

A Journal of the Plague Year, being random jottings of personal experiences during the coronavirus pande

March 22, 2020

It was about the beginning of September, 1664... Excuse me. I shouldn't ape, or plagiarize (*plague* your eyes?), the r was actually yesterday, March 21, 2020 (gotta love the number of the year) that I picked up the new lawn mower at Depot, and many of the people there seemed curiously frenzied; I can't quite characterize their behavior, but they had an uneasy quality. Many of them moved faster than they usually do.

Later, I walked down to my local shopping center and saw that the parking lots were almost entirely empty. That was Saturday. Except on Christmas or whatever, they're always almost full. Women walking their dogs were giving me a berth (more than the recommended six feet), pulling the dogs so as not to be within spraying distance if I sneezed or coughed. I walked for about an hour. On the way home, I stopped at Rimann's Liquor and said, "I'd like to support the breweries, but I don't want to buy a six-pack". One of the employees led me to a shelf and showed me the local brew could buy as singles. The cans were lined up, and he touched the top of every can in the front row with his fingers. I clearly was not thinking about the virus. I waited until he left, and took a can from the *second* row, went to the register, put it on the counter. The clerk said, "Oh! That's a good one!", and touched the top of the can with her fingers, right pop-top and the hole you drink from, thank you very much. I brought it home and put it in the fridge, wondering whether to try to sanitize it, or throw it out.

Friday, the day before, I'd gone to the grocery store, there in the Village, just around the corner from Rimann's. As I observed to a friend, it looked like Moscow under Brezhnev: empty shelves. Well, partly, anyway. (The other day that was even worse: entire sections of vegetables completely gone. And Susan, my wife, said the line at Costco one day from the registers all the way to the back of the store. I'm estimating that's several hundred feet.) This beggar-thy-neighbor panic is madness. Best to make the reasonable assumption that the food supply will continue, and not grab up stuff, which will spoil before you eat it, and some of which will deprive your neighbors of supplies. As is usual, there are exceptions (not toilet paper, you wimps!), such as paper towels, which I find myself using a lot, because I constantly wash my hands. And of course soap. I understand people buying up that stuff, because our consumption of these things is increasing. But milk? The bottom row of the milk cooler was empty for a width of about five feet, and the rest of it denuded 50%, at least. This is absurd. Man up, people! You're only creating shortages and spoilage.

Two of my friends, who, like me, have Parkinson's, self-isolated about a week ago. This, to me, was premature. I sent and some others an email that calculated the chances of infection given the ratio of undiagnosed cases, number of kids, etc., and ending:

"We're not in N.Y., Washington, or California. Sure, this will get worse. Sure, avoid crowds. Sure, if you have contact with infants, take extra measures. Sure, if you're immune compromised stay home. But for the rest of us, it's not time to self-quarantine yet. There are other considerations, such as the effect on other people, who will lose their jobs if we don't patronize the places they work. This is an economic disaster in the making.

"A final comment: as one of the few people locally who carries earthquake insurance on his house, and the only Parkinson sufferer (to my knowledge, and I know a *lot* of them) who's lost his sense of smell and gone out and found a natural gas detection alarm (and hired an electrician to install it at the top of a wall, because natural gas rises), I think my assessment risks can be described as conservative, not cavalier."

Now I'm enjoying my large helping of crow. This damn thing has accelerated, and most of us locally are ordered to stay home, starting Tuesday. (By the way, do mayors even have the legal power to do that? Where is it written?) I do think though, that this will trigger an economic catastrophe of a magnitude far beyond 2008, probably closer to the Depression. It could well result in the Democrats taking control of both houses and the presidency in November. But we saw in the preceding paragraphs how accurate my crystal ball is. I'm switching to the Magic 8 Ball, online version. [Brief pause] just asked it, "Will coronavirus trigger a depression?" The answer was "Yes". Really, it did. Would the Magic 8 Ball tell me? [Brief pause here.] I next asked, "Will the Democrats take over the federal government in November?" The answer was "Without a doubt". I am not making this up, people.

Perhaps the most obvious thing about the reaction to this virus is the amazing lack of traffic. There are few cars on the road about like Thanksgiving day, when traffic is always minimal. But foot traffic has increased. My neighborhood always has lots of walkers, but the number seems to have zoomed.

The worst thing about this is that the gyms are all closed. To hold back my Parkinson's I work out every day: three cardio, three of weights, and one of non-contact boxing, every week. Now I'm working on home routines, but it ain't the same. Not at all. Not to mention that I miss my friends. This is a prelude to weeks, and more likely months, of boredom. How many rock songs will we be hearing about cabin fever?

March 23, 2020

Where's Tom Lehrer when we need him? Anyone who could make us laugh about [nuclear war](#) would be able to help through this pandemic with a sense of humor.

Woke up in the night having trouble breathing. This, combined with the cough I've had for some days (five days?) made me worried. Things to do, in case I have the dread disease: pay bills, cancel dog grooming, send Susan all the stuff she needs to know in order to carry on ... Later: we took my temperature, and it was my normal reading of a bit below 98 degrees. False alarm. I'm usually not hypochondriacal. The reason for the cough and transitory breathing problem (and congestion) must be the dust from all the construction we're having done in the house. Susan had trouble last night, too.

Sociolinguistic change? I'm noticing a change in our phatic speech. The farewell that started back in (I think) the early 1970s, "Have a nice day", which more recently is often "Have a good day" -- has turned in the last week or so to "Be well", "Stay healthy", and the like. Will have to email Phil Duncan about this to get his take on it.

Later -- his response:

So, ironically I got your email right as I was going into a Zoom meeting. My initial thought was something like, "I don't feel like I see these more in writing than in oral speech..." Then, what do the two people say closing the meeting? Speaker 1: "Be well!" Speaker 2: "Stay healthy!"

My (very loose) impression is that people are leveraging some closing expressions (or phatic expressions, as you say, Jakobson's multifunctionality) that may have already been on the uptick (sometimes for other reasons, like an increased interest in and normativity of things related to health/well-being/mindfulness, etc.). In email, I know a good amount of people who have been using "be well" as a closing device over the last year or so. Until now, I'd kind of put that in the category of a fad-ish type behavior, like when it seemed that a good chunk of academia suddenly preferred to use "cheers" to close out emails a while back. And, I can think of at least one person who has regularly used "be well" in both email and conversations for over a year. Of course, the phrase "be well" to say goodbye or end a conversation has been around for quite some time (& sometimes in longer phrases like "goodnight & be well"). On the other hand, people I know who used phrases like "be well" as closings have started to do so only in the last few weeks - and with high regularity to boot. And, as I have heard even more recently, this is definitely found across modalities.

So, it does seem that people are quickly transitioning in connection to covid-19, integrating these phrases into every interaction & conversations.

March 24, 2020

Susan came home early yesterday. Curiously, the hospital where she works was only half full (because people are staying away? because discretionary treatments, such as surgeries, are delayed? must ask her). Management naturally didn't pay a lot of people to twiddle their thumbs, so Susan volunteered to use some paid time off. She stopped at Costco on the way home. While she was in the store, the store management limited the number who could be inside, and made customers wait in a line outside. Unless they enforced social distancing, though, they were merely moving the problem of disease transmission from an enclosed space to an outdoor space, and, I suspect, worsening it, because people in line would be closer together than they would be when spread out through the store.

Susan's hospital has also changed in other ways. The weekly early-morning tumor conference she always attends, where they discuss patient cancers, was cancelled probably a month ago.

I keep thinking of Colin, our son. Must contact him. He's been doing very well as a travel agent, but now, I'm sure, I can't reach him at home, the phone dead, no business.

I see in the latest [LSA](#) missive that [CoLang 2020](#) has been cancelled. This is sad, it being one of the few gatherings dedicated to the practical preservation of indigenous languages. It was at CoLang 2016, in Fairbanks, that my Parkinson's symptoms first presented... Indigenous populations in the U.S. are at high risk from the virus, because they have what may be the worst health systems in our country. There's simply not enough funding. With the old people being most at risk, and the old being the few remaining fluent speakers of all those marvelous languages, the rate of language loss may accelerate even further, taking away those underpinnings of their cultures.

Heard by email from my good friend Larry, asking how Charles and I are doing. Okay, I suppose, except for not being able to get together with them every other week, and except for the gyms being closed. I feel the effects of not doing my workouts. People have commented how extreme they are (to which I reply that it's medically advised), and I just can't

that really hard exercise here at home, lacking all the different weights and machines and bikes, etc. I walk for an hour a day, and I do body-weight exercises, but the new regimen feels lame and largely ineffective.

Trying not to touch my face is a pain in the neck. It was never obvious how much I did it, every day -- just touched a spot unthinkingly. The face seems to be by far the most demanding part of the body in this respect.

I take the dogs, all three of them, to be groomed today. Grooming is classified as an essential service, which I find convenient. But for some dogs, like our Jack, it's a matter of health. His fur continues to grow, unlike most breeds, and he develops spots that can be a medical problem. They drive him right up the wall, poor fella.

I've done the taxes myself for many years, but am finally throwing in the towel this year and hiring an accountant. I got off the paperwork last week. I will not be meeting him in person -- we will confer by phone this evening.

Many people are working from home, something I'm familiar with, having had to remote in uncountably many times over the past twenty years or so. It's become much more common recently, and luckily so. Think how the virus would be spreading if the technology had not developed and everyone had to be physically present at their place of work. If that had appeared in the first decade of this century, we'd be screwed.

Family dinner, which has been our tradition for well over a decade, is cancelled. No more gathering of the four local families every Monday evening, hosted in rotation. No more trading our news, chewing the fat, and just generally enjoying each other. This is sadsadsad. I saw my sister on the street, and our conversation was carried on from opposite sides of the street. This seems to me both dismal and symbolic.

Reading the *New York Times* online, I saw pictures of Florida beaches full of people (before they were closed), and about students on spring break crowding into restaurants and clubs. These delusional inconsiderate assholes should be quarantined on a desert island, away from the rest of us.

And speaking of the Gray Lady, I see this little item therein, which should be a [Darwin Award](#) winner: "[An Arizona man died and his wife was hospitalized](#) after officials said they self-medicated using a fish tank additive that has the same ingredient as an anti-malaria drug promoted by the president." Why did they listen to that fool? And why didn't they ever mind, the questions are endless. We'll never know. Maybe they were thinking, "What's the worst that can happen worth a shot." The dangers of insufficient research.

And by the way, if you think I'm going out too much (grocery, liquor store, dog groomer), you've seen nearly the full extent of my ramblings. Most of them are documented here, and I try to practice social distancing when out, and I don't go to crowded places. Example: the only person in the grooming business is the groomer herself.

Morning news item: the U.S. may be about to displace Europe as the epicenter of the pandemic. Can we thank our political and health systems for this? I'm just sayin', as the sayin' goes.

Our neighbor's wife tells me that her husband is bouncing off the walls (though that's not quite how she phrased it). He has more energy than anyone I know -- his two speeds are fast and faster. I've seen him building a deck in a cold draft. Now he has nowhere to go, nothing to do, though his wife does tell me that they can play golf: the clubhouse is closed, the poles in the cups have been wrapped in foam. If your ball hits the foam, you're considered to have sunk the putt. This is just one of a million adaptations I expect we'll be hearing about.

March 25, 2020

Phillip (my relative, not my former professor) read the above and emailed me that he had a rowing machine, and I was welcome to borrow it. Then he put it in his car and drove right over. The man is the soul of generosity, and it's no wonder everyone loves him. After we set it up in the basement, we had a couple of glasses of wine and talked for a while. He has a lot to talk to, in addition.

This morning I started wondering how Phillip and Janice's garden will be this year -- will it be affected by not being able to get some plants or supplies? Will they be reluctant to go to the nursery for flats, etc.?

Cindy and Susan tell me that Peggy has started a little business sewing masks in her house, since her customers are up, being unwilling to come over and drop off their clothes for alteration. I wonder whether the fabric of the masks is safe to put out the virus.

The neighborhood seems quieter, partly from the lessened traffic, but there seems to be a general lowering of noise level otherwise.

I thought I had a tick bite on one toe, until I looked more carefully. (Note to self: get new flea collars for the dogs, a going barefoot all the time.) Then I started thinking about people who might have both coronavirus and some other problems, like a tick-borne microbe. A frightening thought. The doctors would probably miss the diagnosis, for star

Watched the news yesterday and noticed both local and national news anchors broadcasting from their homes. This quite remarkable.

Settled the taxes yesterday with the CPA. When he first called, I scarcely understood a word. The voice quality was it was at his office. (And the caller i.d. was a different number.) Turned out that he'd had to close the office. He coul my taxes at first, because he'd hauled all his work home in three banker's boxes.

I scarcely need to check my schedule now. All those classes I take have either been cancelled altogether or moved o Note to self: order a webcam and microphone, to enable remote attendance at stuff like Spanish study group, far bel though I am.

Wondering about Tim and Val and their weekly gig at the Brick, which I, disorganized friend that I am, have never a and which, like everything else locally, will now be inoperative. Knowing Tim, I expect that he's writing more song remember that one about Idi Amin. Almost forty years later I smile whenever I think of that song. Funny, and utterl original.

Amazon is hiring more workers. Of course. Their business will boom because people will order online instead of go stores, or the stores will be closed and they'll have no choice but to order online.

It occurs to me that call centers will be very busy, and that they will be little epicenters of the spread of the disease. work asshole-to-elbow. We need to start moving more of them remote, which has already been done for years. But c the call centers that lack this ability will need the proper infrastructure, software, and setup. I'm betting that soon ve will be struggling to keep up with the demand for this.

The Spanish flu was almost exactly a century ago. (And it wasn't "Spanish" at all. It started in central Kansas. Look you don't believe me.) Think how horrifying that must have been, at a time when so much less was understood abou epidemiology and the spread of diseases, and there was so much less medical skill and knowledge. Rejoice that we time when medicine has improved.

March 26, 2020

Walked past half a dozen women sitting in a circle of chairs on a driveway, spaced about ten feet apart. Social distar yes, but not so it makes conversation difficult. ("What did you say?", hand cupped to ear.) Not five minutes earlier, I walked by a group of women in the park, similarly spaced. My impression, from this and things like women distanc themselves from me outdoors, is that women in general are much more careful about social distancing than we men therefore are probably much more cautious (realistic?) about getting the disease.

Woke up drooling. Still half-asleep, I wiped it off with my hand, then thought, *Oh, I'm not supposed to touch my fac*

My niece quit her job, and my sister-in-law's daughter quit hers, too. People who can afford to, often will, I think, a going to create a problem for their employers. Both these women were part-time, and I may be generalizing from insufficient evidence, but still, I think this is probably a trend.

Yesterday I couldn't send email to the CPA who's doing our taxes: all the mails bounced back with a message that th no DNS entry for the domain. And yet I could ping the domain from a command window. (For those not initiated in tech priesthood, I'm simply saying that the CPA's piece of the web did not appear, for email I sent via my ISP, but *di* when I tested it locally from my PC. This is like your Uber driver not being able to find your home.) Then I started messages for that domain, and for the University of Kansas, that my ISP couldn't connect to the recipient's mail serv Either the net is dying, or my ISP is -- but if the latter, how come I can still connect to it, and to my K.U. email? Go ISP; all the evidence points at them. Among other things, sending email from K.U. still succeeds. Electronic techno wonderful when it works, as an electric company field worker once said to me, "But when it doesn't, I just want to t [the toughbook] in the river". Preach it, brother. I'm glad I don't have to work on that shit any more, except of course annoying problems I run into here at home... This morning the problem appears to be fixed, and of course no word c explanation from my damn ISP.

I was surprised to find that people, including a relative, have doubted the existence of the pandemic. How does one them wake up and smell the coffee? Maybe the culture war ([Kulturkampf, in the broad sense](#)) in this country leads p deny the obvious, because they feel besieged, and think it's necessary to circle the wagons against any threat to their system. I'm speculating, of course, because I truly don't understand. When it's crystal clear from photos of Wuhan th

streets are empty, the place is locked down. And it's easy to go online and check the cruise line that owns the [Diamc Princess](#). Et cetera. It's not difficult. So why this inability to admit the obvious?

It occurs to me that we've had such a long string of good luck in public health that we're spoiled. We've come to think of ourselves as invulnerable. But, hey, you ain't seen nothin' yet. Did you know that we still have repositories of the [smallpox virus](#) and the last time I read about the place it's stored in Moscow, the stuff was kept in a building behind a simple chain-fence with a padlock. (Contrary to the Wikipedia article, the Moscow site was *not* "tightly controlled". Let's hope that changed, and Wikipedia's current description is accurate, though I have my doubts -- they have their share of errors. Imagine some fringe doomsday cult getting their hands on that viable smallpox. Can we please agree to destroy those stocks? The risk/reward calculation is clear, because almost the entire planet has lost immunity to that disease by now. Smallpox vaccine stocks are probably slim and none.

Scroll to the bottom of [this story](#) for a weird symptom of Corona: loss of smell. Welcome to the world of Parkinson's; anosmia is extremely common. This is not to claim that the causes are the same for PD and Corona, only that they share a symptom, and that it's curious that this unusual symptom is shared by both diseases.

March 27, 2020

Short entry today. Susan will be using the PC to remote into work.

What I'm hoping for is that I get the virus near the very end, when it's well understood and the medical facilities are longer overcrowded. And that I'm asymptomatic. Welcome to my fantasy planet.

I've always been plagued with skin that's thin. (I mean this literally, not as a remark on any hypothetical emotional sensitivities, none of which, of course, I have.) With age this thinness has worsened. Now both hands have a small sore over patch from all the handwashing I've been doing. I should start counting how many times a day I'm doing it, but would be just one more damn chore to take up precious space in my daily-shrinking mind.

March 28, 2020

Teens -- where are they? School's out, but I see few of them on the street. Maybe they're all at home playing with their thumb pianos (smartphones).

Went to India Palace yesterday. Like every other restaurant in town, it's takeout only. The kitchen was hopping, as seen through the window, and the big tall guy who runs the place was a whirlwind. That dude can multitask like no one I've ever seen, and he never forgets a detail while he juggles taking orders on the phone, giving people their orders, ringing the bell, going back to the kitchen to handle something. If everyone worked like he does, the world would run like a Swiss watch. (Okay, no one talks about Swiss watches as the epitome of accuracy now, but I've always liked that analogy. So I'm kidding myself.) Glad to see that our favorite restaurant is doing well, though I have to worry about the servers. The room was empty, no one at the tables. Note to self: go earlier next time. I seem to have hit the rush hour today, with four to six people standing around, widely spaced, of course, and someone always immediately showing up to replace someone who'd picked up their food. They're doing enough business that it's taking them longer than usual to fill the takeout orders.

Gotta get a webcam, because stuff is coming up that demands it -- virtual meetings with Larry and Charles, and some classes I've been taking, which will now go online, since the metro area is pretty well locked down.

Old Overland Park is a ghost town. The diagonal parking is usually full, or almost, but this afternoon there was one SUV pulled up and the driver parked athwart three or four of the parking spaces, parallel to traffic flow (what little there was). Why not? There's plenty of room, for a change.

11 days since the gyms closed and already I see some changes in my body: smaller forearms, and man boobs.

Thinking about David Quammen's book *Spillover*, about zoonotic diseases. His usual superb job. Read it, what, many years ago? Prophetic. We're living it now -- Corona is precisely the kind of disease he was writing about.

March 29, 2020

Recall the first entry above, the second paragraph, about buying the can of beer. Yesterday it had been in the refrigerator for a week, so I figured any virus was kaput. But I wiped it down with one of those towlettes that's pre-soaked in bleach, cold water on it, planning to pour it into a pint glass. Then I looked at what I'd bought: [milk chocolate stout](#). I check the label and it truly does have milk in it. I'm allergic to cow milk. The one time in my life I don't look at what I'm buying, I buy something I must not consume...

Everybody and his brother is out today, the weather being pleasant. Lots of parents and kids on bicycles. Saw a nun tall women, the kind I think of as Valkyries. Always a pleasure to see you, girls. You brighten up my day.

Things are going to be different after this virus runs its course. The economy will probably be a bit simpler, there may be more complexity to our culture in general, many of us will have a lower standard of living (*I* expect to), and voters may realize the utility of having a functioning federal government, instead of trying to vote in incompetents who want to disassemble what we saw in the first day's entry, above, how accurate my crystal ball is. Which is to say, not at all. I simply hope that we come to appreciate each other, and pull together.

March 30, 2020

Men seem to be getting with the program and doing more social distancing. (See the comment in the March 26 entry about women being more careful.)

I went online to see whether anyone else was putting up a personal journal about Corona, and the very first one, started about the same time as mine, had the same title: [Journal of the Plague Year](#).

We've got a guy coming by today to put up my speed bag and pullup bar, things I'll use to improve the limited work I have so far. The weather's getting better, too, so I'll be able to skip rope outside. Susan is a bit annoyed with me for such a good example", but she doesn't have a neurological disorder that requires [forced exercise](#).

I wonder whether everyone is as paranoid as I am, noticing every cough and wondering whether it's a symptom of it. Back in the early 1980s, before anyone understood anything about AIDS, there were similar fears of infection, until the medical community figured out that it was transmitted via bodily fluids. Then all us straight people heaved a sigh of relief and many of us (me included) figured "That's their problem", meaning that we didn't have to worry because we were not of the gay and drug-using communities. This time it's different, because we can get the disease from droplets in the contaminated surfaces. We (or at least *I*) feel paranoid, instead of immune.

March 31, 2020

Went online to buy a webcam. Woops. Late, as usual. All sold out at Micro Center, Costco, Best Buy, and I think somewhere else I've forgotten the name of. Walmart no good, either -- only saw crappy ones. Had to buy from the Evil Empire. Hate doing that.

Thinking about that beer, the one that runs like a thread through this web page, I started wondering whether the liquor stores are closed. [Brief pause, while I check the Internet.] Yes, but they can sell curbside. (This must be the booze equivalent of the takeout-only rule for restaurants, and the we-get-your-dog-at-the-door rule for the dog day care place in the Village.) At least all the albies can get their fix and avoid the DTs.

Noticed this morning that the women who run in groups, still run in groups, generally without social distancing from each other, as if to say: "None of my running friends will have Corona. We're too healthy". It's curious that men usually run alone and I can't recall ever seeing more than two men running together, except in a race, though I must have. Women, however, often run in threes and fours. Contrarily, male bicyclists often ride in groups, usually of two, and they like to talk while they ride. Why is this? Am I the only one who wonders about these things? Jerry Seinfeld could make a comedy bit out of these little observations.

April 1, 2020

April Fool's Day, but somehow I'm not tempted to put anything here that would be a joke.

Take a quick look at [The Quarantine Diaries](#). Looks like I'm not alone in this project. I wish I could draw, though. So the artwork is lovely. The discussion of paper versus electronic media at the end is apt: electronica are evanescent. As Steven Jay Gould remarked about researching how scholarly progress is made, when investigating collegial communications, and the lack of a permanent record saved somewhere: "Now it goes over a wire and straight into oblivion. (That may not be totally accurate, given my eroding memory, but it's close.) When he wrote that, the telephone was the major medium. Email's not so bad, but still not as good as paper (use acid-free, btw).

Glenn Beck says, "I would rather die than kill the country", to encourage people to go out, go back to the office, or whatever. The logic is clearly spurious: if people follow his advice, they *will* kill the country, in the sense that many more will die. I have an idea, Glenn: since you volunteered, you go first. But don't expect a large funeral crowd.

Broke a tooth this morning. The dentist's office is closed for you know the reason. The emergency number on their answering message gets no response. Damn good thing I don't have any pain. *Later*: they finally called back, and ch

with my dentist, who said to let it be for the time being. She'll take a look at it when the office is open again. Fine by me since there's no pain. Question: why is dentistry so gender egalitarian? My personal experience is that the ratio of women seems much higher than in the other professions, and has been that way for years. Is there something about the profession that attracts women? There's a perfectionist streak in dentists, I've noticed, but that's the only characteristic that stands out to me, and not one I'd expect to be more common among women. Maybe they tolerate the tiny, cramped spaces and intense contact better than men? That's kind of a stretch. They have smaller hands, but that wouldn't be the reason. I give up.

April 2, 2020

Wondering about all the aliens, illegal and otherwise, who do the work of cleaning the businesses and gyms and so on. When these places are closed, what do they do? Go home to Mexico or wherever?

People trooping through the house for various kinds of work -- three of them just now. A bad time to be upgrading the house, neh? Makes me nervous. One of our guys just can't seem to maintain social distance.

Gotta go. Susan needs the PC for work now. I was going to write a couple thousand more words on the current novel including a section about James and his dad, but that will have to wait. Ah: email it to myself, pull up email over wifi, work on the laptop.

April 3, 2020

A guy who's working on our house told me about this: [Stay the Fuck at Home](#). It's a good time to be on the space station, failing that, a desert island. I always wanted to be Robinson Crusoe... And speaking of the space station: if we ever do interplanetary, or even interstellar, travel, will viruses wipe out the inhabitants of a space ship? Cuz it's got to be an incubator, just like a [cruise ship](#) or an [aircraft carrier](#).

The playground in the park down at the corner is closed, all the play equipment wrapped in several layers of bright yellow CAUTION tape.

The car sits in the driveway undriven many days. All my classes are cancelled, except the few that have been moved online. And of course the gym is closed.

April 4, 2020

The county newspaper says "drastic decrease" in traffic crashes. I believe it. 8 a.m. yesterday morning, walking down the post office to mail a letter, there were almost no cars on the road, only one car at any stoplight (and usually none), and it should have been the height of morning rush hour. Air pollution is probably way down, too.

The news also says local tax revenues are way down. Natch.

Had a long, intricate, and problematic dream last night, most of which has vanished in the haze of my fogfilled brain for little wisps, little fragments that are feeling as much as pictures. (And why the hell don't I dream in color any more for a while.) The clearest memory is of a rat, probably inspired by the pizza rat. (The video went viral; look it up, because I'm too lazy to give you a link this morning.) This rat was a Corona carrier (yes, I know they don't, but this was a *drinking* rat and it was getting into a chair I sit in. I have no idea why this chair was outdoors in a public space. I had our dog Jack sit on me, and I set him on the rat. He caught hold of the tail, and pulled, and the rat opened up, and the innards started coming out, too, being dragged out with the tail. So I grabbed the rat's head and Jack switched to biting that, and the rat followed me and left the building. When I told my wife this story, she pointed out that Jack was the wrong dog, because Pogo is the best rodent killer, catching chipmunks and mice and all. He hates them with unexcelled fury; when he's after one, he turns the sweetest dog I've ever known into a killing machine. He'll spend hours trying to find one that's already eluded him. Why was Jack the dog in the dream? And why was that woman being such an asshole to me? And why did the scene look like a combination of rather grand public buildings and a badly damaged desert? And why is this dream stuck in my head like a tape loop, when most of it has evaporated? No, Sigmund, the dream was *not* about sex.

International relations are bound to be changed by this virus, simply because of the magnitude of its effects. Will Africa become poorer, and therefore more dependent on the Chinese handouts they've been gobbling up? Will Iran behave better, or become even more of a problem? Will North Korea be devastated by the disease, given their incredibly shoddy health system, and will this make their wacko leader even more of a loose cannon? There are dozens of questions, and I'm sure there are probably people thinking about these things, and I wish I knew their thinkings.

Economy: with money being pumped in and businesses going belly up, are we headed for huge inflation and/or price gouging? Given massive unemployment, which I think we can assume, will this be even harder for the public than in the 1970s? Will we see price controls, like under Nixon?

'Scuze the conjectures here; my mind is firing furiously on its one weak cylinder, and I'm speculating out loud from lack of knowledge. Consider the source and disregard my ravings.

April 5, 2020

I'm in trouble. My symptoms are considerably worse since I can't go to the gym and do a hard workout every day. T accelerated noticeably in the last week or so. I'd appreciate an exception being made for Parkies, allowing them in tl but I know *that* ain't gonna happen. It will be up to me to work out more at home, though it probably won't be possil what I need. I'll have to bump up the quantity of exercise, since the quality is unreachable.

[Bring Out Your Dead](#). It's getting a *little* like the Plague in some countries: mass burials, public spaces and ice-skating used for morgues, funerals forbidden. Wait until it hits Africa. There will be a cataclysm of another order of magnitud Looking at the charts, South Africa seems to have done a great job turning back the tide, but will they be swamped l tsunami from their neighbors? And even if they're not, the die-off in the other countries will be apocalyptic.

Went to Sprouts yesterday. Until then, I think I'd only seen one person wearing a mask there. But things have chang the employees, and almost half the customers, had them on. What's curious is that the customers had on the good, commercial ones; not one of them was home-made. Susan says you can't buy the commercial ones now. They're all So Sprouts customers, at least some of them, were ahead of the curve. And the people in line stand six feet or more which is also new.

Sprouts is also limiting the number of customers to 70 at a time, and the doors are no longer bidirectional: one is the entrance, and the other the exit. They have employees stationed at each door, and when I entered, the woman suggest I sanitize my basket. 'Scuze me -- I thought that wearing my big fat leather gloves would suffice.

People are starting to hang out and talk in their cars, in the parking lot at the park, in the manner that cops do: pull u side, in adjacent parking slots, the cars facing opposite directions so they can roll down the windows and talk. Perso think this is very strange. I'd rather sit on a park bench, at opposite ends, than talk from an automobile. Apparently t new late-afternoon thing to do. Seems a bit teenagerish, somehow.

I think about the couples who are going through a rough patch, and keep things calm around the house by one of the out somewhere -- the gym, a bar, a friend's house, the library -- to cool things down a bit. It's got to be worse, now tl they're stuck at home all the livelong day. It's gotta be rough for them. I once lived next to a couple who had a busin their house, and seemed to get along beautifully. The woman had a little apartment four blocks away, on the second a house, and occasionally I'd see her walking there. (Though I lived next to them, I had a sort-of girlfriend about a q a block from the woman's apartment, right on the route she walked to get there.) I asked her why she paid for an ap when she had a place to live with her boyfriend, and she replied that you just can't be around anyone twenty-four ho day, every day.

How will this virus change religion in this country? Will some of us lose our faith after seeing their loved ones die? some of us lose the habit of going to church, when the churches have been closed?

I once read a piece on cross-country skiing, in which the writer documented the massive amount of energy and effor time that competitive x-c skiers had to put in. Simply eating enough to keep their weight up was a big problem for tl Then the writer switched to his personal experience with the sport. At the end, he said that for him cross-country ski served as a reminder about life that sometimes "you just have to grind it out". And that's what we're going to have to do with this pandemic: grind it out. I think of my own sport, rock climbing, and the times I hung on desperately. And that's v we're going to have to do with this pandemic: hang on with everything we've got, until the blood is coming out from our fingernails.

April 6, 2020

[What you can do about coronavirus right now](#) -- though this may be a bit excessive, going so far as to discuss end-o documents. Anyone who doesn't have those already (and I'm as guilty as most of you) probably isn't going to go to t trouble of doing them now. But that's a quibble. Most of the article is valuable.

I really ought to re-read Camus' *The Plague*. It meant nothing to me at the time, but I was a teenager and hadn't acqu life experience that's necessary to appreciate certain books. It would probably mean more to me now. Camus, that m humane of men and writers, often moves me deeply. The long version of *Reflections on the Guillotine* is way up the pantheon of the greatest essays I've ever read, just behind Tanizaki's *In Praise of Shadows*, the two of them as differ can be. Maybe his novel about the citizens of Oran, and of Dr. Bernard Rieux's warnings (unheeded?) to the authori would mean more to me now.

April 7, 2020

The virus doesn't seem to have slowed the pace of teardowns here in my little corner of Whitebread Estates. (Those lack a sense of irony, please don't take that name literally.) There's a line of four or five in a row up on 69th street, a boatload elsewhere. Seems like there are new ones every couple of weeks. I'll never understand the philosophy of spending a ton of money on a house, followed by a ton of money to tear it down and cart all the bits away (not to mention the value followed by a ton of money to build a new house to replace it. Either these people have too much money, or they're on too much debt.

Will Corona change the nature of work? See above, where I speculated that call centers will more often be distributed with the customer service representatives working from their homes. I couldn't hack it, because I like work/life separation. When the company I worked for was being split up and acquired by two other companies, I didn't want to move, so I went to a local company. I could have stayed here and telecommuted every day for years for the remote (and I do mean *remote*) company, which was HQed several states away, as two of the guys in my work group chose to do, but I'd rather eat my words than eat my glass. I want to come home in the evening and be away from work -- not that I ever completely was, with all those work pages for help. But what I did was already so virtual, never even seeing the servers I installed/maintained/configured/supported on the network, that another step of remoteness would have made it intolerable. Also, I like to get up occasionally, stretch my legs and get a cup of coffee and see the existence of other human beings in a building. There are good reasons companies like Apple and Google like to collect their employees in a *place*: humans are a hypersocial species, and we're more productive together. There are exceptions, of course, such as novelists writing novels. But mostly, we like to be together.

April 8, 2020

Think of those who have been married for decades, like the Italian woman whose husband died of Covid-19. They'd been together for half a century, and she wasn't even allowed to go to his funeral. He didn't even have a funeral. Her mourning was intensified, bad as it already was. It's like I wrote in my [Ada novel](#): "She had no one to share anecdotes about their children with ('Do you remember the time...?'). All the shorthand references to memories in common: extinct. The shared events and notions: no more. All had vanished ... They had spent decades building a life together, sharing that life existed only in her brain. His death had, in a moment, taken away a million sharings, had turned them into intangibles. She had moved these recognitions from between them to inside her. All that remained had halved, had shrunk from two to one. When she died, the two of them would vanish altogether, and no more of him would be. Until then, the thought of him was all that remained to her. She would never touch him again. He would never hold her." Or [that story I clipped](#) a couple of years ago, by that man whose wife died, and who was remembering travelling with her in France. He couldn't get his memories quite right, and was frustrated that she had died and he could no longer check the details with her: "Here is the terrible beauty of being in love, that you will know things together that no one else will know, that there are events that exist only in the commingling and exchange of memories." This pandemic, when it kills half of a long-married couple, is erasing their memories, reducing their lives.

April 9, 2020

From a story about the increased popularity of jigsaw puzzles: "Half the world -- about four billion people -- is now looking for some sort of order to stay in their homes." *Half the world!* Okay, go for it, puzzlers. We all have to stay busy somehow.

What will happen when this lockdown ends? The gyms will be jammed, for sure. The streets will probably be full of people, the stores full of people trying to get stuff they're lacking (making for yet more empty shelves). The restaurants (at least the ones that are still in business)?

Yet another reason dogs are superior to cats: cats can catch Corona. People with cats invariably tell me their pet is their affectionate, "just like a dog". This baffles me. If you want a doglike animal, get a dog, you dolt. They co-evolved with us because they've been with us way longer than any other domesticated animal, and they sure as hell understand us and our needs better than those narcissistic felines. That's why dogs are called man's best friend. Cats are never mentioned in the same breath.

April 10, 2020

My friend Rich called up yesterday and we talked for a while. He observed that the sky is much more blue, with less haze and fewer factories in operation. The sky has been overcast lately, but this morning was completely clear, and he says it's much bluer. My Brazilian neighbor pointed out that there aren't any airplanes. That was almost right, because I saw only two contrails in the sky this morning, far fewer than usual. And on the subject of aircraft, I haven't heard a helicopter in weeks.

April 11, 2020

From a N.Y. Times Coronavirus Briefing:

By profoundly disrupting modern life, the coronavirus is making itself felt in some novel ways.

The seismometers that geologists use to detect earthquakes also pick up the vibrations of human activity -- vehicle construction equipment, heavy machinery and the like. But with billions of people now staying home, the "thumpin' of civilization is now barely detectable," Robin George Andrews, a volcanologist, writes.

A University of Chicago professor who developed a way to track electricity use as a measure of economic stability has seen a sharp falloff in recent weeks, suggesting an economic decline on a par with the 2007-9 recession, and possibly the Great Depression.

On the other hand, there has been a huge surge in plain old-fashioned phone calls. Voice calling had been dwindling in recent years, but Verizon says it is now handling twice as many calls on an average weekday as it usually gets on Mother's Day.

April 12, 2020

Putting up this entry a day early, because why not save myself the work. It's my page, and I can break any rules I want. Maybe I'll do a short entry in [Unangam Tunuu](#) one of these days. That's my story and I'm stickin' to it.

I was right (see the first entry, top of the page): Corona is turning into an economic catastrophe. It was obvious from the start that quarantining would result in job loss and business bankruptcies. The news is that the banks are sitting on the federal loan money instead of handing it out. Quelle surprise.

There's still a certain unreality about the disease because I don't know anyone yet who has it. That will change. I've been wondering who in my family will get it first, and I'm betting either Susan, from working in a hospital, or me, because I'm sometimes careless.

I've lost five to seven pounds in recent weeks, depending on the day I weigh myself. Some of that may be a change in eating habits, and some may be the acceleration of the Parkinson's. But some may be loss of muscle mass because the gyms are closed.

April 13, 2020

[Click here](#) to help document the Coronavirus. (And by the way, the title of my page precedes knowing about any of my brethren namesakes.)

Or [click here](#) to read about "plague fiction".

April 14, 2020

What may happen: by May, everyone will be going stir crazy, and many will need to get back to work, and nearly all will have to do things they've been putting off, such as getting the car fixed. They'll hammer their state government to lift the lockdown, because infections and deaths have been going down. Then they'll go out and mingle, and the infection rate will spike again. I personally plan to avoid the gym, though I'm desperate to go there: a gym seems like an incubator, where you would be touching weights and handles that many others already had, and where people would be breathing explosively close to each other. No, thank you.

Food is being buried by the ton because no one's buying it -- e.g., onions often go to restaurants, and an onion farmer says "People don't make onion rings at home". Will these farmers go bankrupt? And other crops are rotting in the field because no one is there to pick them. Will we face shortages? And meatpacking plants are closing down left and right because workers, whose jobs are elbow to elbow, are getting the virus. Again, shortages?

Pity the poor sex addicts. They can't hose with strangers now, unless they want to risk getting sick. (Here's an idea: use condoms. [Pause.] I just looked it up, and such a thing actually exists. 72 million hits on Google. I must be out of the doubt that virtual sex over the internet has the same thrill as the real live thing. It wouldn't for me. Not that I'm in the basket as these freaks, you understand.

A panhandler hit me up for money yesterday, and I gave him some. He got too close and I told him to keep his distance. He said not to be so worried: all I had to do was wash my hands a lot, and pray. That latter part struck me as the most superstitious thing I'd heard in years. Besides, praying for one's self is useless; only prayer for others, or "Thy will be done" count as true prayer. And as a confirmed non-theist, I don't believe in even those two forms. But praying for oneself is an appalling leftover from childhood, when we were under the illusion that the world revolved around each of us, personally.

Doctors rescheduling patients until after the lockdown: will conditions be missed? Examples: melanomas, heart pro that signal the approach of a heart attack. Will people die because of the delays?

And speaking of delays, the tooth I broke two weeks ago, and was told not to come in, is discolored and starting to l not enough yet to justify a call to the dentist. If it wasn't for bad luck, I wouldn't have no luck at all. (A song that's worth listening to, [especially the Albert King version.](#))

April 15, 2020

Car traffic looks up a bit to me. If this is not a random blip, are some of us starting to disregard the lockdown?

Out walking, I was crossing the street in a pedestrian crosswalk clearly marked "State law: yield to pedestrian in crc But some twat in a minivan wasn't going to, so I paused, to save my life, and flipped her off. The next car in the oth direction stopped for me, and my sister rolled down her window, laughing.

April 16, 2020

Susan is working from home full-time now, instead of occasionally, which means I can't steam ahead on the novel u work on a laptop, which I don't like. I've always preferred big screens (one of the many reasons I refuse to own a smartphone). So yesterday I didn't write anything until evening, and this was good for me because I got a lot more e Sitting still is the worst thing you can do for Parkinson's. So I got several hours of exercise, and feel better for it tod symptoms have been getting worse since about January, but the deterioration accelerated when the gym closed.

Maybe ten or twelve years ago, during a flu scare (bird flu?), I was considered "essential personnel", and was one o minority whom my employer gave a box of masks to, so I could continue coming to work. (Of course I would have able to telecommute much of the time.) I haven't seen that box in years. In fact, I think I gave it away somewhere al line. Sure would be useful now.

Email from a friend: "These are all wonderful ideas, sadly I've been sick with what I'm assuming is COVID-19 for t weeks (as of today). I haven't had the strength mental or physical to manage Nerd Nite (sadly). I'm hopeful that this week will be a turn in my prospects and I'll be able to return to contributing because these are excellent ideas." ... Tc replied with an offer to help in any way I can. One thing notable about his email is that he *assumed* he has the virus. this to mean he probably couldn't get tested, which is illustrative of the incompetence of the U.S. response to the pa Compare to South Korea.

April 17, 2020

The Mormons are starting to look smart, with their practice of storing a year's worth of food in the basement. I won't whether any of the super-rich people who bought hideouts in old missile silos and such have retreated to them yet.

I wonder whether houses will be, on average, tidier because people are spending more time at home and have more (no commutes), or whether they will be less tidy because they're spending all their time at home and the kids are ch the house. (Yes, I'm verbing the noun "chaos". Deal with it.)

American pre-eminence has sprung, directly and indirectly, from our economic might. Or so it's always seemed to n World War II was the real trigger for that, reading between the lines of the history books -- we suffered no damage, the other major powers, and we ramped up our industry-- and that economic might has largely persisted. If this viru destroys our economy, will we no longer be the dominant superpower?

Are the interstates as empty as the city streets? My car hasn't been driven in a while, and only for short jaunts even a Time for a mini road trip. Lawrence? Nah. Too much time. If the battery goes dead, I'll summon AAA.

That broken tooth is a food trap. Can't wait for semi-normal life to resume, so I can get this sort of thing fixed when happens. Imagine what life was like in the nineteenth century, when the major qualification for being a dentist was t large and strong, so you could hold the patients down while pulling their rotted teeth. Those bad teeth, I've read, we reason people didn't smile in those days when having their picture taken. Man am I grateful to live when I do. Life i much better now than then.

The webcam I ordered about a month ago shows as "shipped", not yet "out for delivery". It was supposed to arrive t and clearly will not. It's probably still on the hamster-powered paddleboat, crossing the Pacific.

April 18, 2020

Went to see [Lawrin](#)'s grave, since why not, I was in the vicinity. There's plenty of time for this sort of spontaneous in these days. Wow. It's been years, and I'd forgotten. What a gravesite. Lawrin and his sire, buried under large stones I call cenotaphs, except that the horses are actually there, under the stones. But "cenotaph" sounds more impressive, and "monument" is too impressive. And these stones are quite big. The rest of it's not bad, either -- doesn't take up a lot but is better maintained than the graves of human beings. It's curious that this little visit should remind me of its exact opposite, the closing words of *Middlemarch*, which touched me so deeply when I read them, and still do: "But the error of her being on those around her was incalculably diffusive: for the growing good of the world is partly dependent on unhistoric acts; and that things are not so ill with you and me as they might have been, is half owing to the number who lived faithfully a hidden life, and rest in unvisited tombs."

April 19, 2020

Is the lockdown putting a greater load on the phone network, because people have to call their colleagues from home directly instead of locally inside the company (via the PBX), and because the kids are home, talking on their phones might there be some reason for a reduced load? Internet traffic has got to be going up, because so many people are online. I'm amazed I've seen no effect whatever on internet response here at home: speed and reliability are unchanged. Different speed tests show us still running at 500 megabits, up and down. Ping is under a millisecond, and latency is in the upper twenties. Everything's up to date in Kansas City.

April 20, 2020

This virus should improve preparations for the next time around. (Although who knows whether the gap won't be so big that we slack again, resulting in expired equipment and other simple fumbles.) The big question, to me, is whether it will carry over into preparation for other kinds of disasters, such as famine and drought. I read a book back in the 70s, *The Genesis Strategy*, which asserted, among other things, that we need to get back to the ancient practice of preparing for famines and similar disasters. The idea is simple, but there will be those who protest the cost, I think.

It's all in the execution. Throwing money at the problems of unemployment and small-business revenue loss, is useful unless the mechanisms to get the money to those needing it are effective, trackable, and immune to fraud. These are the opposite of what one would expect of a federal government run by a party that, at heart, hearkens back to the Confederacy in its opposition to federal power.

From the N.Y. Times: "[F]our factors are likely to play some role [in likelihood to getting the disease]: how close you are to the person; how long you are near the person; whether that person projects viral droplets on you; and how much you touch the person. (Of course, your age and health are also major factors.)"

April 21, 2020

Now that the weather's warmer more teens, often girls in groups of three, are out. They never seem to make social distance, just walk three abreast.

Watching Dr. Anthony Fauci, long may he live, I noticed that this body is too small for his head. When all this is over he really oughta hit the gym and beef up those shoulders, and probably the rest of the body, too.

April 22, 2020

When people brush by me too close, especially when they're running (which requires greater distance), I'm starting to think "Six feet". It don't do a damn bit of good, except the satisfaction of jerking them around.

Stopped at Starbucks this morning, and they'd changed and only accept orders via their mobile app, but the fellow at the door gave me a coffee out of the goodness of his heart when he saw that I lack a smartphone, bless him. I'll leave a tip when they start taking orders via the drive-through. I just wish it would go to him... I wonder whether these acts of generosity are becoming more common. I hope so.

This virus is only one more episode in a flood of problems we've brought on ourselves in the last half-century or so. I think to me that the human race is probably doomed, though all but one of the people I've mentioned this notion to have survived. They're delusional. Here's the reason: in my lifetime, humans have caused these problems:

- * Near nuclear war (the Cuban missile crisis)
- * Massive pollution (metals, sewage, fertilizer, nuclear, plastics, ...)
- * Habitat loss (forests, prairies, wetlands, coral reefs, ...)
- * Ozone depletion (got better, now getting worse again)
- * Resource depletion (sand, phosphorus, various metals, water, ...)
- * Agricultural losses (desertification, soil depletion, overfishing, ...)

- * Geostationary satellites at risk? (weather, spy, eco/ag, communications, ...)
- * Overpopulation (3x since 1948; births ~2.5x deaths; half all historical humans are alive right now)
- * Climate change (atmospheric carbon has doubled in the last 30 years; also more of other greenhouse gases)
- * More-frequent catastrophic events (wildfires(U.S.=10x), storms, floods, ...)
- * Accelerating species extinction (vertebrates, invertebrates)
- * The insect apocalypse (75% of species biomass lost every 25 years)
- * (Later: The oceans are dying (plastics, fertilizer, pollutants))

Those are the ones I remember. I've probably missed some.

Be honest with yourself. The *vast* majority of species throughout the history of this planet have gone extinct. We're special as we think we are -- just another bunch of apes on our rock spinning through the void, circling an obscure world that other species will be able to appreciate the astonishing gift that this world is, in its beauty and complexity? Will other species will understand mathematics? Will have mystical experiences? Will feel romantic love? Will have the gift of laughter? Of language? I bet we're the only one, and that when we're gone, a spark will go with us. I only hope that was right who said, "Mind will find a way to manifest itself," and that a similar species eventually takes our place. If we can manipulate its environment in the ways we have, it too may be doomed by the unanticipated consequences of it.

April 23, 2020

[LibraryThing](#) sends me occasional emails. (Unlike many organizations that do, they are blessedly restrained in the frequency of their missives.) Here's a quote from the latest:

Coronavirus has hit the literary and academic world particularly hard. A partial list of its victims include the Chilean novelist Luis Sepulveda (NYT obit), actress and Hollywood biographer Patricia Bosworth (NYT obit), Tony-winning playwright Terrance McNally (NYT obit), John Conway (NYT obit), creator of the cellular-automaton "Conways Game of Life," art critic and curator Maurice Burger, art critic William H. Gerds, art critic and artist David C. Driskell, archivist author Michael Sorkin (NYT obit), Argentinian comic book artist Juan Gimenez, Catalan philologist Germa Colon, Cuban author and activist Iris M. Zavala, sociologist and LibraryThing Early Reviews alumnus-William B. Helmreich, American and presidential historian Henry Graff, ethnobotanist Arthur Whistler, Spanish historian Carlos Seco Serrano, Irish travel author Tim Robinson, experimental Belgian author Marcel Moreau, French priest and ecumenist Michel de Certeau, Jesuit authors Henri Madelin, Andre Manaranche and Philippe Leclercq, Guyanese poet and literary critic Michael Ondaatje, Romanian anti-communist activist Paul Goma, film critic William Wolfe, philosopher of mathematics Mark Steiner, medievalists Francis Rapp and Michel Parisse, linguist Robert Chaudenson, French historian Jacques Le Brun, and philosopher Lucien Seve.

Here is [a more complete list](#), although the year is clearly wrong: these deaths had to be in 2020. The table is titled "List of deaths in 2020", which is correct, but the header on the page is "List of deaths due to coronavirus disease 2019", which matches the URL, and is off by a year. How did the editors miss such a fat pitch? A simple change of URL and header combined with a redirect for the existing blunderpage, will solve the problem. (My entry here was written at 2:06 PM on 4/22/2020 CDT, and the Wikipedia page shows its last entry at 22 April 2020, at 17:13 (UTC). I include this parenthetical aside in case they fix it by 23 April (or later), that being the date my entry will go up. At the time of this writing, my attempt to find the corresponding correct page results in "Wikipedia does not have an article with this exact name.")

Reading Charles Taylor's *A Secular Age*, a staggering work of scholarship on, among other things, how ideas of society, the individual and the relationship of the two has changed over the past millenium or so, I wonder whether these ideas will be changed by the pandemic. Will there be a greater sense of mutuality and interdependence? Will ideas of hierarchy and equality change? Or will there be greater selfishness? Or, as Taylor lays out in the book, will the changes be too subtle and complex to be so easily summarized?

April 24, 2020

Re-reading the entry yesterday on *A Secular Age*, I see how ridiculous and shallow it is. But let it stand. Better to show my warts and be honest than edit and hide them. That would be like posting a picture of a beautiful stranger when dating to attract women. The truth always comes around to bite you, and even if it doesn't, dishonesty just doesn't sit right with me... I've been working on that book for over a month (though not much, lately), and I'm only 170 pages into it, out of 300, not including the epilogue. How the hell do supermen like Taylor write these masterpieces? I can't even *read* them for me. Unlike my friend Larry, who reads slowly and meticulously and actually masters the books he reads, I end up with a vague notion of what I bashed my way through. That dude Larry, and I bow to his inner Buddha, my forehead all the way to the floor, read *The Cognitive Neuropsychiatry of Parkinson's Disease* not once, but *twice*. You need a double Ph.D. to understand the Goddamn jargon therein. I read it, too, but I only remember one simple idea from it, the most important but nevertheless... Taylor's book reminds me of trying to get through *The Critique of Pure Reason*. I wish I could say I understood it (but only got about 16% of the way through that particular foundation stone of the Western canon), but these projects I usually fail. My brain -- or at least my will -- ain't up to them. Matters were different when I was young, and I could do things like work out my own proof of the prime number theorem. Now I seem to be suffering from synapse collapse. I wish I had the name of a climb I never did, it being on the Apron and not a crack climb, but I wish I had done it, just because of the

though it was above my slab climbing abilities; ditto Transistor Sister, in the same vicinity; ahem!, as so often, I dig On the other hand, these tomes can be relied on as soporifics, late in the evening... What, you ask at this point in my impenetrable thicket of words, does all this have to do with Corona? Not much. Accuse me of self-indulgent rambling I'll fess up.

April 25, 2020

I was in the class of 1970 at K.U. (though theoretically I couldn't graduate until January 1971), and 1970 was the class in which the traditional graduation walk was cancelled due to weather, one of three times that's happened in the more than 100 years the university has existed. A few months ago the administration mailed us a letter that our class could make the graduation walk with the class of 2020. Now *that* is cancelled due to Corona. 1969-70 was the time of three bombings on campus (which, several years ago, when I returned for my second degree, my fellow students did not seem to believe multiple arsons in Lawrence, the police killing two young men on the street, the governor pulling out the police and the highway patrol to maintain the law (because community-police relations were so bad), classes were cancelled, there were riots, demonstrations, and so on, [as documented here](#) (with a left-wing slant)... First all that, then the weather, and Corona. The class of '70 is jinxed.

April 26, 2020

No entry. I forgot.

April 27, 2020

Can't get the webcam. It's been a month, the vendor has gone dark, I can't find one anywhere else, and Amazon either won't do anything to make it right. In the meantime, my neurological appointment is coming up and I'm afraid she won't see me, except remotely (i.e., via webcam), and my symptoms are getting worse.

I keep seeing that people are getting depressed at being shut away. I'm not. What I feel is frustration and helplessness don't tell me these are symptoms of depression, because I'm thoroughly familiar with the latter. These symptoms are standing by themselves this time.) Everything was hunky dory until today, and it's finally all caught up with me. I missed my classes, and meeting my friends, and talking to them, and working out, and getting out in the world.

April 28, 2020

So they finally figured out that my webcam was lost in transit (stolen, I'm betting), and they refunded my money while I was asking what I wanted to do, although I'd told them to just send me another in place of the one they'd lost. This, after eight days of waiting. I loathe Amazon. Monopolies are always like this: screwing us, unresponsive, too much power in a few hands. All webcams from other stores are sold out. I did find a webcam on Craigslist, selling for nearly twice the value, but I'm unwilling to be gouged.

Email from [Penn Valley Meeting](#), Ministry and Counsel clerk, offering help to anyone who feels the need. Haven't seen them in years, but I still think of them. Gentle, generous people.

April 29, 2020

Failed to make an entry for today, so this is actually a 4/30 entry. It's tough to keep up when I'm also writing a novel and preparing the lectures for the class I'll teach in June. Especially when Susan uses the PC all day, because she's working from home.

April 30, 2020

A cool, rainy, windy morning yesterday. The entire hour I was out, I didn't see another walker. Had the city to myself. The woman behind the counter at Hattie's said business was very light. The previous morning, there had been four or five walkers at the same time as me, but that day there were none.

I've noticed that guys who work with their hands -- tree trimmers, carpenters, whatever -- don't seem to observe social distancing. I wonder why this is.

May 1, 2020

Hurray, hurray, for the first of May. Outdoor f***ing starts today.

Gorgeous day yesterday. Passed someone walking, and smelled her perfume, and though she was at least 6 feet away, the scent made me feel we were too close for social distancing.

I walk up to my parents' grave at least three times a week, and often my friend John is in his back yard, right next door today, and we talk over the fence. But of course only at a distance. This whole thing is endlessly sad and weird: crossing the street to avoid each other. Today, a couple coming toward me started to cross the street, but spotted a pair of girls on the other side, leaving them in a dilemma, so I stepped out into the street and pointed at the sidewalk, so they continued walking my direction. They raised their hands to me, because people no longer speak to each other. This is to human nature.

On a screen-sharing (Zoom-ish) call with two friends yesterday, they told me that people are driving like maniacs on highway, and even on city streets, since the amount of traffic has converged to near-zero. I haven't seen it, but then I saw a little bubble here, which seems to have reverted, in ways, to the time of Leave It To Beaver. That will change back once the virus is no longer a threat, and I expect that people will run amuck, and the younger they are, the more they will do.

May 2, 2020

Nancy is over today, and we're all three of us having a great time. She and Susan are painting the Little Free Library going to put in the front yard. It occurs to me that this lockdown is probably bringing a lot of families closer because they have more time for each other.

When driving, I generally listen to classic rock or to NPR. Since I only drive a couple of times a week now, if that, I'm missing my diet of both. Which, really, I must not have felt I was missing because I didn't even think of it until today when I happened to drive the car for a few minutes.

Concert in the neighbor's driveway three doors down from ours. Her husband's band "can't play anywhere [the lockdown so...". First song was that Tracy Chapman number I love: [Give Me One Reason](#). The band was drums, guitar, bass, tenor sax, and a female vocalist. Also a small dog that stood less than a yard from the singer and sax player, never budging to look from one to the other, occasionally nodding its head out of time to the rhythm. Wearing a pink sweater. And ain't no more to say.

May 3, 2020

Pleasant weather, the house windows open, and I noticed the quiet. Now I hear mostly the voices of people walking instead of the sounds of cars.

May 4, 2020

To the hospital today, for routine skin check. Everything has changed. You don't just walk in -- you proceed from one "Here" circle to another, and are required to have an appointment, which is checked by a woman on a workstation near the entrance. Everyone, staff and patients alike, wears a mask. The doctor had a face shield as well. You don't check out until you don't collect money when you drive out of the parking garage. Everything they can do to minimize contact, they do. There are other touches, too, like a list of symptoms; if you've experienced them recently, stay home. The doctor no longer shakes hands when greeting me... I'd planned to answer the question about "How are you" by saying "Bored", but the question morphed into, "How are you? Bored?" Stole my thunder.

May 5, 2020

If I needed more evidence that online learning is inadequate compared to in-person classroom learning, I have it now. The four-hour seminar I attended today was so weak that by the end I was surfing the Net and listening with one ear. The class, several years ago by the same person, was masterful. Yes, I admit some people will be better in one domain than another, and this may be such a case, but I'm not the only one. A friend whose kids are both in college tell him that they're the same. No doubt this will improve, if it goes for another semester or two, but I'll still put money on it never (except for rare exceptions) being the equal of in-person instruction. The one consistent factor known to improve learning is small class size. I assume this is because fewer students enables the teacher to provide more individual attention. Can't do that on a computer wire -- the subtleties of expression that tell you whether someone's getting the material, or even paying attention, get bleached out. Similarly, my wife complained that she couldn't adequately see her clients remotely in her work, and that's a major reason she's glad to get back to the hospital, instead of working from here at home.

May 6, 2020

I wonder how this work-at-home thing is changing people's schedules -- whether they're getting loose, later, earlier, or more variable. Changing their sleep? Certainly changing the exercise of those of us, like me, who habitually hit the gym every

day. For me, that's gone for the foreseeable future: there can hardly be a worse incubator than a gym (see April 14, & Because this thing won't be over when the lockdown comes off. No, sir. There will be spikes for months to come, more than a year. When the kids go back to school there's going to be a big one.

May 7, 2020

The food chain, or at least the meat production, is breaking down. Didn't see that one coming, although it makes per sense and should have been predicted by someone with foresight. Maybe after this is all over we can start working c chain that's less industrial, less focused on meat, and treats the workers better. I once stayed with a Quaker couple in The woman had assumed a false identity in order to work in a meat plant and write about it. What she told me was disturbing, to put it mildly.

May 8, 2020

Kansas Zen Center is doing its first Zoom retreat tomorrow. (The Dhamma Sukha center in southern Missouri starte in mid-April.) I'll be curious how this goes, though I don't intend to "attend", since the arrangement in this house on Saturday is not suitable and the day would be one long continuous distraction.

The Symphony keeps sending out emails. Got me to thinking: they're probably not practicing together, since they're performing now. These people are all astonishingly good at what they do -- but will not playing together for a while that their chops in performance will be poor when they resume? And how will they replace the people who get sick work (or even die)? Of course they can bring someone in, but you probably don't just turn on the tap and get a perfe [Later: and what about the problems of getting their famous soloists to travel here? Will people like Joshua Bell be or ill?] ... I just got an image of the musicians on stage, all masked, and Michael Stern turning around, also masked, acknowledge the applause.

Susan's hospital has just released its first coronavirus patient (i.e., the first one they admitted) after *forty-eight days*.

We keep hearing about the disaster this has visited on musicians and stage actors and even casinos, but I have yet to much about the effect on movies and TV, which seems like a curious omission to me. Maybe I'm not looking in the places, like *Variety* or something.

The Atlantic can always be relied on to cover important stories with clear, well-organized writing. But sometimes th are hair-raising, as in [this story about the small business die-off](#). My father had a small business, employing a couple hundred people at its maximum. A pandemic like this could have ruined his company, impoverished our family, and those people out of work.

Reading [first-person accounts](#) of the virus is horrifying: medically induced coma, pain everywhere, fever and chills succession, "an anvil sitting on my chest", it feels like "it's mutating in your body every day, trying something else", loss of energy, felt "like a very long hangover", "like I was in a U.F.C. match and beaten up", "felt like drowning", "able to walk or even stand". On top of all this, your family is not allowed to visit, and you can't even see the faces ar of the people who are treating you. I imagine lying there, with nothing to do and no substantive human contact, for weeks. I remember my own week in intensive care, when I almost died, and in some ways these stories are worse, b least I saw my wife and the faces of my doctor and the nurses, vegetative state though I was in. So if I get this disea seriously, and I do mean *seriously*, consider suicide -- but by the time I realize I should do it, I won't be able to, bec be trapped in a hospital bed and unable to choose my own path, a passive recipient of what other people decide shou done to me.

May 9, 2020

Had The Australian Dream last night. Apparently as long as I live there will be fresh, never-experienced dreams stil had from the great [Dream Closet](#). [Later. Note: You couldn't pay me enough to take that damn drug.] Who were the wild people trying to break into the house to savage the young man, and what was their grudge against him? Why d entire land look like some sort of Dali painting filtered through aboriginal art? What was the point of photographing of us in the coffin, when I was still alive? And why was I wearing my underwear on the outside of my jeans?

May 10, 2020

Heard a couple of small aircraft yesterday evening, and that was unique. There have been *very* few for weeks now. C traffic is higher. Etc. Things are opening back up, prematurely.

In recent decades what I think of as "the hug culture" has taken over. My wife and I happened to be in Oregon in 20 visited an old friend, who greeted me with a hug. Hadn't seen him in years. He's never been a full-contact kind of gu

and much other similar evidence showed me that the hug culture had taken over this country. With Corona that's changed and I expect it will probably remain changed for quite a while, if not permanently, and that's fine with me personally. My wife once told me it took her a while to understand that I don't like to be touched (introvert?). I'm not a huggy kind of person. But I regret the hug loss for the people who are, and they are clearly many. I can handle being hugged more easily than I can handle the loss of hugging. It seems to be very natural for them.

May 11, 2020

Our neighbor, whose daughter lives in Australia, told her not to come home for Christmas, because they're doing so much better there at managing the disease: "no matter how much I want to see her". This seems to me a wise and loving decision.

An accordionist busking in the parking lot at 95th and Nall. The checkout guy in Sprouts told me the player has been here for a couple of weeks. For Johnson County this is truly out of the norm -- this place is a little enclave of middle-class suburbia, which I call Whitebread Estates... A lot of people seem to hate the accordion, and I kind of get that. As the love of the piano and the harmonica, with a bit of melodica thrown in, the poor critter has nowhere it fits, except polka and Mexican music. It's one of those hat-in-hand instruments that begs to be taken seriously. There's not much love for the squeeze boxes.

Have epidemiologists looked into the spread of infectious disease among animals, particularly domesticated herd animals (Is "domesticated herd animals" redundant? The only exception I can think of is house cats, but then again, they often seem to me as not yet really domesticated. Too self-absorbed. All the others -- dogs, horses, cattle, whatever -- are social.) There might be a bit to be learned about disease spread from such research. I'm sure this must have been done, but I'm reluctant to use Google or Bing on it. I'd end up wasting half an hour, minimum.

----- STOP PRESS -----

LATER. NOTE TO READERS, if there are any: at the dentist's office this morning, my blood oxygen was in the 60s so they refused to see me and insisted I call my doctor because this indicates lung problems. What that means these days is Corona. So if there are no more entries here, it will almost certainly be because I'm in the hospital. Now I wait for the doctor's office to call me back, and probably call me in.

May 12, 2020

The doctor's office confirmed my blood oxygen is unusually low, and seemed maybe a little surprised by my lack of symptoms. (It was odd, consulting with my doctor, whom I love and admire, while he stood in the street and I sat in the car but odd mostly in retrospect. I, like probably most people, am getting accustomed to stuff that would have felt very strange indeed just a couple of months ago.) They x-rayed my chest and will call tomorrow. In the meantime, I continue to live as I have all along in recent months: fine, except for the Goddamn PD and its effects.

Walking around the cemetery where my parents are buried, I remembered the first week of [North American Indian Languages](#) (click "Courses" tab and scroll down to LING 747), when [Dr. McKenzie](#) took us the mile or two to [Haskins](#) showed us around. "Always remember," he said, "that these are human beings." The cemetery on the grounds contains graves for many students, mostly from the 19th century, and I noticed that death dates for certain years were absent, other years had an unusual number of gravestones. The likeliest explanation is years of epidemics. The year 2020 will be like that, in some cemeteries more than others.

May 13, 2020

No entry.

May 14, 2020

Getting into the fucking pulmonologist's office is like [a Kafka novel](#).

Later: [Why We're Obsessed With Celebrities' Bookcases](#). Speak for yourself, Amanda. I don't give a shit about their titles though admittedly I do try to read the titles and maybe that indicates I'm not really above it all. (What next? A subscription to one of those rags like *People* or *Us*, if they even still exist?) The story is interesting, though. Where's Erving Goffman when we need his insights? This whole "bookcase" (a pretentious synonym for "bookshelf") display idea is sort of reminiscent of Goffman's idea of how people disguise their stigmas when they're considered ritually taboo. Too bad he made me give away my physical set of the Encyclopedia Britannica, though when I get a webcam it will show the picture instead of a "bookcase". Jeez. I think I'm losing patience with our culture, esp. celebrities. Ship them off to the jungle where they've had a month of fame, and don't give them any publicity for at least a year after that. Note to readers: the web

linked to at the start of the paragraph came up with speaker volume set to zero, though not muted. That's unique. You need to turn it up.

May 15, 2020

I'm a [swabbie](#) now. I got swabbed yesterday. Nasal rape is the best description I can think of. They tell you to put your head against the headrest of your seat. Because otherwise you'd yank your head back. It hurts.

[This paper](#) on the effect of Covid-19 and disease suppression policies on labor markets is interesting, and points up, again, the uniqueness of the U.S. among the wealthy nations. For one thing, the U.S. has by far the largest job losses (measured as per cent of labor force). The paper discusses, among other matters, the true disruption to the labor force which, here in the U.S., may be twice the official estimate.

May 16, 2020

I noticed in Sprouts the other day that all (5 or 6) black customers were not wearing masks, but the vast majority of white customers were. Yes, it's a small sample size and may be a coincidence. I'll keep an eye peeled, because if this is consistently the case, it's very curious indeed.

My little suburb, which I often find insufferable, is considering an ordinance to require face masks in public. The police chief objects, because he thinks people would think it's overreaching and it "could tarnish our reputation". My initial reaction to this was to fill the rest of this paragraph with profanity. Instead, I'll merely note that the reputation of the suburb is not nearly as important as increased suffering and death. Think of those who try to be responsible and do wear masks but get infected anyway because others did not. In fairness to the police chief, he did make other points, such as the difficulty of enforcing such an ordinance, especially when the surrounding suburbs have different rules. (Race to the bottom?) I'd suggest, though, that if he can't stand the heat, he should get out of the kitchen. The one idea I found interesting is that having to enforce such an ordinance would require police to have more contact with the public, putting them at greater risk. The police chief's main concern "is keeping our officers and staff healthy". If public safety is not more important, well, then, let the police work from home. (For the irony deficient, that was a *joke*.)

Got home just after 1 pm yesterday and there was a message from my doctor's nurse on the phone, asking me to call for the virus test, as it was likely to be, that was quick, about 19 hours after I was swabbed, and I thought the speed was good news. She was not at the phone, so I left a message. When she called back, it turned out that they were following up to want to know whether I'd had the test yet.

May 17, 2020

Us Anglos are known for our personal distance being considerable. We squirm if people get inside it. This is one reason why Arabs make us uncomfortable. They like to get close enough to share their microbes completely, which makes our social norms crawl. So my question today is this: is the [R factor](#) higher, at least in the early days of an epidemic, in cultures with less personal distance?

May 18, 2020

Ran into my friend Dennis in a hardware store yesterday, and he says the Y will be reopening. I'd planned to stay at the gyms being incubators, but he says it will be by appointment, limited in numbers, require wiping down the gear (and bars) before and after use, locker room closed, and so on. I was reconsidering, then went to the web page. They may open our branch June 1. I checked City Gym, to compare, but they won't allow guests, and I'm not a member. Looks like I'll just order more weights.

May 19, 2020

How the hell do these random notions pop up in my brain? I woke up wondering how this virus has affected [Marfa](#), probably has not crossed my mind in years. It's the ultimate case of gentrification: rich strangers moving in and starting expensive boutiques (Prada!), art galleries, and restaurants; the poor locals struggling to afford their housing; etc. etc. town in the middle of BFE. Went to their website, and not a word about the pandemic.

Being stuck at home so much is boring, but it's better than that Goddamn job I used to go to every day. Getting calls in the a.m. to fix applications I'd never heard of and didn't know anything about. My equipment (and, thus, me) getting blamed for problems that were clearly in the PBX/telco interactions, and when, weeks later, it finally dawned on everyone what the problem was, they never apologized, or credited me for saying the right thing. Unrewarding drudgery and incompetent management. This is way better.

So what the hell? Why haven't I heard about my Covid test? It's been more than the 48 hours, even excluding Saturday and Sunday.

Things are getting back to normal at Susan's hospital -- they're doing Tuesday-morning tumor conference again. We don't know what happens when the second wave hits.

From the Shawnee-Mission Post: "On a 7-5 vote Monday, the Prairie Village City Council rejected a proposed ordinance that would have required people to wear facial coverings in public settings like stores. Mayor Eric Mikkelsen said that the idea of mandating masks had generated a wave of strongly held opinions from residents that had 'torn at the fabric of Prairie Village' in a way that troubled him." See the entry for May 16 above for my strongly held opinion. In the end, though I think the whole question may be moot, because this seems like the sort of thing for which people will do as they damn please, and any regulation would be unenforceable anyway.

Walked up to the cemetery and sat on my parents' bench. There was one person there, off yonder in a far corner, looking at something. He turned to leave, and I recognized him: my cousin. We chatted a while about various stuff (he's on the other side of the cemetery), including, as all conversations these days do, the pandemic.

May 20, 2020

The Covid-19 test was negative. I knew it would be. Now I can get my broken tooth fixed.

May 21, 2020

Given the negative test, the dentist saw me today. My blood oxygen was 99%. This fluctuation is weird. Later, called a pulmonologist to get this on the record.

The dentist wore not only a shield, but in place of a simple mask one of those things that looks like the rebreathers that SEALs use (an "elastomeric respirator"), with the little filters sticking out to the sides. Poor woman. All the extra trouble and discomfort. But if anyone is vulnerable, it's gotta be dentists, constantly looking down into people's mouths, and she has to take precautions.

May 22, 2020

Weekly telemeeting / talk with two of my friends yesterday, one of whom had not been out of the house, except to walk the dogs, for three months. He was surprised by the changes: plexiglass barriers, "stand here" markings six feet apart, and shelves. Both these guys are getting a bit depressed. I think I would, too, in isolation that extreme. I refuse to do that. A loner / introvert like me has to have human contact. A few times a week, in proper circumstances, with the right people is the way to live. We don't have the chops needed to meditate in a cave like [Bodhidharma](#).

May 23, 2020

There hasn't been as much discussion as there should be of what the socioeconomic structure of this country will look like after the virus goes away. I fear that our current inequities will be worse. Example: there are a lot of private investors like KKR that have real estate investments (KKR's "focuses on property-level equity"), meaning that people who own houses find them bought up by these 800-pound gorillas, who promptly rent the houses out for *more* than the mortgage payment was. Sometimes the renters are the very people who lost ownership. We have to expect more defaults in the housing market, since people (not just gig workers and waitresses) are losing their jobs; and we have to expect parasites like KKR to take advantage. This is just one example in one area of the economy. Others will be legion. We may end up with a new aristocracy that will make the Gilded Age look like a paragon of equality.

On my schedule, I have one dental or medical appointment every week for seven weeks in a row. Rather varied, including several specialists. It would have been nine weeks in a row, but I cancelled one, which left a gap (resulting in 1, non-consecutive weeks in a row). It's hell, getting old. The machinery wears out.

Walking home yesterday, I was horrified to see, in the parking lot of the new park, dozens of young children clustered together, waiting for treats from a truck. I spoke to two of the adults as I passed ("Why isn't anyone spacing out the children? That's a mini-outbreak waiting to happen."). They didn't respond. Maybe they think the danger's over with lockdown coming off. But they're risking the health, even the lives, of those kids, and the kids' parents and grandparents well... Later: told this story to my wife, who said she'd heard about a similar instance from someone else.

Children have to be *taught* about risk and responsibility. One of them passed me yesterday on his bike, inches away, and I reprimanded him. I plan to make this a practice with everyone, including adults. If they get upset, that's their life. Too many people are getting too damn casual, and I don't care what their delusions, or their politics, are. They endanger the rest of us.

and a few words are the price they may have to pay. As the pro-Trump tee shirts say, "Fuck your feelings". We'll see they can take what they dish out.

Later: the rage got out of hand in the preceding paragraph, but let it stand. I'm tired of watching people take conserv without talking back.

May 24, 2020

We spent the day in St. Joe (a town I've only driven through, not in, despite living an hour or so away much of my li where I was surprised to see so many gorgeous huge old houses) with our quaranteam, four friends of Susan's from Peace Corps (fifty years ago! -- the whole group has stayed in touch and see each other on a regular, ongoing basis). Schrievers drove down from Nebraska, and the Johnsons drove over from Leavenworth. (It's worth noting that they've been self-isolating.) We enjoyed ourselves, and it sank in thoroughly how much I need more human companionship been getting in recent weeks. We should start holding gabfests in the driveway or something, which we see a lot of. (my sister-in-law) had a birthday this weekend, and she's coming over tomorrow, as are Susan's nephew and his wife (They've only visited his mother, and only once, since the lockdown started.) More enjoyment. Just gotta be careful manage this properly and not socialize indiscriminately.

Listening to descriptions of possible virus infections, and thinking over the rise in my blood oxygen, it occurred to me I may have had the virus and been mostly asymptomatic. The blood O2 might reflect recovery. There were a couple of days I felt shitty, though I don't remember the details too clearly and I often have shitty days from the PD anyway. One problem was fatigue, common with the virus, but also common with PD. There's no sure way to know about virus exposure, given how unreliable the tests are. Talk it over with my primary care physician and wait until the tests are more accurate maybe, or whatever he suggests.

May 25, 2020

Thinking over yesterday, my symptoms seemed better controlled than usual (though some of this was illusory, since trying to do difficult things like moving fast). I've concluded that the emotional and social aspects of the day were the cause of the difference. This, in addition, to medicine + sleep + exercise, is a fourth leg to fighting the disease. This is called "engagement", and includes an element of commitment to life with friends and family, and the enjoyment of meaningful things as meaningful projects (such as the class I'm preparing to teach). People who work in jobs they love already have their leg up on this, but I've seen too many retired guys who neglect this (e.g., some of the guys at [the PEWC](#)) and let the slide. This, I think, is the way to fight that decline in the "agentic self" that Patrick McNamara documents in [his book](#). Without this direct involvement with other human beings and meaningful activity, that loss of will seems inevitable, leads directly to physical decline because of the resulting loss of the agency necessary to engage in the actions (hard physical exercise, and the exercises taught by various kinds of therapist) that slow the disease's progress.

May 26, 2020

Guests in our house yesterday -- Susan's sister, nephew, and niece. Again, the social contact is a relief from my recent isolation. The nephew liked that beer that's been referred to many times above. (Yes, the can was disinfected.)

To the pulmonologist this morning. I am immaculate: blood oxygen never got below 97%, and I screamed past all the tests like a Formula 1 race car: all lung function tests were well above 100% for my demographic. My vitals are even better than that. In short, I'm healthy as a horse, except the damn Parkinson's. There are two possible explanations for the low blood oxygen, according to the doc. First, I may have had cold hands. (I didn't, because I thought of this at the time. Second, I was recovering from largely asymptomatic Coronavirus, and now it's gone. Dodged that bullet. Now all I do is correct my posture. That x-ray -- my spine looks like a freakin' semicircle.

May 27, 2020

I've been writing this journal for two months plus, and I'm still wondering when this running-amuck virus will be brought under control, either through herd immunity or a vaccine. (And speaking of herd immunity, [some fools](#) seem to be trying to accelerate its onset.) Let's hope a vaccine is found in record time. Not hopeful. My prediction is for waves of infection well over a year. Let's hope I'm wrong again, as I so often am, and we get a vaccine much sooner.

Concerning vaccines, I read [this story in the Guardian](#) about a man with polio who still requires an iron lung. The people who deny the efficacy of vaccines (I'm looking at you, [Jenny McCarthy](#)) drive me right up the wall. My father had polio and struggled with his withered leg his entire life. Nobody who got the vaccine had to do that. QED. We could get rid of polio disease, if the last three countries that have it would get their shit together. The people who think they know more than the scientists, doctors, and epidemiologists are, quite simply, fools, and their foolishness endangers us all. Having watched

father's struggle, I'm deeply grateful for the polio vaccine, and vaccines in general. I got both of the shingles vaccine instance.

Per yesterday's entry, I will discuss with my primary care physician the possibility of being tested for antibodies. If them, I will donate [convalescent plasma](#), like [Survivor Corps](#). That is, if and when there's a test that can be relied on

May 28, 2020

The United States has passed 100,000 deaths from Covid-19 (and that's the official number, the true toll almost certainly being substantially higher). Our proportion of deaths to population is way above that of the world in general. Why? Could it be the ostrichlike reaction of much of the population, and those in government who should have responded to the event? Could it be the simple incompetence of the agencies that should have gotten off their asses and acted? There are many reasons, such as the people who went to funerals and churches and caused outbreaks, and the bungling by nursing homes. There's plenty of blame to go around, and it all belongs to us, right here in the good old U. S. of A. For anyone who complains and gets indignant because his patriotism is offended, I say, stop living in a fantasy and act like an adult. Admit we failed.

May 29, 2020

I woke up imagining what it must be like to die from this virus in an ICU. Couldn't say goodbye to my wife and son in their important last words forever unsaid. Surrounded by strangers so heavily garbed the only part I could see was their eyes and human touch. Dying not in my own bed, but in one soon to be occupied by someone else. Expiring inside an organ that is not at home. No sight of the world, no trees and sky.

I found [this story](#) in the Washington Post, about hot spots of infection popping up in rural areas, interesting. (Later: I added a comment on the comments that followed the article -- what's the point? They're always like that.)

May 30, 2020

Rereading [The Uninhabitable Earth](#), which begins "It is worse, much worse, than you think", and then sets out to make the sentence an understatement. I wouldn't be altogether surprised if this book hasn't triggered suicides. Follow the link to get some (*some*) idea of how alarming the book is.

Saturday morning. Out for a walk. Too many people, and they walk abreast, forcing me into the street. All the tables at the restaurants in the arcade (the biscuit place and the French Market) were full. Lots of runners. And a lot of babies in strollers. The temperate weather, and the day of the week, may have a lot to do with the crowds, but people are ready to come back to the lockdown, too.

May 31, 2020

(Later: revised) After writing the May 26 entry, I had the notion to check the weather on the dates I had low blood pressure readings. Sure enough, I'd misremembered: though my hands did not feel cold, the weather was cold. So now I think the misreadings caused by vasoconstriction were more likely what was going on. Yes, I had extraordinary fatigue the week before, way beyond anything I'd ever had because of Parkinson's, but is that enough to indicate I had the virus? May 26 given the result of the first x-ray, which indicated a problem. ... So the evidence is contradictory and unclear. It does seem that I never use the heat in my car, unless the temperature is considerably below freezing. Note to self: whenever go to a medical or dental appointment where O2 reading is the faintest possibility, dress warmly, including gloves and hat, and sit on the heat in the car... The pulmonologist explained to me that his 40-year-old sensor was more accurate than the \$100 everyone uses these days, which give readings even when the data are uncertain. As he said, "Bad data is worse than no data". Yes, indeed.

[Isolated indigenous tribes risk extinction from coronavirus](#) comes out of the blue. Balsonaro is probably rubbing his hands in glee. [Here's a better link](#), from inside the preceding one. I noted this: "if this virus that seems to afflict the elderly in isolated groups, it could have a devastating and lasting impact on the world's cultural heritage, too ... A lot of communities will be simply obliterated ... They are our walking libraries, our encyclopedia, and if that's lost, we're losing part of our history." See March 24, above -- we should be worried about the same thing happening here.

June 1, 2020

These trendy bodyweight at-home exercises just don't cut it. My fitness is going down the tubes. My local Y's website says "[T]emporarily closed with plans to open as soon as Monday, June 1." Hello? Anybody home? My PC and my watch are down 6/1.

Some fella on Youtube that I stumbled across had a video in which he rejoiced that his local lockdown had come off could resume his 30-day body transformation. He looked okay, sort of like your average gym rat -- reasonable condition to boast about. He challenged a famous woman athlete, who has lots of followers, to a fitness challenge. I figured he'd lose: she had a six-pack, and he didn't. It's tougher for women to get one, so unless you have an eight-pack, guy better off not going into a contest you'll probably lose. Which he did, though he did much better than I expected. The thing I envy the young is their health and fitness. I'd agree to shorten my life by half, if I could be the animal I was in late 20s, at my peak.

June 2, 2020

When I was young, I never understood this poem:

No man is an island,
Entire of itself.
Each is a piece of the continent,
A part of the main.
If a clod be washed away by the sea,
Europe is the less.
As well as if a promontory were.
As well as if a manor of thine own
Or of thine friend's were.
Each man's death diminishes me,
For I am involved in mankind.
Therefore, send not to know
For whom the bell tolls,
It tolls for thee.

When I was about thirty, I had an experience in which I saw that we are all, every one of us, completely one, absolutely same, in much the way pointed out by the man who said that when he had his breakthrough, every man who came to him had his own face. This identity goes far beyond anything I can explain. The virus diminishes us all, in much the way the poem says.

The [LSA](#) sent an email saying, among other things: "the viability of endangered language and minority communities adversely affected -- disproportionately so -- by the virus". See May 31 and March 24, above. Also "the postponement and derailment of educational or career plans", which I've been worried about, for the grad students I know. This is disastrous for them; they've dedicated years of their lives to learning a subject, spent money they can ill afford, and it's colossally hard. Then this hits, and takes it away, or at minimum delays it and makes it more costly.

On the way to my appointment yesterday, police had the Plaza blocked off. Susan's nephew and niece mentioned this before. Here's what's been going on: [Kansas City police overreact](#) with pepper spray and a takedown. They look like they're trained to do this, the movements are so well coordinated.

June 3, 2020

The local online newspaper reports: "Johnson County has experienced an expected spike in COVID-19 cases following phased reopening plans". Exactly. Here we go -- wave 2 on the roller coaster.

My fourth quarantine: sister, brother, and sister-in-law came over the other day and we had a gabfest in the driveway. Almighty delightful, at least for me, and it seemed for everyone else as well. It's not the same as weekly family dinner; it's a jewel of its own.

From this morning's N. Y. Times, [19 scientists and their insights on the pandemic](#).

With all these cops running amuck, the word "police" is becoming a dirty word. In my late teens and early twenties, a lot of trouble with cops (long hair; that was the 60s for you), and I loathed them. Though their reasons are different, troubles being so much so systematic and institutionalized, I understand, a bit, why so many black people fear and distrust the police. Yes, there are plenty of good cops; yes, this is a complicated subject. But there is *absolutely no question* that the legacy of racism lives on today, in the interactions of police and black people.

Per the observations above, about the lower percentage of black people wearing masks than white people: could this be because they know that many of their actions are interpreted differently from those of whites, and they don't want the chance of being considered robbers? This sounds farfetched at first, but it need not be a conscious decision; it could be one of those things people do unthinkingly.

Zuckerberg continues his appalling lies and evasions. Here's an email I sent Facebook this morning:

Sir or Madam,

I'm not sure this is the right email address to contact FB, but it will have to do. All the others seem less appropriate.

In letting Trump get away with incitement to murder, Zuck has once again shown himself to be the same spineless, toady who pandered to the goons who run the Phillipines and Myanmar -- but now he's doing it at home. Let's talk a elephant in the room, shall we? The only reason he lets these parties get away with murder is that it's in his interest. Here at home, he's making the possibility of a totalitarian regime more likely by doing so.

This is what happens when one narrow-thinking, self-interested individual is allowed to dictate the actions of one of world's most powerful corporations.

As for the rest of the lackeys at FB, if you have any conscience at all, you'll resign your jobs. Grow a spine, please.

It's been said, by a Supreme Court justice, no less, that your right to wave your fist ends at my nose. Zuck's nose is not one being broken here; rather, it's the noses of the rest of us. But the man is so self-interested that he either refuses to recognize this, or doesn't care. This resembles his usual pattern of deny, delay, deflect.

I'd boycott Facebook, except that this sort of thing, among many other egregious behaviors, is why I refuse to be a d of your little (sorry, *huge*) walled garden. I will, however, encourage friends and family to boycott you.

-- [name]

P.S. Yes, I know you will save this and try to track me, but some behavior, such as this most recent refusal to speak in power, are too revolting to let pass without comment.

June 4, 2020

On re-reading yesterday's email to Facebook, it seems, shall we say, a bit intemperate. A flame, as they call such posts when online. I'd catch more flies with honey, but in this case I don't regret it, not a bit. If you need more persuasive than mine, read [Zucked](#), by an early investor in Facebook, and former Zuckerberg friend, who grew deeply disillusioned. The book, though tough on MZ, is still much too easy on him, and more than a little naive at times. I finished it thinking the author should have solicited help from a professional nonfiction writer. (Later (7/13): for more on McNamee, see [this article](#).)

In the grocery store yesterday, I passed a woman whose cart was loaded with healthy fruits and vegetables. Even the arrangement, and the colors, were gorgeous, and I commented in passing that it was the healthiest set of choices. She was for her "quarantine weight", and slapped her right saddlebag -- or, rather, where the saddlebag would be if she'd had one. She didn't look to me like she needed to lose any weight, and I'm betting that she's eaten a supremely healthy diet a long time. (I'm also betting that she's a [great cook](#).) Such people always make me feel my own inadequacy, but I've gotten used to the sensation that it no longer bothers me. Instead of feeling bad about myself, I rejoice for them.

I love the Dutch. In the novel I'm currently writing, the protagonist's girlfriend's parents are Dutch who've moved to Amsterdam and they're very sex-tolerant, and in other ways quite different from American parents. So I found [this article about workers in Amsterdam's red-light district](#) unintentionally amusing until I read it, and felt empathy for the workers at economic plight. I remember walking around the red-light district, curious, back in the day. The women were in rooms with large windows that gave on the street, and I remember one who looked so amazingly sexy that I got a massive, instant erection. You're probably curious about what I did. The answer is that I did not buy her services, the various risks of prostitution for sex not being worth the price. But I've never forgotten that woman. She was clearly a pro at her work.

I've always wanted to do [a long retreat](#), and have done quite a number of weekend and week-long ones, but even over a weekend, things can change. I remember a retreat when I was fifteen, and when we emerged from the weekend, we found out what had happened, and were told that Frank Sinatra's son had been kidnaped. That was impossible to accommodate - cognitive dissonance was too much. Imagine what it must be like now, when the weird factor has increased so dramatically and the pace of change is often unmanageable. This fellow was overwhelmed by the virus-related changes during his isolation, which lasted *75 days*. I found it extremely strange, though, that his cell phone was "locked in gray scale" during his retreat. Did he have the Goddamn thing *with* him? If he did, that negates the entire retreat, in my book. A retreat of *withdrawal* from the outside world. The article clearly implies that he knew nothing of what was going on with the world or anything else, though, so why did he set his phone to gray scale? If he wasn't looking at it, changing the setting should have been irrelevant.

June 5, 2020

Falling asleep last night, I had a brilliant idea for today's entry. I woke up and wondered WTF it was. Now it's almost and I have to admit to myself that it's probably gone for good. Getting hell is old. Er. You know what I mean -- I care of two things simultaneously any more, and even thinking of one is too much some of the time. Yes, the idea evaporated right in the middle of having it...

June 6, 2020

I've always thought of Sweden as a place where everyone's well educated, mostly tall and good-looking, they all own vacation homes, and they get six weeks of paid vacation a year. They've had generous family leave since the beginning time. They don't much care about money, because they don't need to -- as a character in a Swedish novel scoffed and when told he'd have no money, "This is Sweden. I could set a chair on the sidewalk and someone would come along and give me money." They're tolerant. And they have lots and lots of sex... That's mostly been my fantasy, anyway, along with the balancing idea that there's a lot of angst and depression. In recent years, I've been reading about their problems with homegrown neo-Nazis, and with racial intolerance. Now they admit they screwed up their response to the pandemic by trying to develop herd immunity instead of managing the disease. See [Sweden's Tegnell admits too many died](#), and other stories. It's enough to make a boy lose his faith.

June 7, 2020

I've been thinking, or what passes for thinking in my ever more feeble brain, about computer "virus"es, and the analogies to the ones that infect human beings, in particular the coronavirus. The analogy is quite apt. Both kinds are small, invisible things that sneak in and take over and create havoc, spreading from one target to the next. Protecting against them is expensive, difficult, and time-consuming, and the battle is often not over after the first victory, as they may continue to improve. Vigilance is necessary before, during, and after they are encountered. They cause businesses and people to change. They introduce what I call "friction", meaning that they require effort, time, and resources that would be better spent on the normal course of operations, or of living. It's a strange world we inhabit, and this sort of contention seems to be built into it. We have to learn to understand and manage these foes as best we can, and we will never be free of them.

I end up at a lot of academic web sites. [This one from Oxford University Press](#), about their coronavirus support, is interesting.

Speaking of OUP, why is their [handbook of endangered languages](#) so expensive (\$175) and [the Cambridge handbook of endangered languages](#) ditto (\$204)? Academic book prices are way too often outrageous. [Ethnologue](#) is a bargain, comparatively, though I haven't found the most recent edition (23rd) and expect that it's probably a bit over \$100, what the edition I bought a few years ago cost.

The new edition of *The American Scholar* arrived a few days ago. I'm always excited to get it, and I generally read it on the recumbent bike at the gym, but of course that's not possible at the moment. The title on the front cover was "Pandemic from a Distance", but the lead article, a pastiche of Thoreau and observations about the pandemic, disappointed me. Unlike the usual well-crafted essays in the magazine, this had a slapped-together quality, and felt like it was rushed to print. Maybe the editors thought they needed something on the virus, and asked the author to revise the piece. I've never cared for Thoreau anyway. His writing feels preachy and self-absorbed to me. Here are some little-known facts about him I've run across over the years:

- * He didn't actually live in the cabin all the time. He walked into Concord almost every day.
- * He once (carelessly, I think) started a forest fire that consumed most of the woods of Concord. The novel *Walden* is about this event.
- * Thoreau perfected the pencil, as we still use it today.
- * He did not invent the idea of civil disobedience. He got it from the Quakers, who had already been practicing it for a long time.

In the corner of my gym there was a circle of half a dozen chairs where a group of old guys would sit and yak every morning, some subset of the ten or fifteen regulars. This little conclave, which would last for a couple of hours, seemed to be the center of their social lives. They even brought each other donuts and pastries. I can't help but wonder what, if anything, they've been doing the last couple of months, to replace this daily get-together.

June 8, 2020

The N.Y. Times reports: "Online sales of sex toys have surged during virus-related lockdowns." Seems obvious, once pointed out.

June 9, 2020

For those of us who need substantial personal space, social distancing is a blessing. But I've noticed that some people handle it -- I stop them at six feet, and we talk, and after a while they take a couple of steps toward me. I step back. . . later, our little dance is repeated. This bugs me. They're adults, and they should be able to manage the distance.

June 10, 2020

On a map of coronavirus outbreaks, I noticed that there was a bright red spot in Oregon, right where a friend of ours I emailed and asked whether she and her husband were okay. The answer was reassuring, about them, but it confirmed lack of precautions for other people create a hazard. Here's a bit of her email:

"It's a rather alarming outbreak at Pacific Seafoods, a fish processing, packing, and distribution warehouse on the bay here. Apparently, the company brought in more than 100 'migrant' workers to work in the facilities at the beginning of the year. I have a friend who used to work at the EPA. One of her former co-workers walks along the bayfront every morning near Pacific Seafoods, where you can see through windows into the plant. He observed workers wearing masks, but not covering their noses. He observed this daily over two weeks until the plant was closed down on May 17th. His thought was 'I'll be surprised in two weeks!' Sure enough - this past weekend, 124 workers were reported as testing positive, 95% of them asymptomatic until about 2 weeks ago, when the county entered Phase I of reopening, Lincoln County had only 5 confirmed positive cases and no deaths. Now we know for sure that there are cases here in Newport.

"On Memorial Day weekend, we had an influx of tourists, despite the beaches and parks still being closed. The Yaquina Head Lighthouse park, down the road from us, has been closed even to people walking in, since March. But tourists came anyway, very few wearing masks or keeping safe distance. Our cases started to climb from 5 a couple of weeks later before the Pacific Seafoods outbreak became public."

June 11, 2020

Weekly meeting with my P.D. guys, but this time, a first, in my driveway instead of online. We enjoyed it so much that we talked for two hours instead of one.

June 12, 2020

Our Little Free Library went up this morning. My wife and sister-in-law did the painting, and my brother did the construction work (putting the anchor in the ground, etc.). I leaned on the shovel, since I'm no good at any of that stuff. The LFL looks great, and has books waiting for a new home. Some are: No Surrender; The Razor's Edge; The Making of a Surgeon; The Shape of Content; Paris Was Yesterday; The Double Helix; Pocket World Atlas; African Short Stories; Historical Atlas of the World; Mr. Darcy, Vampire; Blood Oath; Blue Shoes and Happiness; Timeline; Performance Climbing; Njal's Saga; In Southern Light; Ultramarine; No Picnic on Mount Kenya; The Best Science and Nature Writing 2000.

Later: I'm betting that the fiction moves a lot faster than the nonfiction, and the vast majority of my books are nonfiction. I'm going to need to publicize the books, to get them gone.

June 13, 2020

Filled out my application to vote by mail in the primary election. Though I rather enjoy going to the polls and seeing fellow citizens, and feeling that I'm fulfilling my civic duty, this year I'm not inclined to spend any more time in crowds than necessary (and "necessary" = zero). This is especially true because so many people around here don't wear masks. So only the second time in my life, I'll vote by mail. (The first time was 1972, when I was in Rome and got an absentee ballot from the consulate and mailed it back to the U.S., to vote against Nixon because of Watergate.)

Went online to look at classes I can take this fall at K.U., and was startled to see that they're listed as always: classic lectures, discussion sections, and very few online classes. Apparently the administration thinks the virus problem will be over by then. It won't.

June 14, 2020

Watching a backpacking video today, I longed to get back on the Colorado Trail again, like last summer, but there's the virus to contend with, and my hip still acts weird. Maybe next year. But God that trail in the video was beautiful. Not as beautiful as the CT, which was truly lovely... Now if I could just backpack another section, then do a few days of climbing, my life would be perfect.

June 15, 2020

I gave away *A Distant Mirror* yesterday, Barbara Tuchman's book about the fourteenth century, which was the time Plague. One of the great books about pandemics, along with *The Speckled Monster* and *Spillover*. What we're going now is less, and will remain less, than the bubonic plague, but it seems very likely to me that it will change not only economy, but how we see the world, and organize our societies. The changes will likely be tectonic.

June 16, 2020

The little free library is gaining books instead of losing them, like a dieter who just keeps getting bigger, because my siblings are contributing books, damn them. I'm trying to *shed* books, not *gain* them. The thing is stuffed to the gills

Half a dozen relatives (my wife's) all weekend in the house, which made me (and still makes me) paranoid. Too many people, too close. Did what I could to avoid them, but you just never know.

June 17, 2020

The Y called a couple of days ago, to get me to come in. They aren't requiring appointments, but they do limit the number of people, and are never hitting the limit. But when I asked whether they required masks in the weight room, the answer was no. I said I'd have to pass. Desperate though I am to get back to weights, explosive breathing and people passing close to each other is nothing I'm willing to risk, in the middle of a pandemic that's mainly spread through exhaled droplets in

When a vaccine, or vaccines, are available, there will be a hell of a battle to get immediate access. It will have to be health care workers first, of course, and then (if safe and effective for them) the immune compromised, and so on, by need and vulnerability. But as for the rest of us, by which I mean the general population with no special claim on the treatment, I'm guessing there will be a lottery. That would be "fair", or the best imitation of fair that we have, since it removes human judgment from the decision. Later: I hope that political decisions don't affect order of treatment. I was a bit surprised if politicians get early access.

June 18, 2020

The N.Y. Times reports that the big spending drop among the rich has disproportionately affected low-income service workers. I may not be rich, but I understand this, because for some time I've been feeling the need for a massage -- my body rigidity is one of the four cardinal diagnostic signs of Parkinson's, and I have it, and feel it. But I don't dare spend 60 minutes in a small room with someone just now. There's way too much risk, even if we're both wearing masks. My wife obviously doesn't make a good living off her business. Note to self: pay for a massage that I can redeem later...

If anyone had told me the day would come when I'd be rooting for John Bolton, I'd have laughed in their face, but he's publishing his memoir of working for Trump, and Trump is suing to prevent its publication. You go, John. Maybe you will make up for some of the fuckedupness you've been responsible for.

I've played, or pretended barely well enough to fool the uninitiated, several musical instruments. Saw a reference to "breathing flutists", which is accurate, based on not only my own experience, but also the common knowledge that the flute is a wind instrument that requires the most wind from the player (there's no need to help you, and you're blowing *across* the keys which has got to be inefficient). So I wonder whether this has affected the income of my former flute teacher.

Went for a walk this morning at 5, a beautiful and quiet time of night, the silver curve of moon yielding to the silhouettes of the frogs and birds expressing themselves. Few vehicles, and didn't see a human being for the first 40 minutes. After that, the number of walkers, runners, and bikers picked up. A woman's dog sat down and watched me pass, and we agreed to act as if he'd never seen a human before. Curiously, this morning the women were the solo runners, and the men were in pairs; this is rare. As always, I hoped to see a fox, but of course the best time for that was already a couple of hours ago. I did not. They are among my favorite species, the others being otters and peregrine falcons.

June 19, 2020

The debate about when and how much to lock down and open up has been carried on by sides with different values and interests past each other. (As is increasingly the case in recent decades, it looks to me like "Let's choose sides and ignore each other.") One side is focused on health, the other on economics. These values (criteria? domains? whatever) are so different from each other that there is no common ground on which to debate. Even for those of us concerned about both, as I am, reconciling the two is difficult enough that we can't give both the weight they deserve: in order to make a decision, we have to value one side more heavily than the other. The two pieces of the jigsaw puzzle don't fit together. I don't have a solution for the problem, only the observation that we need to think about this without preconceptions. Instead of debating, we should *wrestle* the problem. We should, maybe, explore. Chew the fat with each other for a while, without trying to make the other guy give up with us. Listen, question, propose, repeat...

Having said the above, let me further note that the discussion also implies taking positions on another criterion: social responsibility versus personal freedom. This, at least, and despite the overheated feelings of some of the debaters (such as those who show up with automatic weapons outside a state legislature), is generally more accommodating to discussing the medical / economic debate, which has become a debate on illness, death, and swamping the medical system versus impoverishment and bankruptcy.

I find myself wondering what other fault lines are implicit in the discussion. Settling on a plan is difficult enough without trying to reconcile both medical / economic and responsibility / freedom questions. But what else do we need to consider and how might it further complicate the deliberations?

Lastly (meaning that I hope I'm almost at a point of freeing myself from this tar baby for a little while) it's important that we all agree on what's actually happening, and what has actually happened, on the ground. Some of the news makers and me, and particularly the mythmakers like Trump and Fox News, are making this impossible by spreading lies and obfuscating the unlikely chance that one of their true believers ever reads this entry, I encourage him to read paragraph 5 of the 1st entry above.

June 20, 2020

Here's an interesting article [on vaccine development](#) for the virus.

Un-freakin'-believable. The postman was just here, and I saw a package sitting outside the door. It was addressed to me, but I couldn't remember ordering anything, and assumed that I'd simply forgotten about something I'd ordered online. Opened it up ("unboxed" it, to use the trendy term), and it was the prodigal webcam. The labels on the package are like some sort of palimpsest: the original label is faintly and partly visible under a second label, which in turn has a third label pasted over it. See the entries above for the saga: I ordered the thing in March, and Amazon cancelled the order more than a month later, lost, and refunded my money. In the meantime, of course, I've ordered and installed a new monitor with integrated webcam, and love the size and clarity of the monitor, and its webcam works just fine. Plug and play, as they say... I'll probably give the old webcam to someone who needs one, unless there's a use for two webcams. Maybe I can point them at each other to keep them from getting lonely. Do webcams dream of electr(on)ic lovers? (Pardon the sampling, Philip Kindred Dick, but the time for this webcam is clearly out of joint.)

Watching Trump recently, I note facial changes, stoop, a curling hand, and downward gaze, all of which are symptoms of Parkinson's. I'm not saying the guy has PD, because I think it's too soon to say, but he probably has *some* sort of motor problem, and it looks neurological. This is especially likely when you consider his trouble raising a glass of water to his lips (needed both hands), and his hesitations on the ramp at West Point. None of this is reliably diagnostic yet -- not a red flag, though maybe a yellow.

June 21, 2020

Yesterday was the longest day of the year, so we're now officially starting our yearly descent into the summer inferno, which is supposed to be bad this year, so will people stay inside more than usual, and the plague propagate?

June 22, 2020

Siblings over for our driveway meet-and-talk, since we've cancelled the weekly family dinner. Yakked for two hours.

Colin called yesterday, to wish me happy father's day, as is his custom. I appreciate it; always nice to hear from my son. At the end, again, he said "Thanks for having sex with mom," and I replied, "My pleasure".

June 23, 2020

One thing that sums up the change in my life, besides the lack of gym time, is the lack of library time. I used to be in the local library branch three or four times a week, but I haven't been there in months.

My sister observed yesterday that prices of RVs are rising because people want them (in order to avoid travelling in spaces like aircraft, exposing themselves to the virus). I responded that this is an act of ecological vandalism, considering the staggering amount of energy and the number of resources used to manufacture them -- and of course the appallingly high miles per gallon they get. More CO2? No problem! Climate change, here we come.

June 24, 2020

Ran a lot of errands yesterday afternoon -- two hardware stores, library, post office, pharmacy, liquor store. I keep a hand sanitizer in the car, for each time I return to the car. And I always wash my hands on returning home.

Sewer backup this morning, so there will be another workman in the house. That's where a bigger risk lies -- it's to show them things from six feet away when you're in a narrow space in the basement. LATER: Turned out not to be just food. There's a sort of kink in the pipe, and over the years it narrows.

June 25, 2020

N.Y. Times yesterday: "Travelers from the U.S. may be barred from entering the European Union when the bloc reopens July 1 -- a consequence of the country's failure to control the virus... Their main epidemiological criterion is each nation's average rate of new infections over the past 14 days per 100,000 people (that number is currently 16 for the E.U. and the U.S.)." We're the failures, along with the Russians and Brazilians.

Drove by the Y recently, at a time of day when there would usually be a lot of cars in the lot, and there were only 7. I thought it might actually be reasonable to go. Checked again this morning, on my walk, and this time there were seven dozen cars, but they might have been people taking classes. May just have to go in and see for myself. 8:30 - 10:30 time they're open for geezers.

June 26, 2020

My friend John hasn't been out in his yard for weeks now, and the lights in his house are always off. I worry that he and his wife have Covid-19. If this goes on much longer, I'll walk around the long way, to the front of the house, and check how many cars there are, and maybe leave a note.

June 27, 2020

Woke in the middle of the night from the middle of a dream about a poet, one who can bleed on the page like Carolyn Forché, writing to her God about the agony of something she'd done:

I don't know whose kiss was sweeter,
Yours, or Satan's

June 28, 2020

It's baffling, utterly, that people think we're over the first wave of this virus. Not a damn thing has changed. Infections continue, and are accelerating in the south and west of this country. We're too damn self-indulgent here -- we live in a fantasy world where everything is going to turn out fine and we don't have to discipline ourselves and make sacrifices to mention that we're disorganized -- for starters, the show is being run by fifty different states. How the fuck is that supposed to work? All you need is a few idiot governors who deny the reality, and we have incubator states scattered around, to infect their neighboring states. There's more, but I don't have the heart, or the time right now, to continue up and there isn't a Goddamn thing I can do to wake up the fantasists. This is a cataclysm, and it was largely avoidable if our medical system is at risk (97% occupancy in ICUs in Houston, was it?). What happens when the nurses and doctors are collapsing from exhaustion? Again, I could go on, but why? There's not a Goddamn thing I can do.

June 29, 2020

I see from my change log at the bottom of this page that this is the 100th entry, though knowing myself I might be off by one or two. 100 entries. Some days it's hard to come up with one. We'll see how long this goes. I'll give good odds that it will be a serious problem for more than a year.

I've flown hundreds of times, but always hated it. The noise, the vibration, the temperature changes, and above all the *crowding*. I loathe being crowded; in fact, I'm a bit phobic about crowds. The sole panic attack of my life occurred in a crowd. Now I have another reason -- the virus -- not to fly. One of my friends probably got his case of Covid-19 because he was flying a lot.

Heard Hendrix on the radio, doing his version of *All Along the Watchtower*. The line "There are many here among us who feel that life is but a joke" always stands out to me. I feel a bit that way sometimes, except that a joke implies a joke and I wonder whether life is not, rather, an accident. But who knows? I don't. Christians think they know. Atheists think they have to throw up my hands in resignation, because it's clear to me that none of us know anything at all. We think our work is better than they actually do, and we constantly deceive ourselves into thinking we understand more than we do. We don't know shit. In fact, that's an overstatement, but I don't know how to properly phrase the idea that we know less than nothing.

Talking to my doctor and his nurse, we all agreed that this would be a good time to be on the space station -- and sta

With women wearing masks, it's getting difficult sometimes to assess their hotness. (If you find this sexist and offer be it. Don't try to tell me this doesn't work in the other direction, though I admit probably not as much. I don't care a Looking at beautiful women is one of the few pleasures left to old men like me. Their beauty should be appreciated, with music and art. I'm not going to be obvious, I'm not going to bug them. So keep your judgments to yourself. As Kooser or Harrison said, approximately, in *Braided Creek*, so what if women don't appreciate me any more; I appreciate them.)

Listening to boogie woogie piano again. We need more of that these days: music that's cheerful, lively, intricate. An ragtime, too. And blues harmonica. Miraculous stuff to be grateful for. [Try this.](#)

June 30, 2020

Headline: "Trump was briefed on the Russian bounty program months ago." (The information was in his daily brief Quelle surprise: he lied. He lies automatically, even when he should know he'll be caught out. He even lies sometimes the truth would be more to his advantage. This is the so-called president who continues to claim the virus will die and get better, despite all evidence to the contrary... As one who realized in the early days of his campaign that he's a sto can't understand how anyone trusts him. The man has betrayed our (his) armed forces to suck up to Putin by trying to Russia back into the G7/8 -- Putin, of all people, a dictator who wants to destroy us, and who thinks the fall of the S Union was the greatest tragedy of the 20th century. As the joke goes, Putin has made Trump his Russian bride. In a world, Trump would be in prison for treason.

July 1, 2020

48,000 new infections yesterday. Arizona is in "crisis" care, meaning they lack the resources to treat all the infected Presumably they're doing triage. And I see pictures of people in public places close together and not wearing masks here, not all those I see working in stores wear masks. Young people above all walk around in small groups, close together and maskless. I saw a coach the other day, at the high school track, talking to his athletes. They were maskless and together.

July 2, 2020

[New H1N1 swine flu threatens another pandemic.](#) All this shit seems to start in China (SARS, Coronavirus, H7N9, H1N1, etc.). I knew that Xi Jinping seeks world domination (a billion and a half people ain't enough for him), but if keep infecting us at this rate, there won't be anyone left to dominate. (The politically correct can stop reading this because you will continue to find your sensibilities rubbed the wrong way. If you can't see the tongue in the cheek, stop looking.)

[Lieutenant Governor Dan Patrick of Texas says that Fauci "doesn't know what he's talking about"](#). He also claims that "has been wrong every time on every issue". Leaving aside the sweeping nature of that second statement (how is it possible to *always* be wrong?), I find it curious that Patrick, a former talk radio host, bar owner, bankrupt businessman (remind you of anyone?), and an English major, should claim that he knows more than a man who's devoted his entire the study of infectious diseases, and who has advised every president from Reagan on down. Fauci's experience goes childhood, when he worked for his father's pharmacy. His entire professional life has been dedicated to medicine. A "dedicated" is the word to describe him. He's received thirty -- *thirty* -- honorary doctorates for his work. (Later: Patrick said "There are more important things than living". Include me out.) (Later still: he said that " 'lots of grandparents' willing to sacrifice themselves to facilitate the opening of the economy". Name three, sir.) On the other side we have Patrick, the guy who said "[In my view, the only way Trump loses in November, is if you have a proliferation of voter mail-in state after state, particularly the swing states](#)". This guy is farther out in space than the acidheads of the 1960s sure can't read (the polls, that is). He also reminds me of the Brown Shirts, when he says "If they're willing to burn the country, tear statues down, why not steal some ballots out of a mailbox?" He sure ain't espousing American values that Reality doesn't listen to demagogues: the dogs bark and the caravan passes. After this particular dog is out of office the image that comes to mind is of him in a straitjacket, ranting, and the attendants ignoring him: "He's always like that learn to tune him out."

July 3, 2020

Here's an interesting, inexpensive idea that might help control the virus: [paper strip testing](#).

July 4, 2020

Not much in the way of fireworks this year. There were a few last night, enough to terrify Pogo and Sophie, but not many as usual. Now it's one in the afternoon and I've only once, and briefly, heard any firecrackers today. And of course the big fireworks displays are cancelled, to prevent crowds and the spread of the disease. Doesn't seem like much of

Fourth. This is also the most dangerous day of the year to drive, because there are so many drunks on the road. Prob this year.

July 5, 2020

I've started running in the morning, though not all mornings, as the legs won't tolerate that much consistency yet -- either day, or two out of three, depending. Walk on concrete, run on asphalt up to the track at the high school, a bit or half a mile away by the circuitous route I take. Then run laps. Total, probably something above a mile. It's helped my damaged posture noticeably. And gives a general tuneup of energy and alertness. It's always been a particularly difficult form of exercise for me, but it's turning out to be worth the suffering. The only problem is having to avoid those exercise freaks on the track, who sometimes use my lane or zoom past me, or whatever -- heavy breathing and risk of virus particles in the air. So far, so good. The solution is to get up at the crack of dawn; will start cranking my sleep schedule back to get up earlier and have the place to myself, or enough so, so I don't have to zig and zag as much, to avoid the other

July 6, 2020

The KUMC yearly symposium on PD, always held in August, [has been cancelled](#): "For the safety of all attendees, the symposium has been cancelled due to the COVID-19 pandemic." Why they didn't put it on as a webinar is baffling. Webinars have been simple to implement. A webinar would certainly have been easier for all the attendees in stages 3 and 4. There were probably well over a thousand attendees every year, many of them in those stages, and some in stage 5. I always learn something from the talks, as well as refreshing stuff I've forgotten. They could even have included all the vendors and classes and other exhibitors as a sidebar of some sort.

The ideal scenario is that Trump gets the virus immediately after the nominating convention, is hospitalized in an ICU for several weeks, and when he emerges has barely enough energy to occupy the Oval Office again. But even to those who voted for him in 2016, he's clearly incapable of handling the presidency, and he loses in a tsunami.

Hung out with my friend John (see June 26 entry) yesterday, and our friend Dennis, on John's deck, for more than an hour and the time was a great pleasure. To shoot the breeze with someone other than my family or my PD guys was, well, more than pleasure. The time, inconsequential as it was, went a long way to filling a hole I didn't even know was in me.

Dennis told me that some of his family traveled through Springfield and stopped at a restaurant or a store. They were the only ones wearing masks, and all the other patrons were giving them dirty looks. Since the virus doesn't spread ever so easily, assume that Springfield has not been hit hard yet. When it is, the doctors and nurses will tell their families and friends that the situation is in the hospitals, and the news will spread outward in ripples. Then the attitudes of the deniers will change. The problem is this: during the time the news spreads, the virus spreads, too, and we get further behind the ball.

July 7, 2020

Well [that's just great](#): more chance of getting the virus because it hangs around in the air.

Jair Bolsonaro has developed symptoms of Covid-19. Quelle surprise -- he denies the damn thing exists, walks around without a mask meeting people, acts as if all is normal. Of course he caught the damn thing.

July 8, 2020

Banditry -- is it easier, or at least more tempting, for criminals to rob businesses, since wearing a mask has become common?

See July 1, above, the last few sentences. The county newspaper had a story yesterday that that high school has nearly all athletes who've tested positive, kids who've been meeting with their coaches to continue their training over the summer. Since reporting is voluntary and testing isn't mandatory and there are probably some kids in the early stages without symptoms, we can assume an undercount. The punchline here is that the coaches are going to continue meeting with far-thought-to-be uninfected athletes, to continue their training. Since a few of the teens I see running on the track are athletes (i.e., very fast and lean), I'm reluctant to share the track with them. Days I can't get to the track early in the morning (at 4 a.m.), I'll run on back streets. Harder on the legs, but less likely to get the disease. Shin splints are a minor problem, and you can fully recover; Covid-19 is the opposite of all that. Yeah, the track is outdoors, but I don't hear people approaching from behind, and once or twice they've run by too close to me -- and it's always the young runners. The older ones are more careful. Yeah, I veer away, but so? I ain't assumin' nothin'.

Here I sit, in my house in my lily-white suburb, no worries about losing that house, or losing a job, or being forced into a situation that puts my health at risk. All around, people are being evicted from their housing, losing their jobs, or ge

virus. How fortunate I am. How concerned I feel for those others. But besides charitable contributions, there isn't much I can do. So much of it seems to begin and end with money, and the inequity of its distribution, and it simply means digging into my pocket and giving to [Harvesters](#) and other charities. I haven't given enough.

July 9, 2020

As if the current plague is not enough, a herdsman in China has been diagnosed with bubonic plague. Late last year, others had pneumonic plague, which is caused by the same microbe. Next door, Mongolia has reported several cases of bubonic plague, too. I was not aware that the U.S. has a handful of cases every year; I thought it was rarer here. This plague Daniel Defoe wrote about in *A Journal of the Plague Year*, the last great outbreak (1665-6), of which we've been largely free since then. Turns out that this plague originated in China, too.

With people losing their places to live, we'll certainly see more homelessness. But will some move in with family, leaving a greater number of extended families? And more crowding (and thus more likelihood of getting the virus)?

The N.Y. Times, where I get a lot of my data, reports that when treating U.S. states individually (i.e., comparing the rate of infection to nations, measured by new cases per million residents), the rankings for worst outbreaks, in order, are Arizona, Florida, South Carolina, Bahrain, Louisiana, Qatar, Oman, Alabama, Nevada, Mississippi, Texas, Georgia, Panama, Tennessee, Kazakhstan, California, Arkansas, Armenia ... Seems that I live in a third-world country... [You can see the data here](#). Click on the chart to enlarge it. Today we've passed three million cases of the virus. That's about 1% of the population.

Per my June 3 entry above, I see that I'm not the only one [upset with Facebook](#). That's quite a list of organizations that have pulled their advertising from the company. Yesterday the number was 900-some. Today it's over a thousand.

If you're lonely because you're quarantined, get a dog. Of course, after you finally get out of your cage, you'll still have a dog, but by then it will be your best friend.

Yesterday I was sitting on a bench outside the vet's office, waiting for them to finish vaccinating one of my dogs, while a group of teen girls, maskless, walked past. They were talking about meeting some friends, and the shortest one, looking at her phone, said they'd gone to the skate park. Immediately, the tallest one -- within touching distance of me! -- yelled "Fuck!" at a volume of a hundred decibels. Spray it, you rancid nitwit, doing your best to propagate the virus in the most odious possible fashion. Good thing *I* was wearing a mask.

What happened to the advice to "shelter in place"? I haven't heard that in a couple of months. It's still the right thing to do.

July 10, 2020

If one of the worst places for virus outbreaks is meatpacking plants, maybe we should cut way back on our meat consumption. Those people would lose their jobs, but at least they'd be alive. Ditto the prisons: maybe it's time for clemency for all those guys who are serving sentences for minor offenses like marijuana possession. They were supposed to have a finite time in the slammer, not a death sentence.

Vehicle attacks against demonstrators -- i.e., running them down with your car -- are on the rise: at least 66 since 1990. Drivers, has it occurred to you that the people you most resemble are the boyos who turned aircraft into weapons on 9/11? Look at yourselves. You're the same as the people you hate: the Islamists.

Advice from the N.Y. Times: The four factors that play a role in how likely you are to get the disease:

- "[H]ow close you get to an infected person;
- how long you are near that person;
- whether that person expels viral droplets on or near you;
- and how much you touch your face afterwards".

How to reduce your risk:

- "Keep your distance...
- Wash your hands often...
- Avoid touching your face...
- Wear a mask outside your home..."

8 simple things to remember. You could even write them on the back of a business card, using a fine-point pen, and carry it in your wallet. Every time you pull out a credit card, you'd see the business card and if you'd forgotten anything, you could refresh your memory right then.

More evidence of virus-related change (as if any were needed): when I happened to drive past the county office in Napa, there was one car in the lot. Usually there are dozens.

And here's another: yesterday the guy who came to work on an electrical problem wore a mask. Recently, during the rewiring of the house, other guys from the same company did not.

I always hate it that when a microwave or other product fails after years of use that it's necessary simply to throw it because it's obsolete. This is wasteful in many ways. [Here's a guide](#) to minimizing the problem.

There have been few funny virus-related news items, but here's one: "Theme parks in Japan have banned screaming coasters, because it spreads coronavirus". Maybe it's only me, but I think that's a scream.

I remain convinced that our species is almost certainly doomed (see April 22, above), and I'm even starting to think collectively deserve it. I tried to read parts of the transcript of George Floyd's death, but I couldn't bear it. Yes, that's one incident, but there are uncountably many of them, up to and including the hundreds of millions of deaths that result from the actions of Hitler, Stalin, Pol Pot, Mao Zedong, King Leopold, the North Korean dictators, Enver Pasha, Tito and lesser criminals like Saddam Hussein and George W. Bush. If that last one offends you, recall what George Bernard Shaw said: "Patriotism: your conviction that this country is superior to all other countries because you were born in it. Try to grow up and get over yourself. Until we do, and start thinking with wider scope and empathy, we don't have a chance."

It occurs to me that I might get an audience that's in more than the single digits for these bloviations if I moved to Twitter or some other social media platform -- but never mind that. Social media turns me off, and I'd probably get a lot of hate, stalking, death threats: who knows?). I'll go on shouting into the void instead. I have no illusions that I can make a difference. The end of my time on this planet is no longer on the distant horizon, but accelerating into view, and I'm preparing to make my exit. In the meantime, this obscure little corner of the Internet serves as a way to unburden myself; one need pay any attention to these rantings. Sure, I wish millions of people would listen and be influenced. And I'd like to live in a wonderland where we all have whatever we want, from chocolate bunnies and wax lips through being the kid in high school and on up to daily sex, plenty of money, and perfect health. Whatever. It ain't gonna happen, so I'm gonna waste my time trying to make it happen. Have a nice day.

July 11, 2020

Increasingly, the talk is that the nature of much work will change and people will remote in, rather than travelling to office. If so, how much will this reduce climate change (particularly warming) because of reduced CO2 emissions? It will help as much as one would reflexively expect, because carbon dioxide is less of the problem (55%) than most people realize: [see Figure 7 on page xx](#); though the data are for 1980-1990, they give a good general idea. Furthermore, transportation contributes only 14% of the CO2: [see the second pie chart](#). So the reduction in warming would be about 0.14. That's a little less than 8%, *at best*, meaning if people stopped using carbon-emitting transportation altogether. Commuting sure ain't 100% of it -- there are all those trips to deliver Amazon packages, drop off the kids at soccer practice, buy groceries, drive to the mountains or beach for pleasure, fly to Europe (oops, not right now!)... Of course, buildings contribute, and many office buildings might be shuttered. But that would be a small proportion of buildings' contribution. There are industrial, agricultural, and residential buildings, which would presumably continue much as they are. The change in contribution by electricity generation looks difficult to assess, I think, because people would be at home with the lights and the PC on, while the electric usage of their office building would probably decline. But by how much? I don't know, and I'm betting that nobody else does, either. ("Prediction is very difficult, especially if it's about the future." -- Niels Bohr) But I think that rough estimates from the percentages imply that we're not going to get as much improvement in warming as we'd like when more of us start to telecommute. My guess is that the improvement as a percentage would be in the low single digits. And the above figures probably only work for the economically advanced countries, so the result would be even lower.

All the Covid beds in Susan's hospital are full. 100%. And we're not even in a hot spot. And that's a hospital that's typically had a comparatively low number of cases.

July 12, 2020

Per my rants and flames above, here's more on (moron?) Zuck and Facebook here: ["Zuckerberg never fails to disappear"](#). We can only hope that Facebook goes down in flames and takes him with it. Not that the users will revolt. There are many who are addicted to his crack. Any change will have to come from the advertiser boycott and the employee revolt.

Went for a walk this morning, from about 6:40 to 8:10. Beautiful weather, but almost no one out and about until the last few minutes.

I see that Trump finally wore a mask yesterday. Slow learner. And he told reporters: "I've never been against masks' use. He's stretched the truth so many times he should look like a bodybuilder now, not a gordo... He's quoted as remarking at an earlier time he wore a mask (!) that "I looked like the Lone Ranger", which is odd, since Kemo Sabe's mask covers his eyes."

eyes, not his nostrils and mouth -- the exact opposite of the ones we wear now. But, hey, maybe Trump really did wear a Lone Ranger style mask. Given his epidemic life-ineptness, it's possible.

July 13, 2020

The flood of [Facebook horror stories](#) is endless.

July 14, 2020

Sent my friend who lives on the Oregon coast an article about the virus surge in her state. She wrote back this, among other things: "I see the influx of tourists here -- almost as bad as a normal summer, when throngs of people come to the coast and tie up traffic, flock to grocery and drug stores, and swarm into the local parks. Most people I see are not wearing masks or keeping distance." I don't get this. Even if you're one of the fools who doesn't believe that medical experts have more expertise than the rest of us, the reasoning is intuitively obvious: distance and a barrier should help. What's wrong with these people?

July 15, 2020

The news worsens: a flood of small-business closures, banks reserving billions in the expectation of bad debt, 5 million American workers have lost health insurance, the Trump administration cutting the CDC out of the statistics for the (probably in order to choke off the bad news), the U.S. is the only advanced nation in which infections are increasing (skyrocketing!) -- the rest have fallen dramatically. All that is only a small sampling.

July 16, 2020

More evidence that politicization is completely out of hand: [man shows gun when told to mask up](#).

Stopped at the ATM yesterday, and saw several people lined up, with plenty of spacing, but when I got to the device I realized that they'd had their tainted fingers all over the buttons and panel. Then, after getting my money, I forgot to pick up the bottle of hand sanitizer I keep in the car.

Next I stopped at the cobbler, to get a shoe repaired. When I arrived, he and a customer were talking, separated by a few more inches than the width of the counter, which wasn't much, maybe two feet. Their masks were down, and they saw me and pulled theirs up, embarrassed like kids caught with their hands in the cookie jar.

One of my pet peeves: lack of control over my personal data. See [this article and its links](#). I'm surrounded by people who just don't get the dangers of all this, but I've noticed that every book I've read on the subject, the writer of that book becomes totally paranoid by the time s/he finishes the research, and starts doing things like carrying their cell phone in a Faraday bag. And that's the least of their precautions. Don't believe me? See [The Privacy Project](#). Some of my own experiences have been disturbing: looking myself up on data brokers, to find that they know *way* too much about me, and some of it is wrong (e.g., my salary; and I don't have any advanced degrees). Once I bought something at Eddie Bauer, the guy behind the counter asked whether I wanted to be added to their customer database, to get discounts and that kind of thing. I said no. He ignored me ("Yes, you do"), and added me in anyway. Two months later, their database got hacked, and I got an email that they were buying me a monitoring service, to make sure my data didn't get abused. I never bought anything from them again. The next thing that happened, my data got stolen in the Equifax hack; I was one of the *147 million* Americans who got hosed by their shitty security (and it was shitty). And by the way, I looked at the numbers, and the punishment, though it looked substantial, was less than a slap on the wrist -- they didn't have to pony up much. I never saw a fucking dime. My take on all these disasters is that when personal data of a certain sensitivity for more than a certain number of customers is hacked, or when Facebook gives data to Cambridge Analytica, or whatever, the CEO should go to prison for a minimum six months, without any discretion by the judge. (Yes, they'd end up in those white-collar joint "country club" prisons, but that's still better than nothing.) That would end this nonsense real quick. As for blaming it at the top -- yeah, that's totally reasonable. That's where the buck stops. If they're going to make a living plundering people, they have to pay the price when their scam goes wrong. The Europeans, who've had personal experience with the prying (the Nazis, the Stasi, the KGB, etc.) are a lot more strict than we are, because they know the dangers first-hand and should take a leaf from the book of the people who understand the importance of the problem.

Total U.S. Covid cases have reached 3.5 million. That's more than 1% of our population. The Republican governor of North Carolina put it best: "My friends, this is not a drill. It certainly is not any hoax. This is not a dress rehearsal. It's the real thing. The enemy is here."

Turns out that [masks really work](#): at a Springfield, MO Great Clips, two hair stylists had the virus, but used their masks, and of the more than 139 customers they came in contact with, none got infected.

July 17, 2020

What's with this trend to black masks? The look is counter to the medical color white (lab coats, traditional nurse uniforms and so on). Mostly, though, black masks are offputting, like the kind a criminal would wear in a comic book. I don't understand.

And speaking of masks, I watched a piece on television about the pandemic in Italy. They all wear masks, but almost without exception they don't wear them over their nostrils. The masks only cover the mouth, which reduces their effectiveness.

I'm washing my hands a lot more, since one of the dogs got worms. Picking up the back yard at least once a day now. It's amazing the amount of shit three small dogs produce every day.

Coincidentally, after I wrote my rant yesterday about privacy, today I found out that the top EU court has invalidated a data exchange agreement between the EU and U.S. companies. Essentially, I think, the court has ruled that U.S. privacy laws are inadequate (no surprise there), and that U.S. companies will now need a legal reason for collecting data from EU citizens. Data transfers will no longer be permitted. Here are articles in [Fortune](#), [Forbes](#), and [the Wall Street Journal](#) of this is over my head, though, so read and judge for yourself. My own (admittedly ain't-gonna-happen) preference is for the U.S. to adopt the GDPR, or an equivalent that's strong enough to satisfy the Europeans, but more importantly has sufficient safeguards to protect us from predators like Zuckerberg. The California law would be a good starting point.

July 18, 2020

When Susan told me that some places have signs asking customers to pay with plastic because they're short on cash, I wondered whether people are starting to hoard money.

We had an insulation contractor out yesterday, to look at insulating the garage ceiling, and he was telling us about some fellow who insisted he not wear a mask, when he came out to bid his job. First these people say the virus is a hoax, then they say that masks don't work, or are politically motivated. Me, I just wear one because I want to stay alive. God help us -- these idiots are making the situation worse for the rest of us.

It was curious to me, listening to this insulation contractor vent his frustration with the limits on his daily life. He's almost ready to explode, ranting that he can't accept the situation as "the new normal". (Reality check, man: this is not under control and acceptance would be healthier, and of course mellow.) This is yet another attitude that baffles me, because I don't see the restrictions as all that difficult, just something to shrug off. In that way, the pandemic is paradoxically beneficial because I'm so preoccupied with it and spend so much time working on it that I avoid a lot of the exasperation other people feel. Instead, my preoccupation is for *my* disease, not for the cramped life the virus imposes on us. Admittedly, it helps that I'm retired and don't have to take care of any children. Still, the attitude of frustration with our current too-tight world is simply a counterproductive waste of emotional energy. But I sympathize. Try twenty minutes of meditation every day; you can spare the time. If twenty doesn't work, bump it to thirty. If that fails, too, ask your doctor for Valium or Xanax or whatever. Or smoke some weed. (Later: that was a joke. See the July 25 entry, below, for the reason that's a bad idea in the case of a viral lung-affecting pandemic.)

There are plenty of people who oppose masks, including the governor of Georgia. See [this article](#). Masks clearly work, so to deny this is like saying it's useless to cover your cough. But even weirder are the people who say it's an "infringement on their rights". What, they don't think they have to get driver's licenses, pay their taxes, and not punch me in the nose for wearing a mask? "Infringements" (a loaded, simplistic, inaccurate term) are ubiquitous, and when the collective benefit outweighs the inconsequential personal inconvenience, the personal side loses. Man up and stop acting like the world revolves around you individually. You were supposed to get over that when you became an adult, which clearly you have yet to do.

"A recent study found that your political affiliation is the best predictor of whether you wear a mask, even more than your age or where you live." I doubt this, given the nonexistence of masks on teenage faces and the ubiquity on oldsters I live in a heavily Republican state (and, less so, neighborhood), and masks are almost universal when I go to places like a grocery store. I think *age* is the most reliable predictor of mask wearing. But [here are the supposed data](#), suspect the study will find them.

Here's a [vaccine that's way ahead of the others](#). Phase III trials are already underway. Deals have been made to manufacture two billion doses if it works. Zounds. Not only that, but this woman is the mother of (adult) triplets, all of whom are studying biochemistry. Superwoman.

Looks like the feds are running amuck in Portland, arresting demonstrators: [U.S. Attorney requests investigation](#) of unmarked vehicles and unidentified federal agents. Is he asking DHS to investigate itself? Excuse the skepticism, but that likely to be a whitewash? Shoot a guy in the head with an "impact munition", grab people up -- hasn't this country always had *local control* of police? The mayor said it: "[Chad Wolf] is on a mission to provoke confrontation for political gain."

purposes". Also see [Portland mayor says Trump administration putting city's protestors in danger](#): "Mr. President... I don't want your troops in your own buildings or have them leave our city." Let's hope this isn't a preview of things to come, and public indignation and the courts make Trump's minions back down. If they keep this up, his poll numbers will slip further.

July 19, 2020

Yesterday another guy came to bid the insulation work, and Susan stood *right next to him* and neither of them wore masks. And this is a woman who works in a hospital with Covid-19 patients. Say what?

I finally decided to set the formatting of this page to make it more readable when the browser is set wide. Still too simple but I like simplicity and am not inclined to throw in background tiling and that kind of thing. I'm a flat-text guy. When I got on the Internet, I used to look at people's web pages. Those were the days, before everyone went to the boring monoculture of Facebook. Pages that had a lot of pink, and kittens, and exploding stars belonged to teenage girls. Pages that were red on black, they belonged to goths. Green on black, usually programmers. Flat text, they were the C.V.s of mathematicians -- and those are my people. They're interested in the substance, not the show.

July 20, 2020

I see that in addition to his usual bald-faced lies (like the U.S. having the lowest Covid death rate in the world), the president won't say he'll accept the election results -- yet more evidence that he's an outlier, unlike any president in our history belongs in *South America*, where he could get away with this nonsense. I'm reminded of Nixon's resignation, when his sister's foreign friends all asked her, "When's the coup?" Which flabbergasted her. I had the same reaction, when she told the story. This is *the United States of America*, Goddammit. We don't do that shit here. If Trump tries a coup, he'll find that doesn't mean the rest of us won't suffer for his stupidity and egotism.

July 21, 2020

A lot of books about WWII, and especially about Churchill, are showing up in BookBub recommendations. I attribute this to the pandemic. There has even been at least one book that draws parallels between now and the war.

No PD speech class today. Last one for summer was a week ago. The next round starts in September. I miss you guys already. The classes will be even better when we can finally resume doing them in person, instead of online, and I can see my friends, like Charlie, face to face again. (Check out the business he started back in the 80s: [Foot Traffic](#).)

Lots of small businesses are dying, including family businesses that have been around for more than a century. [Long](#) in the N.Y. Times yesterday. Also see the May 8 entry, above.

July 22, 2020

This whole thing in Portland is becoming reminiscent of the 1960s, except that the cops involved aren't cops, but are storm troops from the Trump administration. Watching Chad Wolf at a press conference, I was struck by his resemblance to Senator Joseph McCarthy, especially the way Walt Kelly drew him as [Simple J. Malarkey](#), the vicious bobcat, in the Pogo strips. Chad Wolf is right in that wheelhouse of mendacity and savagery, so the physical resemblance is apt.

July 23, 2020

While whole sections of the economy, from airlines to massage therapy to [museums](#) and live music performances, are shutting down the tubes, others (though fewer) seem to be booming. My friend Larry, a dedicated cook, is unable to order flour online because baking has become popular. He also has to sit 10 weeks on a waitlist just to order a rowing machine. Then he will have to wait again while they build it. Myself, I was unable to find barbells of certain sizes. Fitness gear of all kinds seems in very short supply. They've got to be working night and day. And of course anyone making PPE has probably had to work extra shifts.

The Y called again yesterday, not like the first time, which was a plea to me personally to come back. This one's a bit more subtle and generic, but much the same. My pal John has gone back, and he says that he's always the only person in the rooms he uses. But he goes late in the evening, and I'm not willing to go when the droplets from exhalations have been building up in the ventilation system all day. In the morning, on the other hand, I see cars in the lot. And I hear the ventilation room is busy. So I'll continue solo workouts at home for the foreseeable future.

Hadn't looked at [eel slap](#) in years, and thought of it for no reason. Still there, still the same. It's hard to improve on perfection. If you're uncertain what to do, swipe your mouse back and forth across the pic.

July 24, 2020

I'm amused every time Trump boasts about acing the MoCA test. So he got 30 out of 30. I usually do, though one time I got a 29. (I have to take this test occasionally because PD can cause cognitive impairment.) A lot of people who are not suffering from dementia) get 30. It's *easy*. In fact, it's easily the easiest test I've ever seen. But Trump's rambling and inaccurate description of the test, and his taking of it, is bizarre and verges on incoherence. (Later: As usual, [the con](#) [it better](#) than I can. Even if you like Trump, some of these remarks are hilarious.)

The news about the virus is calamitous, worldwide. If it goes on like this, we'll be facing social, political, economic disruption on a scale we've been assuming we were free of. I'm talking the Black Death here... We've got to wrestle monster to the ground or we could be done for. On the other hand, if the virus puts our economy in the ground, at least the ecosystem will have a prayer. There's always a bright side, eh? It's enough to tempt me into the anthropomorphic fallacy that Mother Nature sat down and cogitated what she could do to get rid of these damn big-brained apes, and came up with the virus.

July 25, 2020

The virus is [a reason people are considering quitting smoking](#). I sure hope so. Not only is it a major contributor to physical health problems, I have people in my own family who smoke, whom I've encouraged to quit because of the virus. It's easy, but worthwhile self-disciplines rarely are. (My wife is an ex-smoker of more than 30 years standing, and once asked her what she'd do if she knew she only had six months to live, the words weren't even out of my mouth before she replied, "Start smoking again". That's how addictive it is.) It's regrettable that weed consumption has increased, and I apologize for my tongue-in-cheek recommendation above, on July 18.

Weird coincidence: I just finished re-reading, for the nth time, *The Man Who Loved Only Numbers*, about Paul Erdős, a guy who enabled his eccentric lifestyle, by keeping a library of his papers, forging his signature and depositing his copies and so on, was Ronald Graham. He was thus instrumental in making possible the productivity of the man who was considered the greatest mathematician of the 20th century. (Example: Erdős was once at a conference and walked past a couple of mathematicians discussing a long-unsolved problem he'd never heard of. He had to ask them to define the fundamental constants they were using, he was so unaware of the problem. He listened, grasped the problem, and went away. They continued talking. It was generally agreed among the experts that the answer, when finally found, would be zero, or infinity. Erdős solved the problem in half an hour and gave them the answer: one.) Graham was in interesting character in his own right. [just died](#).

Looking at [the Wikipedia page for the Mandelbrot set](#), I am astonished at the many relationships with other mathematical entities. The Julia sets I knew about, and the Fibonacci sequence, and the connectedness, and the bifurcation diagrams, and the (near) self-similarity. (Not that I really *understand* all these, except mostly in a rather vague way.) But most of them I referred to I've never even heard of: periodic windows in the Feigenbaum diagram, the Hausdorff dimension, Lebesgue measure, the relationship(s) to pi, and so on. I found it startling that "[t]here is no perfect extension of the Mandelbrot set into 3D", but there is one in 4 dimensions. This is utterly counterintuitive to me... Back in the 1980s and 1990s, I used to write code so I could play with fractals (i.e., graph them on PCs and a Unix workstation). In the end, the work became tedious, and I quit. But occasionally I still go look at graphics on the internet that drill down into the Mandelbrot set and find a strangely entertaining and hypnotic activity.

[You catch more flies with honey](#). But somehow I can rarely resist the temptation to fulminate and criticize the fools who won't wear masks. A huge personal flaw of mine, and a statement about my inability to control myself.

A sampling of news stories from the bottom of the Bing search page (some of the text summaries of the links are my own): [Death threats to Fauci's family](#). And [Man waves gun and threatens to kill other shopper in argument about masks](#). And [United Nations calls on US police to halt use of force against journalists covering protests](#). And [DHS lied](#). Only in the United States among the advanced nations. I get it when this happens in, say, the Philippines or (before they calmed down) El Salvador and Colombia. But here? Makes me ashamed. Small wonder some Europeans think we're just another banana republic.

[Here's something a bit more hopeful](#). Dogs. I love them. They're incredibly adaptable, too: they hunt, track, retrieve, guard, haul, sniff out (contraband, Covid, ...), assist the disabled, and any number of other useful activities. Long ago, a dog came to us and offered us a deal. They said, "If you will feed and shelter us, we will help you hunt, guard you, and attack your enemies. We'll figure out how to do other things for you. When you become 'civilized' and live in houses, we will be your pets and give you love. And when we're old, you can destroy us and replace us with a new breed." It was an irresistible deal, one we've never had cause to regret. I have three dogs, and they're more reliable friends than any human being. A dog just wants to love you.

Finished running on the track about 6:30 this morning, and who should be arriving as I left but my brother.

July 26, 2020

Woke in the middle of the night yet again. For a week I was getting great sleep, but this week has been hell. I finally read 30 pages of Salter's *Solo Faces*, the part where Rand and Cabot put up a new route on the Dru, a mountain that always beckoned to me; I still remember my first sight of it, in Chamonix, unique, foreboding, intimidating, seductive character of Rand is based on Gary Hemming, and Cabot is clearly based on John Harlin. I always thought it was that Hemming would be the inspiration for a novel, but maybe not. He was reputedly a ladies man. So was Salter. At 5:00 I ate and went for a walk. I wanted to run, but my left calf told me that wasn't a good idea. Nobody around but crickets, and the owl. So I intended to walk my long route, 2.9 miles out and the same distance back, but it was so unbearably hot that I bailed after a couple of miles and circled home.

Went to my nephew Aaron's birthday party yesterday. All that generation of the Ross descendants was there, including wives and even their dogs. Fifteen-pound puppy Jag demanded to play with great dane Luna, who finally got control by sitting on him. The only persons missing were Colin, who lives 600 miles away, and Andy, who seems to have given up. Though I greatly enjoyed seeing everyone, I had to leave early; my eyes felt like hot coals. The entire time, I was painfully thinking that if one of them has the virus, ancient and asthmatic as I am, I am a dead man.

July 27, 2020

Protests in response to the federal militarization in some cities have grown violent. These people are playing right into Trump's hands. The correct response would be to imitate the civil rights movement of the 1960s, which succeeded because of nonviolence, and the empathy that tactic elicited. You'll gain more sympathizers if you're the victim, not the perpetrator.

Thinking about the concealed annoyance of my neurologist at our last appointment: she was probably thinking that "this guy still in stage 1, and he has an endless list of complaints and seems to think if he just works hard enough he can beat back this progressive disease, while I treat people in the final stages who are hopelessly fucked up". She's right. I'm just annoying to be simply monitored, but what else is a doctor going to do? They don't have the tools to fix me. It's up to me to do my best every day to fight the disease with the few tools I have (forced exercise, taking the medication on schedule, not demand or complain too much, and when the day comes that the PD turns intolerable, stop eating and drinking, and get out. In the meantime, love my life and my wife and all my family and friends.

July 28, 2020

Reading about the young climate-change activist [Jamie Margolin](#). I'm with you, girl. I've been saying the same thing for years, and getting looks like people think I'm a nutcase. A guy at my gym, a stranger, once volunteered the notion that "people" think they know more about global warming than other people, implying that we had our heads up our asses when it comes to *climate change*, a more accurate term for the problem, I do happen to know more than he does, and can give him half a dozen clear examples of it off the top of my head, including one or two simple things one can observe without even having to swot up on the subject. I ended by saying "All you have to do is look." He was silent for a minute, parked his bike, then got off it and left. I should have been gentler and not lost patience, but he seemed like one of those who his father once said when we were arguing and I was "winning", as it were, "My mind's made up. Don't confuse me with Nobody "wins" these arguments, but we all lose when enough people stick their heads in the sand. The juggernaut is going to stop because you cover your eyes. Like they say, you're entitled to your own opinion, but not your own facts if you think you're on an equal footing with people who have taken the trouble to spend hundreds of hours studying the subject, *you're* the one with your head up your ass.

Another action that resembles that of totalitarian countries -- choke off the information. This is from my county newspaper: "The federal government changed the system for collecting and reporting COVID-19 hospital data in June. Last week, the data on hospital capacity usage that regional officials had been able to access went offline.

" 'Last week...the hospital data stream became unavailable based on decisions made at the Federal level,' said the official. 'This decision has hobbled the efforts of local medical officers and front-line workers to track the spread of COVID-19 and respond accordingly to our region's needs.' "

My wife recently described to me the attempt by Cerner to convert the hospital where she works to the Cerner system. The result was a catastrophe. The radiology department, for instance, was completely unable to function and had to call patients scheduled to come in and tell them to stay home. Weeks later, my wife has records that are unreadable -- they're gibberish. She tells me that Cerner is still working on the conversion. I questioned her for a few minutes, and Cerner made at least three fundamental blunders that no competent I.T. organization would do:

First, they ran the conversion during a weekday instead of a weekend, preferably a three-day holiday weekend.

Second, they had no fallback plan.

Third, they didn't do a trial run first with a copy of the data.

At that point, I saw no reason to question her further. Clearly, no one with a brain reviewed the plan and pointed out holes. I've suspected for a long time that there's a culture of incompetence at Cerner. I'm more certain of it now.

July 29, 2020

Went to the post office yesterday, which was more crowded than I'd like. Fear of strangers is a strange sensibility.

A local radio station has announced that they're giving away a Harley and a free trip to Sturgis. I could hardly believe it. *There's* a virus incubator, if you want to get the disease. Sturgis? The terra firma equivalent of a cruise ship. "S almost rhymes with "surges". Coincidence? I'm just sayin'.

I see that the state I live in is one of those in the red zone. Maybe it's time to move to Canada. I hear the weather's nice this time of year, if you can avoid the mosquitoes. A search for 'canada mosquitoes' on Bing gets 25,400,000 results while a search for 'mosquitoes' gets 11,300,000. There's a big damn statue of a mosquito in a park up there, and pictures show people covered with insects, and wearing nets over their heads, like beekeepers. So move north and stay inside, I suppose. At least if you do, your chances of getting the disease are lower than in this woebegone country. Here we've had 147,449 deaths. They've had 8,901 deaths. (Source: WHO) Our population is 332,639,102. Theirs is 37,694,085. (Source: CIA Factbook) Our death rate is about 1 in 2,256. Theirs is about 1 in 4,235. Hmmmm. Not as good as I thought. Quebec and Ontario have thrown it off. On the other hand, Nunavut is looking real good, with 0 cases. Guess I need to learn how to drive a snowmobile. Not looking forward to eating blubber and hibernating through months of darkness. Maybe I could just stay in the summer, with tons of insect repellent. But wait! It's largely roadless, and flying is dangerous for the virus. Oh, well. Inuit languages are impossibly difficult, anyway. I studied Unangam Tunuu, another language in the Eskimo-Aleut family. Trust me. You'll never learn them if you didn't grow up speaking them. They make Mandarin and Arabic look like child's play.

Maybe Trump is waking up. At the end of commenting on Fauci's popularity, he said, "[N]obody likes me. It can't be my personality." Duh, as Billie Eilish [says](#). Note: this is taken *slightly* out of context, not being the full quote, but [look it up yourself here](#).

See July 18, above. Turns out that "With coins in short supply because of the pandemic, some people have renewed interest in the penny." (N.Y. Times coronavirus briefing)

Seems that different states have different reasons for their surges: "The pandemic has splintered, with multiple epicenters driven by different factors. Each state, each city has its own crisis: vacation crowds in one, bars reopened too soon in another, a revolt against masks in a third." (N.Y. Times coronavirus briefing)

"Sinclair Broadcast Group recently published an online interview with a conspiracy theorist who claimed that Dr. Anthony Fauci created the coronavirus using monkey cells. Sinclair -- which operates almost 200 television stations -- has all news segments downplaying the severity of the virus." (N.Y. Times Wednesday briefing) This conspiracy theorist accuses not only of *creating* the virus, but of murdering a virologist... In the meantime, Fox News (there's an oxymoron for you) is helping the crackpot caravan along by belittling the seriousness of the pandemic.

July 30, 2020

Colin and I were driving back to his condo in Denver one time when I was visiting him, and he asked what I thought about the Singularity, in the sense of downloading ourselves into machines. He seemed to want to believe this can happen so I went short back and forth, I pointed out that the fundamental quality of being human (what could almost be called the "fundamental theorem", if you were a mathematician), is that we are *embodied*. So this hypothetical operation of transforming ourselves would mean the loss of our humanity. This would begin with the loss of the understanding of our own memories, as implied by my argumentation below. We have minds, yes, but they are intimately bound to our bodies in ways we don't understand. ("Everything is deeply intertwined", especially our minds and bodies. A more accurate, deeper, expression of this, is the observation that nothing has any own-being, but exists only at the intersection of other things which also lack own-being. Our minds and bodies do not exist in separation, only in relation to each other.) The Cartesian dualism we've been saddled with for centuries is false at the core, and therefore misleading, and once we've seen as the delusion it is, we are free from this notion of downloading ourselves. See [this explanation](#) for more detail on dualism... Much, perhaps most, of our thinking is linked to our senses. See Charles Taylor's *The Language Animal; and the Brain*; or writings by George Lakoff, Edward T. Hall, and even Erving Goffman; or look up "conceptual metaphor theory" -- all of which is slippery and often quite speculative, and arguably some of what these writings claim is necessary and intrinsic may merely be handy shorthand tricks we use when thinking, but nevertheless these writers are pointing at something unavoidably bound up with being human. Yes, our mental states are clearly influenced by the biochemist's meat machine, the brain -- how could it be otherwise, when drugs like Prozac change mood? And yet the qualia of the mind differ -- e.g., compare the act of climbing a ladder with that of devising a mathematical proof, or the pain of a

with the grief after the death of a loved one. But regardless of the qualitative difference, to be embodied makes our existence possible, and is a source of joy (e.g., sensual pleasures, aesthetic appreciation of the visual arts, successful in an athletic act). At the same time, embodiment puts our lives at risk (aging, illness (including from this current virus death)). It seems to me that there is no escaping our predicament: what makes human life what it is, also necessarily and troubles that life, in degrees (sometimes simultaneously!) of both amplification and damage, the latter leading to inevitable snuffing-out of each one of us. I think, in fact I assert without any hope of proof, that there is not, and probably never can be, any escape from the dilemmas our state of embodiment presents to us.

July 31, 2020

Saw on TV some Portlanders leaving the scene of their demonstration, and they were passing by the apartment building where Dad and I lived in the mid 1970s. The shot was brief, the building partly obscured, but I'm pretty sure it was that building. Hadn't thought of it in a long time. Last time I was out there, in 2008, I saw it, too. Not much in the way of memories. It was a nice place to hang the hat and sleep, and work. I remember the rooms as always feeling cold. I had a strict workout routine on those days and could do one-arm pushups, which I've never been able to do before or since. The park was about half a mile away, and when the weather was good, a few times I ran up there and played pickup soccer. But the weather was usually damp: Portland has 30 nice days a year, and they're all in August. I remember seeing Pele play what was supposed to be his last professional soccer game there (but he had a lot that were the "last"). And I remember stopping at a bar and the bartender gave me a beer, compliments of "Big Frank". I slammed the beer and got right out of there. And I remember the GA 18/30 was delivered, and they'd given us the wrong interrupt system. I flew to L.A. with disk drives and successfully rewrote the operating system overnight, and flew back in the morning. One of the most difficult things I've ever done.

Our Google fiber has slowed *way* down. The download speed is in single digits, or the teens, depending which speed you choose to believe. The upload speed remains right where it should be, 500 mb. I've contacted them twice, tried to troubleshoot about everything. They seem to have given up on me. Will have to ask the neighbors whether they have Google fiber and would they run a speed check.

Watched PBS Newshour, the stories about the collapse of the development of antibiotics. The economics are screwed. Big pharma isn't interested, and the little startups are hanging on by their fingernails, or they've gone bankrupt. We're in an arms race with the microbes, because we're not developing the drugs we need to knock out the resistant forms. I remember what appeared to be a resistant bug back in 1987, when I was in the ICU and dying, and one of the doctors described one of the antibiotics they were giving me as "extraordinarily powerful", maybe a bit defensive of their apparent lack of success, like saying, "We're doing everything we can". I was lucky, but having been through something similar, I can't help but think of the Covid-19 victims who develop secondary infections and can't get treated with the drugs they need. Think of it as surviving the virus and dying from a secondary infection by a microbe, which could be treated with a new antibiotic that the hospital can't afford to use it and instead gives you the standard drugs, sentencing you to an unnecessary death.

August 1, 2020

Fauci's showing the strain. His face has changed, has weathered. He's an unflappable guy, hugely experienced, but like granite wears away under the constant flow of water. He keeps talking, and the ideologues cover their ears and chant "nah nah" so they don't have to hear. Gotta be hugely discouraging, not to mention the threats and hatred he gets.

August 2, 2020

When I met my wife, nearly forty years ago, she introduced me to some of her friends from the Peace Corps. We were sitting around a table and they switched to speaking Marathi, to discuss me without my understanding them. They can't do that now, because they've all forgotten the language. In the last decade or so, though, they've taken to having reunions in Washington, Oregon, Arizona, Kansas, Iowa, and Massachusetts. There was to be another this fall, in Illinois, but it's cancelled because of the virus.

Weather on Friday was gorgeous, and my PD guys and I met in the back yard of one of our houses and talked for two hours. Pleasant, and a great pleasure.

August 3, 2020

Siblings over for weekly jam session, i.e., food and talk, and we talked beautifully today, like jazz musicians improvise theme after theme. It mostly escapes my memory now, though, except a discussion of which businesses are dying, and which are booming. Obvious among the latter are Amazon and its ilk -- any that deliver to your house. Cardboard boxes proliferate like rabbits breeding in a math problem to illustrate the Fibonacci sequence. I remember one time when I was in the hospital, Colin, he received a box for his job, and in an irritated voice, he said, "They always do this, Dad. Watch." He opened the box. Inside was an envelope. Those idiots had written him a letter, sealed it in an addressed envelope, and then *shipped*

envelope inside a box. Nuff said... All this talk of cardboard boxes leads me to fear that someone somewhere is working plastic substitute. I'm reading *Plastic Ocean*, and the plastic problem looks like yet another of the quagmires we're facing on the planet, likely to kill it and us. We don't need no stinkin' plastic.* We need to wean ourselves off it.

* (The reference, in case you're young, is to *The Treasure of the Sierra Madre*, not to any heavyhanded preachy English band.)

August 4, 2020

This whole thing of forced exercise is a pain in the ass. Like running on my ancient legs and lungs. Sure it helps, but the farthest possible thing from fun.

August 5, 2020

Went to a store today, looking to buy some dumbbells, and they were still out of them, after all this time. The guy who worked there told me to come back in two days because they had a shipment coming. I retreated, because he wore his mask low, not covering his nose. I guess the idea is that if he can't infect people with his mouth, he'll do it with his nostrils.

August 6, 2020

Assuming my application for readmission is approved (and they always have been, in the past), I will be taking an independent study class this coming semester. The initial meeting with the professor, a guy I like and respect, will be via Zoom. I do not expect to see him except across the internet during the course of the semester, although I will certainly come to campus to pick up books at the library. Instead, I will be writing a series of papers, and submitting them via email. That's a bit odd, but that's what the virus is doing to us.

From today's N.Y. Times briefing: "[O]nly one affluent nation has suffered a severe, sustained outbreak for more than three months: the United States." [Here's the link](#). As usual, first clear your Times cookies, if you have any. The bottom line they say: "With only 4 percent of the world's population, the United States has accounted for 22 percent of coronavirus deaths."

August 7, 2020

Yesterday was the anniversary of the Hiroshima bombing. I've been there, and Nagasaki. I have no word for the photo of the Hiroshima bombing -- "horrifying" is inadequate. Look them up for yourself online: the flesh gone from one's face, the eyes melted, the shadow on concrete where someone had been sitting and was vaporized by the explosion. John Hersey's book *Hiroshima*. My father in law was not one to talk about the war. The only time I heard him do so was described being in Nagasaki a few days after the bomb was dropped. He was busy working most of the time, doing things like destroying their military aircraft, but on the occasions he had some time off, he walked the city. He described the buildings that were still standing (Nagasaki is hilly, and the blast effects were less than those in Hiroshima, which is said that not a bit of wood was left in them: the window frames and everything else had burned, and all that was left was brick and the "bare metal" of any equipment inside the buildings. All that was left was "brick and the bare metal", and I made a gesture, and we were all silent, because there was nothing more to be said.

What is the source of this continuing trend to informality? A photograph of closing night at the Metropolitan Opera shows a room of people in evening dress, and nothing else, a sea of black and white clothing. I like opera, and classical music, but when I go, many men don't even wear ties to the opera, and some wear jeans to the Symphony. Yes, you're right. Admittedly, I go to the Kauffman Center, not the Met, but still...

August 8, 2020

Out for a run yesterday, in my brand-new shoes, and did they ever make a difference. Perfect, thanks to the guy at the store. He really knew what he was doing. But I ran too much, and during the night I had a cramp for the history books. The calf is still taut. No run today, just a walk. On the home stretch yesterday I was passed by four girls; this neighborhood has a lot of these cross-country high schoolers, out for training runs. They passed me like I was standing still. Boy do I wish I could run that speed. "Youth -- it's wasted on the young." An understatement, if there ever was one.

August 9, 2020

I always think people are irrationally afraid of events that are rare, but which get a lot of press (hijackings, school bus kidnappings). But this one smelled all wrong: Yesterday morning, with the dogs in tow, I was leaving the park, and a van next to me, in the end parking space, started up. I didn't think much about it. I neared the swale over the creek, and the van pulled the van off the street and parked between the gate and the bottom of the swale. Two young children were staring at the sidewalk, close to the van. They moved from the sidewalk onto the footbridge and stopped. The driver of the van stepped out. In a little while, a woman came from across the street with a third, younger, child, and directed the two children

onto the sidewalk, telling them they were going to the Village. The van then pulled away. I was behind it by that time thinking the driver's behavior was strange, I thought I'd memorize the license plate. But the van had no license plate it's extremely rare for children to be snatched by strangers, this time the behavior of the driver seemed like that was intention, and the lack of a license plate seemed like further confirmation.

August 10, 2020

Culling books, I ran across Toulmin's *The Philosophy of Science*, from my freshman year in college, price \$4.95. My copy of *Advanced Engineering Mathematics*, a massive tome of complex typesetting and printing, more than a thousand pages long, cost \$27.95 in 1980. Both those books would cost probably 5 to 10 times that now.

Sturgis. See July 29, above. Or see [this Weekend Edition Story](#): "For the next week, the rally and the coronavirus may look like a local problem for Sturgis and the state of South Dakota. But the people here for the rally come from all over the country, and will soon be going back home." All hundreds of thousands of them. Later in the month we'll be reading them, and all the people they passed the virus on to. Collectively, the attendees should be nominated for a Darwin Award, but someone beat me to it.

August 11, 2020

Dinner with the siblings yesterday evening, as always distanced and outdoors. Latest news: one of our spouses is *flying to Florida*, then driving somewhere for a family reunion. Out of their mind, and a great way to introduce the virus into the family, despite the idea of quarantining on return. What? Like you can share a house with someone and guarantee not to infect them? And that sibling will still be coming to the dinners, to pass it on. Include me the hell out. I won't be seeing anyone for a month. *Flying to Florida?* Flying is bad enough (it's how one of my friends got the disease), but Florida is the worst, or fifth worst, in the nation, depending what measure you look at. The positive test rate is 18%. There won't be any more family reunions if you're dead. This reminds me of those bikers going to Sturgis. Simpler to just get a six-gun Russian Roulette. I'm very likely to get in trouble for this entry. So be it.

August 12, 2020

Called the sporting goods store yesterday. They had one pair of dumbbells left in the weight I wanted. 40 minutes later when I arrived, it was gone. I've tried several times since the lockdown started. The fella who works in the department explained that it's like this every time they get a shipment, twice a week -- the dumbbells arrive at 10 and are gone by 11. All they have left are 8 pounds and lighter.

Almost finished re-reading the book on the Riemann Hypothesis. Highly abstract in places, and it got me to thinking about abstraction in general -- complex numbers, higher-dimensional topologies. I've concluded that it's useless to try to visualize most of these things. Simply *treat them* as abstractions. Trying to imagine them as similar to our sensory world (three dimensions, real numbers) is self-defeating. Here's [an example](#). What's missing in this version are the footsteps that get smaller as they approach the circumference of the circle, because objects become smaller as they get closer to the edge of finite but unbounded geometry. The lines p and g are parallel and meet at infinity. The curve c is infinitely long and does not close. Understand? No? Join the club. For more extraordinary examples, simply search for `poincare diagram` and sample the resulting pics. Be prepared to have your mind boggled.

August 13, 2020

The number of Covid cases among young people is rising. Quelle surprise -- I see groups of them everywhere, mask close together. Yes, I know you *think* you're immortal. Sorry to tell you.

August 14, 2020

Preliminary Zoom meeting arranged with my professor for my independent study project, on the epistemological underpinnings of the methods of representation used in linguistics. That's a mouthful, eh? It will be weird, not meeting him all semester except online. I'll submit a paper every 2 or 3 weeks, and then a final paper, and that's it.

Everybody who's going back to K.U. this fall has to be tested for the virus. I wonder whether this applies to me, since the only time I may be on campus is to pick up and drop off books at the library. Whatever. I just won't go until September. After that, it's not required.

Long story in the N.Y. Times about [cherry farming in Washington state](#), and all the problems involved, and the laborers who pick the fruit. How much (including how much injustice and risk) goes into it all. I've been here in my house, eating dried dark tart cherries, with no thought for the supply chain. Those unfortunate farm workers are, of course, at high risk for Covid-19. The poor tend to get it in the neck while the rest of us sit behind our moats.

Looking at the map of the average daily cases, with the exception of the agricultural parts of California and a handful of other places, the red spots (highest rates) are in the south, exactly the part of the country that seceded from the Union.

I dreamed last night about attending a meeting of the climbing club. Arrived a bit late, and everyone was in line for food. They all saw me, and the PD had progressed to a point that they recognized I had a medical problem, though they didn't know what it was. (The dream was so specific that Jesse recognized me and said hello.) I was embarrassed by their recognition of my physical deficiency. More important, I knew that my disease had progressed so far that my climbing career was over. Of course, this is just my dream life confirming what I already knew and have already admitted to myself. This loss of climbing feels to me like a personal tragedy. For many years, climbing was so central to my life that I thought of myself *as* a climber, not as a computer programmer or husband or student or Buddhist or anything else. If someone asked me, "What *are* you?" in that way that implies a deep question about identity, I would have replied, "I am a climber." It was only about the time I became a father that climbing stepped down from its primary place in my conception of myself. Decades later, I recognize that I can't go out anymore and set hand to rock, and go up, and feel that joy, pure and clear, that matter, that terror also pure and clear). I can no longer stand on a stance hundreds, even thousands, of feet up in watching the birds and the clouds, or unlock the secret of a tricky move, or crank on a hand jam and pull over the lip of an overhang, or walk down from a climb with that sensation of being truly, fully alive and awake. The loss of that is a narrowing of my life. The people who are frustrated with the narrowing of their lives by the pandemic (e.g., see July above) feel something like this, but the difference is that sometime next year this plague will be under control and we will resume a more normal life together, if not precisely what we had in the past. But my inability to climb is permanent and irrevocable. I feel as if I'm grieving a death.

August 15, 2020

Out for a walk this morning and saw, down by the park on the three residential corners, signs in the yards saying
 "Developer to Avoid Bankruptcy
 Forced Auction
 Rolls Royce Picassos
 Fine jewelry, Rolexes etc"

followed by more fine goods, and contact information.

If this is genuine (and it's worth questioning, because the sign lacks the sophistication one would expect if it *were* genuine) wonder whether this fellow is facing financial doom because of the pandemic. Maybe he owned a retail business or other enterprise that's tanked. I wish him well, but putting these signs on corners in a neighborhood full of Cape Cod ranches is the wrong idea. People here can't afford that stuff. Or maybe the idea is that people will read the sign who stopped at the light: "Say, Lovey! Write down that phone number. I've been looking for another Rolls" (said in a local Thurston Howell III accent)... I'll give long odds that this is a scam, and anyone who calls the number will be asked for money to reserve a seat. Then the organizers will abscond with the cash, or abuse the credit card numbers. God forbid anyone give them their checking account number.

August 16, 2020

It occurs to me that I spend almost all my time at home and therefore see so few people that I have little idea of the reactions and feelings and problems people have because of the pandemic. There should be somewhere on the internet where people go to talk about what they face and how they feel. Note to self: look for sites.

August 17, 2020

No entry.

August 18, 2020

Gentle weather, and parties. The swimming pool house had people out in the afternoon, the neighbors to the west had visitors on their deck, and we had the siblings on the patio for a couple of hours. People gotta get together. They can't stay home all the time, hiding from the virus.

Death Valley at 130 degrees, the hottest temperature anywhere since we've started recording them. One time in Joshua Tree when I was there climbing, I had a long conversation with a fellow who walked across Death Valley every summer. He talked him out of it. He musta liked to suffer, is all I can say. I couldn't figure out why anyone would do such a thing. More than forty years later, and understanding much more, I still don't understand. I never will.

August 19, 2020

I knew about the Hawaiian guy who sailed a catamaran around the world by dead reckoning and tides and sun and stars, and show the old Polynesian skills. What I did not know was that it had already been done, in 1984, by a New Jersey pro-

of geography: [Marvin Creamer dies at 104](#). That means he was in his late sixties when he did it. Kinda takes [The Lost Finding Our Way](#) an order of magnitude further. I attended a lecture by Huth, and he told what motivated him to learn skills and write the book and even teach a course: two young women died sea kayaking near his house when fog rolled in. He liked to sea kayak as well, and I think on that very day, he was also lost, but heard a foghorn, knew where it was used the direction of the sound to orient himself. He paddled to shore and "handrailed" along it until he got home. The skills he acquired saved him again, when he was kayaking a complicated route around an island off the northeast coast. Impressive guy. Particle physicist at Harvard, works on CERN a lot.

August 20, 2020

Two guys came today to insulate the garage ceiling. They didn't wear masks. I asked one either to do so, or to stand said he might have a mask in the truck, but he wasn't sure. This was incomprehensible to me, and confirms my impression that people with less education (as he clearly seemed) are less likely to be careful. Maybe the reason is that those without an education have read more history and know what can happen, and have brushed up repeatedly against the invisible dangers that are real, and which affect us. But how would one go about figuring out whether these are, in fact, the reasons?

August 21, 2020

The Times reports that men are less likely to wear masks than women. After reading that, I was tempted to say, "Du was your first clue?" We've all noticed this, haven't we?

People, all of them, have the most incredible stories to tell about their lives, and if you're patient and stick around long enough, you'll hear some of them -- things you'd never have suspected, that are far out of what appears to be the ordinary lives follow. Patience can be necessary, and there are people who simply don't talk about themselves much, but eventually seems, has these nuggets of something-that-happened, or something-I-did, or something-I-saw, that trigger a light of astonishment in your brain when you hear the tales.

The PDGs were over here yesterday and we had our weekly outdoor meeting. I love those guys. I never would have missed them except for this disease, and it's a silver lining to the dark cloud of PD. I commented to one of them that I'm probably better at being alone than anyone I know, but that even I get restless in quarantine. Our weekly couple of hours together often the big highlight of my week, along with the weekly gathering of my siblings, and sometimes even more so.

Fauci's been talking so much in recent months that he's developed a polyp on his vocal cords and needed surgery. It reminds me of a bit of linguistic knowledge I found peculiar: there's a language the speakers of which develop a tumor growth on their vocal chords. This happens not only to native speakers, but also to those who learn the language as a second language. No other language has ever been found to do this to the human body. The details escape me, though I vaguely think the language may have been from the Caucasus (but don't hold me to that).

Steve Bannon arrested on fraud charges. How many Trump lackeys does that make now? I can think of Cohen, Flynn, Manafort in addition, but I'm missing one or two, or maybe even three. The curious thing about this rogue's gallery: the corruption appears to be much worse than even the Reagan and Bush 43 administrations, and these wretches are the prez. The main exceptions to the latter are the family members he's appointed. The nepotism in this administration worthy of a banana republic, or one of the kleptocracies that masquerade as "Communist".

A Putin opponent is poisoned. Quelle surprise. This has happened over and over again. Poison seems to be Vladimir's favorite weapon against individuals. Shades of the Borgias.

I see that Ann Syrdal, a researcher in speech synthesis, has died. But did Frances Ingemann, who pioneered the same in the early 1950s, get an obit in the Times when she died a couple of years ago? Not that I can find. By the way, she established the linguistics department at K.U., too.

August 22, 2020

Made a bet with my sister-in-law today. She thinks that this time next year we'll still be fighting the virus, and I think problems will be small, and that we'll have herd immunity from infections and inoculations. We'll be able to attend school and professional sports events. I expect the pandemic to be largely resolved, at least in the developed countries by mid-2021. So we'll wait until August 22 of next year, and we will see.

August 23, 2020

Listening again to *Kashmir*, a song I never tire of and that in my judgment is better than *Stairway To Heaven* -- and thought so, too.

I've not been seeing butterflies for some years now, but this year (as my sister also observes) they're more common, still not as common as, say, ten or fifteen years ago. But certainly more than they've been the past few years. I can't wonder whether this might be related, improbably, to changes resulting from the pandemic, such as lowered pollution; doubt it, though; there's probably not been enough time to make a difference... I've seen more hummingbirds, too, it may be that's simply in my yard.

August 24, 2020

This, according to the N.Y. Times: "In one social-science experiment, people were told to spend 15 minutes alone in with their thoughts. The only possible distraction was an electric shock they could administer to themselves. And 67 of men and 25 percent of women shocked themselves, choosing -- as Richard Friedman, a psychiatrist, writes in a *T* Op-Ed -- 'negative stimulation over no stimulation.' " One way I'm different from them. When I saw the pulmonologist months ago, I had to wait twenty minutes. The lights in the room shut off, and when he walked in, he freaked out because it was dark, and then he saw me sitting there when the lights came on. (If I'd moved in the least, they would have come on.) I don't mind being alone and without stimulation. As I said to him, "Thinking things over... It's all those Zen retreats. Maybe these people who can't handle the Covid-19 boredom need some Buddhist training. It couldn't be hoit.

August 25, 2020

Leonard Cohen tries too hard with his lyrics: "For you've touched her perfect body with your mind". As if that's not enough, next he rings the changes on that line by changing the pronouns. Or take the lyrics of Hallelujah (please). I love that song, it's risible. Maybe it should be called Hellelujah.

August 26, 2020

On entering KUMC today, the procedures are different. Most interesting was the way they take your temperature: you hold your right wrist a few inches from a sensor. No touch... Saw Arne Z. there. Haven't seen him in months. He told me he stopped going to the Y, too, and agreed that John is taking a risk in going there. I failed to ask whether he and Elaine Stewart will be taking Spanish remotely. I've given up on that, not quite sure why.

Saw an article in the county newspaper about our "[pleasure parks](#)" in the past. They mentioned Fairyland, which was on the other side of the state line. I remember Dad taking us there when we were little. The place was abandoned for years, the wooden roller coaster looming. Now the land is occupied by a big warehouse and they appear to employ blind people because the stop lights at the intersection emit that blind-person beep. While it was abandoned, though, a friend of mine sneaked in there with some other people and if I remember correctly, made a movie. For some reason this reminds me of *Carnival of Souls* (the 1962 film by that title, not the more recent one), which I've seen repeatedly through the years seems to keep popping up occasionally in my life. There was an abandoned amusement park in that movie; must be free-associated from Fairyland to the movie. The movie was made by [Centron](#), or maybe only by a fellow who worked there, in Lawrence. A few years ago I went to a retrospective about the company, which mostly made not horror movies but industrial films and educational films. I noticed a curious thing in watching the clips: most or all of the actors, all of whom were Lawrence locals, had slight Southern accents. Then they brought up some of the people on stage who'd been in the films, to talk about their experiences with Centron and the films. Now adults, they'd completely lost those accents and sounded totally local. Language changes all the time, as I discovered when I took my first class in linguistics, in 2011. One of the dozens of other students (all of them in their late teens), not one could hear the cot/caught distinction. I was the only one who could -- and the only one who used it. I'm still flabbergasted that *all* of them had lost it. The linguists appear to be behind on updating their maps. (What's even more amazing, though, is that my sister doesn't hear it, either. It's plain to me.)

August 27, 2020

The last few weeks the neighbor has been driving to his office instead of working remotely from home. I wish him to

In my dreams last night, or rather in a brief period of wakefulness after a dream, I thought of the unfortunates who've lost their jobs and can't get unemployment because the systems are overloaded. They have to move out of their apartments and live in their cars (if they have one), can't pay for food or gas. They have to go to food pantries and other privately run organizations for help. What a horror. The system in this country doesn't take care of people. They need help, and they can't get it.

I see in the latest missive from the chancellor that the overall positive rate of testing students for Covid-19 is 1.14%. The rate among the "Greeks" (fraternity and sorority population) is 5.47%. The local public health authority is ordering 100 houses to [quarantine for two weeks](#).

N.Y. Times: "Older men are up to twice as likely to become severely sick and die from Covid-19 as women of the same age", not to mention much more likely than the young. As an old guy who's asthmatic, it behooves me to be careful. anyone who mocks my precautions, I say, "The dogs bark; the caravan passes". In case you missed the point, you're

And speaking of dogs, what's this thing I've been seeing the last few days, women in nice dresses walking their dogs: the latest trend?

August 28, 2020

I was raised by a Catholic mother (who later rejected Roman Catholicism, though that was late enough to be irrelevant) and an atheist father who mostly zipped his lip about religion (also irrelevant, because it was clear he was an unbeliever). When people ask me about my religion I invariably say, "I was raised by a Catholic mother and an atheist father. I am a Buddhist in self defense." While the premises are true, and the conclusion also, the syllogism is disingenuous. It is a sleight of hand, because humor is distracting, and the joke always seems to work. My ideas and feelings are way too complicated and ambiguous (unclear? unresolved?) to discuss, or even sort through in solitude. The one thing I firmly believe in is a non-monotheist, by which I mean that I reject the fundamental premise of the Abrahamic religions -- their belief in an individual who is omnipotent, omniscient, and all-loving. I should not need to point out the contradiction in that iron triangle... I still belong to a traditional Quaker monthly meeting, and believe in their testimonies (simplicity, peace, and radical equality ("that of God in everyone" -- not a contradiction, but there's no room to explain)). And I'm an unorthodox Buddhist (I don't believe in karma, but the rest of it, starting with the four noble truths, I accept). What I can maybe and partly be summed up like this: the world, and each of us, is a miracle, but I have no idea how or why that mystery is utterly impenetrable. Nothing, including each of us, exists by itself, but only as the intersection of other things. (Nothing has any "own-being".) Something has unfolded that my mind is too small to comprehend.

August 29, 2020

Here's the problem with the Goddamn internet. More than a decade ago, my wife and I stayed at a B&B when we took a short vacation. I created a unique email for that B&B to communicate with me, and never closed it. That email formed my true email address. Clearly the B&B's database has been hacked, because recently I've started getting dating emails written in Slovak -- three of them to date. So first I had to create the email address in my domain, and now I get spammed and have to get into my cPanel and delete the email address, which I finally just did. None of this should have been necessary. Just goes to show that you get what you pay for, and the internet is free, or nearly so, at least on its surface. you think about it, though, we pay through the nose in dozens of different ways. [Insert my standard Facebook / Zuck rant here.]

Every so often I run across something that vindicates what I've been saying for years -- in this case, trying to tell people that solar panels are hung up on solar power that the panels are produced using, and contain, [some nasty shit](#), such as lead and cadmium. Much of the problem is in their manufacture. See [Forbes](#), [the IEEE](#), and [FEE](#). This last link also points out that "solar has a higher carbon footprint than wind and nuclear energy". Get serious: LFTRs are the way to go: inherently physically safe, simple, nonproliferating, cheap and abundant source (thorium), efficient, miniscule greenhouse contribution, can be used to destroy current stocks of nuclear waste, self-sustaining reaction, can be used to make medical isotopes, produces a vastly reduced nuclear waste stream of few and shortlived products, easy to turn power generation up and down. 3 small containers of thorium could power the U.S. for a year. Other countries are way ahead of us in bringing LFTRs into production.

Another email from the chancellor. The positive rate has increased to 2.18% in the general population, and 10.01% in fraternities and sororities. See above, two days ago. This means the rates have nearly doubled. But get this: "During seven days of our collection period, we have seen a positivity rate of 3.82% in test results among our overall student population." I'm glad my class this fall is an independent study, producing a paper and not attending any classes in person.

August 30, 2020

My sister-in-law went to a funeral Friday and she's over here every Saturday (such as *yesterday*) and Sunday most of the day, working closely with my wife on the garage. She wore a mask on Friday, but I'm giving her a wide berth anyway. I will wash my hands more frequently. Later: most of the people at the funeral wore masks, and she avoided the few "hillbillies" who weren't.

Trees are dropping their leaves already, probably because it's been dry. This reminds me of 1980 or 1983. Both of those years were very hot, but one of them was also very dry. I don't remember which one. A lot of trees turned brown and died. Given the trend in weather in recent years, I expect we'll see more of this. We'll also see more of the grass fires that have been a problem recently in the rural parts of the state, which will cost farmers and ranchers a lot of money, not just from losing their hay but also from having to replace fences. We can expect more baked ground, and floods when the rain

the hard, dry clay. Also fewer insects. (Already a problem, since insect biomass appears to be [decreasing by more than every 27 years or so](#), and not just in Germany. I researched this and gave a talk on it. Just so you know, it appears that climate change is only one of a handful of reasons for the die-off, and not the most important one.) A guy I know who has a farm near Ottawa says he almost never sees quail anymore, and I figure the reason is that the chicks eat insects before switching to their adult diet. So we can expect even fewer quail. The list of problems certainly goes much further, but I'm not inclined to think about this any more. I was fantastically lucky to be born when I was, and not in, say, the 1980s - people, such as my son, who are in their 30s and younger are going to see a world gone to hell. I will be dead. The social and economic disruption, and human death, on a scale never seen or imagined. Everyone I've talked to (except my friend, who's both smart and tough-minded) about this has scoffed and said "we'll figure it out", or words to that effect. Heads in the sand, which is exactly the reason it's going to happen. (Although I've noticed that the more people educate themselves on the subject, the more frightened they become.) Almost everyone but the scientists is in denial, and most scientists seem to think it's up to them to figure this out, but not to try to influence the public. Own up to it: the human race as we've known it is coming to an end. If any humans survive, they'll be a miniscule fraction of the billions now living.

August 31, 2020

Another theft of my data. This is at least the third one I know of (Eddie Bauer, Equifax, now this one). Worse, the breach was at a hospital where I go for my PD. I opened the letter this morning. I quote: "the compromised backup file may have contained some of your patient demographic and guarantor information, such as name, mailing address, and telephone number as well as your email address and date of birth, and possibly limited medical information about you, such as service and department of care." The breach was of a third party that the hospital foundation uses. (This is like the virus spread it around, why don't you? The more the merrier.) Third parties are often where these breaches occur, and they increase the risk. They're cheaper than doing the work yourself, because they're specialists -- "[the breached company] is a widely used ... software provider for engagement and fundraising efforts in higher education and nonprofits". So, to my hospital wanted to touch me up for money, gave my data to an agent, which then screwed up and let some asshole steal my data, along with God knows how many other people's data. Why can't I opt out of this sort of thing?

September 1, 2020

Many people are complaining that they're bored because of the restrictions imposed by the virus. I almost never feel bored. There's plenty to do. I'm writing a novel, working on a paper for independent study, reading books, playing with my dogs, and on and on. I think the problem these people have is that they're not loners like me. They want to get out and meet other people, go to restaurants and movies, that sort of thing. Patience, grasshopper. Practice new skills. Take up a musical instrument (harmonica's cheap and portable). Exercise. Write individual poems for everyone you know, on nice paper, and mail them (yes, the old-fashioned way -- that will make it special). Take care of those minor house repairs that have been putting you off... Sit down and think what you can do. In ten minutes you'll come up with a list that will keep you busy for days. And remember: this too shall pass. All you need is a bit of patience, combined with enough organization to manage all of that stuff to do in the meantime.

[Quick spit tests for the virus.](#)

[A quiz on your carbon footprint.](#) "[T]he most meaningful change would be to have fewer children. The next three are to drive car-free, avoiding air travel, and eating a vegetarian diet." Sounds about right to me.

Here's [another guy who sailed around the world adventurously](#). (See August 19, above.)

"[C]ollege towns with the greatest rise in cases relative to population include ... **Lawrence, Kan. (University of Kansas)** ..." (boldface added). 8 universities were listed.

September 2, 2020

I'm taking the day off from writing an entry in this journal. There's plenty to do on the novel, and more than plenty to do with research for the linguistics paper. Not to mention the chores I have today, and so forth. And to think that it has been quite half a year since I started this blog. Sometimes it feels interminable, but it's one more daily reminder of the passage of time.

September 3, 2020

Iowa. I loved the place. Used to drive to Ames to work on the book of Faith and Practice for [Iowa Yearly Meeting \(Conservative\)](#), representing my monthly Meeting. They were the kindest group of people you could imagine. And there were a lot of little things I liked about the state -- just in education, it had the highest percentage of Ph.D.s in its population of the 50 states, and a schoolhouse on the state's quarter (the coin). Now the place has a rate of infection three times the national average. Friends in the center of the state tell us that few people wear masks. And they elected a fool for their

governor -- her attitude to a football game at Iowa State was, if you don't like it, don't go. Like she doesn't have a responsibility to encourage people to stay healthy and not to infect others.

I see that Trump is encouraging people in North Carolina to vote twice. He never fails to surprise, breaking the limit propriety and exhorting his admirers to break the law. Wait until after the election. If he loses, I predict he'll tell his to take to the streets with their guns.

September 4, 2020

[Marjorie Taylor Greene](#), a candidate for the House of Representatives, believes in [QAnon](#), a conspiracy theory that I on [4chan](#). To quote the Wikipedia article, 4chan included: "posting of illegal content, threats of violence, misogyny racism". Greene, being a Republican in Georgia, is likely to win. Just what we need -- a fringe Representative, in addition a President who encourages voters to break the law. This is starting to be reminiscent of the later days of the Weimar Republic. The problem with talking to conspiracy nuts is that when you ask them "What's the evidence?", they talk circles. There ain't no stinkin' evidence, but they already believe what they're saying, so firmly that it's impossible to get through the circle. I knew some wackos like them back in the 1960s and 70s, but in those days most of the loonies were on the left. I find the right much scarier.

September 5, 2020

I voted by mail in the primary, but I will vote early in person in November. Now I have to figure out the safest time, place. Here's some info, for people who live in Johnson County: [how to vote in Jo. Co. for the 2020 general election](#)

Yet more gun problems locally: [Stray bullets hit homes in southern JoCo](#). "On Thursday, Matt Keys of Stilwell described a day May 31, when, after listening to three-and-a-half hours of gunfire coming from an adjacent field, he discovered bullets had struck his home in an area often used by his children."

September 6, 2020

Read [an article](#) by a Black woman who was a U.S. consular officer in Juarez and got stopped repeatedly by Customs crossing into Texas. Her treatment was indisputably racist -- her diplomatic passport being ignored, being asked why she'd stolen her own car (registered to her in their system), and on and on. Read it for yourself. One quote from the article really got my attention: "At one point that day, a State Department official told me that what I was experiencing was racism, because personally, he had no issues crossing the border as a white man." I have to confess this leaves me at a loss for words. It's not exactly doublethink, but it's somewhere in that ballpark. This reminds me of a Black friend of mine who used to get stopped every time she drove through Mission Hills (an exclusive, expensive, lily-white suburb here), if she saw her. Yes, "driving while black" is a real thing, and can be carried to extremes like those detailed in the article, and worse. If you don't understand why Black people are upset and demonstrate, get a clue. You're the problem.

September 7, 2020

People came by to check out our old car top carrier, which we listed on Craigslist for free. It's about 27 years old, and the buckles don't attach well to new cars, which appear to have the metal around their windows more flush than they used to be. The buckles are too big for their narrow profiles. Maybe the idea is to reduce the drag coefficient. We found a work-around for the problem. Glad to get rid of the thing. Takes up too much space, and no one's used it in a decade or more, since I was working for Rock The Planet, following bands all over the country. That enterprise appears not to exist any more, although there are a zillion other things by the same name. The half-life of all human enterprises appears to be converging to zero.

For years I've been keeping a list of names for bands -- weird ideas that pop into my brain. The very first one on the list, from about twenty years ago, is "Venom Pandemic", which now strikes me as a curious coincidence, though I had to wait a couple of decades for it.

September 8, 2020

Yet another hack. (See 8/29 and 8/31 above.) This time it's of Wattpad, an outfit I haven't used in years -- in fact, never anything beyond sign up. I need to go through these old websites and delete my accounts. I signed up under a fake name with an intermediate (forwarding) password and am glad to have taken the precautions. The damage could have been worse. Here's what got hacked:

- * Email address
- * Date of birth, gender, and language preference (if provided) [I didn't specify DOB or gender]
- * IP address upon sign up, if signed up before 2017
- * Profile display name and any information which you have made public in the "about" or "status" fields of your profile

you chose to use these, and account status for a very limited number of users

* Account name, salted and cryptographically hashed passwords

* Any third-party account IDs, such as Google or Facebook. Passwords associated with third-party accounts are not on our systems and are unaffected.

Firefox Monitor tells me the email I used appeared in the breach, but nowhere else. I deleted the account, with the n "I'm leaving because this is the third time in less than 2 weeks that one of my online accounts has been hacked." But still log in after supposedly deleting the account. LATER: Got an email saying "Your Wattpad account was successfully restored." Apparently when I tested whether it was gone, they brought it back to life. Fer cryin' out loud. That mean didn't really delete it, just marked it deleted, and it was still in the database, waiting, like Dracula, to be roused from slumber.

September 9, 2020

On waking, I had the thought that my situation, and thus my reaction to the pandemic, is quite different from that of people. For starters, I'm retired and live in a paid-off house and have no children to care for and am married to a woman who still works. That leaves me free to do pretty much whatever I please. And I'm really good at being alone. I always have projects going. This morning I jumped out of bed, eager to get to work on the novel and on my linguistics independent project, trying to figure out which one to tackle first. Not to mention my beloved dogs, and my exercise schedule, and weekly meetings with my family and the PDG, and the online Zoom meetings for various stuff. My life is full of meaning and pleasure, and I'm grateful for that.

I see that "Keeping up with the Kardashians" is coming to an end, after 20 seasons. Jesus Christ. It's embarrassing to see a country where a piece of shit like that can last two decades. I watched four or five minutes of it, way back when. Remembering it, I want to vomit. What the hell is wrong with that family? Did they come from another planet, to fuck mess up our beloved mother Earth? And why would anyone watch that shit? Were I single and dating a woman who admitted watching the show, I'd probably dump her. It's right up there in the second tier of my list of cardinal sins, along with smoking and tattoos and too much makeup and a taste for nasal-accent country music.

September 10, 2020

At least two restaurants have closed recently in Corinth, a shopping center a bit more than a mile from my house. I wonder how far this will go, where it will end. Naturally restaurants are among the businesses most vulnerable to the pandemic, but "most" is not the operative word here. There will probably be other businesses. I dread a reduction in services and goods I want, and sometimes need. LATER: It looks like one restaurant's space is already spoken for by another. Good news, that.

More evidence that Trump not only lies, he's sometimes stupid enough to admit it: "President Trump acknowledged journalist Bob Woodward that he had knowingly played down the coronavirus earlier this year even though he was : was 'deadly' and vastly more serious than the seasonal flu." And he did this *in a taped interview*. He's more than a king. He's a Goddamn rogue. Not to mention that he's a bonehead, admitting this in a taped interview with *Bob Woodward*, a very man who brought down Nixon and has damaged countless politicians in between.

Also from the Times: "Indonesia has ordered some people who have not worn masks to lie in a coffin or sit in the back of a hearse -- punishments meant to underline the seriousness of the virus." Maybe they should make them sit there for 24 hours or sort of like timeouts for young children who misbehave.

The west coast burns, and places I've lived, or spent years in, have orange skies: Yosemite, San Francisco, Santa Monica, maybe even a little in Portland (not sure of that one). The videos shock: the size, speed, intensity of the fires. The ground jolt: fires everywhere in CA, and all over the eastern halves of OR and WA. The facts sadden: one fire (in WA?) burned as much acreage as a *normal fire season* usually does. From health effects (breathing the smoke) to future mudslides and to people losing their homes to such lesser things as backpackers having to trudge through miles of ash, the aftermath is endless and unredeemed. This is like the opening of some big Hollywood postapocalyptic sci-fi extravaganza, except we won't get out of our seats after ninety minutes, get in our cars, and drive home. This is real. The damages are unimaginable.

Chiefs fans from Johnson County who attend the game tonight don't have to quarantine, but they're supposed to wear masks and maintain social distance. Right. The masks, maybe, but when they're in line, or seated in the stands, there's no way to maintain distance. This is just another superspreader event. The fig leaf is that if they don't wear a mask or maintain distance, they're "mandated" to quarantine, and the county will enforce the state recommendation. How? They won't know who went to the game even if they did know, most of the fans will lie and say they maintained social distance. Can we say "toothless regulation"? This is a joke. It's exactly the sort of thing that promotes cavalier attitudes toward laws and regulations. Kansas received a surge in cases. This will either help bring it back, or make it worse.

September 11, 2020

Nineteen years ago today I pulled my car into the street, to drive to work, and turned on the radio and heard talk about something dramatic, but didn't get any context for several minutes. Then they said an aircraft had flown into one of World Trade Center buildings. I think I was driving and listening when the second one crashed into the other building was like entering an alternate reality. The only event in my life I can compare it to is the Kennedy assassination, which in the print shop setting type and the radio (it's always the radio, isn't it?) announced what had happened, and I went into the hall and shouted, "The President's been shot!" and a couple of teachers came to the door of the print shop and listened in silence. Shortly after that, we carried the radio, the only one on campus, to the lunchroom and the entire school ate lunch in silence, listening.

This pandemic is a prolonged alternate reality, isn't it? That's what Zen is about, in part: shaking you into a recognition of the strangeness and inexplicability and *hereness* of the world. Its suchness. "Only don't know." But I can do without this damn pandemic, not so much for myself as for other people.

These [six-word poems about the pandemic](#) are worth reading. I've started writing my own. Those six word poems are addictive.

September 12, 2020

I remember watching Mort Sahl on TV when he said, "George Washington couldn't tell a lie. Nixon couldn't tell the truth. And Reagan can't tell the difference." If Sahl were still alive he'd probably add, "And Trump doesn't give a shit." (L or "And Trump *prefers* to lie.")

Friends in Portland and Corvallis have emailed that the air quality is appalling, but getting better. The entire snapshot of the emails was orange, from the smoke in the air. On the news I heard that Portland had the worst air quality of any city in the world (worse than Delhi and Beijing!). Australia burned, and now our west coast is burning. In the case of the west coast, much of this is due to prolonged drought, poor forest management, and other causes. California has been through exceptional heat waves lately, too. But it's generally agreed that climate change contributes. How many of these even take place before climate change deniers admit their error? The northwest passage is open for the first time in recorded history around the north pole continues to shrink, the icecaps of Greenland and the Antarctic continue to melt, people have fled their Pacific atolls because rising water has made the islands uninhabitable, birds are shifting their ranges to the north (as are disease-bearing mosquitoes), there are people in south Florida who can't drive home during king tides, the Navy is desperate to keep Norfolk naval base open (and the DOD says that climate change is a major security threat). The list goes on. The abruptness of these changes, and the way they coincide with the gasses, is the cincher. I worry because over the years all the predictions I've seen scientists make have turned out to be optimistic. They say it's a train wreck in the making and it looks to me like the trains have already hit head-on, and we're feeling the initial jolt ("What was that?" think the past and momentarily we're going to get a very unpleasant surprise (rather, series of surprises) indeed. See May 30, above.

September 13, 2020

Whoops. Forgot to update these bloviations today.

September 14, 2020

I see that Shere Hite (does anyone else always think "sheer height" when seeing her name, or is this just the rock climber?, though the first name is pronounced "share", which reminds me instead of two guys "sharing the rope" to climb but I digress), local gal (born in Saint Joe, MO), has died. She had Parkinson's, according to a friend.

Reading Milton Friedman, like reading any Johnny One-Note, always made me gag, and I don't regret that he's "so overrated" the phrase goes. Turns out the *Times* published an influential article by him half a century ago, and the [commentary](#) says that his time has passed. My own observation, after working my entire career for corporations, was that the idea he was pushing simply did not jibe with the way corporations acted in the 1970s and at least part of the 80s. Later, this seemed to change, and they swung in his direction -- but for me this was single-minded and unbalanced. The world is not so simple and there must always be room for all our competing values, or we will end up painting ourselves into corners. Besides, what's the point of making as much money as possible, simply for the sake of making as much money as possible? Is it circular and frivolous? Where are the qualia of a well-lived life in this notion? What are you going to *do* with your money if it's in the hundreds of millions? Yes, I know that I'm ignoring "shareholder value", but similar reasoning can be made up: wealth is the economic equivalent of overkill. You're gonna die, bub. Try to be remembered with love, not revile. A question: why do so many incredibly wealthy people, starting with Carnegie (mister "A kept dollar is a stinking fish" all the way to the present (Gates, Buffett) *give their money away*? Maybe I haven't thought this through, but this belief seems to contradict the values implicit in Friedman's doctrine of selfishness.

September 15, 2020

In the past month or two the word "Black", referring to race, has commonly been capitalized. This is a change, which I thought ridiculous until it occurred to me that all ethnicities, races, religions, and nationalities I could think of are capitalized (Latino/a/x, Native American, Indian, Jewish, English, Asian, ...) -- except "black". So I'm going with it. The change is overdue, and I'm left to wonder why I never noticed the discrepancy.

Having recently read half of Carolyn Forché's book *What You Have Heard Is True*, and being unable to bear any more of it, which was so unrelentingly painful, I looked up Colonel Chacon this morning and was glad to see that Spain has [sentenced 133 years in prison](#). I hope the bastard serves every day of it, and dies the moment before he steps out the gate. Before ending this, I should point out that I don't know that Montano is actually "Chacon". Forché has refused to give the real name, in order to protect his family. But Montano was one of the gang. Read Forché's original poem (same title as this one). That incident actually happened.

September 16, 2020

I've been thinking about [climate migration](#) for years now, and finally someone is writing about it. Should look in *PLoS One*. There's got to be an extensive literature about this somewhere, it's so obvious. It won't be just within the United States -- our southern border will be swarmed, the problems Europe has been having with migrants will blow up by magnitude, Australia will be overwhelmed, so will South Africa. Anywhere, to get away from the hot parts of the planet. Just looked in Google advanced search for the literal string "climate migration" and got about 198,000 results. That number will grow.

September 17, 2020

Walking yesterday, I heard both a commercial aircraft and a distant train, and wondered why the one should be as appealing as the other, even romantic. (Clue: the quality of the jet's sound is harsh. But why do the sounds of the train's whistle and its horn, appeal?) Has anyone examined the waveforms of the sounds we find appealing or not, in search of the why? I'd love to know.

Checked out the book *Rabid* from the library. Its subtitle (digression: I've always wanted to write a paper titled "The An Examination of Subtitles")... As I was saying, the subtitle advertises the book as a "cultural history" of rabies. The disease has always fascinated me -- it's so fatal that we might as well round off the "error" and say 100% fatal without treatment. Even weirder, it can infect *all* mammals -- and it's the only disease so universal. (Of course it can't have been tested or observed in all mammal species, but given the evidence, I suppose scientists concluded this is a reasonable supposition.) Rabies is such a rich idea to mine. For instance, it's passed on by a bite. Is this where the idea of vampirism originated? My dogs, by law, have to be vaccinated against the virus every year. Britain, being an island, had managed to stamp out the disease, and I remember reading years ago that a case had turned up; the government recruited hunters into the area where it was found and kill every animal they could find. There's the heart-rending end of the movie *O* where the boy has to kill his beloved dog. And the scene in *To Kill A Mockingbird* where Gregory Peck shoots the nighthawk. Don't forget the story of Pasteur creating a treatment for the disease; that's a medical/science classic. The list goes on. I'll stop thinking up stuff now. Rabies is one of those subliminal threads in our lives that surfaces occasionally. In that respect, it could not be more different from the virus that we're facing right now, which has no history but is new, and is not so common and occasional but explicit and ubiquitous, infecting not only its victims but everyone else's thoughts.

September 18, 2020

Sometimes I read *Pocket* (yes, I'm a sucker), where I spotted [this story about Chuck Feeney](#), whom I'd never heard of until he died billions away. (See the bottom of the September 14 entry, above.) He did a very intelligent job of it, too.

I thought this map of [climate change risks by U.S. county](#) was worth saving for future reference, so stuck it here. That way I'll be able to find it in the future. We're sitting pretty here in my county, if we don't all die like rotisserie chickens.

I've been having dreams I know are related to the pandemic, but hell if I can pinpoint *how*. A couple of days ago I woke up from a dream about having dinner with Keith Richards and my roommate from 1980 (also named Keith). This morning I had a dream that the Polish customs people wouldn't let me into their country because I said I'd never been there, and they didn't believe me because I spoke fluent Polish. What the hell does this stuff mean, and why does it stick in my brain? It makes me long for high school days and wet dreams. At least they were pleasurable, even if none of that was gonna happen during waking hours.

Got an email from the clerk of Penn Valley Monthly Meeting that Shane Rowse had died. That floored me. His kids are probably in their late teens or early twenties, and the last time I saw Shane, a couple of years ago, he looked like he was in his mid 40s. I liked the guy a lot. We used to have great long conversations. Now he's up and has a heart attack. Poor guy.

Marianne. She must be distraught. As always with a death, I have no idea what to do, because the conventional words are inadequate -- but I grieve, both for him and for her.

LATER: a GoFundMe campaign started 22 hours ago so far has 256 donors, for a total of \$15,041. Clearly, I wasn't the person who loved him. You can donate [here](#). Just checked again, a couple of minutes later, and it's increased another

September 19, 2020

Discussion with relatives this afternoon about haze from the fires on the west coast. Aaron mentioned that the sun was blue and red the other day. I knew the smoke from the Oregon fires had reached the east coast, but I'd thought we were too far south to see it. Apparently not. We all agreed that we're sneezing more than usual, esp. outside, but that might be due to seasonal allergies -- though the allergy conditions are moderate or low for the next ten days. (Can't find any history. Ragweed's bad, though, so there's an alternate explanation. Isn't there always?)

Searched in Bing for covid myths snopes.com and got 22,500,000 results. (Someday I'd like to *actually see* the last 100 of those millions of supposed hits. Color me skeptical.) Headline in the Washington Post: "There are so many coronavirus myths that even Snopes can't keep up" -- but the right all know that the Post is just a liberal echo chamber. ... There's a word from the WHO, which describes the flood of material about the subject as an "infodemic". At least, I thought it was new, but I checked, and the word also gets more than a million hits. Okay, it's not new. It dates back to February 2015.

September 20, 2020

Trump wears adult diapers? I like that rumor. Spread it around... (I'm *kidding*.)

Trump stands tilted forward because he wears shoe lifts to look taller? I like that rumor. Spread it around... (Again, I'm *kidding*.)

Trump posted a fake video of Biden. That one's actually true.

September 21, 2020

Didn't have time for an entry today; too busy.

September 22, 2020

Looks like I'll have to kill another temporary email address. "Sweetheart" sent me some spam: "Salut! Perhaps you could message me and we will pursue to build up our own communication immediately. And then who really knows exactly how this could lead us towards. I'm actually young full of energy I love almost everything new, so please write to this address: liydmyla17deva@gmail.com, so that we can continue on this conversation. Seriously yours". Seriously? Now I have to remove an address that's used by numerous parties. Seriously.

September 23, 2020

Ruth Bader Ginsburg has died and it's been all over the news for days. I fail to understand this canonization of her, given her selfish behavior, which led to our current crisis. She'd had cancer three times, as well as other serious health problems. She was old enough that this situation was quite possible. She wasn't stupid. She knew it. But when she was encouraged to resign, so Obama could appoint her replacement, she refused. Her self-centered behavior set up this catastrophe. And that egocentricity pales into nothingness when compared to Mitch McConnell's behavior. That foul hypocrite has the audacity to invoke tradition and law for ramming through Trump's nominee in record time. He certainly didn't believe in that four years ago, when he stalled on Merrick Garland's nomination for *eleven months*. Now he takes the opposite tack and breaks the law (vote twice), and violate the 22nd amendment to the Constitution (take a third term in office, or even more). He demonizes his opponents, spits on the Fourth Estate, engages in shameful nepotism, gathers power into his own hands, shatters checks and balances, disciplines his party into robotic yes-men, ...) McConnell is enabling this. The next step may be that the court will go so conservative that we'll lose Obamacare, and tens of millions will lack medical coverage *in the middle of a pandemic*. Not that the Republican Party will give a shit. Nor Trump, whose entire political agenda has been motivated from the start by cancelling everything Obama did. Let the virus run unchecked -- Trump is so in empathy that he won't give a damn. But he's playing out his neuroses on all of us, and even the world. The price we pay is likely more than we can manage.

September 24, 2020

Exactly what I've been afraid of for a year: [that mad dog may refuse to leave office](#).

September 25, 2020

There are two counties in this state that vote Democratic, and mine is not one of them; it has always voted reliably Republican. But everywhere I've been (which admittedly is mostly within a few miles of my house, and thus a narrow sample) I see yard signs for Democratic candidates. I have seen nary a one for Trump, and less than a handful for of Republicans. It will be very interesting to see whether this corner of the county is an outlier this year, or whether the as a whole has swung left. Even if it does go Democratic for 2020, that can't be expected to last; it will be an anti-T reaction.

September 26, 2020

Thinking about the Supreme Court, and its fixation on deciding the constitutionality of laws and government actions (wasn't always thus.) Reminds me of nothing so much as Vatican I deciding that when the Pope speaks *ex cathedra* he is infallible. Arrogate much?

Bought a copy of Scientific American the other day, off the rack at the grocery store -- the climate change "special collector's edition"! How that rag has changed from the periodical I read in the 1970s and 80s. Back then, as a physics friend observed, the articles were "all written in code" and you had to be an expert already to understand much, but finish the articles understanding a lot more, anyway. The graphics were gorgeous, beautifully crafted by hand. That at some point (the 90s?) to computer-drawn, which looked just as precise but somehow lacked the aesthetic appeal. Like the difference between a mass-produced car and a handmade Italian supercar (Ferrari F40, say): something -- not missing. Now they seem to have replaced even the graphics, and they're burning tons of space on the page with photographs. The few remaining graphics are almost cartoonish (sometimes not even "almost"). I miss the good old but once again, I digress. What I started to say is "while we're on the subject of pandemics, as this journal pretends to because the second article listed on the cover is "Accelerating Pandemics". No surprise. Read *Spillover* (see March 1 above). And further digressing, I was surprised to see in Pocket this morning an article that [Miami Will Be Underwater Soon. Its Drinking Water Could Go First](#). There seems to be no end to the unintended side effects we're inflicting on ourselves. Our industrialization and self-indulgence in comfort and convenience and consumerism and clueless ignorance was and remains self-destructive. Barry Commoner said way back when that "There is no 'away' ", and what we've been ignoring is piling up and threatening to bury us. I thought I'd be dead before things got too bad to bear, but beginning to see that I've been a Pollyanna.

Reading an article online about the differences between Japanese minimalism and Scandinavian minimalism, there were references to Ikea versus Muji, so I looked up the latter stores. They're bicoastal -- all in U.S. States or Canadian provinces bordering the Atlantic or Pacific, except the one in Toronto. This is what sucks about living in flyover country. At least in a city. What would be totally unacceptable would be living in the wilds of Montana or somewhere. Nice to visit for vacation, but wouldn't want to live there. Not that self-sufficient, and I like my little luxuries -- library a mile away, Symphony (as soon as the virus settles down), grocery stores with my favorite stuff, and all the rest of it. Sure, I hate choppers that fly over, living cheek to jowl with neighbors, but on balance...

September 27, 2020

A lot of people write about how different they feel, staying home, avoiding things they used to do, reducing the number of trips to the grocery store, not being with family and friends, and so on. (One friend of ours has her groceries delivered when her husband has gone somewhere, he removes his clothes and showers, first thing, on entering the house. Another friend and his wife wipe down the grocery sacks before unloading them. These actions seem extreme to me.) All this writing, has affected the tone and temper of their days. They feel limited (caged?), blue, frustrated, no longer the captives of their ships. I must be insensitive -- even though I was retired and spending most of my time around the house before the pandemic hit, and though I do see my family and a couple of friends once a week (properly distanced), I should probably be feeling more like those people. This is not to say there's anything wrong with me (at least in this respect), and not to say my self-sufficiency is excessive (though maybe it is). There's something else going on, and I'm not sure what. See [this in the L.A. Times](#). I'd like to read some of those journals in a few years, when all this is over, and see how they strike. Maybe someone will collect good bits into a book and publish it. Maybe I'll be able to understand why this is less stressful for me than for everyone else.

September 28, 2020

Maybe it's being locked up by the pandemic, and coming to terms with my PD, and certainly I'm reconciled to the reality that it will never happen again, but my love affair with rock climbing is over. Ten years after the last time I took a climbing trip, I've finally divorced my pastime and feel nothing but a tiny bit of nostalgia, and probably not even that. When I remember a climb, my body no longer feels that attenuated kinesthetic sensation, and my mind does not long to be on a cliff, as if it had happened to a different me, which, I suppose, it did. If this is a sign of aging, I accept it, with neither

nor joy. Perhaps this is a bit like the original meaning of the word "nirvana", which meant "blown out", as in a candle snuffed. That's what it feels like: gone, extinguished. Or, more accurately, there is no feeling whatever.

September 29, 2020

Spent most of an hour yesterday trying to get my bank to email me daily updates again. The last one they sent was cancelled. I have repeatedly re-entered my email in my profile, and their system accepts it, and then does not send the emails, and when I look, the same error message shows: my email address is invalid. This is strange, since it hasn't changed in nearly a decade and my wife gets the emails, and her address is with the same ISP. Getting through their IVR system was a nightmare itself -- error-prone, lacking options I could use, unable to find my info, etc. When I finally talked to a human, she could not solve the problem, and put me on hold for what felt like forever (more than 5 minutes) while she opened a trouble ticket. Modern life. As one of the linemen at KCPL told me about his ruggedized laptop, "When it works, it's great. When it doesn't, I'm ready to throw it in the river". I'm ready to throw my bank in the river. We started out with a small bank that was acquired, which got acquired, which got acquired -- and every time, service got worse and fees got higher. This was the result of bank deregulation... I will hear from a technician within 5 to 7 business days. I take this to mean I will only get a *phone call*, not a resolution. The damn thing broke, and they did it, not me. All they need to do is look at what they did on September 1, or August 31. That's the first thing anyone in I.T. would do. This should not be difficult.

My father had polio, and I vaguely remember the polio scares of the 1950s, though I was very young. I'm grateful for the vaccine; I and my siblings were safe from the disease. My mother, I think, had scarlet fever, which, I seem to recall, can cause heart damage in those days. I'm grateful for antibiotics. What remains to be seen, given the possibility of increased pandemics, low investment in finding new antibiotics, and the collapse of our economy when climate change gets real (that's my personal opinion) is whether we'll find ourselves in something like the times my parents grew up in: erasing many of the medical advances we've come to take for granted. Take, for example, polio, which has an extermination program underway that's similar to that for smallpox. In 2015 there were only three countries left that had polio, according to [Voice of America](#). Now there are only two, Nigeria having been removed from the list. But I've read that the program is having problems because of Covid -- and other efforts are hampered similarly. This summary is inaccurate, because of other reasons it's too brief. See [Wikipedia](#) for more detail.

September 30, 2020

Halloween. I'm betting there will be very few trick or treaters this year.

I plan to wear both a mask *and* a face shield when I vote. I don't care about all the articles claiming face shields / visors don't work, which is probably true when used by themselves -- but if they're good enough for doctors and nurses to comb through, they're good enough for me, and anyone who looks askance at me can go straight to hell, without passing Go and without collecting \$200. Afterwards, I plan to use hand sanitizer and when I get home I will shower and change my clothes because particles can get in your hair and on your ears and neck, in addition to your hands and your clothing.

Took Pogo for a walk yesterday, and on our way back, he was attacked by a dog five or six times his size. Weirdly, the dog never opened its mouth, which is reassuring, since I just read a book about rabies. The dog, named Shadow (what it called it), simply rammed Pogo three times. I've seen plenty of dogs and their behavior, but never this; this is unique in that some dogs lunge at other dogs because they're trying to play, and don't know how. In fact, that happened to Pogo last summer. But that wasn't what this dog was doing. The idiot owner apparently was giving the dog a bath in the driveway. When he had him off-leash, he saw Pogo, and came barreling down the driveway. She must have just acquired the dog, because she was clearly surprised at his behavior. She apologized. I said nothing, because what could I say? I could have ripped the dog out, I suppose. My poor little dog made a sound I'd never heard before, the dog equivalent of a scream.

I didn't watch the debate last night, because I can't stand to see, and above all to listen to, that liar Trump. Reading a book today, he clearly acted as expected. He's what the physicists would call a singularity. Even his body language (hand gestures no one else ever uses), posture (what's with that forward lean, anyway, his arms dangling out in front as if they're in a socket?), and hair (a 74-year-old with a dyed-blond hood that invites you to wipe your feet on it) are bizarre, as if the first attempt by aliens to manufacture a human being, but they'd never worked with DNA before and ended up with an unconvincing facsimile. Send him back to Pluto.

October 1, 2020

These people who claim the pandemic is a myth baffle me. I personally know five people, and a possible sixth, who had it. Are all these deniers living in a plywood cabin in the mountains, like Ted Kaczynski? My wife works in a hospital and they've had plenty of cases. Then there are all the personal testimonies by the survivors, many of which are horrifying. This is not to mention the increased death rate, the mobile freezer trucks for storing the corpses so they don't rot and the joint, the rooms full of coffins, the cruise ships that were marooned offshore, and on and on. (See March 26, above)

There's no doubt whatever that this disease is real. But there's clearly no limit to human gullibility. I have some land Florida you'd like (with plenty of water rights!), and a bridge in Brooklyn you could put a toll booth on. I need the c I'll sell them cheap... And as for you people who believe Trump when he says we're approaching herd immunity: NC 9% of the country, based on studies of blood samples, have antibodies. If we could harness energy from the falsehood man spews, we'd go carbon neutral in no time. He's a bad apple, and those of us with minds that can think are tired of spreading his rot.

Now we're being asked to answer calls from numbers we don't recognize, on the chance that the caller is a contact tracing way. Let them leave a message on the phone and *say* they're a contact tracer. I'll either hear it and pick up, or call them later. I ain't takin' a chance on robocalls. I got my fill of them years ago. The average person gets about 200 such calls a year. My wife and I probably get that many in a month, partly because of that other woman by the same name as my who ran up tuition fees, an unpaid mortgage (I think), and at least one car loan she skipped out on. So thanks anyway I don't recognize the caller, I ain't gonna answer.

[The pandemic has highlighted deep-rooted problems in the federal tribal health service.](#) This is not news. See Marcel above.

10 months since the appearance of the virus, and a million deaths. That's 100,000 a month, or more than 3,000 deaths a day. Keep in mind that this is likely an underestimate. Nor does it include the economic hardship, and other hardships it does include the lingering effects of the disease, like my friend who needed months before he felt he was fully recovered. [See here for more.](#)

I've been seeing a new kind of trash, related to the virus, the last couple of months: one-use masks discarded on the street as trash, across the street from my local shopping center. The stores must pick up the ones outside their doors, because there are none to be seen there.

No trick or treaters at all last night. That's unique. (Later: Halloween's a month away, duh.)

Got a text at 10:15 pm last night. I'm tired of late-evening pages when I'm getting ready for bed -- they mess up my preparations (the phone just keeps ringing until I punch it out), and the PD causes me enough sleep problems already to mention that all those years of being paged out for work still rankle. So I looked at the message, on my tiny screen a small sign, too small and fuzzy to be legible, from my niece. I replied "Late. Send during the DAY." There was another on the third, a picture of a newborn. (Sound of hand slapping forehead.) Oops. She just had her baby. I'm going to have some 'splainin' to do. At least the child's birthday will be easy to remember: Halloween. (Later: Halloween's a month away.)

October 2, 2020

Chris Wallace on the debate: "I never dreamt that it would go off the tracks the way it did." Either he's lying or he's I'm an average Midwesterner, and it worked out exactly the way I expected. Trump has made a career of taking it to the bottom, and then blasting the hole to a new, deeper bottom.

I logged into Instagram yesterday (yes, that's unlike me, but I'm crushing on Aspen Mansfield; don't judge me), and have four followers? Excuse my skepticism.

Through the years I've volunteered a number of times on election day or earlier, to drive people to the polls, hang lit signs on doors, act as a pollwatcher, and other stuff. Not this year. If it weren't for the virus, I'd volunteer again.

More on [the Native American virus problem](#). Scroll down, just past the middle.

I see that Trump has tested positive for coronavirus. Strange to say, I felt no glee, no schadenfreude, when I read that. For a number of reasons, I hope his symptoms aren't bad. I also hope this is a lesson to the morons who believed all he spewed about the virus, the disease, the pandemic. He's old enough, and male, so he's at serious risk. If he's incapacitated or dies, the crisis we've been facing will be an order of magnitude worse than it already is. Let this be a lesson to the who went maskless: this is what happens when you don't cover your mouth and nose.

October 3, 2020

I was curious what QAnon would have to say about Trump testing positive, so I looked it up yesterday. [QAnon folks believe the virus is fake, but also that Trump has it.](#) There's also this: [... the president is stepping out of the public eye in anticipation of what they call The Storm.](#) If these people weren't dangerous, these playground rumors would be amusing. I say KMN, but they might take me seriously. They probably don't understand irony.

Here's a weird notion (but not as weird as Trump being President; for four years, every time I've heard him referred that, a circuit in my brain has gone "Trump? President? Does not compute", and a few million more neurons burn out. Where was I? Oh, yes -- suppose Trump dies of the virus and Pence ascends, but he already has the virus, too, and he's before January. As I recall, the Speaker of the House is next, so Pelosi would be our first female President. This would be the conservatives nuts, because they hate her. Never mind that, though. How long would she stay in office? Would there be an alternate (snap?) election? How would the Republicans choose their candidates? The Supreme Court would, of course, feel obligated to meddle, probably on the side of the Republicans, especially if Trump had won the Electoral College. Chaos would ensue. So let's hope Trump survives the virus, unless you want to chance a Pence Presidency. That possibility gives me the shudders, no, the creeps. There's something reptilian about that man. See July 6, above, the paragraph, for something similar but simpler and less hazardous to us all.

I see that in addition to Trump, at least three Republican senators have tested positive. Two of them serve on the Judiciary Committee! If it wasn't for bad luck, the GOP wouldn't have no luck at all. Looks like Amy Coney Barrett is going to wait -- there may not be enough votes to confirm. (Who knows? She might have caught it from Trump when she was maskless and undistanced, though she's negative so far. There's time yet. A positive result would really screw the party. Others who tested positive are the re-election campaign manager Bill Stepien (oops, there goes!), Kellyanne Conway (couldn't happen to a nicer person), RNC chair Ronna McDaniel, and Chris Christie. I empathize with them, but still point out that most of this is likely their own faults for not taking precautions. May you all get well soon, with a minimum of suffering. After that, please resign and get out of the way for a competent adult to replace you.

October 4, 2020

Stumbled across this: [Trump's lies](#). What always baffled me was that it took people, esp. media, so long to start calling out his lies. It was clear almost from the beginning of his campaign for the Republican nomination.

The Republicans, with their inability to wear masks (that's not as broad a brush as it sounds, when you examine the evidence), remind me of the hippies who didn't wear condoms and spread their STDs around. Both cases are described by the phrase "the gift that keeps on giving". Welcome to the creed (ideology?) of selfishness. Curious, that these two groups are usually considered to be at opposite ends of the philosophical spectrum.

October 5, 2020

Saw Trump on TV, talking from the hospital. (Muted him, though, because that lying voice of his drives me up the wall. I had the same reaction to Reagan, though he was a different kind of phony.) Though he was behind a desk and wore a starched white shirt, he looked like shit. He's obviously ill. This happy talk the White House doctor is dishing us so much bullshit to me. I do feel sorry for the Donald, but I'm beyond sick of the lies and nonsense and the smoke blown up in his face. If Biden wins, January 20 can't come soon enough for me. I've been grinding my teeth for four Goddamn years while this misbegotten chimera struts like the offspring of a tail-less peacock and a mad dog. Biden and crew will have to spend their time reassembling the government and otherwise undoing the damage this wretch has inflicted on us and humankind in general. It may not even be altogether possible.

Today's entry is number 200, unless I'm off by one or two. I wonder how many hours I've put in on this little project.

October 6, 2020

No entry today. It slipped my increasingly slippery mind.

October 7, 2020

... and continuing with my recent observation about the number of entries in this blog (ugly word, that), I have decided to quit at 366, which will be exactly a year and a day.

Holy Mother of God: *Michael Hayden* is backing Biden! I never expected *that*. He may be the most disingenuous person on the planet, slicker than Teflon, and he's taking a stand he's not paid for.

I have been trying and trying to figure out why all the male Republican Senators are behind this push to confirm Amy Coney Barrett. Either Trump has something on the ones who might show some spirit (hired a PI to look into their extramarital affairs, maybe?), or they're a bunch of ball-less wonders. The latter would not surprise me; it's the thugs like them who are generally gutless when truly threatened. Now that I think of it, though, Jeff Flake was more or less forced out by the conservative base, and maybe there were others I've forgotten. But what the hell happened to guys like Ben Sasse or Mitt Romney? Is there some kind of infectious right-wing ethical virus infecting the Senate? The only Senators with testicles are Lisa Murkowski and Susan Collins, and Collins has kowtowed in the past, so maybe she's worried about all those independent-minded Mainers who no longer trust her -- she's in a tight race. Maybe Murkowski stands alone.

October 8, 2020

Everyone keeps talking about carbon as if it were the only greenhouse gas, but it only accounts for 40% of the problem. Why the hell aren't we discussing methane and fluorinated gases and the rest of the culprits? (I forget their names now, by the way, at least as recently as last year the Chinese were releasing CFCs into the atmosphere by the millions of tons, though maybe this has changed recently.) This is like thinking we'll eliminate car wrecks by outlawing alcohol. The problem has multiple sources.

Mephitic software continually robo-calls my cell phone (at least 4 times yesterday, as of 5 p.m., and probably more, and I deleted my "missed" calls in the late morning). They always use a phone number that pretends to be the same area code as my cell phone, varying the last 4 digits, and never leave a message. How naive do they think I am? If they were a human, they'd have given up by now. It's a sad truth of modern life that I have no recourse except to interrupt what they're doing, look at the ANI (supposed calling phone number) to see whether it's family / friend / organization I deal with, pick up the phone, talk back, and try to get re-absorbed in whatever I was doing. I lack the information I need in order to drive to their data center, sledgehammer the door open, and turn a flamethrower on their servers. Not that I'd do that. But if our federal government would actually act *in the interest of the human beings it's supposed to serve*, instead of selling itself to special interests, this problem would have disappeared years ago... I thought this rant would make me feel better. On the contrary,

And while on the subject of mephitic software, why are there 20 Chrome files (dlls, JSONs, and other stuff) on my computer that I've never installed that crap? And I can't find it to uninstall it, because the control panel doesn't show it. Not actually installed, just has a few fingers in the pie, as it were. In readiness. Google is so good at looking over our shoulders that it makes the Stasi seem like amateurs. But they seem friendlier than the Stasi as limned in *The Lives of Others*. Most people shrug their shoulders about Google (and Facebook and Apple -- yes, them too -- and Amazon, and ...) and say either "Nothing to hide," or "There's nothing I can do". Both of these statements are false. The reason the Europeans, as I've written about (July 16 and 17), are obsessed with privacy and we are not is that they've had first-hand exposure to the rampant, ubiquitous surveillance, and we have not. We're going to be really fucking sorry when this blows up in our faces (*re* blows up, worse than Equifax and Cambridge Analytica and Bush 43's illegal snooping on American citizens and all other shitstorms we've had in the last couple of decades), like Chris Wallace saying he never dreamed the debate would go up the way it did. The ostriches will cry "What?", and it will be too late. Those who warned us will have no satisfaction having been right, because they'll be dragged down with everyone else. And by the way, Europe is not a paradise, either. CCTVs are ubiquitous in England, where they're used for surveillance.

No news recently about demonstrations, or DHS trying to take over police functions, or any of that stuff. Gotta wonder where it seems to have evaporated. I see that Chad Wolf, he of the startling resemblance to Joe McCarthy may have his like never again (insert here an emoticon for depressing (im)probability), has got the head job in his department. (Why does that "homeland security" sound vaguely fascist? Is it just me, or does it smack of brown shirts and the like?) Quelle surprise: the half-life in office of these guys is much much shorter than it has been under other presidents. Keep that resume lined up, Chad boy.

I see the little children playing soccer in the park, unmasked and within inches of each other, and their coaches, too. Parents risking their children, and more likely the grandparents the children love and can infect.

I remember thinking when the worst places for the virus were in the South (the former Confederacy) that it was just ignorant yahoos playing virus roulette. Yes, I'm as prejudiced as anybody. As Lenny Bruce observed (I had to look it up because I didn't remember the quote exactly): "[T]he white Southerner has been getting kicked in the ass for the last 100 years. 'Folks, I think this nuclear fission is'... 'Aw, shut up you schmuck! You don't know anything.' " I apologize for one of the non-Southern assholes doing the asskicking. Now the worst places are in the middle strip: North Dakota, Wisconsin. Recently I saw a map with Kansas, Nebraska, South Dakota, and Montana as the four worst states. (Specify the "middle strip", as I called it, why is the Midwest not the middle of the West, and why is it nearly half a world away from the Mideast? Geography should be rational. All we have to do is look at the dang map. It shouldn't be difficult to name the worst places so they're not misleading / contradictory / hilariously inept.)

October 9, 2020

Students and faculty at Notre Dame are furious at their leader, Rev. Jenkins, for not using his mask at that Rose Garden contagion jamboree. The guy has a Ph.D. in philosophy. Did that not include the study of ethics?

I'm reluctant to comment on the fly that landed on Pence's head for two minutes, though much could be said. "Shit for brains" is one of my more vigorous reactions. (Note to self: "reluctant"? Like Antony claiming he only comes to bury Caesar, not to praise him. There's a word for this rhetorical device, which escapes me.)

News in my email this morning: a hack of data, including mine, from the other hospital I go to. This is becoming ro Eddie Bauer, Equifax, the B&B, Wattpad (my partly-fake data), one hospital I use for medical care, and now the oth hospital. Plus also the linguistics server at BYU. I'm probably missing something. This new one sounds like the one other hospital, but the earlier one notified me by a mailed letter, which I'd have to dig out. I think they both used Blk which was the third party that was hacked this time. So maybe the hackers are making the rounds of Blackbob clien hasn't Blackbob tightened up security yet? And why aren't the hospitals demanding that our data be destroyed, and t their business elsewhere? (Later: Becker's hospital review reported 66 healthcare providers that underwent cyberatta the first half of 2020.)

October 10, 2020

An unexpected bit of news in the *Times* coronavirus briefing Thursday: "Senator Mitch McConnell, the majority lea that he had been avoiding 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue for months because of the lack of virus precautions. 'My impr was that their approach to how to handle this was different from mine and what I insisted that we do in the Senate, v to wear a mask and practice social distancing,' Mr. McConnell said." At least when it comes to self-preservation he's toady. Even for him, there are limits. Color me surprised.

Once again, I saw student athletes up at the high school within a foot of each other, unmasked, and their coach, also unmasked and close to them, giving them a talk. Then they whine when some of them test positive and their practic cancelled. I'm increasingly disgusted with this place, where people insist on living a daydream and not having to ac consequences of their actions. Idiots who insist that even if you get the disease you'll recover, like Trump. Yeah, a lc people do -- but you're playing a game of *chance*. Apparently this is too subtle a concept for their simple minds. Of seven people I know who have had it (yes, two more have gotten it, and yes I know that seven is too small a sample offer this as illustrative only), two had little problem recovering, two had some trouble, two I haven't questioned abo subject, and one said he didn't feel like he was starting to get back to normal until half a year or so had elapsed. His problems were horrendous. Unlike many, though, he may be free of permanent damage. To the fools who put us all with their delusion that everything's okay, I say: "You've got to ask yourself one question: 'Do I feel lucky?' Well, do punk?" In the movie, all the rounds in the Magnum had been fired, and though I wouldn't wish it on anyone, some o people will lose their little game of Russian roulette.

October 11, 2020

I once told a coworker who caused a lot of problems, "Curtis, you're a catalyst for chaos". He was proud, and added phrase "catalyst for chaos" under his email signature. That was twenty years ago; now a search for the phrase turns 1 zillions of hits -- and the first image is of Trump. (Note: I had this entry all planned out before I did the search, the r which surprised me. I expected a dry well.) I remember Trump pointing at a painting of Andrew Jackson and boasti a disrupter, too". Him and his weird fixations. Trump was certainly right, for once, but he has no reason to be proud

October 12, 2020

I'm struggling with my linguistics paper, rambling hither and yon, from Kimhi's *Thinking and Being* to Claude Shan paper on data communication to the use of symbolic logic in semantics to Tufte's book on visual presentation, trying my arms around all this stuff that's related to my central idea, but I can't organize it. The subject's too big and my m small. I'm wrestling with an octopus. I need oxygen. I need a higher IQ.

The sight of people wearing masks remains subliminally jarring. When I go to the grocery, or a workman comes to t house, or I go to the library, it seems a bit like living in Hong Kong or somewhere. Of course, teens and younger stil rare exceptions, or when required to, to enter a store, don't bother. If they're walking around together, they're unmasl Only the adults are consistent.

We've been going through this for half a year now, and there's at least some evidence of fatigue with the inconvenie the militia that was planning to kidnap the governor of Michigan, for one. There are plenty more examples. What hz this goes on for another year? Will we get used to it, or will there be a medical train wreck when we abandon cautio what will happen to the economy? How will we bring it back? What happens to the education of our children? Ther of talk about how to deal these problems now, but what about the aftereffects, the long term?

I see that the water main in front of our neighbor's house (the next house to the west) has broken again, for the seco in a week. Water bubbling up into the street from the ground, like a big spring. Makes me reluctant to drink water fr tap. Tonight's the night we host the siblings for dinner, too.

October 13, 2020

I've been flooded with Republican mailings lately -- those big ones made of heavy, glossy paper. All of them are against Democratic candidates, and all of them have Photoshopped the pictures of the candidates to make them ghastly: sall dark, lined faces, gloomy expressions, etc. I momentarily turn against them when I see those disgusting likenesses. Psychologists are right: appearance does affect how we're (or at least *I'm*) disposed toward people.

October 14, 2020

A friend and I were discussing movie theaters and the financial problems they face because of the pandemic, and that some of them may have to close up shop. (I expect that the moneybags like investment banks and private equity and such will just buy them up for pennies on the dollar and then use them as a cash cow, like ants stroking aphids. But again I digress.) He pointed out that movies can be delivered right to the screens in your house now. To me, this is almost irrelevant, because the experience of seeing a movie in a theater is different. There's some ritual involved: you find out the time, drive to the theater, buy your ticket, find a seat. Then the screen is big, the room is dark, and if you're lucky no one talks. The experience is immersive. At home, you're surrounded by your own furniture, and the doorbell may ring or your dogs start barking or noise outside. Not to mention the temptation to pause the movie because you have the notion to do something else. . . . This breaks up the concentration, the state of *flow*. It's not the same at all.

October 15, 2020

One of my neighbors seems to think I'm an expert on the internet, and was telling me that he hopes to sell his art online. I was soliciting my advice, without directly saying so. (In English class or criticism, this would be called the subtext; in linguistics, it's part of pragmatics.) I gave him a little obvious advice, such as you have to spend a lot of time promoting yourself. Also, you need something that appeals to an audience, and you have to find that audience, and you have to use a better word, stroke them ("groom"? them, though these days that has unpleasant sexual connotations). Most of the people who try to make money on the internet fail, I think, for lacking one of these, or simply from bad luck -- and I don't know what factor, such as when you get noticed by a widely-read website. Me, I have none of these, and gave up decades ago, though I do wonder where I squirreled away that online journal with zillions of entries, some of them not bad. I could dig it up if I probably, without too much trouble, but haven't bothered. Don't care much, really. I don't mind being my own best friend. (That sounds solipsistic, doesn't it? Reminds me of Schopenhauer's remark that the solipsist is a madman shut up in an impregnable blockhouse. Hey, there's a lot to be said in favor of living in such a place. For starters, it's safe: no one can get at you. I expect it could be kinda lonely, but not really being one, I don't know, and not wanting to be one, I'll never know. Where's Sidney Morgenbesser when we need him? He'd be able to shoot the bombshell question at solipsists. (When a student asked him, "How do I know I exist?", Morgenbesser replied, "Who's asking?"))

The more time passes, the more careful I get about the virus -- going fewer places, taking a shower after prolonged contact with a stranger, such as the guy who came to set up a piece of equipment yesterday and whom I helped, etc.

October 16, 2020

Eleven members of the Swiss Guard have tested positive. Apparently even the Pope is at risk. I wish him well -- Francis is the only Pope I've liked in my lifetime, except possibly John XXIII, but I was very young when he reigned. As an ex-Catholic, I merely observe that if we'd had the like of Francis sooner and oftener, fewer of us would have been vaccinated with our feet. (Not that I wouldn't have anyway, because in my case it was inevitable: my faith was shattered when I moved from a Catholic school to a prep school and learned about all the dirty laundry in the church's history. Then I started thinking things through, and all the unfounded assumptions emerged from the background. This bull about taking matters on is circular reasoning, to say the least. "Pay no attention to the man behind the curtain.")

October 17, 2020

There are a handful of poets whose work speaks to me: Rilke (especially the first *Duino Elegy*), Neruda (most of all *Quiet*), W. S. Merwin (anything; they're all great), Wallace Stevens, and Philip Larkin. Maybe one or two others, an [occasional poem](#) by someone else. But for the most part, poetry flies past my ear. I'm reading *Averno*, by Louise Glück (I regret the missing umlaut -- this is written with Notepad), and I see that there's much going on in her poetry. But what she's doing escapes me, and this is largely the case with other acclaimed poets and poems. Personal flaw. Like everyone else, I have plenty of them. Here's a poem I wrote for my wife:

Who loves more, you or her?
Do you think it matters? Leave it tangled.
The strongest things are those
we cannot see: time, and love.
Stay alive -- she needs you.
Without you, who would love her?

Yes, it's in motion. You can't change that, either.
Just stay, until that final stop, and hope
you can say goodbye.

Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us now... The Trump administration is about to [change regulations for the collection of biometric data](#). See my many rants about privacy, above. And you thought I was paranoid. "Responsible governing" is the first step toward a police state, more like. Can we say "mission creep"? "Camel's nose"? "Slippery slope"? Trump has in common with those guys he admires -- Kim Jong Un, Putin, Duterte, Bolsonaro, etc. This is more of his dictatorship. The department didn't think this up on their own. Biden will need a team of dozens just to undo all this last-minute stuff. If the lawsuits get to the Supreme Court, we can kiss our privacy goodbye, with a conservative supermajority.

October 18, 2020

When this virus is beaten and we finally start getting back to normal (or what will pass as the "new normal"), people are going to be vacationing like mad. The national parks will be jammed, ditto resorts, our big cities will be full of European tourists as theirs will be full of Americans, and so on. Maybe this will help our economy come back, if there are enough businesses still in operation to meet demand. Maybe some of those people who lost their jobs will get them back, and some of the small businesses can re-open. I hope so. Regardless, though, I think the demand from vacationers will be high. You read it here first, so "That will be twenty-five cents, please" (to quote Count Basie).

When did the phrase "the new normal" come into use? I don't remember hearing it as recently as five years ago. Given George Orwell's observations being a good guide to this sort of thing, I [looked him up on the phrase](#) just now. It's been around longer than I thought.

"Interactions may be less positive when they become artificial", also known as: "What cows can teach us about zoology" triggered a flash memory of a weekend project I went on, my first or second year of college, with dozens of fellow students all jammed together, doing exercises that we were shown later applied to international relations. The point here is that working with them in close quarters and working on these projects was massive fun. I'd gladly go back and do it again right now, not for this Goddamn virus.

I'm starting to miss going places with my wife -- restaurants, movies, ... We haven't done a lot of this in recent years and I'm starting to yearn for it.

October 19, 2020

Walked to Hattie's yesterday, to get a green tea, and the person in front of me looked like my cousin Linda. I said "Linda" and she shook her head and apologized. But I still think it was her: the bearing, the thinness, the unusual hair cut, the way she could see of her face, all were exactly correct. I think she didn't have her hearing aids in (she's hard of hearing), and wasn't wearing her glasses, and I was too far away, and was wearing a mask myself, so she misunderstood and didn't recognize me. If it wasn't her, she has a secret twin.

My forty-some-year-old Patagonia pile jacket has finally quit on me. The zipper teeth keep getting out of alignment and it's a *hell* of a time unzipping it yesterday. Maybe replace the zipper, because the rest of the jacket is still good. Not bad for a jacket I've worn climbing, hiking, working in the yard, and miscellaneous daily living. I think it's one of the jackets from the second-year production run. Certainly it was the mid 1970s when I bought it.

What I miss most while hermiting, at least at the moment, is meeting new people -- striking up a conversation with someone at the gym and making a new friend (or at least acquaintance), chatting with someone at a coffeehouse, going to a party or whatever. They always leave a piece of themselves with me, like spy dust that sticks, a memory of an observation they made, a piece of their history they described, or simply their general presence. This aloneness has reminded me what a marvelously varied species we are. Human beings are endlessly different from each other, and most of them are fascinating. If you get to know them well enough, after a while you'll hear some remarkable story, something they did, or that they went to, or a place they went to, or an event they witnessed. Something you'd never expect. This world is full of extraordinary people masquerading as ordinary. Even when they *are* ordinary, they're remarkable anyway. Everybody is normal, until you get to know them. Then they're unique.

October 20, 2020

Why I object to [political correctness](#), put better than I possibly could. Even comedians (with the possible exception of Chappelle) are self-censoring these days, and comedy acts should be a total free zone for the expression of *anything* (other comics take them down if they go too far.) Here's [more on the subject](#), by some heavyweights. We could use [this](#) as a first step in returning to candor.

October 21, 2020

Most of our lives are private, I think: the constant stream of ideas, memories, speculations, fantasies. The things we tell anyone because they're too sacred to us, or too shameful. The desire to merge with someone, and almost never a that; among the few cases I know is that of Chan / Zen, where transmission is said to be direct, "mind to mind". I believe it is possible, but most of us experience this only rarely, if at all. I think it's more common among identical twins. (I wouldn't want to have an identical twin, someone who feels the same way you do, and who always understands you. An identical twin I knew once said, "I never had an identity crisis. All my friends did in high school, but there was always someone there who felt the same way I did." Yup. I met her identical twin, and they sure seemed that way.) I once pointed out to my son that the fundamental fact of human existence, at least as I see it, is that we're *embodied*. So we are also. Thomas Wolfe never tired of pointing out: "Naked and alone we came into exile. In her dark womb we did not know our mother's face; from the prison of her flesh have we come into the unspeakable and incommunicable prison of this earth. Which of us has known his brother? Which of us has looked into his father's heart? Which of us has not remained forever in prison-pent? Which of us is not forever a stranger and alone?" But that's incomplete. There are those moments of merging into our environment, or with a specific other person. In the end, I think that none of us exists as an entity, but only as an intersection of things, events, other people, ... -- like a woven carpet, we are not a single thing, but the interweaving of innumerable other existents, impossibly complex. And I think that when I die, all my parts will separate and be recycled. I will be no more, though really I never was. This self, and thus this separation, is an illusion. The mystics are right.

Starting today, the predicted daily high temperatures are: 54, 60, 84, 49, 51, 59, 37. How's that supposed to work? Where do these anomalies come from?

October 22, 2020

Woke up this morning (or went to bed thinking about, and remembered) trail names, the monikers people bestow on themselves, or which are bestowed on them by others, when hiking. This was prompted by a memory of my first day on the Colorado Trail last year, when someone asked me whether I had a trail name and I said no, and he replied that I probably would by the end of my walk. (At that point I told him my climbing nickname.) What's this urge to assume a different identity when out on a long hike? There's a woman with a Youtube channel about backpacking calls herself Dixie (with a southern accent). People have names like Boxcar and Ice and Oz, or Lost and Found, Mouse King, Magneto, Heat and Banana Split... I pulled these from the internet because I can't remember any of the trail names people told me last year. If I go on the trail again next year, I'll invent a name in advance, because I prefer to choose, rather than to have one bestow on me. Could always use Laggard, I suppose, since everyone else is faster than me. Somehow, though, that lacks the trail name originality of the best names. I guess I could use Alpha, for Alpha Synuclein. Nah. People would think I was calling myself the alpha wolf or something. Nuke, as shorthand for synuclein. No. That would invoke Duke Nukem. Well, dang. No. "Dang"? I've got it: Spartacus. When I introduce myself, I'll say, "I am Spartacus", and see how many people get the reference.

Surfing around the internet yesterday, I thought I'd look at sites on (the euphemistically named) "love" dolls. (Who I wonder where these impulses come from? I certainly wouldn't want one.) That is one weird little corner of the World Wide Web. All I have to say is, the guys who buy and use those things have more imagination than I do, because if I bought one, the money would be squandered. I couldn't have sex with anything inanimate: no speech, no volitional movement, no eyes. Not to mention that they'll never have an orgasm, or come up with some creative idea while lovemaking. If you get them to dress sexy, you have to do it for them, because they can't move... It baffles me, how those guys can do that. Desperate incels, maybe, leaving the gene pool by leaving no children to carry on their line. [Cherry 2000](#), where are all those Damn consumer goods. They never last.

I thought [the media manipulation casebook](#) looked interesting. We need more of that kind of thing.

Saw a reference to the "fake pandemic". Knowing eight people who have had the virus, being married to someone who works in a hospital, and seeing the incontrovertible evidence, I find this sort of nonsense incomprehensible. Fake pandemics. The fakery belongs to the deniers. There's a real world out there, and things going on in it that are very different from what goes on in the heads of these fantasists.

[Google's getting worse](#) (i.e., its results are less accurate). Google is still better than Bing, or DuckDuckGo, which is pretty crappy. But I use Bing most of the time anyway, since I don't like being spied on, and for most searches Bing is pretty adequate. (Back in the early days, I remember, different search engines were better for different subjects: a certain one for tech questions, a different one for news...) It's amusing that whenever anyone, such as the Justice Department, accuses Google of something, such as being a monopoly, their reply almost never directly addresses the accusation. Reminds me of politicians answering the question they would have preferred to be asked, instead of the one they actually were asked.

My wife says she never gets earworms. Wish I could say the same. "Danny Boy" is running through my head this morning. I haven't heard in years, maybe even decades, and which I don't know the words to. So the few words and the melody play, and then only the tune. This is aggravating. I just now looked it up. You could get Type II diabetes from the lyrics. Type I from the way the song is sung. Sentiment has its place, but must we take it to excess?

Pocket had a story on *The Day After* yesterday. Rather, the day after yesterday being today, I should have written "Yesterday Pocket had a story ..." I remember a scene that was shot at the old St. Joseph hospital in east K.C. The contract said the hospital was not to be torn down until after the filmmakers had arrived, shot their scene, and departed, but someone else showed up, and the place was already half demolished. They were shooting in the ruin anyway when I and my then-girlfriend went to snag some sandstone blocks to put in my front walk. (Hey, better to re-use it than to see it go to a landfill.) As for the movie itself, I failed to see what all the fuss was about. Sure, everyone will die. I'd taken that for granted all along, and I was surprised that most people didn't seem to have adjusted to the reality yet. Also, I thought that flick was amateurish and unconvincing. But the internet asserts that it had quite an emotional effect on its viewers, including then-President Ford, and that the movie may have helped inspire his nuclear arms limitation agreement with what was then the Soviet Union. May it rest in peace (and good riddance, I say).

October 23, 2020

Looking at the references in my linguistics paper, though I didn't bother counting them all, it's fairly clear that the titles of most of the books are not about linguistics, but philosophy and math (including logic), so I appear to be going back to my roots. I can dignify them as such. Strange, to write a paper about linguistics for which the books (and probably the internet references as well) are not directly in the field, but I suppose that's to be expected, since I'm attacking epistemology that underlies the field of linguistics. Frankly, the unexamined nature of the assumptions in the field astonishes me. Why haven't linguists looked into them? Much of the foundation they rely on needs serious repair, and some needs replacement.

Gotta change up my workout routine; need to shock the old bod with something new. And anyway, certain muscles are getting overused, and others not taxed enough. This staying-at-home because of the pandemic has limited what I can do. When I return to the gym, it's gonna be tough.

The final debate between the two candidates of our ossified political duopoly was last night. "Debate"? It is to laugh. I can't watch, since hearing and seeing that simulacrum of a human being always costs me more neurons than I can afford. Wasn't this event a waste of bandwidth? What percentage of viewers changed, or made up, their minds? My bet is that the percentage is in the *extremely* low single digits, and that any benefit of said made-up minds was far outweighed by the increased polarization the event probably generated. I do hope the polarization change was minimal, and I say that despite being who is highly opinionated, at least concerning our current (and I hope temporary) crybaby in chief.

Marjorie Champion, the model for Snow White, has died at 101. She danced into her last year of life. Would that we had such love for what we do.

Vermont has not had a Covid death in more than two months. That's where my youngest brother lives, so I'm glad.

October 24, 2020

Keith Jarrett stopped performing a couple of years ago because of strokes. His Koln Concert was extraordinary, and I wish they'd taken out his moans. Really distracting, those. He says he's a Christian Scientist. As one who believes that we are (for lack of a better term) the particles of a world that constantly affects us in unexpected and unpredictable ways (like tiny bits of matter experiencing Brownian motion), I've always found the core belief of Christian Science preposterous. We aren't in control of *anything*, including our bodies. We are infinitely weak and limited in many domains, but our big flawed brains delude us into thinking we know and can do more than is in fact possible. Christian Science is a particularly egregious example of this human shortcoming.

Oliver Sacks' essay *A General Feeling of Disorder* I can't fully identify with, having spent a vanishingly small part of my life in that state. Or course I know when I'm ill, but I have never had those afflictions like migraine (I exclude the occasional migraines I get, which, though annoying, are only that and nothing more) that lead to the sort of generalized ontological qualia he's referring to. Strangely, even my PD does not cause me to experience the highly specific sort of malaise he refers to. Maybe I'm simply impervious, or nearly so, to it. Even when I was dying in the ICU, back in late 1986 or early 1987, I don't think I experienced it, though my brain was so underfunctioning that I was almost vegetable, which could explain why I didn't notice it. Or maybe I've simply forgotten the times I had it. Regardless, I do think I understand what he's referring to so I clearly have had it. I feel that it probably happened more when I was young, diminishing as I aged, which is the opposite of what one would expect from the essay. (As has been said: "Old age. It ain't for sissies.") I do feel that my mind and the increasing need to cater to its increasing weaknesses, is coming to rule my quotidian existence. That's about as close as I get to Sacks' "general feeling", though I anticipate that this would change if I got, say, cancer, which will rub yo

in the dirt very hard indeed. The closest thing to Sacks' essay I can think of is Dostoevsky's description of an epileptic seizure, probably in *The Idiot*.

October 25, 2020

Because of a case of the virus, Nepal has suspended trekking and climbing in the Everest region. I remember seeing mountain (though I couldn't pick out specifically which one Everest was) when I flew into Kathmandu, probably on three most terrifying aircraft landings of my life. Saw the mountain again from a rooftop in that city, though again I pick out precisely which one it was. Though more than a hundred miles away, I think, the mountains still required *n* look *up* to see their tops, covered in white, a ragged serration in the sky.

The virus is surging. The graph of infections in this country looks like a side view of a series of increasingly higher mountain ranges: rise to a peak, dip, rise to a higher peak, dip, then rise a third time to our highest peak yet. Record of infections in more than a dozen states, and record deaths in some. Hospitals are filling up; some have had to turn patients. And yet, the number of people here who say they'll be willing to take a vaccine has dropped by about 10% that means the line will be shorter for me. Weirdest of all, the Trump administration shut down the vaccine office in and Human Services. It's still gone, and the department won't say why. I wonder whether I can move to New Zealand while.

How the virus is [changing our habits](#).

Family: my son lives in Colorado, where cases are accelerating. My youngest brother lives in Vermont, which has *n* the virus in superb fashion: no deaths for months.

Might be time soon, when I've finished up the novel and the linguistics paper, to switch to writing a memoir. My son on a number of occasions for stories of my life, and even said I didn't give him enough. Maybe write them all down them to him. Probably a much more difficult job than writing a novel or an academic paper. How the hell can I organize a mess? Chronologically won't work, and writing by themes would be difficult. Just write a boatload of short chapters read through them looking for the threads to tie up the untidy package into some sort of shape.

While I was walking Pogo yesterday, a Republican candidate whom I won't name introduced herself and asked whether I voted. I told her not yet, and she offered me some campaign literature, which I declined, saying my mind was made up. She identified herself thus: "I'm the Republican", to which I answered, "I'm voting Democratic". Then she tried to re-engage asking a couple of questions about whether I couldn't change my mind, for instance because of her "community involvement". I said no and kept walking. She didn't seem able to understand, and I don't give a rat's ass. I've been with the party since Gingrich in 1994, when it started its continuing infernal slide. I have no love for the Democrats they're the only realistic hope for getting the freaks out of office. Maybe if there's a bloodbath and these people lose of both houses and the Presidency, they'll wake up and return to the real world. One can only hope. In the meantime despairingly, in a state where Trump leads Biden by 10 or 12 points, depending on the poll. This is what's happened party of Lincoln, Eisenhower, Rockefeller, and Jerry Ford, that its members follow an incompetent, narcissistic ass who'd rather be a dictator than President.

This being Sunday, I'm tempted to take the car for a drive to Lawrence -- cars need to be used, and mine rarely is, at only for short jaunts. The university should be empty, and I could drop the Cavalli-Sforza book in the library return. out of the house, too. But I think I'll wait a week, it being just possible I'll use the book some more in my paper.

October 26, 2020

It has been said, more or less, that those who deploy brutal candor are more interested in the brutality than the candor is true, at times, of me. The other day, for instance, the short shrift I gave to the woman who aspires to political office as I walks, to try to force myself to go fast, forced exercise being useful in holding back PD. So her desire to talk tripped my impatience. But that rudeness may become another bit of political resentment on her part, discouraging her from working across the aisle if she is elected. Another: I was once at the gym, on a recumbent bike, sitting next to a fellow another, similar bike, and he started up a conversation about climate change. He was watching Fox News, I think, on screen, and remarked that he didn't see why some people thought they knew more about the subject than others. (But that true of *every* subject?) So I hit him with half a dozen observations: the Northwest Passage is open for the first time in human history; residents of atolls in the south Pacific have had to leave their islands because rising seas have made them uninhabitable; some people in south Florida can no longer drive to their houses during king tides; the Navy is frantically Norfolk naval base open; and so on. I said that the evidence was clear, and "All you have to do is look". He was silent after a minute got off his bike and left. I did my point of view no favors by beating him over the head with my facts, certainly didn't change his mind. On the contrary, he probably dug his heels in harder. A friend of mine, when I told the story, said that you can't take the world on your shoulders. It's my belief that even though you can't, you should never

try to, every chance you get. That's what will lead to change. But skillful means are the way to do it. You catch more with honey.

Reading Max Boot's book *The Corrosion of Conservatism: Why I Left the Right*. Not bad, though I can't say much for his style, which, like that of many journalists, is functional, but nothing to make me get up and dance with joy. The book is honest, though just occasionally a note of self-congratulation creeps in, which brings to mind Comey's *A Higher Loyalty*. But Boot is much less that way. I'll see how it goes, being only a quarter of the way through. The narrative has turned from personal history to fulminations against Trump (and I thought *I* hated him!) and those who suck up to him like lampshade. Still, I don't think this is score-settling, just a sort of baffled outrage. (For score settling, read Taleb's *The Black Swan*. Wouldn't want to be enemies with him; might find ground glass in my dinner.) Boot's book reminds me of Ann Applegate's *Twilight of Democracy*, which is largely told through descriptions of people who have enabled the drift toward authoritarianism in some European countries, like Orbán and Johnson and their like. She knew many of these people personally, and she tells the story through narratives of those friends and acquaintances. In the end she utterly fails to explain their motives, though her descriptions of their *acts* seems incontrovertible. But her book is largely Eurocentric, and lacks a certain sense of detachment, or at least emotional evenness. I think some of her snapshots are unfair, as when she writes something along the lines of David Brooks having become someone who has turned to writing about personal growth. I suspect that Appelbaum may have slid some stuff I didn't notice under the door jamb; it was subliminal, and I missed it. Boot, on the other hand, writes only about what's happened here, and there's no mistaking what he thinks: he's appalled. He *loathes* Trump. Would that more Republicans had his balls. I never really knew, until four years ago, that my father was right when he said that most people are sheep. Republican politicians certainly are.

First snow of the season, most of the day, sifting down. Stuck on the grass, and on my car, but melted on the patio, the street, and sidewalk. Maybe an inch, so at least we don't have another October surprise, like back in 1996. Wet, heavy, and the trees still had their leaves on, so they carried a lot of weight. Tree limbs tearing off, blue flashes from transformers shorting out. I was out in the yard with a pole, pushing the limbs on my trees to shake the snow off, wondering why anyone else was doing the same. I didn't have any broken limbs, though there were plenty around the neighborhood.

October 27, 2020

Voted this morning, thinking that a cold day would have shorter lines. There were a lot of people there, but the line moved very well organized, and I was only in the building for ten minutes, from walking in through voting to walking out. The line moved right along, the poll workers knew exactly what they were doing, and so on. Swiss watch. I was the only one with a visor in addition to a mask. Call me paranoid; I don't care.

Stumbled on another silly contest, this one for the most beautiful tweet ever. The winner was this: "I believe we can have a better world! Of course, it'll take a whole lot of rock, water & dirt. Also, not sure where to put it." Nice, but the exclamation mark (that's an exclamation mark, in case you don't know) is inappropriate. In this case, interpreted literally, the tweeter considers his own opinion surprising, as if he'd just wakened to a realization about what he believes... In recent years the exclamation mark has been so overused that I'd like to abolish it, or at least ration it. ("You've exceeded your limit this year. You were allowed ten. The fine is a thousand dollars. You are number 3,397,211 in the queue. If you step out of line to use the return at the end of the line.") The exclamation mark should be rare almost to vanishing... I see that I've violated my own rule 32 times in the entries above, but a dozen or so were quotes, real or imaginary, and don't count. Plus there's a hell of a lot of text to accommodate a mere 20 or so screamers.

Thinking of Mary McCarthy and Lillian Hellman and their famous dustup this morning, I found [this](#), by Dick Cavett.

October 28, 2020

At a linguistics conference back in 2014 a Finn told me the world's most beautiful sentence was "Alavilla mailla halva vaara" (risk of frost in low-lying areas), and when she said it, I believed her. But when I said it, it wasn't the same -- the phonemes were wrong, the prosody was wrong, everything was wrong. It is ever thus with foreign tongues.

The online newspaper for Johnson County says that poll workers are required to wear masks, but voters are not. I thought there was a state-wide order that masks are required in groups of more than a certain size. Apparently not. Interestingly, everyone I saw yesterday wore a mask inside, though many did not have them on when in the parking lot.

October 29, 2020

Another police killing of a Black man leads to unrest in Philadelphia, including fires and looting. I hope this doesn't lead to voters from Biden to Trump. Pennsylvania may be closer than the polls imply, according to journalists who grew up in the city and went back to walk the ground and listen.

Woke up and thought, *I'm alone in the house all day every day*, and felt a little sad, followed by *Oh. This is how oth feel, but they feel more so.*

I've waited for years, knowing this was coming: "The idea of modifying Earth's atmosphere to cool the planet -- solar geoengineering -- was once seen as too risky to seriously consider. Now, it's attracting new money and attention. Or I likened it to 'chemotherapy for the planet: If all else is failing, you try it.' " [Here's the link](#). I'll take bets that there will be disastrous unintended side effects. Right off, I have to wonder whether less sunlight means less food. And how will dimming affect the growth of other (non-food) plants we rely on? Will it affect ocean currents? (Possible headline: "Stream fails, U.K. becomes Arctic.") What about snowfall and the water that gets buffered on mountains -- more, or what effect might this have on stream scouring, flooding, and drought? How will an abrupt change in temperature affect animals and plants that are adapting to warmth? Will the insect apocalypse accelerate? I'll stop here, instead of going miles.

October 30, 2020

Our elections aren't enough for Putin to mess with. Now his boys are [attacking our hospitals, too](#). There's something in the brains of people like Putin and these hackers. They lack both empathy and imagination. Their "theory of mind" is crippled.

Cell phones to the rescue, again: [they can be used to detect asymptomatic people with the virus](#). Great is the magic of the white man.

This Goddamn Parkinson's has about the uncertainty of playing Russian roulette with an automatic: I know exactly what will happen. I'll deteriorate in various repellent ways, losing control of my body and quite possibly my mind. It's a final death sentence, the same as everyone has, but worse, because more specific and shorter.

Reading Jordan Kisner's *Thin Places*, which starts with a description of deep brain stimulation, moves to a discussion of OCD, then segues to a discussion of her own OCD and the questions the disease raises. Superb. I'm not, and never have been, OCD, but she puts me right there, understanding what she's been through. It's in *Best American Essays 2016*. I found it up online, and since 2016 it's become the title essay of a book she's published. "*Where do I start and stop, is what I know*." Me, too. Since the essay was originally from n+1, you can [find it \[t\]here](#), if you don't want to bother with Me, I plan to read the whole damn thing.

October 31, 2020

Halloween, the weirdest, silliest holiday of the year. This year, I'm planning to leave the porch light off, to discourage asymptomatic spreaders from ringing the doorbell.

November 1, 2020

Sean Connery's dead. Last night there was a brief clip of him playing Bond (lighting a cigarette, shaking out the martini saying "Bond... James Bond"). Ghastly. He couldn't even be bothered to lose his Scots accent when he played a Russian submarine commander. One of the worst actors ever. A friend of my sister once argued that point with me, insisting it was sexy. I said, "That's a *movie star*, not an *actor*." It being the truth, she had no reply. But I do see her point. The guy is all man, to the very marrow. In one of Connery's earliest roles, before he played Bond, Johnny Stompanato, the Mafia boyfriend of Lana Turner, whom Connery was playing opposite, threatened Connery's life. Connery hauled off and killed him. (Later: [there's more to the story](#).)

The virus is running amuck, here, there, and it's "kind of everywhere", as a public health official says. N.Y. Times: "Public health officials have all but given up trying to figure out who is giving the virus to whom". My wife plans to host Thanksgiving with her relatives, who are noticeably less careful than my relatives. To say the least, there are a couple of hers I don't trust. I don't want to be in a house with them. I think I'll spend the day visiting the local wildlife refuge. Dress warmly and take a thermos of hot cider. No one should be there, so I don't have to worry about getting in trouble or urinating in a public place... Not that this caution will do me any good if my wife gets it and passes it on to me.

Imma and Seraphine aren't real? Nooooo! Scuze me while I kill myself. Seriously, though, nonexistent people (oxyr alert) are going "viral" and becoming "influencers"? Now I *know* I'm old. The whole influencer thing was bad enough for people who exist in meatspace, but this is taking it too far.

November 2, 2020

I've been puzzling over question six on the math olympiad in Australia, 1988, trying to achieve some intuitive grasp of why the solution when a and b are integers, and the solution to $(a^2 + b^2)/(ab + 1)$ is also an integer, that integer is always a square. I c

achieve a feel for this problem. I simply see the statement, understand the statement, and all progress toward some intuition stays stuck at the starting line. There is no mental movement whatever. See [this web page](#) for more detail. I'm still interested, watch the Numberphile video; there are several links to it in the web page. I notice that Pampena never gives the actual proof, though he talks about the problem in detail. In addition to its difficulty, the problem is both simple and extraordinarily beautiful, and I'm devastated that it's like one of those Zen koans that are described as making you feel like a mosquito biting an iron ball.

Could our political system be any more arcane? The Electoral College (unique, apparently); appointing Supreme Court judges for life (also unique, or nearly so); the bizarre method of resolving disputed elections in the House, by state-by-state individual Representative votes; and so on. We need to clean up this mess and get ourselves out of the Goddamn Middle Ages and join the twenty-first century. I'm not arguing for a parliamentary system here (God forbid we end up like a bunch of countries that can't form a government, that call snap elections, etc.). It's nice that, at least most of the time, our system is first past the post. That simplifies matters. But the rest of that shit has got to go. It ain't workin'. The National Popular Vote Interstate Compact would be a good start. Failing that, more states that allocate electors the way Maine and Nebraska would help. (Yes, I know some people claim that this would lead to an *increased* likelihood of someone winning the Presidency while losing the popular vote, and I need to read up on this, but until I see sound reasoning, I'm considering that line of argument to be counterintuitive enough that it's almost certainly untrue.) In the meantime, let's limit the term of those stinkin' judges on the SCOTUS. With people living into their 90s, it's insane to make lifetime appointments. Call them "ossified"? Not to mention that we need to mix it up so we avoid activist courts like the Warren court and the Chief Justice Roberts court, its polar opposite. Whatever happened to judging by the fucking *law*, instead of your personal biases? Get those mofos out to pasture, where they belong. Now stick your head out the window and yell, "I'm mad as hell and I'm not gonna take this anymore."

It's been said that you have to learn the rules before you break them. (Or Oliver Wendell Holmes: "The young man knows the rules, but the old man knows the exceptions.") I read a review by Vance Bourjaily of James Salter's *Solo Faces*, which was spent criticizing Salter's occasional use of implicit first person in various characters -- but Salter was so good that he could get away with it. (As one of the people in my writer's group once said, marvelling, "When he wants to tell you something, he just *tells* you.") Bourjaily spent decades teaching at the Iowa Writer's Workshop. Clearly he let his pedagogical side get out of hand. He only knew the rules, not the exceptions.

November 3, 2020

Election Day. I will be relieved when the shouting dies down, and I hope that happens ASAP and with as little uproar and shit-hurling as possible.

What I failed to point out in yesterday's entry is that elections are one of the craziest parts of our political system: so prolonged, on a weekday instead of weekends (though this is improving in many places, with advance voting), so gerrymandered, massively inconvenient (especially for certain groups of voters in certain places), overemotional, dependent on voting machines and badly designed ballots (Florida in 2000; and remember the Diebold scandal?), and add your own observations ad nauseam. A giant kludge, in brief. And we're supposed to be the archetype for democracy? I think not. Pick a Western European country at random, or any of a variety of third-world countries (after eliminating the dictatorships and other nonqualifiers), and with high probability you'll find a better system... Also, I failed to note how disruptive to a system's functioning it is to have multiple legal systems (federal, 50 states, Native American tribes, and so on)... At this point I won't list any more problems. Looks FUBAR to me.

Our trees are dropping their leaves, as usual more or less in alphabetical order. The ash and the elm are almost bare, crabapple completely so, but the Japanese maple and the linden are holding on. (The maple, with its scarlet leaves, is lovely. On one occasion a woman asked whether she could take a photograph.) The exception to the order of operation is the dogwood, which caucuses with the later trees, and the early ones. The oaks, which are ubiquitous in this neighborhood, have not started dropping their leaves yet. I'm waiting for the two maples down the road, just past the park, just beyond the swale at the creek. One has red leaves, one has yellow. When they drop on the sidewalk between, my feet walk as if through a Seurat painting magnified, spots of color jumping together. My shoes rustle the brittle discarded jumble that will fly away, to be replaced by green when dark winter yields to spring and we humans can shed our outer layers.

Walking home in the dark last night, past all the modest 1950s ranch houses mostly lit behind their drawn curtains, I feel something like fellowship and warmth toward the people in them, perhaps eating a late dinner or washing the dishes, talking to each other or doing homework or watching television. Human life seemed quite simple to me, all of us living our modest daily lives. I hope we go on this way forever.

My wife bought me four large-format books of the early Pogo comic strips. It's too bad Walt Kelly isn't still alive. He would have shredded Trump the way he shredded Spiro Agnew and Joe McCarthy. No telling what animal Kelly would have

chosen for the Donald. He was good at that -- the hyena was perfect for Agnew. The bobcat worked well for McCar fat badger for Trump? A platypus? The best I can do is an orangutan.

November 4, 2020

I didn't watch the voting results last night. Too soon. Why upset oneself?

[This is fantastic](#). When people ask me my dream place to go to, I tell them the space station. Imagine the view. Bon corona there.

You know you're getting old when you're in a pandemic and you start listening to Tony Bennett singing "Don't Get Much Anymore", and enjoy it. All my life, I've cringed at those jazz-standard Italian-lounge-singer acts. (Sinatra? U I really liked the singing, *and* the song. Certainly more listenable than, say, heavy metal.

Struck up a conversation with my wife last night. She was more inclined to continue reading her novel, but spared n time. I observed that she'd been with people all day, and I'd been at home with the dogs. So I kept it short. Just got n fix of human contact.

I get to the end of the days and I've rarely done all the stuff I planned to. Wonder where the time got squandered. Pu away the days, frittering away what remains of my life. It's this damn interrupted sleep. When I get good rest, I'm o and energetic.

November 5, 2020

How do guys with big beards (ZZ Top are the worst) wear masks for the virus? Question: has anyone researched w beards are less common since the virus hit?

If the Y survives the decline in patronage during the pandemic, and smaller gyms do not, then the Y will be even m crowded after the pandemic ends. We can hope this doesn't happen, or at least that various parties buy up the equipn the smaller gyms and start up new ones. Otherwise there will be people lined up at every weight station. Dreadful p

Vermont looks like a good place to be right now. It ranks 50th (best) for virus spread by state. Maybe it's time to dri and visit my youngest brother, of course avoiding all human contact on the way.

It just gets weirder. From the N.Y. Times briefing: "A mutation in the virus has prompted Denmark to kill millions c infected mink. In Utah, nearly 10,000 mink at nine fur farms have died from the virus." Is the plural of mink really 1 Like deer, and sheep? Never mind. There should be some cheap fur coats for your girlfriend or wife soon, especially furs are contagious and you want to get rid of her. The perfect crime. I'm left to wonder, though: what did they do w little mink corpses?

I've managed to largely ignore the election news. Waiting until tomorrow, or whenever it settles down. General imp Trump is throwing tantrums as usual, and the Republicans are cheating as much as they can.

November 6, 2020

Found myself, on the subject of solving puzzles to supposedly keep my mind from deteriorating, describing my lack conviction about this little project as, "I don't really believe myself", which actually seems to be a thread that's run t my life from early days.

Whatever happened to the jays and crows? Occasionally they'd sit in different stands of trees and scream across at e other, like the Sharks and the Jets. I haven't seen that in years now. Come to think of it, scarcely a day went by that I see a jay, but they've become quite rare. I saw maybe one of them last month. Later: saw two, or the same one twice day, and heard another in the distance. Impaired memory?

November 7, 2020

So the news, which I was listening to selectively in order to avoid the nailbiting results to date, reported on the radi yesterday that the Europeans are impatient for the results of our election. They should be grateful they don't live her exercise a little imagination, Eurofolk -- there's a lot more at stake for us than there is for you. Be patient. You're ge better at that than we are.

Local capacity to handle Covid cases is "dwindling dangerously low because of sharply increasing transmission of t disease, and local hospital officials warned Friday that the result may be delays in all types of medical treatment". A

"Several of the hospital officials on the call said they now have more COVID-19 patients than at any previous point pandemic". Source: Shawnee-Mission Post. My wife works in a hospital and tells me that medical personnel are wa they're more at risk *outside* the hospital than inside. The amount of ignorant shit people believe never fails to amaze [T]he public health department gets hundreds of emails every week from people promoting discredited ideas about achieving herd immunity by letting the disease run its course through a population". That would take a while, and p would be dropping like flies, not to mention that the hospitals would have to turn the sick away. What happened to f the curve?

If anyone ever says their vote doesn't make enough difference to justify the effort of going to the polls, quote them t [T]he contestants for Kansas House District 16 are separated by a single vote".

Finally started yesterday afternoon to follow the election results. The Republicans refuse to concede. Recall 2000, w Florida recount was underway and James Baker and others pretended it was complete ("We've had the recount", wh baldfaced lie) and that they'd won. They told the Democrats to man up. Then Florida destroyed the ballots, though t York Times had tried to buy them. Madame Harris and the Supreme Court threw the election. Now that their oppon taking the gold and they're not on the winner's podium, many Republicans are sore losers, Trump most of all. They : think there are two sets of rules, one for them and one for the Dems, and both sets of rules are supposed to favor the Republicans. These people are wretched, spoiled children, and unamerican to boot.

Things I've always wondered about: Why are female raptors generally larger than the males, but almost all other bir are the other way around? How does a species get started that has a different number of chromosomes than its ances species? Why do trees drop their leaves in the fall according to the length of the days, but seem to leaf out in the spr according to temperature?

Sturgis is back in the news as what I'll call a super-superspreader event. People are furious at their relatives who we brought back the disease. Shun them, I say: kick them out of the house and refuse to see them again. Don't take then for at least a year, following repeated craven sniffing apologies. If they'd just brought it on themselves, that would l thing, but infecting your loved ones through determined risk-taking is inexcusable and should be treated as such.

After writing all the above, I checked the news. The result is still up in the air. God help us. Trump, of course, is hav another snit and launching lawsuits. The only time he's predictable is when his self-interest is in play. He's lying abc votes, too. ("Fake news"? He's the big offender.) What I continue to find baffling, as I have since before the 2016 el why anyone would believe a word coming out of the mouth of that compulsive liar. And yet there are suckers who c repeat, God help us. How can people be that stupid? ... The best hope is that Republican politicians will see the writ the wall and the rats will start leaving the ship. Even better, Trump could work himself into such a frenzy that he ha: and is unable to talk, or type on Twitter. Not that I'd wish such a thing on anyone, understand, but it would be a bles wouldn't have to deal with his mendacity, and the future would be blessedly free of his noise.

A friend of mine strongly opposes the Electoral College. I'm less certain, though I do prefer that the winner of the p vote should become President, and though I've been outraged in both 2000 and 2016. Not being entirely disintereste subject (I loathed the younger Bush, as well as Trump, and both sneaked into office via the E.C.), I think [this article](#) interesting. It speaks of "the potential delegitimization of the United States' democratic systems in the eyes of its cit. But as I pointed out to my friend, getting rid of the E.C. is not perfect, either -- I think it would lead to campaigns th on large states and large cities, to the detriment of rural voters. I've seen discussions of this that claim it wouldn't ha: I'm not a believer: like anyone rational, candidates will concentrate their efforts where they get the most bang for th Wyoming will get hind tit. But changing the subject from the Presidential vote, what about the Senate? Speaking of Wyoming, the people there get as many Senators as Californians, who outnumber Wyomingans (Wyomingites? Wyomingers?) by 68 to 1. That ain't representative government. (The pun on "Representative" was accidental.) This E.C., but it's a similar inequity.

November 8, 2020

I find myself thinking, for no reason at all, about Charles Bukowski and the two Dutch girls. I've read his books but find his life more interesting than his writing. I'm unable to find the story about the Dutch girls online, where I was to confirm the accuracy of my memory, nor can I find *Locked in the Arms of a Crazy Life*, where apparently the stor Local libraries don't have it. I did stumble across an interesting fact: the Red Hot Chili Peppers refer to him in some songs. Quelle surprise. I remember reading in a couple of places that his books are shoplifted more than anyone else course that's probably an urban legend (how would one know? what about Kerouac?), but it *should* be true. So I [use Google just now](#). Once you start researching, every conceivable subject gets more complicated.

November 9, 2020

When I was a kid, I remember the family driving south along the Oregon coast. I have no memory of when this trip most likely it followed the Seattle World's Fair in 1962, coming home. The coast was extraordinary, and I sat with n turned to watch as it passed, with dunes and driftwood, everything as if arranged by an artist of supernatural ability. reminded of this by today's Windows login screen, which said that many people consider Oregon's coast the most b in the nation. Depends on taste, I suppose. Maine's is glorious in places, too, though entirely different in character -- rockier. And parts of California's are lovely. I suppose, having seen it, that Prince William Sound is unsurpassed, bu think of it as coastal. For me, Oregon sets the standard.

My wife's weird speech habits -- we've been married 36 years, but I've continued to notice new ones. She's had little pieces of accents from places like Illinois and Wisconsin, where she's never lived. She's used double modals, a Sout on at least one occasion. And she routinely drops the "ur" from the middle of words, pronouncing "garage", "accura "mercury" respectively as "grozh", "akrut", and "murkree". (Later: also "hickory" as "hikree".) She's the only persor ever met who does this (though I suppose I could invoke Steve Miller singing "Gonna buy me a murkree", but he dr the syllable to make the line's meter work). I'll never know where or how she picked this up, because asking about it her off. She thinks I'm being critical, but it's only my linguistic curiosity. She's lived around here all her life, except years in India, so I have to assume she invented this little quirk.

Reading *The Forest Unseen* -- a biologist visits a section of an old-growth forest in Tennessee every week for a year writes a chapter about each visit. There's more sheer knowledge in this book than any I've read in a long long time. l chapter is a compressed seminar on one subject -- flowers, water hydraulics in trees, snail sex, firefly flashes, lichen patch of sunlight that moves across the forest floor, coyotes... And not just the central topic, either. All the chapters lot of other information as well. It's impossible to remember it all without re-reading it, which I should probably do, got too much other reading queued up and am not that disciplined anyway. But this book is definitely worth a re-rea sometime in the future.

November 10, 2020

The virus continues to rampage. Feels like it's about to pass the point of no return, where we can't control it at all. T problem in this country is all the people who refuse to take it, and their personal responsibility for their actions, seri Maybe with Trump gone this will improve. But there's still more than two months before Biden takes over. At least has been prompt, and already appointed a task force of experts to chart the course.

From the N.Y. Times coronavirus briefing: "Dogs, cats, tigers, hamsters, monkeys, ferrets and genetically engineere have also been infected." I wish I knew what to say about that. Seems like a strange hodgepodge. This is a very opportunistic, adaptable bug, the coyote of viruses.

Pfizer and its German partner have announced a vaccine. What's weird about all the brouhaha over this is that almos everyone is ignoring a simple fact: the vaccine must be kept at minus 70 degrees Celsius. (Most of the stories omit t That's gonna be no help at all to people outside the rich nations. Keep it that cold in India, with all its infrastructure problems? Brazil? Most of Africa? Even here, it won't be easy. Note to self: buy stock in manufacturers of equipme makes dry ice.

November 11, 2020

--It has come to this: the police chief of Marshall, a town in northern Arkansas, posted on Parler: "Will you and sever hundred more go with me to D.C. and fight our way into the Congress and arrest every Democrat who has participa this coup? We may have to shoot and kill many of the Communist B.L.M. and ANTIFA Democrat foot soldiers to accomplish this!!!" He resigned.

--Last week it was this: "Alabama police captain resigns after saying Biden voters need 'a bullet in their skull' ". The read: "They need to line up evl of them and put a bullet in their skull for treason".

--Also last week, "In Platteville, Colo., officer Jason Taft was put on leave after allegedly posting to Facebook that l wanted to 'beat the hell' out of Democrats and asked them to 'meet me at the battle grounds.' "

--This was in August: "The Philadelphia Police Department says seven officers whose Facebook posts were flagged investigation into offensive and sometimes threatening social media activity have resigned."

--This was back in June: "A police officer threatened to run over people who protested the death of George Floyd ar them 'animals,' West Virginia officials say."

--This was in June: "Billy Dishman-who retired from the San Jose Police Department in 2006 before going on to lea PD's Internal Affairs Unit-was named as one of the ex-cops being investigated by the FBI for making online death t against [Shaun] King. Though Dishman left SJPD long ago, he's part of a closed Facebook group of current and reti Jose cops that's reportedly very similar to the one that became part of the FBI probe this week."

--To see raw material, some of it similar to the above, go to [The Plain View Project](#).

[Emily Harrington](#) becomes the first woman to free climb Golden Gate on El Cap in a day. Okay. Why is this a big deal? Because it's 41 pitches? (The description on Mountain Project says it's 36, but most people say 41.) NIAD (the Nose Day) has been a thing since before 2010, when I was out there to climb the Captain myself (failed), and talked to a woman who was there to do the NIAD with her brother. I'm betting she did. And of course there are the immortal Lynn Hill and Steph Davis. You can also read about [Miranda Oakley soloing the NIAD in 2016](#) in less than a day. So when do you like Harrington's become, if not meaningless, at least not very meaningful? Having said all that, my hat is still off to Harrington. 41 pitches in a day is way *way* beyond what most climbers are capable of, especially when you lead every pitch free. Especially when there are three pitches of 5.13 and five of 5.12 and at least four overhanging pitches of 5.11. (next day): "A correction: On Tuesday, we misstated Emily Harrington's achievement in Yosemite National Park. She is the first woman to free-climb El Capitan's Golden Gate route in less than 24 hours. The first woman to free-climb the mountain so quickly was Lynn Hill, in 1994." They're confused. As I remember, they only claimed Harrington was to free-climb Golden Gate in less than a day, not El Cap in general. I think Lynn Hill did the NIAD. But she's superhuman; she has probably have been something else.)

Frost on the grass this morning, and all over the car. Yesterday was cold, in the low 40s. I drove down to K.U. to return a book and pick up some stuff, and the wind was coming over the hill like it does, apocalyptic and enraged. That wind is a shock to people who haven't felt it before, and even to me, who's felt it hundreds of times. The campus was empty and everyone at home in their dorms and apartments, attending class virtually. Very strange, to see so few people on campus.

November 12, 2020

The local school district may have to return to remote learning because of staffing shortages: resignations, retirements, and quarantines. I'll give long damn odds that the reason for these Covid-related shortages, especially the quarantines, is that the students are giving it to the teachers, and the students have it because almost none of them wear a mask. Quote from the president of the board: "It might not be by a vote [of the board]. It might just be we can't open the damn doors". Whore. Profanity. That's a real rarity around here. 52 "certified" staff have resigned in just over four months. The usual number reported as 3 to 5.

I voted two weeks ago and my ballot still hasn't shown up on the state's web site. I'll give them one more week before they -- and if it wasn't counted, I will complain not only to them but to all local media.

Trump is firing people right and left, like the secretary of defense, and replacing them with loyalists. Feels to me like he's preparing a coup. The problem with the talking heads is that they're stuck in thinking that's conditioned by what they've seen in the past, but this sociopath is not bound by tradition and law. I fully expect him to try a coup. The Army is unlikely to come out to assist him, since its tradition is strongly against doing so. Republican governors could call out the National Guard, of course, but that's not very relevant, because the issue is who holds power at the federal level. The question becomes this: can Trump hold onto the White House and the levers of power in the federal agencies? And what happens on the streets when right and left clash? Dollars to doughnuts the right wingers massacre the liberals. Even if Trump's rule is a short and abortive one, the damage will be unimaginable and long lasting. Imagine that the new head of Justice is on trial. That would mean civil war. And if he were found guilty and appealed to the Supreme Court, what then? The problem with situations like these is that they're inherently unpredictable, like war, and the consequences are usually worse than we expect. For instance, what if Trump refuses to leave the White House and Biden cuts off his power and phones in the police? Do Trump supporters come out with their weapons and battle the police? I guess is that Trump will walk up to the edge and possibly even over the edge (i.e., initiate the coup), see that it will back off and pretend he didn't mean to. But there's no telling. I think he's ignorant enough of the ways power works that if he does try a coup, he'll botch it. Disclaimer: this is all speculation and I hope I'm wrong. If I were a praying man, I'd be down on my knees, pleading with God. (Later: (two days later) I take all this back. In video and pictures of Trump looking destroyed. I don't think he can do anything now, maybe not even talk. Poor bastard. It's enough that I feel sorry for him, he's so pathetic.)

November 13, 2020

"COVID-19 in Johnson County has continued its troubling upward trend over the past week. New cases per 100,000 residents shot up 69%, and the percent positivity rate increased to 14.5%. From early July to mid-October, new cases averaged about 715 per week. That metric has now more than doubled. 'We are very much in a period of what we call exponential growth, where the cases are doubling every period of time just because transmission is so rampant in our community,' says county epidemiologist Elizabeth Holzschuh." Source: yesterday's Shawnee-Mission Post. On the cases nationwide (in the NYT), the infection rate looks to be approaching the vertical. If it goes on accelerating like this, we're screwed. Maybe it's all for the best. A smaller population, including people who are permanently physically disabled and thus contributing less to ecological havoc (by not commuting, buying less with their shrunken income, etc.) means the planet has a better chance of survival, especially if said people are in the nations that consume the most resources and produce the most damaging effects. Not exactly hopeful. In fact, the worst kind of consolation prize imaginable.

This is a true story, as best I remember, not one of those walks-into-a-bar jokes: Two guys got to talking in a bar in (New Mexico. One asks the other, a cowboy, whether he has any children. The cowboy answers, "No. I'm sterile. It's genetic." The first one asks, "How can it be genetic? Your dad fathered you." The cowboy answers, "I'm adopted."

A bad joke I like: "I heard that by law you need to turn on your headlights when it's raining in Sweden. How the hell supposed to know when it's raining in Sweden?"

I've been walking our dogs since they were pups and not until this year have we had an attack, and now we've had to get the one back on September 29. Yesterday, a big yellow dog attacked all three of ours. It was an aggressive attack -- it was trying to bite them. I checked them when we got home, and didn't find any visible wounds or blood. It's pretty clear the dog is savage, from the way the owners responded: the woman promptly fell on it, to immobilize it, and the man asked how it got out. Their response was well-coordinated, as if they'd done it before. One of these days that dog is going to bite someone else's dog. Later: animal control said they had no record of this happening at that address before, and the dog's inoculations are all up to date. Nuff said.

Joined a virtual coffee hour for nontraditional students this morning. Highlight of my week -- met new people, had a good conversation. I miss having fun like that.

November 14, 2020

I seem to have got through Friday the 13th without any disasters.

A lot of the local races for state Representative and such were very close -- well under 1%. For a while, one of the races had a vote difference of 1. In the end, two races were decided by coin tosses (I'm not making that up); in both cases they were treasurer races in two local townships, with ties between write-in candidates. I hear Wally Shawn in *The Princess Bride* declaiming "Inconceivable".

I've become a connoisseur of masks. Someone was at the house this morning, to bid some work, and I (approvingly) noted the wide coverage and tight fit of his mask. He complained about seeing people in a rural area who were unmasked. They get the virus and there aren't any rural hospitals that can treat them, and they're sent here, to take a bed and we can't have enough." Preach it, brother. My sister-in-law commented on the patrons and waitresses in a rural restaurant: "You've got a lot of stares" for wearing masks. It's not a political statement, and the country people should stop thinking with their heads and start thinking with logic and data, get over themselves and leave behind the notion that they're making some kind of statement -- which they are: that they're fools. Yes, I'm painting with a broad brush, and there are fools everywhere; but there are smart people everywhere, but there's a real divide on this behavior, and most of the irrational people are out in the countryside. If that's too politically incorrect, I don't give a shit. It's true.

November 15, 2020

This won't make any difference, but sending it to my Senators did make me feel better: "Senator [name here], For fuck's sake I have watched as Donald Trump has shredded all norms of decent behavior. It's time you and your craven brethren in the Senate tell him that the people have spoken and he must make room for the incoming President. Grow a spine and a man." I didn't intend to change their minds, as that's not possible. The best I can hope is that it stings the underlings and they read it.

More than 1,000 Americans are dying of Covid-19 every day, on average. I looked at the graph of infections yesterday and the line looked vertical.

With Biden in the White House, we can expect to see an end to the sound-bite Presidency and erratic mismanagement, firings and resignations (three chiefs of staff, three national security advisers gone, ...); inconsistency in policy; Twitterstorms; Fox "news" people influencing the Oval Office; crybaby tantrums; ADD + psychopathic + narcissist behavior -- we've had to witness for four years. Make America Respected Again.

November 16, 2020

I had a frightening thought that hasn't been mentioned in my reading: what if McConnell uses his control of the Senate to prevent the confirmation of any of Biden's Cabinet nominees?

"[T]wo hundred thousand homes and their contents were swept out to sea ... by the March 2011 tsunami in Japan." (*Plastic Ocean*.)

I've thought for some time that Trump may have Parkinson's: " 'While most frequently observed in Parkinson's Disease, the bent posture so evident in Trump may also be seen in Alzheimer's Dementia, movement disorders of the basal ganglia

as the side effect of certain medications,' Cytowic continued. 'Also noted are the sudden, jerking movements of Trump's right arm. Since they occur only on one side, the prefix "hemi" is applied, while "ballistic" means sudden or flinging manner of a projectile. Trump's hemiballistic arm movements are evident in news clips from Memorial Day at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier, as are his uncontrolled swaying and forward tilt. He is seen to grab his wayward arm with the other in an effort to keep it under control.' " [salon.com, oct. 22, 2020](https://www.salon.com/2020/10/22/trump-wayward-arm/) As for grabbing his "wayward" arm (love that medic jargon) with the other, it's reminiscent of Peter Sellers' [brilliant bit](#) in *Dr. Strangelove*. *Strangelove* was supposedly inspired by Kubrick's meeting with Henry Kissinger, though Sellers dismissed this and said the character was modeled on Werner von Braun. Herman Kahn supposedly said the character was a melding of himself, Braun, and Kissinger, but what else would you expect from an egomaniac like Kahn? Slate also mentions Edward Teller, which strikes me as quite appropriate. Mr. Never-Met-A-Weapon-He-Didn't-Like. Looking this stuff up, I stumbled on yet another flawless, brutal, penetrating Mort Sahl quote: "von Braun's autobiography *I Aimed For the Stars* should have been subtitled '*but Sometimes I Hit London*.'" Too bad he's dead; Sahl's humor would have been useful the last four years. Walk Kelly ditto. And Lenny

Again on Friday people were surprised that I use a flip phone instead of a smartphone. As I said to a friend once upon a time, "I can make and receive calls. I can send and receive texts. That's all I need." But that's the least of it:

- * A smartphone would worsen my already execrable posture. There's considerable evidence (not just studies, but also my own eyes) that people with smartphones are prone to stoop.

- * I'd get addicted to the damn thing. I spend too much time on the PC already, for instance. And I see too many people spend way too much time on their phones.

- * They're distracting. This is the love child of some of the other problems listed here.

- * They're too expensive. I don't want to spend that much money. Yes, you can get a cheap one from Cricket, but it's more expensive than what I have now, and cost is only one consideration. Cricket's other drawbacks are irrelevant here.

- * They're time-consuming. This one's *really* obvious, isn't it?

- * The screens are too small. I like huge screens. Also, my eyes don't work well anymore, and I don't want to have to wear glasses more often than strictly necessary.

- * I don't like being tracked and spied on. Try to avoid that, if you have a smartphone. My flip phone is anonymized.

- * I don't want a big lump in my pocket.

- * My flip phone is truly ruggedized, and I really really like ruggedized stuff (like my wristwatch). Never yet seen a smartphone that's rugged, vendor and user bullshit to the contrary.

- * They're really fucking rude. People are always ignoring each other and looking at their phones. I'm too rude already. I've forgotten the other objections. The above will have to do.

"The nation's top infectious disease expert, Dr. Anthony S. Fauci, made it clear on Sunday that President Trump's coronavirus task force has not been allowed to communicate with President-elect Joseph R. Biden Jr.'s transition team that he said was critically important to curbing the pandemic." (N.Y. Times)

November 17, 2020

Nothing to say today.

November 18, 2020

"While the United States abides by a 'proof of harm' rule, Europe applies the precautionary principle. This means that the analysis favors human health over the economic health of chemical producers. As a consequence, Europeans have measurably lighter chemical body burdens than do Americans, especially in the category of brominated flame retardants. The most concerning effects of these chemicals are on the thyroid... This includes brain development... BFRs do not persist but bioaccumulate." (*Plastic Ocean*)

November 19, 2020

Windy warm weather, as it has been for several days. If Indian Summer were a season, which it can't be because its unanticipatability makes it impossible to print on the calendar, but if it were, it would be my second favorite, after Cleaning up all these damn leaves is a pain in the shoulder, though.

The website for the secretary of state finally shows my vote. Took three weeks, approximately. The first time I voted by mail. At the time, you had to be 21. I was 24. Because of my birthday, that was the first election I could vote in. I was in Rome, got a mail-in ballot, and sent it back to the U.S.

November 20, 2020

Yesterday I finished *Plastic Ocean*, one of the most depressing books I've ever read. Also yesterday, on a Zoom call with two friends, one mentioned he'd just bought a fancy-ass Norwegian coffee maker. I asked to see it, and he went and showed us. Minimalist design, made of glass, metal, and copper. He might have mentioned wood, too, but not possible.

occurred to me right then that *this* is the sort of thing we need. Naturally it's expensive (\$300). And I'll bet it ships v in bubble wrap and/or plastic foam.

Got up early and read Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations* for a couple of hours. The variety of writing in the still surprises me, lo all these decades later. Wittgenstein's Delphic conundrums are as different as they can be from, Descartes, and verge at times on unintelligibility, like Heidegger. You could wrestle with this stuff forever. Philosoph professors are even paid to do so.

Watched a video of a guy named Daniel Suelo, who, at the time the video was made, had not made or spent a penny years. Interesting, and such people always have something to teach us. (He's trying to live a truly Christian life, guic the sermon on the mount.) But his lifestyle doesn't scale up: there aren't enough caves for 300 million people in this to live in... This fellow's parents, a couple of extreme (I repeat, *extreme*) fundamentalists, who used to talk about kil homosexuals, had a tough time adapting to the news that Suelo is gay ("the Lord threw me a curve ball"). When the old, he moved back home to take care of them. Seems very Christian to me.

You can [find your dialect here](#). Apparently I come from California. News to me.

November 21, 2020

Walked by a man this morning who was using a spray hose to manually water his grass.

"New grass?" I asked.

"Yup. Trying to keep it damp."

"It's supposed to rain today."

"That's why I'm doing this. To make sure it happens."

Magical thinking, or a joke?

A weird, strong siren was nearby this morning. Sirens always drive Pogo nuts, and sometimes, as for this one, Soph in: Pogo howling his high-pitched howl, and Sophie her bass, mournful howl. A chorus of complaint. Puts me in mi one of the Dracula movies, when the wolves are howling and the Count gets a rapt, faraway look in his eyes and say "Listen to the children of the night. What beautiful music they make." Vampires. Why do they fascinate me so?

Read my linguistics paper through, instead of in pieces. Ouch. Parts are quite lame, though parts (not to worship at 1 shrine or anything) are deep and insightful. Now if I could just achieve that latter, consistently... The whole damn id changed again, though, and I have to rip most of the argument out and start over. Again. I've never worked on such : mutable project in my life.

The [Covid-19 event risk assessment planning tool](#) shows, for an event size of 15, a probability in my county of 42% least one attendee will have the virus. Counties adjacent have risks of 37%, 32%, 34%, 29%, and 25%. If you bump "ascertainment bias" from 5 to 10, the risk in my county goes to 67%.

Mid-day we had a large mixed flock in our back yard, which stayed around for hours. Nancy counted eight species. are not as sharp as hers. I noticed that more squirrels than usual also populated the yard -- though we never see more two on the ground, and rarely that, today there were four, and often. All the animals are trying to bulk up, I suppose yard is better than the monocultures of our neighbors. I'm even more tempted to turn the yard into a habitat for both fellow vertebrates and invertebrates (without whom we can't survive). This would take some research, a bit of mone lot of work. See [Homegrown National Park](#). That is, if my suburb will keep their pea-pickin' legal actions off my as [map](#) is supposed to go live this month... I just went to my local library website to reserve Tallamy's book *Nature's B* and am encouraged to see that all five copies are in use, with 11 people waiting ahead of me.

November 22, 2020

Decades ago, for a few years, I lived across the street and one house north of a really lousy neighbor. Every few mo guy would get stoned and fall asleep with a steak in the oven. Apparently he lived on steak and never cleaned the ov While he was out cold the steak would burn and smoke would come boiling out of the house. The fire department w show up, the problem would resolve, and they'd go away again. Another thing this fellow did was to play his loudsp unbelievable volume some weekend nights. I'd call, but apparently he couldn't hear the phone ring (this was in the d before cell phones). I was not inclined to go over there and knock on the door, because he was a gun nut and irascib one or two times he did answer the phone, he did turn down the volume, though, and I was able to sleep. Eventually landlord kicked him out. When the guy left, I heard that he trashed the house, leaving holes in the walls. Sorta remit of Trump: misbehave, then deliberately leave as much wreckage as possible.

The two friends I've had whom I consider my heroes were superficially about as different as can be, but underlyingl much in common. One went to West Point and spent twenty years in Special Forces. (He should have been an Engli

professor, though -- he loved literature, loved being a mentor, and had been accepted at Princeton as well as West Po. The other friend had been one of only nineteen young men in the entire country who refused to register for the draft had a profound experience as a boy, and it had changed his attitude toward human life. I read his statement to the court during his trial, and it was far more mature than his age. He spent much of World War II in solitary confinement, but never felt alone. After the war he became a Quaker, and that was how I met him... As I said at the beginning, these are my heroes, in the sense that they are (or were, one of them having died) extraordinary. Maybe some would say that it's too late to have heroes. I don't think so. There should always be better ways to aspire to.

November 23, 2020

More death threats against Anthony Fauci, a man who's the exact opposite of that -- he spends his time encouraging people to live.

[This person does not exist](#) disturbs me. Go ahead, hit the link. Then refresh it. Except for the occasional one with a white blob on its face, most of these images are very convincing, which convinces me that we've come too far. I can imagine an incel falling in love with one of these images... Alan Kay once said "The best way to predict the future is to invent it. Please, stop inventing this stuff. Next thing, someone will invent a bug with his home Crispr unit that will wipe up everything." (Yes, home Crispr kits do exist. I even know someone who has one.) Invention is going to be the death of us.

New word: covidiot. It's pretty obvious what it must mean.

The savants are predicting a surge in demand for goods and services after the pandemic ends. Well, duh. So have I, and probably millions of other people. What I *should* have predicted is that the mavens would predict it. What worries me, though, is all the businesses that will have failed by then. This may put the vice grips on the rebound. Could it lead to something like that movie *Jingle All the Way*, with people fighting each other to buy the stuff they want, or jumping lines at restaurants? To inflation from the pressure of demand? Ask the economists, not that they've ever been able to predict anything.

November 24, 2020

The new issue of *Smithsonian* arrived and the lead story was about dog cognition, but really about dogs and people. The problem with the story was that it assumed that the dogs *we* (meaning people like you and me, who live with pets or dogs) are around, are typical. Most dogs on this planet are village dogs, and they are not as domesticated as ours... I remember when she was a major figure in the article. She's switched from her monkeynomics work to dogs. I remember when she showed Linda Hall to talk about that, years ago, her inner calm was striking. She seemed to exude what I'll call "stability" or "lack of a better term." Her picture in the magazine was rather odd: she was dressed all in black, including a very long and black leggings underneath, seated in a chair in the very corner of a room, one elbow up and leaning against the chair's head supported by that hand. A quite unnatural position and pose.

Finished rereading *Lost in Math* the other day. I'd forgotten that CERN experiments generate too much data for even the monster machines to record, and that the majority of the data get thrown out on the fly. Puts me in mind of LIGO. The dirty little secret is that they manually clean up the data (oops, maybe I should have written that with scare quotes: "cleaned up"), and don't explain what they did. At least, that used to be the case. Maybe they've changed their ways. But still, it's supposed to be science, and worthy of a Nobel? And the public (mostly European) is supposed to fund multibillion-dollar accelerators that can't drink from their own firehose?

November 25, 2020

I see that there's been a new leap in A.I. called GPT-3 (why do they pick such hideous names?), [which you can find here](#). Along with deepfakes and [this person does not exist](#) (keep refreshing the page to see more people) and [fooling Alex Siri](#), as well as [audio adversarial examples](#), we're approaching what actually *will* be fake news. As a friend of mine commented about the nonexistent people: "serious nightmare fuel".

Assuming the GSA manager lied about making the decision herself, Trump has finally allowed the transition to go forward. (Or maybe he did keep his hands off, and decided to make the best of it. Who cares?) In the meantime, though, he can't claim fraud. I can't figure out whether he believes himself or not. By now I just wish he would disappear, or at least become incapacitated. He's the Brian Bosworth of politics, but more so: our worst nightmare, a tiresome, hypertrophied egomaniac who keeps shooting himself in the foot, an infantile whiner.

November 26, 2020

There have been several Presidents I liked, and several I hated, during my life. Joe Biden is the first about whom I have such a reaction. I'm completely neutral. Watching him is like looking at the color gray. I have no doubt whatever that

first-rate chief executive; he has the experience and the temperament. (And what's with these Americans who want a politician in a political office? Would you want a non-sailor heading the Navy, or a non-scientist running particle accelerator experiments? Since when are ignorance and inexperience qualifications?) Biden is boring, which, come to think of it, is exactly what we need after four years of a head case.

The pandemic continues unabated. Hospitals are filling up. People are flying home. It's likely to get even worse. What's wrong with people? Do they think they're immortal? Easy for me to say, in my dotage, but I suppose I should understand, given all the insane physical risks I took in my youth. I'm lucky to be alive, and that is *not* a cliché, *not* exaggeration. But still I have no sympathy for the idiots who travel, or who refuse to wear masks, during this pandemic. Like the Chicago health official said, "Better to have a Zoom Thanksgiving than an ICU Christmas".

November 27, 2020

Many times, friends and I have been discussing some question and speculating about the answer. Then someone whistles their phone and looks it up. I miss the old days, when you actually had to *reason things out*, though admittedly it was impossible to arrive at a conclusion, and even more often the discussion simply ended up in an unresolved disagreement. But in addition to settling questions (often with questionable data), the internet also raises them. Example: a map I saw the other day, of the most popular pet in each of the 48 contiguous states. Dogs won everywhere, except that in the row from Washington across to Maine, all the northernmost states showed cats as most popular. (Also, unexpectedly, in Alaska.) My wife and I discussed this and decided the most likely reason is that in cold (and wet?) states people don't want drafty doors, which cause a draft and higher heating bills. That means they'd have to let the dogs out and back in manually, reducing the popularity of cats. Hey, until someone actually figures this out, this is as good a reason as any other. But I bet that Alaska's an exception; outdoorsy wanna-be-frontier people like that state attracts likely prefer dogs. (Q.: What do you suggest a woman intending to move to Alaska? A.: "The odds are good, but the goods are odd.") Speaking of Alaska and doing a number of them in Fairbanks, and they were all pit bulls, or nearly all.

A doctor who used to treat me always wanted to know what I was reading. One time it was a triple biography of Pat McCarter, and Marshall. (*The Generals?*) Somehow this got into a discussion that ended up with him saying something that I thought was absurd, and to which I responded, "The state is the entity with a monopoly on the legitimate use of force; if you get rid of that, you have anarchy." I thought that was unanswerable, but of course right-wingers have no end of fallacious retorts. (He seemed, shall we say, quite far right, having moved here from the old Soviet Union, and in the process of rejecting all that had adopted what he apparently saw as its opposite.) He responded, "I don't think anarchy is so bad. I suggest you move to Somalia, sir, and see how you feel when it's right in your face."

Walking the other day, and thinking about numbers, I realized that in base 10 the unit (low-order) digit of any number will be the same when you raise the number to its ninth power. After an embarrassingly long time, I realized the same was true for the fifth power, and furthermore that this implied the ninth (and thirteenth, etc.). Note that I'm speaking of the full set of numbers, 0 through 9, collectively; some cycle faster (0, 1, 5, and 6 do not change; 4 and 9 cycle twice as fast as the others). But thinking further, I saw that this is not true of all number bases. Consider base 4 -- a number ending in 2 will end in 2 (a multiple of 4) when squared, and will remain there for all higher powers of the number. Too bad none of this helps with Question Six. I'm still stuck, nibbling around the edges.

My wife's Peace Corps group is writing a book, collectively, about their experience, from training through the two years in India and after. A photo of the group came round in email, and there was only one person in the dozens who could be my wife, but she didn't resemble herself, or even her pictures from a couple of years later.

The Supreme Court rules that you can't restrict the number of attendees at church services. Either they don't read the Bible, or no one close to them has had the virus, or they just don't care about public health, deaths, and fanning the fire. It's a *pandemic*, you clueless dolts, and there have been multiple incidents of church-related superspreader events. Too many Catholics on that court -- 6 of the 9. How did it get this unrepresentative? And yes, two of the Catholics (Roberts and Sotomayor) dissented. But Barrett and Kavanaugh, and the other two, were in the majority.

When we were in Scotland, in 2001, I went to a Quaker Meeting in Edinburgh. If my memory is correct, I counted 700 people at that Meeting, by far the largest I'd ever attended. As a result, it was a popcorn meeting: a lot of people stood and talked. The only one I remember was an American who lived there. He had taken his son to see the "military tattoo", which is a formal show, with fancy traditional Scottish uniforms, and marching, and bagpipes, and cannons and all that sort of thing, which is held yearly at the castle, quite near the Meeting house. This man's son, who was maybe six or so, was quite interested after seeing this, and that evening, when this fellow tucked in his son, he said, in Quaker spirit, "You know, guns are important." The son looked right in his eyes, and said, "I like guns". This fellow concluded his story by telling us that right then he foresaw a dialog about this, lasting many years. We laughed in recognition, not just of such things with children, but of such things with everyone, with life in general.

November 28, 2020

Is "bookaholic" a word? Must be -- a million hits in Bing. I have 14 books checked out of my local library, and seven other libraries ("libraryholic", too). Also 6 books on hold, not delivered yet.

Having recently re-read *Lost In Math* as well as *Not Even Wrong*, I've concluded that the authors of such books cannot elucidate their subjects to someone of my limited knowledge and intelligence -- and I'm doing better than all but the who majored in physics, since I've studied math up to and including abstract algebra, as well as some physics. But the guys have spent so many years dealing with the gnarlies that they're stuck in their jargon and concepts, like Br'er Rabbit and an unbreakable embrace with the tar baby (though I admit that much of *Lost In Math* actually is intelligible, in dumbed-down fashion, and parts of *Not Even Wrong* are simple to understand), and often seem not even to realize how obscure writing is. More important, said material appears inexplicable without the technicalities. And the technicalities are very technical indeed, requiring years of hard study and thought. I get symmetry, but not quite symmetry breaking, or gauge theories. Renormalization, okay, no problem. But a lot of the rest is like watching a stampede in the distance: a cloud I'll never catch up to, unless I study hard and long. Which I am unwilling and incapable of at this point in my personal life. The motor is worn out. And how the hell can a particle be massless, anyway? At least I'm not alone in this. Jethro Lieberman, who's been reading physics for decades and wrote about the problems in *The American Scholar*, is befuddled, too. That article may be online by now... As I said to a physicist friend once, and to an engineer friend later, "I've never trusted [physicists]. It always seems like they're pulling something out of their ass." It's all smoke and mirrors with the guys. How many muons can dance on the head of a neutrino? Woit almost agrees with this in *Not Even Wrong*: you get the mathematicians, but the physicists are sloppy.

November 29, 2020

The (supposed) Chinese imprecation "May you live in interesting times" has certainly been true of late. The 1950s have been cloistered and stifling, and were, I think, less "interesting" despite the terror of nuclear war, and I'd be tempted if given the choice. There was no pandemic, and other problems were less abundant. Once McCarthy was disposed of, the least government was more rational than it seems to be at the moment. Public discourse was mostly civil. But racism was open and vicious. And sexism was largely unquestioned. We lived in a sort of unrecognized mental straitjacket of conformity, with a few exceptions like Lenny Bruce and Pete Seeger. Never mind. Travelling back would be a no-win proposition. There should be a better phrase for that. "Lose-lose" is ugly and contrived, and "double bind" doesn't fit. A little thought experiment.

The Israelis have bumped off the top Iranian nuclear scientist. Leaving aside all political and moral considerations, there are plenty, which I'm not qualified to unravel (though such considerations often don't seem to stop me), the Israelis are sure good at that stuff. They've had plenty of experience, dating back before the creation of the state of Israel. They've got a lot of people, including some wrong ones. But mostly they're amazingly good at it. One lesson here is that if you beat a group, as the Nazis did the Jews, they'll learn to do the same, and someone, somewhere, will suffer the consequences. I'm oversimplifying here -- the Israelis live in a tough neighborhood and are compelled to defend themselves. But that's illustrative of the point I'm trying to make. In fact, there's a very strong argument, which the Quakers made in advance of World War II sprang directly from the punitive conditions imposed on Germany after World War I. The repercussions are still felt today. I call this "passing on the blows". Look at the former Yugoslavia and the massacres that went on there. I remember when my wife and son and I were walking around the site of the battle of Culloden and I heard a Scotsman say to his son, "That's the English way -- kill, kill, kill", and I thought, "This is how it gets passed down." People believe what they're told as children. It's like an infection, and it gets passed on to the next generation, and to their neighbors. I remember watching a Black fellow on TV who said that his son was being hassled by a classmate, and he found out that that boy was the son of the man who had bullied *him* decades before. Racism begets racism. More generally, hatred begets hatred, anger begets anger. Look at the red/blue split in this country. I'm guilty here. But this has to change, or we'll go on and so will our children, and their children.

November 30, 2020

Biden. Trump. Obama. The Bushes. Why would anyone want to be President, anyway? The stress in that job has to be off the charts. I'd never get a wink of sleep.

On TV I've seen demonstrators in Germany and the U.K. protesting shutdowns, not wearing masks, and struggling with the police. Those aren't the only countries, either. Over here, we do it a little differently -- first, the government is decentralized and mostly less strict, and second, a lot of people just ignore the mandates. The New York City police busted a sex club where people were getting it on. Naturally they were maskless and undistanced. (How would it work, otherwise?) If you want to get together, you might as well bump uglies. Have fun, folks -- I can't wait to hear what the comedians will say about you.

The Bidens apparently will have their dogs in the White House, and will be getting a cat as well. As a dog lover, I find owners inexplicable. No one ever called cats "Man's best friend", or said, "If you want a friend in Washington, get a Truman did. Could this be a political move, to appeal to everyone, lovers of dogs and cats alike? What next, house plants and a garden? A compost heap? Jill Biden sitting by the fire knitting a sweater for Joe?

How much has the Trump administration covered up, and when, if ever, and how much, if any, will we find of what concealed? I'm probably missing some, but there are at least two reasons governments and politicians conceal what done: (honorably) to protect the public good, as when the knowledge of secret operations would tip off an enemy; and (dishonorably) to hide what is shameful, as many regimes have tried to conceal the crimes they've committed. Trump certainly not tried to do the first, with all his revelations of espionage results that gave away methods and personnel second, we may find out as the sewage gradually leaks.

More bad news. *Scientific American* reports that permafrost, which covers 24% of earth's land surface, is thawing at extreme rate and may release microbes that have been frozen for centuries or millenia. They further hint that frozen smallpox may be among the thawed-out. Like we need *that* pandemic, having lost our resistance since the disease supposedly extinguished. There's more at [nature.com](https://www.nature.com). The WHO is trying to decide when to destroy the remaining samples of the virus, but may fail. But at least viable virus hasn't yet been found in any corpse. Also see March 26, above. Most disturbing, to me, is that the genetic sequence has been "available since the 1990s" and could be synthesized... Return to the thawing story, one of the people on my flight to Fairbanks in 2016 was a scientist who was studying mosses or lichens (I forget which) to figure out whether they were contributing to or slowing greenhouse gasses. Wonder what he found.

December 1, 2020

Once a coworker told me about a meeting he'd just attended, at which one of the executives had been present. The discussion was about the competition, and the exec said, "Business is war and I want those guys dead". It occurs to me the credo of free enterprise in this nation sometimes goes too far. More narrowly (and more accurately), that guy took the ideology of *competition* too far. It needn't be nature red in tooth and claw; we can move beyond that in human culture. I think many people agree with him, and are simply more cautious, less candid, more careful in expressing themselves. They don't want to be seen as intemperate. There's something to be said for that kind of behavior: it lets us live together with less friction. On the other hand, when you sweep stuff under the rug, you have to expect that the lump is bound to trip you eventually.

And still on the subject of working at that company in the early 90s, that was the place where I first saw magnetic poetry. One of my coworkers brought a box of those little magnetized words to work. I spent a bit of time composing a poem (called) on top of her filing cabinet: "The girl is a goddess. / I lick her pink meat / and moan". Which amused the workers at the time: they laughed. These days, I'd probably get fired unless I sneaked in at night when no one was around, and behind anonymously. See the previous entry, regarding the pros and cons of candor and concealment.

Ellen Page has come out as transgender and nonbinary and changed her name to Elliot Page. (I say "her" name because she was considered female before the decision. There is, of course, an argument for using "his" instead.) Not to be unhelpfully clueless, though I am, but sometimes when I hear "him" or "her" about a trans person I've never heard of before, I wonder which phase of that person the pronoun refers to. (Yeah, I know, I shouldn't, and besides, it's clear about Mx Page.) I don't understand that they struggle and suffer. But I find myself baffled. Much as I'd like to be able to say that nothing human is alien to me, there remain areas that are utterly foreign. The only thing that irks me, really, is the ambiguities that sometimes result in the language, say when someone says their (!) pronoun is "they", and I wave bye-bye to the plural, which then becomes singular, leaving a void in 3P (third person plural) in the context of the conversation.

December 2, 2020

Recommendations by the CDC about who gets vaccinated first, and as usual the Trump administration disagrees with the scientists. Seems to be routine with those guys. They always get in a pissing contest with their experts. As for the phases of vaccination, the experts disagree among themselves about order; some say old folk before young, while others favor young before old. Maybe they should use my technique and ask the Magic 8 Ball. One thing that occurs to me is that even if a lot of the states make the wrong choice, the decentralization of this country (individual states following their own choices) will effectively act as an experiment and produce data on the results, so that next time we have a pandemic we'll have a much better idea what to do. Sorry if you have to die in the meantime -- it would be better to learn from the results of other countries, instead of our own -- but then there's the berries.

AstraZeneca bungled their trial. Some of the participants got a half dose. How the hell does that happen? Aren't the procedures nailed down in advance? Doesn't everyone get thoroughly trained? Don't they check each other's work? AstraZeneca says the error was made by a contractor. So what? And furthermore, they mixed results from trials of different designs in their reporting. I'd still take their vaccine, because something's better than nothing, and it does appear to work.

they're Keystone Kops. I admired the woman who developed the vaccine (see July 18), but the people who designed aren't up to her standards. That is, assuming *she* wasn't one of the trial designers.

Surprising factoid: the three states with the lowest number of hospital beds per capita are Washington, Oregon, and California. (Source: N.Y. Times coronavirus briefing.)

Also from the N.Y. Times coronavirus briefing: "When the New Hampshire Legislature -- the largest in the country assembles on Wednesday to begin its new session, it will do so outdoors". A small state has the largest legislature in country? And isn't it really cold up there?

Mitch McConnell, professional asshole, appears unready to offer relief to people who are unemployed or facing evic house loss. He says he doesn't "have time to waste time". Like helping his fellow Americans is a waste of time. Whi is the major offender here, there's plenty of blame for the Democrats, too. This is like a political version of that mov *War of the Roses*.

Apparently I was wrong about Barr. I thought he was so far up Trump's ass he'd never see daylight again, but he say has found no evidence of fraud that could have changed the result of the election. In the meantime, Trump is branch and considering pardoning his children and Jared in advance. What next? Stay tuned.

"Japan is an old-business superpower. The country is home to more than 33,000 with at least 100 years of history -- percent of the world's total. Over 3,100 have been running for at least two centuries. Around 140 have existed for m 500 years. And at least 19 claim to have been continuously operating since the first millennium." That includes [a bu that started in the year 1000](#). The story made me nostalgic; there have been two countries I've ever felt homesick for U.S., and Japan. The others were not special enough.

Almost all the TV I watch is Youtube on Roku, a lot of it the suggestions it offers (to my tastes: linguistics, math, st comedy, jazz and ragtime, climbing, which seems to have vanished recently). Inexplicably, it offered me a site calle "Natural Wonders", which consists entirely of series of stills of women with bathycolpian builds. The most massive decks I've ever seen, freakishly large enough not to be stimulating, but to, yes, provoke wonder, as the title suggests these women made Dolly Parton's boobs look small. Where do they buy their clothes? Because the stores everyone have to be insufficient.) There were also a couple of callipygian chicks in there, I suppose to provide variety. I look channel up on Youtube. There seem to be hundreds of pages on that site. How did they find them, and get them to a be photographed (or spend time hunting for the pics on the internet), and why waste your time building such a site? of course, you have an obsession. This is one that should be in that book *Perv, the Sexual Deviant in All of Us*, whic a lot of sexual obsessions. Compared to some of those, this one seems quite normal.

December 3, 2020

Watching TV, a story about an accomplished, but forgotten until recently, woman Renaissance painter, brought hom to me how women have been held back throughout history. Biology has hobbled them: they're physically weaker th and they're the ones to bear children. That latter is changing, especially in the West, with birth control, which allows to time their children. But the piece that's still missing is the necessary change in the behavior of men. This will foll their *minds* change, and I'm afraid that that will take a long time. All this, of course, is obvious and has been said ma times. But last night I had one of those moments when I saw the truth of a commonplace, when it opened up and be clear to me.

This journal has turned into a record of every random thought I have. Here's one that's been running through my mi how I'd live differently if I had to do it all over. I would: listen to my elders more; challenge myself every chance I g kind; take better care of myself; contribute.

December 4, 2020

A blip seen in passing: E.U. members warn of no more concessions in Brexit talks. That was predictable. They have to gain, and much to lose, at least on the surface, by making concessions. Their motivation has to be that Britain mu punished, to discourage future defections. (I bet this is precisely what game theory would predict.) But they could t long view. Backed-up trucks at the borders, the Northern Ireland problem, resentment festering in a nation just mile: the continent -- all this could come back to haunt them later. As for the Brits, I've wondered from the start what the were thinking. Secede in haste, repent at leisure. Yeah, the E.U. has structural problems (the requirement for unanim one, enabling the dictators in Poland and Hungary to prevent the other members from censuring their undemocratic by threatening to block the budget). And Britain has long been an outlier, feeling not-entirely-European (witness ke their own passports and currency on joining the E.U.). But as my mother used to describe this sort of thing, it's "cutt your nose to spite your face". Bluntly put, they're were a pack of Goddamn fools when they decided to leave.

Stumbled on this guy [Robert Huffstutter](#), a hometown boy I'd never heard of.

Can you adjust the speed [on this thing](#)? First comment says the kid will always have all his lunch money. I thought it funny and apt. But I have to wonder, will he be able to defend himself against anything except roundhouse swings? rely on this one training method too much, kid.

First snow yesterday. At the grocery store, the bagger was excited about it. I wasn't, having intended to rake leaves.

(Cue Coltrane playing in the background.) These are a few of my favorite things: number theory, protein folding, lizards, dogs, books, rock climbing, standup comedy, and let's not forget Brigitte Bardot (the young, sex kitten version, not the haggard old animal activist).

December 5, 2020

Georgia elections confuse me. First, let me say right off that it took guts for the officials there to castigate Trump. But not what I find baffling. In 2018 the state likely had more problems with voting than any other, and they had some history of this. That year, there appeared to be systematic efforts to minimize the Black vote, not only making registration difficult, but closing polling places so that people had to stand in line for hours at a new place. Lawsuits were threatened. This year, if you believe them, their voting and results are pristine. Somehow I doubt that they turned on a dime like that. What seems more likely to me is that Biden carried the state *despite* the rightward bias in their voting system. Now we have to go through the entire damn show again in early January, when they have two runoffs that will determine the party that controls the Senate.

December 6, 2020

Comedians who were philosophy majors in college: Woody Allen, George Carlin, Jimmy Kimmel, Ricky Gervais, Stephen Colbert, Bill Murray, Steve Martin, Jay Leno?, Dennis Miller?, Joan Rivers?. I'm forgetting one, and there were others who were obscure. Some of them dropped out of school or changed majors, but still, I'm left to wonder what's common between the study of philosophy and the performance of comedy. It reminds me of the philosophy-mathematics connection: there are zillions of guys who did both. As for the comics, did they give up on solving the absurdities that troubled them and that humor was the best response? Or what? "How the hell do I know why there were Nazis? I don't know how the comedian opener works!" (Woody Allen)

And while on the subject of humor, what's funny? There isn't just one thing. Surprise (Steven Wright: "So what's the deal with the world of dark?"). The truth, especially when it's something we've recognized liminally (much of Dave Chapelle's humor). Exaggeration and/or absurdity (early Steve Martin and the arrow through his head, or his skit about the King Tut exhibition). Shock (different from surprise; a lot of Lenny Bruce's bits). Dissonance (Woody Allen's bathos; see the Nazi / can't joke above). Impropriety (an open-miker I saw once said, "Why do Black people have more kids? Don't your swim trunks sink, too?" -- verging on racist, but the audience laughed). Most of these examples fall into more than one category, and my list is far from complete. Laughter's a strange thing; we don't understand it, and why would that spasmodic, noisy release of air be pleasurable?

The U.S. is the third most populous country on the planet. That's why I object to the statistic that we've had the most deaths. Even if it's true, it's misleading. The Chinese government lies, and the Indians have a shitty health system and can't be expected to accurately track virus deaths. More to the point, though, we shouldn't be ranked above smaller countries that have a higher death *rate*. The statistic should be the ratio: deaths per capita, not the gross total. This is elementary and should be obvious.

Out for a walk yesterday, I saw four yards with Trump/Pence signs. They were almost nonexistent around here before the election. Now that it's over, they seem to be springing up like toadstools, probably because so many Republicans still believe Trump's bullshit. Let me see if I understand them correctly: there was a plot to steal the Presidency, and all the Republican secretaries of state who certified the results for Biden, as well as the people who worked for them, and the Republican-appointed judges (some of them Trump appointees) who tossed out Trump's legal challenges, are in on it. But the Trump wins in various states, and the Republican gains in the House, are not to be questioned. The perpetrators of this iniquitous plot have managed to keep it secret. No one has revealed the details, or given any confirming evidence. [John Bolton said](#), "The Trump campaign simply has no evidence. Their basic argument is this was a conspiracy so successful that there's no evidence of it. Now if that's true, I really want to know who the people are who pulled it off. We need to hire them at the CIA." As my dad once said, "My mind is made up. Don't confuse me with facts." Trump is whatever you've been smoking, you gotta stop. It's over. You lost. Now man up.

December 7, 2020

Watched a video yesterday of 44 thrills to add to your "bucket" list (lame term, that). Hurlled or dropped vast distant sort of thing. Time was, I would have done the majority of those (though not the roller coasters, or the things that would trigger my motion sickness and make me vomit). Not now, when I'd do fewer than half.

Woke up early, thinking about dreaming, which seems somehow slightly paradoxical, but never mind. Here I offer a phenomenology of dreaming:... Dreams have counterintuitive quality. Unlike the daylight life, with its tangibility, its incontrovertibility, the mental life in darkness is characterized by its insubstantiality. Dreams are gossamer, and easily forgotten. They evaporate, usually leaving nothing behind, or at most a sort of vague feeling-perception, and a mild frustration at the inability to recall the details. They have story lines, but unlike the stories we use to organize our lives to amuse ourselves; instead, they're full of stuff that shouldn't fit together, yet somehow is taken for granted during the dream itself. We all agree that they aren't "real", in the way that waking life is real, but when we think about this, we wonder we should assume it so quickly, except, of course, that we're more or less awake when we assert this. There is a peculiar abstract quality to dreams that I suppose leads to this conclusion of unreality. That abstraction is nothing like, say, mathematics, lacking its rigor and clarity. Quite the opposite: rigor and clarity are utterly lacking in dreams. They seem to be separate from waking life, and yet, it's possible to train ourselves to stay awake in order to observe our dreams called "lucid dreaming"; I've experienced it). We can train ourselves to remember them more consistently. They can feel real that they're convincing; who hasn't said on occasion, "It felt really *real*"? They have loose connections to quotidian sometimes populated with characters we know (our dogs, even), and events we recognize (or at least their funhouse siblings). Dreaming varies from person to person, I contend -- some of us dream in color, as I briefly used to, but often dream in black and white, as I do again now. They tend to be visual, and perhaps slightly kinesthetic. The other senses, are missing, though hearing may occasionally be present in some bleached-out, implicit fashion. They are narrative (though the narratives are bent at nonexistent, indescribable angles). Dreams are the phantasms of thought, and refused to be caught in any net of thought, or words. They are the quantum foam of our neurology, the poetry of the subconscious can only be described with inadequate approximations. Untouchable as smoke, they elude our grasping hands.

An email I sent a couple of friends recently:

Take the following with a grain of salt, as it's all based on old memories.

As I mentioned last night, Philip Roth was not accepted by Wikipedia as an authority on his own life. So he wrote [a letter in the New Yorker](#). After that, Wikipedia changed the entry, I suspect from embarrassment.

Broyard's daughter Bliss, in her memoir *One Drop: My Father's Hidden Life -- A Story of Race and Family Secrets*, mentions once meeting Roth at a party, at which her father was also present. (I think he threw the party.) Roth commented that she was "white as a ghost" or something like that, a comment that baffled her. (Anatole Broyard was an octaroon thereabouts, which you can tell when you look at pictures of him. But he never told his children. He spent his life passing for white.) Since Bliss's mother was Norwegian, and Bliss thought her father was also white, she did not understand the comment until her father died and her mother revealed his secret. Roth seems to have figured it out. Thus, his letter in the New Yorker ("I did not even know whether he had children.") conflicts with what Bliss had to say in her memoir. That again, my memory may be wrong, but I think not. Maybe Roth's memory failed, or he lied. A lot of writers do, including Broyard himself in *Kafka was the Rage*, where he wrote about an affair that the woman it was based on denied that it occurred -- and her story was more believable. (The book is still worth reading, though. I remember *Intoxicated by Illness* as even better. He was the greatest stylist I've ever read, except James Salter.)

I think Roth mixed a lot of stuff together, and was less than completely candid about what he'd written. [There's also](#) add to the mix.

December 8, 2020

Heard on the radio that people have taken up stargazing since the pandemic hit, and you can't find a new telescope anywhere. You'll have to watch the grand conjunction of Jupiter and Saturn, the best since 1423, with the naked eye. I suggest not relying on the date of December 21st, when the planets are closest to each other. Check them out on the case the 21st is cloudy. If both those days are cloudy, repeat on the 22nd. I would be outdoors with my binoculars, even though that I care more about getting sleep than watching heavenly bodies.

The times they are a-changin'. Dylan sells the rights to his entire oeuvre for hundreds of millions of dollars. Not to be judging you or anything, Bob, but what are you going to do with the dough? Put it in a vault and dive into it, joyous Scrooge McDuck?

Seems that the United States could have paid for more doses of the Pfizer vaccine, but the Trump administration said thanks. So we'll make do with less. This is what comes of electing an ignoramus who appoints amateurs to office.

A lot of books in the Little Free Library had been sitting there for weeks. They couldn't get any love, so I replaced them with others. One of the books I removed was *The Cuckoo's Egg*, and I made the mistake of dipping into it again. Now I'm hooked. I skim, to reduce the waste of time spent re-reading. (I really should be finishing up that paper I'm writing, my other chores.) Great detective story, of tracking down a hacker / spy. His second book was good, too. I looked at the site a few years ago. Now he makes and sells Klein bottles. With that hair of his, he looks like a junior Einstein. Qui eccentric, but what do you expect? Every physicist I've ever met has been an oddball.

December 9, 2020

Reading my third book of Louise Gluck's poetry, and starting to get her. She demands complete focus on her words, has the ability to speak the familiar unexpected recognizable... This brought me up short: "But if the essence of time change, / how can anything become nothing?" One of those questions that seems natural and unanswerable, and at the same time based on some illusion, or false distinction.

When I was quite young, I rode the train a hundred miles, to visit my mother's parents. My sister did the same thing. While I may have some of the details wrong, her story is essentially this: there were two trains, and everyone was gone, so she followed them on. It was the train for L.A. (where she lived, years later), the wrong train. When the conductor punched everyone's tickets, he saw that she was on the wrong train, and arranged matters so that she would get off at a first stop and be taken to a bus, and passed from person to person, so she would get to her grandparents' house. How he managed this I don't know, because that was when you still had to reserve the line hours in advance if you wanted to make a long-distance call. Who did he find, and how was she passed along, if those helpers couldn't call ahead? Somehow it worked, and she was restored to her family.

I used to say, "The great emptiness we come from and will return to," a notion I associated mostly with the Inuit, but with Buddhism for some reason. Now I think, yes, it's true, but the word "emptiness" is too uncomplicated, even if true (which, how would I know?), and lacks resonance.

Has my neighbor died? Her house has gone quietly up for sale and is dark in the evening, and I haven't seen her out for weeks.

At CoLang 2016, in Fairbanks, we students were invited to a party. The apartment, elegant, had a balcony that overlooked the Chena River. Inside the apartment, a grand piano, with the lid down, and a jigsaw puzzle on top, disassembled. A dozen or more students headed directly to it, dispersed themselves evenly around it, and began putting it together. I thought of it as a perfect metaphor for the discipline: a group of people working on problems together.

The boys from Redmond strike again. For a long time now, I've left the tabs in my browser (Firefox) open, and when I go to work, I simply shut down the PC, without logging off. The next time I start the machine, the browser comes up with all my tabs, and all my customary websites (various emails, the latest draft of my book, research for my linguistics paper, etc.) are restored automatically. No longer. Yesterday the PC updated itself, interminably, rebooting over and over, taking its damn time. Now the color scheme is eye-stabblingly ugly, which I've tried to change and only partly succeeded. My point, though, Firefox did not preserve the tabs. Someone at Microsoft may have noticed and said, "Hey, this is competition and it's in a browser that competes with ours. We have to kill this." And yes, I've found the way to set up Firefox so the problem is fixed, but in the meantime I've lost some of the technical papers I was reading for my research. I wonder why the option for restoring the previous session changed (I had to manually re-check the box). (Later: and it stopped launching automatically when firing up the PC, which I fixed, but why did Firefox disappear from the startup folder? For that matter, why does Microsoft keep encouraging me to download Edge, when the damn thing has been on my PC for most of this year? And is it really necessary to put the damn exhortations right in the middle of search screen?)

December 10, 2020

Finally, 46 states are suing Facebook, and the FTC is on their ass, too. Only took them a decade to smell the coffee. It's a little late than never, though incalculable damage has been done. Next up should be Amazon and the private equity firms (the latter may have to be on grounds other than monopolistic practices).

All the counties in the metro area have tightened their restrictions because of the rise in Covid cases. All, that is, except the one I live in. Goddamn these morons.

Gardening has become more popular, and as usual, change leads to unexpected consequences: "Gardeners in Hampshire county in southeast England, were weeding their yard in April when they found 63 gold coins and one silver coin from Henry VIII's reign in the 16th century, with four of the coins inscribed with the initials of the king's wives Catherine of Aragon, Anne Boleyn and Jane Seymour." (NY Times) Ain't gonna happen around here. The most I might find is an arrowhead.

More evidence that our government has become a clown car:

"Why isn't the U.S. doing more testing? There are a few reasons.

"The F.D.A. has been slow to grant approval for new tests. The Trump administration has been slow to spend the money Congress has allocated for testing. And Congress may need to allocate more money; mass testing could cost a few billion dollars a month -- still a small fraction of the cost of recent proposed virus bills." (Source: NY Times)

From the WSJ: "FORGET BITCOIN. If you're looking for a surefire investment right now, try buying and reselling Patagonia fleeces. Kelsey Silverstein, 28, and Mark Donoher, 30, resold a Sea Turtle-patterned Snap-T fleece from \$165 about a year and a half ago. Today that same fleece could fetch more than \$300 online. Rather than worry that they sold it too soon, the couple—who run Orbital Outdoors, an online clothing store dedicated to vintage outdoor gear—is ahead. 'I'm hoarding the best stuff,' said Mr. Donoher who is convinced the market can only go up. 'I think everything now is just beginning.' " Hah! Mine, from the mid-1970s, was worth two or three hundred dollars *ten years ago*. An antique more now. But I ain't selling. I've lived too much of my life in that jacket. And don't think you can steal it. I just hid it. Now I've got to hope I'll remember where I hid it.

" 'Faces are my whole life... I think of the human face as a theater that performs the actor inside, in flickers and pulls of 42 tiny muscles, in the rise and fall of blood that swirls with our emotions.' Now, those faces are masked." I'm having facial masking because of Parkinson's. "Facial masking" is the name of the symptom for our frozen faces. It's the symptoms I hate most.

December 11, 2020

How do blind people operate stuff like microwaves, with touchpads they can't see? Do they have helpers who paste labels on them?

BBC NewsHour had a piece yesterday about the European bison. It's no longer threatened with extinction. That was heartening. I hadn't seen or heard any news of the species in quite some time. They interviewed a fellow in Montana, apparently a bison specialist, and he called the species a success story, but then immediately pointed out that the bison live in small groups and have extremely limited genetic diversity. The number of animals was reduced to 11 at one point in the early 20th century (the BBC announcer said 34), and the species needs further help to ensure its survival. There was no mention of our North American bison ("buffalo"), which went through a similar genetic bottleneck, but which lives, essentially, in captivity.

I'm starting to read *The Seasons Alter*. The two authors open the book with a quote from *Midsummer Night's Dream* that reads prophetically. (There must be a word for those pages at the beginnings of books that are given over to quotes. I know that word, dammit.) Despite my inability to read and watch Shakespeare's plays, the man had an extraordinary command of our language: "hoary-headed frosts / Fall in the fresh lap of the crimson rose; ... The childing autumn, / winter / change their wonted liveries; ... We are their parents and original." The book's authors are both professors of philosophy. The field allows its people to range more widely (and increasingly so in recent decades) than any other. It was what attracted me to it, to get my first B.A. in that subject. Ever since, though, when people learn that, they tend to scoff, usually silently, but sometimes not, and when they voice their contempt (that word not being too strong), and to respond (sometimes letting it pass), it's easy to defend my choice, because invariably they've been unable to answer simply don't know how to argue back in favor of the unexamined life or counter whatever other tack I've taken. If that's the thing the field teaches you, it's how to examine and disassemble an argument (which I mean in the sense of "thesis"). Perhaps only law school spends as much time (or more?) on this, but the focus there is much more specialized and rigorous. The sciences don't teach this -- get a scientist off his turf, and he will usually err fairly quickly, though there are many admirable exceptions to this generalization. The physicians are trained to an extraordinary degree of skill in observational reasoning, but again this tends to be specialized. Philosophy remains the one domain that allows, even encourages, its practitioners to range widely. Now if we could just get rid of all the airy abstractions and nonsense that are produced in the name -- though this seems to have improved in recent decades: a friend of mine who spent his career teaching philosophy asserted, when I noted that it seemed to have become more practical, that in fact it had. He credited the influx of women into the field. It did, indeed, used to be a male domain, and has opened up to the other gender (though not to the extent of a truly egalitarian -- but who knows? you'd have to do some research into the reasons why, and the trends, and ...), but I have no idea whether his observation is correct.

Reading entries in this journal, I'm always struck by the variability -- the random topics, the sentences wandering off and ending altogether different from their beginnings, the entries ditto, the ubiquitous parenthetical asides, the ridiculous and complicated sentences, often grammatical only on re-reading them. If I were writing for someone else, I'd clean up that indulgent crap. As is, I don't care, because I can read my own mind. Which puts me in mind of Wittgenstein's private language argument... Kidding.

December 12, 2020

"Testing positive" used to mean AIDS. Also, though memory fails me, various other stuff. Now it means Covid. So who's learned to read is going to see the phrase in old material online and wonder briefly whether Covid existed back too.

Biden's appointments sure are the old-boy network in action. It's always bugged me that Presidents appoint people they know, and while I realize they want to have people they're guaranteed to be able to work with, this smacks of cronyism.

The half-life (shelf life?) of ideas is converging to that of radon. I remember a book titled "Same-Sex Marriage, Pro and Con", collected by a gay (still detest that word -- it was one of those words with particular connotations and got co-opted and nothing has ever quite replaced the original meaning), as I was saying, collected by a homosexual writer who opposed same-sex marriage, but judiciously chose essays arguing both sides of the question. Same-sex unions are a fait accompli now, but we sure rushed into them without pondering all the ramifications first. Puts me in mind of a cartoon of a man and his wife, she reading a book, he a periodical. She looks startled at his outburst: "Gay marriage! Haven't they suffered enough?"

As if the endless update the other day wasn't enough, Windows wants to update again. Made a mistake, guys, and now I have to go back and fix it? I sympathize, having gone through that sort of thing more times than I care to remember. Still, one can only sigh and shrug one's shoulders. Microsoft has a big, unwieldy system, which is the victim of its early sloppy coding practices, the variability of the platform, and more other stuff than is worth going into. But I find myself endlessly exasperated at the *slovenliness* of the software, when compared to the Mac, or to Unix and Linux. The only other architecture I ever saw that was as bad as Windows was the IBM mainframe family. No, it was pretty bad, but still considerably better. I'd abandon the damn thing but I don't want to make the effort: don't want to join Apple's walled garden or undertake the extra DIY that Linux requires. Windows is just so damn *convenient*... In checking the update notice, I noticed this, which is both helpful and snooping, like a busybody aunt: "We noticed you regularly use your device between 10:00 AM and 6:00 PM. Would you like Windows to automatically update your active hours to match your activity? We won't update during this time."

[David Quammen](#), whose writing and knowledge I've admired since forever, was in the Times yesterday, exhibiting impeccable research, organization, clarity and precision, and of course the fascinating insights that he scatters. As for the subject of his piece, I remember a scientist coming to my high school to talk about echolocation and asserting that it was counterintuitive that the ability should include what he'd found: the sight-like knack for deducing shape, not just distance. When I asked why he thought this was an unexpected finding, he was stumped and could not answer, maybe too deeply embedded in his human sight-dominant modality to disentangle himself? I noticed that the reaction may be obsolete because Quammen mentions the ability of bats to use echolocation to deduce shape... I remember, vaguely, reading something he wrote that included that fruit-bat research in India.

Got an email pleading for contributions to help preserve the platypus. I gave a talk on them at Nerd Nite. That is one little critter: neck vertebrae have rudimentary ribs, like reptiles; legs splay to side, like reptiles, not like other mammals; pectoral girdle, like fossil reptiles; eyes are birdlike; webbed feet; cloaca; propels itself with the *front* feet; poor at wading; can remain underwater for 11 minutes; much iron, many red blood cells, relatively large lungs; catches food in water in cheek pouches, eats on surface of water; juveniles lose their teeth, which are replaced with keratin pads; uses gravity to grind up food; lays eggs; only the left ovary is functional; the penis has two heads; the testes are inside the abdomen; males nurse young, despite lacking teats (milk "patches"); have 5 pairs of sex chromosomes; only poisonous mammals other than shrews (if you get tagged by a male's spur, the pain is "spectacular", so always pick up a platypus by the tail); bill is the major sensory organ, including electroreceptors; cerebral hemispheres show almost no folding; have been known to die simply from being handled by a human; dogs and foxes (an exotic) are threats; river structure changes (human-induced), flooding, pollution, and many other threats. The Tasmania parks site used to have a page to play the growl that's gone. [Listen to this instead.](#)

I see that Ben Bliss is returning for a home visit and virtual concert. If he's the one I'm thinking of, I've seen him in Lyric Opera productions. I didn't know he was from P.V., though. So we have two professional opera singers from a modest little suburb in this hick Midwestern metro: him and Joyce DiDonato. He's good, but she's world class. The first time I saw her, she wasn't bad. The next time, a few years later, she'd really upped her game, and knocked me out. The crowd agrees. She sings all over Europe and North America, including the Met and La Scala. *La Cenerentola* used to be her signature role, but I think she sings a lot of different roles now. As for Ben Bliss, I used to work with his cousin; in that time, that guy was my boss (a really nice guy, too), and told me about hanging out with Bliss after a performance. Years later, I was envious.

Weird science (redundant phrase, that?): Voyager 2, after traveling 43 years and reaching the edge of the solar system, billions of miles from us, the little robot is still sending back data (!), and is telling us that the density of space is increasing as it travels farther from the edge of the sun's influence. Apparently this, and similar results from Voyager 1, surprised scientists. I wonder whether this might explain the discrepancies that led to the dark matter hypothesis. I don't even

whether this question would provoke a chuckle and head shake from the cognoscenti: "These speculations from the polloi are always good for a laugh".

My weirdest earworm yet: "God said to Abraham, Kill me a son. Abe said, Man you must be puttin' me on. God said Abe said, What. God said, You can do what you want Abe, but the next time you see me comin' you better run. Abe Where you want this killin' done. God said, Out on highway 61."

When we summered in Colorado, when I was young, the newspapers there had different comic strips from here, and looked forward to them, or at least some of them. There were Dondi (little Mexican kid); Alley Oop (he had a club, Popeye-like forearms, and rode a dinosaur); Little Orphan Annie (a fascist strip if ever there was one; LATER: I for mention the name of Daddy *Warbucks*, clearly wealthy from making munitions or something, who was Annie's (kin implicitly pedo?) sort-of-guardian); Terry and the Pirates; Mary Worth (boring); On Stage (beautifully drawn); Princ Valiant (also well drawn); Gasoline Alley (Nina Clock); maybe Lil Abner (which we had here); there was a strip ab cowboy, but I can't recall the name; Nancy, maybe. The rest of them escape me now, after more than 60 years. Pogo in those Colorado Springs and Denver papers, which was a disappointment. I wonder how long those strips went on whether any of them have been collected between the covers of books, or preserved in an archive. Sorta like Nick at "preserving our precious television heritage". Gotta stop taking pop culture (another oxymoron, like "Fox News") s

When I get a late-evening text from a number that has no relation to me, I turn off my phone, so it can't get any mor next day, and typically a day or two after that, I forget to turn it back on. This and other behaviors lead my brother to caricature my attitude as, "I have a phone. Don't call me." I've got a reputation I don't fully deserve, the kind you ca of. It's not entirely untrue, just exaggerated.

Biden's middle name is Robinette. Who knew? But I've got that beat. I have a middle name that almost no one has heard of, and which is, quite literally, phonetically unpronounceable. I've never liked it, so you'll never know.

Went to [xkcd](#), because I hadn't been there in years. The [good ones](#) are too few -- you have to slog through too much pop culture, Unix references, etc. to get to them. Try [this one](#). I'd forgotten all the implicitly self-congratulatory pree that site. There's too much stuff you have to look up, though I do recognize a lot of it. Gotta admit, though, that som [tee shirts](#) he sells are worth the money. I like the Collatz Conjecture tee -- that's one of my favorite math conjectures like the coffee cup labeled "doughnut". Get it? Hint: think topology.

December 13, 2020

Have almost keeled over several times today. PD is destroying my balance.

Trying to find number pairs for Question Six so I could seek patterns without having to load a compiler and write ar or do endless multiplications by hand, I stumbled across [this quote](#) (bottom of page 4). I knew the answer in a few s using the shortcut (I think I've seen the problem before, but, hey, it's obvious, right?). I'm stunned that von Neuman sum an infinite series that quickly. I knew the guy was smart, but that's not even human, von Newman -- er, Neumar Here's the quote: "There is a well-known anecdote about the famous mathematician John von Neumann (1903-1957 friend of von Neumann once gave him a problem to solve. Two cyclists A and B at a distance 20 miles apart were approaching each other, each going at a speed of 10 miles per hour. A bee flew back and forth between A and B at a 15 miles per hour, starting with A and back to A after meeting B, then back to B after meeting A, and so on. By the two cyclists met, how far had the bee travelled? In a flash von Neumann gave the answer -- 15 miles. His friend res by saying that von Neumann must have already known the trick so that he gave the answer so fast. His friend had in the slick solution to this quickie, namely, that the cyclists met after one hour so that within that one hour the bee had travelled 15 miles. To his friend's astonishment von Neumann said that he knew no trick but simply summed an infi series!"

December 14, 2020

Last night I had an insight on Question Six: it should be possible to solve it geometrically, rather than algebraically. Cartesian plane, define the point (2,8) or any other point that gives an integer solution, as one vertex of a right triang the other vertices at (2,0) and (0,0). The numerator of the expression in the problem works out to be 68 for this case the square root of that, and you get the length of the hypotenuse. Now make that one edge of a square, area of 68. A It all works out very neatly; you can use either 8 triangles, or a bit more simply 4 rectangles (area of 16). The only p have is that this is still merely a *demonstration*, not a proof. And what's with that ugly "+ 1" term in the denominato anyway? Sure, it makes everything work out correctly, but it ruins the elegance of the problem. Geometrically, it's li the triangles leave an extra square of size one half behind, which need to be cleaned up after you've packed them int square. I can visualize this, though not in full detail, as a tilted square (2 by 2, area of 4) in the center of the big squ where all the triangles meet -- but I think this doesn't fit neatly, and the little squares probably have to be broken up.

obviously would, if you packed the big square with rectangles instead of triangles.) I'll have to try drawing this out on a sheet of graph paper. The leftover unit square / integer 1 in the denominator feels like one of those makeshifts physicists always sticking into their theories, to make everything come out even. Oh, well, maybe I've gained a bit more insight that, or gotten sidetracked.

Saw in the news that Doug Scott has died. He was one of the great high-altitude mountaineers of the 1970s -- first on the southwest face of Everest, among other achievements. He and his partner had to bivouac because their headlamp (WTF? Why no spare batteries?) It was the highest night out ever spent by human beings at the time, and maybe still oxygen was done, too. But in the morning, they made it down. Another time, on the Ogre, he broke both legs, but the descent was so tough that his partners (Mo Anthoine is the only one I remember) couldn't help him much. When he finished the rappels, he had to crawl back to camp. One tough motherfucker. He was also, except for Edmund Hillary only climber I've ever heard of who gave anything back to the Sherpas. Come to think of it, he was a Buddhist, so was that in common, too, though he was orders of magnitude beyond me in both domains, of course.

For some reason, whenever I think of living weekdays at Kansas Zen Center in spring of 2016, during that semester so demanding, standing at the kitchen window looking out at the side yard is usually part of the memory. The place longer KZC; it's in other hands now, having been sold. I've never been in the new KZC, about half a mile away. It's better, since it's all in one building and you don't have to go through bitter cold (the week-long retreats were always beginning of January) or for that matter scorching heat, to schlep the food back and forth from the house to the dhar -- or to go to the interview room, or just go to the house to take a leak. But KZC had been there for 40 years or more even though I never did anything except attend retreats (and live there for a semester), I feel nostalgia for the place. It's part of my mental furniture, or at least the clutter in my mental attic. Well, hell, impermanence, to use the Buddhist term everything changes, so don't cling to it.

December 15, 2020

Armless mannequins: they usually give me that little liminal jolt of cognitive dissonance. I understand the drive to save money, and maybe the risk of parts that can break off. For that matter, the arms could obscure parts of the clothing. But those dummies briefly look mutilated and paraplegic to me.

Russia hacks U.S. government agencies again -- State Department, Pentagon, Justice, Commerce, Treasury, CDC. And utility companies, which (as a former employee of an electrical utility) I find more frightening, because many of the programmable logic controllers in the network were (still are?) totally insecure. Why hasn't anyone pointed out the fact that the insecurity of the Windows platform has enabled this hacking? Unix has its problems, certainly, especially the Android variant, but in general Windows is the O.S. that's full of holes. And certainly there are other weaknesses, like problems in database software (e.g. SQL injection), cross-site scripting attacks, phishing, man in the middle attacks, Denial of Service attacks, social engineering, viruses in various types of files (including Word and Excel), and endless other stuff. I'm speaking very generally here. Windows security has been crippled from day one. Putin's not stupid: he's ordered that the Russian government must get rid of the damn thing. Windows was developed for features first, performance second, security last -- and it shows.

Finally, a Congressman with integrity. Paul Mitchell, a Republican Representative from Michigan, is severing ties with his party because it has enabled Trump's lies. He will serve as an independent. Justin Amash, also a Republican Representative from Michigan, did the same thing last year.

What's with all those screamers (that's a bit of typographer jargon meaning exclamation point, in case you didn't know what's with all those screamers Trump uses? I asked a coworker once why she used so many in her emails, and she said "it's a woman thing". So I started paying attention. Mostly, it *is* a woman thing. Trump dyes his hair blond (or did; he may be letting it go gray now). That was a woman thing, too. He's politically correct, it seems: he embraces his inner woman.

Health care workers are receiving injections of the Pfizer vaccine, starting yesterday. After that, residents of old folks' homes. Next, stay tuned.

[Kobach loses again](#). The man's obsessed about immigrants, vote fraud, and I don't know what all. He keeps bringing lawsuits about these hobbyhorses, and consistently losing.

December 16, 2020

As Roseanne Rosanadanna would say, it's always something. [This guy](#) used a jet ski (though he'd never been on one before) to go from Scotland to the Isle of Man, to see his girlfriend. For him, we should rename it the Isle of Woman.

[Snow days](#) may be a thing of the past. I remember once in San Antonio, when I was in college there, a bit of snow came down, just enough to make a peekaboo lacework: snow, but you could see the dirt under it through the gaps. They let

primary schools out so the kids could look at it, and a good thing, because it was gone by afternoon. I wonder whether will use online classes like the more northerly schools. Then again, with climate change, the chance of another snow Antonio is probably growing remote. [Spoke too soon](#). They do get it, mostly traces. Check out January 12, 1985: 13 inches. Kowabunga.

Language unfailingly puzzles me. Take that word "unfailingly" that I used in the first sentence. It's a perfectly acceptable adverb in our mother tongue. And "unfailing" is an adjective, e.g. in "unfailing devotion". But "unfail" is not a verb, because it would be confusing and too broad. Now consider the uninflected word "fail". Common verb, right? The *ε* is also common ("failing grade"). So why is the adverb "failingly" nonexistent? Why can't I say "Eddie the Eagle failed to compete in the Olympics again"?

During a wakeful period, a memory, gone for decades, came back, of a time maybe fifty years ago. I was driving in the middle of the night in a torrential rain. So many frogs were on the highway that I couldn't avoid crushing them, in spite of weaving the car around them to try to avoid them. Popping noises. I gripped the steering wheel in horror.

I've compared PD to the movie *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*: you know you have an alien thing inside you, and it takes you over. You struggle against it, all the time knowing it will destroy you. *Woman in the Dunes* would be another comparison -- the futility, the frustration, the failure at every turn.

December 17, 2020

Big snowstorm in the northeast. Pfizer has a manufacturing facility in Andover, MA, along with a bunch of other plants. Let's hope the storm doesn't hinder the supply chain.

December 18, 2020

These vaccines that have to be kept ultracold -- what is the fluid medium that carries them? It sure isn't water, which freezes and expands. Not likely alcohol, either. So what is it?

Remember when most of us had a little scar on their left deltoid, from their smallpox vaccination? No one gets them anymore, and I haven't noticed one in a long, long time. I thought mine had disappeared, but when I looked carefully now, it's still there, but hard to see. I guess they must fade with time. ("Fade" is a poor word choice, but I don't know better.) [Learn more about smallpox here](#). Or read the book *The Speckled Monster*, which is a great read.

December 19, 2020

Nothing to say today. I've run out of words, and the world will have to stumble along somehow without my bloviations.

December 20, 2020

When I was working in Lawrence, several of the people at that company were Hindus, and several were Muslims. I go to lunch with them. Though I noticed they never discussed religion with each other if their religions were different. Always wanted to convert me, the sole Buddhist. One of my Muslim friends once insisted to me, "I know God exists in it." I replied, "Fine. You know it. I don't." He looked at me, silent and astonished, as if he'd never imagined such a thing.

The PD voice class is over for the semester. No more Tuesday-morning Zoom sessions with the grad students, those wonderful young women who were so alert and engaging and helpful. They were always crystal clear, both in what they said, and in the timbre of their voices. Without exception, I never heard a one of them utter a word that I didn't immediately understand. But what was most appealing about them was the generous spirit of helpfulness. Even if I didn't need them to maintain my voice, I'd still want to take it, both because of the grad students and because of the other persons with Parkinson's.

Whoever subscribed me to the Sunday New York Times, thank you. Most generous of you. I'd get you something, to let you know who you are.

December 21, 2020

Walked up to the cemetery yesterday, to visit my parents and take Pogo for a stroll and get a bit of fresh air. Looked at the gravestones. Most of the old ones have worn away, at least partly. A couple of them are completely blank. The stones going back to 1868, 1871, and that period. Some of them read "8 weeks", or a number of months and days. Particularly babies, didn't last long back then; they popped off like flies. There's one granite stone that reads simply "She must have died before they named her. Death comes to us all, but there's something particularly poignant about

deaths -- children and young women above all. An old man like me, you take it as a matter of course. But these others could have had full lives, or brought more lives into this world.

December 22, 2020

I've ripped out those amazingly ugly, anorexic bushes behind the back of the house. Yesterday I was digging up the again, to sort through and extract all the oriental bittersweet roots, which like a plague will return if I don't utterly extirpate it, only to find that it's more deeply and thickly entrenched than I realized. There's no hope. I'll be ripping that shit out the day I die, as I've said to my wife about other parts of the yard. I'd hoped that in this small space I could eliminate that damn thing. Oh hopeful foolish me. I let it go for twenty years, and it got firmly entrenched, my little analogue of kudzu or another invasive and persistent exotic, there to interfere with the blackeyed Susans I hope to put there. This is war, motherfucker.

Having found that the grand conjunction was only an hour after sunset yesterday, which meant around 6 p.m., it being the shortest day of the year, I walked to Harmon Park, but I was a bit early, and walked home, then drove up to McCrun where there were too many trees. Returned to Harmon. I figured the water tank had to be a high point, and I walked the fifty feet downhill to the swale where the Santa Fe Trail used to run, just above the Y. The Y now has a brilliant light, up which of course I thought would interfere with my little stargazing expedition, but didn't, much, since it was SE of the conjunction was SW. I looked, and saw what seemed to be a star, but the light was split in two. I figured that that was either because of my blurry vision (from PD), or because a twig of the tree it was behind was splitting the light. In the time between me and the star, was a man leaning over something. Briefly, strangely, I thought he was teaching a dog how to climb a stepladder, but then I realized he was looking through a telescope. He said, "I've got it!". I wandered over. He and his daughter appeared and looked through the scope. Then he offered me a look. The planets had already separated after having taken them long, the time being about 15 minutes after the hour. But one was larger than the other, and white, and the smaller one, below and to the left, was faintly red. So respectively they were Jupiter and Saturn, and I had seen and identified them. This was a minor surprise, because I always assume failure at this sort of thing. What consistently surprises me more is the ability of human beings to figure out these tracteries in the sky, and predict them with such accuracy. I'll try again this evening, arriving a bit earlier and being more patient, so I can see them approach each other, join up, cross, and split apart. I hope both that the sky is clear and that the fellow with the telescope returns and is generous again.

December 23, 2020

I always want to ask [what is wrong with these people?](#) But never mind. Romantic infatuation is a form of madness, and some of us lose our minds so badly we can't control ourselves. Been there, got the scars to prove it, though not as bad as this poor creature. I hope you get over it, Christie Smythe. The one to be pitied here is your ex-husband. I lack the details for the full story. Only read and scanned the first third or so.

And speaking of reading, I just finished about half the profiles in *Seriously Funny*, long portraits of comics and humorists from the 1950s and 60s -- Mort Sahl, Lenny Bruce, Tom Lehrer, Joan Rivers, Bob Newhart, Steve Allen, Woody Allen, Paul Diller, Jean Shepherd, Mel Brooks, and one or two more. The others I skipped. Oddballs, except Newhart and Steve Allen. But those people worked their asses off. There's not much on this planet that's more difficult than standup comedy, or professional boxing; the weeklong Zen sesshin called rohatsu where, at least in some Japanese Zen monasteries, you aren't even allowed to lie down to sleep -- you get two hours a night to sleep in sitting position, and you spend every available other minute meditating; ultramarathons; rodeo; and insert your favorite three ultimate endeavors here...

Walked to the park again last night, and saw the conjunction. Again, the two lights were right next to each other, with a small gap. But a thin layer of cloud made the viewing peekaboo. With the now-you-see-it-now-you-don't, I couldn't tell if they merged. I *thought* they did, right after 6 p.m., and then I thought after a while that they were parting, but I might have been indulging in wishful thinking, since the cloud changed the appearance, making them look in different relations to each other, adjacent, now not. Diffracted differently? The experience, though imperfect, was a small treasure. After 15 or so minutes of watching and standing, my back was bothering me and I thought I'd need to urinate soon, so I headed home.

Less flu this year, since many people wear masks and avoid close contact? In the years when I spent much of my time outdoors and had little contact with people, I never caught cold. When I resumed a normal life (that should have been written "normal life"), I again got colds every year. Not sure about this year; I think I may have had one, early in the year.

Email from [Dhamma Sukha](#). Sitting still is the worst thing you can do for PD, and my posture has deteriorated because of the disease, which also causes me to cough frequently, so I would be avoiding retreats, both for myself and for the other attendees, even if we did not have the pandemic to deal with. But when all this virus thing is over, I will probably head down to the place and check it out. The southern schools of Buddhism have always appealed more to me than the northern ones, which seem needlessly ornate (especially Tibetan), but it's been impossible to find anywhere to practice without going to a retreat.

away. The only exception I found was that place in Wichita, but it was clearly for Vietnamese immigrants and more church than a center for study and meditation.

The new coronavirus relief bill is two feet high, 5,600 pages long. The Congress lacks discipline. First they bicker while the virus rages out of control. Then they throw in everything imaginable that has nothing to do with the pandemic problems people are having. 5,600 pages divided by 535 (435 Representatives plus 100 Senators) is more than ten pages per legislator. Leaves a bad taste, at least for me. Still, it could be worse, I suppose. Consider Israel's public and intragovernmental (emphasis on "mental", as in deranged) squabbling and logjams, heading into their fourth election in two years. Year after year oversimplifying again. If it bugs you, you can have your money back. On this site, you get what you pay for: zip.

Listening to Mozart. My God, what is it about his music? He never fails. I have yet to hear anything of his that I did not and usually love. He used to just sit there and write it, straight from his brain, and never needed to change a note.

And speaking of classical music, [Kill the Wabbit](#). Ravel once observed that Wagner gave us some wonderful moments and some excruciating hours, which hits the nail dead center. Listening to Wagner's *Sturm und Drang*, it all seems cryptic or protofascist, or fascist plain and simple. I feel like I'm being interrogated by a granite-faced functionary with a cube-shaped head (someone like Gletkin in *Darkness at Noon*) force-feeding me hugely overseasoned animal flesh, until "Enough! I'll sign the confession!" But this Warner Brothers cartoon sends Wagner up, and seems to send up Fantasia the same time. It's a satirical masterpiece. Humor is often the best weapon against brutes... Curious, that *Warner*, in "Warner Brothers", the maker of this cartoon, is only one letter different than *Wagner*, whom they're mocking.

December 24, 2020

Our son texted yesterday about brake problems delaying him. He should be here this morning. Let's hope the brakes are fixed and reliable... I know we shouldn't be seeing him, that we should restrict ourselves, and if it were just me, I could do that, but not having seen him in a year, my wife really needs to, and this is only one person, and he had himself tested when he left Denver.

I stayed home yesterday, not even taking my walk, so my nephews could stop by and pick up the presents for the relatives in St. Louis. Apparently they did, and I didn't hear them knock on the door, which has sent me into the pits of shame and regret.

Thinking about my youngest brother, whose life I was describing yesterday to someone. He's content now. We see him maybe every ten years or so -- he comes to town when someone dies or something. Lives in Vermont. But from the time he was born, life was a torment to him. He had a brilliant, even astonishing, mind. Once, a teacher gave him an F on an exam because he said no one that young could write that well, and the essay had to be plagiarized. My mother dug out all drafts from his wastebasket and took them in, and the teacher changed the grade to an A. He was always proving mathematical theorems. He independently reinvented the calculus of finite differences, while in high school. But he had a brilliant mind. When I was living in L.A., my father called me one Saturday. He and my brother were having an argument, and he was frantic. I talked to my brother, trying to bring him to reason, but couldn't. Coincidentally, another brother was driving from the Bay Area that weekend to visit me, and I passed the phone to him, and his conversation with the youngest brother went on interminably, and finally, I think, inconclusively. When I moved back here from L.A., by that time he was in a mental institution. Mom took me to visit him, and he sat up in bed and mumbled something about having to refurbish his father's car. That was about the extent of our interaction. When we walked out of the building, Mom was ecstatic: "He was so much better today, because you visited." I was stunned. I'd been living elsewhere, with no idea how bad things had become. Mom said, "Mom, he's a vegetable."

I've known other people whose lives were disordered and insupportable through no fault of their own. Increasingly, I come to think that we're most of us hapless, frail creatures struggling in the nets of circumstance, often the victims of our own haywire minds, but also the products of random chance, that life is a series of accidents, many of them malignant. I have a rather Buddhist outlook. But I have also concluded that the Four Noble Truths are at best incomplete, and possibly completely misleading. These days I no longer think that most of us are capable of freeing ourselves. Nor do I believe that the suffering is craving. That is one corner of the problems we have, which are much more varied than the Buddhists would have us believe. Suffering is built in, and there's not much escape. Buddhism, while the most accurate philosophy of religion I've encountered, is, I regret, inadequate. It's like a math proof that's correct but not complete.

Sarrisa has done an amazing job of keeping [the PEWC](#) running in spite of the pandemic. People are reluctant to contribute because they're old, mostly male, and already infirm. But Sarrisa's a dynamo, utterly committed, inventive, caring, and she's kept that place going through determination and willpower. Last night we had a gathering on Zoom, recited A Visit to Saint Nicholas, played Christmas bingo across the internet, and so on. At the end there was a long reading from Matthew which grated on me. Christianity is utterly foreign to me. I avoid discussing it with people, which is utterly unlike me because I'll usually slap people in the face with my opinions. But I see how much it means to them, and I don't want

them, nor do I want to get into such a futile discussion: no one, them or me, is going to change because of anything each other. Last year, in the cemetery, a woman asked me what I thought of Jesus, and I replied that he was a great genius but no more God than any of the rest of us. She said, "That's where we disagree". And that was the end. Refr for once. But the theology is absurd, on a par with believing in little fairies that live at the center of the earth.

December 25, 2020

Merry Christmas, everyone.

December 26, 2020

A pleasant family Christmas. If only I'd had more energy, so I could participate more. While I was vegging out, though everyone else had lots of fun.

My special Christmas gift was a Primer, a little machine that shows the next prime number when you press a button only thing wrong is that when I unpacked it, it was set to 13 instead of 2 (yes, Virginia, there is an even prime), and no way to set the machine back to the start except to roll through all the primes it will show (and it shows six digits) will take me so long my thumb will be worn out. Other than that, it's the niftiest nerdy toy I've had since childhood. I was obsessed with the primes and even did my own proof of the prime number theorem when I was in that number theory class that basically turned into a tutorial, me being the only student because Barker scared off the others. I took the class but Barker changed my grade to an A instead of a Pass because I'd done so well. (Later: found this pair of twin primes close together as they can be: 821, 823, 827, 829. On 12/30: 1871, 1873, 1877, 1879.)

Oh God. Chomsky again. In doing research for my paper, I stumbled on his contention that the mind-body problem is misconceived because we have no understanding of the physical. He contends that Newton (the inventor of the calculus from which he deduced the movement of the planets) showed that "there could be no mechanical account of the physical world: the world is not a machine". There goes physics. (Thanks, Noam, I found the subject confusing.) This is yet another of his attempts to prestidigitate away problems he dislikes. Chomsky's errors are legion. With a coauthor he published a piece arguing that language evolved spontaneously, with a single mutation, not gradually. This is a view that professional biologists reject. The most egregious Chomskyism, at least to me, is his insistence on the "poverty of the stimulus", with no evidence whatever. (This is the notion that children deduce underlying rules of grammar, so that they speak correctly without hearing sufficient examples of the rules of their native language.) He simply *asserted* it, never bothered to provide evidence for the claim, and has continued to push the idea over the decades. I've seen (and read in whole or in part) two papers that show this is not true, based on corpus research. Yet the man goes on playing his pipe and linguists in thousands follow him like the children of Hamelin.

December 27, 2020

Today's Times book section has a long review of a new biography of Sylvia Plath. I've never cared for her poetry, and my frank opinion is that she made a good career move by killing herself and turning herself into a victimized feminist icon. Maybe, hey, I could be wrong. I've always thought Ted Hughes, her husband, was more interesting. He was the Franz Liszt of the twentieth century -- women found him irresistible. Once, upon meeting him for the first time, a woman was so overcome that she had to flee to the bathroom and vomit. His poetry, on the other hand, is not to everyone's taste. I don't care for it. Philip Larkin had a lacerating description of Hughes' poetry, of which I only remember the phrase "the same old myth kitty". Ouch. That must have stung. I remember that Hughes described Larkin's poetry as "spermicide". There is nothing more fun than two great poets battling it out. As has been said, the tongue is the only weapon that grows sharper with use.

December 28, 2020

Trump refuses to sign the bill keeping the government open and extending Covid relief. The purported reason is that the amount given per person is inadequate. Then why didn't he say so while negotiations were in progress? Maybe the real reason is that he gets attention when he throws a monkey wrench in the works. A three-year-old in a seventy-three-year-old body.

Thinking about the flu pandemic a century ago. They had no lifesaving machinery in hospitals to rely on, no highly-trained doctors knowledgeable about infections, nothing but their families and neighbors. They helped each other, and they survived.

Woke up thinking about Half Dome. I've been down the cables twice, but have never gone up them. The first time, I finished the Northwest Face and I was carrying the haul bag. The rangers hadn't put the cables up yet -- they were still down -- and the weight of the bag and the steepness of the walk down constantly threatened to tip me forward. I would have been able to stop. Strange that the most dangerous part of the climb was *after* the climb.

Also thinking about that wonderful hand crack I led. Got to the stance and my partner handed me the rack. The crack vertical, looking much harder than it was rated. I put in my hand and discovered that it was a split, exfoliating slab 6 inches or two thick. In the back I could half-close my fingers. A solid lock, the kind of thing I could do all day. My style probably even looked impeccable, or close, the pitch was so easy (5.8?). I think that pitch was part of the hundreds of thousands of tons of rock that peeled off in 2015. Mountain Project probably would say, but I don't care enough to let me never do that route again, but I have the memory. (Later: things changed 35 years after I did the RNWF. It used to be a big deal. [Here's a guy](#) who took his 12-year-old daughter up it, and she led at least one pitch. Drew tons (~200?) of comments. Click the link above the photo to see more.)

The second time I went down the cables was after doing Snake Dike, which has a long approach and is easy, but we did it. A lot of guys used to like to do it in the moonlight. I never did; the idea seemed kind of iffy. Did it in daylight, with friends, and it was fun. Easy enough I still could do it, but the approach is too long. I just looked it up. Though I rate it as 5.6, it's rated 5.7R. I think the R (for dangerous) might be overblown, at least for the climber I was back in the day. Lacking a partner, I went up to solo it, then started thinking about my wife and son and backed off it. Hadn't been climbing a while. Can't remember why I was there all by myself, or when this happened, but the memory is clear as day, including a guy on the approach who blasted past me like Usain Bolt. (Later: See [pics and description here](#). Scroll to the picture 4, exactly as I remember it. I don't remember the day as being physically taxing, like the sore calf muscles the trip report describes, but maybe I've forgotten. I'm betting these people are weekend climbers, not in top shape. I do remember being careful because of the risk of a huge fall, or of death after we unroped, but the climbing was consistently reasonable.)

December 29, 2020

Culling books, including many I'd like to re-read, though I lack a place to send these wonderful friends. But freeing and removing clutter is more important. I'm never going to finish *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Philip II*, or re-read *The Making of the Atomic Bomb*. They're too damn big. And the vast bulk of my library is nonfiction, which simply doesn't move in our Little Free Library. I'm living in the wrong place. Cambridge, MA might be more my style, or Berserkly, CA. Not... And the local library has stopped accepting books for their yearly sale, because of the pandemic. If the secondhand bookstore doesn't take these tomes, they'll end up in the trash. As a bibliophile, contemplating this is very painful indeed. I need to find a young person, an autodidact whose interests are broad, and who is trying to educate himself or herself. Sometimes I wish English were like Turkish, which lacks a gender system, so I can avoid roundabout awkwardisms like "himself or herself". The 3P form just don't work sometimes... The hardest thing is what to do with the signed books that friends of mine wrote, most of which I wouldn't wish on anyone. With exceptions they're generally not all that good, and many of them I haven't even read, but I feel like it's a betrayal to get rid of them.

Appt. yesterday with my primary care physician. He wants me to get a coronary calcium scan. Though not covered by insurance, the cost is only \$40 or \$50, which, since it involves an MRI machine, I find unbelievable. After all, this is the U.S.A., where such things always cost more than one can afford. My doctor has been pushing me toward statins for years and now he's escalating. Good luck, buddy. I don't need them -- no family history of problems, and my numbers are barely over the threshold. Ain't gonna happen unless the pipes look like ancient plugged-up sewer lines. Which they do.

The Symphony is ringing in the new year with a virtual concert called "Good Riddance, 2020". Preach it, brother, that I think 2020's problems will be dragging on for a while.

December 30, 2020

Hitting the button on my Primer, I've reached 1489. That and 1487 are twin primes. Twin primes are surprisingly common. But I'm only about 1/70th of the way to the end, when it will wrap around and start at 2 again. (That is, 1/70th as measured by division, not time, since primes get scarcer the higher you go, and the machine will cover a given range of numbers more quickly, needing fewer button presses, as the numbers get larger.) I need a machine to press the button on my 1489 like [that machine Claude Shannon invented](#), only repetitive. Start it up and let it go, being sure to get an estimate in time and check it well before it should complete, so you can pull the plug in time.

Sophie loves her teddy bear and her moose, and one other soft toy that has become so shapeless I don't know what it is. My wife bought her a little fox, and she ignores it. Jack, on the other hand, who lost interest in such toys many years ago, likes to play with it. Now we just have to find something Pogo likes. A rodent-smelling rodent toy would be right up his alley. He loves to kill chipmunks, rabbits, and squirrels.

Dogs are expensive. Took all three in to the vet -- Pogo had somehow cut his left front leg and couldn't walk on it, and the others needed their rabies shot, and I'd run out of Heartgard, and various other odds and ends. The tab came to \$420.

My wife got her first Covid shot this morning. What a relief that is, and will be more so when she gets the second.

Our son drove back to Denver this afternoon. Wonderful visit. Six days, and not a single argument. We've learned to and agree with each other. Our dogs, on the other hand, never got used to his dog Emerson and gave him no end of trouble. He could have taken any one of them, but facing three freaked him out. One time he was standing in the kitchen, with a barricade to the living room protecting his flank, on alert while our three stood behind, in front of, and beside him, barking and growling. Sort of like a grade schooler facing a gang of bullies on the playground. I like that dog -- strong, lively and friendly. He has a habit of backing up to a tree when he takes a poop, and leaving a shit-bump stuck to the tree. Never that before. Never even heard of such a thing.

December 31, 2020

Happiness, I think, comes when you're not looking for it, not prepared for it, as serious relationships tend to. These pop out of our grasp if we grasp at them. Happiness may come most easily to those who don't live for themselves, but for others. I really don't know, because I don't understand any of this stuff. The longer I live, it seems, the less I know, and the more tangled and uncertain my ideas become.

Woke up thinking about a guy I climbed with more than 40 years ago. We'll call him Bill, since that's the name I remember though without any certainty. He was from New Zealand. In the Valley, after dark and after dinner, in Camp 4, we often stood around a campfire or sat around a picnic table and talked about climbs or told stories, and that was how I met him. He told a story I'd read in a climbing magazine, about two guys in Patagonia, one of whom fell into a crevasse and got stuck. His partner tried for hours but couldn't get him out, and the poor fellow froze to death. At the end of the story I said to the survivor, "Think how he must have felt", and a guy at the end of the table, whom I'd never seen, said, "That was me". He confirmed the accuracy of the story, and added some details. We climbed together two or three times. One of the times he was going up to fix a route on the S.E. face of El Cap and for some reason his partner was not available that day, so he recruited me to go with him. The route starts via El Cap Tree, the only sizeable tree on the entire cliff. Getting to it, climbing is steeply overhanging. We went up and came down, leaving ropes fixed so he and his partner could get a quick start and save themselves time. Not too many years later I heard that Bill had died in an avalanche in the Himalayas -- a strange coincidence, I did the exact same route with another friend named Tony, leaving ropes fixed for him and his partner to start the route. On that occasion, though, we tied two ropes together end to end for a free rappel (out in space all the way to the ground), and had to transfer around the knot in the middle, which is an operation that requires meticulous attention; you don't end up at the bottom a lot faster than you intended. A few years later I heard that Tony had been killed in an avalanche -- either by rockfall or in an avalanche.

The vet told me that Sophie's canine teeth are loose and should be pulled, and asked whether we'd noticed that her breath was bad. I hadn't, since PD has erased most of my sense of smell, especially unpleasant odors. (Which, when you think about it, is worse than the opposite. It's the unpleasant smells you *want* to be able to smell, like your own body odor or you that you've sweated enough to need a shower (though PD has stopped my sweating, too), or the mercaptan smell of a gas leak, or the smell of spilled gasoline, etc.) My wife confirmed that Sophie's breath has gone bad, and I wondered how much the vet will charge for pulling the loose teeth with his thumb and forefinger. Not much? My wife said that the operation doesn't seem to stop dentists from charging an arm and a leg. I pointed out that, "That's different. It's not like I'm going to put myself down if it costs too much'." and for once she laughed at one of my jokes.

I think it was Erdos who said that mathematics is the surest path to immortality. Afraid not, Paul. The universe is going to run down and end in heat death. There is no such thing as immortality. That "eternal" flame on JFK's grave will go out. All the skyscrapers on Manhattan island will crumble and fall. Everything will cease to be, on differing schedules. As an ancient Egyptian wrote about doing something "that my name may live on beyond me". This craving for immortality seems to me as very very strange, though I myself have a little of it. But it's definitely a delusion, and a waste of mental time and energy.

Last day of the year, and 1231 (get it?) is a prime number, *and* the twin prime of 1229. [Here's a link about closing the twin primes conjecture](#). It was written 7 years ago. The conjecture is still open. Prove it and you will achieve what I called mathematical immortality, but probably no money. I should note that great mathematicians have worked on it for more than a century. Good luck, and happy new year.

January 1, 2021

The Biden transition team has complained that the Defense Department, unlike other departments, is not helping with the information needed for the transition. Is this because of the acting Secretary, or is the Trump administration trying to do something?

Dawn Wells, who played Mary Ann on *Gilligan's Island*, has died. Someone once told me that when Bob Denver was arrested for possession of marijuana, he was offered a deal if he'd name his dealer. He refused, and was given a jail sentence. Turned out his dealer was Dawn Wells. That wholesome girl was a little bit naughty after all.

First substantial snowfall of the winter. I shoveled the front stoop and out to my wife's car. Then I shoveled our section of the public sidewalk. My back was sore, and I quit. It was only last year that I could do twice as much before I had to dread finishing that double driveway of ours. Aging is for the birds. Wasn't supposed to happen to me. I was indestructible. On further thought, it occurs to me that last year I used to keep up with the work, shoveling several times, to reduce effort, though increasing the time spent. Feel better about myself. That's my excuse and I'm stickin' to it.

January 2, 2021

Reading *Diagnosis*, about tough medical cases. The woman who wrote the book was the consultant for the TV show (Am I the only one who noticed that Hugh Laurie's accent in that show was completely unAmerican, though the fact is obvious unless you listened carefully?) Here's a tip: don't eat barracuda, because it can give you ciguatera disease, very unpleasant indeed. The fish passes on a toxin it takes up from plants. This causes you intense pain. There's no treatment. You must wait until the symptoms disappear, which can take years. The weirdest diagnostic for this disease is that it makes cold things feel like they're burning in your mouth. With climate change the disease has progressed up the coast as far as North Carolina. Factoid: the first written record of the disease was on one of Captain Cook's voyages.

What is this love of punctuation I have, this fondness for colons, dashes, parentheses? I use more of these than anyone else.

The linguistics classes at K.U. don't fill up. Even if there are too many students for the room, they'll find a bigger room. Syntax I was like that, when I took it. But LING 418, Intro to Cognitive Science, is being offered in both the linguistics and philosophy departments, one of those Janus-faced classes you can take in either of two departments. And the prof is a philosophy guy. And the class is full. What the heck, I'll email him and ask to audit. What's the worst that can happen? He can hit the DELETE key? Or he could give me his secret code so I can sign up.

Had another of those damn dreams last night. A woman was coming on to me. She was beautiful and she was all over me like a forest fire until I said, "There's something you don't know", and she asked what it was, and I said, "There's something between us", which she thought strange, since she was on me like a burr. So I told her I was married. She was gone in three seconds. Why must these dreams always play out this way? Why must I be faithful even while asleep? My dream should be a free zone, dammit.

Productive day yesterday -- lots of ideas for my paper. For a change my mind was actually working, instead of loafing on my back. Unfortunately, my wife was remoted into the office all day and I couldn't get on the PC to work on the paper. [I wasn't for bad luck, I wouldn't have no luck at all](#). At least I wrote it all down. With a bit of good luck (hah!), maybe a page of notes will trigger another flow of ideas. Fat chance. The old noggin just ain't what it used to be.

January 3, 2021

One small good thing about this pandemic, for me, is that for once I don't have seasonal affective disorder, because I can go anywhere when it's dark. In fact, I scarcely go anywhere at all. The SAD was terrible when I drove to and from work in the dark, and was still bad when I commuted to classes on campus. Now that I'm in my little bubble of light in my home, I'm cheerful. And being in the warmth helps, too.

Yes, after taking all those linguistics classes, I know that language constantly mutates, but that doesn't stop me from regretting some of the changes I notice. Like, everyone now says "We had a discussion *around* [topic]", instead of *about* and this usage brings me up short every time. This has been going on for years, but I haven't adapted to it yet. Why language changes happen is not well understood, unless there's some research I've missed (always a certainty in a field as vast as linguistics). Geoff Pullum, who died recently, had a lot to say about this sort of language change; he was able to figure out some of what was going on. I'll miss reading him; he was always instructive, entertaining, reasoned, and absolutely brilliant. But even he didn't really have the answers. Language is a mystery, and I think we'll never understand it, it's so deep into what we are. The problem of understanding language is much like the mind-body problem: inherently unsolvable. My opinion makes me a heretic in the linguistic community, so be it. My drive to learn linguistics is not so much to win the prize of understanding its underlying mechanisms, as seems to be common among the professionals, as to marvel at its baroque and endless miraculous variability. Language makes mathematics look simple in comparison.

January 4, 2021

Reading a *very* technical paper titled "alpha-synuclein misfolding and aggregation: Implications in Parkinson's disease pathogenesis" (that "alpha" at the start is actually the Greek letter in the original), I see that it all makes sense in a very detailed way, but poor old me, who lacks the training, gets only a sort of table-of-contents view, lacking some of the details. The jargon alone overwhelms the nonscientific reader. The idea quickly struck me, though, that cleaning up the fibrils might be key to stopping the progress of the disease, and I thought of chelation therapy. The I remembered, duh!, that the disease often (usually?) progresses up the vagus nerve to the brain. Not to mention the blood-brain barrier. There goes that idea. The article contains the best capsule description of PD I've seen: "The clinical signs and symptoms of PD include tr

postural instability, slowness of movement, rigidity, behavioral problems, anxiety hallucinations, and sometimes delirium. The main motor symptoms associated with PD are collectively called parkinsonism or Parkinsonian syndrome. Motor disorders stay as a vital criterion for the diagnosis of PD, but PD is pre-disposed to several nonmotor symptoms such as gut problems, impaired olfaction, constipation, disordered sleep, etc., which precede the actual motor symptoms by years before it gets diagnosed... [Levodopa] gives only symptomatic relief and does not halt or slow down the progress of the disease... the pathogenic mechanisms underlying PD are still obscure, and hence, the disease is incurable..."

I met Dr. Mark Fisher about fifteen years ago, when I was interested in protein folding. He generously made time for a tour of his lab and explain his research, which was utterly fascinating. Yesterday I learned that he'd died a couple of days ago. Though I knew him only briefly, the news saddened me. He was one of those rare people who seemed fully engaged with life in all its aspects.

[Some Covid Survivors Haunted by Loss of Smell and Taste](#). (If you can't read the article, clear your cookies, at least in *Times*, then reload the page.) But I didn't even notice that I'd lost mine (from PD). Lots of material there, including assertions that smell may be important for enabling people to feel connected to each other. If true, that would explain why I've never loved anyone. Smell has never mattered much to me. And yet, the times I've been deeply in love, I was usually convinced that the attraction was chemical, that smell was intimately involved. I remember J. and her floral scent (and it was her, not a perfume that addicted me to her. Does the loss of smell mean that if my wife dies before me I won't be able to fall deeply in love again?

I miss browsing. I used to stop at SRO, since it was exactly on my way home -- just pull into a parking spot, drop my laundry at the laundry, and walk a few steps to the video rental, which had a huge array of movies, some of which I'd want to see, and others that simply looked interesting. Then along came Blockbuster, then Netflix. I used to go to Borders and ramble through the books. Occasionally I'd run into someone I knew; once that was a friend of my youth whom I had not seen in many years. The variety of books was endless, even technical math books. Wonderful, to pick these up and dip in. Then along came Amazon. And now, of course, we have the pandemic. Browsing has taken it in the neck, repeatedly. It has been one of the great pleasures of my life. I've probably spent thousands of hours in the activity. The serendipity of finding something to think of it, I still do it on the internet, but that is a pale imitation of the real thing, comparable to the difference between in-person conversation and a Zoom session.

If Trump weren't so incompetent, he might have been re-elected and we'd really be in trouble; that would mean the end of our political system, replaced by autocracy. This latest botch of his, calling up Georgia's secretary of state and telling her to "find" enough votes to change the state result, is one more bungle. It wouldn't have been enough to change the national result, and it would have been transparent fraud. The only effect *might* be to shred Trump's credibility with some of his supporters. Either Trump thinks he can lie his way out of anything; or he can't tell the difference between truth and falsehood; or he thinks that whatever he wants to be true actually is true, by definition. I think it's that last one, but only because I know he's the bastard. Whatever his problem is, he's pathological. If he were a dog, his owner would have him destroyed.

January 5, 2021

Yesterday evening was the weekly sibling get-together. I went outside in the dark to move my car and make space for it and slipped and fell on the ice, which I didn't see. Left the car where it was so no one else would park there and fall. Jack leaped off his chair and his dog tags went flying; have to find a new wire thingy for his collar. Then the knob on the door to the garage started to fall off and I had to fix it. Last, I joined the group talk, and leaned on the arm of my chair and it broke. It's a nice, well-built chair, too. All this happened in about half an hour, and I hope I'm done with this nonsense.

Was reading a book review yesterday, of a memoir by a woman writer, and the reviewer mentioned that the woman's husband is Anthony Swofford, and I had that little mental flash of connection: hey, I've had a beer and talked with him. There should be a word for that mental sensation. There probably is, and I probably used to know it.

Words fail me: "Roeland Park COVID-19 testing site closes due to low demand".

Millions of vaccine shots could expire due to distribution problems. This, in the wealthiest, most technically advanced nation on the planet. We used to crush it when we had a challenge: win WWII, put men on the moon, whatever. Now we can't vaccinate our people. The state I live in is in a three-way tie with Georgia and Mississippi, measured by percentage of population that has received a shot. Any time you're tied with *Mississippi*, you're as broken as you can be. The only state lower on the list is the Virgin Islands. Even Puerto Rico, with all the infrastructure problems left by the hurricanes of the last few years, has vaccinated almost twice the percentage of its population we have. Worse yet, as measured by % of doses used, *are the only state or territory that has used less than 12% of its doses. We have used 4%, one third of the rate of the worst.* In other words, we are the champion loser.

Sent the department of health an email:

"Bottom line:

Kansas has administered the fewest doses per capita among states, by far, and this is *not* because we failed to receive our fair share.

Stop putting us all at risk.

People will die because of your incompetence."

Here's the response -- and I wonder why we're the only state that has such a problem, if this is not just bullshit, which are all the hallmarks of being:

"The data that is pulled on distribution of vaccine comes from a computer software program utilized by Kansas and federal government. The providers who have been giving the vaccine to individuals have been focused on administering vaccine rather than inputting data into the computer software (as they should be), so our data is lagging behind, but I believe the administration of the vaccine is - we have not had any reports of any of the doses of vaccine that we have received being wasted or expired. We also know that there are some providers who aren't signed up for the software still need to be trained, so we are actively working on doing that so that moving forward our numbers and data can be accurate."

(Later: stumbled across this the next day: [Kansas stumbles on Covid-19](#), which clearly shows up the bullshit in the original reply: shipments sent to the wrong place, ruined because not kept cold enough, whatever.)

January 6, 2021

Intellectuals in the 1930s supported Stalin, knowing but denying his criminal behavior. People seeking answers join suckers on the street put down their money for a shell game despite seeing that everyone who tried it before them lost. There are even people who believe Donald Trump, despite his never-ending torrent of lies. Imagine some advanced alien civilization coming here and observing us, then giving up ("hopeless") and casting off in the search for a planet inhabited by a more rational species. (Later: QAnon alone would be enough to make those aliens want to shower with bleach.)

January 7, 2021

3:38 PM 1/6/2021. The following, above the line of dashes, was written yesterday -- I often prep the next day's entry. I've already posted the current day -- *before* I learned that a mob had stormed the Capitol. Under the dashes was written *after*, on the sixth.

Is Trump clinging to the presidency because he's afraid of the flood tide of lawsuits once he's out of office, or because of a hypertrophied ego? I suggest the answer is both, though either one by itself would suffice. I also suggest that he's going to try a coup. He seems desperate enough. The generals will probably refuse. People seem to think that it can't happen. Oh, yes it can.

Looks like the Dems will control both houses, as well as the White House. The Magic 8 Ball wins again -- see its prediction above, on March 22, in the very first entry of this journal. Maybe I should stop while I'm ahead.

Seems that Western European countries are having slow vaccine rollouts, too -- shortages of nurses, shortages of non-bureaucratic ineptitude, you name it. The U.S. is not alone in its incompetence. The West is fumbling. Compare us to Vietnam. Go to [Johns Hopkins coronavirus resource center, mortality](#), scroll down to the chart "Cases and mortality by country", and click on the right column to sort by deaths per 100,000 of population. Look at the top 10 (the best). A third-world countries. (I include China in "third world". Of course its numbers are official Party lies.) Now look at the bottom 10 (the worst). All but one are in Europe. There's probably a lot of play (flex? approximation?) in these numbers only because of inaccuracy in medical reporting systems, but the general idea is obvious.

The U.S. citizens who are moving to Mexico to get away from lockdowns are suicidal. In the chart referred to in the preceding paragraph, click "Case fatality". Mexico is in second place, behind only Yemen, and we can attribute Yemen's problem to its civil war. As measured this way, the U.S. is in the middle of the pack. But our infection rate is way too high because of anti-maskers and inadequate testing and tracing. It ain't rocket science, folks. Wake up and smell the coffee.

Triage, as on the battlefield: L.A. ambulance crews have been told not to pick up people who have little chance of survival. Correct me if I'm wrong, but I thought that patient assessment was up to *doctors*, not EMTs. But never mind that. L.A. appears to have a hospital system that's nearing collapse. If things don't change, can we expect other cities to start practicing triage, too?

3:40 PM 1/6/2021 A mob has stormed the Capitol. This is not the beginning of the end. That happened when Trump accepted the Republican nomination. This is the apotheosis of the process that started then. He didn't do it alone. He plenty of enablers, and he's done his best to recruit more. If politicians like Mitch McConnell want to know who hel birth to this monstrosity, they need only look at each other. More than 150 years later, the Confederacy has finally w mob are carrying Confederate flags in the Capitol. Although I usually find Paul Krugman extreme, I agree complete his notion that "the Republican Party has gone feral".

This is a self-inflicted 9/11. What next? Will the prediction that Trump would (now *has*) incite public disorder and t disorder as a pretext to try to call out the Army under the Insurrection Act and preserve himself in office, come true? Will the rioters be removed peacefully? Will they be prosecuted? Will there be follow-on disruptions, especially in state? Will this be like the burning of the palace of Justice in Vienna in 1927 and result in something like the bringing dow government, strikes, riots, etc.? (And will we find a Canetti to help us understand the roots?) Will many of the Trum followers finally acknowledge their mistake, or will they find yet more rationalizations? Will the dozen Senators and Representatives who planned to challenge the state results change their plans, or will they continue to pursue their s seeking, opportunistic scheme? Will this deepen our divide, or will we be able to come back together?

How did the authorities miss this? Surely there were warning signs.

The contrast between Trump's unhinged, self-absorbed hysteria and Biden's reasoned, selfless entreaty could not be sharper. Nor could the difference be greater between Trump's narcissism and the grace with which Gore accepted th Supreme Court decision handing the Presidency to Bush: Gore had to preside over the procedure that handed the of his opponent. Trump couldn't do that.

4:57 PM 1/6/2021 Will the riot be a superspreader event? Most of the rioters in the photographs weren't wearing ma you have to expect that they were shouting, and of course they were close together.

I remember sending Tom Ryan an email, 10 or more years ago, after something untoward happened, and asking his thoughts. His reply was that he felt "concern for my country", and this is exactly how I feel right now. I remember n Washington, D.C. with my wife, and the patriotism I felt there. There's a grandeur about this country, in its ideals, its openness to immigrants, its willingness to *help* (Marshall Plan, Peace Corps, etc.), its dedication to shared values an institutions of collective interests and compromise, instead of to personalities. All this has been shredded in the last years.

This would not have happened if it weren't for the Electoral College. There would have been no need for the formal was disrupted today. Something much simpler and safer would be done instead. We *must* get rid of the Electoral Co has long outlived its usefulness. It was a workaround, a compromise to cobble the colonies into a nation. It is a vern appendix that has ruptured.

I wish people would stop using the word *insurrection* to describe today's event. Doing so gives Trump cover to invc Insurrection Act.

Merrick Garland as Attorney General? It is to smile. Biden is not one to stick a thumb in the eye of an opponent, in Mitch McConnell, but it feels like that anyway, at least to me. As a confirmed McConnell-phobe, I feel glee.

Everyone hoped that things would get better with 2020 in the dustbin. Not so far. Let's hope today isn't a harbinger t rest of the year.

8:13 AM 1/7/2021 Trump finally tweets that there will be a peaceful transition of power on the 20th. Maybe he's sh the result of his own actions. Maybe he finally sees there's nothing he can do, and doesn't want to be carried out fro his desk and set in Lafayette Square. Maybe he sees that he has no allies who can help him, Pence and McConnell h rejected him. Several of his aides have resigned. Whatever the reasons, he'll be gone in less than two weeks and ma can start getting back to normal. Maybe. Even if we can, it's going to take time.

There's more to be done than political reconciliation. The list is huge. Will scientists be able to find all the environm data Trump's appointees erased?

Rudy Giuliani, the opening act for Trump yesterday, called for "trial by combat". This is a medieval practice, a judic sanctioned duel between the individuals involved. The suggestion would be comic if it weren't deranged, and if it h been the first match struck to the tinder.

More absurdity: QAnon/right-wing claims that the rioters were actually Antifa. There's video of them walking from speech to the Capitol. Somehow I doubt that the people cheering Trump and carrying flags with his name were Anti (Later: Photos show a number of well-known far-right activists, including Jake Angeli, in what is clearly the Capito

I hope that picture of a noose hanging from a gallows yesterday was faked. Oops. I just checked. Snopes.com says i There was also a "make-shift mannequin with a noose arounds [sic] its neck". These people came prepared.

My neighbor is not dead after all, but suffering from dementia and in a home. Speaking of dementia, my wife thinks has it. That would explain the limited vocabulary, the repetition, the frequent incoherence.

January 8, 2021

It dawns on me that, stuck at home all day with no one to talk to, this journal has been my way of talking, if only to Too bad. Other people would provide a lot more variety. You can learn a lot by listening. You can even learn a new language. You can certainly learn new ideas and outlooks. This is almost always done more effectively in person than looking at a screen.

The rats are jumping ship: Trump's aides, and even some Cabinet members, are quitting left and right. His island is

When something like this riot happens, the rhetoric always gets inflated. After 9/11, the common epithet for the hijackers was "cowards". That, they were not. Terrorists, murderers, sneaks, and so on, yes. But not cowards. Flying a plane into a building takes guts. Similarly, the invasion of the Capitol was not a "coup". There are plenty of ways to describe it, but a coup in my dictionary is "a brilliant, sudden, and usually highly successful stroke or act". Furthermore, it is usually undertaken by an organized group, such as the colonels in so many Latin American countries, and is aimed at the overthrow of established structure, to seize power. A coup is usually undertaken by knowledgeable parties, often insiders, and they have a plan. Think back to that failed attempt in Moscow to restore the Communist Party to power, when they had to clear the streets and Yeltsin faced them down. That was a coup, one that failed. These turkeys we saw the other day had no fucking idea what they were doing. They were a mob that ran out of steam. If we cheapen words with this sort of misusage, they lose their punch. Sometimes we even lose the connotation. Think back to the meaning of the word "gay" before it was hijacked. That word had a connotation of carefree good cheer. Now I can't find an equivalent for it. The now-"gay" community stole that word to give themselves a glow of happiness. Now we can't use the word in that sense anymore. I'm not kicking against language change here, because years of studying linguistics have shown me that language is utterly unruly and will always go its own way, changing unpredictably. (Anthropomorphic fallacy alert!) What I'm protesting is the *dishonest or thoughtless* use of loaded terms. I'm also arguing against rhetorical escalation. Much as I detest them -- and I do -- to say they attempted a coup is both to dignify them (by giving them too much credit) and to demonize them (by attributing a more conscious, intentional malice than they had) simultaneously. They were a mass of people temporarily whipped into a frenzy by a demagogue into venting their rage against the Capitol, taken as both a symbol and a concrete target for their fury. They are gullible people who feel disenfranchised. In a limited sense, I consider them my foes. I am also my fellows, and it behooves me to try to think through all this, and understand them. They've been swindled by conservative media, they seem unable to reason through the evidence, they've attached themselves to someone they consider a strongman. All this sickens me. But I have to learn to see through their eyes before I can hope to make any of them useful through mine.

January 9, 2021

These generalizations are always risky, not to mention politically incorrect because they're sexist, but as usual I'm going to forge ahead. My impression of the current crisis is that women in Washington are more ready to show integrity and care for their political futures than men. The proportion of women who are abandoning Trump seems higher than that of men, even those who are staying don't exhibit the opportunistic cynicism of Hawley and Cruz, the only exception I know of is Sarah Palin, who holds no public office at the moment. Consider also the examples of Senators Murkowski and Collins. Women are more willing, in general, to take moderate positions than their male brethren, although this observation should be hedged. I have not space, time, knowledge, energy, or interest in doing so here... I'd like to see someone research the claim that women as a group tend to exhibit more political integrity than men. This would be hard to do, problematic in many ways, full of exceptions, impressionistic, blah blah blah. It would probably have to be done by a journalist, not an academic. But it would be interesting, and might start what these days is called "an important conversation".

There are calls for Pence to invoke the 25th amendment, to remove Trump. Won't happen. He lacks both the guts and the integrity.

The opinion-givers mostly implicitly seem to think that once Trump is gone, he'll be gone. Either that, or they're not looking ahead. Faulkner said, "The past isn't dead. It isn't even past." Trump won't be past, either. He'll remain a spoiler until he dies. He's a malignant tumor on the body politic, one that should be surgically removed by sending him to prison.

Postscript: revolutions eat their fathers. Robespierre was guillotined. Trotsky was hacked to death. Trump should be the forces he's unleashing.

Favorite prime of the day: 2999.

Neil Sheehan has died. His obit can be found [here](#). "Susan Sheehan, his wife, said the cause was complications of Parkinson's disease." The pic at the top, from 2009, seems to show facial masking. I suspect he had the disease for a decade.

If anyone had suggested to me at any time up to the present that I could be grateful to Parkinson's, I would have said yes. Yes, if an angel descended to earth and offered to free me of the disease, I would instantly accept. But yesterday I said no. Parkinson's has not been an unmixed curse; it has changed me for the better. There's more purpose to my life, even if it's the well, not so simple, task of taking care of myself. I'm more willing to let trivia slide off me. And as a friend observe himself, I'm more willing to believe that everyone is doing the best they can and not be annoyed at the little problems sometimes cause. I appreciate my wife more, and argue with her much much less. And maybe I'm becoming reconciled to the prospect of my death, though slowly and with hesitations. All this is a combination of acceptance and determination with much remaining to be done.

On January 6th, the dog caught the car. Then it couldn't do anything with it. What next? The well-known rabble-rouser caught on camera will likely be prosecuted. Who will represent them, how will they plead, and will they be given prison sentences? If so, will they become heroes? (Recall Hitler's failed putsch, followed by his emergence from his incarceration afterward to work his way to power.)

A story posted yesterday morning says 68 people have been arrested for the riot. [This](#) is even more interesting. Scroll to the pics. If I did something like that, I'd at least wear a ski mask and gloves (no fingerprints) and used clothes unless anything I own bought with cash at thrift store, and which I would promptly get rid of in a dumpster far from the site to avoid hooliganism, so they wouldn't be found if the FBI searched my house, nor would my wife or anyone who knows me recognize the clothes in a photograph. And I sure wouldn't boast about what I did, or use my real name. The extent to which these people flaunt their identities can be astonishing. Jake Angeli wore his fur hat and horns and exhibited his distinctive tattoos. What are these people using for brains? One of the women arrested says she didn't know she was doing anything wrong. I find this inconceivable, and I hope that adjective applies to her reproductive apparatus as well.

When Trump ran for the Republican nomination, he did so because he didn't have a prayer at winning the Democrat nomination. In fact, I've read that he'd been a Democrat all his life, and when someone asked him why he was a Republican he said, "I have no idea." He joined the Republican Party, hijacked it, stripped it of some of its most cherished notions (anticommunism, free trade, fiscal responsibility come to mind), and took it further down the road it had been following for two decades, into yet deeper viciousness and irrationality. Now the madness is blowing up in his face, and the face of the party. His talk about the "stolen" election, and "fraud", and not trusting the voting process, may have suppressed the conservative turnout in the Georgia runoffs. The result was that the Democrats squeaked by and won both Senate seats giving them the slimmest of margins in that house. Now they will control both houses in very short order. Next, Trump incited a mob. In response, Twitter has banned him. I have a mental image of the guy trying to work around the platform somehow. He is, after all, a Twitterholic, and it seems to be his chief way of communicating with his fan base, because that is what it is. When he became President, he did not give up being a reality TV star, he simply, as they say, "took it to a new level". Next, and the latest thing I've heard, Lisa Murkowski has said she may leave the party if Trump does not resign. (Note: I did not know this when I wrote the first paragraph, yesterday, for today's entry.) She can do this. After all, she is a write-in against a Republican. If she's serious, and carries through, then Trump has seriously damaged the Republican Party. Not that he cares about it, except as a vehicle for his own ego. But we have had a two-party system for a century. What happens now? Will cooler heads, like Romney and Sasse, prevail? And if they do succeed in remaking the party, where do the Trumpies go? Still whipped up by their media (Fox, Sinclair, and the wackos on the internet), it's safe to say that they'll feel that the deep state they hypothesize has whacked their champion. One solution is the courts. Although I always thought this country is much too litigious, desperate measures are called for. Dominion Voting Systems has filed a billion-dollar suit against Sidney Powell for defamation. (Later, from an email received 1/11: [the billion-dollar war: right-wing conspiracists](#).) (Aside: Powell alleged involvement by Hugo Chavez, who has been dead since 2013. Per Business Insider, Powell belongs in a mental institution instead of defending herself in court.) This is from Business Insider, dated Jan 11: "[Dominion] will file subsequent lawsuits against others who have spread the conspiracy theory. Dominion has sent a warning of potential litigation to the White House, Fox News, Newsmax, One America News and a number of Trump individuals, including his lawyer Rudy Giuliani, Rush Limbaugh, Fox News personalities Sean Hannity and Maria Bartiromo, conservative attorney Lin Wood and Melissa Carone..." I read somewhere that Fox, at least, has been threatened seriously. Smartmatic, the other voting-machine company that's been the target of allegations, has threatened legal action as well. If that's what it takes, so be it. The lies are the biggest source of the political problems we face, and they must be stopped. We're circling the drain already. We have to extricate ourselves before we're irretrievably down the drain. Holding the big public media accountable is the first step. We also have to find a way to temper the internet, including

dark web. That will probably take techniques other than litigation, and will need meticulous care so we don't imping speech. A start might be to change section 230, which exempts social media companies from responsibility for their posts. That will be a delicate operation indeed, with far-reaching implications. Twitter, Facebook, et al. do have a pc the expense of monitoring all the posts, and the difficulty of deciding what to take down and what to leave up. (Late edit at end of that sentence: removed "is difficult".) As for convincing people to listen to and believe each other in tl to face encounters, we need more American Public Squares for a start, and the restoration of required civics classes school, and... I'm almost ready to despair. The scope of work is staggering, and there's too much that can go wrong.

January 10, 2021

The Times says that a year ago this week, China first identified the virus. Next time, I hope that whatever country fi new virus (and most of them seem to start in China) stamps on it quick, and the rest of us take appropriate action, to would be nice if the U.S. could get its act together and implement testing and tracing, and require wearing masks (w penalties, so the regs aren't toothless). Let's act like adults next time around.

Amazing dreams last night, both in number and in brilliance. *Lots* of color and variety. If I could draw like I was luc dreaming, I'd make a comfortable living as an artist.

Well, this is disturbing: cops from around the country went to D.C. and were part of the mob. One of them was the chief of a New Hampshire town (not entirely clear, but he seems only to have attended the rally). All this reminds n problem the Germans are having with their cops right now -- those far-right moles in their police departments. Colo paranoid, with visions of vigilantes and actual cops joining forces and thinking of themselves as *Walking Tall*.

Biden plans to dump all the currently available shots into arms, not holding back the second doses. That's a big risk. assumes we'll get the second doses *and* they'll be shipped to all the right places *and* all the logistics will go well. I tl a damn fool. The logistics have been a series of snafus so far. Don't assume it's going to get better. Nor do we know effective a single shot is, or how long it will last without the booster. It would be a shame if we had to start all over, who failed to get a timely second shot.

Email from the Times says, in part: "Los Angeles County has a coronavirus-related death every eight minutes, and t on the threshold of one in 10 residents testing positive for the virus. Dozens of overcrowded emergency rooms have their doors to ambulances for hours at a time."

The internet is [changing everything](#). Demand for sperm is up, but donations, if that's the word, are down at sperm b: with so much else on the internet, producers and consumers are going direct and bypassing the middleman. 20% of bank clients are straight couples, 60% are lesbians, and 20% are "single moms by choice". The pandemic is a factor demand, but there's a lot more involved. I read the article, and the thought occurred to me that if this had happened , was younger, I could have pulled down a nice chunk of change: tall, fairly handsome (then, not now), smart (800 on math SAT), no medical problems except allergies, long-lived ancestors, college education, and we'll skip any discus my prematurely bald head (Later: and color blindness). I missed my calling. I would have preferred the old-fashion: but for the money, artificial insemination would be acceptable. (I'm not serious. I think fathering a child without any contact is painful.)

Thinking about Question Six during a wakeful period of the night, I played in my head with changing the +1 term to +2, and found examples that had integer solutions, but the solutions were *not squares*. The +0 was trivial: $a=b=1$, $a=$ and $a=b=4$, etc., work (and all are powers of 2 -- recall that $1 = 2^0$). They all give a result of 2, obviously. For the + example, consider (1,3), (2,4), (4,6), (8,10), and (16,18), all of which have the same result, 2, as the examples above that one number is a power of 2 and the other number is two more.) Is 2 the answer for all +0 and +2 pairs that give integer result? I won't know, because I'm not inclined to waste any more time on this.

January 11, 2021

Words and numbers:

- Do not occupy spatial or temporal locations ("where" and "how" they exist is uncertain)
- Are immaterial
- Do not enter into causal relations
- Are abstract
- Have never been defined in a way that is clear and widely agreed upon
- Can be productively used,
- but must be represented (speech, sign, or writing) in order to do so,
- and the representation is conventional and not the thing itself

But numbers are better defined and better understood than words.

I had forgotten about the mobs that roamed Washington in advance of Lincoln's inauguration in 1861, and that Winfield Scott protected the Capitol with soldiers. Even more interesting, John C. Breckinridge, at the time Vice President, a man Lincoln had defeated, had to preside over the certification of the votes, as did Gore in 2000 and Pence last week.

[Ved Mehta](#) has died. My father loved his writing, and when I went to hear Mehta talk, and have him sign a book (*Dark Harbor*), I told him that. Mehta was blind, and I noticed that in order to sign, he used a piece of stiff paper as a straight edge near the bottom of the page, presumably to guide his writing. He died at 86 from complications of Parkinson's. I did not know that he was an alumnus of Pomona College, from which my sister graduated.

"Love / is a glandular game / until *they* are sure you are inefficient. / But until then, it is a carefree disappointment." (by C. Myer.)

January 12, 2021

The virus (I first mistakenly wishfully typed "the vaccine") continues to burn through the population like a California wildfire. It didn't have to be this way.

The riot both may have been a spreader, and given at least two legislators the virus (i.e., they tested positive afterwards) crowded together sheltering. We can expect others, if we assume that only a fraction had themselves tested. Turns out most of their colleagues refused to wear masks. Ten to one they were Republicans.

This is being written in the middle of my Zoom voice class and I feel sneaky. Not only that, but multitasking almost always fails. I used to work for someone who thought she could, and she invariably wasted everyone's time in meetings by making them to repeat what they'd said, because she'd missed it while simultaneously tending to her email. One of the worst managers I've ever seen, and I've seen plenty, in fact more than I can, or care to, remember. I remember only one person who had mastered multitasking, and she was not a manager. "To do two things together is to do them both badly", or worse, that effect -- I think it was Seneca who said that.

"Private Scroggs et al. were marched thirty thirsty miles and ordered to VOTE." (*Why*, by C. Myer.)

Human life, and being human, and the simple existence of anything at all, has always seemed ineluctably strange to me. After more than 70 years on this planet, I have yet to get any clue at all about what's going on. The deeper I delve into anything, the stranger, more tangled and complicated, and mysterious it gets. At the heart of almost everything there seems to be mystery.

Being so puzzled all the time is one reason I loved rock climbing. It's all *immediacy*, no mystery. Cranking on thin rock to get over a crux before I fell, the urgency left no space for wondering about imponderables. Of course, there's more to that. I remember being on the first stance of Rixon's West (before it was wiped out by that huge rockslide), enjoying the view, and a bobcat strolled up to the base of the climb, sat down, and disappeared. I was looking down at him, but I couldn't see him. Bobcat magic. Or the east buttress of Middle Cathedral. I was four hundred feet off the deck or thereabouts, and a peregrine falcon came flying straight at me. Another magic animal. And all those times simply admiring my surroundings, exulting in being high off the earth's floor. Merely feeling the rock. The movement. The texture of the experience. There is nothing comparable, to me.

Email from the Times: the "Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report" goes back to 1878, and some of the material that first appeared in it, warning us of problems. This is why I believe in government. It helps us live better. When there are problems in a group, the group needs the data to keep itself safe, meaning healthy and orderly. To get rid of government is to get into disorder and death.

Thinking about the people who flock to Trump, many of them because they feel ignored and disenfranchised, I recall a semester several years ago. The professor of a class I was taking, a slender, attractive woman, told us she'd been at a shopping station, walking in to buy something, when a fat woman confronted her and accused her of being a person who was politically correct and would not call her fat. This woman challenged her to "go ahead" and call her fat. I found this unbelievable. In retrospect, this was the first time I encountered one of the chickens that's coming home to roost now. People who feel that way, feel that way because they've been treated too often with contempt, or because they see a way of improving their lives disappearing, as in the case of the woman who was shot by a Capitol policeman -- she was struggling economically. They need help, of many kinds, and it's up to us, who are doing well, to provide it.

Fer cryin' out loud. I've had my ass in this chair for hours, taking my Zoom class, reading the news, dealing with medical appointments and wasting time on this frivolous journal ("blog" is too ugly a word) and have not had a lick of exercise. It's 2 pm. This is madness.

Out for a long walk, where I thought, among other things, about the two gorillas in the San Diego Zoo that have test positive for the virus. There are three other species I can think of (cats, dogs, and minks), not counting whatever the species was (a bat?) that give it to someone in Wuhan. This is a generalist virus, like rabies, and if these other species give it back to us, the disease is going to be around for a long time, especially if there are other reservoir species we identified yet, and even if we achieve herd "immunity", a clear misnomer. This is a lot like the problem of evil: evid there's no loving "God" (one of the few words that means nothing unless it's in quotation marks), and which believe tie themselves into knots trying to rationalize. Good luck with your circular reasoning and equivocations.

At last, after wondering all this time why eloquence was uniformly missing from all the talk about the disaster in the Capitol, I heard some: Representative Mary Gay Scanlon's speech on the House floor. Flawless.

Email to the county: "The department of health in this county is derelict and incompetent. Adjoining counties Wyan Jackson, and Johnson (Mo.), and probably others, allow residents to sign up for shots. But not our county. This is outrageous." They'll respond with mendacity, as the state department of health did.

January 13, 2021

From yesterday's *Times* coronavirus email: "Another new coronavirus variant has been detected in four people who to Japan from Brazil." The more, the merr -- er, scarier. The bad news is getting so consistent, this one didn't even seem surprising. I read the first two paragraphs and bailed. Next item: "Brazilian researchers found that a Chinese vaccine hailed as a triumph is far less effective than thought." Quelle surprise. Didn't even bother to read a word of that one.

Also in the email, "The coronavirus has ripped through Native American communities at a ferocious pace, and the c many elders is inflicting an incalculable toll on the languages and traditions that are passed on through the generatio surprise to me. See March 24, above. It should have been obvious to everyone.

The latest technique: [wearing two masks](#). I think it's a good idea, and plan to do it. I may even add one of those plas shields in risky situations. Call me paranoid -- it's a compliment.

[The sum-product conjecture](#). Paul Erdos again. That guy really got around. I'll have to try to understand this, somed which I mean the conjecture, not Erdos's ubiquity.

[Randonautica](#) claims to connect you with a quantum supercomputer in Australia. And I have some beachfront prop the moon you might want to buy. I think the xkcd thing where you meet strangers at a random point in the real worl credible, though the only time I tried it, the point was in a lake northeast of here, and nobody else showed up. I'm no kidding; this really happened. Or maybe "really didn't happen" would be a better way of putting it. "Failed to happe "Misfired"? Language is so confusing, especially when it involves [the irrealis modality](#), which, by the way, is far br than the definition given in the SIL glossary. For once, the [Wikipedia explanation](#) is better.

"'Dad', says Mom, 'This after-school Zen is good, clean fun for the kids.' And Buddha, overhearing, buys a split-lev [Leawood](#) and becomes a [Botar](#)." (*Why*, by C. Myer.)

With apologies to Albert King: if it wasn't for bad news, we wouldn't have no news at all. Of course there's the crim still in the White House, and his minions. Plus the pandemic continues to gets worse. A new variant that's more infe hospitals stretched to the breaking point, a population with too many people who don't give a shit anymore and engz risky behavior (kinda reminding me of the AIDS epidemic, though comparing maskless rightwingers to promiscuou homosexuals will light their short fuses), kids who never wear masks (I see them almost every time I take a walk), a and on. And of course there's the criminal incompetence of the state I live in, in failing at vaccinating its population to find a cave somewhere, pull the entrance in behind me, and emerge in a year. I'm surrounded by idiots, and they'r my health at risk. This is the fundamental theorem of being human: we're all idiots, endangering each other. Mea cu baby. Don't get me started, or I'll rant all day, 'cuz there's plenty to rant about. 'Nuff -- no, too much -- said.

January 14, 2021

I can't believe this, especially since some of these people are programmers: [Lost Passwords Lock Millionaires Out c Bitcoin Fortunes](#). This is the epitome of carelessness, because this sort of need is exactly what password safes are fc you're super-cautious, you can always put your password in the password safe, copy the password safe to a thumb d then put the thumb drive in a safe-deposit box in a bank, for safety from theft and fire. While you're at it, put copies safe deposit boxes, in different banks. The first three rules of information technology are backup, backup, and backt

Three hundred entries in this journal, give or take a couple. How time flies.

Is my full-spectrum light, which I use to make myself more wakeful, giving me a sunburn on the left side of my face. Unintended consequences; there are too many of them.

New: two virus variants in Ohio that are "more contagious", though unspecified what they're more contagious *than*. Presumably the variant(s?) we had last year. Whatever, it's more of the flood of bad news. You'd think that after two centuries of astonishing advances in medicine, we'd be able to do better, but the root problem here is not so much medicine is the stupidity of those who do not mask, distance, and wash their hands. Not to mention risky behavior. My brother and wife are planning to fly somewhere in a few months, which is madness. After their return, they'll be banned from the country for two weeks *and* required to get a negative test, in case they were asymptomatic.

Read Steve Martin's book *Born Standing Up* and wondered why anyone would want to put themselves through the rigors of a career in comedy. Sounds like a desperate, lonely grind. And he's not the only one who's said so. I notice that even when they get the chance to change to something else (usually acting, sometimes writing for TV or movies) jumps at the opportunity and at least scales back on the touring. Well, maybe not *every* one (how would I know?), but this seems a general rule... Factoid: he says he dated Linda Ronstadt for a while but was so intimidated by her beauty and talent that he never made a pass, until she said, "Do you always go out with a woman nine times and not try to sleep with her?", and they went their separate ways, which he described it as "chaste".

Every day I do the current puzzle on my desk calendar. Today's was a sort of crossword with all the vowels filled in and blank spaces occupied by two consonants for us solvers to figure out and write in. Not very difficult today. What I found surprising, though, was the instructions, which said that all the words were common English words. I don't think "ia" is common. I knew it, but there would be lots of people who don't. On the other hand, maybe people who solve puzzles know this kind of thing. This was a wasted entry...

A general rule of thumb I try to use, and invariably fail at, going gung-ho instead: when taking up a new physical skill as a martial art or musical instrument or type of exercise, concentrate on form and precision. Speed or strength or weight will come later. What I need to practice first is following my own rules of thumb.

The linguistics paper is turning into a philosophy paper, and it's taking too damn long. It's turned into a tick, latched and impossible to remove.

When I was in Fairbanks, the [Eskimo games](#) were being held. These redefine the word "extreme". The descriptions on the web page are too low-key and don't give any idea of the pain involved. For instance, someone told me that the winner of the knuckle hop often loses flesh on the top of his fingers, so the bones of the knuckles are exposed. The four-man carry is ridiculous; even at my fittest, when I was climbing a lot, I couldn't have carried four other guys simultaneously. They're some tough, tough people. The name surprises me. "Eskimo" is an insulting term from the Athabaskan languages, similar to the n-word we white people aren't supposed to say. I think it means "eater of raw flesh". The preferred word is "Inuit". I wanted to go see the games, but was always in class or studying, and had only one day free at the end, but that's a start later, involving sandhill cranes, a missed bus, sore feet, and friends.

There are too many things I've never seen, and certainly won't, before I die. Flying foxes and harpy eagles and the incomparable Halle Berry come to mind.

"Imagine yourself as the elevator operator, quietly *passing* up and down all day, with everyone wondering, but never sure, who is making that SMELL." (*Why*, by C. Myer.)

The schwa is one of my favorite characters. It's that upside-down and backwards letter e, and represents the sound of the first and last vowels in the words "America" and "banana". It's the central sound in the vowel space and is an unstressed sound that other vowels often get reduced to in English, the language where vowel reduction is rampant. That's the factoid for today.

January 15, 2021

What is the difference between a "crafty" politician, and a "wily" one?

Sales of video games are up, attributed to the pandemic. (But aren't they always up?) Those things baffle me. I can't understand them. They're like sand under my eyelids. I'd rather eat ground glass.

My rants about Facebook, dismissed by family and friends as demented jeremiads, are vindicated yet again: [How Facebook Incubated the Insurrection](#). Admittedly, my concerns were more about privacy than politics. Nevertheless. Every dirty trick Zuckerberg ever made should be taken away, as a lesson about social responsibility to future technocrats. (Once again, I'm living in my fantasy world here, just venting. We all need a release valve, me more than most.) (Later: see [Big Tech Has Helped Trash America](#).)

This entry's for you, CAR: [The Supreme Court and Trump](#), including remarks about your boogeyman Josh Hawley. So sure about his potential to be our future fascist leader, but he certainly is a self-absorbed little asshole. That speech he traced what he sees as society's current problems back to a third-century (?) monk was absurd. He managed to be fallacious and pretentious simultaneously. And what about that raised-fist salute to the rioters? His ambition, combi his take-no-prisoners, slash-and-burn style, are so hypertrophied he can best be described as diseased.

The county department of health has not replied to my dressing-down. This is no surprise; they probably don't respect wackos (I wear the badge with pride). Of more concern, the local online newsrag says the county won't even finish vaccinating health workers for at least another month. That seems remarkably slow. No. That *is* remarkably slow. I've always thought this county more capable than its neighbors. Clearly I was wrong.

Most of my life I've hated going to bed, but in recent years this has changed. Now I crawl between the sheets with satisfaction, feeling snug and warm and safe. Used to be I only felt that way in my sleeping bag, waking in the morning my tent, especially on cold, rainy days. Much as I would have preferred a sunny day, to go climbing, the sensation of comfort in my bag was some recompense, that feeling of being warm when the world outside the bag was cold -- the longer I didn't stir and contact a part of the bag my body hadn't warmed. I delayed the time when I'd have to crawl and hurry into my cold clothes (and boots!, which would stay cold longer than the clothes), put on my rain gear, and start my day. Sometimes I'd stay in the bag until the need to pee forced me out. Hell, there was nothing better to do, and why would I seek comfort for its opposite? I miss those days, and I don't.

January 16, 2021

What a joy this world is. The snow yesterday, a virginal blanket. (From the Ada novel: "She waved a hand, indicating the street, the snow-plastered stop sign, everything dressed in white, and more white falling from the sky. The trees and the ground were sugared, everywhere changed by a trick of weather into new, pure things, a geometry of curves never before seen. Food, family, friends. The dogs and their simple love and exuberance. Books. Everything a gift, unasked-for, unimmediately awarded me without my ever having asked, or known. This world, and my life within it, are miracles. Every child born is another miracle. The mountains and sea, in their scope and forms, are miracles. This world is sacred. "There is something great and indecipherable going on all around us, which we cannot understand, and that feeling of gratitude toward it is a way of worship... None of this needs an explanation. What is required is the proper humility, to accept it with gratitude. A sense of its worth and holiness is that much stronger when I do not presume to understand or explain anything. I am so small, too finite, to understand." Enough, simply to be grateful.

A quote seen in an email: "I am spending more time pulling out invasive Oriental Bittersweet by the roots. I used to just enjoy and photograph the woods around me, but the post-holiday surge has me needing work that is physical and points to a better future." Yes, indeed. As soon as we have a warmer day I'll resume that same work in my back yard preparation for the homegrown national park.

The more I read, the clearer the conclusion: avoiding the virus is a matter of avoiding other people, especially in groups. To fly, to attend a public event of any sort, to engage in any group activity, is to spin the cylinder, put the gun to your temple, pull the trigger, and hope that the hammer doesn't fall on the loaded chamber.

A recurrent theme in the last year has been websites that crash when overloaded (applying for unemployment, applying to get listed for a vaccination, etc.). Why hasn't some sort of throttling been implemented on these servers, or the network through which people access them? By that, of course, I do not mean the superhighways of the internet, but the equivalent of local streets. Or stop spawning sessions on your servers when you reach a limit, return a message that you're overloaded and kill the connection. E.g., return the HTTP status code "503 Service Unavailable", though that's ambiguous because it has several possible meanings, as well as being misleading to the uninitiated. Better, get specific and return the unofficial status code "529 Site is overloaded". (They really should make that one official.) When Kennedy was shot, everyone was up the phone, to talk to family, but the telcos were overloaded and gave a fast busy instead of a dial tone or a ring tone. At least the phone switches didn't melt down. Yes, the server equivalent of a fast busy is suboptimal, but at least the people are already 90% of the way through applying and wouldn't lose their work. This should not be difficult to solve, though the solution(s) will be far from satisfactory. The real fix is bigger iron, but that costs money and states are always short on it, and these overloading problems are unusual, so the iron would be oversized like a Ferrari on a go-kart track, maybe for a few years at a time. Maybe move the applications to the cloud, though that might just transfer the problem to the hosting company. Not to mention the additional security problems this brings. For all I know, many of these applications may already be in the cloud. Regardless, some kind of stopgap workaround should have been implemented by now. Later: Immediately after posting today's entry, I checked my email. My sister had notified us that the county had posted a survey. It was so overloaded that most connections failed, and every time I tried to move from one page to the next, that failed, too. I re-resent until I hit the end. Took 55 minutes to do what would usually take 5, and I don't know that my data are actually accepted.

If, as has been asserted, the enormous populations of China and India are the result of the Himalaya and its snows, a rivers and rich soils that sprang therefrom, what happens when climate change reduces the snows, or causes heavy f
Are any scientists looking into this?

A [table of prime gaps](#). Note that Knuth was responsible for two. I did not realize that this was one of his interests.

The skin on my right heel is cracked, which is slightly painful and causes me to limp. This happens when I go baref much and the skin dries out. Note to self: resume wearing socks.

In recent years, when reading instructions or warranties that are included with something we've purchased, the second language is increasingly likely to be French. Invariably, it always used to be Spanish. I assume this change is to meet bilingual requirement in Quebec.

"Meanwhile, back at the washateria, Wonder Bunny finds **gold**." (*Why*, by C. Myer.)

Seems out of character: Biden wearing a blue hat that says "We Just Did", with the number 46 below the words. Trump and his MAGA hat? Or maybe the photo is photoshopped? Regardless, a search for hat "we just did" in gets more than 7 million hits. Thanks, but I have too many hats already, though the idea is clever.

The virus is surging in China now, and other places that had tamped it way down. This bug is resilient. The problem China is in a province that surrounds Beijing. How many people live in Beijing? If it gets to the city, they'll have a problem on their hands. Let's hope they dodge this bullet.

I thought I recognized the name. [George Whitmore](#), member of Harding's team on the first ascent of El Cap, died a weeks ago. I used to see Harding around the Valley occasionally, but I don't think I ever saw Whitmore. Though I probably wouldn't have recognized him if I had, someone might have mentioned him and pointed him out. Those guys and W Merry were the pioneers, even though Robbins and his partners had done the Northwest Face of Half Dome first. (A route, which I've done. See December 28, above.) Yeah, Harding and his guys fixed a lot of pitches, but El Cap was nobody knew if it could be done. Good God, Harding drilled holes for bolts through the night to finish the last pitch requires prodigious stamina and determination. (John Long said, "Light? He don't need no stinkin' light.") When a calls someone a hardman, it's a high compliment. These guys were the real thing, the definition of the word. Goldilocks prusiks and fixing with clothesline. Primitive doesn't begin to describe the equipment. As an acquaintance of mine called "It takes a certain size and shape of balls".

More problems with the outgoing administration and its mishandling of the pandemic: ["Vaccine reserve was exhausted, Trump administration vowed to release it, dashing hopes of expanded access"](#). Here is [a more nuanced story](#), implying of clarity that led to the misunderstanding.

From the Times Coronavirus email: "Upgrades will take Pfizer's main European vaccine plant offline for weeks, stirring outrage in the region." This does not affect U.S. supply.

The leading cause of death in the U.S. is the virus, and has been, if my memory is correct, for over a month.

We need [more vaccines](#).

January 17, 2021

Vowel shifts. No one knows why they happen, though the actual processes involved are fairly well understood -- displacement between vowels being maintained, and so on, at least in chain shifts. But no one can explain the great vowel shift of centuries ago, that changed its vowels so they're different from its neighbors on the European continent. Anyone who learned one of those languages can affirm that the sounds associated with the letters of the vowels are substantially different. The northern cities vowel shift is going on right now. In my first linguistics class we listened to a recording of a Detroit speaker saying something about catching a bus. Or so we were told. I couldn't understand a word of what she was saying. Meanwhile, right across the river from Detroit, Canada is immune to this change.

Walking through my neighborhood, you will pass a house or two with snow on the roof, then a house or two without snow; ones with snow are insulated; those without, are not.

Saw a picture of Trump the other day, and felt sorry for him. He looked like he was in despair. It must be hell, living with his head.

Authorities are checking airline passengers for security risks. This sort of thing always makes me nervous about the slope to Big Brother watching us. I remember back in the 1980s, when one of my co-workers was responsible for th

that did this on an airline reservations system. Yes, the government has been watching passenger lists for that long.

Biden has used the phrase "the honest truth". Uh, don't mean to be a word nerd here, but isn't that redundant? Is there other kind of truth than honest?

The sky is falling! One of the ravens in the Tower of London has disappeared, so the kingdom will crumble if they lose another -- the minimum is six, and that's the number I think they have now. Quick, get on Craigslist (?) and find and bring that murder of ravens back up to a safe number. (Yes, it's a "murder", not a "flock".) There's a book by the raven master, titled *Ravenmaster*, possibly preceded by the definite article, which is quite interesting. The writing was a bit amateurish, but so what. Ravens are fascinating, though I wouldn't keep one as a "pet". Too smart and too anarchic.

Reading today's entries, they seem slapdash. Sosumi.

January 18, 2021

Factoid of the day: The U.S. has more species of salamander than any other country. (Source: *Big Night*, an essay in *American Essays of 2016*.) I have to wonder, though, whether this is not a sort of amphibian opt-in, because we're a wealthy country with a lot of biologists and a wide variety of ecosystems. So we think we have more, but really that's illusory, only in comparison to all the under-researched countries. I can easily imagine a large country with a wide variety of terrain, weather, vegetation, watercourses, etc., (Russia? China?) having more species than we do. Whatever. The essay says that you may spend your life without ever seeing a salamander. I've seen them more than once, in the Valley, and it was always a special event. They're magical, only partly for the rarity of sightings. They seem like something not native to our planet; there's a touch of the alien about them.

"And bug the beats on Christmas Eve who press hungry noses to the windowpane." (*Why*, by C. Myer.)

I met Nanda Devi at the Teton Climber's Ranch. I don't know how the place is now, but in the mid-70s it was almost entirely a male domain. But when I stepped out to make my dinner in the shelter where everyone set up their stoves, there was a long-haired, barefoot, long-skirted hippie chick playing a flute. I introduced myself and asked her name, which I didn't comprehend and asked her to repeat. She smiled, brilliantly, and said it again. I was a little smitten. Still not understanding, I nodded, said it was nice to meet her, and went off to cook. Later, I think, someone explained to me that she was named after the mountain Nanda Devi. Her father was Willi Unsoeld, who was one of the first team to climb Everest's West Ridge, after reaching the summit, descended by the South Col, the first traverse of a major Himalayan peak, a double first. The year I so briefly met her, or the next, she and her father went to climb Nanda Devi, which I think he'd named her for because it was the most beautiful mountain he'd ever seen. She died there, on her eponymous mountain.

Observation on Question Six: any integer solutions are squares, but most solutions are fractions. But any integer can be expressed as a fraction, with a denominator of 1. So when the $ab+1$ term disappears into the numerator with no remainder, the denominator can be treated as the number 1 left behind. (As if the first term of the denominator $(ab+1)*1$ had left behind the right-hand 1.) I thought this might get me started on solving the problem, but I think now that it's just an implicit restatement of the problem. This damn problem just keeps giving me illusory glimpses. If it took a professional mathematician a year to solve the problem, I suppose I shouldn't be discouraged, especially because my mathematical training is decades old, and is only the equivalent of a minor degree. On the other hand, some of the teenagers at the olympiad solved it. On the other other hand, Terrence Tao only got one point on the question. On the other other other hand, that was on the day before his 13th birthday.

My wife told me that vaccines for viruses don't last. This can't be true, since polio and measles and smallpox are caused by viruses, and we only have to get those vaccines once. (By this I mean only one set, which includes the booster.) When I voiced this objection, she pointed out that we have to get a flu shot every year, and that's true. Though there are a variety of flus (H1N1 and so on), we do have to get the shot even if we've already had it for the variety that's expected that year, maybe not? Maybe we get the shot because we don't know what variety (varieties) we've had, and it's faster, simpler, and cheaper to get the shot than it is to test for antibodies. (Besides which, I think flu vaccines sometimes are for two kinds of flu, not just one.) So maybe flu shots last, too. But let's be conservative and assume that some virus vaccines last, while others do not. Then the question becomes: will coronavirus vaccines be more like the polio vaccine, given once, or like the flu vaccine, which must be given yearly? Complicating the question, there are a wide variety of coronavirus vaccines, many of them altogether new, of types never before made. So it might be possible that someone who'd had one kind of vaccine would need to be vaccinated again the next year (or whatever the expiration period turns out to be), preferably with a permanent vaccine, while someone who'd originally been given a permanent kind would never have to be vaccinated again. And would there be any side effects caused by getting two kinds of vaccine? Why haven't I seen any discussion of this? This is a *fundamental question*, dammit. I need to search Stat and Johns Hopkins on this, but what the heck do I use for search terms? All I know is, I'm going to record the kind of vaccine I get in my medical records so I can take precaution later. *No mistakes.*

I've spent four years grinding my teeth, and Trump will finally be gone tomorrow. He's done more to destroy the no: civilization, decency, and democracy than I thought he could. Back in 2015, when he started running for the Republ nomination, I described him as a clown that forgot his makeup. To say that was an understatement is an understater galactic scope.

How can people who joined the military storm the Capitol? Isn't that contradictory? Serving your country, then tryir it down? I remember working with a guy who'd been career military for 20 years (*not* my friend Tom), and overhear on the phone, talking to his wife about the government and "their jackboots" coming in to do them harm, when it wa obvious from the context that the complaint was inappropriate -- some dispute over taxes, I think. He retired from tl government, and then he hated the government. I'm missing something here.

I have to find my copy of *Crowds and Power* and skim through it, as well as re-read Hoffer's *The True Believer*. Ho book was sure easier than Canetti's.

January 20, 2021

"Good planets are scarce and few, earthworms and caribou." (Steve Forbert, [Good planets are hard to find.](#))

Down to campus today, to get some miles on the car and maybe fix that battery problem from it sitting in the drive c day. And while I'm at it, return that library book they mailed me. And because I'm going to campus, I have to get tes Covid in the parking garage. And The Fixx starts up: "One thing leads to another..." Earworms. Why do I get them I haven't heard in years, or even decades? This morning it was Ray Charles, Cryin' Time. Last week it was Herman! Hermits, I'm Henry the VIII. Someone finally gave me a cure: sing a favorite song to block out the earworm. Now i could sing.

Now that the run is over, and the work begins, I hope that soon Biden will show a bit of joy. He's always so damn se liked that gif where he was in a convertible, and grinned, and waved, to invite the viewer into the car to ride along v He needs to do more of that. We need to see more of that. And leave Harris out of it. She's too much like the little gi went to Catholic grade school with: preoccupied with doing well, gleeful when they succeed. She, and they, have/he of self-satisfaction tied to an obsession with conventional success.

January 21, 2021

The campus yesterday was a ghost town. The fraternities on Edgehill looked empty, and the usually-jammed street l or three parked cars, which probably has only happened in the past on Christmas Day. On campus I saw two people masked. The buildings looked unlit. Of course, the semester hasn't started yet, but still. Stuck Pullum's tome in the l return and was early for my Covid testing appointment, so I drove around for a while. Never thought of it before, th have noted all the decayed buildings in east Lawrence, but that area is the exception to my dislike of teardowns. A g many of those shacks *should* be torn down and replaced with better, or even, simply, empty lots, though something v have to be done to provide replacement housing. Saw the Zen Center again. It sticks out, being a new, nice building well-groomed lot nestled among a jumble of crummy other stuff: rundown houses, a lot with tall grass, industrial wl The municipal wastewater treatment plant, gravel dumps, recycling center, and compost facility weren't apparent, th really didn't look. They're all within a block or so of KZC. Curious to me that KZC should be so close to Oread Frie Meeting, though I've never attended the latter. Swung by the old place, where I attended many retreats and also live semester. The KZC sign is gone, of course, but I noticed that there's a small statue of a seated Buddha on the newel the top of the steps on the front porch. Drove through that big cemetery on 15th, too. The mausoleum was dated 181 seems a bit early for Kansas. 1918 would be more what you'd expect. Or maybe I'm getting dsylexic and switched tl digits... When I took the Covid test, which was a spit test, I dropped the tube between the seat and the console and h of a time retrieving it. Good thing I hadn't filled it yet. Didn't do the sample 100% correctly. Really should read all t instructions on such things in advance. On the drive down and then back, changed the sound between inaguration cc music, silence, and occasionally the hurdy-gurdy CD, none of which satisfied me. Need a violinist and a flutist in th seat, playing Mozart. When that gets boring, let the harmonica guy in the front passenger seat play blues. Oh, yes, h to remove his mask and would be spreading his virus. Same for the flutist. Too cold to roll the windows down. Encl space, infectious air. Never mind.

Tried to read the inaugural poem by Amanda Gorman. The commentators got it wrong. That poem was amateurish. looked vivid and cheery in that yellow and red outfit, though.

More of the far-right guys like the Proud Boys seem to wear beards than the rest of us do. There's a vein of ore for s academic to mine. Beards are trendy these days, though. A few years ago I went to a climbing club yearly party. Bit weather, and three guys were standing around a fire, all of them with super-long, perfectly trimmed beards. I walke my Van Dyke chin whiskers and said, "I feel my beard is inadequate", and got a good laugh.

January 22, 2021

Prime of the day: 5791. The digits increase by 2, left to right, modulo 10.

Talking about companies acquiring other companies, a thought occurred to me: they're rarely buying the employees is why so many acquired employees promptly get laid off. Rather, the acquiring company is either buying the customer or the product line. If it's the product line they're after, they either want to extinguish the competition (Facebook being a good example -- Zuck said that it's better to buy than to compete), or to add to the product line. Regardless, it's a matter of the big fish swallowing the little fish, and it's obvious who benefits. Though management and shareholders of the latter may gain, the average employee rarely does. At least, that's what I've seen, most of the times I've seen it.

January 23, 2021

About halfway through Atul Gawande's *Being Mortal*, which was clearly intended as a corrective to the medicalization of the death process at the expense of human emotion and quality of life. The book accomplishes a rare thing, helping me prepare for the end. Reading these wordsmith doctors is always a pleasure -- Lewis Thomas, Lisa Sanders, Willi Nolen (maybe), Perri Klass, and of course Oliver Sacks.

When you're a child, you learn to do things and they become automatic, so that you simply *do* them, unthinkingly. If you get PD, you lose what you've learned. The disease damages those movements that have moved to the unconscious circuitry. Mostly, you don't even know that you're doing it badly, or at least you think you're doing it much better than you actually are. If you want to walk properly, you have to attend every moment to shoulders above hips, head above shoulders, chin tucked, arms swinging, and all the other shit you used to do just like every other normal human being -- because you're not normal any longer. This is not mindfulness, but something entirely different. It's like being the inexpert puppeteer of your own body. I've about had it with this Goddamn disease. I'd just like one fucking day a month when I can be like a normal person before this fell on my head.

January 24, 2021

The unexpected side effects of the pandemic, some of which have generated a new word, [the anthropause](#).

"The individualist puts self-interest first, seeing his own pain, pleasure, and existence as his greatest concern... because you are gone, self-sacrifice makes no sense... The only way death is not meaningless is to see yourself as part of something greater: a family, a community, a society. If we don't, mortality is only a horror." (*Being Mortal*)

In one of my classes, the graduate assistant asked the students who'd seen *Arrival*, which had come out maybe a month earlier. (I forget that grad student's name, but she was a marvel. I've read some of her papers, and they're things of beauty -- organized and crystal clear. She won a prize for her work. Beyond that, though, she was both helpful and selfless.) (I had dozens of students in that section, only two of us, including me, raised our hands. The others were probably waiting for a streaming service. Either that, or they were taking the class to fill a requirement. (I was doing exactly that, it being my final requirement to get my degree, though it was a freshman-level class. Too time-consuming to be worth explaining. Having already had everything else, I got the top grade of the 300 students in the full class.) But I digress yet again. [Coon](#) consulted for *Arrival*, and I found out later that she had attended CoLang 2016, as I did. Had I known, I would have made it a point to meet her, but at the time I knew nothing about the movie, or about her. She's one of those people for whom the subject is more than academic. It's a human endeavor for her, as shown by her interest in studying and documenting understudied North American indigenous languages, exactly what I'd hoped to do before I got diagnosed with PD, but I couldn't.

Someone in Wuhan said, "I always thought I wasn't afraid of death, [but] I found out during the epidemic that I'm terrified of it." Yeah. Me, too. Easy to think I wasn't, until the times I faced it. Then the only thing that mattered was to keep on going.

One way you know you're old: you start reading the obits. The lives of dead people start to interest you. I remember a discussion about this with my dad, when I was in my twenties and asked him why he read the obituaries. He said that was interesting. Indeed they are. There's not much that's more interesting than our own species, especially the individuals that stand out from the rest of us.

Clearly my repeated refreshes of the Covid signup page succeeded. I've received two emails saying I'm on the list and I can be patient. Should have the first shot within a month. Glad I'm not living a few miles east of here: Missouri has the best vaccination record of the 50 states.

Seems like an impossibility: [flightless moths](#), but flightless moth species exist in other parts of the world. [Wikipedia](#) lists several species as having wingless females, followed by the line "Many more". Also wasps, flies, and "others". But I think that's all.

missed *Oscro Flaco* (California) and maybe the species on Inaccessible Island, which also hosts the flightless rail *La rogersi*.

The [Rocky Mountain Locust](#) swarmed in such staggering numbers that one sighting may have consisted of 12.5 trillion insects. It is now extinct, no one knows why. Other extinct North American species I can recall are the passenger pigeon, the Carolina parakeet, both of them wiped out by the human species. The buffalo (American bison) came close. Opposite the tumbleweed has died out in Asia, where it originated, but it flourishes here.

The lame rubbish the tech guys get away with, and no one calls them on, amazes me. Google: "Don't be evil". Vague and inadequate, and shows their indifference to ethical problems and ethical implementation. I imagine Brin and Page looking at each other and saying, "Took care of that. Let's get back to coding." One-dimensional people.

I re-read my paper on prohibitives (i.e., negative imperatives) in North American indigenous languages from five years ago. Hadn't thought about that in a long time. Amazing how complicated and varied those languages are. Tragic that they are dying. Some of them distinguish between delayed and immediate prohibitives. In many, prohibitives take a special form of negation not used for declarative sentences. They may or may not mark the verb, either for negation or specifically for prohibitive. Or they may use the bare verb, or a nonstandard case. They may omit the second person, or require it. In Greenlandic there is a special form for rescinding a prohibitive. Or they have multiple ways of making the prohibitive. Unangam Tunuu, the language of the Aleutian islands, which I studied for several weeks at CoLang 2016, has 5 different mechanisms for prohibitives, although this is not entirely clear, because the documentation varies. Regardless, that is a knotty language. Consider the gloss below, of a single polysynthetic word. This has nothing to do with prohibitives, but I can't resist showing it. (I omit the diacritics, since I don't know the HTML.) The first line is the word, the second is the word broken into morphemes, the third is the literal translation of the morphemes, and the fourth is idiomatic English. The parent parts of line 2 are sounds that are usually pronounced but get dropped in this word. Note the marker for habitual action is required for such actions. Also note that the order of the morphemes is exactly opposite that of the English words whose subscripts are there to make this more obvious.

1. kurizaqadanaagituudahlilakaq
2. kuri₁- za₂- qada₃-naagi₄-itu₅-udahli₆-laka(g)₇ -q(ing)₈
3. smoke HAB quit try want even not I
4. I₈ do not₇ even₆ want₅ to try₄ to quit₃ (habitual)₂ smoking₁.

January 25, 2021

Twin primes of the day: 8009 and 8011.

Jack is ill. He's lost muscle tone and muscle mass on his right hip, is listless and constipated. Took him for walks, but he always takes a dump when we do. Not this time, even though we were out for twenty minutes and an hour.

January 26, 2021

Reuters says "[Johnson & Johnson expects COVID-19 vaccine data next week](#)". Let's hope the vaccine, which doesn't require super-cold storage, and is only one shot, is available yesterday if not sooner.

Gad. Deutsche Welle says "[Netherlands: Another night of riots over coronavirus curfew](#)". My illusions are crumbling. I thought it was an enlightened and peaceful place.

Reading *A Good Time To Be Born*. The second chapter discusses child mortality among 19th-century American slave children, then wanders into related issues of forced family separation and the like. Though I'd read about these things, the writing brought it home, and nearly brought tears to my eyes. I begin to see why Black sensitivity to slavery is so strong.

January 27, 2021

What happened to American efficiency? It's a myth, plain and simple. I pulled up St. Luke's website and it offered to open a ticket for me up for when the vaccine is available, but when I clicked the button and logged in, it wasn't there, and the help desk couldn't open a ticket. As for KUMC, I was told by a person who works there that I could sign up on the main web site. That site is missing, too.

Someone once said there are no atheists in foxholes. This seems entirely wrong to me. My own reading convinces me that foxholes have turned many men into atheists. Living in them, the soldiers of World War I suffered more than the rest of us can fully imagine. They saw that death was random, there was no order or sense to life, that life was a matter of endless cruelty. Why *would* they (at least those who were open to doubt) continue to have faith in a loving God? I admit that

little more than a hunch on my part, but I'm betting that somewhere there are books and papers by writers and scholars who have looked into the subject, and I'd love to read them.

Christianity seems like a mosaic to me. Maybe "patchwork" is a better term. The core belief in a single god comes from Judaism. But I was reading Egyptian mythology one day when I came across the story of a god who died and came back to life after three days. And the date of Jesus' birth was borrowed from a Mideastern cult, supposedly to help recruit its adherents to Christianity. And the idea of a man who can be a god is heretical to Jews; it probably comes from the Romans. All this slapped-together stuff is a fiction masquerading as fact. The later monotheistic religions, Islam and Mormonism, are even worse. They strike me, quite frankly, as inventions by self-seeking liars. When I see the nonsense people believe in, I'm reminded of the one-eyed man in the kingdom of the blind. How can they take these fairy tales seriously? And yet, as a friend pointed out to me, human beings have a sense of the sacred, and they need to express it. What I don't see is why this has to be dressed in shabby secondhand threads.

January 28, 2021

I'm always baffled at the idea of taking pride in your heritage. Your heritage was in the past, before you even existed, and you weren't responsible for it, so you can't be proud of it.

A friend of mine created a yard sign for last year's election that said "Trump Putin", like Putin was the VP candidate and Trump was the real world, Trump acted like Putin was his boss. My own theory on this is that Trump has a Darwinian worldview that sees the human race as sharks and minnows, and he admires the sharks -- Putin, Duterte, that little North Korean cretin, and so on. He never met a thug he didn't like. Now Putin's lost his toady and the honeymoon is over. Biden called him up and ripped him a new one, talking about all the stuff Trump swept under the rug: Ukraine, Novalny, messing with the 2020 election, the Solar Wind hacking. The only reasonable conclusion is that Trump didn't care about his country enough to defend it against our enemy.

You'd think that after decades of producing versions of their O.S.es, Microsoft could get it right, but Windows 10 is like all the other junk they've produced: sometimes that login screen, with the beautiful nature pictures, lacks the text in the center and upper right. Other times I fire up the PC and the contents of my desktop have been rearranged for no reason (this is not because I failed to sleep the machine): move my post-its, including resizing them, and even deleting one or two. Or the file system loses its mind and, among other problems, the "Quick Access" (left-hand section in File Explorer) is blank. More than once the machine has simply locked up and I've had to unplug it, then plug it back in. I compare this to working on QNX, which, though admittedly specialized and simpler, was rock solid. Most versions of Unix were produced by AT&T, and they were solid, too (I worked on half a dozen). The biggest wrong turn in the last half century of computing was when IBM pushed DOS over CP/M, which was objectively better, and ran on multiple architectures to boot. Come to think of it, that push may be part of the reason: IBM's not-invented-here, monopolistic attitude in those days. Regardless, the triumph of DOS+Windows is more evidence that the best technology rarely wins. People can get passionate about the O.S. they use, whether it's Mac or Linux, but I have yet to hear anyone say they love Microsoft Windows. It's offal. They all have their problems -- the Mac feels to me like being forced to wear Armani; at least Windows gives you more control. But using Windows often feels like living in a tarpaper shack with a leaky roof in a rainstorm. Not to mention that the security is appalling; Windows is the O.S. equivalent of Android in that respect. Windows is the lowest common denominator. I had to get myself a RAID NAS and keep all my files on it; Windows is too nerve-wracking.

Installed Firefox VPN. Easy, quick, and intuitive. Only slows my download speed from 500 megs to 465 or 422, depending on which speed test I want to believe. Not bad. It will be interesting to see whether and how it affects Tor.

Like everybody else, I'm aware of and disturbed by the egregious blunders that have been made in persuading people to wear masks, and in distributing and using the vaccine. But what has been consistently underappreciated is how much we have to be grateful for. The mRNA vaccines were produced in record time because scientists have been working on this technology for decades. Look back little more than half a century, to when I was a child and everyone was terrified. In WWI and afterward we had the "Spanish" (really "Kansas") flu. This doesn't even begin to tell the story: massive deaths of babies in the summers, bubonic plague and cholera, diphtheria (only two cases in the U.S. in a decade recently!), and, of course, smallpox, the curse that's been eradicated. We are lucky to be living today, in a time of public health (clean water, sewage treatment, infant car seats and much more), vaccines, superb dentistry, and sophisticated medical treatment. Despite its blunders (some of which have personally damaged *me*), it's better than the past, and I wouldn't trade it away.

The perils of middle-class life: a vendor that charged me last year, although I'd cancelled my account repeatedly, is charging my credit card again. Last time they did this, cleaning it up and getting my credit card company to give me the money back took months. The whole thing is starting over again, and there's nothing to do but slog through the endless paperwork, emails and phone calls and text messages. The vendor ignores the tickets I open, never responds to emails, and does not have a phone number, which makes complaining real hard, and that's what my credit card company wants me to do. I've had to call the credit card company twice and explain everything repeatedly. Not to mention the inconvenience of calling

my card number. So take it from one who knows: *never buy from LiquidVPN*. "Fraudsters" does not begin to describe criminals.

January 29, 2021

Biden has ordered that the federal government electrify its fleet of vehicles. What do you want to bet that Defense will be an exception, as they clearly are for pollution rules (all those huge trucks in Army convoys blasting out black smoke, for instance). But electric vehicles don't reduce carbon emissions in parts of the country that use coal to generate electricity here. And what about the increased load on the grid? When I worked for the local power company here, I occasionally worked at the facility where they charged their electric vehicles, and I asked one of the guys how they liked it. (He was charging up a big bucket truck.) He didn't, because the batteries needed hours to get charged up. Cuts into the work

Read [an article about loss of the sense of smell](#) because of the virus. Apparently these people pay better attention than I do. When PD killed my sense of smell, years ago, I didn't notice. Some of it came back, after that study at KUMC. Now it fluctuates. A week or so ago, I smelled lemon (real) for the first time since I don't know when, but yesterday I could smell a scented candle (scent stick), though the smell of orange was quite distinct. And I've regained the ability to smell coffee, until yesterday morning, when that one failed again. I've always been able to smell the dogs, especially the schnoodles. Recently I realized that I can smell the compost heap, which I've never been able to in the past. And I regained the ability to smell farts for a while, but that's gone again. Taste seems pretty consistent -- minimal, except that red wine tastes sour. But smell is damn random. Check yourself out [here](#).

Heads will roll. Biden has moved with startling efficiency in getting rid of Trump's political appointees, who were in the way of hamstringing government operations. We can attribute his speed to professionalism: he's been around a long time, and knows where the levers are, and what needs to be done, and has surrounded himself with capable people. We're fortunate to have the amateur ideologues. Maybe we'll have a functioning government again: Voice of America, the CDC, the NSA, and the other organizations we need, that have been gagged and trussed and bound. No more of Trump's B&D. He should have done that to his and Melania's bedroom.

Apparently Sarah Huckabee Sanders is running for governor of Arkansas. Two friends and I were talking about this aside, I said that every time I see a pic of her, I think the woman needs to stop eating Big Macs or whatever. She's a target attack waiting to happen. Her diet has made her look like a Cabbage Patch doll, and she should head for the Golden State somewhere. It's for your own good, Sarah. Forget politics. Slim down and make a fortune telling other people how to do it the same. You'll be happier in the end.

January 30, 2021

A snowy owl has been seen in Central Park. That is one gorgeous bird, and I wish I could have seen it. But I've seen a [hawk](#) in Costa Rica, and it's comparable.

Saw Dr. Sifers Tuesday (today is Saturday) and we agreed to experiment with my Sinemet, upping it from 1.5 to 2 pills on the same schedule. I feel fantastic. I type faster, walk faster, stand up straighter, swing my arms when walking, and so on. It's all better. I have more energy. My concentration is better. Of course, I'm now at the threshold where dyskinesias can start to happen. I have to get a half-pill bump every couple of years (which is what it's been since I started in October 2016), then I'll have to deal with all those symptoms that can follow heavy levodopa use. Think Michael J. Fox and those spontaneous, uncontrolled movements. I have to start working even harder to hold the disease back. I want to be normal again, dammit, but not the little slut, continues to recede over the horizon. It didn't even kiss me goodbye.

Another obit: Christopher Little, J. K. Rowling's agent, has died. Dress him differently and he would [look like a character from the books](#).

Another bitch slap from the virus: vaccines are less effective against the South African variant and we may need new vaccines for it. Even worse, it seems that people who have already had Covid can get the South African variant -- i.e. immunity doesn't carry over to this variant. So I guess we may have to go on wearing masks even after a lot of people have been vaccinated, and then undergo new vaccinations, if we can't shoot enough arms fast enough to get out ahead of the virus. Like, given our track record, that's going to happen. And even if everybody was vaccinated tomorrow, would that do the trick? I'm no epidemiologist, so all I can do is speculate. If the new variant (and, God forbid, yet-to-come other new variants?) is this tough, the impatience people have started to exhibit will *really* get out of hand. Social and political dysfunction, here we come. This is more of the Covid alternate reality. It's like living in the book [Rotwang](#), where the aliens say "Everybody's gotta mutate at his own rate". If only that didn't apply to the virus. Maybe the aliens will take Rotwang, Miss Photo and me to their home planet Mongo. It's gotta be better than this. Bye, everyone. I've gotta go pack my things.

A couple of years ago I had surgery on my chrome dome, just above the forehead, to remove a basal cell carcinoma. The surgeon did a great job of sewing it up, and the scar is barely visible. The next time I saw my dermatologist, she insisted

and said, "That's a beautiful scar", reverently. I found that amusing, and something no one but a dermatologist would likely to say. We all have our areas of expertise, which affect how we see things, sometimes in ways that non-expert peculiar.

Much as I admire Camus -- and I do admire him, almost without limit, for his profound humanity, his empathy for humans, his decency -- I've come lately to disagree with some of his premises. I think, even more than I have in the past, he was wrong to say that suicide is the first question. And now I believe that we do not gain meaning by simply perceiving life like Sisyphus in rolling that stone uphill. Instead, I wonder why we need, even *demand*, meaning. Why do we have a compulsive compulsion to take nebulous philosophical and theological problems and create fallacy-filled systems that pretend to solve said "problems"? Isn't it enough simply to be?

Finishing *A Good Time To Be Born* this morning, I ran across this, which is like my entry for the 28th, above, but with a more pediatric slant (Klass is, after all, a pediatrician, and her book is about how advances in medicine and public health have improved childhood survival): "Sometimes I wonder how I ever lived to grow up, and other times I feel that my children's survival through infancy and childhood was a minor miracle. There I was, rattling around in the back seat car seats or seat belts, riding my bike in the street with no helmet, growing up in the era before childproof caps on medicine bottles, in homes with window blind cords, with walls painted before the rules on lead paint reduction. No vaccines against meningitis, pneumonia, or even chicken pox. I'm absolutely grateful for each of the hard-won measures that collectively made all our children so much safer."

[Harold Bloom](#), what I know of him, has always struck me as an insufferable, pompous, self-absorbed ivory tower academic, but though I've given up on fiction, I used to read a ton of it, and I agree that some of the writers mentioned in the article linked to at the start of this sentence are magnificent, though not all of these are to Bloom's taste, some only to Gottfried Keller. George Eliot (*Middlemarch* being the greatest novel I've ever read), Joyce (though I have yet to get all the way through *Ulysses*), Kafka (deeply weird), Chekhov (as humane as Camus, and maybe as insightful as Tolstoy). But I've outranked Tolstoy (yes, vivid and real, but too preachy), and I've never had the taste for Nabokov (precious), Freud (it is to gaze at), Austen (upper-crust romance novels), Dickens (I recognize his talent, without caring for it), Whitman (so what), Coleridge, McCarthy (as self-indulgent as Don DeLillo), Dostoyevsky (a steel weight on my brain). Oh, well, that's enough for me. Feel free to disagree. You're as likely, or more so, to be right as I am. My tastes in fiction were very specific, at times eccentric, and I admit to having many blind spots, such as an utter inability to appreciate anything by Shakespeare except his sonnets, and an overwhelming admiration for Mandarin stylists like Salter and Broyard. I'll stick to my guns, though Bloom himself is overrated.

January 31, 2021

Curious, I picked John le Carre's *Our Kind of Traitor* off my wife's bookshelf this morning and read the beginning. The first paragraphs. Five sentences. Beyond perfect, those words come from some empyrean realm accessible to very few in our world. Not only are the sentences perfect and clear (though long and complex), but they set the tone and the background, set the players, engage the reader, and trigger what John Gardner called the vivid and continuous dream. The reader's mind is drawn to the book, no longer standing in front of the bookshelf, no longer aware of the room around him, all forgotten, wanting to know what comes next.

There was a boy in my school who seemed never to speak to anyone. I never heard him utter a word. I think it was in November, probably the year I was in ninth grade and he was in eighth. Lunch had ended, and we were standing outside the middle-school building, the short minutes between the cafeteria and the classroom. The second-floor bathroom window opened and the boy squirmed out, sitting on the windowsill. Someone noticed, spoke, and pointed at him, and we all looked on. Then he jumped. After landing, he stood up, and we all applauded. He looked confused, and walked back into the building. I don't remember anyone talking about it later, as if nothing out of the ordinary had happened. I thought, and still do, that I naively believed that he could commit suicide that way, farfetched as that seems, but of course I have no way of knowing. The images of him in the window, and on all fours, and picking himself up, have stayed with me, though not the image of him falling. It remains a puzzle, and maybe the oddest experience of that year of my life.

February 1, 2021

Busy week. Two appointments today, two classes tomorrow, an appointment Wednesday, and a class on Thursday.

February 2, 2021

Dermatologist yesterday excised something on my left side and patched it up, but the bandaid was inadequate and by the time I arrived home I had a bloodstain on my favorite cotton sweater. Managed to get it out, but the rigamarole took so much time that it blew up my plans for the day. These little impromptu excursions into unplanned expenditures of time always frustrate me. Most people seem to accept them with better grace than I. They're probably more grown up than me. (

use of "I" and "me" at the end of successive sentences was deliberate and experimental. I like to try different flavors sometimes.)

This, from the NYT Book Review, is spot on: "[Creative writing s]tudents were taught to produce concrete rendering individual experience with greater focus on personal agency than on social or historical circumstances. These principles were referred to as craft, and distilled to what are now considered universal truths: A good story should be driven by character, not plot. It should show, not tell. But, as Matthew Salesses argues in his book "Craft in the Real World", "call craft is in fact nothing more or less than a set of expectations... These expectations are never neutral."

Curious, that women can be named after beautiful things and ideas (flowers: daisy, rose, lily, violet; virtues: hope, faith, grace, patience; precious ornaments: ruby, opal, pearl), but men never are. What is the meaning of this? That women beauty and men don't? I agree.

Everest: as the climate warms, the snow melts, and [bodies emerge](#). "Finding bones has become the new normal for us." "About 300 climbers have died" on the mountain in the last six decades. "On the mountain, everything is weighed against the risk of death," Ang Tshering Sherpa said. "It is better to bring down the bodies if possible. But climbers should always give first priority to safety. Dead bodies can claim their lives." And much more. See also January 16, above, for related speculations had me puzzled.

February 3, 2021

Much news lately about the efficacy of the vaccines. Take the mRNA ones, from Pfizer and Moderna. That 95% success is misleading. Yes, if you are given one of these vaccines, your chance of getting the disease is only 5% of the chance you have, had you not been vaccinated. But this "success" is the standard success ratio, harking back to things like smallpox. This disease is different, because it's more variable. The vaccinated people who get the disease, get only a mild case like a normal case of the flu. They don't go to the hospital, much less die. The people in that 5% have been saved from severe illness and death. And of course the other 95% have no problem whatever.

When I lie awake in the middle of the night, the mind rambles off into the least-followed, most-overgrown paths into thoughts I haven't had in years -- for instance, the movie *Phenomenon*, which I haven't seen in well over a decade and usually dislike Travolta's performances, but that one engaged me: the story of an ordinary man who becomes extraordinary and has to struggle with the reactions of other people. (Great line in the movie, when a surgeon wants to cut open George Malley's brain and Robert Duvall's character says, "Now I know why you guys wear masks".) The ending was inspired by George's girlfriend giving his work on earthquakes to the scientist, who promises to do his best with it; and all the townspeople gathering in their yearly celebration of George, showing each other their projects.

ASL has always interested me, maybe because I was deaf for a few years as a child, but I had trouble mastering the language, and quit for lack of time, already being a degree-seeking student elsewhere. (JCCC dropped its interpretive program, the only one between Denver and St. Louis. I heard that UMKC was supposed to take it over, but they don't do it as an offering. Apparently JCCC now offers only a certificate, and the translation program has moved to the K.U. campus.) Most people don't realize that the sign languages are real languages in every respect, except that they are gestured instead of spoken. When researchers look at brain activity, the same parts of the brain light up for Sign as for spoken languages. There are a few differences, such as a higher degree of iconicity in signing. This is to be expected, since Sign is innately more abstract (in the sense of lacking physical resemblance to its topic of discussion). But these differences are minor. Sign is as much human speech as the spoken varieties most of us use. All this was triggered because I read the other day about "How the President gets a name sign", which sadly is not online. This article about [name signs for political figures](#) will have to do in its place.

Thinking about [the Heart Sutra](#), in particular the last time we chanted it at a week-long retreat. Later, Susan Warden and I'd nailed it. Indeed we had, and I'd noticed the same thing. We did it much better than the people in the Youtube video.

February 4, 2021

I remember Mom, the last few years of her life, after her sister Louise died and there were no members of her birth family left, saying on at least two occasions, more to herself than to me or anyone else, "I'm the last one". Writing this, it now occurs to me that with my PD, this will not be true of me.

My days seem to pass like one of those montages in an old movie that showed the passage of time as a series of pages flying off a calendar, fluttering away, irretrievable.

Calendars, yes. I have a *Far Side* desk calendar, one of those one-page-per-day things. I like to conceal a page in every library book I return and imagine the reaction of the next person who checks out the book. There, in the middle of the

will be a cartoon of three dinosaurs and a small furry mammal walking by them. Two of the dinosaurs are bent over at the mammal. The third one, taller and erect, is holding out his "hand", puzzling over the white flakes falling from

I'd never heard of [Michael Goldhaber](#). Admittedly these thinkpieces usually exaggerate, and the actual description of prognostications is fuzzy and skimpy. But it's interesting that a theoretical physicist should be socially prescient, if, the article is on target. There's a large degree of luck in these matters, so I wonder whether he's made other successful predictions. As Bohr remarked, "Prediction is very difficult, especially when it involves the future"... "While Mr. Goldhaber said he wanted to remain hopeful, he was deeply concerned about whether the attention economy and a healthy democracy can coexist." reminded me of Shoshanna Zuboff, whose book *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism* gives a related take on current electro-net-neuro problems. I've read, or at least skimmed (too long and too theoretical), the book. I'm currently reading [her piece last Sunday](#) in the New York Times. While it partly sums up the book, at a fraction of its length, it's related to Goldhaber's concerns. If you're interested, it may repay your attention, though as Goldhaber pointed out, time is an increasingly scarce commodity. My personal experience is that time online is a source of tension, and that being completely absent from it, as I was in the summer of 2016, is calming. I intend to take a one-day weekly vacation from being online, every Friday, starting tomorrow. Now I just have to remember to remember, and then exert the necessary will to reject my daily fix.

February 5, 2021

Talking with my PD guys yesterday, the three of us agreed that very little is known about the disease, and it won't be anytime soon, certainly not in our lifetimes. Levodopa remains the gold standard for treatment, as it has been for half a century. The genesis or geneses of the disease are poorly understood: pollution, Lewy bodies moving up the vagus nerve to the brain, Lewy bodies forming in the brain, viruses that lurk in cells and suck up resources, and other theories. The substantia nigra is known to be involved, specifically its deterioration. But the mechanism is not entirely understood. Other parts of the brain appear to be involved. Symptoms vary widely among those who have the disease. Alpha synuclein, particularly its misfolding ("tangles"), is clearly involved in some way, but the details are fuzzy (the tangles themselves are oligomers? fibrils?). Alpha synuclein is an "inherently" or "intrinsically" disordered protein anyway, which probably makes understanding the mechanisms more difficult. Mysteries abound. No one knows why some people deteriorate quickly and others remain stable for decades. No one knows why the symptoms vary so widely from one person to another. Compare all this to cancer. Regardless of the degree of understanding of cancer, it's much more treatable. We sympathize with those who have, or have had, it, such as my wife. Often it is *not* treatable, and often the treatment is extremely uncomfortable. In the context of this entry, though, I am limiting the discussion to comparison.) With cancer, you can use one or a combination of three techniques: radiation, chemotherapy, and surgery. (My wife had all three.) It's not necessary to understand the genesis of the disease, though it's helpful to identify the kind of cancer. The doctors imagine, take a biopsy, and so on, to determine the type and extent of the cancer. The disease is handled with the classic diagnosis-prognosis-treatment paradigm. You find it, assess it, and try to kill it. Often, you're successful. When I was diagnosed with all that an oncologist could do was to give you an approximate time you had left to live. Now, they often cure you. Contrast that to PD, which remains essentially stuck where it was half a century ago. You can't go into the body and find and remove these alpha synuclein tangles floating everywhere. You can't prevent them from forming. The best you can do is to give drugs to slow the disease (levodopa that converts to replace the lost dopamine, or other drugs to alleviate symptoms) and give advice (exercise daily, get sufficient sleep, etc.) about what the sufferer can do to slow the disease. My two guys see this quite clearly, and we see that it's not going to change anytime soon. Research into the mechanisms is difficult (diffuse and elusive), and the problems involve the brain (complex, and you don't want to invade it). Yes, you can use the mouse model and so on, but that doesn't seem to have given us much progress. This disease is not what I call a tractable problem. It appears to be *innately intractable*. Living with it is like living in a house built on a floodplain: you stack the sandbags around the house, and keep at it, but you see the water rising. You work as hard as you can, stack sandbags as fast as you can, and you watch the waters rise, knowing full well that in the end you will drown.

February 6, 2021

Reading a couple of books from the University of Chicago Press. *The Politics of Petulance* is an accomplished but pretty showy tract on the populism of the moment. I won't finish it. *Bitten by the Blues*, a memoir by the guy who founded Alligator Records, is a blast, and I'm eating it up. After you get past his childhood (worth skipping), the pages are full of great stories about South Side Chicago blues clubs and the famous musicians he knew, and the early struggles to start a business. I've heard a number of tracks from albums he's produced on the local show The Fish Fry. (Chuck Haddock says something like "This is the latest from the Alligator label". Other favorites are the Rounder and Blind Pig labels, mentioned in the book.) A knife fight between two members of a band, and he breaks it up by saying "You have a contract. You do another set." So they're glad to end it, and go back inside, to play. Or the time a gang member attacked a band member on the stage and a bluesman sitting at the bar shot the gang member. The gang put out a contract on him, and he claimed they gave it up after he'd shot six of them who came after him.

More Chicago: My teacher David Ray (this was 40 years ago; he's pushing 90 and still alive; last I knew, he'd retired in Arizona) knew Nelson Algren. One story he told was about Simone de Beauvoir. She came to Chicago and Algren stayed around, exposing her to a side of life she'd never seen -- like introducing her to gangsters. Everything I've ever read about her and Algren claims that she was madly infatuated with him, but he didn't return the feeling. She went back to France and Sartre, and whenever people asked Algren about the relationship, if that's the right word, he would dismiss it saying that Sartre was her real love. (Just looked up [the love affair](#), and apparently my take on it was way off. Read the last two paragraphs, including the ring and the orgasm.) David also said that Algren couldn't get his papers organized, so he finally gave them to the archive at a local university (U. of C.?). One day, he said to David, "Come with me," and they went to the archive, where Algren took a box off a shelf and said, "Help me. Grab a box." David said, "What are you doing?" And Algren replied, "These are my papers. I'm taking them back." He'd given them to the archive knowing they would organize them, and waited until they were. I don't know whether he managed to get them back, and I don't know whether David helped him, but I suspect the answer to both questions is yes.

February 7, 2021

Yet another story that frightens me, privacy freak that I am: [They stormed the Capitol. Their apps tracked them](#). One of the things I marvel at is the ignorance and stupidity of the rioters. Ronnie Vincent is toast, and I'm not sorry for him. I'm sorry for all of us. The rioters are revealed today, the rest of us tomorrow, and in fact already: "In the hands of law enforcement, your location data could be evidence. But at every other moment, the location data is reviewed by hedge funds, financial institutions and marketers, in an attempt to learn more about where we shop and how we live." And "military agencies use these data without a warrant, no less. How? They purchase it." See [the earlier report](#) if you want the full story. "To evaluate the companies' claims, we turned most of our attention to identifying people in positions of power. With the help of publicly available information, like home addresses, we easily identified and then tracked scores of notables. We followed members of Congress and officials with security clearances as they drove home at night." Who knows? Maybe Putin's people are doing this to military personnel all the time. Yes, I'm small fry in comparison, but companies that want to sell stuff might track me, too. That's one reason I use a flip phone that's essentially anonymized, though I admit that it's insufficiently so. I already have a flip phone set not to send GPS data, though pings pretty much make that moot. And it ain't just apps tracking you: "Much of the concern over location data has focused on telecom giants like Verizon and AT&T, which have been selling location data to third parties for years." I'm going to start turning off my phone every time I leave the house, even though I don't have any apps that could send tracking data back to the companies that wrote the apps (Adobe, Google, Oracle...). I don't worry about telco tracking me. Borrowing from the July 16 entry, above: I've noticed that in all the books I've read about electronic privacy, the writers have gotten extremely paranoid by the time they finished writing their books and they start doing things like carrying their phones around in Faraday bags so they can't be tracked. They did the research, and they had the right idea. The rest of us should, too. If you're still not worried, see [The Privacy Project](#). And I stumbled on [this story in Wired](#), which is reminiscent of *Minority Report*, although claims like identifying you from a couple of hundred yards with a laser that measures your heartbeat usually turn out to work in the lab, not in the real world. There's always some bullshit at first, but accuracy usually improves, and deployment is usually secret. Have you noticed recently how many cameras are mounted above stop lights? That's nothing. In 2006, the BBC reported that the *UK government estimates 4.2 million CCTV cameras* in Britain. Yes, that's "up to", meaning there could be fewer, but that was also 14 or 15 years ago. In 2015, The Guardian put the number at up to 6 million. In 2019, the New York Times put the number of [surveillance cameras in London alone at 420,000](#). We don't need them here, because our cell phones do the job.

Excerpt from my notes on Thursday's class (Intro to Cognitive Science):

"It is clear from the lecture and discussions that there were parts of the paper I missed. These are smart students. I am afraid I have lost a step."

Today I ordered a mushroom growing kit. [You can find various kinds here](#), but I ordered Golden Oysters from North

Trying to use FTP yesterday while running my VPN, I got the response:

500 I won't open a connection to 10.71.151.138 (only to [native IP removed for my own privacy])

This has to do with "active" mode, when my side replies with its real address. Surprising, but totally to be expected, and explained.

February 8, 2021

Watched the first half hour of the Super Bowl, and tuned in a couple of times later for a few minutes. Too many ads for people in this country like American football (as opposed to football or "futbol", what we call soccer, everywhere else) because it's what they're accustomed to. And they're accustomed to it because it's on the tube. And it's on the tube because the advertisers love it. And the advertisers love it because it's so stop-start that they have plenty of space for commercials. About 90% of the time spent, when you measure the games, is not action -- the players are walking back and forth to the huddle, the referees are screwing around with the chain, or there's an ad on the screen. Whatever. Soccer, on the other hand, is all about flow. The treatment of time is looser and much more natural. Arguably, the other two major American games,

and basketball, are similar to football in that they stop and start a lot. And in basketball the treatment of time is even artificial. (Ever watch the "last few minutes" of a college game? It's always like waiting for Godot.) Baseball, given does not have this problem, but it's so uneventful I'd rather be stabbed with a fork than forced to watch a game from beginning to end. I could be doing something more interesting, like raking leaves, or scratching my ass.

Back when I was climbing for months of every year, which is to say back in the Stone Age, I always noticed the rare women climbers and thought it was a shame. The reasons were obvious: women hadn't come to the point of feeling physically empowered yet, they had few exemplars (models, mentors) and little opportunity, and the sexism of the men climbers was, shall we say, egregiously obnoxious. (But not yours truly; I accepted the women.) These days, there are women climbers, many of them quite good. They're often featured on the covers of the magazines. Those pictures probably sell (sex appeal for the men; identifying with them for the women). What I notice is that these pictures of women rock climbing are always elegant, while the men seem bulky, despite their low BMIs. This probably has to do with the leaner women and the muscle mass of the men, but of the two, I find that elegance much more appealing. The women are ballerinas of stone, and the men are boxers or bodybuilders in comparison.

February 9, 2021

It's been so cold that no one has shoveled their sidewalks. That's okay, because it's been so cold that no one has been walking. On the other hand, the cities and the states (we have two here) have not been taking care of the streets and highways. On my wife's commute yesterday, the light on the dashboard that shows the tires spinning came on repeatedly, through all the cities, and both states, on local roads, arterials, and the highways. They had two days to take care of the surfaces, and didn't.

My PD guys were emailing back and forth about what a particular PD organization meant by a "cure". I'm not sure that is meaningful for us; we all agree that one won't come before we die, and probably not for a long time afterward. I've said back, "Righto. My hope is to find a vampire who will turn me. I've never wanted to be immortal, but it's gotta be this slow decline." Seems about as likely as a "cure".

I don't remember this, about [the Electoral College almost being abolished](#), at all, though I was in college at the time and have been even more tuned out than I remember. And tuned out I certainly was.

February 10, 2021

The [Millennium Ecosystem Assessment](#).

February 11, 2021

Word of the day: nuncupative (carried on in speaking, rather than writing).

Twin primes of the day: 8999 and 9001.

I've been very happy the last few days with the state of my symptoms, and have been attributing their improvement to better sleep. On mentioning this to my wife, she pointed out that my medicine was recently increased. Oh, yeah. Duh. The doctor bumped up a third, this is a bit discouraging, since it confirms once again that the disease is progressive, and is causing increases in levodopa, which will probably eventually result in symptoms of their own, and which will increasingly be ineffectual. I recall the PwPs I've seen who speak unintelligibly, or have uncontrollable tremors, or live in a wheelchair, drool incessantly, or whose faces are immobile masks, and so on. These horrify me. I cannot resign myself to the prospect of losing control of my body. And that's not even considering cognitive impairments, such as hallucinations and (let me be blunt) stupidity.

Yesterday, going through my email, at noon, I saw an email from KUMC titled "Limited COVID-19 vaccine appointments available to schedule". I'd been randomly chosen to get vaccinated. It was sent the day before, at 4:30. I immediately checked onto my account, and could not schedule an appointment: "No times found", for every day through the end of the month. Called the number they gave on the web page. The guy I talked to said to check it periodically. Right. Why am I skeptical that I'll get in that way? I have *really* got to start checking email three times a day, at least.

In the meantime, there are 8 local pharmacies that will be offering shots to seniors, but they don't know when. We're supposed to check their websites. Right-o. My ass if going to be planted in my chair for the foreseeable future.

There is *one state* that's used less than 60% of the vaccine it's been given, and that is the hapless one I live in. More than a month ago, it was the cellar dweller, and still remains there. First Brownback, now this. Government by idiots.

Sense of smell not very good yesterday morning -- barely able to smell coffee and chlorine. But I tried tasting red wine today; it always tastes sour to me, but not that time. It tasted true.

A [117-year-old French nun beats the virus](#). She also went through the 1918 pandemic. Sylvia Goldsholl, in New Jersey, 108, and beat the virus, too. Phil Corio was 108 years old in New Mexico last May and survived. February 23: "A 101-year-old New Jersey resident survived the Spanish flu and then the coronavirus."

Japan has not started vaccinations yet. They need to vote out the LDP.

Yesterday I finally got around to uninstalling Flash Player, which I should have done months ago. Adobe tells you to delete files, which you can't do, even if you're the administrator (which I am), because Microsoft prevents you from messing with such things if you're not the "trusted installer". I messed with permissions, with no luck. Apparently Adobe doesn't give a shit, because they never discuss the issue. After probably more than an hour of rummaging around, I found [this link](#) which solved the problem, sort of. Run a command box as administrator, then type these lines (I've put in bold the only ones that actually worked):

```
takeown /f "%WINDIR%\SysWOW64\Macromed\Flash" /a /r /d /y
icacls "%WINDIR%\SysWOW64\Macromed\Flash" /inheritance:r /grant:r Administrators:(OI)(CI)F /t /c
del "%WINDIR%\SysWOW64\Macromed\Flash\*" /s /f /q
takeown /f "%WINDIR%\system32\Macromed\Flash" /a /r /d /y
icacls "%WINDIR%\system32\Macromed\Flash" /inheritance:r /grant:r Administrators:(OI)(CI)F /t /c
del "%WINDIR%\system32\Macromed\Flash\*" /s /f /q
takeown /f "%appdata%\Adobe\Flash Player" /a /r /d /y
icacls "%appdata%\Adobe\Flash Player" /inheritance:r /grant:r Administrators:(OI)(CI)F /t /c
del "%appdata%\Adobe\Flash Player\*" /s /f /q
```

I've never even seen that "icacls" command before.

After doing the first pair and the second pair, I was able to delete the Adobe files by hand. (Inexplicably, the "del" commands didn't work. I used file explorer instead. And the third folder didn't exist.) This kind of nonsense is why I hate Windows. Things like this didn't happen to me on Unix systems.

In my cognitive science class, the professor obviously believes in assigning the classics. Last week we read Chomsky on Skinner's *Verbal Behavior*. This week, it's Turing's paper on what is now called the Turing Test. Next week: the Room argument. Tasty! This is like listening to great jazz.

Alan Turing interests me less for his work on the halting problem or the Turing test, or even for deciphering the Enigma machine. His invention of round-the-house chess cracks me up (you make your move, then run around the house as fast as you can, and your opponent has to move before you sit back down; then he does the same -- like speed chess, but without exercise). Most interesting is how he killed himself. He painted an apple with cyanide and then ate it. Why go to all that trouble? Seems like quite an eccentric procedure to me.

I recall Alan Watts writing that the sense of self comes partly from chronic muscular tension, or words to that effect. What did he think so?

Live and learn. Fox gets big money from you, via cable fees -- bigger money than its competitors do. If you like, you can add yourself to the [unfox my cable box](#) petition.

February 12, 2021

Here's a measurable difference between not having PD and having it. When I didn't have it, I tended to meditate at about 5 breaths a minute (sometimes 4). Now that I have PD, my rate is up to 11 because my breath is shallow and continuous. I don't seem to be able to lower it. Posture is worse, too, and doesn't stay in place, as it used to.

Woke up and started thinking about Shakespeare and Company, Sylvia Beach's bookstore in Paris. The memory of it reminds me of the memory of Lawrence Ferlinghetti's bookstore City Lights, in San Francisco. Though their exteriors are quite different, both were small and crowded inside, but mostly, both felt like they were the personal projects of their owners. Each seemed individual, like a person, unlike large corporate bookstores. When I lived in North Beach, I used to walk home past City Lights, and I stopped in a few times. I remember two family members commenting that Ferlinghetti was working the register one day when (I think) they bought a book, and they commented that he looked like the kind of person who might take off one day without warning, to go travelling for a while. Since I didn't, and still don't, know what he's like, I couldn't relate to what they said. For all I know, he might have been behind the register sometime when I was there or leaving the store. I actually preferred the used bookstore in the alley close by. There were an amazing number of books at that place, on an enormous variety of subjects. I remember that store as three storeys, bottom to top. A little dim in the back. I remember the sunlight filtering in from a high window, through a thousand dust motes. That place would be long gone

now. I think these memories are questionable... Bookstores. I've spent thousands of hours in them, browsing happily heaven exists, and I end up there, it will have many bookstores, some of them combined with a coffeehouse. Colora Springs: the Chinook, an elegant place, panelled in dark wood throughout, with beautiful touches everywhere, so much in the design it seemed like a throwback to a more genteel time, when beauty mattered as much as profit. When we kids in the mountains in the summer, going to the Chinook was a special treat. But when I was out at the Pikes Peak Conference in 2004 and decided to visit the bookstore, they were closing it. A writer promoting her book was talking group, and they seemed like a little island in the emptiness. The shelves were maybe half full. I can't quite capture the something like blue. I bought a couple of maps; the map department had always been world class, filling orders from over the country. Just a couple of blocks from the Chinook, Poor Richards (funky, with used books and coffee and Santa Monica: Papa Bach, though I mostly used the library when I lived there. Kansas City: Whistler's and Rainy D Books. Portland: Powell's Books (a full city block; I regret not going there when I lived there). Lisbon: that amazing English-language bookstore, where I couldn't buy anything because I was on my way to the Alps, carrying three packs of climbing and camping gear; when I returned about a decade later and headed to the bookstore, a fire had completely destroyed it. Fayetteville Arkansas had a collection of interesting bookstores clustered within a walk of a minute or when we were there for a few days of mini-vacation. (College towns are usually good for that sort of break.) And of bookstores in my life, most of all there's Mrs. Van Gundy's store on 63rd Street, the store of my childhood. My brother sister and I would walk the half mile every Saturday. We were each allowed to charge one book to the family account Mrs. Van Gundy loved to see us, not so much because she was guaranteed to sell some books to us, but because she books and she knew we loved to read, and she was like a teacher who had good students: excited to share. She knew tastes, and she'd show us the things she thought we'd like. She knew I loved science books. One time I bought a book X-15. That must have set my parents back some, because it was really a coffee-table book, the kind you put out to impress visitors, full of beautiful photographs. But I read it, and loved it. My parents probably sold it when they moved out of Ward Parkway house, when I was living in Santa Monica. That seems the likeliest explanation for its disappearance to daydream about owning a bookstore / coffeehouse, and being wealthy enough to run it without having to worry about making a profit. Just hire a few interesting people to man the place, and go in for a half-day a few times a week, help with whatever needed doing, talk to the customers, and generally hang out. Combine that with good health and outdoor recreation, and that would be the perfect life.

PD guys over here yesterday afternoon and as usual the subjects of conversation ranged widely, including Sam Harris in the evening, scrolling through the Youtube videos that Roku offered me, I ran across [this, where he discusses Dzog](#) once attended a talk by a longtime Dzogchen practitioner -- a serious one, who'd spent many years studying directly Tibetan master, over in that part of the world -- and though I don't remember much of what she said, what Harris said to be entirely different than what I remember of her talk. And what Harris has to say about consciousness attending is nonsensical. Sartre pointed out in *The Transcendence of the Ego* that what he was calling the "ego", roughly corresponding to awareness or attention, is always outer-directed, like a light that shines on things but not on itself. Harris made the same point somewhere, I think in *The Critique of Pure Reason*. What they're saying seems incontrovertible Harris probably should have been more careful with his explanation, difficult those these things are to explain.

I thought [this](#) was amusing. Also, I've never seen it called "Faux News" before.

It helps to be privileged -- meaning, in my case, to be retired and have internet access. I've been checking the KUMC website frequently and appointments just opened up for Covid shots tomorrow morning, and I snagged one. Called my sister-in-law who suggested that my sister-in-law may need one, so called over there to let her know. Of course, many people who booked an appointment will be doing the same thing with their relatives and friends, so we just have to hope there are appointments left. It's like trying to buy tickets to a Stones concert: even if you get on immediately, you may be too late. Tomorrow was supposed to be a workout day, but I think I'll pass. I'll do today, instead, as a second day in a row.

February 13, 2021

Seen on the internet: "Google legal chief Kent Walker on Thursday accused Microsoft of maneuvering to bolster its share". Excuse me? This is coming from Google, which understands market share, because *it owns 92% of search*. I'm calling the kettle black? How stupid do they think we are?

Got the shot this morning. 50 minutes from walking in to walking out, including the 15-minute wait after getting the shot. Told a guy in the elevator that I don't understand the anti-vaxxers, and he said he knew some, and they're "borderline"

We've been enduring an Arctic cold spell lately. The cold started on Sunday the 7th. Today, when I drove to my appointment, the car showed the temperature as 1 (yes, ONE) degree. I notice the dogs are spending less time in the yard, and they wear fur coats. The night of the 15th is supposed to get down to 17 below. Temperatures will start climbing the single digits on the 16th, with a high of 10. The 17th will feel balmy, at 21. By the 22nd, the high should be back in the mid-forties. I plan to sunbathe.

Per my earlier entry on the Himalaya (January 16), it now turns out that these mountains seem to be warming much than the average rate of the rest of our planet. The Indian Institute of Tropical Meteorology warns of "profound hydrological and agricultural impacts". [Here's the article](#).

Everything has unanticipated side effects, including [living in a tiny house in a pandemic](#). I find tiny houses romantic and appealing, but I know I would go mad if I lived in one.

February 14, 2021

I get annoyed when people claim Y2K was a hoax. I know this because I was responsible for managing the Y2K fix lab that had hundreds of Unix (Solaris, HP-UX, AIX) servers, and a scattering of DOS servers as well. I installed that was the only person there on New Year's Eve, testing, to make sure they worked. (We ran on Zulu time, so I came in before midnight.) Y2K was real, and for once, management gave us the money and time to do the job right, and the vendors did. We did so well that the ignoramuses then started claiming that we'd blown smoke up their asses. If you think that, fuck you. If you're not too narrow-minded, you can [watch this video](#). Yes, there were preposterous claims like people saying that cars would stop working, which was idiotic -- cars burn gasoline, not data. But other than the baloney the problem was real, and the people who fixed it should be given credit for their brains and hard work. Many smart, dedicated people worked on the problem, and the result was an almost error-free January 1, 2000.

The dermatologist cut out a chunk of my left side recently, and it's so big it's still not healed and itching like crazy, 10 days later. But this stuff is necessary, because I have numerous risk factors for increased chance of melanoma. Trying not to scratch that thing is like trying not to scratch poison ivy -- always there. I recommend not getting Parkinson's, or having family members who've had skin cancers, or having had it yourself, or taking iron if you can avoid it, or having had catastrophic sunburn, et cetera.

The left upper arm was a little swollen yesterday, but otherwise unaffected by the Pfizer vaccine. Then I got in my chair, as part of my bedtime ritual, and it started pounding the shoulder. Lifting it during the night hurt a wee bit. It cleared up (it's noon now), and the only side effect is a slight stiffness. That vaccination was a breeze. My wife had a slight headache, and isn't even sure it was the result of the first shot. The second shot caused her some discomfort; she actually hoped for more of a reaction.

February 15, 2021

Snow yesterday. They plowed the streets this time, not like the week before, when they didn't bother. Odd. I went out and shoveled, to help my wife -- clear her car and the driveway. Though well bundled up, my fingers were in agony in minutes or so. Came in. Weather prediction for more snow in an hour. No doubt the neighbors thought I was a lunatic out in one-degree weather, with more snow coming. No doubt they were right.

I've been thinking about all the times I drove up to Ames (mostly, but also a couple of other places) to help [Iowa Yearly Meeting](#) revise the book of Faith and Practice. Penn Valley, my Monthly Meeting, was a member of IYMC, and each supposed to send a member to help with the work; I was the one from PVM. It's a three or four hour drive, and it usually seemed to be in winter. The snow always lasts much later than here, and I remember it as usually snowy. One time it was a foot or more of the stuff on the meeting house drive, and I shoveled it off. Long job. I usually stayed with a fellow who was a professor of microeconomics at the University and we'd have great conversations in the evening. His wife never spoke, and I didn't realize that she had Alzheimers. A few years after I stopped going up there, she went into a home and then he joined her there. They lived out in the country, in a little town with a huge windmill, of the modern electricity-generating kind, not far from where they lived. Can't remember their names. Nor can I remember the name of the other Quaker professor I stayed with one time, a few blocks away from the meeting house. His wife had assumed a false identity in order to work at a meatpacking plant and write an expose of it, which she did, and which was published. She was committed to her ideals. Her husband and the fellow I usually stayed with, I heard, couldn't stand each other, which surprised me. I knew the one guy was easygoing and genial, and the other seemed much the same. The third person I stayed with one time was an old gal. I believe she was in her eighties, but sharp, and living alone and taking care of herself. She spent a lot of time and energy working for her causes, and was arrested and taken to jail despite being superannuated. The only other place I stayed was in the actual basement of the meeting house, on the concrete floor. I do remember the name of the woman who chaired the committee. Carol. She wasn't much of a people manager. Invariably, we'd have a section that was perfect and agree that it seemed finished, and then someone would object to a word choice, or want to include some new, or any number of other things that would slow our progress, and then the whole thing would fall apart and we'd be rewriting that section. This is why the rewrite of F&P went on for years, and caused some dissatisfaction by other people. (Rachel MacNair said this is typical of Quakers collectively writing something, and she had a song about it: "Move a comma one word over", sung to the tune of "What do you do with a drunken sailor".) Invariably, because I'm a committee note-taker, it fell to me to reconstruct the earlier versions, so we could rewrite a section using the parts people liked. I had a worthwhile function. Otherwise, I was out of place. I remember one time, the young guy (in his 30s? EMT?)

inspired about something he'd written and it included the search for Truth with an upper-case T. This is a Quaker no I unintentionally trampled all over it by saying emphatically that I didn't know what Truth with an upper-case T was should have restrained my inner philosophy student. Everyone was more or less flabbergasted, but being polite, they go. Those were gentle, honest people, and I liked them, and I remember them fondly, but in the end the drive back a was too much and my commitment flagged (taking too many years!) and I quit. No one else from PVM stepped in a my place. The revision finally came out, I don't remember when but I do think it was years later. The cover was surj looked like a picture of someone's handwriting of the book title. The book, of course, was properly typeset. But I've understood the cover. It seemed slovenly. Looking at the map of the monthly meetings, I see that they've added a pr meeting in Minnesota ("Laughing Waters"), and maybe Yahara in Wisconsin, which I don't remember but on second sounds vaguely familiar. Silver River Worship Group, as I think it was called, in N.E. Missouri, is gone. Those folks to Maine. They were totally off the grid, made so little money (deliberately) that they didn't have to pay taxes and th support the military, farmed using a horse to pull the plow, sewed their clothes out of fragments of cloth, and when t needed electricity, they got on their bicycle and pedaled, to generate it. They were under the care of PVM, as a prep meeting, and Jim Kenney in particular worked with them. They were in their twenties and totally dedicated to makin that had minimal impact on the earth. David Rommel, of PVM, was a bit like that; though he lived in town and led a conventional life, he and Amy did live simply. David went to Bard and I think majored in theater, but became a mot mechanic. We were talking about bikes one day and I commented that I didn't understand the need for a fuel pump. agreed, saying he preferred the old way, no pump to go wrong, because "gravity will always be there". They moved Arizona. I've wondered many times what became of him. Oh. Just looked them up. Amy died. That is shocking. She young.

Instead of the usual biologically-oriented comments on viruses and plagues, [here's one by an historian](#). Curious, that smallpox is less than 2,000 years old -- though maybe I should say "was" instead of "is", at least if they'd get rid of t existing stocks in the U.S. and Russia.

About half the population of our country is under ice or winter weather advisories. Minus 50 degrees in part of Min Frostbite Falls, home of Rocky and Bullwinkle. I was going to run some errands today, figuring nobody else would stupid as to go to the library and grocery store. Then I changed my mind. Let the car sit in the drive for two or three days. I'm thankful that we had the outside faucet at the front of the house replaced with the freezeproof variety. We c thank climate change for this: "Winter storms are influenced by many factors, but the planet's warming appears to b that icy blend -- even while climate change is making winters milder over all. The air that sits over the Arctic is now sweeping down into the southern United States, as a result of a weakened jet stream, which circulates around the po usually holds in the frigid air of the polar vortex." (New York Times) Austin's palm trees may be toast. Single-digit temperatures in Louisiana and Mississippi. At least here we're prepared for it. There, they lack the clothes, the insul snowplows, the experience of driving on ice. I wish them well. When I lived in San Antonio, temperatures in the 30 40s were hard to take. What they face now is much worse, and there may be another cold snap coming.

February 16, 2021

Was working on this at 7:36, when the power went off. Rolling blackout, to save energy during the cold wave. Laste more than half an hour. Got back on, and saw an email from the gas company saying, among other things, "Due to t unprecedented, historically low temperatures over an extended period, we are seeing much higher natural gas use cc with supply issues. As of this morning, our suppliers of natural gas are experiencing freezing gas wells due to the dt the extreme cold." They ask us to turn off the furnace during an electric outage and wait 10 minutes after power con on before turning the furnace back on. Wish I'd known.

It's that time of my life, time to give away books. There are simply too many, and my room is so choked with them t almost impossible to move around. The library is accepting them again. I have a box here, next to the PC, with may score of books in it. I'll add the Aubrey/Maturin novels. I started checking those out of the library, I think, then didn wait in line and switched to buying the paperbacks. Then I caught up with Patrick O'Brian, and being unwilling to w year for them to come out in soft covers, had to buy and read the last several in hard covers. Do yourself a favor. Do them. They're heroin.

The bedroom is so damn cold that I went downstairs and took the down quilt off the guest bed. That helped, though remember that when I had to get up in the middle of the night, my shoulder stung briefly from the cold -- a false me because I was wearing a tee shirt, which I never do, and which covered the shoulder. Down quilt, weighted blanket, and tee shirt were just about right, to sleep comfortably.

There isn't much in life that's certain, but I'm sure of this: young children don't understand adult problems. When the us "big kids" were small, before the two "little kids" were born after a gap of five years or so, our Mom got a call fr former neighbor, and she piled us into the car, and we headed over there in a hurry. We kids ran around the woman's while she talked to Mom. I remember there were clothes spread out on all the beds, probably drying. She talked, and

listened closely, not saying anything. I think that woman (I remember her name, but withhold it here, because her still live in this city) was depressed because the last of her (many) children had grown and moved out and she had to take care of while her husband worked. But that's in retrospect. At the time, her depression bounced off me. I was a and didn't understand the burdens adults have to bear. But something got through. The memory of how sad she was stayed with me all my life.

My mushrooms shipped yesterday, but I worry that this brutal cold will kill the spores. FedEx reports that it has left Willington, CT. I'm eager to see my golden oysters.

February 17, 2021

Both my classes were cancelled yesterday because of weather, though both were Zoomed. "A white sport coat and a carnation I'm all dressed up for the dance. A white sport coat and a pink carnation I'm all alone in romance." I'm thinking that since I shouldn't travel, so I can't use the linguistics degree to document dying languages, maybe I should study across the state line, but even at the in-state rate, which I'm entitled to, that's still three hundred bucks a credit hour, the tuition. JCCC sounds more affordable, but their offerings are career-oriented, and I'm so over that. And the Edw campus offers only things I'm lukewarm about, or which look to take too many years. But I'm jonesing to learn some new.

I see that James Brown's majordomo, if that's the word, has died. I'd forgotten that routine about Brown being exhausted and his guy putting a cape over his shoulders, only for Brown to feign getting his energy back, throw it off, and continue performing. "The hardest working man in show business." That cape bit was a classic. Kinda reminds me of seeing Waters at the Uptown. He was old, and couldn't keep his energy going. With him the fatigue appeared to be genuine brought out a stool for him to sit on, and he would, but he just couldn't stay put. He'd have to get back up after a (very) rest and stand again, but then he needed to sit down, but he couldn't stay put. Repeat...

I've been fortunate to see some great musicians. Muddy Waters. The Beatles (my picture, or rather half of my face, that of it obscured by someone else's face, was on the front page of the newspaper the next morning). Tina Turner, when still with Ike. Wow. The energy. Steve Miller. No. Scratch that. Probably not a great performance. The Moody Blues. Definitely scratch that. I only went because friends of mine were fans. Arlo Guthrie ditto. Eric Clapton, backing up friends. Joan Baez. Other performers I don't remember now. (As Robin Williams said, "If you remember the 60s, you weren't there.") The greatest was Janis Joplin, hands down. She's the only artist I ever felt was singing to me personally. Someone told me later that a lot of great performers choose a person in the audience to perform to, and maybe I was that person. It unquestionably felt that way.

Why has the government not yet approved the Johnson & Johnson and AstraZeneca vaccines? The latter has been approved by WHO. (Yes, AstraZeneca screwed up the trials, but the vaccines (two versions) are still good.) The J&J application is under review by the FDA, last I knew. The wheels seem to be grinding slowly. Or more likely I'm impatient, and expecting everyone else to have the vaccine and for this cloud that hangs over us to be dispelled for them, too.

With data showing that some vaccines are less effective against new mutations of the virus, I hope the drug companies working on improved versions of their vaccines. There's been nothing I've seen about this, and I did a brief advance search of statnews.com for covid mutation vaccine improve in the past month. There's good news, though: the J&J vaccine will probably be approved in a couple of weeks, and this will increase the number of doses available. The problem then will be the logistical mechanics of administering millions of doses per day. The government in states like the one in can't seem to find the toilet paper if you give them an instruction book, much less distribute vaccines. Oh. No so much written the above than I stumbled on [this](#), which says "Moderna has begun developing a new form of its vaccine that can be used as a booster shot against the variant in South Africa... BioNTech [Pfizer] could develop a newly adjusted vaccine against the variants in about six weeks..." Later in the day, I got this in the daily coronavirus briefing email: "With Moderna and Pfizer continuing to ramp up production, and the likelihood that Johnson & Johnson's single-shot vaccine is approved for emergency use in the U.S. in early March, the next big challenge will be logistics."

We weren't supposed to buy N95 masks, so there would be enough for medical workers. Apparently [that has changed](#) can get the real thing, or the slightly less effective KN95s. But as always, watch out for Amazon, which for these as goods is untrustworthy. For the time being, I'm sticking with double masking -- disposable under cloth. If you really drill down, as they say, [the CDC has the data](#).

I've always been white, American, with German and English ancestry. For other people, [identity can be complicated](#) down to "I have a brown face".

February 18, 2021

Watching "Tales from the Far Side", a tale about multigenerational Civil-war-like animosity between cats and dogs, remembered an anecdote about the Korean Zen Master Seung Sahn. He'd written or said something that was being t into English. The idea, or one of the ideas, was that people exhibited enmity to each other because they'd been differ kinds of animals in earlier lives. The wife of the translator asked whether this couldn't be weakened (in other words, less embarrassing), and was met in the negative, because "He really believes it". That was the ethical thing to do, of not to tinker with another person's words without their knowledge. A climber friend of mine in the Valley, when we sitting around the picnic table eating our dinners, was outraged because he had just been victimized in this manner: guidebook had just come out and someone had changed the name of a first ascent he'd done. He'd named the climb ' like a stud". A typesetter had changed it to "Movin' like a spud". I see online that he managed to get it corrected, at l last word. (And isn't the last word what most of us want? This is a perennial problem between me and my wife.) Lat stumbled across [this](#), where George Meyers, the guidebook author, is fingered as the source of the name change. Int that it's 5.10dR. Not my cup of tea, thanks anyway, though I'll be glad to spectate. [Mid-Life Crisis](#) is safer. But chec routes listed on the left side of the page, the R routes that are hard. Whole lotta shakin' goin' on.

Thinking that the cold snap might delay or cancel trash service this week, I checked the Republic Services website. was nothing about any change to the schedule. Like all the neighbors, I put out my trash and recycling. They never o Gotta wonder whether their trucks won't work in these temperatures, or they're protecting their guys, or maybe it's ju taking more time than usual and they're delayed. On second thought, maybe they shut down their operation to save o for the Southwest Power Pool. Aaaaand there they are, outside my window, a day late. Unprecedented.

I see that Rush Limbaugh has died. One is not supposed to speak ill of the dead, so I should stop calling him Pus W Trump gave him the Medal of Freedom. Somehow I don't think Rush stands with Marian Anderson, John XXIII, Jo Kennedy, Edwin Land, Jean Monnet, E.B. White, Edward R. Murrow, Reinhold Niebuhr, Neil Armstrong, Duke Ell and they're only a fraction of the recipients from the 1960s. What did Limbaugh do that ranks as an "especially meri contribution" to the U.S., world peace, or "cultural or other significant public or private endeavors"? All he did was public discourse. I imagine St. Peter at the Pearly Gates looking at the balance sheet for Limbaugh's life: "Denied." mince my words, but Rush was a liar and provocateur and we're better off without him. He was also a hypocrite wh his servant for getting him the drugs he was addicted to. Since his audience also tended to be hypocrites, mostly the him, something they never would have done for a leftwinger.

More about [the attention crisis](#), in this case not attending to misinformation. Or, as my friend Larry says, "triangulat among other practices, in order not to be deceived.

Senator Ted Cruz flew to Cancun. He says he wanted to be a good father and take his daughters on a trip; they want with friends. First of all, the timing, during a record-breaking winter storm, seems convenient. Second, hasn't he he there's a pandemic? Taking along children outside your household is risky, for you and them both, and besides, Mex been a hot spot lately. Third, he told other people on Monday to stay home. Fourth, I guess he doesn't care much ab political career. Either that, or he's tone deaf. This is likely to irritate a lot of voters.

February 19, 2021

This is officially no longer a journal of the plague year, but a memoir.

The girl who organized the hill-rolling party. What was her name? That was the last semester, after my draft number up high and I wasn't under that cloud any more, the last semester before I graduated, although I had to take the West exam in the summer, to quiz out of that requirement and graduate. (Bought the booklet that covered the quiz, which bookstore sold. Was already ready for it, having been a philosophy major. Aced it.) This girl noticed that we had tw together in succession, and introduced herself to me one day on the walk between, which was a long one, and after t sometimes walked and talked from one class to the other. (The second class was microbiology; I took the final beca forgotten that I didn't need to, having a grade of A. But I must have blown the final, because I ended up with a C.) S lovely person, unaffected. She planned to be a nurse, and I'm sure, given the way she related to people, she made a g one. The only other things about her that I remember is that she had a boyfriend, and that dandelions were her favor flower. Spring sprang, and she organized the hill-rolling party. We started on Jayhawk Boulevard, between that last on the west end and the traffic circle, and rolled down like human logs to Memorial Drive. I remember I couldn't stc in time and my right arm flung out into the street. A car was coming, but I pulled my arm back. There was plenty of Then we stood up and crossed the street, for me a hazardous undertaking, because I was already dizzy. We rolled do toward Potter Lake. I kept getting sideways to the fall line and having to straighten myself out. Arrived at the end ar everybody matter of factly split up and went their ways. I felt ill. The idea of rolling down that hill was crazy. I'd in friend Carlos, and at one point on the second part of this little epic, he was parallel to me and shouted, "This is crazy meaning it literally. That would be correct, my friend. He and his girlfriend Hendle lived in Stonehenge, that curios building on the short, hidden lane behind the fraternity where my brother lived. (One of the other residents of the bu dropped acid so he'd be tripping while taking his draft induction exam. One wonders what the outcome was.) When

and Hendle got married, I gave him a big walking stick I'd made for him, with a hole in the top, like some kind of giant needle. Hendle later gave me a picture of Carlos walking around town with the walking stick, while wearing a loincloth. They visited me once, in K.C., and met my mom at the big house, and stayed at the farm, where I lived with my friend south of town, one night. The next morning I showed them a favorite place out at the Blue River and remarked that no sharp boundaries in nature, to which Carlos tellingly commented, "He says as he steps on a thorn". That was ancient times, and I've forgotten most of what I knew about these people, other than Carlos having a job tending the rats in a lab underneath the football stadium, because he had no money. I looked them up on the internet just now and found Hendle was married to someone else in Austin, Texas. She and Carlos, who was from Cuba apparently, got divorced in 1978. Apparently she's become a strong Christian, judging by references in the hits that came up. As for Carlos, his name is [Carlos Alberto Rumbaut Riera](#). The internet is wonderful for this stuff, but it does tend to be spotty and take and what I miss is *the people themselves*. I want to know their growth and change, like trees that have sprouted new branches. I want to know the stuff of their lives now, and their history, with its little events that shaped them.

How much we take on trust. Almost everything. We order something and trust that it will work, and will arrive. We question and trust that the person doesn't lie to us. We step outside and trust that a tree limb won't fall on our heads. We trust most everything on trust, and we know almost nothing. We're each of us a point, miniscule in the center of an infinite world and can't even see all our immediate connections, and certainly not the distant ones. We think we understand, but the inexplicable, the mysterious, the imperceptible and unsuspected are what rule us.

David Quammen again, on the virus: [And Then the Gorillas Started Coughing](#). See also the entry for January 12. Besides gorillas and probably the other great apes, tigers and lions and snow leopards and house cats, dogs, mink, probably mice and white-tailed deer. Quammen concludes that animals will be a reservoir for this opportunistic virus, which will continue to circulate among humans. Maybe we'll get booster shots for it as part of our yearly flu vaccines. At least we should hope that tests will become routine when people are symptomatic.

Letter to the Times: "As Texas and other states deal with blackouts, the authorities should look to Canada, which is colder and for much longer periods every year, and where no such problems exist." Then again, apples and oranges: don't have crushing heat up north. I used to work for a power company. I'm glad I don't. The industry always seemed musclebound to me. As someone commented of it, executives in that line of business had to "think in decades". I think now they need to think much faster, in shorter periods of time. Infrastructure, anyone?

Reading *None of Your Damn Business*. P. 27: "The consequences of the industrial era [were] the development of the family, the weakening of religious authority in day-to-day life, increased mobility, and the anonymity that accompanied the rise of modern cities".

Get away to [a tree house](#). Scroll down to "Graham's Treehouse Tree Cabin" for details.

February 20, 2021

The linguistics department had more labs than I would have expected. For a semester, I had keys to three of them: the fieldwork lab; the main lab in the basement of Blake, where grad students sometimes hung out, including Charlie R. (a brilliant guy; he's on a postdoc at Oxford now); and the quiet room in the basement of Fraser. That was the weird one, a place that would have been perfect to film a short horror movie: "where no one can hear you scream". Dr. Jongman told me the story of how it came to be built. The university was trying to lure a famous researcher to come there, and the fellow made a list of demands, one of which was to build a room that blocked out all noise, meaning *all* external noise. The university met his demands, including building the room, but he reneged. No one had any use for the room, so people were using it as a dumping ground for old junk. When Dr. Jongman came, he needed a silent room for some of his acoustic research. They got the key, opened the room, and there was so much crap that they had to crawl, to get to the inner room. They cleared out all the stuff and threw it away. The design was this: a big outer room, with a smaller inner silent room. The walls of the outer room were lined with thick foam. You open the door and immediately turn right on a silent catwalk, go to the corner, turn left, again to the next corner, turn left, again to the next corner, turn left, then a few steps walk down some stairs and into the inner room. The walls and door are reminiscent of a bank vault, and the inner room is mounted on legs, to dampen vibration if, say, a truck drives near the building. The inside walls of the silent room were insulated, but the insulation was falling off, so the linguistics department called the manufacturer, who, when they heard the room would be used for phonetics research, said it was okay to remove the insulation. I remember those inner walls were covered in metal mesh. It was so quiet that when you walked in and the door was closed behind you, your brain kicked in with a rush of sound to fill the silence. (In my case, having already lost a lot of hearing, the tinnitus just doubled.) The semester I had the room was helping with a research project on word-final devoicing in Russian, testing whether students did the devoicing properly. We recruited seven students. One of them, whom I remember as a cute blond, put her hand on the foam wall when she was halfway around the catwalk and said, "This is where I die," and I wanted to say, "Look, I know I'm the creepy old guy, but really? You're signed up for this, with an appointment, and they'd know right away that I was a suspect," but I didn't. I was the first student or two, Dr. Jongman told me that there was a 60 hertz spike in the recordings, and I knew instantly it

be AC power. Charlie came down to help me, and we started testing; he was very systematic, and figured out that it was coming from inside the room, and I realized it was the monitor on which I remotely displayed the words for the to read. I shoved it a foot back from the chair and microphone. Problem solved.

Progress on my project to turn the back yard into habitat for birds and insects: I've hired a local plant expert to come assessment.

The golden oyster mushroom spray and grow kit has arrived. I start spritzing tonight. Looking forward to eating my homegrown mushrooms. There's something sorta science-fiction about the pics of these mushrooms surging up and box: an alien life form.

The latest from statnews.com, and some ancient (circa November) stuff, too: [pulse oximeters are nearly three times to miss hypoxemia in Black patients compared with white patients](#). This was first identified decades ago. I know from personal experience how unreliable these things are, but at least I don't carry the problem in my melanin. What's the here? [Comparison of Pfizer, Moderna, and J&J vaccines](#). New word: "reactogenic". The article is out of date, though because Pfizer now says ultracold storage is no longer necessary. I think they've upped the length of the stable period I've wondered whether the extra demands that were made of the Pfizer vaccine accounted for it being used by place: KUMC, leaving Moderna's vaccine to be used in rural and other underequipped areas. But I haven't seen any discussion that anywhere... Glad to have read this, because I've had a severe allergic reaction in the past, and will therefore wait an hour after the second dose, instead of only 15 minutes. [The story of mRNA vaccines](#). This was published in November, it's prehistoric. That in itself makes it interesting. The [Covid-19 tracker](#). Or you can go to Johns Hopkins or the N.Y. [Drug-resistant germs](#). This has been a problem for quite a while. You'll have to watch the livestream; there's no transcript. As a textaholic, I passed on this.

February 21, 2021

What a joy it is to read. Abstract and peculiar as -- wait, let me establish that. "Abstract and peculiar" because written language is a collection of signs, radically unlike the continuous flow of spoken or signed speech, which children learn naturally. (In fact, spoken language is so continuous that when you look at the waveforms, you will see the phonemes overlapping their neighbors. This stunned me, when I took phonetics.) Reading is mastered with difficulty, and does not come naturally. Writing, which we read, is an *invention*, and in that sense learning to read is more like learning math than like learning to speak. Yes, as Anatole Broyard said, "Language is a symphony. Writing is a hieroglyph." But that's half the truth. Despite that, to read is to make contact with ideas, facts, arguments (theses), even personalities. It provides evidence that, in addition to being embodied, we are abstract beings, reading proves it. How many times have I seen someone absorbed in a book, absent to their surroundings? Reading takes you elsewhere, enlarging your world. Reading enabled the growth of civilization and technology. Reading multiplies the reader, inside.

The most recent issue of *The American Scholar* arrived yesterday. I found most of the articles utterly depressing. I'm changed; I find frank discussions of hopeless topics increasingly hard to get through. I can't bear to look at those ubiquitous photos and video of the storming of the Capitol, either. I avert my eyes.

Ranting the other day about Texas and the attitude of Texans that their state is special, my wife seemed not to understand me, but then she hasn't lived there, as I have. I was trying, in my inept way, to make the point that if Texas had joined the power pool, Texans would not have found themselves in the predicament they did, because they would have been able to borrow power from neighboring states. Today in Pickett I happened to see [the proof of my point](#): El Paso, which is in a shared grid, weathered the storm much better than the rest of the state, which has always refused to join [an interconnector](#). The history of electric management in Texas is precisely what led to the disastrous failures during this storm, the failures which they're still trying to recover. You pay your money and you make your choice. Texas got what it paid for -- vulnerability. Now it's up to the rest of the country to send them a bailout because of their irrationality.

[Spermeddon](#). And not just all that, either. I read somewhere that penis size has shrunk 10% in recent decades. Told my wife that, and her immediate reaction was that this is tragic for young women. Er, sure, but what about the young men?

While on the subject of sperm, I remember a comic at an open mic night saying, "I don't understand why black people have more children. Don't your swimmers sink, too?" That joke walked right up to the edge of the cliff and stuck its toes in the void. Shortly after, a black comic, clearly annoyed, said, "The reason we have more kids is because we have more sophisticated swimmers." A fistfight ensued, but his feelings were clearly bruised. I laughed at the joke, because I thought "swimmers" was clearly a pun on "sinkings" to each other. But it was racist. That comic was always pushing as hard as he could to offend the audience, and I almost always found him disgusting and self-indulgent. As for the racism, where's the line where comedy becomes forbid offensive speech? There's a lawsuit in Canada right now against a comic who ridiculed a man who had a birth defect, and a quick search on the internet shows other lawsuits against comics up north. Comedy should be a free zone. If you don't like it, get up on stage yourself and ridicule them, or do it online. Or start a movement to boycott them. Don't sue. Y

take the war against offensive speech too far, hamstringing everyone and making them self-conscious. I once had an argument with a Quaker friend who insisted I used the then-current "LGBT" acronym, which has since expanded to even-more-sandwich-like "LGBTQ" (lettuce, guacamole, bacon, tomato, quinoa?). I refused. We were with two others at the time, and the woman told her husband to intervene. He replied, "I'm not getting in the middle of this". I would chastise him, too. These politically correct neologisms are an attempt to control thinking, in more or less the fashion Orwell's Newspeak. Include me out. I'm a traditionalist anyway, when faced with clumsy coinages that replace more serviceable traditional words. Not least of all, many of those whose feelings people like my friend are trying to tipple around don't agree with the new terms anyway. Sometimes they find them demeaning. Since I lack the ability to react, I'll stick with what's comfortable until using my favored terms truly does become old-fashioned and offensive, at which point I will join the herd.

February 22, 2021

People who squander time on their phones are wretched. Yes, that's harsh, but think about it. They stumble along with heads down (reducing their lung capacity!) and can't wait for a stop light without checking their little electronic teat of them text incessantly, the most inefficient method of communication since the telegraph. They sign up for social media and for free applications that track them and sell their movements to companies that abuse the data. I've seen a couple on a date, sitting at a bar, facing each other but ignoring each other and looking down at their phones. (I'm known as a rude person, but I'm not *that* rude. And if the date is going that badly, why not end it instead of wasting the emotional energy I knew a guy in Lawrence whose girlfriend was so obsessive about her phone that they broke up -- and they'd had a child together. If my ruggedized flip phone ever gives up the ghost, I may well do without. These people are addicted. I react.

The Times' [Spelling Bee](#) is defective, because it often refuses perfectly good words like "middy" and "lignin" with the message "Not in word list". This probably happens with half the puzzles or so.

The UDK (K.U. student newspaper) used to publish overheard quotes. Throwing out some stuff, I ran across these:

I can't wait to get into an argument about Trump today.

This Thanksgiving I think we need a kids table and a boomer table.

I've been studying for my drug test.

I have nothing against virgins. I used to be one. [I adapted this one in my most recent novel.]

If you're over the age of 20 and your parents aren't divorced, grow up.

She's like me but like...slutty.

Everybody's invited to the orgies except for me.

Oh, no. I know my limits. I just hate myself.

Wait. What's wrong with drinking water from the shower?

I feel like I look like an acid dealer right now.

He's never had a pet? That's probably why he's a Republican.

They're a free-spirited family. I also don't think they know she's a stripper.

I should be drinking while I do this. Get the tequila out.

February 23, 2021

Scientists are short of monkeys for testing vaccines in development. While I'm all for scientific testing, this is deeply disturbing. Will a gray market develop? Note to self: actually read [the article](#).

February 24, 2021

Lawrence Ferlinghetti died. Strange coincidence, since I wrote about him January 12, above. He was 101 years old. My literary life must have agreed with him. I remember "The dog trots freely in the street ... Congressman Sludgepump another fire hydrant to him". I misremembered that. "The pennycandy store behind the El is where I first fell in love with unreality." Probably misremembered that, too, but I'm not going to bother looking it up. I read *A Coney Island of the Mind* at high school (it probably belonged to my dad), and occasionally after that for a couple of decades. Should do that again. Goodbye, Ferlinghetti, and may your molecules be recycled in other poets.

Our shared world and our private personal worlds alike are a brew of values, ideas, interests and needs that have to be reconciled with imperfect compromises that are never permanent, always needing adjustments or replacement.

From the Times coronavirus briefing email: "Camilla Holten Moller of the Statens Serum Institute, which models the epidemic for the Danish government, told me that they think the [B.1.1.7] variant could make up as much as 80 per cent of cases in the country, possibly by the end of this month. If that happens, she expects a sudden rise in infections and hospitalizations." [B.1.1.7 is the variant first discovered in England.] "And with B.1.1.7, it's like speeding in a car." "Your reaction time is shorter." We'd better increase testing and tracing as well as vaccinations. Also, "Two new studies

show that the variant first discovered in California in December is more contagious than earlier forms of the corona and may be better at evading vaccines. The findings added to concerns that emerging mutants could hamper a decline in cases."

See July 30, above, and also [Humans Are Animals. Let's Get Over It](#). Preach it, fella.

February 25, 2021

Yet another symptom of PD that I didn't know about: vertigo. Yeah, this is one of the few diseases you can slow down by being disciplined (exercise, etc.), but on the other hand, it has more damn symptoms than any five other diseases I know of. Oopsie. Now that I think about it, I used to have this, triggered by specific events that have disappeared from my life.

The effects of this pandemic won't end when the pandemic ends. There will be undereducated children, long-haul COVID sufferers who will need ongoing medical treatment, families damaged by the death of parents and grandparents, nurses who have burned out and can't bear to stay in their jobs after suffering from the trauma of seeing patient after patient die, couples who couldn't abide being together 24 hours a day and divorced, women whose exhaustion from staying home and caring for their children damaged them psychologically. There will be many unanticipated side effects, because this is not just a medical problem, but a social problem, and social problems always spring surprises on us. Most of this didn't have to happen, at least not to the degree it is happening and will continue to happen, if we'd been smarter in our reaction to the disease. Will we be smarter next time? With the destruction of earth's ecosystems, zoonotic diseases are becoming more and more likely. How will we deal with them while we're dealing with the disappearance of places like Florida and Bangladesh (the mass exoduses that result), climate migration from poor countries to wealthy countries, the loss of farmland, the water in India (see February 13, above), the insect apocalypse that threatens the existence of human life?

Who knew it was possible? [Sacha Baron Cohen gets serious](#). The "Silicon Six". I like that. "The Silicon Six -- all billionaires, all Americans, who care more about boosting their share price than about protecting democracy. [APPI] This is ideological imperialism -- six unelected individuals in Silicon Valley imposing their vision on the rest of the world, unaccountable to any government and acting like they're above the reach of law." And even better, I feel vindicated because someone else has pointed out the emperor's nakedness, exactly as it's been bugging me: "they're incredibly smart in their area, but they should not be given the reins of power".

In a seminar in college, we read Reinhold Niebuhr's *Moral Man and Immoral Society*, which struck me as mostly inane blather, except for this telling point: no one in an office of responsibility has the right to disregard the interests of his or her constituents. For instance, the President must consider the interests of Americans before those of the peoples of other countries. If he doesn't, it will lead to immoral choices. The pandemic is the apotheosis of this, because the President fulfills his responsibility by getting as much vaccine for the country as he can, while begging our neighbors, in this case mostly the poor third-world countries that haven't received any vaccine yet. That means more poor people overseas die, in order to save American lives. I think that Niebuhr would judge this immoral, but (for lack of a better word) dutiful. But let me just point out in passing that *all* of the planet reaches herd immunity, those poor countries remain reservoirs of the disease, and will keep exporting it, including new variants, to us. (We do live in a time of cheap and ubiquitous international travel.) So the situation is, always, not so simple as ethical theory (Niebuhr's observation) implies. Ethical theory, I've noticed, seems particularly inapplicable to these troubling counterexamples.

February 26, 2021

The WSJ reports what we've all known for years, though not the full extent of it: [Texas Electric Bills Were \\$28 Billion Higher Under Deregulation](#). Isn't the whole point of regulation to prevent abuse of customers? And isn't that why Enron and other private entities argued for deregulation, pretending it would benefit customers? That would, of course, be the lie that employed scoundrels who actually gloated out loud (I am not making this up) about extorting more money from California electrical customers during a crisis, crowing about making "grandma" pay up. The Enron that went bankrupt when its frauds were uncovered. Arthur Andersen, one of the Big Five accounting firms, had enabled Enron's crime and destroyed evidence, and also ended up also out of business. Texas. It's a disaster. By that I mean it's like your alcoholic sibling you have to bail out of trouble. See February 21, above.

There's a [new kind of world map](#). As a geography buff (I even belonged to [The American Geographical Society](#) for a few years), this is exciting news. Can I get rid of my Dymaxion maps now?

After writing yesterday's entry on ethics and vaccines, I found [State of the Science and the Ethics of Equitable Allocation of Vaccines](#) and an email from [American Public Square](#). I'll pass. Zoom requires too much personal information when you register.

How does "raw" kombucha differ from what might be called "plain old" kombucha?

Word of the day: univocal -- having one meaning; unambiguous.

In addition to the British variant, the South African variant, and the California variant, we now have New York variant B.1.526, which may be able to dodge the immune system. [Have we not suffered enough?](#)

Woke up thinking about Jim Bridwell, Mister Yosemite. He'd taken over the top spot in the hierarchy after Robbins much retired, because, as someone wrote, he was the only one left from the Golden Age who still climbed "as if his were on fire". Telling my friend Tom about him once, I said that Bridwell was The Man, and the rules didn't apply to Tom was one of the most diplomatic people I've ever known; he rarely ventured an opinion, and never argued, but he had 20 years in the Army, and I got the clear sense he didn't think anyone was beyond the rules. (Once, when we were talking about his time at West Point, I mentioned how rules were woven into the fabric of the place, and he said, "There were a lot of those," in sort of the way you'd mention any fact of life.) But Bridwell did seem to be larger than life. Here's an incident once I was walking back to my tent in Camp 4 from an early visit to the canyon, and a dog came bounding out of a tent and greeted me. I was playing with it when Bridwell emerged from the tent and, thinking it was some Alaskan breed I didn't recognize, I asked him what kind of dog it was. "It's a wolf," he said. The Park Service had rules about that. You were supposed to have dogs in the Valley, much less a wolf. That was my impression of Bridwell, though. Later, his wife told me that *she* had bought the animal, because Bridwell was always gone and she wanted companionship in his absences. I remember about a couple of things he'd done -- the first one-day ascent of Cerro Torre, I think, which was also the first true ascent of the Compressor Route, and something staggering in Alaska. Of course there was the one-day ascent of the Nose with Worrall, which set a new high-water mark (often done these days, with modern cams and shoes and all, but in 1960 an accomplishment that exploded the standards and echoed all around the world, at least among climbers). Bridwell was a legend while he was still active. He even had disciples, the Stone Masters, who were clearly the best rock climbers of the day. He would assign them tasks, like going out and freeing the East Face of Washington Column, which Harding (who called it up as an aid route) said later he didn't believe they'd done. It was the hardest continuous rock climb in the world at the time. (Kauk, Bachar, and Long renamed it Astroman, if you want to look this up. Renaming someone's climb, even if you freed it, is unconventional and rather arrogant.) Bridwell himself often set the standards, and I could never figure out why I didn't see his name listed in big expeditions. Trango Tower with Todd Skinner should have been right up his alley. He never seemed to be on these things. 2010 was the last time I went out to the Valley, to tick El Cap, which was the one I'd never done that I wanted to do. Bridwell had put up a bunch of routes on that rock. He was out there on the hairy side of death, regularly, and he said he didn't repeat his routes because later ascensionists added bolts, and he couldn't abide the thought of seeing them. In a video, Dale Bard, who climbed a lot with the Bird (Bridwell's nickname), said the Bird died on lead death pitches while tripping on acid. My own trip (in the conventional sense of the word), orders of magnitude more modest, was a disastrous mess from start to finish. I more or less ripped off my fingertips in a fall, leaving a bloody trail a foot long on the rock. Never experienced pain like that before or since. Woke myself up that night with the sound of moaning in my sleep. But enough about me. Back to Bridwell. It being early in the year, and the northern route, I-80, prone to blizzards, and the central route, I-70, relying on Tuolumne Pass being open, which it almost never was that year, I naturally took the southern route. Since it went near Twentynine Palms and since his friends were throwing a party for Bridwell, to raise money to pay his medical bills, I swung by. I was walking in when someone called my friend Tom. I didn't recognize the guy until he introduced himself. He was a local climber, from here, I hadn't seen in 25 years or more. In fact, the only local climber I hadn't liked. He'd call me up to go bouldering and my function was to watch him do the problems, and to spot him on the ones he was still working. After a couple of times like that, I stopped going bouldering with him. We talked for a few minutes. He'd moved to Vegas, and said I should visit him and we'd climb together. I had the intention of doing so, but we exchanged contact info and after a polite interval I went inside. Bridwell was there. I introduced myself and we chatted briefly. He seemed like he'd lost a few steps mentally, and he looked staggeringly old. He'd always looked older than his age -- Whillans once described him as a 70-year-old face on a 17-year-old body, and he'd nailed it -- but now his face had more miles on it than a moonshot. I bought a couple of things, to contribute, but the ice screws, which were the only things I wanted, were of course gone. They probably sold right away. I hope his pal Tom had enough to make a dent in his bills. My impression was that he never had any money, unlike Chouinard, say, who's got fabulously wealthy (still owns Patagonia), or Robbins, who seemed to make a comfortable living off his store in McCall and his clothing business. Bridwell probably snagged some nice bread from being head rigger on *Cliffhanger*, but I never lived in a trailer park in Truckee, which, if true, sort of indicates he lived close to the edge financially. (But I'm just out old memories and rumors here. Don't take my word for it.) He died a few years ago. He never complained, so I said he didn't feel good, his son knew something serious was going on and got him to the hospital. He'd had undiagnosed hepatitis, apparently for a long time, and died without delay. No one was sure where he got it, but the tentative conclusion was that it probably came from a tattoo some tribespeople had given him when he was on an expedition in Borneo.

February 27, 2021

Like to know about weird coronavirus side effects, like coyotes walking around San Francisco, and thoughts that spring from contemplating the virus, like fish that clone themselves to produce offspring by mating with a different species. What percentage of the human genome that came from viruses? [Satisfy your curiosity.](#)

Dreamed I was in a Patrick O'Brian naval novel. The part that's unlike any dream I ever remember is that my consciousness moved from person to person, not tethered to my own body. Another oddity was the Joycean gibberish. Was it Chua who asked, "Was I a man dreaming I was a butterfly? Or am I a butterfly dreaming I am a man?" The big problem with consciousness, at least for me, is that it's private, and there's no external check on it. We think we know, but it's all filtered and the ray of light that's my awareness cannot inspect itself for accuracy. The personal data are axiomatic, they are what we can't come to grips with what underlies them. Though there are teasers here and there, e.g. in neurological studies they're ultimately beside the point. The world could be, and to some extent probably is, an hallucination resulting from a filter of senses and thought. Nothing can be trusted.

[Russian diplomats sneak out of North Korea by railcar](#). You have to look at the pic -- the adults and kids and the luggage. These people were organized and determined. There doesn't seem to be any method of propulsion except by pushing the damn thing. The double rails are probably so both Russian and North Korean trains can run on the tracks (differing gauge). Kinda reminds me of the "railroad" they had in Cambodia for a while -- no locomotives, so people used railcars to transport stuff. When they met going in opposite directions, they would figure out which load was lighter, take everything off, disassemble the railcar, move it behind the opposing railcar, put it all back together, and proceed. But I digress... As if you're blocked from the article, clear your cookies and try again.

What? The Senate has a "parliamentarian"? Sounds like one of them decadent Eurotrash ideas. That there Senate ain't American. Too complicated.

I usually dislike Maureen Dowd because she indulges in gratuitous nastiness, but she's been getting better. [This piece](#) points out the left for pouncing on the press. Maybe they learned it from the right. Maybe it's time for all the children to sit for a while and shut the fuck up and play well with each other.

February 28, 2021

Not much to say today. Nice day. I'll probably spend some of it outside.

March 1, 2021

I've nearly achieved my goal of erasing myself from social media. No Facebook account, fake Twitter account, and even onto LinkedIn for the first time in I don't know how long and there are no messages. I'd get rid of the LinkedIn account every few years some old friend will use it to contact me. Now if I could just go all the way. There was a developer who wrote Bitcoin code and hackers swatted him (i.e., they called a Swat team, who showed up at his house, armed to the teeth. Afterward, the hackers sent him a message that they'd do the same thing again, until he paid them not to. Being a profane fanatic, he opened a secret Wyoming corporation and takes care of all his transactions through that. Sold his house and bought a new one through the corporation, for instance. Every year he hires a private detective to try to find him, and if a guy succeeds, he closes that hole. For entities that require a real address in his name (Social Security and the IRS), he maintains a crummy apartment as a mail drop. Wherever he is, he is my hero.

Thinking about climbers screaming when they fall. It's usually not a real "scream", but more like a shocked shout, "AAAHH!" or something similar. Seems like it's automatic. I think we almost all do it, with the exception of Ammor McNeely. In his videos, I don't think I ever heard him make a sound, except to laugh afterwards... And speaking of the Cap Pirate, that reminds me: the dirtbag climber lifestyle is dying, and that's a shame. Used to be you could stay in a tent indefinitely for 25 cents a day, on the occasional day a ranger actually showed up to collect the money. I knew guys who survived financially by pulling out empty soda cans from the trash containers, which they turned in for the deposit. Now there's a kiosk you need to sleep in front of so you can get a camping spot, and the maximum time is two weeks. It was in 2010, and they might have tightened it up more since then. Like my friend Peter said, back in the mid-70s: even the park service made it harder for us to get by. It's not just them and the popularity of climbing, either -- society has changed, making it harder to live that way. I can only think of three climbers who have lived out of their cars in the years: Steph Davis, Conrad Anker, and James Lucas. The first two, and probably Lucas as well, live in houses now.

March 2, 2021

An email, received this morning, says this is National Platypus Day. I'm trying to get my head around the hemisphere difference, but my brain is not that flexible. I do love the little buggers, though. They're just so weird I've made them imaginary pets. See December 12, above, for factoids.

My golden oyster mushrooms have metastasized. Every time I spritz them and come back an hour or two later, they're noticeably bigger and more colorful. I don't even want to eat them, just see how big they can get. From above, they look like a little tropical canopy. A friend just emailed me that he's growing shrooms, too, but he does it all from scratch: "spore germination and culture isolation on homemade agar plates, sterilization of grain and substrate, incubation, and fruiting."

have several blocks of lions mane and black pearl oyster going". I took the lazy way and bought a kit. He's always I guy has more talents than any twenty people put together.

March 3, 2021

PD swallowing problems have returned. I've thought almost from the start that this is the way I'll die. At least it's be slow decline, or struggling through months or years of cancer treatment. But maybe I should suggest to my wife that learn how to do a tracheotomy. (Hey, a sense of humor helps. Then again, that might be a good idea after all.)

Great. The Brazil variant of the virus is much more infectious, can infect people who've already recovered from the and has been found in at least 5 states here. There was nothing in the story about how much (or little!) immunity a vaccination is likely to provide.

The good news is that Merck will step in and manufacture the J&J vaccine, alongside J&J itself. The bad news is that could take a couple of months or more to get started. The other good news is that the Novavax vaccine may be approved. What happened to Astra Zeneca? It's been approved in other countries. When things get back to normal, which will if people (including state governors) act responsibly ("better" Covid numbers not being the same as "good", so we should behave cautiously for the time being), I want to throw a party -- outdoors, from an abundance of caution. The virus is going to disappear. As my wife put it a few weeks ago, it will go from pandemic to endemic.

"A Frontier Airlines flight from Miami to New York City was canceled after a large group of passengers, all Orthodox were said to have refused to wear masks." (From the daily coronavirus briefing.) Many of them do the same in Israel leads to conflict with their government. Not to mention the frequency of Orthodox mask refusal in New York City. ("This is an anti-Semitic act." Maybe, but the same would happen to any other group. Give the Orthodox a special dispensation and you've got an anti-everyone-else act, because their recalcitrance threatens everyone else's health. A quote: "This is Nazi Germany." Playing the victim card? This sort of rhetoric means people will stop listening to you me the ovens, if you're asserting an equivalence. On the other hand, if the airline employees did high-five each other masks were only off for eating (although it sounds like this was before the flight took off), and all the rest, who know thankful I can go on living here in my tight little cocoon, without these entanglements.

"Hunters in Wisconsin killed more than 200 wolves last week, far exceeding the state's limit as they scrambled to take advantage of Trump-era wildlife rules that they worry may be tightened by the Biden administration. [paragraph] At 216 wolves were killed in less than 60 hours, exceeding the state quota of 119 and prompting Wisconsin to end what meant to be a one-week hunt four days early". After reading *American Wolf* (the book, not the web site), this seems Wolves are a keystone species necessary to maintaining healthy ecosystems. (You're upset about deer overpopulation Wolves are part of the solution, and that's only a fraction of their contribution. Read the book.) Yes, they kill cattle a sheep, and that should be handled fairly. That doesn't mean the solution is slaughter. The Ojibwe chose not to hunt, they were allocated 81 wolves under their treaty rights. A spokesman called the deaths "appalling". I'm thankful I can living here in my tight little cocoon, without these entanglements.

My DIY friend (see yesterday's entry), the aeronautical engineer, tells me he's working on this [love child of a drone airplane](#). Advance it about two-thirds of the way, to where the plane takes off.

Here's one I've worried about for years, and it finally may be happening: [the Gulf Stream may be weakening](#). No more trees in northwest Scotland. (Yes, I've seen them there.) Europe could get it in the neck, and not just Europe. "The climate system is an angry beast and we are poking it with sticks." I may be dead by then, anyway. I'm thankful I can go on here in my tight little cocoon, without these entanglements.

March 4, 2021

So I logged onto the library site to reserve the book *Think Again, The Power of Knowing What You Don't Know*, and surprised to see that I'm number 186 in line. They have 11 copies of the book. That's approximately a 51-week wait, everyone in the queue actually gets the book and keeps it for the 3 weeks they're allowed to. Of course, some will not pick it up, and others will keep it and pay the overdue fine. But one year is a good approximation. By the time I book, I may have lost interest... The premise of the book reminds me of Nate Silver's point in *The Signal and the Noise* about hedgehogs and foxes. Silver has an extraordinary record of accurate predictions, certainly the best I've seen. It is well worth the time to read it. The problem then becomes putting its lessons into practice.

Got a call just now claiming to be from the county health department, giving a suspect URL. It was clearly text-to-speech and not to be trusted. What was weirdest is that moments after the call to the landline started, I got 2 text messages with the same information on my cell. Maybe it really was the health department, since I gave them both phone numbers. What technology supposed to reduce ambiguity? Seems to *increase*, the more technological we get. Later: I also received

at the same time, which was clearly from them, and which clears up the uncertainty. But they need to clean up their looking URL and abandon text-to-speech, both of which are hallmarks of spammers.

Noticed that overnight, dust had somehow appeared all around my mushrooms, and only close to the mushrooms, so I decided that the "dust" must be spores. I looked this up on the internet and saw golden oysters releasing spores like streaks of smoke. I'm going to assume that the release of the spores to mean it's time to harvest. Life is amazingly complex even the stuff like mushrooms that I've always assumed is simple. I'm reading *Metazoa*, which is about the evolution of consciousness, and starts with life in the ocean. Elizabeth Marshall Thomas, who's written several books I've read, I've never encountered a book like *Metazoa* before. Yes. It's a masterpiece of disciplined research, thinking, and writing, on par with D'Arcy Wentworth Thompson's *On Growth and Form*. Though admittedly I read only part of that one, but both books have the same masterful, comprehensive, and original scope. *Metazoa* is so interesting I've concluded that I'll stop reading it before bed, because it keeps me awake.

Spam email from someone who wants me to add their page on solar panels to this Journal of the Plague Year -- i.e., the very page you're looking at. 'Scuse me? Solar panels? These people are like flies buzzing around my head. They keep showing up. I need a bigger flyswatter.

March 5, 2021

It's baaaack! Five nights in a row of bad sleep, when I thought after months of good sleep that I finally had the problem. But that's the way it is with PD: a symptom is bad, you work on it, it's good, it skulks off into the underbrush, waits, then ambushes you later. I tried to sign up for a sleep study at KUMC. Things were going well on the phone interview, she asked whether I had a neurological condition, such as ALS or Parkinson's. I admitted to the latter. The response, a millisecond later, was that I didn't qualify for the study. She couldn't get off the phone fast enough. That leaves me not paying a sleep specialist out of pocket.

What the hell is up with Google? My speed was *way* low for months and they couldn't find the problem. Then it came up to 500 megs. I never changed anything, so clearly the change was on Google's side. Now it's down in the single digits according to 6 different speed tests using 2 different browsers. Power cycling their gear and turning off my antivirus and firewall made no difference. The geniuses du jour ain't so genius. Maybe my neighbor, with the gigabit connection in his office, is sucking up all the bandwidth, unlikely as that is (the pipe is supposed to be shared, after all). But this 9 megabit what I'm paying two bucks a day to get. It's *fiber*, in 2021, for fucksake. And it ain't anything physical, either, because the uplink is running at the full 500.

March 6, 2021

Got the second shot this morning. Shoulder slightly stiff in the evening, and increased sensitivity to pain, but that's a

March 7, 2021

Busy day. No entry.

March 8, 2021

Major breach in Microsoft email, probably by China. I am not surprised. Quite the opposite, in fact. This is why, when I turned their email over to Microsoft, I sighed and shrugged my shoulders and waited for the inevitable. Once again, intrusions were discovered by a third party. This seems to be the rule: the original vendors -- in recent cases that would be SolarWinds and Microsoft -- don't see the problem. We have to rely on third parties to kick over the rocks and reveal the pests... Correction: it turns out that only organizations that ran their email in-house were affected, not those on Microsoft cloud. But don't overlook the point that the root problem was in a Microsoft product (Exchange). The company designs software for features first, performance second, and security last. The results of that design philosophy have been evaded for decades. Not that Microsoft, though probably the worst, is the sole culprit. In 2014, the Chinese stole the entire contents of the federal government's security-clearance database, tens of millions of records. (At least, it was *probably* the Chinese with so much else in this domain, no one knew for certain. Maybe that's changed. Nor have I been able to find what was exploited. Maybe SAP, which is owned by Oracle. Or WebLogic, which they also own. And of course there are Oracle database vulnerabilities. All of these appear to have been exploited in the middle of the last decade to hack U.S. systems. Now the Chinese have the goods from tens of thousands of other organizations. Get the Vaseline. Xi Jinping is coming. Was that a pun?

Haven't taken the Prius in to get scheduled maintenance since the "Maint Req'd" light went on in the fall. Most days the driveway, untouched as a former girlfriend, and even when driven is never driven far. But the engine check light came on a week ago. I looked at the fluids. The radiator's dry, and so's the reservoir for the battery pack. (Who knew? That would explain the strange behavior of the batteries, as shown on the dash display.) The car is 15 years old and has run like

with only a couple of things that needed work. Otherwise, only stuff like oil changes and other scheduled work. Am that a machine that complex, the first marque of its kind, can be so reliable. And not just the car itself, either. The dealer provides impeccable service. They even came out to get the vehicle; I did not know they provide "valet service". I came at home and not have to sit for hours in their waiting room. Given that my back is sore as hell today (too much bending yesterday, digging stuff out of the yard), this is a huge bonus.

A friend told me the other day that he doesn't care whether corporations know a lot about him. I give up. See July 10 February 7, above. If my friend wants to be a fool and let strangers rummage through his wallet and open his mail, that's not a damn thing I can do. Reminds me of my dad saying, "My mind is made up. Don't confuse me with facts." The problem is that we're all in this together, and this willful ignorance drags me down with them.

There's a certain cognitive dissonance when I see in the local news that someone died of something other than Covid.

Turns out that low rates of Covid in third-world countries are not just due to poor medical reporting. They really do have a lower proportion of cases, and no one's entirely sure why, although there are a number of known and conjectured factors: younger population; more time outdoors; better immunity because of exposure to prior related viruses; better government response (social distancing, masking, tracing, and testing). Africa leads in that last category.

Kill me now. I just noticed that tomorrow's reading assignment for Cognitive Science is 56 pages long and I'm on page 9. Oh, if I subtract off what I call the "wallpaper" (the Abstract and the references), I only have 47 more pages to read. That's a relief. Unfortunately, it's another piece by Fodor, and I found his first one incomprehensible, not to mention self-indulgent and pretentious. On the other hand, it did increase my vocabulary, which, these days, seems to be shrinking by the hour. Yeah. I really oughta read what tells me what I'm supposed to read: the first 21 pages, the rest of the piece to be read Thursday.

March 9, 2021

To Meadowbrook Park yesterday, to finally see the place, and in the hope that a walk would help my back, which even now is still sore from the stooping of two days ago. I was shocked to see that the county has planted *no* native plants at a place that could do vast good there with the enormous space at their disposal.

Went to the hardware store to buy one of those little curved handsaws for cutting branches and found myself coveting many tools that I had to get out of there before I squandered money on things I didn't need.

The spring edition of *The American Scholar* arrived a couple of days ago. Since the magazine is a quarterly, it should have arrived so soon after the winter issue -- maybe because I re-upped recently. At any rate, I've already read through the entire issue, straight from front to back, which I never do, with great pleasure. Lots of great stuff like an essay about a writer's friendship with Jacques Barzun. Strange, that my reaction to this issue should be entirely different than to the one that arrived a couple of weeks ago.

On a Zoom call with a couple of PWPers yesterday, one of the guys said he's had PD for 20 years, which is about as long as I've had it, judging by the onset of the first symptoms. But he's much worse. I can't understand half of what he says. He keeps trying to speak, and says "if" dozens of times because he can't complete his sentence. (I had started to stutter once until I got on levodopa.) And he has all the other speech problems as well. Says the problems have accelerated in the last year. We talked about how the disease is like wrestling an octopus: too many symptoms, and they keep coming back. A third guy bailed out quickly, probably because he wanted to talk about anxiety and apathy.) Things fluctuate. He says "It messes with your head" that you suddenly can't move or whatever. "Do something the opposite of what you want to do. All of a sudden you can move." Told him about my friend who froze in the TSA security line at the airport, and everyone was mad at him. They didn't want to hear that he had Parkinson's. They wanted to *proceed* through the damn inspection. Normal people just don't get it.

Listening to the [local library podcast](#), the librarians talked about weird stuff they've gotten in the return bins and donation bins. Someone told a story about a patron who was trying to return an audiobook, but couldn't get one CD out of his CD player. So he brought in the CD player and said, "You have the whole book, so take it off my account". They did. (He did manage to get the CD out, but didn't return the player.) In another case, they got a tooth, and attached a note: "For book drop. No patron attached." Mix of local and national: people leave money and checks (!) in books, as bookmarks: a pair of shoes; a phone book; chewed-up puppy training books ("very common", and "I like a dog with a good sense of its outgoing mail; a live lobster; rotisserie chickens; a live kitten ("they found the kitten a home, what about the lobster?"); a paycheck; credit card; "genuine love letters"; lottery tickets; Broadway show tickets; "a list of karma violations"; "a registration form from the county jail"; "divorce agreements"; "a folder full of tax return information"; lists of questions; "New Year's resolutions. Gotta throw 'em away somewhere". Tip: don't put postage notes on CDs/DVDs -- you can ruin them. Local: dried pinto bean as a bookmark; food that sat for three or four days during Thanksgiving and they had to throw it out.

all the books in the bin; oregano (they gave it to the O.P. police, thinking it was weed -- but didn't reveal the patron's "patron privacy"); a drawing by a child: "I shall have all the beans". This and other images should be on the website yeah, maybe. But I looked, and couldn't find them, and am willing to bet that they aren't.

I'm waiting for restaurant workers to be vaccinated before I eat dinner out -- and a lot of similar stuff, too. Or maybe won't. Maybe I missed my calling: hermiting.

Keeping up with what I want to read becomes increasingly difficult. First I gave up looking at my emails from Book Now I may have to give up reading the Sunday Times Book Review. Definitely have to read *This Is The Voice*. Mar who's written a couple of books I've read and enjoyed, reviewed it in the Book Review. My inner linguist perked up saw references I never thought I'd read in a nonspecialist piece, i.e., outside the domain of linguistics: vocal fry, hov larynx position changes, and more. Also, Kazuo Ishiguro has a new book out, and despite my loss of interest in ficti found *Remains of the Day* to be superb, though his other novel I read was an utter waste of time (and that wasn't my alone: a friend who had an M.A. in English as well as impeccable taste agreed). But this new book, *Klara and the S* appeals to my inner cognitive scientist. "Two souls do dwell within this breast"? Not two, but many more than that r - there are too many dilettantes (I won't glorify my interests as scholarly) inside me, contending for my limited time this book!" "No! This one first!"

Thinking about Question Six again, I've come up with what may be a more promising way to think about the proble stating it more precisely, though of course this could be vain hope and another blind lead. The choice of integers lea integer solution only when the denominator divides the numerator with no remainder. In such cases, prove that the r consists only of integer factors occurring in pairs (thus, squares). In other words, the numerator in such cases will al divide the denominator by a number of times that, when factored, gives pairs of factors. Consider the case where $a=b=30$. The numerator of $(a^2 + b^2)/(ab + 1)$ is 964, and the denominator is 241. Dividing, we get 4, which is $2*2$. Cor $a=3$ and $b=27$. We get $738/82 = 9 = 3*3$. (Of course, where either a or b is 0, the solution is trivially obvious.) But tl seeing a foreign city on a map, and I lack a way to get there. Something like the quadratic formula would let me sail ocean to my destination. Either that, or the way to solve it is geometrical, as I used to think -- but I couldn't make th either. The difficulty boils down to this: because both the parts of the numerator are multiples of a square (in these e either 4 or 9), their sum must likewise be. It's necessary to show that the rest of the sum (i.e., what's left after you di the square) will always be $ab+1$. Either that, or show that when the denominator divides the numerator with no reme the factors remaining are paired. I see no way to prove this, and continue to feel like a lamebrain.

Meghan and Harry. And now that psychic vampire Oprah. I don't want to hear about famous people's personal mess Really. I don't. This is so unedifying that it's nauseating. But, like Michael Jackson back in the 90s, it's impossible to People have their problems, but I don't know these people, and the publicity about their troubles is a waste of ink an bandwidth and neurons in my brain. Yet sooner or later, driving along in traffic and something happening that I hav to so I can't hit the radio, or watching the news, there it is. This culture of celebrity is a collective mental illness. Do ordinary people have their own lives to lead? The hell with the royal family and their problems. Let them live in the castles without the newspapers and TV networks and whatever hitching a ride on the royals like a Siamese twin on t of the sibling that pumps nourishment to it.

The problem with photography is its presentation of an image as a fact, without any context. Think of a photograph person on their website, and then you meet them and they look like their own parent, the photo being twenty-five ye of date. Photographs exhibit a false authenticity.

Someone left a Jim Butcher book in our Little Free Library, which I removed and will donate to the county library, I I'm trying to get rid of my *own* books, dammit, not offer a venue for freeloaders. (Yes, this attitude is contrary to the the LFL movement. Maybe I'm supposed to be ashamed. I'm not. And if you don't like it, put up your own Little Fre Library.) My wife snagged the tawdry tome, telling me she likes Jim Butcher's books. I read one, years ago. I'd rath stabbed to death with a blunt fork than go through that ordeal again. As to why I read the damn thing through to the like to know.

I'm [disappointed in Mark Twain](#), apparently dumping Gorky to keep his own hands looking clean. Where does Sore these stories? *First Encounters* (though the writing in that case was his wife's, and he is credited only with the draw was more fun than, I don't know, most of the parties I've attended?

Up in the middle of the night, reading. Listening to the night trains almost makes it worthwhile, the faint rhythm of wheels and the wail of the horn. That may be the most romantic pair of sounds on the planet.

Reading today's assignment in Cognitive Science, I came across this, which I love and find amusing and pungent: "t bistability of the Necker cube". But what I really loved was this:

Insert FIGURE 1 about here

And likewise for figures 2 and 3. Rough draft, boys?

Since childhood, the mystery of how I can be, and be separate and conscious, has always seemed to me the central problem of my life. (How can *I* exist?) If one refuses the temptation to be a solipsist, and accepts (as I think we must) that other people have similar individuality and awareness, and even that animals have varying degrees of consciousness, how is it that we have all splintered off of the underlying reality? And looking at this a bit differently, how is it that consciousness arises from what could be called the emptiness or inertness of matter? How does this private realm get started? Though I can't solve this problem with more sophistication now, I grasped it with more immediacy when I was twelve years old. I saw it more directly. But the conundrum remains. Despite my experience that showed me that individual existence is unquestionably an illusion, nevertheless if one sees oneself as existing separately, we have to say that by definition one *does*. (Sure, I think Buddhists are right when they say that you exist, "but not in the way you think you exist". But isn't that simply to rephrase the question? They're not trying to perform a sleight of hand, but that's the net effect, at least for me, though if they're saying that one exists as the sum of experience, genetic endowment, and so on, I agree, because that's exactly what I also think I am, still, that only pushes the puzzle back one remove.) The contradiction seems irreconcilable. The qualia of consciousness is something other than the existence of matter. And yet, the two are *not* separate, as is clearly the case with mental illness and other states that originate biochemically, implying that all mental states spring from that ground, as plants grow from dirt. And yet, there's still that qualitative difference between matter and mind. Once one starts trying to undo this knot, it seems to go on ramifying. Every time one enters the puzzle maze, through any of the doors, one will eventually emerge into the same epistemological desert, never in the sought-for garden of understanding, though that's the wrong word. For I find myself consistently exasperated at those who try to wave away this problem when thinking through the questions of cognitive science. Like Turing, who oversimplified the problem into what's now called the Turing Test. Or the logic positivists, who tried to define the problem away. These cowards recognize the difficulty of the question and try to throw it in the trash. But no matter how hard you try, you will never escape, because this riddle is woven into you. We should beware of these fabulists and take Camus as our exemplar; he always had the courage to confront questions head-on and admit uncertainties. And in this case, there is little more than uncertainty to be found.

March 10, 2021

Extremely windy today, and I was up on the ladder trimming branches that were tangled in our utility lines. Could have picked a better day. Two doors east of our house, a big old oak, not as big as some on our block, but more than mere "mature", toppled. Guys from a tree service arrived and cleaned it up in less than half an hour, sawing up the trunk (a chain saw cut the trunk like a knife going through butter, and the skill of its user was perfect, making matching cuts so the trunk was too big even for that long saw and the man had to make cuts from opposite sides, which ended up perfectly flush with each other), chipping the wood, shoveling up the sawdust and twigs, grinding the stump. Amazing to watch a man do what they move right along. My mom would have said they worked "like they were killing snakes".

March 11, 2021

After the wind yesterday, in the evening, a short, fierce storm, Sophie quivering in terror as always. I keep forgetting to give that dog some drugs.

Perfect *Far Side* panel: several large spaceships full of dogs, hovering above a dog in his yard who's standing upright between his doghouse and his owner. The owner is on the back stoop looking up at the spaceships. The dog is saying, "they finally came. ... But before I go, let's see you roll over a couple times."

Raring to go: I've had plenty of sleep, and my back feels normal. What a joy it is to be rested and free of pain. As a friend from my writer's group once commented, we're in heaven if we're not in pain; I think of this as: we're in heaven if we're not in hell. Today I won't have to drag my body like a sled all day, and stand up from a chair as gently and slowly as I can. Spoke too soon. Getting out of this chair, my back complained. Will simply have to avoid sitting down much, today. Modern American attending a class via the internet, and who also has to prepare for the class by reading a document on a screen of his PC, it is, of course, impossible not to spend some time in a chair, as I'm doing at this very moment, ferociously out loud.

Saw a dog with balls yesterday. (Reminded me of that Bill Burr comedy bit: "I saw a dog with balls. Remember that? He goes on to riff about his childhood pet, and the idea that cutting off its balls makes a dog a better pet. I pretty much agree with him that it doesn't. This notion may be one that the dog breeders foisted on us, and on the cities that regulate pet ownership within their boundaries. In our house, my wife insisted that all our dogs be made into former males and females, and since I live with her and have to choose my battles, I buckled: she was more passionate than I was, and this saved me some cred for a later disagreement... Also reminds me of the *New Yorker* cartoon where two dogs are talking and one says to the other, "I thought we were going for a ride and look what they did to me." See above -- two dog cartoons in one cartoon.

entries.) In this case, though, that would be a dog with *ball*, because it had only one. Since then I've regretted not asking the owner what the heck was up with that. The ball was the left one, by the way.

Emailed my cognitive science prof, recommending *Metazoa*, and he shot back an answer immediately that he knew and it was a "fun read", which sort of seemed to patronize it, or (possibly?) me.

Once, talking to a Native American about terms for Native Americans, I commented that I prefer the Canadian term "Nations", because it's accurate. Essentially, they were separate, small nations, though not in the modern North Atlantic Euro-Anglo sense of fixed and more or less static territories, with associated governments and bureaucracies, etc. (I always, this is a simplification.) I wasn't trying to be PC. I do prefer *First Nations*, precisely because the term is accurate. Not to mention that the "America" part of the term we tend to use comes from the name of an Italian cartographer, which I find jarring and inappropriate. But that's human language for you: a mess. Don't try to make it perfect -- you'll only make yourself unhappy.

March 12, 2021

The following were mostly written yesterday, after posting that day's entries.

What is it about Vermeer's paintings that's unlike those anyone else has done? They have calm, and eternity. They're beautiful but without the pejorative sense of that word. They share with photography that feeling of capturing a moment, but far beyond that other medium. Vermeer erases himself, showing you people as if to say, "Here. This is what we are" though these paintings are only moments, we nod and agree. "Yes. This is essentially human." There is clarity here, and we recognize it. These are human beings, and though they lived centuries ago, we share with them these qualia of their those moments the artist freezes and puts before our eyes. Vermeer moves the inner life to the visual plane, and we recognize what he has done, and think, without words, that "I have experienced these moments, too."

The biggest pandemic change in my life has been not-going to the gym every day. I have to wonder whether I'll resume that habit. I'm not sure I want to be around people like that (i.e., not *people* who are "like that", but a *place* "like that") -- the environment there will feel crowded.

So many people have left New York City that apartments are probably going begging and rents have probably slipped. They should rise when the pandemic ends and people return. That's a chance to make money, if you have the proper timing and the patience to hold on long enough to make the money back from subletting. But the risks are many.

Reading a story by an EMT about responding to Covid calls a year ago in NYC, she made the point that the patients were quiet because they can't breathe. It occurred to me that it might have been handy to learn Sign. I'm not being sarcastic. A major problem, of course, is that the EMTs, nurses, and docs would probably not be able to talk with their hands, though I wonder how they do when a deaf person comes in? They must have a translator.

It strikes me as strange that maybe six to nine months ago I knew eight people who'd had the virus, and since then no more. The circles I move in must be cautious. If only the maskless had acted the same as my family and friends, we had this thing largely under control months ago. And to anyone who reads the preceding sentences and resents them, experiment: put aside your feelings for a moment and consider whether what I said might be true. Feelings, I notice, usually lead me astray. I'm wiser to notice those emotions, pat them on the head, and tell them, "Sit. Stay.", while trying to figure out what to do, based on the uncertain, incomplete, changeable data there is to work with. Yes, I use this self control, too, so I feel your frustration. Sure, I'm not in your shoes. I wish you the best. We're all in this bucket together, so here's a bucket, if you want to start bailing. Good luck to all of us.

Fodor becomes intelligible and interesting: "Classical psychological theories appeal to the constituent structure of mental representations to explain three closely related features of cognition: its productivity, its compositionality, and its incoherence. The traditional argument has been that these features of cognition are, on the one hand, pervasive and, on the other hand, explicable only on the assumption that mental representations have internal structure. This argument -- found in more or less explicit versions for the last thirty years or so -- is still intact, so far as we can tell. It appears to offer something close to a demonstration that an empirically adequate cognitive theory must recognize not just causal relations among representational states but also relations of syntactic and semantic constituency; hence that the mind cannot be represented by a general structure, a Connectionist network." This strikes me as a powerful argument, but not a crushing one. I'll refrain from getting into the weeds here. This is a beautiful paper. Back to my reading...

I'm finally starting to comprehend Kimhi's *Thinking and Being*, half a year or more after I read it. Should go back and review it, but I don't want to get stuck to that tar baby again, thank you very much. I seem to recall reading the entire book twice, though memory has become increasingly fallible and maybe I only read it once (but I do think it was twice). If, as my understanding must be, I'll rest content, like this: "My mind is made up. Don't confuse me with disambiguating."

"An English person [Lynne Truss] lecturing Americans about punctuation is like an American lecturing a Frenchman about sauces", or words to that effect, in a review of *Eats, Shoots, & Leaves* I once read. Yes. I've noticed that the English be quite sloppy with their punctuation; they use a lot of comma splices, and apostrophization tends to be erratic. No anarchy (though often intentional) and inconsistent and eccentric usages leave me a podium to lecture them in return for punctuation, and I love to play with it.

Less than teaching me any new lessons, the pandemic has reinforced my belief in the unpredictability of life, of culture, of institutions of all sorts, and of human fallibility in the face of the unexpected.

I've noticed that those who change the world don't only have a good idea, they develop it. Consider Pasteur, for instance: he had the idea of germ theory; he went into the lab and busted his ass to demonstrate it; he developed pasteurization; he created a shot for rabies (even handling mad dogs to get their saliva!); he defended his theories masterfully, crushing opposition; and so forth. What a C.V.! He did, in fact, change the world with his brain and his hard work.

The latest talk of geoengineering, which could involve putting material into the atmosphere to reflect sunlight, makes me extremely nervous. Someone objected that it would turn the sky white. What happens to the plants when there's less sunlight? And what about the polarization of light? That would make the honeybee dance impossible, I'm sure, so that's out. But could it also affect bird migration? I had visions of birds flying in circles until they die. Then the plants that they need to spread their seeds will die out, followed by the insects that rely on the plants, followed by other birds that rely on the insects, in a cascade of failures.

In *Metazoa*, the author mentions a school of fish that turn together simultaneously. This reminded me of bird flocks doing the same thing. There's always a feeling that I'm watching a minor miracle.

March 13, 2021

I see that I'm offered an article titled "[50 fictional writers, ranked](#)". If these people are fictional, what's the purpose of ranking them? On the other hand, if you meant "50 writers of fiction, ranked", why are you bothering? The rankings seem pointless, at least in the sense that they can't be objective, as would be implicit in your inaccurately phrased teaser... This is what comes from assuming. The title was actually correct (except that the writers are more *reviewed* than ranked despite being numbered). The writers are indeed fictional, and I recognized almost a dozen of them. The author "wastes a bit of space, but a few of the quotes are funny: "Quivering member. I like that." There's a whole internet of them out there, girl, and as the Chinese say, one look is worth a thousand words. Indulge yourself. "Hey, I've read Jane Austen. I think she would have liked Bukowski." Can we say *Clueless*? "I sing of the wrath of Callisto, the pain of Gabrielle, the courage of Xena and the inevitable mystery of a friendship as immortal as the gods." Deathless prose? No, a comedy of the making. "Seen from the outside, from a being who is alien to it, reason is simply a vast tautology. Of course reason can't validate reason as the first principle of the universe -- what else should it do? Dethrone itself? Reasoning systems, a system of totality, do not have that power. If there were a position from which reason could attack and dethrone itself, reason would already have occupied that position; otherwise it would not be total." Maybe, but "cracker barrel" is the thought that comes to mind.

March 14, 2021

Daylight savings. The PC synchronized itself, but my watch, which syncs at midnight, is an hour off and won't fix it tonight. The thing that gets most messed up is my schedule for Sinemet; the medicine is supposed to be taken at the same time every day, but the time is an hour earlier, as measured by number of hours elapsed.

Nephew and niece to dinner last night, and her (the niece's) parents, all the way from India to visit their daughter. My wife and I even set the table with the good china, the pattern we both loved above all the other choices, and which we use maybe once a year. This was the first time I've sat down to eat with anyone outside the household (except our son or daughter-in-law) in nearly a year. We provided the food, but they brought a goat-meat biryani, which was exquisite. I had a few helpings. They all seemed to have a great time, but I bailed out early to go through my sleep routine. Well rested this morning, which is only the third time out of the last 14 nights I've had adequate sleep. That's a PD symptom: now you don't, now you don't, now you have it again. Nothing has changed, meaning my habits are precisely the same. The only difference is the symptom. I've read that eliminating sugar improves sleep, so that's the next step.

Incredible: last night, someone put a water glass on an end table, between adjacent stacks of coasters half a foot apart, leaving a water ring when they had half a dozen coasters to choose from, a few inches from the surface they marked.

In Cog. sci., we're reading our third paper by Fodor. No one else will get more than one. Curious. I checked Schulz's bio, and he doesn't seem to have crossed paths with Fodor, by which I mean he was never at the same institutions Fodor was. He's not assigning these because he's carrying on his teacher's tradition. [Info about Fodor here](#). Aside: interestingly, Putnam is mentioned in the Fodor bio. Putnam and Chomsky went to high school together in Pennsylvania (an obscure

know because of research for a linguistics paper I wrote, about Putnam's rejection of one of Chomsky's central ideas and Chomsky were at MIT, and Putnam was there, too, until he moved down the street to Harvard. That's a tight little

Thinking about Marshall McLuhan and his notion that certain human inventions externalize human abilities, say as a wheel does for the foot, or certain weapons do for the hand. (I *think* he used these as examples. Been a long time.) So he claims that the internet is the externalization of our brains? It would be interesting to hear what he had to say, though with everything else he claimed it would be pretentious and fatuous, not to mention devoid of logic.

Liturgical languages: Latin, Sanskrit, Coptic, Hebrew, and I suppose classical Arabic. Once they were used in everyday speech. Then they ossified (though Hebrew, uniquely, revived). This seems very curious, as if the languages were thought to be essential to the sacred nature of the religious beliefs, or the original language of the texts had to be preserved, right to the grammar and lexicon. Why? What's so special about religious language?

Last night I said "past Stanley" (meaning the town), and someone thought I'd said "Pakistani". Shortly after, I said "Haiti" and someone else thought I'd said "Haiti". At least my wife still understands me when I speak geographically.

Eight days until this journal ends, though there's much left to run on about. (Hey, that sentence ended with *two* prep

March 15, 2021

Sometimes someone says it perfectly: "While our digital world was expected to simplify our lives and leave us free for discretionary activities, it has led instead to ubiquitous frustration and paralysis. What was once simple now involves many steps with uncertain success (think phone answering menus). What was once routine now requires study and perseverance (think "smart TV"). [paragraph] Requests for assistance typically demand arduous computer "chat" sessions or long conversations in person to a different expert whose perfect but tone-deaf English and scripted courtesy unsuccessfully camouflage an inability to truly assist."

Another indigenous language dies: [Juma](#). Clearly it's poorly documented, as judged by the limited data in WALS. Now it's gone. (Ken Hale: losing a language "is like dropping a bomb on the Louvre". You lose a culture.) Read about it [here](#) on language loss, though woeful, is the least of it. The real tragedy is the death of a *people*. Brazil repeats what the U.S., Canada, and Australia pioneered.

More than half the time I've joined the hangout Zoom session for the PEWC, I've been the only one there. Maybe I value human companionship more than I realized. Or maybe I'm bored.

March 16, 2021

John le Carré died a few months ago. His wife followed him a couple of months later. Their son says she had a hand in his books, not only as his typist, but as his first reader, almost an editor. Cornwell (le Carré's real last name) worked in the longhand. He didn't use a computer, or even a typewriter. He wrote and edited with pen, and sometimes with scissor glue. Then his wife retyped the book. He also gave near-final drafts to friends whose judgment he respected, for their comments. He did extensive research that underpinned the books. Everything points to a man who was not only creative but painstaking and egoless about his work. I've enjoyed watching interviews with him on Roku recently (probably posthumously because of his death) -- he had interesting, intelligent things to say, and seemed, usually, to be both as honest and as good as any writer I've ever seen. One of his friends called him a true gentleman, and said it had been a privilege to know

The [categorical imperative](#) ("Act only according to that maxim by which you can at the same time will that it should become a universal law", or, in other words, do that which would be most perfect if everyone else acted the same way) -- the idea of acting from good will, in such a manner that if everyone did so, the world would be at its best -- has always seemed like that's too celestial for this knotty world of ours. Kant's edict is perfect, but impractical, or at least impossible to put into widespread practice. Give three people the same difficult ethical problem, and you'll likely get three different solutions because they used three different sets of evidence and lines of reasoning. There are even times when, if everyone acted the same way, the result would be suboptimal. Here, on the ground of the everyday, Kant's maxim fails.

And speaking of moral imperatives, there's so damn much *shit* in my life that it's impossible to be pure -- problems not only for the planet and other people, but for me, personally, as well. There are, of course, the usual things like owning a car and dumping carbon into the atmosphere; the ubiquity of plastics, which have become a huge environmental problem; the [apocalypse](#) (easy read) [or try this](#), for the original data, and for which I'm trying to do my bit by revising my backyard with nasty chemicals in furniture; and all the rest, a list that would go on for miles, if I even knew all the problems, which of course I don't. I'm tangled in a web that's impossible to even partly extricate myself from.

After I order something from a website, they start sending me emails, whether it was a tee shirt, mushrooms, or whatever. The only way I've found to insulate myself is to give them an individual email address on my domain, then kill that

later, a process that's a bit time-consuming and cumbersome. (I used to do this routinely, and now have hundreds of masking addresses.) Either that, or take the chance that unsubscribing will actually work, which it usually does. But an offer for satellite radio because I got my car maintained at the dealership is really fucking annoying. The dealer's business passing my email address on to a third party.

March 17, 2021

We're seeing a wave of attacks on Asians. The attackers seem to take the virus, which started in China, as a reason to and even kill strangers who look Oriental. This one's a real head-scratcher. How can you blame a person for a virus that came from China, but so what? How are these people supposed to be guilty? And how can you attack a complete stranger? Do the attackers think this is going to make them feel better, or solve a problem? What's the thought process here?

I have a neurologist, a dermatologist, a dentist of course, a couple of eye specialists, a personal physician, and not too long ago an audiologist and a physical therapist. Not to mention occasional specialists like a pulmonologist, and a surgeon for a hernia, and whatever you call the guy who runs a tube up your ass to look for problems. For much of my life I had a lot of doctors at all. This is what aging is all about. Additionally, I've been going to a urologist lately. They handed me the questionnaire to fill out. I sat down, answered all the questions, and returned to the desk, but now there was another doctor in front of me and he put a diaper on the counter, as if this were the most normal thing to do. The woman behind the counter took it and put it in a bag. Ewww.

The damn PD is eroding my brain. I couldn't remember the word "Sherpa" for hours, a word I've seen a thousand times in the climbing magazines. Yeah, everyone around me says they have the same problem of recalling words, but this is related to the PD; it's a well-known symptom. One of the problems with the disease is that there's such a smorgasbord of symptoms that a lot of them are shared with other diseases, like aging (humor me; agree that aging is a disease). Since it's so common and often extreme in PD, the doctors tag it as a symptom. Like blurry vision, for instance, which people always dismiss. We can't get no respect. Where was I? PD eroding my brain. Seems like the associative connections that allow us to recall are disappearing. This is different from Alzheimer's, which damages the ability to form *new* memories. Instead, PD just has to do what's known in database-land as a [full-table scan](#), instead of relying on an [index](#) -- and as a result, retrieval takes vastly longer than it should.

Several thoughts on religion this morning:

1. If you're a workman, I'm not paying you to convert me. Shut up and leave your Christianity out of it. Just do the work, like the carpentry or remove the tree or whatever, and I'll thank you to stick to the thing you're getting paid to do. This is a financial transaction and if I wanted a minister, I'd get one. That's not your specialty.
2. What's the deal with people who run on about the wonderful resources at their church -- various interest groups and groups together and such? Isn't a church about encouraging you to be better, comforting you in adversity, and all that traditional stuff? It's not a social club.
3. When I was one of the columnists on the local newspaper's *Faithwalk* column, one of the pieces I wrote compared religious alternatives to being an Italian in the voting booth -- i.e., too many choices. Even the atheists assert certain things seem to be one of the few who's too uncertain even to be an agnostic. (The whole question of God and human life is too big for our brains, so I want nothing to do with it. Even agnosticism is too definite for me.) I got an email from a reader who wanted me to come to her church and experience their communal joy -- sing with them, etc. Wrote back and decline. She wrote again, more insistent. I replied, pointing out that the column had said that *I don't know*, and that I wanted to be alone, and that that shouldn't have been too hard to understand. She must have finally got the point, because she did answer. It's strange to me, this evangelism. They feel it's necessary to bring other people into the fold. Though I don't accept any religious notions (other than limited non-theological subsets of Buddhism and Quakerism), these are ideas I reject, and one of them is the notion that I will go to hell if I don't accept Jesus as my personal savior. That assertion is bizarre and unsupported, and the whole chain of reasoning, if such it can be called, leading to that conclusion consists of circular arguments, equivocations, special pleadings, and a variety of exhortations to have faith, with no convincing reasons why. Thanks for the empathy, but as Milosz said of the Communists, the paths of your thought are impossible to follow.

March 18, 2021

The gym called again. I'm not ready to go back, though it's probably safe. Partly, I'm out of the habit and reluctant to get back into it.

We were stuck with weeks of record-setting cold and repetitive snow, and now we've been hit with day after day of rain. Another lost habit that will have to be rebuilt: taking daily walks. PD is orders of magnitude more high-maintenance than a teenage case of acne. Besides the physical exercise (weights, cardio, HIIT, walking, yoga), there are the cognitive exercises: dexterity exercises, balance exercises, facial exercises, handwriting exercises, swallowing exercises, speech exercises, and foot exercises, posture correction work, anosmia work, diet-related stuff, memory exercises, struggling not to let

weight, working to reverse flexion, working to improve amplitude, interrupted sleep, poor concentration, dehydratic probably [forgetting some of them](#). No surprise there. Then there's the stuff that's irreversible, like sweating. I used to more heavily than anyone I knew (my yoga teacher called me "the king of sweating"), and then, suddenly, I stopped almost never sweat at all. Salivation has changed, and this promotes tooth decay, so I brush with all three of these: v pick, electric toothbrush, and regular toothbrush. I'm going to stop now. This could go on for yards.

March 19, 2021

No entry today. I forgot. So this is being written the following day: Yesterday was a good day. I finished reading two and I cut and extricated the last of the honeysuckle that had grown up into the utility lines. And what a tricky, difficult that was, too. Should have been trimming them regularly through the years, stitch in time and all that. I've never see intricate tangles, branches that fork around a line, requiring me to remove them by rotating the branch with care in successive planes and circles. Glad that's done. When the fellow I hired to help plan the work in the back yard saw t of those honeysuckles, he seemed awestruck, and touched the biggest of them and said, "This is the mother", like it origin of the species.

March 20, 2021

Normality is on the horizon. Soon, meaning maybe late spring or more likely summer, we'll be acting much the way before the pandemic hit. Not completely. I think the whole huggy culture we were developing, of embracing newly-strangers, will be gone, and good riddance, too, I say. But we'll be dining out and going to movies, and masks will g disappear. I may win my bet with my sister-in-law that things will be more or less back to normal by the end of Aug there will be permanent aftereffects. What they will be, remains to be seen.

Curious, that our country did such an abysmal job of holding down the spread of the virus, and contrarily a stellar jc vaccinating the public, after the initial misfires. The Europeans, at least with respect to vaccination, failed miserably for the U.K. and its contrarian "one jab" strategy. There are a lot of lessons to be learned here, including logistics an communications, and the doctors and epidemiologists and even the journalists will be working on them for years. I, look forward to the day when the subject loses its ubiquity.

At a Nerd Nite talk, I once asked the speaker, who worked in medical insurance, a question about how a company c data about our prescriptions. (There is at least one company that does this.) Federal law forbids that. But as with mu in privacy, the law seemed to be a dead letter. I was not aware of a related matter, [this case](#), in which the Supreme C ruled that Vermont could not outlaw the sale of information about which drugs doctors prescribed -- on the grounds violated free speech. That ruling I can understand, because the public has an interest in knowing when doctors appe prescribing drugs based on relationships with pharmaceutical companies, or otherwise prescribing drugs in ways th problematic. But we start to get into murky waters when companies like [Clearview AI](#) can Hoover up photographs fi over the internet and sell facial recognition services to law enforcement -- and hide behind "free speech". That's a st someone posts a picture of happy grandparents holding a new baby, for other family and friends to see, should that photograph be treated as public and free for use as raw material for a company like Clearview to make money from precisely the sort of automation that can lead to the panopticon I've feared for years. (Aside: the roots of my anxiety mostly in the security summaries I used to get as part of my job, and in my reading outside work, which further sup that fear. They were a response to that information, not a personal quirk.) If you want evidence that it's possible, loo China, and the effectiveness of government surveillance there, and don't dismiss it by invoking the differences betw politics. That sort of Big Brotherism would develop differently here, but it could develop, and the seeds of it, in Go Facebook and the genetic testing companies like 23andme that sell customer data to potential employers, and most egregiously in companies like Clearview AI, are already sprouting. We should uproot these seedlings before we run time and we find ourselves living in the darkness under their canopies.

March 21, 2021

The PD has progressed. During the night I got out of bed, stood up, and fell over. I stood up again, and fell over aga the other side. I foresee the time when I will need a cane, and regret not taking a couple of my father's collection aft died. Further evidence of disease progression: I had my first hallucination recently, when I saw a couple of pieces o electronic equipment lying on the floor. They looked utterly real. Not until later did I realize they hadn't been there a There's little more to say about these incidents; the disease has me in its hands, and will determine the shape of my l the meantime, I will do what I can to slow its progress. The only difference between me and most other people is th end is in clearer sight for me. Sad though the thought of leaving this beautiful world and my wife and dogs makes n departure is one that I see as not only real and inevitable, but near.

March 22, 2021

This is the last entry. I started this journal a year ago, and said I would keep it for a year, and now it's been a year. O projects beckon: the last little bit of the novel, followed perhaps by revisions; the linguistics papers that have been h fire; the work in the back yard; more time spent on exercise of various kinds; chores I've routinely neglected; and sc

Rev 366, 20210322