

Stolen Toys

Sort of an apazine for an experiment that may not even work, prepared on 29 March 2014, © by Taral Wayne, who can be reached at taral@bell.net or 245 Dunn Ave. #2111, Tor. Ont. M6K 1S6, Canada.

The Less Said the Better about me, I suppose. But if I don't say something, the reader will probably wonder who wrote this, and why. The why is easy, actually. I was asked to. I may be an awful curmudgeon, but an earnest one who takes his obligations as a fan seriously.

Perhaps that was why I was picked out of a hat to be the Fan Guest of Honour at the Worldcon in 2009, held in Montreal. It certainly wasn't because of my personality, or because I'm a good dresser. While it isn't unusual these days for fans to boast about being in fandom since 1807 (or whatever), the 42 years I've put in as a fan have been fairly productive. As a fanartist, I've earned 11 Hugo nominations to date. Also as a fanartist, I've won the Rotsler Award and a couple of dandy certificates from a dude out west who runs a Canadian Fanzine Achievement Award. There have been a scattering of times I've been in the top five for Best Fanartist and Best fanwriter in another set of awards called the FAAns. For the most part, this doesn't really matter, since you won't have heard of any of them but the Hugo. I try not to take them too seriously myself. Only one of them comes with money ... and it isn't the Hugo.

Nevertheless, fanart, fanwriting and fanzine publishing is what I do, so awards do offer a concise summary of all that, and possibly my ranking in the tiny world of fanzine fandom.

In my life I've been a comic book artist, illustrated one SF novel and sold cartoons to a magazine on the West Coast. I've done what professional commissions I could find, and limped through life on a free-lance living that made the poverty line seem impossibly out of reach. But, I've finally reached a point in my life where age and a disability has made it possible to veg out on a pension. Now I can *really* get some real work done, I tell myself. But I'll probably just veg out.

You may wonder if you can find me at Ad Astra. Not a chance. Apart from issues of money and interest, I no longer travel well, and AA is not even *in* Toronto. To be honest, I've not been a regular at any conventions for a long, long time. I more or less waved a fond farewell to regular con-going in the first years of the 1980s, and concentrated on fanac I could do by myself at home. And why not? That was what fandom was – about 80 years ago – when they first said that “fandom was a proud and lonely thing.”



From Sound Stage to Holo Deck

Recently, I read mention of a nearly-forgotten milestone of entertainment history – *My Favourite Husband*. I've listened to at least a dozen episodes of this radio program that were recorded on the DVD collections of *I Love Lucy*. In tone, the radio program was much like the TV show, but the Lucy character played by Lucille Ball is rather more on the ball. She isn't as wacky. In some ways, the radio program was funnier than *I Love Lucy*. For one thing, there are no embarrassing

scenes in which Lucy is slobbering all over Sonny Tufts or Alan Ladd. There is no music, either. The show never came to a stop as Ricky belted out “Babbaloo” in barely understandable English, or while the Mertzes did a Vaudeville song and dance routine. Another advantage that *My Favourite Husband* enjoyed was that you couldn’t see it. Because you didn’t watch radio, you weren’t horrified by Lucille Ball’s mugging and rug-chewing.

I have two seasons’ worth of Lucille Ball and Desi Arnaz’s history-making sitcom. Despite sometimes going well over the top, or sometimes stooping to new lows, *I Love Lucy* was often hilariously funny. Sometimes, it was unexpectedly moving, as well. If you have ever seen the episode where Lucy tells Ricky, in the middle of his act at the club, that she is pregnant, you may remember how oddly intense it was. What the TV audience didn’t know, though, was that Lucy *was* pregnant. The actors knew it, of course, but real-life husband and wife became so caught up in the moment that, in effect, they forget they were acting. That was an instant of genuine emotion you saw, unplanned and very nearly lost. Ricky stumbled over his next line, and had to be cued by one of the musicians in the band.

The show was enormously influential. For more than a decade after *I Love Lucy* first aired, a surprising number of sitcoms involved show business in one way or another. *The Dick van Dyke Show*, for example, and the *Danny Thomas Show*, were stories about entertainers. *I Love Lucy* was influential in another way, as well. Previously, sets for television comedies were rather minimal. *The Honeymooners* had Ralph’s apartment, and you rarely saw anything else, not even the bedroom connecting to the sitting room (where all the action occurred). This is hardly surprising, as the sitcom grew out of five-minute blackouts on Jackie Gleason’s comedy-variety hour and only later spun off as a sitcom. Another early classic, variously known as *You’re In the Army Now* and *The Phil Silvers Show*, had few basic sets. The barracks, Bilko’s private room in the barracks, and occasionally Ritzik’s kitchen or the Colonel’s office. They were simply backdrops, that were never seen from any other camera angle.

To my surprise, as I watched the nearly 80 episodes again for the first time in decades, I was impressed by the seeming reality of the sets used for *I Love Lucy*. I began to make sketches, and soon discovered that the Ricardo apartment was virtually a complete suite. There is even one episode where you see Lucy and Ethyl from outside, leaning in a window in the “fourth” wall. Not only was the kitchen connected logically to the sitting room, but so was the hallway to their bedroom. The hallway outside the apartment door led to a real corridor, which contained a flight of stairs up to a logically laid out rooftop. The downstairs flight led to the Mertze’s apartment, on the floor below. Even the balcony made sense, leading down to an alley that was seen in one episode. In the second season, when the Ricardos moved to a larger apartment in the same building, they were on the same floor as the Mertzes, and shared the balcony. There is even a basement set where Lucy once accidentally burned \$500 worth of frozen beef in the furnace.

The producers, Desi and Lucy themselves, apparently thought it important enough to establish a believable environment for the series that they created all these logically constructed sets! This too made its mark on TV history, for most television programs thereafter followed *Lucy’s* lead.

Next time you beg to disagree with a friend about whether there is a turbolift on the right side of the transporter room on the *Enterprise D*, or on both sides, remember who started it all. There might have been no *Enterprise D* without the Ricardo apartment.