Just got the new Patient Zero lifesize zombie bust from Sideshow. Wow! Single best life-size zombie anything I've ever seen. Brought to mind a couple of things though. Staring at the gaping maw and the dead white eyes and the decayed flesh reminded me that a) nobody gets to take their toys with them when they shuffle off this mortal coil and b) all those toys eventually pass into the dust of history themselves.

Everything rots, baby.

So why collect anything? Does anybody else see the irony of surrounding oneself with memorabilia and media that offers so many constant reminders of the above.

I remember touring the Ackermansion about 15 years ago. Forrest J was giving us a tour, when he suddenly started talking bout how much he missed his wife Wendayne. She had been injured in Italy during a mugging, which triggered one health problem after another until she finally died. Suddenly the mansion seemed smaller, the priceless treasures a little more like bric-a-brac. Forrest asked if we minded walking around on our own for a little while so he could take a short nap. Unchaperoned, I wandered the fabled Ackemansion caught up between the wonder of the opportunity and the reality of life's brevity. Ironically, the friend who was with me took his own life a few years later during a bout of mental illness. I still treasure the visit not only for the chance to see the Ackermansion up close, but because the three of us went out to a

cheap little restaurant after Forry woke up, and the Ackermonster seemed to appreciate the company so much. I can still see him forking Swedish meatballs into his mouth and the mundanity of that seems more profound to me now than the picture we took of me holding the gas grenade that brought down King Kong in 1931.

But the day was only half over. We drove straight from Forry's over to the house of a person I knew almost nothing about named Bob Burns. Bob greeted us at the door of his house, and we did an interview with him where he talked at length about his experiences working with AIP FX wizard Paul Blaisdell on pictures like INVASION OF THE SAUCER MEN (1957), THE SHE-CREATURE (1957) and IT CONQUERED THE WORLD (1956), as well as becoming one of Hollywood's foremost gorilla men playing both Kogar in films like RAT PFINK A BOO BOO (1966) and finally Tracy the Gorilla in the short lived but much loved Saturday morning kiddie show THE GHOST BUSTERS (1975).

Then Bob showed me his collection. The original TIME MACHINE from the George pal film, Robby the Robot's head, space helmets from every significant science fiction film of the last 50 years, dozens of props from the ALIEN films, the original cane head from THE WOLF MAN (1941), the only surviving stop-motion animation armature of KING KONG (1933), Flash Gordon's uniform, the full size AMERICAN WEREWOLF IN LONDON (1981) beast that was used for close-ups, blinking light-up Krell machinery from FORBIDDEN PLANET (1956), the Blaisdell props, PLAN 9 FROM OUTER SPACE (1959) props, Gizmo and Stripe from GREMLINS (1984), parts of C-3P0, the tortoise banjo that Kirk Douglas played in 20,000 LEAGUES UNDER THE SEA (1954), as well as Captain Nemo's diving helmet. And hanging on the large back wall: a full size lunar landscape matte painting from Chesley Bonestell. The list could go on and on. So could reminiscences about the interview time. We talked at serious length about every aspect of Bob's career and curatorship. The stories were amazing.

But at one point, the interview took a serious turn. I had been to a bookseller on the first leg of our trip and being as it was my first trip to California, I brought up the subject of earthquakes during my browsing. The proprietor let drop that he knew Harlan Ellison pretty well and that Harlan had been pretty shook up during a recent earthquake in which he'd lost a significant part of his life collection of awards and artwork. I asked Bob about the earthquake during our chat, and he got a faraway look in his eye.

"I've never told anyone this before, but after the last large quake, I lost a bunch of props," he said. "I fell into a really bad depression. At one point suicide even crossed my mind. It was a dark time, and I really struggled. Then it started to hit me that all I could ever be was a curator anyway. Someday I wasn't going to be here anymore, and this stuff would have to be cared for

by somebody else. Since then I've realized I'm really lucky. This is for other people, not me."

I've thought about that day so many times; two men, each struggling under the weight of real life and fighting to preserve a small piece of our fantastic heritage even though it was going to slip through their own hands. That speaks of real care for others.

In his later years, Forrest was fortunate to have many loving friends around him, and, of course, we were all grateful for the heroic efforts of Joe Moe in Forrest's daily care and business affairs. Bob has remained active, accessible, published a several great books about his collection and in many ways has taken over the post that Forrest left behind as grandfather to the monster generation.

As I sit in my office typing this, I'm in two worlds. One is the world of the hundreds of pieces of film related memorabilia and thousands of DVDs that have accumulated around me over all these years. The other is the fond memories and relationships attached to them. There are the ancient Halloween novelty candles; a green-skinned witch; a top-hatted skeleton; a purple-cloaked skull; and an oversize candy corn, along with a plastic cigar and an Emmett Kelly vacu-form mask that my grandmother (whose real-life birthday was October 31) would wear to greet trick or treaters.

There is the Sideshow baby Hellboy *faux* bronze statue I had signed by Guillermo del Toro at an interview. It had been sent to me by Diane Kamahele, Sideshow's first PR person, who got me started in collecting. Diane passed away in her early 40s just after sending me that piece. I'll treasure it as much for that reason as for the fact that it's signed by one of the great creative minds and great collectors of our time.

I keep everything in as good a condition as I can and enjoy watching peoples' faces light up when they enter my office and encounter all the familiar faces and stories that have inspired them. We talk about myth and metaphor, the power of symbol, the way stories can help us along in our search for meaning. But increasingly, I find myself talking about relationships. It's the sharing that's so rewarding. The relationships.

I think it may be because I am acutely aware that I myself will one day be collected by that great Collector, the one who assembled me, gave me color and has so expertly cared for me. The

idea of caring for something because I think it is precious is inextricably intertwined for me with the idea of love. Without love the only reason left to collect anything is the worst sort of avarice.

Who are you blessing with your collection? Ever donated a piece to charity auction? Do you use it to inspire others? Is it only there to stroke your own ego? Do you take the same care with the relationships in your life as you do in the care and display of that stuff on the shelves?

Death comes for everybody, great and small. He who dies with the most toys…dies.

There are a lot of reasons to collect. Collecting has been and remains an important part of my journey as a fan of horror, but also as a human being made in the image of God. Symbols all around me remind me of the importance of that journey. Beware of Greed (Indiana Jones' fertility idol), remember to love the other lest they become monstrous (Frankenstein's monster), remember that awe is the only response to the majesty of God's work (dinosaurs, King Kong) and remember death is near, open-mouthed and ever shambling my way.

{jcomments on}