daughter came with me on the GUFF trip and I'm so glad she did. But we never did answer the question about why we took the bus to Sydney to get the plane. We left Canberra on the 8 am bus to Sydney International Airport. Luckily, the faithful Dweeb (Matthew) drove us to the bus.

The bus trip itself was smooth and we arrived in plenty of time to catch the flight. The big issue was the amount of luggage we had, so much luggage that we both had backpacks and we had to juggle stuff before we got the weight balance right. We had a 23 kilogram

allowance for our checked bag and then because we flew British Airways we were allowed two carry-on bags up to 10 kilos each. I really needed that extra allowance. A lot of the excess stuff we carried was for the fan fund auction at Worldcon 75 and some were for gifts for people in the UK and Ireland and elsewhere on our travels.

Fan fund auctions, as previously mentioned, are one of the main ways to raise money for GUFF and the other fan funds. I was bringing donations of books from author friends, mostly signed books, books of mine that I was donating and a hefty supply of Tim Tams, Australian lollies, and a few stuffed toys like a wombat and a platypus.

Luggage is not fun. It's the major downside of travelling. We approached it with humour. What else could we do? Our bags weighed 22.5 kilos each—so close. Carrying around the backpacks was hard work until we discovered trolleys. I also had my heavy laptop in there. Lugging my backpack around felt like my head was being detached from my body.



We had some time after check in to grab a coffee. We went to one of the cafes, which guaranteed city views and had a nice meal. I was travelling with a vegan so finding food

that we both could eat was logistically difficult at times.

The first leg of the journey was just over eight hours, where we landed in Singapore. We had to take our carry-on bags off. Instead of being able to go for a walk and grab a coffee, we were shepherded to the departure lounge to reboard straight away. We didn't even get a chance to pee. There were no toilets in the departure lounge. We will not fall for that again!

The next leg was over 12 hours to London, allowing plenty of time for movie and TV watching. I had caught *Ghost in the Shell* (the remake with Scarlett Johansson) on the first leg. It was good. That is going direct to the 'must buy' DVD list. Beans was laughing her head off and she got me to listen in on *Snatched* starring Goldie Hawn—so I ended up watching that movie too. At times, I laughed so hard I cried. As Paul Feig had something to do with the making of the movie, I'm not surprised. Some very funny inappropriateness there. Then Beans told me there was some very cool *X-Files* episodes available. I hadn't seen the reboot and I saw about four episodes. One had a very cute story line about the monster who had been bitten by a human and so became human at the full moon. It guest starred Murray from *Flight of the Conchords* (Rhys Darby). Absolutely funny and well done. I also watched *Boss Baby*: very cute.

The food was pretty good on the plane but I took no pictures so maybe it didn't happen. Slight joke there.

When we were landing in London, the captain said, "I hope you enjoyed the trip from Singapore." Beans and I looked at each other. 'Enjoyed' should have been 'endured'. You may wonder why us downunderarians come topside and stay so long. It's because it's a

damned ordeal getting here. And we have to reverse our body clocks and do food gymnastics by eating when our body thinks we should be sleeping and then we pee all night because our bodies think we are awake. It settles down, but even after a good night's sleep my brain feels like scrambled eggs.

The landing in the UK was smooth. Really smooth. The trip from the plane to collect our bags was less smooth. This is due to our inability to read signs in English. We walked passed the trains that take you directly to the customs and baggage claim areas and started walking. After walking for about 10 minutes and noticing only one or two people were in the corridor with us, we realised our mistake. It was too late to reverse our tracks so we kept walking. It only took 20 minutes. Customs and baggage claim were a breeze.

We were desperate for a real espresso coffee or a nice cup of tea so we found a café. We arrived about 5 am and we were in luck. However, my £5 notes couldn't be used because they have been replaced by fancy plastic ones since my last visit. That was all right because my £10 note worked just fine. We had a cuppa tea...we were really hanging out for one while we tried to figure out how to get to the airport hotel next to terminal 5.

Our connecting flight to Helsinki was at 6 pm. That's like 12 hours to wait and we'd been travelling for more than a day. Realising that, I had booked us into a day suite to shower and nap before making the connection to Helsinki.

The server at the tea place was able to tell me where the hotel was and we headed to the other end of the terminal. After over 24 hours travelling, being horizontal is the most important thing in the world. Our room was at the Sofitel. The beds were awesome and the shower was good, too. Unfortunately, the lights didn't work in the bathroom. They were

fixed temporarily but Beans ended up having a shower in the dark.

In no time at all, it was time to check out and struggle with the heavy carry-on bags to the flight to Helsinki. But we had time for some fun at the airport.



My daughter suggested I buy a portable trolley: a stroke of genius. I didn't have to worry about getting an airport one, which can't go everywhere. This little one could be used on the plane. My head didn't have to get detached from my body after all.

The flight to Helsinki wasn't too full. It was still daylight. It was summer in the north of the northern hemisphere. The sky was glorious. It reminded me of footage I've seen of the Grand Canyon, layers of orange and gold.



Also we saw the coast of England. The country looks flat from up in the sky. We arrived in Helsinki near 11.30 pm and staggered to the airport Hilton. Thank goodness for the Hilton.

Sunday, 6 August 2017

Sunday we moved from the wonderful Hilton at the airport (with its tea and coffee making facilities) to Hotel Arthur via the train. But first, I must mention buffet breakfast at the Hilton, which was to die for. My daughter, who is vegan, was amazed. They had seeds and nuts and she was over the moon about them. I discovered a local specialty—rice pancakes.

To prepare for our trip to the city, we did a reconnoiter sans luggage. Pushing and carrying that much stuff is exhausting so getting the lay of the land first was a good plan. Also we didn't need to check out till 12 noon, and we were awake and in need of exercise. I had planned to have lunch with Jukka Halme but I couldn't raise him. I think being chair of the Worldcon might have had something to do with that. We walked back to the airport terminal and spotted one of the little supermarkets I had read about in the Worldcon 75 Progress report. There I bought a SIM for my phone that gave me phone and internet access. I did not need to sign a register or give out all my life secrets to obtain a SIM card. So different to Australia.

Then we went looking for the train. We had to get directions, being brain dead with jetlag. We discovered we needed to use the lift to get down to the platform and found that too. Then we had more tea before doing the deed. The trip into Helsinki city was lovely and smooth on very new-looking trains. Our accommodation was within walking distance of the central station. I admit to getting lost but fortunately my daughter took control.

The Hotel Arthur is a quaint old place. Our room was ready early and we negotiated the lifts, which looked like fridges and were as big as a fridge, too, and found our way to our room.



Lift that doubles as a fridge, Hotel Arthur

The room was as cute as a cupboard. Inside was just right for us, and the shower was really good once you figure out the handwaving technique to get it started (it had a sensor switch) and eventually I learned to stop crying when it suddenly turned itself off.



Our little room at the Hotel Arthur

The only downside was there was no hot water jug or tea-making facilities. I found the lack of tea-making facilities disturbing...

We went downstairs and begged for some hot water, which we transported in paper cups to our room. I grew acquainted with my uncaffeinated self. I told myself while I sipped water my health would improve as I became accustomed to not being able to sip tea in bed in the mornings. Instead, I pounced on coffee as I found it.



Me on the fountain, near the markets Helsinki

Our big plan was an outing to Tallinn, Estonia, which is a couple of hours by ferry from Helsinki. Our first plan was to look around Helsinki city and, at the same time, work out where the ferry left from and how long it would take to walk there. We headed off. It was quite a walk, around 35 minutes—longer going there, because we didn't know where we were going.

Helsinki is so lovely. We walked down to the docks and we bought giant mutant black cherries grown in Holland—actually, probably not mutant, but so big they were like small plums, and so yummy—and also blueberries. There were lots of things to buy but we didn't. Mostly because our flights to Iceland involved 15 kilos checked bags and that was going to be tough with the amount of luggage we had. Looks like no shopping until the UK in the last two weeks of this odyssey. We found the Viking Line Terminal and then timed the walk back with some adjustments for time out for photos. We figured we needed 30 minutes to walk to the ferry, allowing an additional half an hour for check-in time.



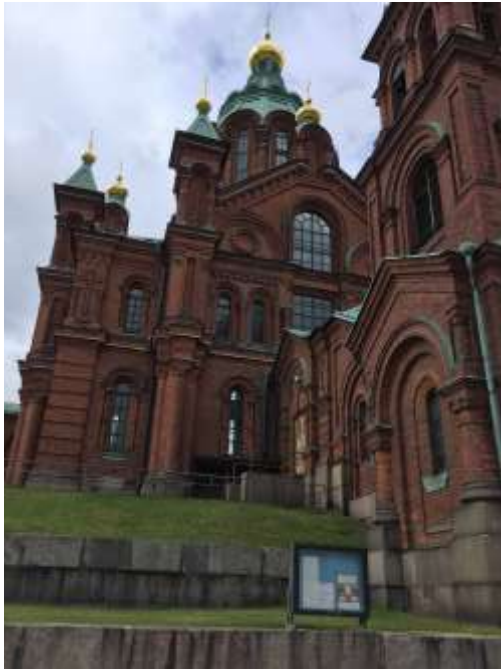
Giant cherries from Helsinki market



The Gentlemen guarding Helsinki's Central Station

That evening we went for dinner at a Nepalese place close by the hotel. It was so good and so much food I was fit to burst. Then we went to bed early. Like 9 pm. It was still light outside.

Man, that night was the longest of the longest nights. I woke up at 1.30 am thinking it was 5 am. Then I woke up on the hour and couldn't really sleep. By the time Beans woke up, I was exasperated. We had breakfast at 6.30 am so we could start our journey on time. We had booked breakfast on the ferry so we planned two breakfasts, mostly because we didn't know breakfast came with the room when we booked.



Helsinki cathedral

Monday, 7 August 2017

The Hotel Arthur breakfast was not as luxurious as the Hilton but it was still pretty good—rice pancakes, little franks, meatballs, scrambled eggs, loads of bread of all kinds and more. You could seriously eat yourself to death with the bread. Also, there was coffee. Tea, cheese, salami, fruits, yogurts, porridge among other things.

After that, we set off at a quick pace for the ferry. It was faster than we expected, but it was weird. The terminal was pretty quiet. We arrived to find our ferry cancelled. Cancelled? Something we had not anticipated. A ‘technical fault’, the Viking Line said. And the next trip was 11.30 am and already fully booked. We were told to find one of their competitors. We sat in the terminal thinking up what to do next. In the end, we went walking on the other side of the docks looking for an alternative. It did not help that there were no people serving in any of these places. Everything was closed—there were only self-serve kiosks for checking in. Then we realised that you need to book online, that the real people did not come at 9 am. We also

couldn’t read the signs so we just couldn’t work it out. It was very frustrating and disappointing.

Finally, we tried booking online as there was a 10.30 am ferry, but the Direct Ferries site wouldn’t let us book for a ferry leaving that day. Then we tried direct to the provider site but it wouldn’t let us book that one, only the 1.30 pm one and we tried that but didn’t work either.

I googled “Catamaran” and found the Linda Line. We’d been at the Linda Line terminal earlier but didn’t understand the signs and didn’t think they did Tallinn (but they all do we realised later). So we tried booking a 10 am trip and we got it almost booked—and then my bank wanted a code to authorise the transaction but that only worked to my Australian phone. I was on my Finland SIM. We were so close. It was so stressful.



Bus stop with welcome to SF Fans sign

We decided to hurry to the Linda Line terminal to book in person. Only one person there doing check-in. No sales booths. I was nearly in tears; I don’t do stress well. Beans tried to book with her credit card. Meanwhile,

people were queuing to board the 10 am and we were in the check-in line. At last, the transaction went through and we lined up. We were finally going to Tallinn and would be able to meet up with Australian writer and fan, Cat Sparks, Robert Hood, Jonathan Strahan and friends.

The sea was a bit choppy. The catamaran was small. We were going to make it in time to meet Cat and the others for lunch after all, I thought. I was being highly optimistic. The turbulence started to take its toll. As well as being a longer trip than I first thought, the catamaran turned into a vomit fest. Kids puking everywhere and the poor parents having to deal with it. Then a guy behind us started to go and the smell hit us. Beans and I leaped out of our seats (it was rather crowded too). As I am a sympathetic vomiter, I started to feel unwell. Beans went to find somewhere to stand away from the sink. I went out the back into the open part of the catamaran. I was a bit bumpy and wet, but it was better than heaving. I spent the rest of the journey clinging to the rail and watching the horizon. I made it without losing any food. I visited the loo before disembarking and there was vomit on the carpet and the walls. Technicolour wall paper!



The Karolin-Catamaran

Tallinn was really very nice, particularly the old town where the tourists go. I could have bought such cute souvenirs, but I had no baggage allowance. Here we had lunch in a

restaurant in the old town that served Middle Eastern food. I could not contact Cat because my Finnish SIM card did not work in Estonia and we were rather late for lunch.



Entry into Tallinn old town

Lunch was so good and the sun was shining. Beans enjoyed her lunch and I had beef with peanut sauce. There did not seem to be a plentiful supply of wifi in which to contact the others. And, given there were so many people, it was going to be hard just to run into them by accident.



At lunch in Tallinn

The old town in Tallinn was so pretty and quaint. I headed to the Tourist Information Centre where I found free wifi. At last I could contact Cat and also found the location of the public loos.

I'm sad to say the public toilets were the loos from hell. They weren't quite the worst in the world, but they consisted of two non-flushing and all-seeing Portalos. But only one seemed

to be working. There was no water to wash your hands. I'm so white privileged. When Beans had to use them, it was hilarious. She went in and came back out again, hyperventilating. She couldn't go but then we checked out the other one and realized that while it had a broken lock, it was better.

We met up briefly with Cat, Rob, Jonathan, Francesca Myman (Locus Magazine), Aiden Walsh and Alex Hong and walked around with them for a bit.

By then as my foot was paining me, I had to get out my walking stick. At the time, I hadn't quite worked out how to use it. However, I can safely say that cobblestones are tourist torture. We went up high to get a good view of Tallinn and then parted ways. Our catamaran was leaving at 5 pm. Our previous plan was to catch the 8 pm ferry back and have dinner in Tallinn. This was not to be so. We were grateful for our time in Tallinn. Even though it was an adventure and a half getting there, we did get there.



Cat Sparks and me with a view of Tallinn

The trip back on the catamaran was smooth, there was no vomit! The weather must have been bad in the morning. We heard that it rained in Helsinki, whereas we had very pleasant weather in Tallinn.

Finally, we made it back to Helsinki and then walked back to our rooms. There we both

discovered we had swollen feet; my sore foot was really swollen. It is probably just the flights combined with cobblestones. We bandaged up my foot and crashed out.



Church in Tallinn

We both slept really well as our body clocks had caught up with us.

Tuesday, August 8 2017

I had intended to volunteer to stuff bags etc, but the bad foot put me off that idea. I didn't think I could stand for too long or traipse around the convention centre.

However, loaded with anti-inflammatory meds and painkillers and encouraged by my daughter, I slunk down to the port and took the ferry over to Suomenlinna, the island fortress. I figured I could find a restaurant, plonk myself down and take it easy. I did do a bit of therapeutic stretching so I could walk without looking and sounding like Igor.

I wished I had been able to both things: volunteer and sightseeing.



Suomenlinna

Helsinki put on a beautiful day. It was so lovely and warm and bright. The trip over to the fortress was pretty quick, about 15 minutes. There were lots of tourists. Lots more than the weekend. I think the city had filled up with SF fans. Suomenlinna was a beautiful and interesting place. It had been used for military defense over the years. Originally built by the Swedes, and later used by the Russians, now it is a lovely picnic spot.



One of the tunnels on the island

There were plenty of cafés and restaurants, some like Café Piper that had lovely views. Café Piper did coffee and cake and a few sandwiches. Not a good place for a vegan, though. We had a coffee and looked at the

view and then went in search of a place where my daughter could also eat. We walked to the end of the island and found a pizza place. Unfortunately, it was not that good for vegans either and it was about €14 for a pizza—a little on the pricey side. We went to look for another place that we had passed when crossing the bridge. It was called Café Chapman. They had a buffet lunch for also €14, with salad and vegetables and stuff that both of us could eat. We felt it was good value compared to a pizza and the building is lovely too. We sat out in the garden.



Beans and I at the end of island

By then fatigue had set in. We caught the ferry back and Beans made me shop for a T-shirt. I only bought one with me (my Yoda posing as Buddha T-shirt that I bought at a fan fund action) and it was dirty and she said it was ugly. We spent some time in the shops, and then went back to the hotel to rest.

That night there was a special event put on by Helsinki city for guests of the Worldcon. Some delegates were invited to this welcome event at City Hall. The welcome function was well attended. The city hall was once a hotel, built in the neo-classical style. It was a beautiful structure. Helsinki has a number of impressive neo-classical buildings. Someone told me that during the Cold War, Helsinki was used for filming St Petersburg, formerly Leningrad.



A neo-classical ceiling, City Hall, Helsinki

It was great to see so many attendees in their finery. I caught up with Cheryl Morgan and met Kevin Roche (chair of the next Worldcon in San Jose) and his husband, Andrew Trembley.



Me, Craig Cormick and Alex from Finland

Then we met Philippa from Glastonbury and then introduced ourselves to a young person standing alone. It turned out that Alex was a first time Worldcon attendee and a local. We got to chat about stuff and I practiced my Finnish and learnt a new expression. Then we saw Cat Sparks and Robert Hood. We got to catch up with Jukka Halme and Sari Polvinen. Fellow Canberran, Craig Cormick helped me spell the new Finnish expression, and tutored me a little. Did you know that Craig Cormick speaks Finnish? Well, he does, and also Swedish. He is a very talented man. Then I met Kylie Ding, for the first time, and saw Gillian Polack, who was amazed how Canberrans tend to flock together. She likes to meet people and avoided us as best she could. I also met PRK, who I met in Perth a

while ago, and his partner Tori in the queue. David Gallagher, who I met at the Denver Worldcon, a long, long time ago. I spotted Charlie Stross, but he would not remember me so I didn't say hi. He gave me a Twistie cheese snack on the escalator in Montreal, at the Montreal Worldcon some eight years before. Also, I caught sight of Joe and Gay Haldeman and a few other familiar faces. I kept my fan girl squeeing to a minimum.



The welcome reception, City Hall, Helsinki

There was wine and soft drink and a cold buffet. As I'd eaten so much for lunch I didn't have much room for more food. However, I did try some. Kiitos Paljon to Helsinki for the warm welcome.

After the function, we walked with Cat and Rob to find a supermarket. We saw a take away burger place and advertisement for a Kesburger—a burger made with haloumi. As I was full, I couldn't try one but we secured all our purchases and went back our hotel for rest and sleep.

I know Gillian teases us Aussie for sticking together at Worldcons. I've noticed this before at other World SF conventions. I'm not sure why it is. It's not that we don't want to meet other people, because we do. I think it's because we like to share experience, talk about what we have done and what we thought about it. Also, Australia is a big place so some of us only see each other once every year or two and meeting overseas is another

social event. For me, though, I like to have people I know around me. It makes me feel comfortable. Maybe I am not as outgoing as I think.

Wednesday, August 9 2017

Big day. I had to find the way to Messuskeskus (the convention centre) on the train, register and then hang around and meet people while waiting for the opening ceremony.



Messuskeskus (the convention centre).

We had another hotel breakfast, but this time I went for the porridge instead of meatballs, franks and eggs. I also indulged in one of the bread rolls. The Finns really do bread in a big way. There were many kinds of bread displayed at the hotel. Also, that morning there were more fans at the hotel.

Beans and I made the train okay. It was only one station and all the trains go to that station (Pasila). We could have taken a tram, too.



The entrance to Worldcon 75

As part of our registration we were given a travel pass for free travel for the week from the city of Helsinki. So excellent! I queued up to get my membership, but there was a hitch. I didn't have a membership. Wires were crossed and my GUFF membership wasn't processed somehow. Worldcon 75 had granted me a gratis membership. It was sorted pretty quickly after I chased down Jukka Halme who was able to vouch for me.



Jukka Halme, Worldcon 75 Chair, and 2016 Guff Delegate

He just happened to be standing around—lucky! All my program stuff was fine; it was just the membership. Registration was pretty efficient and I was able to get my badge printed out.

There were many Australians at this convention and also many Canberrans. A

number of New Zealanders, too. One, Simon Litten, gave me a bag of New Zealand chocolates. You could say that there was an infestation of Australians here. I like that idea. We infested the place like cockroaches.



Me with the Worldcon 75 Bear

On that first day, I was pretty overwhelmed. My job as GUFF delegate was to meet people, preferably people I didn't know. I couldn't just hang with people I knew, although I could chat and stuff in passing. It would not do for me to ignore all the Australian and New Zealand fans I knew, in the quest to meet people I didn't know.

It was good to have the support network there from the Australians and I really appreciated them and also my daughter who looked out for me as well. She tolerated the fannish stuff pretty well. Eventually I settled down and was able to meet people. I had a bag with little Australian flag stickers, Australian chocolate—(Caramel Koalas, and Cherry Ripes) and clip-on koala bears to give away. They made nice ice breakers.

After registering, we went in search of tea. Not much was open before 10 am but we found a place. Then we walked about checking out the conference centre. To my daughter, I pointed out George RR Martin, who was just sitting there by himself. I think of myself as an extrovert, but I have fits of shyness. I've seen George around at all the Worldcons I've been to, but, I've not been introduced so I feel that I can't rock up and say 'hi'. Although, I did work up the courage to give him a clip-on Koala and then slink away. I must say that he is very generous with fans, making himself accessible to them.

Paul Weimer, the DUFF delegate, and I met up. I handed over some books I had promised, a bag of Caramel Koalas, and a few NZ chocolate fish. We also took a bag full of books, Tim Tams and NZ chocolate to Gillian and Kylie's room ready to be auctioned off on Saturday at the fan fund auction. It is one of the ways to earn back the money spent on bringing me to Helsinki.

I met Riikka Utriainen, who told me there is a geekgirl group in Finland. She gave me a Fake Geek Girl ribbon and a Feminist ribbon and told me I could get a Finnish one. I had to find it and after tweeting and asking about it, I found their table next to the Dublin World con bid table. I was so pleased.



Geek girl

Meanwhile, I was chatting up Finnish people and asking how to say things, like...how do I say: I come from Australia? "Olen kotoisin Australiasta."

After checking out the place, I met up with Joshua Beatty, who was involved with running the Hugo ceremony and with John Purcell, who was the TAFF delegate. We were presenting a Hugo together and Joshua wanted photos for the Hugo Booklet. Also, Joshua wanted to make sure we had the script for the ceremony and our Hugo ribbon. We chatted for a bit. For someone who was very busy, Joshua was very kind and patient with us. I was very impressed.

As John and I were also involved in the opening ceremony, we had to make our way to the appointed place. I was heading to the prep room when I was stopped by a woman who demanded I get to the back of the line. I had to explain that I was participating in the ceremony. I can understand people's frustrations in queues when people seemed to be pushing in. As it was, we were sorta in the wrong place: we were supposed to be in the front row of the audience, not back stage. However, it couldn't be rectified because the section reserved for us was full anyway so we missed most of the performances as we were backstage. However, we did get the behind the scenes view.



Jukka Halme in his opening ceremony costume

I talked to a Finnish fan called Vanessa and she taught me how to say "I love Helsinki" and I gave her chocolate. She was so surprised she gave me her personal reflector, a thing that Finnish people hang from their clothes in winter so they can be seen. It gets very dark at that latitude in winter.

Then it was our turn to be called out on stage. The Finns have been lovely to us fan fund delegates. They included us in the opening ceremony, and we stood up there in front of a thousand people, along with the guests of honour. Amazing. Then we got to say a few words.

I have to admit that as soon as I got the email saying we were expected to say a few words it worried me. What few words should I say? My daughter had been teaching me to say "Good day, my name is Donna Maree Hanson, pleased to meet you" in Finnish. She suggested I say that. During the day and the night before, we added more Finnish phrases to my repertoire and rearranged it. I was pretty nervous and Finnish is a hard language but I gave a little speech in Finnish. (I was told I was understandable!). As the open ceremony was recorded and put on the net, that included my speech. I had praise from fans I follow on Facebook and I was told that people were very heart-warmed by that. I had intended to repeat my Finnish speech in English, but I was too nervous to remember to do so.

This is the English version of what I said: "Good day. My name is Donna Maree Hanson. I am from Australia. Pleased to meet you. I am happy to be here. Thank you very much. I love Helsinki!"

Pretty standard but I practised and practised it. There was cheering. I hope I did not say anything rude!

As part of the opening ceremony, I received a gift from Santa. It was a set of mini Moomin cups, which I have on display at home.



Opening ceremony gift

I was still shaking ten minutes later. The room was packed out and I understand people missed out on the opening ceremony, which is sad. It is also strange, I think, because often people don't come to the opening ceremony. It was an early indicator of how popular the Helsinki Worldcon was going to be.

After the opening ceremony was a tea and chat session with George RR Martin and Peter and Emma Newman. It was called *Live Tea and Jeopardy*. It was fun and clever. Emma was hilarious. I realised later that I actually subscribe to the podcast of *Tea and Jeopardy*.

After that for me it was catch up with people, then have dinner, then hang around for the parties, which I did. We met more Finns, chatted, drank a long gin and then folded pretty early and were home by 10 pm.

Thursday, August 10 2017

My daughter could not be brought to attend Worldcon, so I went to Messukeskus on my own. However, she did do my hair for me. I love it. I included a shot of my hair on my blog posts. Totally frivolous of me, I know.

Usually I just have boring hair and I'm not an elegant person, but I felt elegant after my daughter did this.



Fancy hairdo

There were two panels that I was appearing on so I made sure I arrived in time for those. I decided to try the tram. From Hotel Arthur, it is Route 9. I waited on the wrong side because that's what my daughter and I thought was the right direction. However, I saw people with Worldcon 75 name tags on the other side of the road, and I skipped over the tracks to head the right way.

I managed to tag on with the free transport card that the city has given to all the Worldcon attendees. This is a wonderful thing. Kiitos Paljon to Helsinki! Also I should mention there was free wifi just about everywhere so we were very spoiled.

I was sitting there staring into space (as you do) when I heard an Australian voice at the next stop. "How do you use your ticket?" Or something like that. I recognised the voice. It was Cat and Rob. We greeted each other and when I faced forward I saw Janeen Webb tottering down the aisle as the tram had pulled away. So we had more greetings and I met Janeen's friend Dena. It was a happy little

group setting out to Worldcon. It is a mysterious force that draws all the Australians together. The tram stop was right out the front of Messukeskus and was for that reason, a wee bit more convenient than the train, but the train is great too.

I had arranged to meet Paul Weimer before our fan fund panel, but first up I sat down and put my feet up in a lovely collection of easy chairs. There was an American woman doing the same so I joined her. I met some Danish fans while I was waiting for Paul by the Worldcon 75 bear. We chatted about fan funds, I gave away Caramel Koalas and I also told them about my other panel, 'Romance and the power of female gaze in science fiction'. They were very keen to see that panel. Later, I did see them there and they waved. My Finnish geekgirl ribbon continued to be of interest. People asked me about it and, sadly, I think they ran out.

Paul showed up in good time so went to grab something to eat and a coffee. We tried this little eatery called Street Food, in the downstairs area of the conference centre. It had a few options and all seemed to be regional/Finnish. I had a baked potato stuffed with shrimps in a dill mayonnaise. Paul had the crumbed chicken drumsticks, with coleslaw, and the other option I saw was potato salad with bratwurst sausage. These were about €8 each. Coffee was €3. The coffee (Kahvi) was filtered I think. Sometimes that Finnish coffee is like sludge. My daughter tells me that Finns drink the most coffee per capita in the world. She had read the guidebooks. I think that means that Finns have caffeine in their blood. You would think that would make them quite tense but they appear quite laid back.

Paul chatted about his DUFF trip report. (He visited Australia from the USA and visited us

in Canberra.) He pulled out this massive document with great pictures, including the kangaroos near my place and the yummy pavlova. The fan funds expected to provide a written report and these can be sold to raise money for the fan funds. Paul is selling his for \$7US. I thought that was too cheap because it is a massive document, really. I mean really big. So I paid \$15 US for it as I had some money in my Paypal account and it was for a great cause and I was really, really looking forward to seeing all those pictures of waterfalls etc.

We went to the Green Room to meet our other panelists. It was a smallish room and I found it a bit overwhelming, because it has people in it, people I didn't know. Lucky Paul knew people. We met Ben Roimola, our panel chair, and then the other people. We had a bit of a run through of the order of business and went to our panel. Luckily, the fan fund panel had a small audience and that made it cozy, instead of daunting.



GUFF Panel, Worldcon 75

I'm not sure why but I lost my extrovertedness somewhere. Except I had no trouble talking on the panel. In fact, I had to stop myself from grabbing the microphone and raving on and on. I met Claire Brialey, who I am meeting up with in London and also Marcin Klak from Poland who wanted to run for GUFF. (He did end up running and is the GUFF delegate for 2018) He said he was disappointed I did not choose to visit Poland

on my GUFF trip. I said I'd like to visit Poland in my next visit to Europe.



Claire Briarley with some Aussie gifts

Here is a selfie shot of the fanfunds panel, Paul Weimer, Nina Horvath, John Purcell, John Coxon and Ben Roimala.

We were chased from the room after the panel as there was a huge crowd waiting to get in. With such a large number of people, it was a difficult job to move people in and out of rooms; you needed to queue early if you wanted to get into a panel and even then it was no guarantee. I had another panel around 3 pm. I had more books and chocolates to drop off for the fan fund auction and I was lucky enough to bump into Kylie, who took them off my hands.

During the day, I went to the dealers' room and the fan lounge because I saw there were NZ ribbons. I caught up with Maree Pavletich, who I hadn't seen for years. She was representing the NZ 2020 Worldcon bid. As an aside, I've met people who are looking forward to coming to the NZ 2020 Worldcon and who would like to visit Australia too, so we need to have a convention just before or after NZ 2020. I also picked up a mini Whittakers Hokey Pokey slab. Eat your heart out, Russell Kirkpatrick!

I gave away more chocolates and clip-on Koalas during the day. However, it was a bit of a whirl so I don't recall everyone I gave them to. I saw some kids in costume and gave them one each. One had a Kylo Ren costume and at the Welcome to Finland Party the previous night we met Nina who said she had been commissioned to make two costumes. I asked if the costume had been made by Nina and the girl said yes. I think she thought I was rather strange... but that is okay. Small fannish world.

The romance and the power of the female gaze panel was full. There were probably 10 seats vacant. That was an interesting panel. I met Carrie Vaughan beforehand in the Green Room, but we didn't spot the other panelists or more importantly the moderator until later. We had not chatted via email about what we were talking about, so there were a few anxious moments until Fiona Moore turned up. She was a great moderator and had some hard and interesting questions. The panel sessions are only 45 minutes long so there wasn't time for questions after. I had some lovely feedback afterwards and one on the audience came up and thanked me. The gist of my argument is: Why can't we imagine a world where women can initiate sex as equals? Where there isn't slut shaming. Maybe I was a wee bit passionate! Later, I found out that this panel session was recorded. It is available on You Tube.²

Afterwards, I went for a walk and took a shot of Gillian doing her book signing. I didn't get a chance to say hi as she was talking to a reader. I met Houston, a fellow Australian, in the queue. I also bumped into Laura E Goodin (Houston's other half) in the Fan lounge.

² Shortened link: <https://is.gd/0oQYRV>



Gillian Polack-book signing

When I went to the little collection of comfy chairs, I met up with Rob. He was heading off to see Cat on an Australian literature panel. I thought I'd join him and support my fellow Aussies. We were amazed that there was already a line forming; we were about number 70 in the queue for a room with 100 people and it was half an hour before. As the queue kept growing, I realised that I was taking the space of someone who really wanted to hear about the Australian scene and as I already knew about it, I thought I'd leave the queue.

On the tram, I was sitting there zoning out when someone said "Hello" and surprised me. It was Rob, he also had the same idea as me and left the queue to allow others to go to the panel. We had fun on the tram. We didn't have a clue where to get off. We struck up a conversation with a Belgian who was married to a Finn, who was sitting across from us and they gave us advice. It all turned out well; Rob spotted his hotel and I found my stop. The other passengers were very friendly and kind to us.

That evening, I managed to convince my daughter to come back into the convention centre to the parties. An essential part of Worldcon for me is the parties. They are fun. You meet people. You perhaps drink a little or

eat strange foods. At first, my daughter said she was too tired to join me. I resigned myself to going alone. However, I gave her a hug and said, in a loving and sad tone, "I really wish you were coming with me." And she changed her mind.

On the way to Messukeskus, we saw a police bust. We were quite surprised. A man was stopped and pulled out of a car and placed on the ground and more police arrived. It was strange. People in the street were drinking coffee and gawping at the goings on. Helsinki, according to my daughter, is the safest city in Europe and one of the safest in the world. We had not seen a police bust before—like ever.

I thought I should take steps to meet Einar Leif Nielsen, the Icelandic fan I had made contact with while still in Australia. As it happened we got there early. The parties hadn't started. We bumped into John Morris (Canberra fan) and watched him eat dinner while we drank tea. Then we hit the parties. Like the panel sessions, you needed to get in early. There were lots of people, the free vouchers for drinks and the food was already gone. And there was only one type of beer left and the queue was long.



Einar, me, Sara and Thomas

After a bit of phone tag, I met Einar and he joined Thomas Westerberg (Finnish fan, who we'd met the night before at the Finnish party) and my daughter. Einar and I went to

get a drink and the queue was even longer. However, the queue moved quickly. The bar staff were very efficient. Then John Morris and Sara Lindberg (Swedish fan) joined us so we were very multicultural. With all the crowd around us we talked about our countries, conventions and what we had been doing. I talked convention running and Iceland with Einar. Then when it came time to leave, I called Thomas, James. I was so embarrassed. Then he told me I had called him something else earlier in the day. I was so embarrassed. I am terrible with names and it's getting worse as I grow older.

It was important that I remember to call him by the correct name. Einar had left and it was then we realised it was 11.30 pm and there was a mad panic about whether the trams were still running. All was good though, as there were people waiting and the board said the Route #9 was due. We made it home in good time and went to sleep.

Friday, 11 August 2017

My head was not feeling too good. It may have had something to do with the two long gins I had the night before while I was at a party. I think it was the Dublin party, but it was hard to tell. Or it could have been the dreaded con lurgy. As I recovered pretty quickly, it was the long gins.

My daughter asked if I mentioned the green smoothies she makes every morning. You see, she had this goal of making me slimmer, healthier and possibly converted to veganism on this trip.

As I normally gain weight when I travel, I did not fancy her chances on any of her goals. However, I do drink the green smoothies she makes. Actually, she stands over me until I drink the last drop.



Me drinking green smoothie Beans made
The green smoothies contain, baby spinach, cucumber, broccoli, apple, banana and water.



Smoothie contents

When I related my blog post Bean responded: "I don't want you to become a vegan! I want you to go on a plant-based diet of six months and lose weight." I laughed so hard. A plant-based diet is vegan!

It was a big day for me at World con 75. There was the Hugo Awards' ceremony as I was so honoured and delighted to be invited to co-present an award. And my daughter came in with me and also did my hair. We went with an Austenesque style but we had to do it in the morning in the hope that it would hold until the evening.

We were going to take the tram, but another tram had broken down and blocked the track. After thinking about it for like 30 seconds, we decided to catch the train in instead. The train and tram are so convenient from our location.

We had packed all our gear in case we needed to change on site. My first item was to go to the Hugo rehearsal session. I had arrived in good time, but was so directionally challenged I couldn't find the hall. In an act of desperation, I ran up to a security guard. She said you can't go there as it is shut. After I explained I was going to the rehearsals she directed me to an inconspicuous door. I would not have found it without help.

I made it in good time and watched a few of the run-throughs and met people. John Purcell turned up and we were able to go through some minor edits I had made to the text and then it was our turn. Things were a little rushed and we had marks to move to on stage at certain times. John and I did a vocal run-through off stage just so we knew we could say it all. We needed one name, and Irish one, to be tutored. Luckily the Hugo Award administrator, Nicholas Whyte, is from Northern Ireland and could help out.

After that, there wasn't much to do. We had lunch and hung out with Rob and then Cat briefly. Cat donated a signed copy on her book *Lotus Blue* for the fan fun auction.

The pre-Hugo reception was to start at 5.30 pm, so my daughter suggested we take the tram back to our hotel and come return for the reception. We were having vigorous discussions about shoes and, in the end, she decided to go to buy some.

I was going to rest but by the time we got back, there wasn't much time. My daughter returned with shoes and a big handbag. We needed to carry extra shoes because we couldn't stand in high heels all night.



Pre-Hugo's Cocktail Party

We made it to the reception with the aid of directions. This is the closest I'm ever going to get to a Hugo so it was a pleasure to be there. It was really quite crowded. I guess you can't experience the impact of all those names until you see them gathered together. There was rumours of food. I did see people eating but by 6.15 pm, there was no more food, just some chocolates out for sweets. I wasn't too hungry so all good. When I walked into the reception, I was given a cocktail. I think it was a long gin with Lingon berries. I had to make sure that was all I had. On an empty stomach, too much alcohol is not a good thing.

I caught up with Carrie Vaughn, Paul Weimer, Nalo Hopkinson, Mihaela and others. I met C E Murphy from Ireland (via Alaska, she told me). Then it was time for photos. I was going to get a photo with Jukka Halme, but I lost Paul Weimer so I had to scrap that idea.

As people were having official photos taken, we lined up, but just as it was nearly our turn, they announced they were taking official group photos of the different categories of nominees and there ended the queue. Later though, Jukka grabbed me and said: "Come and have a photo with my official photographer." I got my photo after all.



Me and Nalo Hopkinson, both in red velvet
Then it was time to go in and take our places. We made sure to sit with John and Valerie Purcell (the TAFF delegate and his wife) as we were presenting together.

There was type written script on the screen. It was for the hearing impaired, I think, but it had problems at times and some of the misspelt words were hilarious.



*Photo credit By Henry Söderlund [CC BY 4.0
(<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0>)],
via Wikimedia Commons)*

“I am slighted to be here,” it said once. I forgot most of them, but 6000 delegates from 6000 countries was the funniest. This probably wasn’t fair to those working behind the scenes to have the wording up there for hearing impaired people.



Me and John Purcell on the Hugo couch. (Photo credit By Henry Söderlund)

Then it was our turn to go on stage. The ceremony was webcast and is on You Tube.³ We were in the beginning section. There was an international group of people presenting the fan awards, from South Africa, Poland, China, US and Australia. We had to sit on a sofa on stage with host Karen Lord, and then after we presented we had a short interview. Amazing, John and I got to plug the fan auction to about 5000 people. They had John’s name wrong in the script so Karen Lord called him ‘Jeff’. We gave John a hard time—so, Jeff, what did you do with John etc?



John Purcell (TAFF delegate) and me presenting a Hugo (Photo credit By Henry Söderlund)

After the awards ceremony, we were invited to the Hugo Losers’ Party. There was a shuttle

³ Shortened link: <https://is.gd/sFjma0>

bus (a small one) so a lot of people took cabs. We waited with C E Murphy, Nalo Hopkinson, George RR Martin, Pat Cadigan and others. A Finnish fan guy leaped on the bus, crying, "Nalo can I come with you?" and he did, sprawled on the floor of the mini bus.

The venue was Helsinki's steampunk nightclub. By the time we arrived it was already crowded. Winners turn up and are booed and made to wear ridiculous head gear. There was an amazing steampunk cake.



Steampunk-themed cake Hugo Loser's Party

Lots of booze, food and desserts. The music was great at first, but then we tried to dance the music went crappy.



Gin and tonic

I had a blast but wanted to go home. Beans, my daughter, wanted to party and dance and I didn't get out of there until around 2 am. But I met people, talked to people. John and Valerie turned up late dressed in their steampunk gear. So cute. I had fun with them but it was really hard to dance to the music.



Valerie and John Purcell

Saturday 12 August 2017

After partying at the Hugo Losers party, it was a slow start to Saturday at Worldcon. Thank you to Worldcon 76 and George RR Martin for a great party. Saturday for me was a panel on 'Urban Fantasy and Paranormal Romance'. Just before I was heading to the tram, I received an email from program ops saying the moderator for the panel was sick and could I take over as moderator. I said, yes, but then put myself in stress mode. It is much easier to answer questions than it is to ask them. I'd slept late and was already hard pressed to get to Messukeskus in time for my panel. I managed to brainstorm on the tram. Then I realised I left my bag of koalas and chocolates at the hotel.

The panel went really well, I thought. I went to the Green Room first, but couldn't see any fellow panelists and we hadn't talked beforehand. When I got there to the program room, the panelists were already assembled. They were Delia Sherman (USA), Russell Smith (UK) and Elina Rouhiainen (Finland). The panel were mixed in their writing on paranormal

romance and urban fantasy. Only Elina and I wrote both.

My brainstorming I came at the topic from a romance side of things. It was good that Delia and Russell reminded me there was/is a different style of urban fantasy, starting from Mary Shelley, and including, Charles de Lint and, more recently, Ben Aaronovitch's *Rivers of London* series.

I was able to clarify the paranormal romance/urban fantasy divide from the romance perspective. It was an interesting panel for me learning about the other panelists' work but particularly Elina, whose work is not translated/published in English. It was sad for me because her work sounded so interesting. Apparently, her book is in Finnish and also translated into Chinese.

We finished that panel on time and my next assignment was the fan fund auction, which as GUFF delegate I needed to attend. I had donated quite a bit of stuff. There was plenty to auction off.



The goods up for auction for the Fan funds

First up I have to say the fan fund auction did not go off as I expected. I had expectations that it would be fun and entertaining in the way I have seen them in Australian

conventions. I, also, thought it would be more organised. But a few things went wrong, particularly the last minute change of venue. Jukka Halme did take time out of his busy schedule to do some auctioning but he couldn't stay long and as there were a lot of other auctioneers it was a bit chaotic from my perspective.

However, we did sell a lot of stuff and that makes it a success! I did hear that the Brits do auctions differently. I thought it was odd that I had culture shock, but that's my fault for having expectations. A learning experience all round. As the auction took a few hours and I was on my feet, I had serious issues with my feet afterwards.



Paul Weimer auction an item for the Down Under Fan Fund

My daughter had come to bring me my koalas and chocolates and she urged me to go back to the hotel. By the time I got there, I could hardly walk and my feet were so sore and swollen I was in agony. This meant that I could not go back into Worldcon in the evening for the parties. I really should have sat down during the auction instead of standing up. Again, my own fault. Grumble.

I was so upset to miss the parties. My daughter made me lie down and she went out

to get us takeaway dinner. However, just after she stepped out a massive storm hit. It was the weirdest thing. The air just went horizontal and swept over Helsinki, bringing rain and lightning and wind and thunder. A nice Finnish man on the tram warned us the storm was coming and told us to stay safe, but we could hardly see any clouds in the sky and then it just hit. There were sirens and trees were blown down. I turned myself around on the bed so I could lie down and look at the sky.

My daughter came back safely, but wet. She said it was rather dramatic being out in the storm. Anyway, I had an early night but was rather sad about missing the last night of parties.

Sunday, 13 August 2017

The last day of Worldcon75, was walking stick day. My only seeming duty on Sunday was to be at the closing ceremony as it was on my schedule, but I had not been informed if I was to do anything so I sent a query to Events. Eventually, I found out that I didn't have to do anything, but I was invited to sit up the front in the reserved seats.

My daughter and I did the hop on/hop off bus tour around Helsinki, before heading to the con. I got to sit on my butt, which was good for my feet. Apparently, I had a cough 'mild' case of plantar fasciitis, deterioration and soft tissue injury in my left foot of some two months duration.

I spent my time meeting some fans in the fan lounge and checking out the dealers' room before it shut down. We caught up with our Finnish friends, Thomas and Alex and Canberrans, Craig Cormick, Robert Hood and Lawrie Brown. I also caught up with and said

goodbye to Paul Weimer and met Cora Buhlert (Germany) again.

These procrastinating activities meant that I didn't get to any panels. I caught up with Sam Hawke, who was taking some Finnish coffee and sweets back to Canberra for me. They will be sold in the fan fund Auction at Conflux when I get back. She sent me a message later tell me that she made the allowable weight by 0.14 of a kilo. She just scraped in.

Due to our luggage restrictions, we had to beg space in other Canberrans' luggage. It was lucky that Rob Porteous and Sam Hawke came to my rescue. Because I'd been raving about Finnish blueberry-flavoured coffee, my daughter wanted to buy some but couldn't fit any in her bags.

When the time came, we went to the closing ceremony. It appears someone didn't get the memo about us being invited to sit up the front and we were tossed from our seats. My daughter went outside and I found a place somewhere else. They were very pressed for space again. The closing ceremony was full. The numbers were s encouraging because usually a lot less people go to the closing ceremony.

We were given the details of dead dog party, which was to be held in a nearby hotel. It was being sponsored by another convention. Well that was a really sad thing because we walked over there and were refused entry. Some not quite nice guy had the tough job to tell us to bugger off. It was a mistake, he said. The venue was only expecting 400 people and we couldn't go in. That's it. So our plans to say goodbye, to celebrate a wonderful convention were destroyed. It was a sad, brutal cutting off of a lovely convention. What was said to us and how we were treated was not good. I don't know who he was, but it was so badly

handled. I can't begin to express how hurt I was feeling and how upset people were.

If the closing ceremony had 1000 people then clearly you are going to have a lot of people come to the dead dog party. So, heartbroken, we trailed off into town.



Kevin Roche, next Worldcon Chair at the closing ceremony

Then, I had the absolutely brilliant idea to try the Viking restaurant that Thoraiya Dyer had recommended.

We found it once we had wifi access and we got in. Unfortunately, there was only one waitress when we turned up. Another came to help out.

We had a fab meal. We had picked up some other fans along the way, but getting a table for six wasn't going to happen quickly. So three of them peeled off leaving Lawrie Brown, my daughter and me.

Haralds was very cool. We had cider with cranberry in these cool mugs. I had beef stew in bread (like a trencher I suppose), lingonberry relish, baked garlic in tomato, parsnip mash and baked root vegetables. It was delicious and rich. My daughter got a vegan veggie/bean thing.



Dinner from Haralds

We tried two desserts and shared them. There was also a vegan dessert but my daughter was too full to try any. We tried tar and bramble ice cream. I will tell you a secret: it tasted like tar, or how tar smells.



Dessert from Haralds

Later, on Twitter, I saw that the venue for the dead dog opened an upstairs bar and people were allowed in and they had a wonderful time. I am trying not to feel bad about this. I'm glad people got to go and have fun, but I'm sad we were turned away so callously, with no information, no alternative, just go away. This was not the Worldcon 75 people doing this, by the way. They were awesome. I messaged Jukka Halme about it and he was very sorry and distressed to hear what happened.

Monday 13 August 2017

I was sad to be leaving Helsinki. Such a great place, such lovely people, such a fantastic convention. Still, I was really looking forward

to going to Stockholm on the ferry. I was not looking forward to moving our luggage from the hotel, though. Who likes moving their luggage while on holiday? No one.

If a city has a spirit then Helsinki has a gentle and kind one. It is a very pretty place too.

We booked a sauna at our hotel for after breakfast on our last day. We felt we should experience a Finnish sauna in Finland. I am not generally keen on saunas, but I thought I coped with this one quite well. It was a lovely clean room with shower, sauna with glass door and its own toilet. I think we were supposed to be quiet in there, but we chatted and relaxed.

As we had to check out by 12 and our ferry didn't leave until 5 pm, we had the old travellers' dilemma about what to do with our luggage. We toyed with the idea of leaving it at the hotel and going sightseeing. We discussed taxi versus pushing the damn things to the marina to using the trams. In the end we had the brilliant idea of taking the luggage to the terminal and putting it in a locker. We asked directions about which tram to take and headed off with our bags on wheels. My daughter's bag is new and the wheels work really well. My bag has temperamental wheels, which means they randomly stop working. We went to the tram stop in front of central station. We waited for a while and realised the rumoured tram Route # 5 was not appearing on the schedule. We had out our maps and were discussing things and arguing as tourists do, when someone took pity on us. We were at the wrong tram stop and we needed tram Route #4. A woman pointed us to where we needed to go.

All the trams we'd been riding on had wide doorways with little or no stairs. The tram to the ferry terminal had narrow doorways and

three or four stairs. Eek! So we made it on the tram but where we thought it would be obvious to get off, it wasn't. Luckily some people on the tram asked us. "Boat? Or no Boat?" We then realised it was our stop, so I quick as a flash dragged the bags off. My daughter said: "You did that so fast!"

We walked the bags to the terminal, only to find that all the big lockers were taken. We had hours until we were due to board. We used two smaller lockers to put our hand luggage and pushed our suitcases back up the street to the markets and stalls. We thought we could sit with our bags in the lovely sun. Then we got the idea we could do a ferry trip. I did a scout around and the ferry company let us take our bags on so we managed to get the tourist 45—minute tour.



Me with our bags at the back of the ferry

It was an amazing day. The weather was warm, the sky so blue. I took some lovely photos.



The ferry we were taking to Stockholm

We got to see some of Suomenlinna from the seaward side.



The King's Gate, Suomenlinna

After we returned, we sat by the wharf and ate burgers. I had a reindeer burger and Beans had a vegetarian one without mayo or cheese. She was very impressed with the vegan food options in Helsinki. The seagulls were very aggressive which meant we had to guard our food from being stolen away. I spied someone eating a plate of meatballs, potatoes and gravy and I developed food envy. My burger was fine, but I didn't taste much difference between the reindeer meat and beef.

We also took turns checking out the stalls. I found some Finnish yarn! I'm so happy, I bought a mitten kit. It was €27, a bit pricey but it's Finnish!



Finnish Mitten Kit

Soon it was time to say goodbye to Helsinki. Picture sad faces. Then we went to check in to the ferry. Upstairs, sitting down having a coffee was Sara Lindberg, who we had met at a party at Worldcon. We sat with her and chatted, learned some Swedish and agreed to meet for drinks. She told us about the buffet on board so we planned to get tickets to that.

It wasn't long before we got on board the massive ferry *Gabriella* run by the Viking Line. It's a very big ship from my perspective. Then there was the queue for the lifts to reach the berths. We discovered we were on level two: that's the bottom of the bottom deck. We were under the cars and trucks. We had a four berth room, but luckily we didn't have to share. Despite the fake window, we were quite comfortable.



Our cabin on the Gabriella

Except for the terrible feelings of foreboding and death, I slept well. I read later that a ferry

accident some years before, led to over 800 people being killed.

There was onboard wifi. I discovered it didn't work on Deck Two so no morning internet browsing for me. I had to go up to the higher decks to log on. Also, every time I went to the loo or out of range I had to relog on to the internet. We managed to buy buffet tickets for the 6 pm seating. The ship took off and it was so smooth I didn't even feel us embarking. We took some lovely shots leaving Helsinki from the ship.

The restaurant couldn't seat us together saying our table was full. Poor Sara had to eat on her own. However, we had two seats next to us that weren't used at all.

The buffet was an interesting experience. I liken it to starved zombies who had access to five day old corpses. It was as if they hadn't ever been fed and thought that the food would disappear. A lot I couldn't eat, as there was fish of all kinds: fresh, smoked, pickled, tar flavoured, and fermented. I served myself some meat, but it was very smokey and salty for a roast. Beans said she paid €35 for a salad. She found some things to eat, but it was pricey if you don't eat most of the things on offer. She was saddened that they didn't have anything vegan and hot.

Later on, we found Sara and she joined us at the table. We had some wine (the buffet included wine and beer on tap) and chatted. Then we went for a stroll and found our way to the bar at the back of the ship. I had a cocktail which was vodka and campari based. We talked some more and then the day's toil weighed on me and I took myself to bed. Beans stayed up with Sara for a bit.

Next morning, I got up and ready and went upstairs to get an Internet fix. Then I saw the

islands! It was so pretty coming into Stockholm. I took photos.



A sample photo coming into Stockholm on the ferry from Helsinki

Tuesday 15 August 2017

Beans and Sara joined me and we watched the scenery and then went to breakfast. It was a lot calmer at breakfast than the buffet the previous night. A full array of food was available. I had crepes, bacon, scrambled eggs and I forget now what else. Some fruit, I think.

Because we were on the very bottom of the ship and there were queues when we were getting on, we packed up early and were at the front of the line to disembark before anyone else. Later, it got pretty packed behind the doors, with screaming babies and barking dogs and people saying let us out. I once again thought of zombies trying to get out the door. I am not sure my imagination is helpful. Being down in the lower decks, I thought that if there was a crisis on the ship we would be the first to die! Anyway, all good.

The journey to our AirBnB was eventful, of course, but not as eventful as other people. I bought a 24 hour metro ticket and was given the general direction of the bus and a number '50'. It took us a bit to figure out which direction we should go. There were a lot of busses to Slussen, but we were told to go to

Central Station. I asked one bus driver and he said “no” when I asked if he was going to Central. Another tourist just took any bus. She said that it was bound to put down near a metro stop. She probably had the right idea, because Slussen does have a metro stop. We waited with our huge suitcases until 53 bus eventually came and it did go to Central Station. Another couple from the ship got on with us, but as they had no ticket they had to get off and go find one. Thank heavens we bought our ticket on the ship. We had help finding Central Station and then we followed the signs to the metro.

Our instructions were pretty straightforward. We made it to the correct metro station. We were out in the burbs. Unfortunately, we got lost trying to find the apartment. We started to get stressed and had to ring our host. It did work out, but it was funny. He said I’ll go on the balcony and look for you. We followed instructions and saw a shirtless guy jumping up and down on a balcony and waving his hands. It was easy after that.



The suburbs of Stockholm

We were tired and decided on a short break before going grocery shopping. Sweden doesn’t use the Euro so we had to do quick mental gymnastics to figure out what things cost.

As we arrived in the morning, we were in plenty of time for the local SF fan meet up at

the British Arms Hotel. This pub was quite near where the Viking Line berthed so we thought we could find our way back there by reversing our trip. Our AirBnB host told us about the local transport app. During Winter in Stockholm it is very important to plan your trips and know when buses and trains are arriving so their app was very efficient. We used it to plan our journey back the way we came.



A Stockholm Metro station, which looked like Sydney’s Town Hall station

We had been invited to come along to this meet-up by local fan, Johan Anglemark. He had organised the meet-up because there were visitors in town. It was good to meet local fans and the visitors were Australians; Gillian Polack, who was staying with Johan. Janice Gelb and Stephen Boucher and also some USains. It was quite an international group. The locals very kindly spoke in English and we had some great conversation. So great was the conversation that we forgot to take photos.

It was an English style pub and one of the bartenders was English and chatted with us. The vegetarian burger had cheese in the vegetable pattie so I ordered chips for Beans.

The bar tender told me there was a vegan dish available, but it wasn't on the menu. He very kindly made sure my daughter got a vegan bean stew. I had some potent local cider called Old Rosie.

My daughter had a really good chat with Magnus Westerlund and Mårten Svantesson and got recommendations for what she should do in Stockholm and surrounds. The recommendations were: Gamla Stan, the Historica museum, and a trip to Birka for our itinerary.

Wednesday, 16 August 2017

We did the tourist thing and took the metro to Gamla Stan, old town. It had cobblestones: nasty feet killers! I will spare you photos of me with swollen feet, just this once.



Beans and me in Gamla Stan

We made it to Gamla Stan and we had been told the best restaurants are in streets parallel to the main street. First up we found a café that did raw food, organic food and vegan stuff. Once again my daughter was in vegan heaven, being able to have a good coffee with soy milk and a vegan muffin. I had a pastry and a coffee, too. Then we noted there was a vegan restaurant across the road so we pegged that for lunch. Next to that was Geronimo's Bar and I have a nice picture of their sign.



The most important thing in Gamla Stan is the SF bookshop, but I was also on a mission to buy some knitting needles so I could knit the Finnish wool mittens. I don't expect to finish them up as I have to watch the old RSI, but a few rows now and then might keep me occupied. Google told me there was a yarn shop in Gamla Stan so we went there first, taking a few snaps on the way.



Beanie walking the streets of Gamla Stan

The yarn shop was smallish, with some yarn: the local yarn I thought was a bit rough/scratchy. The Icelandic yarn I intended to buy in Iceland. In the end I only purchased the needles. Then we headed for the SF bookshop.



Gamla Stan SF bookstore

Wow! What a glorious SF bookshop. It had English versions, Swedish translations, DVDs, related stuff like *TinTin* models and then upstairs it had games, Games Workshop and Black Library books. My daughter wanted to buy a book and she chose *The Lies of Locke Lamora* by Scott Lynch. She wanted to buy *Norse Mythology* by Neil Gaiman, too, but we had to worry about weight restrictions.



Name checking Sarah Cawkwell, Black Library

We headed back to the vegan restaurant for the buffet lunch, which was really nice. I had black bean soup, vegetable casserole and salad.

We booked the Birka tour and wanted to make sure we knew where the ferry left from, so we did the checking out the venue thing with a map, Google etc. We caught the bus to City Hall, which was only two stops away, and

did a bit of exploring there. The building looks like a cathedral to me with its funny steeple. I took a photo of this mausoleum. Later, we were told that it has no body in it, and was a bit of a tourist scam.



Talking of scams... we needed to pay for the loos. A 5 SEK coin to be exact. The public loos weren't luxurious or even that clean, but you needed to pay to spend a penny. At the railway station it was 10 SEK.

We took some nice pictures and then decided to walk back to Gamla Stan as it looked close enough. It was across the bridge on another island. We were a bit turned around but eventually we made it and went back to the first café for an afternoon coffee and snack. Then we headed back to our accommodation.



City Hall, Stockholm

Where we were staying was quite close to a nature reserve. So after resting my feet for a bit we went for an evening walk. There was a lake there and it was so picturesque and quiet. People were swimming and having fun. There was a golf course in there, too. I tried taking a photo for Russell Kirkpatrick, but the

sun was setting. Besides the scenery, the forest and the lake, we saw deer (Bambi look alike) and a pet cemetery.



Nature reserve

Thursday 17 August 2017

We had the trip to Birka so wet the alarm. Except, we woke up early, well before it. It was because it was so light at night and early in the morning. Even though we were early we just went. It was a beautiful day. Bright blue skies, calm weather etc. After a bit of a wait (happens when you are early) we boarded the ferry.

Our tour guide Emil, was wearing historical costume. Not a Viking helmet etc, just every day wear. He gave us a bit of a talk about features on our way to Birka and stories: the Raven Rock, the rock where a king jumped off with his horse and survived, and more.



The little ferry to Birka

Birka is an island where the remains of an early Viking village was found. I was hoping to see archeological digs but, alas, it was covered up. We saw burial mounds, and, the remains of the hill fort, a museum and a replica village. The guide was funny and informative. He was an archeologist and so provided some useful information and tips for where to find things that had been taken from Birka.

He explained there was so much more to explore, but funds being limited, they will be excavated in the future, sometime. Only about five per cent of the village/city had been excavated so far.



Replica Viking Boats, Birka

The government bought most of the island from the people who live there. Apparently, seven people lived there, farming etc. We saw sheep and cows.

In the museum shop, I bought a Viking inspired T-shirt. Beans bought vegan soap and a Thor hammer fridge magnet. We had our lunch on the way back to Stockholm



View of Birka

After a long day we headed home. The ferry ride was lovely. I was a bit sunburnt, despite sun block. We did another walk in the nature reserve.



The nature reserve, near Skarpaak

Friday, 18 August 2017

We had planned to visit the museum historica. Not only was it recommended because of the Viking related exhibits, it was also free. It was rainy so it was a good day to visit a museum. We found our way there with the aid of maps and preplanning for the metro. We had purchased a three-day pass, which made travel easy and economical. We had to buy them from the grocery store no the Metro station.

We went on the guided tour of the Viking section and then went to explore the gold room, where the treasure hordes were on display. There were gold torques, and blacksmiths' tools, and coils of gold and silver used in hair or as currency; there were buckles and rings and amazing things.



Museum Historica

We saw skeletons and grave goods and tall panels explaining the layout of the grave goods and their purpose. There were rune stones and swords, and it was all fantastic really. We did a second look around after lunch in the museum café, which was yummy and quite reasonably priced. We went upstairs to look at the Swedish cultural history collection with relics of the church and so on.



Viking helmet, Museum Historica, Stockholm

Overall, an excellent museum and the shop was good too, but we were heading to Norway and thought we might find a Thor hammer necklace there.

Once we were home, we didn't bother with a walk in the nature park as it continued to be gray and rainy. We had to pack and weigh our bags and work out our departure time and how to get to the airport and also eat the remains of our food. Self-catering is really quite fun, except the changing countries part. We had to leave behind some plant-based margarine, which I had cunningly identified even though I don't speak Swedish. The margarine was much missed!

Saturday 19 August 2017

The feared rain was falling quite heavily on the morning of our departure from Stockholm. It was about a 15 minute walk to the metro from our lodgings.

The trip to Norway was uneventful except for the struggle to get on the plane and to our seat. People were very shovey and pushy.

Norway. Lovely Norway! It is so nice. I have some Norwegian heritage. With a name like Hanson you would guess so. The Norwegian may come from my great, great, grandmother, Elizabeth Ericksen, who married a John Hanson. Without a birthplace, I will find it hard to discover more about them. The information I have is from England. Apparently, because of the church in Norway there are continuous records of births, deaths and marriages way, way back. I'll have to do more family history to find a link.

Anyway, we had addition to our little party. My son, Taamo, joined us from Shanghai for a week. I have to get used to the idea of international meet-ups, given that my son works overseas and may continue to do so for the foreseeable future.

He and my daughter had plans to hike near Bergen. We met up at Oslo airport on Saturday lunchtime and caught the train in. Apparently, there was an express train but the guy at the train ticket counter said the normal train was cheaper and took the same amount of time, so we bought 24 hour tickets.

We only had a short stay planned in Oslo and we had an AirBnB in an unlikely place. It was in the posh area where all the big houses are and on the peninsula that contains a lot of the best museums and the ferry. The ones we wanted to see were the Viking Ships and the Folk Museum.

Our little studio was so cute and within walking distance, like 650 metres, from the Viking Ship Museum. First of all we settled in, arranged our wine bottles and my kids went to the supermarket to get supplies. I rested

my feet. Funny that the kids came back with some great food but no tea or milk.

To feed my tea addiction, I had to go out and buy some tea and milk and nice cheese. Taamo came with me. It was quite a walk to the little supermarket. I put my iPhone on the counter and the cashier made jokes in English about selling it back to me.

If you don't know, then I'll tell you: Norway is very expensive. It is one of the most expensive places in the world. We were going to Iceland the next Friday and maybe that is more expensive than Norway. Self-catering is a godsend and that's what I love about AirBnB. In our little place, we had a cook top, fridge, microwave and a washing machine. My job was to get the laundry done while the kids did the shopping. I didn't just sit on my ass. No spoiling of the mother going on there.

Our first night was spent in, eating, drinking wine and catching up. Taamo was jetlagged as he'd come from Shanghai with a five hour layover in Moscow, so we slept. It was one room but with earplugs the snoring sounds were muted. My poor daughter was caught between me and Taamo!

Sunday, 20 August 2017

I had arranged to meet Heidi Lyshol, local SF fan and con organiser. She had offered to take me around the Viking Ship museum. My kids went off to buy an Oslo pass, which we determined was good value in the 24 hour option because it gave us access to museums and included unlimited travel within Oslo on trains, trams and buses and included the ferry.

We were told we could use an online version, but couldn't find confirmation of this on the website. As a result, the kids went to the

Maritime Museum, which sold the cards and they were going to meet me at the Folk Museum at 1 pm.



Heidi Lyshol, Olso, Norway

I managed to have a brain blowout and mixed up which museum I was meeting Heidi. I had no internet and when I realised my mistake, I went into a panic. I ran back to our accommodation so I could access the wifi and sent a message. There I found one from Heidi saying she was running late. I sent a message telling her I was coming and went to the Viking Ship museum. But because I was panicked and stressed, I couldn't find my way and I worried about getting lost. It was only around the corner, but when I have a meltdown I can't think logically. Anyway, I got over that and found my way to the museum. Heidi wasn't there yet so I waited and I saw a robot lawnmower. You've seen robot vacuum cleaners right? Well, these robots do the lawn. I want one.

I waited a bit longer, rechecked the messages and Heidi said to go in without her, so I started to line up. I was in the line when she came in so we bought tickets and Heidi showed me around. Heidi knows a lot about the ships and the museum. She said she'd been there a lot, listened to the guides and was a history buff. She gave me excellent

commentary and pointed out things. This is not a big museum in the sense that there is a lot to cover. It is physically big to house the ships and the collection.

Heidi's commentary was wonderful. I loved it. It was so generous of her to give up her time and show me her city and her culture. She told me that her DNA said she was 98 per cent Norwegian. She was very proud of her heritage and her country. We chatted the whole day about fandom and conrunning and ate a lovely lunch.



View of one of the dug up Viking ships

The Viking ships were dug up in the 1800s and they were graves. The ships contained grave goods and skeletons. The most substantial ship and grave goods were for a woman. That ship contained two female skeletons—an older woman and a younger woman. Apparently, the grave is for the older woman, a queen, perhaps. They aren't too sure about the younger one or how she died. The ship was decorated and shallow. Heidi said it was a pleasure boat, not for sea-going, but rather quiet waters. In the pictures, the lighter-coloured wood is where sections have been restored.

The grave goods were varied: buckets, sewing equipment, animals, food etc. In a similar way

to the Egyptians, Viking age graves prepared the way for the afterlife. Goods and personal items were buried with the dead so that they could use them in the afterlife. This included favourite pets, dogs, horses etc—even favourite slaves.

After that trip around that museum, Heidi and I had a cuppa and I tried a hotdog. The hot dog was on a flattened bread roll and the dog itself was very good with crispy fried onions. It was yummy! Then we walked down to the Folksmuseet to meet my kids.



The only Scandinavian Hot Dog I tasted. Thumbs up Norway

This place is amazing. It was like ten museums thrown in together. There was an outdoor part and an indoor part. The outdoor part contained buildings. Yes, buildings that have been transported there from other places, buildings from many eras. I had never seen anything like it. Heidi told me there are other similar museums in a few countries. It was started in the 1800s by King Olaf II, I think, she said.



One of the turf-roofed houses

Anyway, the buildings for me were uniquely Norwegian. Some were really old like from 1600s and later. The storehouses were the most interesting for me because they bring home the reality of living in this northern climate and also what it was like in the past.

The spring and summer involved growing and storing enough food for the winter. The food had to be protected from rats, fire, and thieves, otherwise the whole family would starve.

Heidi was so knowledgeable about the place and she explained about how they were built. They were on staves, wooden supports, but shaped in such a way that rats couldn't climb inside.



Me and Heidi outside the Viking Ship Museum

The stairs leading up to the storage houses had a big gap so the rats couldn't cross over. They were separate from the house, so that if there was a fire the food would be safe.

The storehouses had sturdy doors with locks to protect them from thieves. Some had little balconies where the sour cream was kept cool. Inside some of them stood wooden casks that had been used for storing grain and other foodstuffs, rough-hewn stairs made from a log, big thick wooden logs for the sides. This was an age of big forests and plentiful wood. Heidi explained that long winters meant that people carved.



An example of a storehouse

The other buildings were different types of farm houses and a stave-built church from circa 1645. This was originally Catholic and then with the Lutheran reformation they were denuded of their idols etc.



The 16C Stave Church

Heidi said that anything the pope said was not to be followed. Catholic priests became Lutheran priests (or died, I expect) and the crosses and the Virgin Marys were taken down. Heidi said that there had been some renovations of old churches and underneath the floors the hoarded statues of Virgin Marys and other religious icons had been found.

There was so much to do and see in this museum that you needed to start early and spend the whole day. There were gardens and animals for kids to interact with. Horse and cart rides. Folk dancing. Music. Baking. I tried

Lefse. Girls in traditional dress kneaded the dough and then baked the *Lefse* on a griddle over hot coals



Lefse cooking on the griddle

Then, as we had to meet my kids by a certain time (they had to duck down to the Viking Ship Museum, because they hadn't seen it), we did a rush job on some other displays.

I went to the weavers' workshop and bought some yarn. As you do. Then we went to an apartment building that had been torn down and then rebuilt on the museum site. This showed the apartments through time, a mid-19th century, a late 19th century, a 1960s and a late 1970s. They were so cute and lovely. I noticed that the rooms had Perspex barriers so you could see in but not touch anything.



Traditional headdress (Norway)

In a country with high labour costs, it makes sense to police exhibitions that way. We also popped in to see the folk costumes and there was a special exhibition called 'Queering the Sami'. That was interesting with personal stories of being queer and Sami.

We met up with my kids, grabbed my Oslo pass again, and Heidi said she'd deliver me back to them at the venue for the concert. We had booked tickets to Wardruna, Taamo's favourite band. The band's music is what I would call Neo Norse. They sing in old Norse, and use old instruments that the Vikings or the old Norse would use. They have a personal desire to preserve the past. They are sort of folk sounding but not really. Anyway, we split up for the remainder of the day.



My kids tasting rosehips with Heidi

Heidi took me to the ferry, but we stopped at the Indonesian embassy where there was a celebration happening that was open to the public. Just a random thing. We saw it and thought let's check it out. We drank/ate some kind of drink with jelly and watermelon in it and listened to some singing (Karaoke?) before catching the ferry.

Back in the city, Heidi took me to the City Hall, an unusual building and evocative, too, when a Norwegian is telling you about its history. It was built in the late 1950s I think, post war. The Nazis invaded Norway and did a lot of harm. They shipped Norwegian Jews out to

the central European camps and used a scorched earth policy when they retreated.

By the way, there is a Jewish Museum on the peninsula which we didn't get to. Just opened in 2017.

Norway was in pretty bad shape after the war and rationing was still in place in the 1950s. There are murals on the walls of City Hall that depict these things but also share a vision of a future Norway, where the old are well fed and dressed and happy, the children are happy, healthy and learning, young people are fit etc. It is really interesting that Norway has achieved a lot of that vision. Heidi also told me about the patron saint of Oslo, St Hallvard, who features on the city seal.



Oslo City Seal

Next, we went to check out the Opera House, the harbour and surrounds. The Opera House is very impressive, a modern construction with grand dimensions. We then went looking for dinner. Heidi took me to the old train station, which was now a Holiday Inn and a building with lots of restaurants. In the end we ate Italian food. The prices were comparable to Australia. We shared a plate of potatoes and aioli and a salad for our starters, and we both had small servings of Tagliatelle Bosciola. It was very delicious and plentiful so we had to abandon our plans for dessert.

Then we took the short walk to where the Wardruna concert was being held; a place

called SALT. It is a temporary fixture, a bar, a large sauna, an artistic place. Interesting. We found my kids and I said good bye to Heidi. Heidi thought I might be the oldest person at the concert. So did I at first. Later, I discovered I was not the oldest by far.

My kids told me I had to stand up for the concert as it was outside. I was in a bit of pain by then because I'd been walking and walking all day. So I wasn't too impressed. My daughter bought me a red wine and we waited for the venue to start letting us in. By 7.30 we were in the concert space but things were a bit slow kicking off.



Wardruna at SALT, Oslo

People seemed to be eating and drinking and I found a place inside with a seat. I staked my claim and put my foot up on the chair next to me. The kids sat with me for a bit. There was a support act that started about 8 pm, an hour after the official start. My kids said that was normal for a concert. I was like, gee, if this doesn't kick off soon I'll fall asleep. Wardruna didn't kick off until 9.30. Two and a half hours after the time we were told. My kids had no problem with that. Me, I was starting to fall asleep! But the music was amazing and

excellent. The band played for just over an hour and a half. Now I am a Wardruna fan.

Weird haunting music, with powerful vocals and extraordinary instruments. My daughter said that it was geeky music that I liked and I agreed that this was so. There were people dressed up in Viking age costumes and people with lots of piercings and leather and tats, and I liked the music just as much as they did.

Monday, 21 August 2017

It was an early train to Bergen. This train ride provided views of mountains, lakes, and waterfalls. I was spellbound and I was on the boring side of the train. It goes through Finse (where, if memory serves, parts of *The Empire Strikes Back* was filmed). In Voss, we saw a glacier from the distance. I have photos but too many.

In Bergen, we stayed at an AirBnB right alongside the fjord. I took a few photos. Our host was lovely. She greeted me with a hug. A bit disconcerting because I was all sweaty from climbing the hill. We were lost. I lost it and had a fight with Taamo. I'm so ashamed about it. I wasn't able to contact any fans in Bergen to arrange a meet up.



The view of the fjord from our AirBnB

Our host took me in the car to pick up Taamo and Beans and we settled in. Taamo and Beans were going for a hike and I intended on

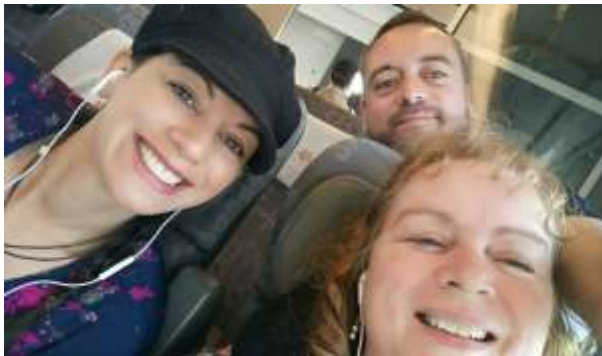
writing for a couple of days. Technically, I was still working on my PhD.

Taamo and Beans made it to Trolltunga (Trollstongue). I wish I had the stamina and the knees for that. They came back early, thoroughly knackered from the hike. I enjoyed my time out writing, but it was cut short by their early return. I took a trip to Bergen to check out the old town, Bryggen.



Bryggen

As I had no fan commitments in Bergen, it was technically my time out.



On the train to Bergen, Norway



Photo by Taamati Te Rata, Beans on Trolltunga

Friday, August 25 2017

We said goodbye to Taamo and took ourselves off to the airport. There were a few tears leaving Bergen, though. I called a taxi and told it to come in an hour and it turned up straightway, cutting short the goodbyes.

It was a long day when we finally arrived in Iceland. We were both so excited. We didn't make it to our accommodation until after 6 pm and I had arranged to be at the Loft Bar by 7.30 pm. I was a bit pressured to be there.

The Keflavik Airport, which serves Reykjavik, is about 50 kilometres out of town. A taxi is probably around \$250 (more than our actual flights, believe it nor not), so we had booked a bus transfer, which is probably more around the \$30 mark. That was fine. We caught the bus, saw a massive power station and deduced it to be geothermal. Research later indicated that this was so. We were deposited at the BSI bus station.

Our AirBnB instructions said to catch bus 11 or a taxi. After going to a couple of bus stops and my daughter enquiring inside the terminal, we found that bus 11 was a good ten to fifteen minutes' walk away from the BSI station. A long walk in a strange city with no internet access had not been figured into my plan. It was only five kilometres to our accommodation and around 4000 ISK by taxi, so around \$60. The mental arithmetic for currency conversions killed me. Actually, the Commonwealth Bank converted at a much higher rate than the internet said the rates were and charged fees on top, so the credit card price gouge hurt.

We made it to our AirBnB out in the burbs. It was a great place: a whole bottom floor, with one bedroom, big lounge dining area, kitchen,

drying room etc. Weird thing was we didn't meet our host. We never did meet her.

We decided to find a bus, and thankfully the AirBnB had wifi, so we were able to work stuff out and catch a bus into town and search for the Loft Bar. It took a bit of orienting ourselves, but we managed it. I had hoped to be meeting a local SF fan or fans there. Unfortunately, they were a no show.

Apart from the taxi driver, we had not met an Icelandic person. All around us were tourists. It weirded me out a bit. It also turned cold—for us. We hung around the bar for an hour, and then went in search of some dinner.

As I had imbibed a big glass of red wine on an empty stomach, I was slightly tipsy afterwards. The Loft Bar (on top of a backpacker place) did not sell food at all. My daughter had to rug me up and drag me somewhere to get food.

You might recall that I said Norway was expensive. Well, Iceland is more expensive, particularly the food. I looked at some menus and a lamb meal in a restaurant was 4990 ISK That's around \$75. Some meals were more than that although some were cheaper. I settled for two slices of pizza in an el cheapo place that was across from the backpackers. That might have cost me around 1000 ISK or \$13.50. Don't quote me on the conversions; I used google.

The next thing on the to do list was catching the bus back to the AirBnB and working out where to get off. Luckily, even though my phone was not connected to the Internet, the GPS worked and we just watched the little blue dot getting closer to our AirBnB.

We also stopped at a little convenience store and bought some bread, milk and butter and

a can of baked beans. I'm living the high life, I tell you.

We made it back without any problems and went straight to bed. Iceland is two hours behind Oslo time, so our body clocks were skewed/screwed. After all our excitement to be coming to Iceland, we were a bit let down. I can't really put my finger on why. It was a grey day. Maybe we were tired.

Saturday, 26 August 2017

We decided to have an easy morning, which was kind of good. I blogged. We rested. The black tea had been left behind in Bergen. Major crisis! And it was raining. When we checked the forecast, we realised it was forecast for rain our entire stay. The temperature was 12 degrees Celsius all day. At first, there was no wind. I remember Einar Leif Nielsen (Icelandic fan guy I met at Worldcon) said it was windy here and other people saying forget the umbrellas. Well, it wasn't windy in the morning, but by the time we got going sometime after lunch it was windy and we missed the bus. We actually saw it go past and bugger! The next one was in half an hour.

Beans wanted to return to the apartment, but I figured if I did that I might not leave at all. I had a mission. I was going to the Nexus book and toy store as a pilgrimage and I'd told the owner I was coming. Also, I wanted to find a yarn store as my next pilgrimage. We checked out a shop across the road from the bus shelter. The building was sort of shaped like a tent. They didn't have much. It was an ecigarette shop and they also stocked candy and soft drinks. We felt a bit weird going in there (to take shelter, as well as discover what was inside) so we bought some local candy. With nothing much else to occupy us, we ventured into the wind and rain again. We sat

in the bus shelter taking selfies and making each other laugh for half an hour. The bus did come. We weren't too wet, and only a little cold. I had thick tights and jeans on and three layers under my coat.

We sort of knew where the Nexus book store was, but we overshot in the bus and had to walk up through the centre of town, a tourist haven. We kept detouring into souvenir shops. I bought some socks in the Thor store. Not much of Thor in there but the socks were cute. Beans decided she needed gloves or mittens because we were going on a tour that involved walking for three hours across a glacier. I thought it was a good idea and bought some too. Godsend!



Nexus SF Bookstore, Reykjavik, Iceland

We walked and walked. We scouted out a noodle joint, which had food for under \$20 and a supermarket where we could buy some food for sandwiches. Although we paid \$450 each for the day tour, there was no food included. Usually, guides take you to places where you can pay lots of money for food. We expected there not be a lot of food for Beanie to eat. Traditional Icelandic food involves fish and shark, which counted me out on that, too.

At Nexus, I name checked Trudi Canavan and Dan Abnett. And checked out Game of Thrones in Icelandic. George R R Martin is very popular here along with Robin Hobb.



Trudi Canavan's books in Reykjavik, Iceland (Nexus)

I am not sure but is Nexus the most northern SF bookstore? If you come to Reykjavik you should totally visit here.



Game of Thrones in Icelandic

I was so proud of myself for finding Nexus bookstore. I know I had a GPS but even so...I can't read maps! We also learned a bit more about the place and our way around.

What a haven for geeks! I loved this store. It had toys, merchandise, LARP clothes, DVDs, and so many games—books and—jewelry. Most of the stuff is imported from the USA and the UK. There were local books too, fantasy in Icelandic. So cool.

We met Sveinn, a local SF fan, who works in the store. He was so nice to us. Talked to us for ages, talked about the store, Reykjavik, Iceland, Worldcons, Australia. This guy came to Aussiecon 4 in 2010! And he wants to come again. I told him about the NZ Worldcon bid for 2020 and that Dublin won the 2019

Worldcon bid. He wants to come back to Australia so badly, he said. I was so happy to meet him and talk fan stuff and about GUFF. He also told us a bit about the Harry Potter Experience in the UK as we were heading there. He said it is booked out every time he's been to the UK and he goes twice a year. We haven't even tried booking for it. After a long browse around the store, and undertaking some purchases, we headed off to get our cheap noodles for lunch. It was about 4 pm by this time.



Sveinn

Sunday, 26 August 2017

We booked two tours, The Fire and Ice Tour booked through [Iceland Tours](#) and the Grand Golden Circle Tour booked through [Busland](#).

The Fire and Ice Tour included a three-hour trek on a glacier. I was a bit worried about this because you know I'm old, I have bad knees and I've got a problem with my foot. It was a pricey tour around \$450 each, but the description was very cool and because it was 'hands-on' we went for it.

In Bergen, I had inadvertently invested a fortune in hiking boots. I thought I was spending under \$200 but ended up spending just over \$300. I had currency conversion blindness. Anyway, you can hire them from the tour company along with wet weather gear. I didn't know this beforehand. Oops!

Once in Reykjavik we got to know our way around. Our tour was picking up from the BSI bust station, but the local bus didn't go there. I tried to change the pick-up place, but the office was shut. Then, I discovered that on Sundays the buses didn't start until 9.55 am and our tour pick up was 8 ish. It ended up being a taxi required anyway. We waited at BSI and lots of tour buses pick up from there, Icelandic horse rides, Golden Circle and so on.

It was an effing miserable day. Raining and cold. We had only just thawed out and we were going out in that! Our bus arrived. We were the only ones on the tour. I thought they would cancel if there was only two of us, but no, Ingimundur, our guide, said he was taking us. We had a personalised tour!

A few things of note. Icelandic is a very musical and delightful language. I wish I had the tongue and ear for it. We had to ask Ingimundur quite a few times to repeat his name. He gave us a very informative tour and our conversations ranged from Iceland's economics, history and geology. On the return journey, he played Icelandic music for us. Beans likes a few Icelandic performers.

The Icelandic landscape is many things at once. It's a young land, geologically speaking. Mountains thrust up out of lava plains, moss covered lava fields range next to the coast near Reykjavik, clouds obscure volcanoes and glaciers blanket a large part of the country. The landscape is sometimes bleak. I thought of descriptors but words fail really to communicate what the Icelandic landscape is and also the camera really fails to deliver what the eye sees. I only had the iPhone so I apologise for that. Rugged, spectacular, raw, primal, dramatic, awe-inspiring, amazing, beautiful, stark, breathe taking, breath-stealing...



On the glacier

We drank some of the water on the glacier. It was pure and cold. This glacier we walked on was Sólheimajökull glacier tongue. It was just tip of a really big glacier. Up close you could see it had ash and grit in it. From the distance, it looked white.

Walking the glacier was a pivotal moment for us, a defining moment of our trip. To walk on the glacier, we had to wear ice shoes fitted with claws to grip the ice (crampons), a harness and an ice axe.



Explorers

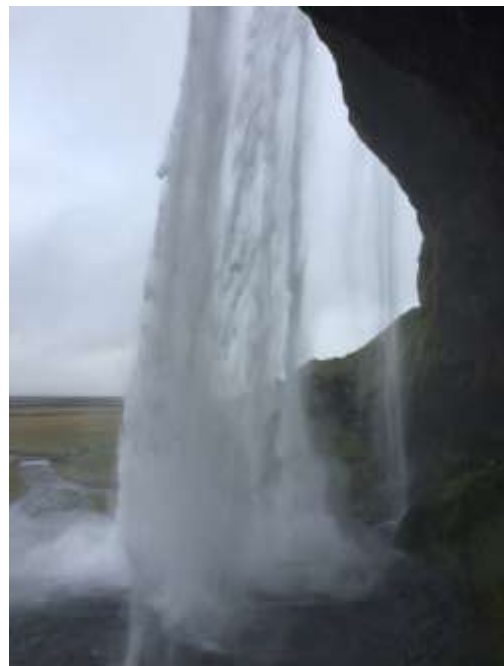
I want to say one thing. I did not complain the whole trip across the ice. I did not whinge. I did not want to spoil it for my daughter. My inner dialogue though was something else. A snippet for you. "Oh God we are not climbing

up there are we?" And "OMG! We are still going up? Will this never end?" And "Thank god we are going downhill! Yay!" "God, I'm tired I don't think I can lift my feet". Although, near the end of the walk, I nearly tipped myself into a moulin.



Intrepid adventurer

On the way to the glacier, we stopped to see a couple of waterfalls.



Behind Selfoss waterfall

At Selfoss, you were able to walk behind the waterfall, at your own risk. There were some slippery rocks to climb over and the spray was so cold and wet, too. There were other waterfalls along the same ridge.

Part of the tour involved a dip in a hot stream. We chose to do this bit last. Imagine being

bone weary and only wanting to crawl into a warm bed and then stopping in the middle of nowhere to walk to a hot stream.



In the hot stream

I giggled as I walked down this incredible hill, because I knew I had to walk up it again.



The hill leading to the hot stream

There was as steady drizzle. It was freezing and I was so tired. I thought we were lunatics for walking the twenty-five minutes to the selected spot. When we arrived, there were a whole lot of other lunatics there. The hot stream was entirely bone warming. I didn't want to get out. I did, of course, and we

changed back into our cold, wet clothes for the trip home.

Surrounding Reykjavik are fields of moss-covered lava. This lava was laid down in the year 1000. Apparently, it is called Christian lava because after they converted to Christianity there was this massive eruption and they thought the old gods were angry.



Black sheep

Iceland, also, has many kinds of sheep. On our walk back from the hot stream a black sheep looked huge loomed out of the mist. As I drew closer, it looked smaller. Ingimundur took some photos for me as my phone had died. He took a phot of us in the stream. It was really close to nature as it had chunks of moss floating past. And, despite my laughing on the walk down, the trip back up the hill was not as bad as I expected. I suspect it was the warm bones from the hot stream.

Ingimundur dropped us back to our accommodation. We were cold, wet and tired and so incredibly happy.

Monday, 28 August 2017

We had booked the Grand Golden Circle Tour: a much cheaper tour than the glacier walk, but one where we could sit on our tired butts all day. Or so we thought. Our tour guide was called Aesigir. I knew this because Beans loves the musician by the same name.

This tour included waterfalls, geysers and the national park, which has the continental drift in it. This was much more touristy than our glacier tour, but that can't be helped. You have to see these places. Really you do. Faxi was a broad and grand waterfall and along side it was a salmon ladder. As the current is too strong for the fish to return to spawn, they get help.



Faxi

Then there was the geyser surrounded by what looks like the bog of eternal stench. It did not smell bad at all. We got video of the geyser erupting (Stokur, I think it's called) going off. My daughter was taken by surprise when it spouted, as she wasn't expecting it. It went off with three blows, then it sort of just gurgled a bit while we waited to film it.



Looking like the bog of eternal stench

In the same area was the waterfall, Gullfoss, the most famous waterfall. The tour also went to the Kerid crater and the national park that contains the continental drift. About half of Iceland is part of Europe and the other is on

the Atlantic plate. The join between the plates is visible as they are pulling away from each other. There is also a huge lake there.



Stokur erupting

And lastly, I wanted to say that Iceland is a must visit place. If you are in the north, you should come see it. The culture is amazing too, being so isolated and I think the efforts to maintain the language and culture are worthwhile. I hope in sharing this amazing country that it doesn't spoil it. Here you can be close to nature, take some risks in seeing them, and be up close. The Fire and Ice Tour took us to some unspoiled places and the guide was very careful that even our footsteps did not disturb anything, particularly plants as they take a long time to grow.

I would love to come back and do the hiking/tramping tour to the centre. That whole area shuts down for winter. They close the roads in a couple of weeks and they don't open until June. Next time I want to explore more widely to the Westfjords as well. Thank you Iceland! I wish I could be here for Icecon in 2018!

Tuesday 29 August 2017

We left early for Scotland on Beanie's birthday. Sadly, our stay in Scotland was to be rather short. I feel you need more time in Scotland to explore it, including visiting the highlands. We were only there for three days. We did one full day in Glasgow and one day in Edinburgh, the rest was getting here and leaving.

I've been to Scotland before but Beans has not. She wanted to do all the things, but visit just had to serve as a preview. She's going to have to come back.

We did attempt a hop on/hop off tour in Glasgow but sadly we couldn't get on the bus. They required us to physically print out our vouchers. I mean, we were travelling; we didn't have access to a printer. The bus driver told us to go to the Uni Library and use their internet café. Unfortunately, the library said they had no public facilities. Bum Steer!

We had limited time, so spending a couple of hours and more money trying to find somewhere to print out a voucher and walking back to the pick-up place was ridiculous. I mean really what was the driver thinking? We never did get a refund.



Tardis, Glasgow

We had a nice lunch, actually breakfast, and then went for a walk to the Botanical Gardens. We were meeting a friend in the evening. We walked through West End to get there and then had a fab dinner at the Banana Leaf, a kind of up market Malaysian place. Glasgow really is a vegan food heaven. Thanks Tash!



Botanical gardens, in the conservatory

Thursday, 31 August 2017

We took the train to Edinburgh. It was really easy to get to the station via the metro. Funny little things, the metro trains. They are so small. Beans felt claustrophobic. At Buchanan Street you walk through the tunnel to Queen Street Station. It is weird, but the online instructions said to catch a bus. We could have done, but the metro was easier and more predictable.

First up we met up with Laura Vivanco, who was waiting for us at the train station. Laura is a romance scholar and she took us on a walking tour around Edinburgh. I went to places I had never been before: Calton Hill, behind Hollyrood Castle and then into the Georgian part of town. We had lunch in Hendersen's, a vegetarian restaurant, and later we made for the National Museum of Scotland.

I had a fan meet-up planned with Alistair Rennie, but he had to call it off due to illness

in the family. Local fan, Lillian Edwards met us at 4 pm. Originally, I was meeting Lillian in Glasgow, but as she lives in Edinburgh it worked out really well. We had failed to meet up at Worldcon. It just happens that way sometimes.



View down to the Georgian part of Edinburgh

Lillian was a whirlwind, full of energy and excitement. She had a new car, a wonderful bright green Skoda, and she took us up in the car and around Arthur's Seat to the village of Duddingston, which has the oldest pub in Glasgow, the Sheep's Heid. We had a lovely drink, then we stumbled across some ancient skittles and played with those.



Skittles, Sheep's Heid, Edinburgh

After that we headed to an Indian Restaurant, Mother India on Infirmary Street. We said goodbye to Laura, who had come along with us, and had an excellent meal. Lillian was a great host and very informative. My daughter is interested in Lillian's area of academic expertise—Internet privacy.



Me and Lillian Edwards

I was so happy we got to meet two new people, who I had only ever corresponded with on the internet.

Friday 1 September 2017

We went to Dublin, Ireland. We were invited by SF fans, James Shields and Fionna O'Sullivan to come visit Dublin and Drogheda. It was so lovely to be invited. We were picked up from the airport.

I bought some plum and vanilla flavoured gin liqueur to go with the handmade boomerang and Australian-made Wombat that were thank you gifts.

On arrival in Drogheda, we went with James to a giant Tesco's. OMG! It was really big. There I snaffled a bottle of aromatic gin, which tasted quite good. Beans bought some French red wine. It was a bit of a treat seeing the local produce and prices. I find supermarkets a cultural experience. Maybe it's the economics and accounting background.

For a late dinner, we picked up some Indian takeaway. It was so yummy and we bought too much, but that was fine because: left overs! Fionna had found a recipe for vegan bread. It was delicious and had chopped hazelnuts in it. Tea and toast is an excellent breakfast for me! We used the last of our

vegemite in James's and Fionna's kitchen. We also met the best fannish dog, Leia, as in General Leia Organa.

There was also Lego! Lego daleks!



Daleks by James Sheilds

Saturday, 2 September 2017

On our first full day, we went into Dublin for the day. It was sunny and lovely and mild. A fantastic day. We visited the Glasnevin Cemetery, which had a museum attached. Visiting Dublin you can't help but discover the political history including the 1916 uprising. In the cemetery a number of the 1916 martyrs were buried. The museum also contained illustrations of different religions approaches to death and burial.

We had lunch at the Brazen Head pub. It was meant to be the oldest pub in Dublin. It was pretty touristy but we had no trouble getting a table and fed. I tried boiled bacon and cabbage. It was so good.



James, Fionna and me in the pub

We also visited the Leprechaun Museum. That was more about curiosity, and it was fun but again a bit touristy. Here are some silly shots from the Leprechaun Museum.



James climbing the chair, Leprechaun Museum

We ended up at a British pub where the local SF fans meet. It was a lovely place: classy and quiet. SF fans who were coming pulled out at the last moment. That did not perturb us, as we had a nice drink together in any case. Then we headed back to Drogheda, a bit tired after a long day.

Sunday, 3 September 2017

Sunday was going to be our big sightseeing day, but Fionna had this cool idea to break it up as we were leaving late on Monday. She had booked us into the Kilmeadhan Gaol for a tour there at 4 pm. This was also linked to the 1916 uprisings, as the people who had surrendered were executed in the days after for treason. The gaol was really sad and moving. However, before we went there Fionna invited us to go for a walk in the Wicklow Ranges, up the Sugarloaf Mountain to be exact. Unlike, the day before, the weather turned typically Irish, light misty rain, grey clouds and not too cold.

The walk.

I did not complain! Well, I don't think anyone heard me. I did berate myself for not bringing a change of clothes. The first part involved walking through waist high ferns, which were wet from the overnight rain. The drizzle wasn't bad at all. There were blackberries everywhere so I kept snacking. From the beginning of the walk, I had no idea where we were walking. Beans said she was worried about me because I'm not a walker. I did buy those hiking boots in Bergen so I can now say they have had two serious outings.



Me enjoying the walk

It was so beautiful there: the ferns and the mist and the view. We walked and walked. Leia came with us and the dog had so much fun, really so much fun. We did have a few worries finding the right path. I seriously earned whatever bad food I ate that night. I saw the way to the summit, a steep rocky incline and thought I wasn't going to make it.

After a few hours, my feet protested. I sat down as a cloud rolled in and the others went up the last slope. I'm glad I sat the last bit out because it involved a bit of climbing. Not bad on the way up but a bit scary coming down.



Fionna and Leia

Monday, 4 September 2017

Monday was for Knowth and Newgrange, 5000 year old chamber tombs. I've been in a chamber tomb before in Okney, but I really didn't understand it. The guides here gave some good insights and I felt that I understood more.



Doing both together was a nice fit because there are different access provisions. It was an eerie experience going inside these old buildings.

We had lunch in the museum café and then it was time to collect our bags for the trip to the airport. Fionna took us up in her little zippy Skoda and it was time to stay goodbye to Ireland.



Some thoughts

I will definitely come back to Ireland. I'm mostly Irish so it was good to go there for that reason. I'm glad James and Fionna invited us because it showed me how convenient it is to go there. For some reason it always seemed too hard when I traveled to the UK previously.



The view from Sugarloaf Mountain

Also, Ireland got me thinking about how British Australia is and how my perspective is shaped by that. We have "Give Way" signs where Ireland (and the USA) have "Yield", and in Ireland the postal boxes are green and so are the postal vans and ours are red like the UK. It got me thinking about how the victor writes the history books. While I have very Irish ancestors, their nationalism didn't get passed on to me, but the Catholicism did. Although I am so lapsed, I consider myself not any religion. Ireland got me thinking that I need to learn more about the country and its people and also come again and learn about the history, the myths and the politics.



Kilmeianhan Gaol

Also, our hosts were so cute. They made me homesick for Matthew. They are as Dweebie as we are but I consider they had more books and we don't have Lego so maybe they have way more geek cred than we do. I heart Fionna and James!

For the next few days I took a break. We stayed in the Manchester region in a cute little cottage. We took a trip to York for the day. I had been there about four times, but it was Beans' first visit.

Thursday, 7 September 2017

On GUFF-related business, I went to London to meet up at the Tun, London Circle, a group of fans, who meet on the first Thursday of every month—currently at the Bishop's Finger, in Smithfield. The lovely Claire Brialey and Mark Plummer, put me up for the night. I caught a Virgin Train from Manchester Piccadilly. I had pre-booked it so it was £22, but the train ticket from Holmes Chapel to Manchester Piccadilly was £11. That's a suburban train. I don't know how the Brits bear it. The cost of train tickets here is ridiculous and the service not even that good.

Claire met me at the train at Euston Station and she took me for a walk to the British

Museum. I only had a day pack so that worked well. You have to line up to be searched to enter the museum these days and they don't allow big bags with wheels. We didn't have too much time so we did a quick raid on the Egyptian exhibition. The Rosetta Stone was four deep in people so I only got a passing glance at that. A lot of the exhibitions were crowded with people either taking photos or standing next to the exhibitions. I had a quick fix of mummies and amazing statuary and then we headed to Farringdon to the pub. It was great walking around the streets of London. I wanted to stay in London for a week just to walk around and get acquainted with the place. Unfortunately, time ran out when we were booking things. There was only so many things I could pack into 8 weeks.

Claire bought me a pint of cider and we headed upstairs where the Tun meet. People still call it that because in most of the 1970s and '80s, the group met in the nearly One Tun.



Claire and Me

The Tun meeting was pretty amazing really. So many people coming in and it was quite vibrant and alive with talk. The room they met in was upstairs and quiet, until it is filled up with SF fans. I met up with Kylie and met Caroline Mullan and her partner Brian Ameringen, who I had not met before. Patrick McMurray showed up, although he was meant to be in Ireland. I knew Patrick when

he was GUFF delegate years ago; I hosted him for a few days.

Fiona Moore showed up and we hugged. We had met at Worldcon and were on a panel together.



Me and Fiona

I met more people, like Nicholas Whyte who sounds like Liam Neeson and others but I can't remember everyone's name. I had a meal of bangers and mash. The bangers were pork, apple and mustard. Very nice.

A side note here. After keeping my weight reasonably under control during the trip, I seemed to have ballooned. It must be because my daughter isn't making me green smoothies anymore. It could also be the presence of so many roast dinners and bangers and mash.

After the Tun meeting, we got on a train to Claire and Mark's place in Croydon, where I had a loft room and a great big bed. I was a bit sleepless and I don't know why; I have had a few of these weird nights on the trip.

Friday, 8 September 2017

After some cold brewed coffee and toast and jam in the morning, I was on my way back into London to meet up with my daughter in Bath. I snuck a lunch in with an old friend from Australia, who has been in the UK and Europe

for years, walking the pilgrim trails. The train trip to Bath was uneventful.

I've been to Bath a number of times and this visit was to meet up with Cheryl Morgan, who lives outside of Bath, and for my daughter to take in the sights. Bath was a totally weird experience this time, mostly because we were stupid!

We booked an AirBnB, which we found after a post from Craig Cormick. We loved the pictures and we didn't read any of the fine print. After staying near Manchester in that lovely little cottage, which sadly was without wifi or a washing machine, we were hanging out for the next self-catering AirBnB with both. This quirky AirBnB was in a small village about 7.5 miles out of Bath. I arrived by train and found a bus to meet Beans out there. On the bus ride, I started receiving stressed messages from my daughter. She didn't want to stay at the AirBnB and asked me to book another. I said: "Can't you wait till I get there and at least let me look at it first?"



The AirBnB's conservatory

The AirBnB was a quaint cottage, with creaky floors and very weird plumbing. Worse it was not self-catering and we couldn't use the washing machine. I read all the fine print belatedly and realised it was more like a traditional BnB with cooked breakfast. I hadn't even communicated that my daughter was a vegan. Anyway, it got sorted. There was

a shower in one of the bedrooms, sort of a cupboard space really and our loo was by the kitchen. It was a pump thing so every time you went and flushed, a massive sound clanged through the house announcing that you had just been. One morning we all couldn't bring ourselves to do serious business because the landlady was in the kitchen cooking and we had to go into town and find a café.

Saturday, 9 September 2017

Breakfast was served in a very pretty conservatory. There was no mobile phone coverage in the village, but there was wifi in the AirBnB. The landlady said she didn't cater for vegans. A bit sad really, because she didn't ask what she could do, but because I hadn't read the fine print I had to take the blame. Even a can of baked beans would have been good. At least, she did let us put food in the fridge. But basically we spent as little time there as we could. A shame really; I thought it the cottage was a quaint, lovely old place.

I met Cheryl for lunch and we had planned to take in the Dragon Exhibition as a thing to do. We met at Mr B's Emporium of Reading Delights. I bought a book for my granddaughter, *Madd: Odd and the Frost Giants* by Neil Gaiman and illustrated by Chris Riddell.



Dragon on the wall, Dragon Exhibition

From the bookshop, we found a nice café. Thankfully, Cheryl requested an inside table as she thought it would rain and it did, quite heavily.



Me and Cheryl

Being Bath, it fined up again pretty quickly. We caught up on stuff. We were both at the Worldcon in Helsinki but didn't get to talk much. Cheryl had been busy organising the web text feed for the Hugos. Cheryl talked a bit about the radio spot she does in Bristol and how busy her work as been. I was very privileged to be a social outing for her, as she had to come into Bath to meet me. Thank you, Cheryl! She had come into town on my previous visits and has always been a wonderful native guide and generous with her time.

We walked down to the Victoria Gallery to see the Dragon Exhibition. There was some wonderful work there. The exhibition was centred on children, I believe, and a lot of the illustrations were from children's books. As it was raining when we finished, we took in the permanent exhibition too. There was an app that went with this exhibition where you find eggs. We hunted around for a couple and found them. I later found all but one before leaving Bath.

Cheryl and I walked around to the Putney Street Bridge and she showed me her favourite spot where I took some lovely photos. Cheryl also took me to an

independent craft beer place where I bought some cider before we said goodbye. I met up with my daughter and we did more sight seeing before heading back to the village and the pub for dinner.



Under Pultney Bridge, Bath

Sunday, 10 September 2017

We went on a day bus tour, which was going to take us to Stonehenge, Avebury, Lacock and Castle Combe with a few things inbetween. My daughter woke up sick and it was a close call whether we would go, but she rallied and we went. We had a bit of an issue with Beanie's sickness at Avebury. I did of sprinting around the village, which became a lot bigger once I needed to get from one end to another. Despite this, Beans had a fab time. I had been to all these sites before, but I hadn't been to Castle Combe. It was a delight to see that, and also to experience these places with my daughter.



Stonehenge

There is so much to see in the UK and it's impossible to do it all. It was also quite cold so I invested in another set of beanie and mittens.



Looking serious in new beanie

When we got back to Bath after the tour we wondered around for a bit, not for a moment thinking we should check what time the buses left. It turns out that the last bus departed at 6 pm and we were stuck in Bath unless we caught a cab, which we had to do. It was £26 plus a tip.

We then rocked up to the Butchers Arms in the village for dinner and were told they stopped serving food at 3 pm. We were over it by this time and just went back to the AirBnB and bed without any dinner.

Monday 11 September 2017

I had reserved this time to go back up north to Nottingham to visit with Marc Gascoigne. Unfortunately, with my daughter still being ill and the cost of getting back up there, we had to kill that idea. Instead, I wrote to Nick, a cousin of Matthew's (the Dweeb) to see if we could rock up there early. We were pooped and over it by then.

Checking out is always a hassle. You have to pack, gather up your crap, check that you

have all your crap etc. Complications include being in a remote village with a less than frequent bus service and schizo rain storms and wild winds.

We sat in the observatory and watched the weather and formulated plans. We were to check out at 12 but our train didn't leave until 2.36 pm from Bath Spa. We had our massive bags, so no chance of doing anything interesting if we went early. Watching the weather, we both decided it was a cab job. Unfortunately, we had not counted on the lack of mobile phone coverage. I was just lamenting this fact, when one bar appeared on my phone. I dared not move, so I sent Beans running for the taxi's phone number and booked a cab.

We arrived in good time with a nice, chatty private taxi driver who delivered us to the door of Bath Spa train station. Then we tried to sort our tickets. Beans noticed that our taxi driver couldn't restart his car. He still hadn't started his car when we moved upstairs to the station. We felt bad for him. There is this little café called Dashi on the platform at Bath Spa. They had vegan sushi and their sandwiches weren't bad either. We settled in there. Bean's tummy was still a bit unsettled unfortunately. Lots of acid pain for her. Me, I enjoyed my chicken and corn sandwich that was so fresh. We stocked up at that café for the journey as none of our trains had food services on them.

We had reserved seats, supposedly near the luggage racks. When our train was on the notice board it said no reserved seats and that the train was formed of two coaches. It was the Portsmouth service and we had to change at Fratton. I'd never heard of Fratton so looked it up. It's near Portsmouth.

I was concerned about the two coach train, the number of people waiting to board on the platform and the no reservation notice. When the train pulled up, it was every man for himself and every woman.

People were aggressive and that surprised me. The little old lady in front of me was trying to push the train conductor out of the way to get in. Obviously, he stood still for too long. We had two big bags and other luggage and it was hectic getting on board.

I made a comment about Brits and queues and the old lady turned around and sneered. She said: "Not likely." What has happened here? I looked up the population statistics and the population had increased by 6 million. I suppose that can put pressure on infrastructure.

Anyway, on the train we tried to move along the aisle to put our luggage in the little space provided. There was a Japanese man with his bag in the aisle and I couldn't get passed and he wouldn't move his bag. I had a crowd of people behind me so couldn't move backwards and I was stuck. A man switched seats so I could sit down, but basically there were three huge bags blocking the aisle. People could squeeze past, which worked but basically it stayed pretty packed behind me with people standing.

Beans was standing and I wanted her to take my seat because she was sick but she wouldn't. Eventually the ticket inspector came and said we couldn't block the aisles with our bags. By this time I was pretty cranky and had a go at him. I mentioned stress does not agree with me. This is a private train company. Why on earth were there only two coaches for all these people? What the actual? This is a joke. It's expensive and it's bad. Great Western Railway sucks donkey balls. Maybe I'm just an

overly privileged Canberran who drives a car mostly.

To make matters interesting, we missed our connection. According to the schedule, we had seven minutes to climb up the platform and change trains. I stressed about that but our train was ten minutes late so no hope of doing any of it. Then we were told the train was coming and we hadn't missed it, then we were told it was cancelled, and then we were told to go to Barnham. We were on a Southern service, so Great Western Railway weren't interested in us. There was a big issue with the trains due to a breakdown, so it was chaos everywhere. We rang Nick to tell him where we were and where we were being sent. We weren't alone, as other passengers were a bit lost like us and were trying to get to Brighton.

Once in Barnham, we caught a Brighton train and all went to plan. We arrived and then Nick picked us up at the station. Nick spoiled us rotten. It was wonderful just relaxing and hanging near Brighton. We were up on the hill in Saltdean. We went shopping in the Laines, inspected the Brighton Museum, and I had a pre-booked sewer tour. Beanie bailed on that so I went alone. Sewers are cool, but a tad smelly.



Emerging from the Brighton sewer tour

While we stayed in Brighton we did a couple of day trips into London, went to the Bluebell Railway, Eastbourne and a few other things. I

posted about these on my blog, with lots of photos.



Me and Nick on the Bluebell Railway

Wednesday 20 September 2017

Patrick McMurray had organised to show me around London for a day. Patrick met me at the St Pancras Station and then showed me the International Station and the amazing hotel building that had been restored to Victorian splendour.



Statue at St Pancras Station

We then walked through London, as you do, to see the sights and to meet Julie, Patrick's wife, for lunch and to go to the Wellcome Collection. Apparently, the guy who set up this big Pharma company was originally American and then moved to Britain.

He collected stuff. Heaps of stuff and you can see it at the museum as well as the temporary exhibitions. The temporary exhibition was about graphic design and how it has been used, in particularly with packaging medicines and instructions to medical staff. It also covered AIDS advertising among other things.

The old collection was really interesting. I took a few photos. It included sunken heads, sex aids, a dead body from South America, birthing models and bizarre paintings of surgical procedures and births. There was also another exhibition about the human body. I took a photo of this sculpture. I was feeling rather displeased with my body at the time. Also a library, which had other weird stuff in it.



Wellcome Collection Fat Sculpture

In the gift shop, I bought a few items that I figured would go down well in a fan auction. I was due to conduct a fan auction at Conflux in Canberra a few days after I arrived home. I purchased a glow-in-the-dark tentacle and a periodic table tea towel. I would have bought more things but I had decision paralysis.



Patrick McMurray by the Thames

We then went for lunch at the Fleet River Bakery and met Julie. It was quite nice there with salads and excellent coffee. Then, there was an unpleasant altercation between some clients of the establishment that put a damper on things. After farewelling Julie, we trotted off to the Soane Museum, which wasn't far away at all at Lincoln Inn Fields.

Lucky for me, Nick had given me a book to read about the museum and its collection. It is a very eclectic collection. Sir John Soane was an architect and the buildings themselves are a piece of art. Add that to the amazing amount of stuff he collected (he has Seti 1's sarcophagus in the basement). There was art and sculptures everywhere. To visit the museum is free. No photos, unfortunately.



Ye Olde Cheshire Cheese

Ye Olde Cheshire Cheese is a very old pub just off Fleet Street. It is also deceptive. The bar you walk into is tiny, but it has many more floors below. It was apparently destroyed or damaged during the Great Fire of London, but some parts of the pub are meant to be older. We discovered this when we went down the stairs. Patrick and I arrived early so we could grab a table and cider and beer!



Claire and Mark

Patrick had worked up a considerable thirst and, as much as I love walking the streets of London, my feet needed a break. We table hopped until we had a table with just about enough room for us all. Claire arrived and then Mark and all the others came along at intervals—about a dozen all up. Some people I had met before and some I hadn't.

Newly weds, Eddie Cochrane and Claire Wardell. A couple planning to migrate to NZ, Kin-Ming Looi and Julie Smith.



Ex-Aussie, Kylie Ding and her British beau, Robin Stevenson, who drew me a dragon.



Robin and Kylie

I caught up with Caroline and Brian. Julie McMurray was unwell by then, unfortunately so she didn't end up joining us. I was staying over with Patrick and Julie so I was hopefully going to see her again.



Patrick and Caroline

After a very pleasant evening, that was relaxed with plenty of talk, we emerged at night to catch the train.



Leaving the Olde Cheshire Cheese at night

It was lovely to have the London SF fans come out and meet up with me. As the GUFF delegate, I can't thank Patrick enough and all the gang who came along. It meant a lot to me. Food was good too.

Julie collected us from the train station. I was introduced to the cats, and then went up to the top floor to the guest bedroom. This was such a comfortable bed. It was so comfortable that I didn't get up to say goodbye to Julie when she left for work.

Thursday, 21 September 2017

I did get up to go get breakfast with Patrick in town as I intended on catching a train to visit my cousin, Christine, in Greenwich. I had left a little present for Julie. When I saw Patrick and Julie's place I knew my present to them would fit right in. A stuffed wombat. My last! Patrick took a photo and sent it to Julie and she loved it too. I was so pleased. Patrick and I walked into town and had an excellent breakfast. It was really good. Then I caught the train across London, beyond the castle... etc, until I reached Lewisham quite by accident as I'd taken the wrong train. Thank god for mobile phones.

My cousin, Christine, introduced me to Greenwich. We walked under the Thames along this tunnel and came up on the other side, I believe in the Isle of Dogs.



Cousin Christine outside entrance to tunnels

We shopped at Greenwich Markets and ate lunch at the Trafalgar Tavern. We had a Ploughman's lunch. It wasn't bad but the Ploughman's lunch I had at the Rams Inn in Firle was heaps better. I guess it annoys me when a pub says handcut ham and you get sliced ham from a packet and commercial pickles, not homemade ones etc. But the cheese on the platter was amazing.

From Greenwich, I took a ferry to Westminster Pier and walked to Kings Cross Station. After a day with Patrick walking around, I obviously had no trouble finding my way around. Ha ha! I had my phone app to guide me, of course. Even then, I got off track a couple of times. It was a long walk. I kept telling myself I could stop and have a coffee and rest but the other part of my brain said don't because it's going to rain. I didn't stop and it started raining just as I was across the road from Kings Cross Station. I count that as a win.

After a bit of wrangling, I managed to go from London to Baldock to meet former Australian fan friend but now British fan friend and buddy, Barbara Holten. The train I was on decided it wasn't stopping in Baldock after I got on it, and Barbara had to come rescue me. It's a bit of a theme, me being rescued by SF fans. I wish some would come right now and save me from the coconut biscuits I am stuffing into my gob as I type.

Barbara and I ate Indian takeaways and talked about Britain, Australia, SF fans and our mutual friends.

Friday, 22 September 2017

In the morning, we did a walk around Baldock, had morning tea at the Costa at Tesco's and I bought a new carry-on bag in the mega Tesco's.



Baldock

Then we sat around all day watching telly, talking books and writing and so on and then, around 7 pm, it was time for me to take off again. The trip back to Brighton was via Gatwick as Beans was returning from a few days in Morocco. Her plane kept getting delayed and next thing you know Nick is driving in from Brighton to pick us both up. We did not get to bed until 2.00 am.

We had another couple of days in Brighton and caught up with my step-son, Daren (Bean's half brother), and took Nick for a big thank you lunch at a posh vegetarian restaurant. Nick drove us to Heathrow, even though we argued with him about it. He was so good to us. He wants me to visit him without one of those "SF things" as my reason for being in the UK.

We arrived home safely to Sydney, but there was the bus. Yes, the bloody bus takes 3.5 hours and this time it took more like four. After a day on a plane, you really don't want a bus. I think I passed out on the bus and by the time I arrived I could hardly stay awake.

Matthew was there to collect us. Lovely, adorable and cuddly Matthew. The mighty darling Dweeb! It was great to be home but sad too. I didn't want to come back. But the GUFF trip could not last forever.



Royal Pavilion, Brighton

After arriving home, I had a day or two before I had to prepare for Conflux SF convention. I had a table, a book launch and a fan auction to prepare for.

The fan auction was amazing. We made good money from a small crowd. Thank to the generous fans who attended and paid through the nostrils for Finnish sweets. The tentacle and the periodic table tea towel went down like a treat, as did the Finnish sweets and Moomin coffee and biscuit tin. Canberra fans are crazy for the Finnish sweets!

We also auctioned off a Worldcon 75 souvenir book, as it was a marvelous publication, and some Finish weird anthologies. I was well pleased. Gillian says I have a talent for auctioneering. Who knew!



Finnish auction items

The GUFF trip was done.

Reflections

I learned a lot about myself on this trip. I think I'm extroverted but at times it was hard to reach out to people I didn't know, particularly ones from different cultures.

When you travel you are often stressed but you may not be aware of it. I think that is true for me. I was excited to be there, but there was a stress there, too, from being out of my comfort zone, away from home. I am so happy to have met some wonderful people who reached out to me or me to them, who shared their homes or their cities with me.

I love the feeling of community I experienced on the GUFF trip. I thank those who went to extra mile to meet me and say hello.

GUFF (and the other fan funds) enhances the community ties of fandom. Each person you meet and talk to learns about fan funds and fan from other countries. That is the community reaching out and reinforcing itself. Also, prior GUFF delegates and those involved in supporting the fan funds, offer fellowship and support. I had words of advice and assistance from Gillian, who was the administrator, and Claire Briarley, who manages the money in the UK. In addition, I had advice from prior delegates, such Damien Warman, Kylie Ding, Jukka Halme, Mihaela Perković and Roman Ozanski. I know that I'm now part of a bigger GUFF family.

Other fan fund delegates also meet up and cross-pollinate ideas about fandom, con running and the way they 'do' fandom on their home turf. I had the opportunity to get to know John Purcell, the TAFF delegate (2017) and meet up again with Paul Weimer, the DUFF delegate (2017). It is really important that the fan funds continue on and have support.

I'm very grateful to my daughter, Beans, who came with me and offered support. She did my hair which was just wonderful. I think it was hard for her given she doesn't identify as a fan (though she really is, as it is in her blood) and she had to put up with me, my demands, the demands of fandom on my time and the times I just needed to zone out when she really wanted me to be present and attentive. I don't think I could have done it alone, Beans. Thank you.

Many thanks to Bill Wright for some very generous donations to the GUFF fund this year. This money helped us bring Marcin Klack to Australia, but also helped in having enough in the back account to send someone to Dublin Worldcon in 2019.

Thank you fandom for a wonderful time, a wonderful trip. I commend you to my GUFF trip report.

Donna Maree Hanson

June 2018

Fionna O'Sullivan took this picture of me. She thought it would make a nice author shot because I look like I'm reflecting on something.



Photo credit: Fionna O'Sullivan 2017