

THE METROPOLIS SUPERMAN CELEBRATION 2000

Thursday June 8 to Sunday June 11

Located about a half hour North of Paducah Kentucky and a few hours' drive South of Chicago and East of St. Louis is the small town of Metropolis. In fact the city more closely resembles Superman's boyhood home of Smallville Kansas than the Big Apricot, even before the Braniac 13 changes. Quiet, peaceful, and small, this town comes alive for one weekend every year, during the annual Superman Celebration.

I drove the 1015 miles from my home to Metropolis to be there for the 2000 Celebration, the city's 22nd. The drive took fifteen and a half hours. It is said that getting there is half the fun. In this case, when "getting there" is accomplished single handed across one thousand miles of pretty much nothing interrupted only briefly by Kansas City at lunch and St. Louis over rushour, "getting there" really comprises less than ten percent of the fun, and that's if I'm being very generous with the fun. Actually it wasn't that bad; because of the lack of company and stimulating conversation (I'd talk to myself but I always finish my own sentences and that starts an argument which I always somehow manage to lose) I brought along my collection of recordings of the 1940s Superman radio show and listened to them. In fact over the course of the journey I developed a new drinking game which I call "What?!" The rules are very simple; every time someone on the show says something, and another person says "What?!" prompting the first person to repeat himself, you drink. If you're familiar with the Superman radio show, you'll understand how much fun this game could be: "An Atom Man." "What?!" "An Atom Man!" (Drink) "Tell no one." "What?!" "Tell no one!" (Drink) Well, it was a good idea at 8 pm after 15 hours of driving.

Once I was in town, though, things looked more promising. As I was unpacking my car, a fellow traveller (from Georgia according to his license plates) asked if I was in town for the Superman Celebration. When I said I was, he told me he was in charge of the dinner which was to be one of the last events of the weekend. He introduced himself as David Olsen and told me to ask if I had any questions. David was very helpful to me during my visit, and I'm glad to have met him.

The actual Celebration didn't start until Thursday evening, so I spent that day tooling around the neighborhood. I explored Metropolis itself, from the riverfront where the carnival was set up to the giant kryptonite meteorite, from the water tower to the 15-foot tall Superman statue in front of City Hall. I also visited nearby Fort Massac and learned some of its history. Fort Massac was originally built by the French; then the British moved in and when it was burned down they abandoned it and the Americans moved in. The site of the original fort is still there, although it's all pretty much stumps at this point. Stumps and a nice statue. Right next to it there's a full reconstruction of the American version of Ft Massac, and the picture is of that. The Fort, which is Illinois' first state park, is located right along the river, and the surrounding territory is absolutely beautiful.

There was also a preview of the Antique Car show that was scheduled for Monday at Fort Massac State Park. I took some shots of some of the more interesting looking cars. There was one that looked like it might've belonged to the Joker and his gang!

Now just because I went down there by myself and spent all of the first day pretty much alone doesn't mean that I intended to remain isolated all weekend. I mean heck, I hadn't been in town five minutes Wednesday night and I was already meeting people. So on Thursday afternoon, while exploring around the small town of Metropolis, I made the acquaintance of a very nice chap from Sydney Australia, who at the end of the Celebration took the unofficial "I've Come The Farthest Distance To Be Here" award (a couple of gents from Paris France placed second, and I beat out Norm from Toronto Canada for third). Terry was staying at the Best Western next door to the Best Inns where I was staying, and since he didn't have a car I volunteered to shuttle him back; we got to talking and agreed that if he needed a drive back I'd be happy to help him out. He's a delightful fellow and I'm glad to have met him.

And then there were Kevin and his girlfriend Kaarie (who, I hope he'll forgive me for saying, is quite the cutie indeed) from Springfield Missouri. Kevin's a nice guy, and pretty funny at that. Plus he kinda looks like Freddy Prinze Jr. That's us in the picture: Terry on the left, then my own humble self, then Kaarie and Kevin. The four of us wound up spending some time together, culminating in a very nice (if brief) breakfast on Sunday morning. My life is richer for having them in it, even for so short a time; and I truly hope we'll be able to get together again the next time we visit Metropolis for the Superman Celebration.

Okay, that was a little too afterschool-specialy for me. Moving on.

On Friday I visited the Superman Museum owned by James Hambrick. The museum has its own website which has information about the museum and the town of Metropolis. I took a few pictures, but sadly none of those turned out.

I really felt the museum was less a "museum" than a really very huge collection of Superman stuff. A museum tends to have an ordered progression (you know, "Here we have bones from the early Mesozoic era...and these are bones from the mid-Mesozoic...these are from the late Mesozoic...and these are from the early-mid-neo-late-post-Mesozoic era." "Um, didn't they call it something else by then?" "Yes, but 'Mesozoic' is the only thing I can say."), but this stuff wasn't really organized like that. There was a room devoted to Supergirl, and some things seemed grouped kind of by a central theme, but that was it. Much of the memorabilia focused on the George Reeves TV show, with easily hundreds of photos and publicity shots. There were also displays cataloging the Christopher Reeve movies and Kirk Alyn serials, as well as some things acknowledging the cartoons, from the Fleischers through the Super Friends to the most recent version on the WB network. There was surprisingly little mention of the comics themselves, though, at least when compared with all the stuff

devoted to the movies and TV shows. Still, with all the clothing, costumes, toys, tapes, pictures, oversize novelty watches, Christmas ornaments, magazines, TV Guides...I could have easily lost myself in there for hours and still not seen everything there was to see. It really is an amazing place.

On Saturday I and my little group finally got to meet the celebrities, first at a Q&A session under the main tent, and then at the Metropolis Chamber of Commerce office for the autograph session. Terry confessed to me that his main reason for coming (all the way from Oz!) was to meet Noel Neill, who played Lois Lane in the Superman movie serials with Kirk Alyn and the latter part of the George Reeves television show. I think perhaps he might've had a crush on her in those days. That's quite all right; I have a copy of that first serial and she was a fox! Yes, I have a crush on her. But it's not like I have a large laminated glossy of her that I keep under my pillow! No, honest, really I don't! The young Katherine Hepburn, on the other hand...

Sorry...where was I? Oh yes. Margot Kidder and Marc McClure (Lois Lane and Jimmy Olsen in the Christopher Reeve movies) were there, and they were wonderfully funny people! Margot Kidder in particular was quite a treat to listen to.

And then there were the DC guys.

Before Metropolis I had developed an acquaintance with Jeph Loeb, writer for the Superman comic, through the DC Message Boards. I was really excited to meet him, and curious to see how long it would take for him to deduce who I was. I'm happy to say that by my third question he was able to hazard a guess: "Are you Mister Mxy?" Both I and my friends thought that was terribly funny, although I doubt most other people appreciated the humor.

After the Q&A, we all filed en masse to the Chamber Office to line up for the autograph session. Thanks to Kevin and Kaarie, our little group was right up at the head of the line, and I got all the autographs I wanted. Tom Nguyen, inker on The Man Of Steel, signed my copies of MOS #95, 98, 100 (featuring the new Fortress of Solitude), and 102. He even broke out the fancy gold paint marker for it. Noel Neill signed my copy of The Adventures of Superman serial VHS. Margot Kidder and Marc McClure signed my copy of the 1978 Superman movie VHS. Mike Carlin, Executive Editor of DC Comics, signed his forward to my copy of the Superman Archives Volume Five. And Jeph Loeb signed my copies of his four-part Superman: For All Seasons. Jeph even was kind enough to personalize each of his signatures for me. I had my picture taken with Marc, Margot, Noel, Jeph, and Mike; I also had one taken with Tom, but sadly it didn't turn out. Stupid camera.

Saturday night was the dinner and auction. The auction, the last major event of the weekend, really was a lot of fun. I bought the Hallmark Golden Age Superman breaking out of chains, because no Superman collection is complete without at least one statue or picture of the guy breaking out of chains. I also bought a li'l tiny Superman figurine for the

cute girl helping out with the auction. Poor TJ...she'd been trying to bid on things all night but I think she'd only brought like \$15 dollars with her and everything she bid on was sold for more than that. So I bought the little trinket and presented it to her as a gift. She must've been taken somewhat aback, I mean here was this total stranger buying something for her; but at the same time I hope she was flattered and maybe a little impressed. So this way when I go back she'll remember me as the guy who gave her something she'd tried to buy. Or something, I dunno.

Some of us did agree afterwards that the auction might've run a tad long (it ran about three hours, but seemed longer for some reason...I felt like I was aboard the "Minnow"). I think it might have been better if about a third or half of the lots had been put on silent auction. I almost didn't stay till the end; but I wanted a chance to get one last picture with all the DC gang!

I really had a lot of fun in Metropolis. I look forward to going again and to getting together with all the great friends I met while I was there. I hope you've enjoyed my essay.