



Staff photo by E.J. Harris

Clockwise from the top, Nathan Stewart, 37, his daughter Natalie, 15, son Collin, 12, and their friend, Braea Frogner, 12, all from Elgin, ready for the journey to the Wizard World Comic Con last weekend in Portland. This was their second consecutive year attending the convention of fans of pop culture ranging from the world of Harry Potter to animated series to science fiction. Nathan said he is sure the children will want to go next year as well.

A FAMILY THAT COSPLAYS TOGETHER STAYS TOGETHER

Elgin family treks west to Portland for Wizard World Comic Con

By PHIL WRIGHT
East Oregonian

Every hero's journey begins with a quest. For the Stewart clan of Elgin, the quest is an annual trek to Portland for Wizard World Comic Con.

This year's daunting winter storm did not deter the hearty souls of patriarch Nathan Stewart, daughter Natalie, 15, and son Collin, 12, from embarking Friday, Feb. 22, for the five-hour-or-longer drive from the outskirts of Union County to the Oregon Convention Center in heart of Portland. Collin and Natalie's friend, Braea Frogner, 12, also from Elgin, joined the adventure like she did last year, but Jennifer Stewart, Nathan's wife and mother to Natalie and Collin, passed this time around.

"Last year was our first time," Nathan said. "I guess there's not too many people from this side of the state that go. We did it more for the kids than anything."

Natalie was the instigator who pushed the family to attend Wizard World. The teen is a science fiction and fantasy aficionado and has been since she was little.

"Natalie, as soon as she could read, 'Harry Potter' was the first book she read," her dad said.

Then came "Star Wars," and Natalie said she was hooked on the genres of the wondrous. Collin, too, loves science fiction. All three youth have favorite fantasy or science fiction books, movies and series. But when Natalie discovered Wizard World, the annual celebration in Portland of just about everything she digs, from the aforementioned Harry Potter to Hollywood sci-fi blockbusters to the spectacle of Japanese animation, well, she had only one response.

WHAT IS IT?

Wizard World Comic Con is an annual series of conventions in cities across the U.S. celebrating all things sci-fi and fantasy. Fans dress up as their favorite characters, or create their own. The Portland event was Feb. 22-24.

"It was like, we need to do this," she exclaimed.

And so they did, with verve. The siblings went one day as characters from the Harry Potter books and movies, and the next as characters from the Disney animated series "Gravity Falls" (which takes place in the fictitious Oregon locale of Gravity Falls in Roadkill County.) Cosplay — costume play — is a major part of the scene at fan cons. The kids even convinced their dad, an Army National Guard veteran, to give it a try last year. He said he went "full Grunkle Stan," another character from "Gravity Falls."

"Honestly, it made it a lot more fun," he said. "People take your picture and come up and talk to you."

This year, however, he cut back to just the character's fez. Nathan said it made it easier and still went over well. Collin dressed up as a "galaxy wizard" with wand in hand and a cloak displaying a swirling cosmos of stars and planets. Natalie slipped on a steam punk Phantom of the Opera mask and black cape. Braea stepped into the role of Harry Potter nemesis Draco Malfoy.

Part of the fun of cosplay, Natalie and Braea said, is creating characters or putting your twist on well-known ones.

Wizard World, like other cons, also gives fans the chance — for a price — to get close

with their favorite TV and film actors, comic book artists, cosplay pros and more. Nathan said each member of the family last year selected one star to meet for a photo, or to get their autograph.

Collin chose Ezra Miller, the actor who portrayed Barry Allen/The Flash in the DC Universe movies. Natalie met Sebastian Stan, the actor behind the character of Bucky Barnes in the Marvel Universe movies. Mom Jennifer set her sights on Ian Somerhalder, star of the TV series "The Vampire Diaries." And Nathan got none other than Star Trek's original Lt. Uhura, Nichelle Nichols, to autograph a poster.

"It was so much fun to meet them in person," he said.

Nathan also said he has scanners set to find Northwest cons featuring William Shatner, the original Capt. James Kirk, and George Takei, the actor who originated the role of Sulu, navigator of the U.S.S. Enterprise. Either would make the perfect complement to that poster from Uhura.

The Stewarts also met and chatted with actor, producer and writer Henry Winkler, who was there to read his children's book. Natalie got a selfie with the man she knows from movies such as the comedy "The Water Boy," but her grandparents would remember him as Arthur "Fonzie" Fonzarelli, AKA The Fonz, from the popular 1970s American sitcom "Happy Days."

This year, Natalie said, they had their eyes set on meeting the con's big attraction, actor Jason Momoa, star of the hit movie "Aquaman" in the DC Universe of flicks. But the late winter storm cut their stay to just Saturday, Nathan said, and they missed out. Still, the Army National Guard veteran said, the con packed plenty of cool fun even if they had to leave a day early.

Nathan said he was sure his children would convince him to return next year.

"They seemed to be hooked on it," he said. And, well, he may be, too.

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