

40th YEAR REUNION OF MARINER MARS 1969 IRS

by Les Hughes

The Event... The much heralded 40th year reunion for the Mariner Mars 1969 IRS was held on October 25th, at the Space Sciences Lab. The Conference Room was used so that the IRS and Gas System could be displayed, along with slides and movies projected, and food and hors d'oeuvres laid out in abundance. About 50 people attended, talked continuously, went on a tour of the old SSL building, ogled the IRS and Gas System, watched movies, ate, drank, and generally had a great time. The following paragraphs try to catch the flavor and meat of the event.



Paul Forney, Rich Mathies and John MacAfee with the IRS

Why It's A Big Deal... For those of us who were on the Mariner Mars team, the experience was a very big deal indeed, and it looms larger as we age. I'm sure that our friends and family are tired of our stories and even suspicious of some, but they are part of the basic fabric of our lives. We did other things in our lives after Mariner Mars, but what can compare with going to another world? And Mars at that time was a mysterious world; the most likely candidate for harboring life, outside of earth itself...

Further, the Principal Investigator was George Pimentel, a UC professor of considerable renown. Renown aside, he was a terrific guy, fiercely intelligent, funny, and incredibly energetic. And his Co-investigator was Ken Herr, who was our immediate boss. George once said of Ken that he was not just intelligent, but that he could generate more ideas for study and research than either of them had the capacity to undertake.

For myself, I had never heard of either man. I just wanted a job that was in science, rather than at the drug store where I had been working while I went to school. I started as a lab technician and immediately was involved in trying to make circular variable wedge interference filters. I never stopped being interested and challenged every single day I was there. I simply stumbled into this job and it was the same for all of us. And for the climax, we did get to go to that mysterious world and it became less mysterious because of our efforts.

Who Came... We spent some time trying to find people whose records were lost. The 'we' in this case were Jeanne Pimentel, Paul Forney and myself. We were a self appointed 'Committee of Three' who planned, invited, and put on this event that is now being described. Jeanne did most of the heavy lifting. She secured the caterer and her only flaw was that there was no pizza; she got the location at the Space Sciences Lab and she invited some other folks who were interested or who were grad students of George's so long ago. Paul and I provided hors d'oeuvres and supported her as best we could. A detailed list of who came is at the end of this write-up, along with a list of those who couldn't come.



Laurel Kirkland with IRS peeking around corner

A special guest was Laurel Kirkland. Twelve years ago, she was the grad student who put together Paul Forney, Don Stone, and Ken Herr to reexamine data from the 1969 flybys, using freshly acquired calibration information which resulted in the publication of more papers. She now works with Ken Herr at Aerospace. Ken was supposed to attend, but his schedule proved too hectic to allow it.

My daughter Jennifer came with my granddaughter Isabella. She was our youngest attendee at age 4. Jeanne's son Vincent Robinson, who had been at the 1997 reunion, was also there with his wife Laura Trott. I personally think that as many of our offspring as possible should attend these events. In a few years, we'll need them to help us hobble to the gathering.



Isabella James with self portraits or Martians

Details of the Event... We started off just meeting and greeting, consuming wine or soft drinks, as if at a cocktail party. We gobbled down chips, dip and vegetables, although the latter strikes me personally as unseemly. Then two current researchers at SSL stopped by, Dan Werthimer and Henry Heetderks, who volunteered to take us on a tour of the original Space Sciences Lab, now the Sam Silver building. We walked down the hallway on the second floor where we worked then and found that the view was still sensational on this glorious sunny fall day. But the place seemed smaller now, and the windows all had warning signs that they weren't to be opened. Our labs were now offices and the clean room no longer existed.

Downstairs the shop that had built our electronics and cables had been converted to offices. The computer room which once held a Sigma 7 was also now offices and storage. Yikes! They're changing our childhood! But the building looked crowded compared to back then and it is very apparent why they built two additional buildings.



Don Stone and Jim Holsworth in Space Sciences hallway

The machine shop had many more machines in it and Paul Duffey was in his glory as he spotted the chin-up bar he had installed years ago. Numerically controlled machines, which didn't exist in 1969, were also in the shop. To our kids and grandkids, we must have sounded quaint as we talked about life without computers or cell phones. We even used pencils then to draft our designs for the instrument...



Paul Duffey and Jesse (Joanne) Herr in SSL machine shop

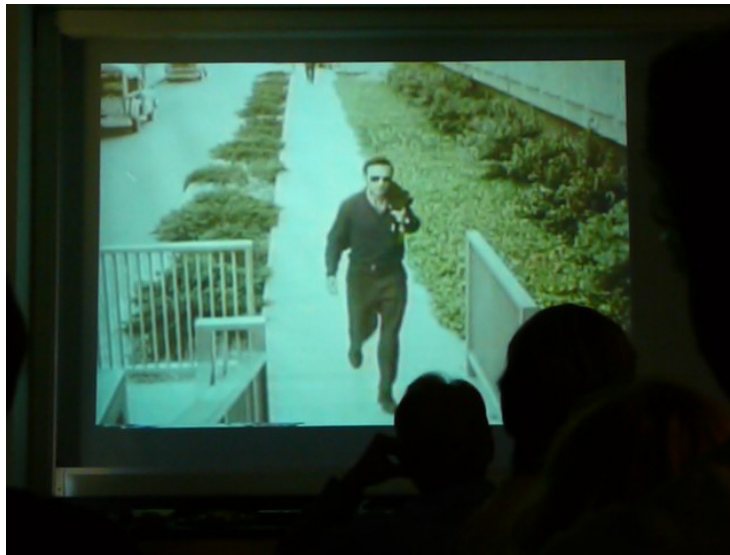


Barry and Sandy Jones

The IRS and Gas System were on display, and another highlight of the day was the movies, “The Martian Investigators” and “Mariner Mars 1969: A Space Oddity”. The former was a NASA documentary that focused on the conflict between our IRS team and the Cal Tech camera team. The latter was a silent 16mm film made by Don Renfro showing us in our youth zipping around Florida and viewing the night and day launches of Mariner 6 and 7 respectively.



Hummus disguised as a flower painting



George Pimentel heading to JPL meeting in “The Martian Investigators”

My daughter shot video of us making wisecracks as we viewed the two films. It is our heads that you see in the picture of George going to his meeting. My daughter thought we looked like the hostage spaceman and his robot pals from Mystery Theater 3000. Eventually, some of that video will make its way to our new website.

Then we had cake and toasted ourselves and our project. It is only now that I realize that I didn't get any of the cake. No pizza and no cake? I really must have had too much wine. More seriously, we vowed that we would have reunions every five years now instead of ten, bowing to the limits of lifetime.

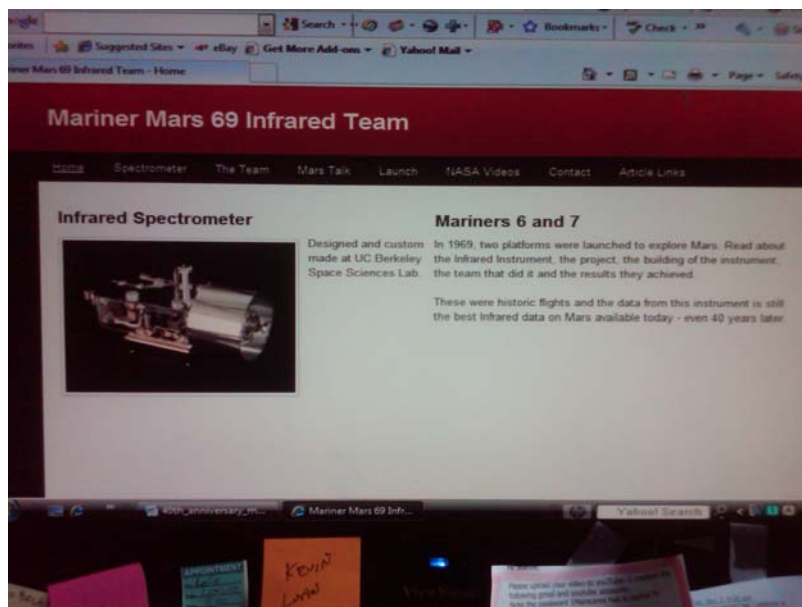


The 40-year reunion cake

Mariner Mars Website... Jeanne announced the Mariner Mars website that Jim Holsworth put up just a couple of weeks ago. This is:

www.marinermars69.weebly.com

Please check this site fairly often, since we will be putting up more photos, stories, and videos as time permits. My apologies to Jim who has created a very attractive website that I have made less so by using a cell phone picture to portray it. You can even see my Post-It notes to remind me of things to do. Go to the website; it is much better looking than this.



Cell phone picture of website

More Pictures... The pictures shown here were taken by me or my daughter Jennifer. My apologies for not getting any others included and for any bias that may be seen in the subject matter. When I looked through the photos after the party, I realized how paltry my collection was. If others have photos, please send them to us and we will get them posted on the Internet. Official UC photographer Michael Barnes took photos for an upcoming article in the College of Chemistry magazine. Watch the website for that also.



Jeanne Pimentel leading toast to ourselves



Kathy Altes, Bob Altes and Lynne Bostick in machine shop



Paul Forney looking wistfully out the window



Les Hughes holding forth on something



Cecelia Forney and Joyce Barker



Pat Hughes gesticulating



Tom Foster's back and Jim Holsworth

List of Attendees (with Mariner Team Members in Bold)

Kathie Altes and Robert Altes
Michael Barnes
Mike Berry
Lynne Bostick
Robert Challey
Enrique Cuellar
Paul Duffey
Paul Forney and Cecelia Forney
Tom Foster and Debbie Foster
Henry Heetderks
Jesse (Joanne) Herr
Jim Holsworth and Nancy Holsworth
Les Hughes and Pat Hughes
Barry Jones and Sandy Jones
Don Jurica
Laurel Kirkland (*Honorary Team Member*)
Rich Mathies
John McAfee and Joyce Barker
Brad Moore and Penny Moore
Jeanne Pimentel (*Honorary Team Member*)
Vin Robinson and Laura Trott
Eric Sirkin
Pam Stello
Don Stone
Dan Werthimer