

*Publisher's Page***Twelve Years and Counting**by **H. Paul Shuch, Ph.D.**

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See how quickly time passes when you're having fun? I can hardly believe it's been a dozen years since Richard called me up with his ridiculous idea...

Richard Factor, who founded The SETI League, Inc. just twelve years ago, has contributed a thought-provoking article to this issue of *Contact In Context*. Which is altogether appropriate, given the considerable support he has lent to the publication of this august journal. But when he rang me up in December of 1994, I'm sure hosting an online scholarly journal was the farthest thing from his mind.

Richard and I had long been the kind of friends who spoke seldom, but always looked forward to our occasional encounters. These usually occurred about once per year, generally by telephone, often as not in December. As one year drew to a close and another was poised to begin, one of us would ring up the other for an hour's chat, as though we could that quickly play catch-up on a whole year of our lives.

Richard initiated this particular call. I hadn't seen him in the flesh for perhaps five years, back when I was still living in California. I was by now teaching in Pennsylvania, but Richard and I still shared an interest in ham radio, and aviation, and technology in general. And, it turns out, we also shared an interest in SETI.

"What's going on in your life?" asked Richard with his characteristically casual demeanor. "Any new jobs? Kids? Wives?" (This latter was something of an inside joke, as Richard prides himself in 'never having made the same mistake once.')

Though I could only claim two out of three, we chatted for a while about the changes, both positive and negative, in our lives.

"Say," interjected Richard, mid-chat, "what do you know about SETI?" It was an interesting digression, but not an unexpected one, given Richard's short attention span and eclectic interests.

"Funny you should mention that," I replied. "Back in my Berkeley days, I got to know a bunch of the NASA SETI team: Jill, Barney, Kent, even Frank. And Jack was one of my advisors in grad school." (Last names, as Canadian science fiction author Rob Sawyer noted in his recent novel "Rollback", are irrelevant in that small and close-knit community.) "Pity about the cancellation of their project last year -- what was Congress thinking? Fortunately, I hear they're regrouping under private funding, and about to launch a continuation of HRMS -- something called 'Project Phoenix.' Ever heard of it?"

Richard had, so we proceeded to discuss the strengths, and weaknesses, of the SETI Institute and its efforts to keep SETI science alive in the wake of Congressional budget cuts. Being active

radio amateurs, Richard and I agreed that hams represented a valuable, untapped resource that could greatly benefit the SETI enterprise.

And then, Richard dropped his bombshell. "I've just founded a SETI nonprofit of my own. How'd you like to head it up?"

Suddenly, an annual ritual had turned into a job interview. The rest of the story, how I took a leave of absence from my College, then raised some funding, ultimately resigning my Professorship to head up The SETI League, has been often retold, so I will not bore you with it again. The point is, this all started with a casual telephone call, now a full dozen years ago.

Eventually, I retired from The SETI League, was elevated to Executive Director Emeritus (all of the responsibilities, none of the benefits...) and most recently, un-retired back into academia. But The SETI League survives, thanks to the support and enthusiasm of our roughly 1500 members in 65 countries on 7 (!) continents.

So, where will the next dozen years take The SETI League? And what holds for the future of *Contact in Context*? Those questions are on the agenda for my next annual phone chat with Richard, coming up any day now.