

Rex Jaeschke's Blog Postings from
Tales from the Man who would be King
Volume 13 – Dec 2021 through Nov 2022

Rex Jaeschke

(rex@RexJaeschke.com)

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Introduction

When I decided to start a blog, I wrote the first three installments and let them “bake” awhile before I posted them and announced the creation of the blog. I wanted to get past the romantic aspect of dreaming something up, jumping in and doing it, and then, later, finding out it wasn't sustainable. Now, more than 13 years later, looking back, not only was I able to deliver a substantive posting each month for 156 months, I have 18 of the 24 postings for the next two years already written, and ideas for the remaining six mapped out!

On a semi-regular basis, over a home-made [café-au-lait](#), I read an old posting, and I'm very happy to say that *I'm not embarrassed by any of them!* It surely has become a labor of love!

Over the years, a number of regular readers have suggested that I publish the postings in some sort of printed book form. Having written numerous technical books, many articles for technical journals, and a newspaper column, I am well aware of the formal publishing process, and the work involved in getting what I might consider to be a perfectly good manuscript into a shape that a publisher would accept. Regarding writing books, my financial return was probably far less than the minimum wage! Of course, I could self-publish, and, in fact, I have access to a facility to do just that at a very reasonable cost. After serious consideration and putting my ego aside, I decided that I would indeed re-publish the first 13-years-worth of installments, but in an electronic book form, [PDF](#). And I would do so, 12 installments (that is, one year's-worth) per Volume.

To make it worth having these Volumes available for downloading instead of readers simply going to the website for installments one at a time, I've added some small value to the Volumes. Here are the enhancement and/or changes I've made:

- Did some light editing: corrected spelling mistakes, improved punctuation, and tweaked some grammatical constructs
- Corrected factual errors
- Updated outdated information
- Added an occasional bit of extra relevant information as an aside
- Added *many* more links, primarily to [Wikipedia](#) and [Wiktionary](#)
- Added a few photos. [I write installments using MS Word, which easily allows me to arrange embedded photos. However, when I export the result to my blog (which is hosted by the freely available BlogEngine.NET), the result is far from pleasing. As such, after some early experimentation, I have included very few photos.]
- Added forward pointers to relevant installments that came later

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- Regarding links to other installments, links to destinations that are in the same Volume resolve to the corresponding chapter in that Volume; otherwise, they resolve to the blog web site.

Lastly, a very big “Thank You!” to my reviewer, good friend John Tew, who has been with me from the beginning. Now I say “good” friend. There is a saying, “Friends help you move, but good friends help you move bodies!” I have not yet asked John to help in such a manner, but for now, I’ll give him the benefit of the doubt.

Happy reading,

Rex Jaeschke, November 2022.

1. December 2021, "Signs of Life: Part 26"

From time to time during my travels, I come across signs that I find interesting for one reason or another. Sometimes, they contain clever writing, are humorous, or remind me of some place or event. Here are some from a trip to Munich, Germany, in December 2017, and elsewhere.



Banner from the [Munich Summer Olympic Games Stadium](#).



Across the road from the Olympic Stadium was BMW Welt, BMW's "futuristic distribution center and exhibition hall." As they now own the Rolls Royce brand, I stopped by to check out the latest models.



In 2016, the city of Munich launched BeeZero, the first hydrogen-powered car sharing program.



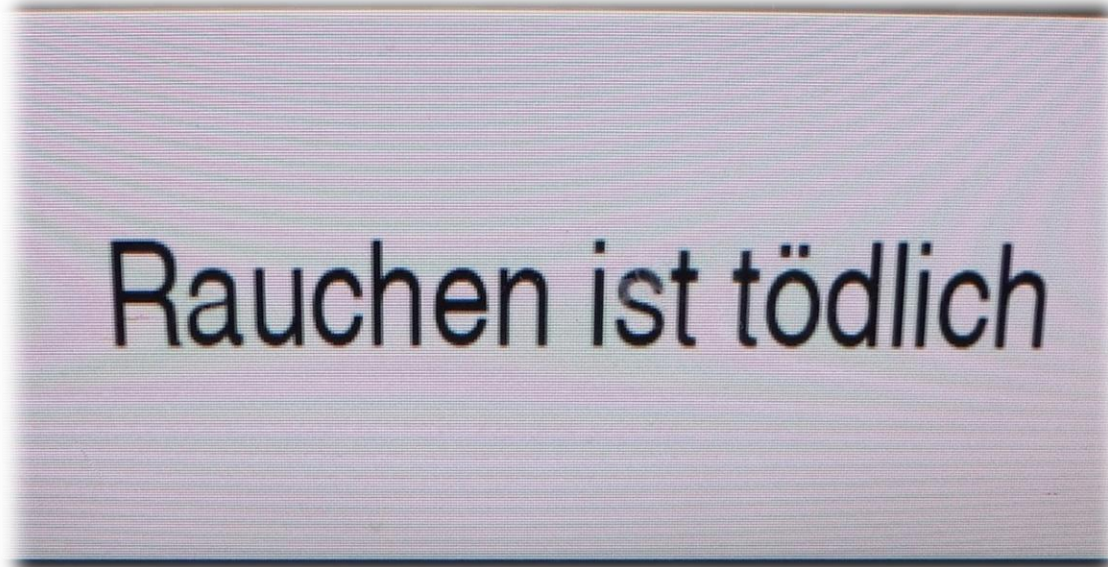
I found it interesting to see the kangaroo with joey in her pouch.



A gay pride symbol. (A family of lions is called a *pride*.)



"Work shall set you free." Sign at the entrance of the [Dachau concentration camp](#).



Yes, "Smoking is deadly," and you see signs like this all around Europe, but the countries still sell cigarettes and people still smoke them!

'O CAFFÈ MIO

Perhaps it's the German branch of the Italian "O Sole Mio" chain.



Purveyors of "fair, organic, and vegan fashion."

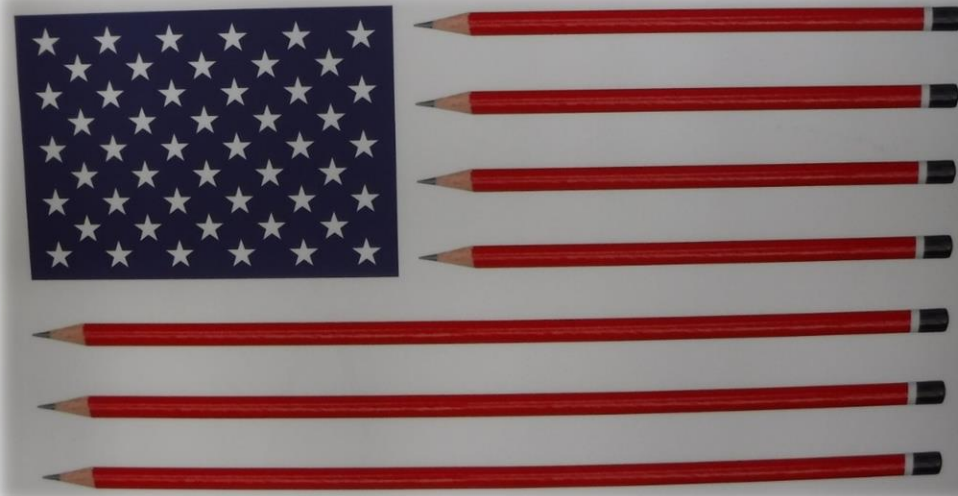


"We have to stay outside."

Some shops provide a place outside their entrance to tie up a dog's leash. Some also provide water dishes.



At the entrance of the unaccompanied-minors' lounge at Munich Airport.



An interesting depiction of the US flag on a poster at Munich Airport, by Ogilvy, "one of Germany's most successful creative agencies in the field of marketing and communication."



A backstreet in Whitby, Yorkshire, a town where I spent four delightful nights.



Where refined Whitby residents walk.



Tiles on the front of a house, also from Whitby. In all my many trips to the UK, I have yet to eat a kipper, for breakfast or at any other time.

A Pitcher's Worth a Thousand Words

Ceramics are one of the MSV collection's greatest strengths. Craftsmen who worked in the region's thriving pottery industry from the 1700s to the early 1900s produced thousands of examples that survive today. Potters developed various ways to distinguish their wares from those of the

A clever take on the saying, "A picture is worth a thousand words." See pitcher.

A pottery exhibit at a small gallery in Winchester, Virginia, USA.

2. January 2022, “Travel: Memories of Beijing, China”

It was December 2010, and I'd been home from Europe 12 whole days, which was just enough time to unpack, do laundry, rest, and recover from the 5-hour time change. Now, it was time to head off again, in the other direction, for two weeks in the Chinese capital [Beijing](#). Although I'd been to several of the Chinese [Special Administrative Regions](#)—Hong Kong (twice, once when it was still British) and Macao (once, when it was still Portuguese)—this was my first time to the mainland.

2.1 The Unplanned Routing to Beijing

I'd planned to fly Business Class from Washington Dulles International (IAD) via Tokyo, but the price was very high. However, if I flew with Air Canada via Toronto, the price was almost halved. Unfortunately, my flight to Toronto was delayed once, then twice, then a third and fourth time as a host of mechanics swarmed over the small Embraer jet. After a delay of more than two hours, the flight was cancelled, and I would miss my connection to Beijing. So, I was rebooked, on United Airline's direct flight to Tokyo, which continued on to Beijing. The ironic thing was that was the flight I initially wanted to take!

We landed at Beijing City International Airport ([PEK](#)) in light fog well ahead of schedule. The terminal was quite new and rather interesting, architecture-wise. After a long walk, I reached immigration, where after a cursory check of my visa I was passed through. It was another long walk to the baggage area and just as I arrived, bags from my flight started coming out. I stopped off at a tourist office desk to get a city map and information about a cash machine and taxi service. Customs was a formality, and at a money-exchange desk, I changed US\$200 cash into Yuan ([CNY](#)).

I went outside to the taxi line where it was below freezing. I drew a young guy who apparently wanted to drive in the [Indianapolis 500](#), and he showed me his “skills” on the way to my hotel. Throughout the 30-minute ride, I doubt we stayed in the same lane more than 15 seconds (I kid you not), and he was tailgating cars at 120 kph! To make it interesting, I couldn't find the piece of my seatbelt to clip my harness in. I found it best not to look at the road ahead and to sit back and think happy thoughts, like, “Is my will up to date?”

We arrived at my hotel/convention center around 11 pm, local time, where three young desk assistants eagerly awaited me. Between their minimal English, we managed, and I was given the key to Room 1603, a so-called luxury apartment on the top floor. My home for the next two weeks was a large apartment with a bedroom, a bathroom, a large lounge/dining room, and kitchen with all the appliances, a bit of glassware, but no cookware. There was also a large glassed-in balcony. Breakfast was included as was internet access, and all for about US\$72/night, a very good price.

2.2 A Look at Some Sites

[Next day] Breakfast was served from 6:30–9:30 each morning, and I went down at 6:45. There were a couple of other early birds. I showed my room key and made the rounds to check out the buffet offerings. It was quite a bit like breakfast buffets I'd visited in Japan and Korea: a generic Asian section involving salad and dressing, and various other “local stuff,” and the Western part with bacon, eggs,

sausage, and toast. There was also a Chinese section with fried rice and various kinds of noodles. The day broke while I ate, and I had my first glimpse of China.

Around 9 o'clock, I phoned my local contact, Li Ning, who had offered to drive me around the city. (He was head of the Chinese delegation to one of the committees in which I participate.) At 10 am, he and his wife arrived, and we drove by the Olympic village, through Tiananmen Square, and then to a large shopping district where we walked through local markets, department stores, and the country's biggest bookstore. Along the way, we stopped off for lunch at a Chinese restaurant. Then it was on to a large supermarket to lay in a few supplies for my kitchen.

[Next day] I worked some hours to prepare for my upcoming conference, which then ran for three days.

2.3 Off to the Great Wall

[Next day] The day after my conference ended, I booked a tour. Our minibus pulled out at 9:15 and we were on our way out of the city to the [Ming Tombs](#). Our guide was a young Chinese woman named Pan Jiao with an English name of Sally, and thus we became "Sally's Group," and followed our fearless leader and her yellow flag. It was quite cold out with a strong wind. We were a small group with people from the UK, the Netherlands, and the US. We stopped at a jade carving place with the requisite (enormous) showroom where we were all encouraged to buy. The pieces ranged from the very small to the truly gigantic, with none of them being cheap. We lunched in the attached restaurant.

We drove quite some distance along the bottom of a very old valley and, finally, started to see glimpses of the famous [Great Wall](#), and very great it surely was. We parked at the base of the mountain. To get near the top we each sat in a sled-like device and were pulled up 20 people at a time, through a tunnel and then out in the vicious cold wind. At the end, we were right next to the base of a section of wall, where the really serious work began. The goal was to hike/climb to the top-most point, which didn't seem all that far away. And, horizontally speaking, it wasn't. But the vertical climb was a different matter, especially as we not only had to go up but over each rise, we seemed to go way down again. I decided to concentrate on the walk rather than take pictures and video, and to do those on the way back. The wall is one heck of a structure and was built over a 2,000+-year period. Although it was supposed to keep out the Mongol hordes, I kept asking myself why the Mongols would want to attack over those mountains anyway even if no wall existed. (I think it was built simply as a way to keep unemployment down!) Although the whole walk was very steep, I did okay on the sections that had steps. At least they were level, and I could rest occasionally. However, some parts were just flat stones at a steep angle, and coming down those was difficult. The surrounding countryside was harsh, almost semi-desert. I had dressed warmly with a knitted cap and windproof hood over that, plus gloves. However, each time I took my gloves off to take pictures or video, my hands got cold very quickly.

2.4 Back to Work

[Next day] After eight hours of solid sleep, I was awake around 6 am. I felt like I'd recently hiked a section of the Great Wall! However, a hot shower helped loosen me up. I went down for breakfast around 7 o'clock. Back in my room, I sipped coffee and worked some more on this diary before preparing to attend a conference.

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At 8:30, I went down to the meeting room floor where I registered for the 1-day “2010 Conference on Document Information Processing.” My colleague Li Ning was the organizer, and he welcomed attendees, then a number of Chinese dignitaries each spoke. About 150 people attended. At the first break, we went out into the cold for group photos, and then had tea/coffee. We reconvened soon after 10:30, and I was the first of the keynote speakers. I gave two presentations, which ran for 40 minutes total. After each sentence, I paused while my English was translated to Chinese. And this process was repeated for the other English presentation. For the presentations done in Chinese, I donned my headset to get the English translation, which was simultaneous; that is, the speaker did not pause. Two women sat in a booth at the back where they took turns translating, changing every 10 minutes or so. (I chatted with them later, and complemented them on the great job they did, especially given the technical nature of the topic.)

Lunch was a Chinese buffet served in the hotel dining room. I met some of the delegates, quite a few of whom were young graduate students. I was approached by one of the administrators and asked to fill in a form with information including my passport number. It turned out that I was being paid an honorarium of 2,000 Yuan (\$300) for speaking, and I needed to sign for it. I did so, and in return, I received a plain brown envelope that was stapled shut. I decided it wouldn't be polite to open and to count it, so I stuck it in my pocket until day's end. (It did indeed contain twenty 100-Yuan bills.)

Most of the afternoon presentations were in Chinese, as was each corresponding slide show. Speakers had been asked to submit their papers and slide decks in advance, and these were distributed in both paper and DVD form. Cameramen took stills and video of much of the presentations. It was all very professionally done. Throughout, waiters came by each table to top up our cups of green tea.

2.5 Visiting the Nationalities Museum

[Next day] I rugged up against the elements and left my hotel at 10:40. In 10 minutes, I was near the Olympic Park main stadium that the world had come to know as the Bird's Nest. I was headed for the [China Nationalities Museum](#), a showcase for the 56 nationalities that live in China. (The groups range from fewer than 10,000 members to many millions.) The open-air museum/park was right on the other side of the fence next to me, but it took some time to find the entrance. After a long walk, I came to an entrance, but it was locked tight. Don't you just hate that when that happens! I asked a woman passing by if she spoke English. She didn't, but when I pointed to the entrance, she seemed to understand and very confidently pointed me in the right direction. So back I went the way I had just come, and there in an obscure spot was the ticket booth and entrance.

The park covers more than 100 acres and is split into two parts, one of which is closed in winter. So, I paid my 60 Yuan and entered the half that was open. For the whole three hours I was there, I didn't see any other staff, and only a handful of visitors came through. The gardens were dead or dormant, the numerous water-based parts had been drained, and the large stream/lake was frozen. In all, it looked pretty drab and uninviting. However, I soldiered on shooting a few photos and some video. The land of the [Dong](#) was especially interesting with respect to its buildings and an impressive wooden bridge. Apparently, in high season, the place is full of performers in ethnic costume, but that was not the case now. However, I heard some music and followed that to the [Tu](#) village where a group of teenage boys and girls danced around a pole that was attached to strings of brightly colored flags. Some dancers wore costumes, and I stayed, watched, and shot video. The buildings were also colorful

and interesting. In the Tibetan area, I chatted with a young woman who had a souvenir shop. Her English was decent, and she wasn't at all pushy, and we negotiated over the price for a pashmina, some scatter-cushion covers, and a wall hanging.

Having had a large breakfast, I hadn't planned to eat lunch, but as I exited the park, I spied a McDonalds and thought I should at least look in and see how it was done in China. No surprise, it was pretty much like home, but with a few twists. I ordered a small burger, French fries, Coke, and four chicken nuggets for the grand total of \$3.50, and I went upstairs to eat with the locals. At the table next to me, a 5-year-old girl patiently practiced writing Chinese characters in a workbook under the direction of her mother. English-language Christmas music was playing, and I got my fill of Elvis and Mariah Carey, and decided to leave after the music tape started repeating. The 40-minute break was most welcome not to mention nice and warm.

As I went outside, I spied a huge sign on the wall that said, "Chinatown." What a treat thought I at having located THE Chinatown of Beijing! It turned out to be a shopping center, and I went inside to see how the locals shopped. The ground level extended a great distance and contained stores selling mostly shoes and clothing with all stores looking very western. I rode the escalator upstairs to a huge place that was half department store and half supermarket. I grabbed a shopping cart and tried to blend in with the locals although I did happen to notice that none of them was tall, carrying camera gear, or looked much like me. I browsed up and down many aisles and noted how many things were quite cheap. Many things looked familiar, but the Chinese writing gave no clue as to the contents. Those Chinese have names for everything! (In fact, many signs and product packaging had English writing as well as Chinese, which made it easier for me to read some details.) I topped up my emergency rations with some peanut chocolate bars, cherry-flavored fruit rolls, and potato chips. Chips came in many flavors including sweet and sour fish soup, cucumber, and Mexican; I kid you not!

By the time I got back to my room, it was 4:15, and I was ready for a rest. The Great Wall expedition was catching up with my body. Much of my laundry was dry, and my bedding had been changed in my absence as I'd left the "change me" card on the bed. I watched a bit of TV, sorted through my new photos, and worked on this diary. For supper, I delved into my emergency rations. Then it was on to a long soak in a hot bath before bed. I put out the lights quite early.

2.6 Tiananmen Square and Olympic Park

[Next day] I had nearly 10 hours sleep, which was great. Around 7:30 am, I went down to breakfast where I had a fried egg with fried noodles. I'd half made the transition to a Chinese breakfast! Back in my room, I sipped a cup of Twinning's finest English breakfast tea while catching up with some world news.

At 10 o'clock, Chinese colleague Allison phoned me from the hotel lobby, so I packed my gear and headed downstairs. She'd hired a car and driver for the day, so she could show me around. It was bitterly cold out (-2C). We drove to Tiananmen Square, the world's largest square. It was built after the Chinese Revolution and occupies the space between the main South gate of the city and the main North gate, just on the edge of the Forbidden City. The driver dropped us in front of the People's Congress building. We crossed the street and went through a security checkpoint into the square where we went to Chairman Mao's mausoleum, but it was closed on Mondays. Don't you just hate that

when that happens! We walked all around the square and looked at the elaborate gates and the buildings that housed them. On the north side, we went through three sets of city gates and their accompanying plazas. In one, we watched groups of soldiers engaged in some marching drills. Whenever I took off a glove for more than 30 seconds to take pictures or video, my fingers took some massaging to get warm again.

An hour exposed to the elements was more than enough, so Allison phoned the driver to meet us, and we headed out of the downtown area for lunch. I had expressed a preference for Szechuan cuisine, so we headed to a restaurant specializing in that. It was a very nicely appointed place. The best way to describe it would be “nouveau Chinese,” with very nice modern furniture and décor, but a strong hint of traditional Chinese style. I sensed it was upscale, but it didn't exude an exclusive feeling, and prices were quite reasonable. We looked over the menu, which had lots of pictures and English descriptions. We shared a variety of dishes with meats, vegetables, rice, and noodles, along with oolong tea. It was great, and I ate quite a bit more than I needed. A colleague of Allison's, Pine, joined us for lunch, as did our driver.

After lunch, Allison went off to work while Pine became my guide. We drove to the [Olympic Park](#), where the driver dropped us near the main Bird's Nest stadium. We got admission tickets and went inside for a look around. The 80,000-seat stadium was functional as well as a piece of art. During the games, an athletic track went around the ground while the inside space served as a soccer field, among other things. However, now, it was covered in man-made snow, which was being produced by a number of machines. A large crew was setting up for a Snow Festival. There were small and large ice-skating rinks, a castle, and various buildings for kids to visit, and a large space for families to play in the snow. We climbed a lot of stairs to the upper deck and walked around to view the arena from several angles.

After a short walk around the plaza, we headed to the [Blue Cube](#), a large cube-like building that housed the water sports. It contains a large swimming area with a wave pool, and many people were swimming there. The public can also use the practice pool, and a number of people were swimming laps. The main pool is only used for competitions and is next to the diving pool. Out front, Pine and I parted company and I walked the short distance to my hotel. Given the cold, I was very happy to be back indoors for the night. By the time I sat down in my room to sip a café au lait, it was 4:30. It had been a busy day, and as an honored guest, I hadn't been allowed to pay for anything.

I certainly didn't need to eat for the rest of the day, but that didn't stop me from snacking. I spent the evening watching TV, listening to some music albums, and playing games on my laptop. Lights out at 9:30.

2.7 Summer Palace, Forbidden City, and Temple of Heaven

[Next day] My alarm went off at 7 am, by which time I'd had a very good sleep. For the first time, I forewent the buffet breakfast choosing instead to drink tea in my room and snack on my emergency rations. At 8:20, the phone rang to let me know that my tour bus was minutes away from the hotel.

Once again, it was freezing outside although the sun was shining brightly. The Chinese tour guide, “Helen,” welcomed me aboard her bus. There were five tourists: a couple of Chinese men, a young

Portuguese couple who had been in Macao for a conference, and me. First stop was the summer palace, a place where emperors “escaped” the Forbidden City from spring to late summer. It consisted of some 600 acres three quarters being a man-made lake the soil and mud from which had been used to build a very large hill. The lake was frozen over, and the wind started to blow. I looked around a few buildings, but when I heard music and singing, I made my way up a hill to locate the source. I found a very enthusiastic group of pensioners and others singing from songbooks. A choir performed, and a number of musicians played wind instruments and drums. I captured a whole song on video. An elderly man approached me and asked me where I was from, shook my hand vigorously, and welcomed me to China and Beijing. Next stop was a pearl store, which had a lot of very nice pearls mounted in a variety of settings. We watched a guide open a freshwater oyster, which contained 20–30 small pearls. Those too small to use in jewelry are ground into powder, which is used in hand and face cream, among other things. Upstairs was a restaurant at which we ate lunch.

After lunch, we drove to the Forbidden City where the extended families of 20+ royal dynasties lived for some hundreds of years, and which was off-limits to all others. A series of very large and elaborate gates lead to the inner sanctums. There are more than 8,000 rooms! I shot some video, but each gate or door led to an even bigger and fancier set of rooms and courtyards that it really was too much. Very quickly, I overdosed. It certainly was impressive, however. It has only been open to the public for 20+ years.

Next was a silk factory and that's where I got very close to spending some serious money. We watched silk being spun from cocoons, each one containing more than a kilometer of thread. I looked over some pure silk bed “blankets,” and was on the verge of buying one, but thought that would need a zip-off cover. And, of course, what else to use but one made of silk. I saw exactly the one I wanted, but once I saw the cost and that of two pillowcases, I swallowed hard. It came to more than \$700! As a consolation prize, I bought a nice silk scarf.

Then, it was on to the Temple of Heaven, a place that was visited twice each year by the emperor who took part in major ceremonies to pray for a good harvest and on the winter solstice to pray for a good next season. Nearby was a teahouse, and we dropped in for a tea ceremony. The hostess explained the process and prepared five different teas for us to taste. I particularly liked the leechee and rose petal. The staff tried hard to sell us all kinds of tea and tea-related utensils, but the prices were quite high.

Our guide left us then and the driver took us back to our respective hotels. I was last, and we took more than 45 minutes to get there through slow traffic. We kept off the main highways, which moved even slower. I gave the driver a small tip, which made him smile and give me a big handshake.

I was happy to be back in my room with the heat turned way up. The first thing I did was to boil the electric kettle and make a large bowl of vegetable soup. I watched some TV while snacking, and then brought this diary up to date. Lights out early.

2.8 Travel Day!

[Next day] After another 10 hours of sleep, I was up and at it! I went down for breakfast, picking up a copy of the English-language China Daily newspaper at the front desk. I took my time reading that while I ate. As I had covered all the sites I'd planned, and it was very cold out again, I decided to stay

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indoors for the day and work and play as the mood took me. For the first hour, I pulled together all my hand-written notes from the last 10 days, and updated my work and play action lists, so I could see just what it was I needed to do and in what order. After that, I paused for a cup of tea.

For my final breakfast, I had noodles and stir-fried egg. I figured that if I'd stayed another day, I might have "gone native" and started eating breakfast with chopsticks. *Sacre bleu!*

While eating, I scanned through some articles in the *China Daily*, and came across the following text in relation to American diplomacy: "Historians know well that the US has never been half as idealistic as it likes to see itself; ... The spirit invoked by the Statue of Liberty, embracing the poor and huddled masses, still shines brighter than all the lights in New York City, but somewhere during the transition from an ordinary nation to an overextended military power, the US lost touch with its better angels and set itself on the road to being the new Rome." Hmm, some food for thought. "Bloody Communist propaganda," you say. But no, it was written by one Phillip J. Cunningham, a visiting fellow at Cornell University, New York.

At 11:30, I was on my way to the airport. It was clear that the driver was passed his racing prime. He didn't speed, he didn't tailgate, and for the most part, he drove quite safely. It truly was a miracle. And he adjusted the seat in front of me to give me maximum legroom. En-route, he even managed to stay in the same lane for minutes at a time. Out on the highway, I noticed a very strange phenomenon; numerous drivers were actually using their indicators to change lanes, although some of them were halfway into the adjacent lane when they turned theirs on. The sun shone brightly through the thin layer of smog, and we were at the airport in 30 minutes. I'd expected it to take at least an hour.

What to do with my 6:45 hours before departure? As it happened, the Air Canada check-in desk didn't open until three hours before flight time (at 3:45), and their customer service agent didn't arrive until 2 pm. And I couldn't get through to the business lounge until I'd checked in. I secured a luggage cart and proceeded to walk around the cavernous terminal looking for a place to "set up shop" for an extended period. I didn't need much, just a comfortable chair with a table and a power outlet (and maybe a hot tub, massage, and *café au lait* machine). Along the way, I found that the terminal provided free wifi internet access, but that required registration. I did so by scanning my passport in a machine, which then printed out my access username and password. I took an elevator up to a dining section in the hopes of finding a table at which to work, but found myself in an upscale restaurant area with lots of private dining and meeting rooms. So, I switched to the fast-food section on the other side of the terminal where I spied an electrical outlet near a spare table in Burger King's spacious eating area. I was operational in minutes.

After three hours of writing and editing, I packed my gear and headed to the check-in area and, lo and behold, it was open for business earlier than I expected. Check in went smoothly and quickly although I had visions of my return leg having been cancelled after the carrier and route change on the way out. I went through document control and then onto a train that took me to a satellite terminal. There, I went through passport control, security, and customs. My carrier, Air Canada, had reciprocal business lounge rights with Air China, and their lounge was close by. It was very large and nicely appointed with deep leather chairs all over the place along with quite a few sleeping rooms. I setup my computer at a table and sipped a cold glass of pink grapefruit juice. All the food on offer was awfully tempting, but I

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declined. It was a big step up from Burger King! I had about 1:45 hours before boarding time, so I worked on some documents I'd been writing. I made great progress.

At 5:45, I left the lounge to find a place to spend the last of my Yuan. In a duty-free shop, I spied some blocks of Milka chocolate with hazelnut. At 44 Yuan each they were no bargain, but my chocolate level was low. At the register, I managed to come up with only 85 Yuan, but the assistant accepted a US dollar bill to cover the difference.

I arrived at Gate E10 a few minutes before the scheduled boarding time, where I struck up a conversation with a Quebecois from Montreal. Soon afterward, we boarded Flight AC32, a nice new Boeing 777. There was no separate First Class, just a large Executive First Business section, which contained some 44 suites. I took up residence in Suite 4K, a starboard window in a 1x2x1 configuration. Each suite was angled at 45 degrees with the window suites pointed into the aisle. Each suite was appointed with all the facilities one might expect.

Once we pushed back from the gate, the pilot announced that flying time to Toronto would be 12½ hours, and that in Toronto it was -6C with light snow. We waited in line for takeoff for some time. Soon after we were airborne, the drinks service arrived followed by mixed nuts and a hot towel, much like on United's flights. I studied the menu making the hard choices. There was dinner, a mid-flight snack, and breakfast.

The appetizer was gravlax tartare timbale with marinated cucumber. What the heck is gravlax you may well ask. I did. (It's salmon.) That was accompanied by a green salad. The main course was a choice of beef, chicken, fish, or a Chinese pork dish. I went with the pan-fried breast of chicken in thyme jus with wild rice and Mediterranean vegetables, and boy was it good. I followed that with Camembert, cheddar, and Gouda cheese with water crackers and a good-sized glass of Portuguese port. Two nice tall cups of decaffeinated coffee chased it all down. Being somewhat disciplined I declined the chocolate lava cake and ice cream.

While I ate, I watched George Clooney in "The American." Although the story was rather slow, it was okay. By the time that ended, it was 10 pm, Beijing time, and we were 1,600 miles into the trip with 5,300 to go. We were flying at 33,000 feet at a ground speed of 583 mph. The outside temperature was a cool -61.6C. I set up my bed, put in my earplugs, and closed my eyes. After a while, I went off to sleep.

Some five hours later, I awoke feeling almost rested. It was 3:30 am Friday, Beijing time, and I set my clock back 13 hours, to 2:30 pm Thursday. According to the in-flight route map, we'd flown northeast from Beijing into Russia (north of North Korea), over the Sea of Okhotsk, the Arctic Circle, the North Bering Sea, just touching northern Alaska near Barrow. Then it was on to Yellowknife, North West Territories; Churchill, Manitoba (the polar bear capital of the world); and down to Toronto, Ontario. We had 2,000 miles to go in four hours. I sat back and watched "Takers" starring Matt Dillon.

As it was 6:30 am back in Beijing, our final meal was breakfast, even though it was 5:30 pm in Toronto. First up was a fruit plate, croissant with strawberry jam, and strong coffee. Then came an omelet with sausage, tomato, fried potatoes, and a floret of broccoli. After my sleep and movie, I really needed a big meal, not! But then it would also be my supper.

I filled in my customs form. Those nosey Canadians wanted to know if I was bringing in any firearms or other weapons, such as a switchblade, Mace, or pepper spray. (Does a Chinese-made AK47 count, I wondered. Probably.) As the form was bilingual, I had a little French lesson.

2.9 Overnight in Toronto

As we approached Toronto, I sang along and tapped my feet to the 70's channel on XM radio: Blood, Sweat, and Tears; Chicago; John Denver; and so on. We had a textbook landing and soon I was through immigration and customs waiting for my luggage. Along the way, I rode a 300 meter-long, and very fast-moving, sidewalk. I phoned my hotel for a pickup, which took 30 minutes to arrive. It was very cold out with light snow on the ground. I was in my room by 8:30, and after a nice hot shower, I handled email until lights out at 10 o'clock.

[Next day] After four hours of sleep in a very comfortable bed, I was wide-awake. I ate the last of my emergency food and then watched TV. By 5 am I was checked out and waiting for the 5:20 airport shuttle. Seven other guests rode with me to Lester B. Pearson International airport (YYZ), named for Canada's 14th Prime Minister and Nobel Peace Prize Laureate.

Despite the early hour, the airport was quite busy. I checked in and pre-cleared US immigration and customs. On the way to my gate, I stopped off for a piping hot chai tea latte. At the gate, I chatted with some fellow passengers. Later, a passenger came on the PA system to announce that his wife was having a birthday and he'd like to sing "Happy Birthday" to her publicly. Of course, we all sang along. They had just gotten married and were headed to Vietnam for their honeymoon.

Our originally scheduled plane had been replaced by a bigger one, so I got a seat with more legroom. Don't you just love that when that happens! I was first aboard the Embraer 170 jet and settled into Seat 3A. We pushed back from the gate and taxied over to a concrete apron where something happened that I'd not experienced in all my years of flying. Our plane was de-iced. Two large trucks pulled up, one by each wing, and a large cherry-picker platform raised up from which each operator hosed down a wing and then coated it with some bright lime-green liquid. The whole process took 30 minutes. The 90-minute flight down to IAD was smooth and uneventful, and we landed around 10 am to find light snow on the ground. After a short wait for my luggage and a taxi ride, it was good to be home.

3. February 2022, “Oh, the Things that I have Written”

I've been writing for publication for nearly 40 years. What started as a sideline in 1983, developed into a mainstream business in the 1980s and 1990s, and around 2010 became my primary source of income, which until then had mostly come from consulting and training. Considering that I failed Years-11 and 12 English in high school, my writing career was quite unexpected. In fact, even now, there are days when it doesn't seem real. After all, “Published authors are other people! How did I ever become one?” Not only do I like writing, but for the most part, I actually enjoy it! And when you get paid for doing something you enjoy it's not really work.

For some background on my writing career (with tongue-in-cheek commentary), see “[Rex on English and Writing](#),” a piece I wrote when I launched my blog in December 2009.

My guess is that most writers started out as avid readers; I know I certainly did. In that vein, take a look at my essay “[Books by My Bed](#)” from October 2010.

In this essay, I'll describe my efforts with regard to writing, editing, publishing, and proofing.

3.1 Getting Started

In late 1982, I bought my first computer, an [IBM PC](#), a year after that model debuted. Knowing that once I got my permanent residency [Green Card](#) I would go into business for myself, I set about teaching myself various computer-related topics. Very quickly I identified the [C programming language](#) as the topic on which I would base my future. [In hindsight, it turned out to be an excellent choice.]

Several months into teaching myself this language, being naïve like most first-time authors, I thought the world was ready to read my writings on the subject. After all, thought I, “What better teacher to have than someone with an enquiring mind and who just learned the subject matter three months earlier?”

At the time, there were two mainstream IBM PC-related publications: [PC Magazine](#) and [Softalk for the IBM PC](#). I sent off letters to the editors of both, and not long afterwards, the editor from Softalk, Craig, called me to say that he was interested to talk further. Here's the (lightly edited) initial letter I wrote to him in August 1983:

Dear Sir or Madam,

I have been a subscriber and avid reader of your magazine “Softalk for the IBM-PC,” since its inception. I would like to contribute to your magazine, and I feel I have the necessary equipment and ability to do so. I have written a significant amount of end-user documentation, and designed and conducted many education classes for all levels of computer users, as well as designing and coding systems. One particular area I would be interested in is reviewing software products.

I own an IBM-PC with 64K and 2 double sided disk drives, MX-80 printer with Graftrax, IBM monochrome screen, PGS HX-12 color screen, and FTG light pen. Software includes PC-DOS V1.1 and V2.0, CP/M-86, BASIC interpreter, small-C:PC (a subset of 'C'), the IBM MACRO assembler, and the CALC-86 spreadsheet.

I use this configuration for consulting, tutoring and for personal research and education in various areas including compiler and language design; and interactive and color graphics, particularly as it applies to computer aided education. I plan to add hardware and software on a regular basis.

Please advise me if you can use my services in some capacity. I look forward to the possibility of contributing to your fine magazine.

Yours Sincerely, Rex Jaeschke

As I was an untested author, Craig assigned me several products to review to see my writing style and my ability to deliver on time and to a certain word count. Once I passed those tests, he committed to a 3-part series, The C Spot, that introduced the C language to readers. At the end of that trial run, I continued with a monthly column.

Magazines often have a 90-day lead time; that is, the author needs to submit an article 90 days prior to the publication date. When my first column installment finally appeared in print, I had an idea: "Wouldn't it be great to syndicate that column to a second, non-competing publication with some adjustments/customization for that second publication's audience?" I did just that, and my writing career had begun! Not being one to sit around and wait for things to happen, within 18 months, I'd dreamed up an idea for a new publication, which launched in 1985 with me as editor.

3.2 Magazine Columns and Features

During the 1980s and 1990s, I wrote a number of regular (typically monthly) columns, each around 3,000 words. These included:

- *Softalk for the IBM*: C columnist. As mentioned above, this is where I got my start. Thanks very much, Craig, for taking a chance on me. Unfortunately, the publication ceased operation within a year of my joining.
- *DEC Professional*: C/C++ editor of the column "Let's C Now," with final articles appearing in *Digital Systems Journal*. This was the magazine to which I syndicated my Softalk column. I spent 12 years working with them. Thanks, Linda, for the big hand up!
- *The Programmers Journal*: C columnist. For one issue, I wrote a piece discussing whether a programmer should learn C. The title was "To C or not to C; that is the question," which, of course, paraphrased Shakespeare's famous line, "To be or not to be," and the front cover contained stylized versions of the letter C with a Shakespearean art theme.
- *The C Users Journal*: columnist
- *NT Developer*: contributing editor
- *Enterprise NT*: columnist
- *VC++ Professional*: contributing editor
- *Computer PR Update*: This short-lived sojourn took me into a very different world, that of public relations. While it was a learning experience, what I learned most was that that direction was *not* for me!

At one time, I had three monthly and one quarterly column on different aspects of the same general topic, C. That was definitely challenging.

There is nothing quite like a looming deadline to get the adrenaline going! On more than a few occasions, I had writer's block up until a few days before a deadline. (However, I never missed a deadline!) Then, the creative juices would start flowing, and away I'd write, often finishing with a piece that had to be broken into two, and sometimes three, parts, which then gave me a break for the next month or two. Sometimes I got creative even without having a deadline, so was able to create a stockpile of spare articles. However, on several occasions, other contributors failed to deliver, and my editor would ask for an extra piece. In one extreme case, most features in an issue were mine!

When writing about computer programming, one device I learned early on reinforced the old adage, "A picture is worth a thousand words." In my case, the visual was a computer program rather than a picture. After spending hours dreaming up and refining just the right program example(s), it was easy to fill in the supporting narrative.

Occasionally, I'd write a one-off feature for one of various magazines, including the long-revered *Doctor Dobbs Journal*.

3.3 A Newspaper Column

I've always been a great believer in looking for opportunities and then "making something happen." To that end, quite early in my writing career, I proposed to a local newspaper, the *Fairfax Journal*, that I write a weekly column on home/small business computing. They agreed, and I did that for a year or so.

Each week, I had to introduce a topic, say something useful about it, and conclude it, all in 600 words without being able to rely on readers having read any previous installments. That was the hardest writing I ever did, and it paid the least, by far!

Before the first installment was published, the newspaper sent a freelance photographer to my home to take a photo of me that would appear next to my column. Was he content with a quick headshot or two? Oh no, we spent several hours with me standing inside and outside in different locations and poses with him shooting several rolls of film. The final shot chosen was printed in black and white, and was a closeup of my head. Any of the shots would have sufficed!

3.4 Books

Once my column with *DEC Professional* had been running for several years, I proposed to that publisher that we make several collections of the articles in book form. The timing was right, as they were launching a book-publishing division. The end result was a 2-volume set. Some years later, I produced a new edition designed to support my growing seminar business, and then a third edition followed.

In late 1984, I joined the US committee that was developing the first standard for the C language. This language had been used to write programs that can be ported (moved, that is) across dissimilar systems. As a result, my book, "Portability and the C Language," came out in 1989.

In 1992, I wrote "The Dictionary of Standard C." Later that year, during a lecture tour to St. Petersburg, Russia, I funded a pair of academics to do a Russian-language translation, as their countrymen were eager for technical information. Later, a Japanese publisher produced a version in that language. It was

interesting to see how the publishers wrote my name in the [Cyrillic alphabet](#) and using Japanese [kanji](#) and [kana](#) characters.

Not everything I touched turned to gold, however. In fact, several of my very early book efforts were quite forgettable even though more than a few copies were sold!

[If you should ever be tempted to write a book, once you get past the egotistical reasons for doing so, you'll very quickly find that the return on investment for most authors is less than the minimum wage! After a few thousand dollars advance payment, royalties might be 15% of the wholesale price, which is often discounted by 60% from the suggested retail price. As such, the author royalty on a \$20 book is around \$1.20.]

3.5 Starting a New Publication

So, after writing features, columns, and a book or two, what to do next? Why not start a publication and become an editor in the process?

I dreamed up the idea of a quarterly publication, *The C Journal*, I found a publisher to handle the production and business end of things, and I appointed myself editor. I also wrote a regular column. (While most editors have formal training and work their way up the ranks to that position, I was a man in a hurry. I simply jumped in at the top and made it up as I went. After all, "How hard could it possibly be?" Sometimes you can plan too much!)

As a member of the US C standards committee, the timing was right, the publication was well-received, and it ran for three years before being sold. The new owners published bi-monthly and then monthly, and I continued as a columnist with them for some years.

3.6 Writing Smart

One of my two business rules is "**Never ever** hire anybody!" and I've been wildly successful at that. However, when working alone for oneself, one's income tends to be tied to the amount one can charge per hour and the number of hours worked. In general, one cannot build a product that can be sold over and over without staff and an organization. However, that isn't so with [intellectual property](#) in the form of writing if one takes the right steps. Soon after I started writing for publication, I wrote my agreements to give my publishers first world serial rights to my materials, and to use those materials in reprints and collections later on. Instead of giving them all the rights and then begging to get some of them back later on, I went the other way. They got what they needed then, and I kept the rest.

How then to generate and reuse material? By design, my research for articles merged very nicely with my work on the standards committee, as well as my experience in teaching seminars, and writing books. All four activities reinforced each other giving me more "bang for the buck" for my time and expenses.

3.7 Learning about Typesetting and Layout

Once PCs became available, it was only a matter of time before desktop publishing followed, although that needed some serious computer horsepower, higher-resolution graphics screens, and laser printers to really take off.

Even before I got into layout and typesetting, I used to add typesetting codes to the articles for several columns, to indicate bold, italic, and such. Eventually, I adopted the [LaTeX](#) system, and with that and a laser printer, I could generate very nice-looking documents. In fact, under contract, I produced some reference cards on various topics for clients using that system. I also published a quarterly journal (see later) and my early seminar manuscripts.

Around 2000, I took on a major consulting project with Microsoft, which involved editing a 500-page specification using Word. [I continue in that role 22 years later.] As such, my long association with Word began. In 2007, I helped write, and took on the editorship of, a 6,500-page specification for Microsoft's Office suite that included Word's new docx file format. That specification was also written using Word. Around 2008, I started converting all my seminar materials and some of my books to Word format.

For practical advice about getting the most from your word processor, see my essay, "[Making Good-Looking Documents](#)," from December 2011.

3.8 Becoming a Publisher

To reinforce a skill that one is trying to learn usually requires an application for that skill. So, in 1987, it was time to launch another new publication, but this time with me as publisher as well as editor. And so was born *The Jaeschke Letter*. It contained information about my consulting activities and various technical tips, and it was circulated in paper form to my current and prospective consulting clients. In 1989, I got my first email account, after which I distributed issues electronically.

In March 1989, I launched another publication, the *Journal of C Language Translation*, a quarterly of at least 64 pages, for which I charged US\$235/year. Yes, it was expensive! I was publisher and editor. After three years, I handed that over to another person who published issues for three more years. It certainly was a labor of love!

3.9 Proofing Manuscripts for Publishers

Once I became established as an author, I started getting requests from publishers of computer science textbooks to proof early and final drafts of books they had under contract. Most were by first-time authors, and more than a few of them were by university professors who had turned their (often not very good) teaching notes into a book. Once I got the hang of things, I was able to proof a manuscript in a relatively short time and actually make it worthwhile financially.

I well remember one instance where it was clear that this professor had taken a book on one topic and replaced various things to suit a new title. It was riddled with errors, which, of course, I pointed out. It took quite a while for the publisher to believe me. After all, four or five teaching colleagues of the author had already given it their blessing, so who was I to question that? I persisted, and after the

publisher got another non-armchair expert to review the text, I was found to be the only reviewer who was actually doing his job!

Sadly, the number of titles on the market has very little to do with their quality; it's all about marketing and placement with booksellers. As I discovered, the best way to improve one's text is to find one's own reviewers.

3.10 Unpublished Works

When I started writing columns, the topics were somewhat random, and each stood alone. However, over time, I developed a plan for each series, which eventually led to turning that series into a manuscript suitable for use in a 3–5-day seminar environment. And so, my seminar business was born, and as I got experience teaching each course, I corrected and improved the teaching materials, and added problems for students to solve. As a result, I finished up with a lot of printed material that was only ever made available to paid customers attending my public and private seminars.

3.11 Discovering Essays, My Blog

In 1995, when my wife went back to university, she had to take an English class, and she chose to do it on a compressed schedule—eight days over four consecutive weekends—at a local Community College. Not having taken university-level English either, I decided to tag along. As it happened, the theme was essays. For me it was a whole new form of writing and as well as liking to read essays I found I was quite good at writing them.

By 2007, printed magazines were getting slimmer by the issue with many being discontinued or moved to on-line editions only. And with the availability of so much stuff on the internet for free, the opportunities to continue paid writing for publication like I had been doing pretty much dried up.

In mid-2009, I came up with the idea of starting a blog, on which I'd post a 6–8-page essay each month. The subject matter would not be about my work, per se, however. Of course, that is the very blog on which this essay was first published. It debuted in December of that year and has continued ever since.

3.12 Learning English Grammar

Having spent half of my elementary school years in a one-teacher school with seven grades being somehow taught in parallel, it is easy to see why I had few grammar skills when I started high school. Of course, by then, one was expected to have said skills, so they were not taught there. Fifteen years after I finished high school and started writing for publication, I still thought that *grammar* was the person married to *grandpa*! Imagine my surprise some years later when I learned that *grammar* was not in fact married to *grandpa*; they just lived together “without the benefit of clergy” and practiced conjugation.

English grammar can be an awfully dry subject to learn, and I was teaching myself. However, from time to time, I really got in the mood, and the first of my essays on English grammar debuted in July 2013 (English – Part 3: Nouns), followed by November 2013 (English – Part 4: Pronouns), November 2014 (English – Part 5: Adjectives), April 2016 (English – Part 6: Verbs), and October 2017 (English – Part 7: Adverbs). One fine day, I just might get around to covering prepositions, conjunctions, and interjections.

Who knew that at the grand old age of 60 I'd be writing essays on English grammar and playing grammar policeman? It really is never too late!

3.13 Writing as a Business

In December 1984, I started work on a committee producing a 450-page formal specification for a computer programming language. All of a sudden, the use of shall vs. should, and must vs. may became very important.

In 2000, I took on my first consulting project as an editor of a similar document for a different programming language. I started with an almost-complete 500-page specification, so was mostly involved with modifying it over the next six years. [In 2022, I'm still expanding it!] In 2003, I took on a similar project, but this time, I started with a blank sheet, and had to manage the growth and evolution of what became a 300-page specification as well as contribute substantial passages to it. Then in 2005, I started again from scratch, contributing 600-pages to what became a 6,500-page specification, which I am still managing in 2022. In more recent years, I've written several 200-page formal specifications for other programming languages. [One was for Facebook, and covered the [PHP language](#). The other was for Microsoft, and covered their [PowerShell](#) tool.]

3.14 Conclusion

While I now have a lot of experience in the writing and publishing world, there is always more to learn, and new technology to deal with. I started with a simple line text editor on my IBM PC, and progressed to a full-screen text editor, through a series of ever-smarter editors that understood certain programming languages, committed in a big way to Microsoft Word, and more recently to using [markdown](#) on [GitHub](#), a very popular platform for collaborative text creation and editing. Who knows what the next big editing tool will be, but we can be sure there will be one!

The choice of words can make a big difference, and in my world, I often deal with people I never meet in person and whose first (or even second) language is *not* English. As such, I have gotten in the habit of "getting it right" even in casual conversation. I started to realize this one day when I caught myself about to end a spoken sentence with a preposition (something frowned upon by many purists), and rearranged the word order in my brain before I actually spoke it. And as far as the written word goes, I'm a huge fan of the rule set down by [Strunk and White](#), "Less is more!" Basically, don't say in 20 words what you can say in 10! For example, "At this point in time, ..." can and should be replaced with "Now, ..." Politicians take note!

So, what else is there for me to do with regards to writing? Although I've never written fiction, a few years ago, I was lying awake in rural Germany with jetlag in the very early hours of the morning, and an idea for a series came to me. After an hour or so of thinking about it, I got out of bed and started writing down all my ideas lest I forget them. It centered on an animated object with a clever name, whose adventures followed my travels. The idea was that each installment would be no more than a page and would be anchored by a photo of that object in some particular situation. Over the next week, I refined the idea quite a bit, but once I got back home to the "real world" the idea was "put on hold" where it has remained ever since. Perhaps I'll revisit it on a cold and rainy pandemic day!

I can honestly say that while I know some general (and R-rated) limericks, I have never had much of an appreciation for poetry. However, I have long been able to invent rhymes and song lyrics. On several, very rare occasions, I even managed to write what turned out to be a coherent poem. Here's a sample:

The Turning Point

A friend once said that life was hard
And man was born to thirst.
For power and love and knowledge
But only then at first.

For as he found the secrets
That unlocked his mystery door,
He surely must be blinded
By the treasures held in store.

And here's a humorous one I wrote for my sister on the occasion of her 50th birthday:

Happy Birthday, Sis!

As you get close to fifty
Things really aren't so nifty.
If you'll give me a minute, I'll explain
Your bum it starts dragin'
And your bosoms they start sagin'
And your hemorrhoids really give pain.

Arthritis sets in and your memory gets dim
And the bags 'neath your eyes start to sag.
And you spend half the day in the bog up the way
'Cos your personal plumbing's gone bad.

I know this sounds awful but that's aging you know.
We all have to do it my dear.
It happens really regular (like you used to be)
And it progresses a little each year.

So, the best advice I can say
Is to pass wind twice a day
And ignore all the gossip you hear.
There's more problems in store on the way to three score.
Which, by the way, will be in ten years!

Pulitzer Prize for Poetry, look out!

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For the past 40-odd years, I've travelled a great deal, and very early on, I got in the habit of keeping a travel diary, initially in paper form. Edited versions of more than a few of these have ended up as essays in this blog with titles of the form, "Travel – Memories of" I've also produced an annual newsletter for friends and family around the world. For some years, that was also done in audio form.

Early in 2021, just after I turned 67, I started thinking about the future of my intellectual property, especially beyond my lifetime. When one dies, does that material just get lost forever? In an effort to not have that happen, for the stuff I can sell, I'm investigating doing that. And for that which still has value, but has no sale value (like my recently revised 1989 book), I'm looking at making it freely available on some website.

Oh, just in case you have been thinking about writing a book, YES, it is exciting when you first see your name on a book in a bookstore!

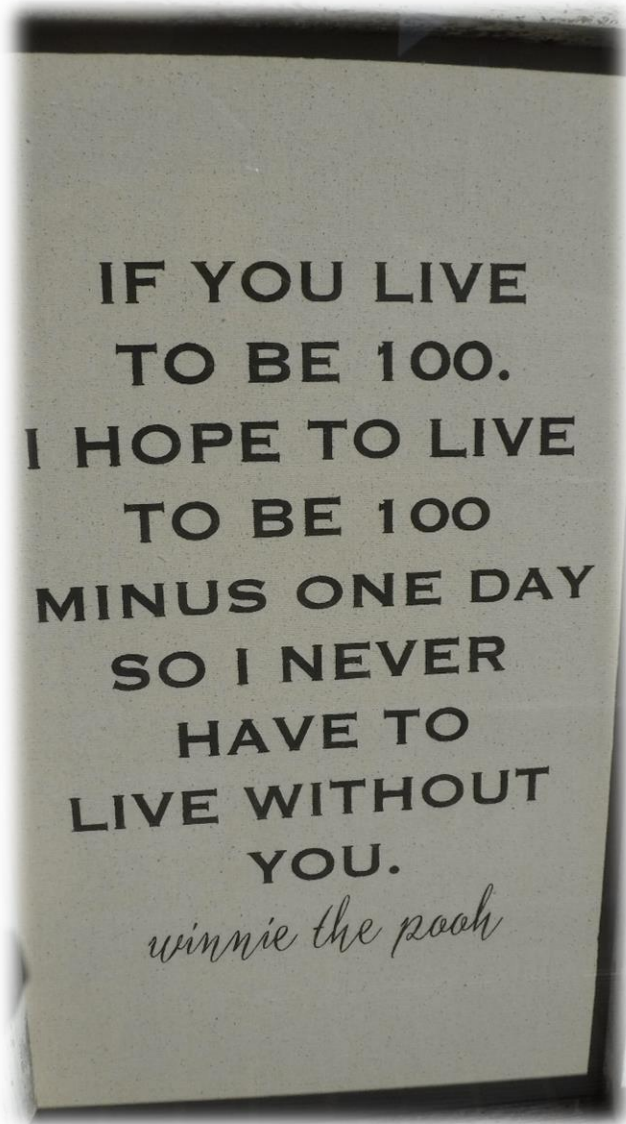
4. March 2022, "Signs of Life: Part 27"

From time to time during my travels, I come across signs that I find interesting for one reason or another. Sometimes, they contain clever writing, are humorous, or remind me of some place or event. Here are some from a trip to Frederick, Maryland, USA, during an ice-storm in January!



After some jerking and jiving, you can sample the jerked chicken.

Sweet words from that great philosopher, Winnie the Pooh.



There we were dancing cheek to cheek among the clothes racks!



I don't actually know how good a housekeeper a squirrel might make, but I'll take the company's word that this is a positive association.

BTW, did you know that a squirrel's nest is called a drey?



An artsy sign on a restaurant that has food for the discriminating palate.



I like spicy Mexican food, but if the expression on the skull is anything to go by, this place has it way too hot!



What looks like an innocent sign at a produce market actually turns out to be a take-off of the Bremen Town Musicians: a rooster atop a cat, on a dog, on a donkey, from the Brothers Grim fairy tale.



Does she or doesn't she? Perhaps we'll never know!



I went looking for this place but when I got to the address, it wasn't there!



While this was indeed an auto repair place, it was a non-profit one intended to "Provide Low-Cost Reliable Transportation & Repairs To Low-Income Families."



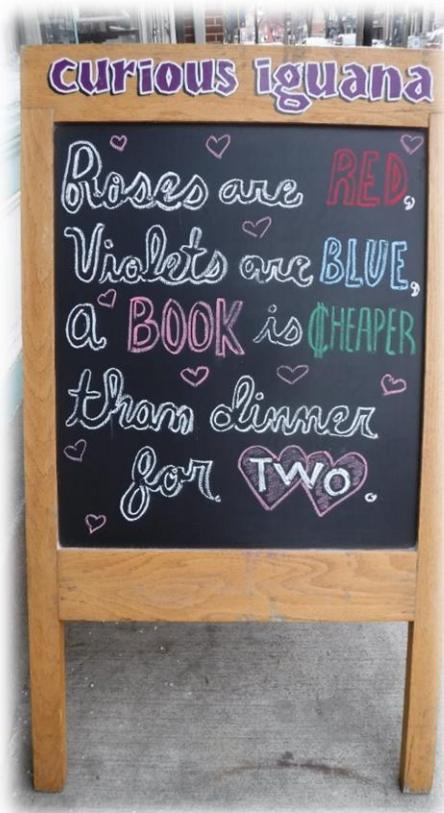
Hmm! It's hard to imagine getting service at a barber that is not live or authentic!



Now there's an offer you probably don't want to accept.



Perhaps one could choke on a slice!



Being a non-recovering bookaholic, I very much enjoyed this bookstore, which did indeed have a number of large iguanas inside. However, it was hard to tell if they were curious.

HOOTCH & BANTER

Just the place for a drink and some witty conversation.

smooch!
S T U D I O

There is no kissing and telling at this makeup store.

5. April 2022, “Travel: Memories of Prague and Eastern Germany”

It was March, and I had two business meetings in Europe 10 days apart, and it didn't make sense to come back home between them, so I thought, “Could I possibly find something to do in Europe for 10 days?” Of course, the answer was, “Yes!” And then I thought, “Why not add some extra personal time to the end as well?” And so, my trip would last four weeks. I'd start in Prague, the Czech Republic, with four days of work, then head to Eastern Germany for 10 days of play visiting several friends, hop on over to London, England, for three more work days, and then head to rural England for a final week of play. I had several offers from friends to come along and carry my bags! However, I declined, taking instead my stuffed toy caterpillar (Mr. C) and several imaginary friends.

5.1 Heading Out

I had a nice, easy morning. I got my final email fix, packed my gear, and headed out around 11:15 am. In Reston, I visited my friend Cathy at whose place I left my car. Right on time, my Pakistani cab driver arrived to take me to the airport, where I checked in and cleared security without delay.

As I approached the information counter near the inter-terminal train station, I saw an elderly volunteer who looked quite interesting, so I stopped to chat. She was 85 years old and very much enjoyed her job helping passengers with their questions. She'd had 125 queries on her shift so far. I caught the train to Terminal C where I went into United Airlines' Business lounge to get some emergency rations and a newspaper.

At Gate 14, things were very busy due to the weather delays caused on the previous day, and, consequently, the flight was full. However, boarding the Boeing 777 went very smoothly, and Flight UA989 took off on time. I had one of the best seats on the plane, at a large exit door. My 20-something seatmate was a United flight attendant who was on a private trip headed to Linz, Austria, to visit her boyfriend's family. She was a very interesting person, and we talked at length of many things. For supper, I chose the pasta in heavy-cream sauce with salad and bread. The mango sorbet dessert was extra good. I declined to watch any video, and, after a short read, I lay back in my seat and tried to sleep.

[Next day] Although I'd closed my eyes for several hours, I probably slept for no more than an hour, which is par for the course on an overnight flight to Europe in Economy Class. We landed at FRA on time in light fog. After a flawless flight, the big plane parked out in mid-field, the crew opened both the front and rear doors, and we walked down steep stairs to waiting buses. Then we were taken on a tour of the airport before pulling up at a terminal. After I cleared passport control, where I got my 5th stamp in my new US passport (the most recent one being when I left Munich, Germany, two months earlier), I headed for my connecting gate. Near that, I spied a Lufthansa Senator's Lounge, so I stopped by for an unnecessary snack of scrambled egg, sausage, and bratwurst with ketchup, all washed down with a steaming-hot cup of milk coffee. I also got an English-language newspaper.

After a short wait at Gate 50, a full flight of passengers boarded buses to an Airbus A319 parked out in mid-field. As I had a seat in the very last row, I entered through the rear door where a smiling young German flight attendant welcomed me on board. Lufthansa Flight LH1392 was 15 minutes late

departing. The flight lasted about 45 minutes during which time we were served a cookie and drink. I read a newspaper and worked on a Sudoku puzzle.

5.2 Arrival in Prague

We had a smooth landing at PRG, and having cleared immigration in Frankfurt, it was an open border into the Czech Republic. All signs were in Czech, English, German, and Russian. Now I'd recently changed banks and had used my ATM card several times before leaving home just to make sure it worked. But, don't you know, when I tried to use it to get cash, I was rejected. I tried three times, certain I had the right PIN, and was locked out. Don't you just hate that when that happens! Being a seasoned traveler, I had several backup cards, so I used one of those to relieve the machine of CZK 4,000 (koruna is Czech for "crown"). The exchange rate was CZK20 to US\$1.

By that time, my luggage arrived, and I headed to where there used to be a desk to buy a ticket on the bus to downtown. Well, don't you know, that service had been discontinued since my previous visit without any consultation with me! But, as you may recall from my previous writings, my travel (indeed life) motto is "Always have a Plan B, even for Plan B!" At the visitors' information desk, a polite young woman informed me that a new service now ran from the airport to the main train station downtown, departing every half hour, and she'd be happy to sell me a ticket for CZK44 (\$2.20), an exceptionally cheap price. Of course, by the time I got to the bus stop, a bus had just left, so I had a 25-minute wait. Although it was quite cold out, I had on thick socks and warm clothing. While waiting, I chatted with a mother and son from Southampton, England.

Although the bus was adequate, it wasn't quite as nice as the one it replaced, hence the lower fare. After the 20-minute ride, it was a 10-minute walk from the train station to my hotel, which was exactly where I'd left it on my last trip in June 2016. It was 11:30, check-in wasn't until 15:00, and my room wasn't ready, bummer! I'd discovered my mistake regarding the ATM card, so tried again with the correct PIN, but it rejected me saying I was "locked out," having used up my three tries. To stay awake, I walked the neighborhood getting programs for music concerts and getting some sunshine. I stopped by my local supermarket where I browsed at length looking at all the items, packaging, and language. As you might expect for this part of the world, many products are sold across borders. For example, the bag of potato chips I bought was labelled in both Czech and Slovak.

Soon after I returned to the hotel, my room was ready, so I boarded the high-tech, glass-enclosed elevator (AU: lift) and went up to my room. After a long, hot shower, I felt decent, and I unpacked while sampling my 4% whole milk, potato chips, and tropical juice. To help with jetlag, it is best to get on local time as soon as possible, so I decided to try that, although I could easily have crashed. As I'm always looking at signage for photos for my blog series, I noticed the unusual "Do not Disturb" sign hanging behind my door. On closer inspection, it read, "CALM. Seeking Peace; no service needed," which was quite clever.

I wiled away the afternoon working on personal and business things until 18:45, when I dressed in my Japanese yukata and slippers, and went down to the health club in the basement. There I had two 15-minute sessions in a very hot sauna with cold showers before, in-between, and after. It was quite invigorating. Lights out at 19:45, asleep at 19:46!

[I had my first visit to Prague in 2009, and this was my sixth one. All of them were for business, for the same committee, and at the same meeting place. So, I'd gotten to know the city and the neighborhoods where I stayed and walked to work.]

[Next day] The bed and super-soft pillow were Heavenly, and I slept like a baby for five hours, waking at 12:45 am. As I was wide awake, I got up, boiled the electric kettle, and had a cup of soup and some cheese and crackers. Then I took care of new email (it never stops arriving) and started work on this diary. I then slept another five hours. At breakfast, I unexpectedly met a colleague, so we ate together and talked some business. Back in my room, I worked for several hours before having a 3-hour nap. Then it was back to work before supper in my room.

At 19:00, I arrived at the health center where I was met by Helene, a trim, athletic-looking young mother of two small children. She invited me into her private room, asked me to disrobe and lie face-down on the table, after which she vigorously exorcized all the demons from my body. Yes, Dear Reader, I had signed up for a 1-hour Swedish massage! To show how serious she was, first she knelt on the table overtop of me, and then she stood, both times putting all her weight on her hands which she used to "walk" up and down my spine. We chatted a bit, and I learned that before she had kids, she enjoyed hiking in remote places, such as Iceland, Uzbekistan, and Kyrgyzstan. She worked hard for more than an hour. I then spent an hour rotating between a cold shower and the steaming sauna. It had been a great first day in-country, and very soon after I got into bed, I was asleep.

It was a very poor night for sleeping; I had only a few hours. For the rest of the time, I lay in the dark, thinking about sleeping! When my alarm went off at 07:45, I got up against my will. Outside, it was snowing steadily, and the temperature was just above freezing. I had the usual, very nice buffet fare for breakfast.

5.3 Getting Down to Business

At 09:30, a colleague and I set off for our meeting place, making sure to not injure ourselves on the slick snow-covered sidewalks. The group had a busy and productive day, and as usual, while the others went out for lunch, as meeting secretary, I snacked in the room and brought the meeting minutes up to date and worked on action items. I got very tired around 13:00, but got a second wind at 16:00. After the meeting ended, I worked on administrative issues for another hour.

The snow had stopped, and light rain fell, making the snow slushy and sidewalks even more slippery. At my local supermarket, I picked up some emergency rations and a nice salad for supper in my room. I ate while alternating between three English-language TV news channels.

I headed down to the health club very much looking forward to more sessions in the sauna, but that was not to be. It appeared the staff had forgotten to fire up the unit, so I returned to my room dejected. My solace lay in chocolate!

[Next day] The ritual for Day 2 of my meeting was much like Day 1. On the way back to my hotel, I swung by the main train station to buy a ticket to Germany. I couldn't get one to my final destination, so got one to Berlin.

At 18:30, three colleagues met me in my hotel lobby, and we walked to a restaurant nearby for supper. I had some nice pork medallions with fried eggs and roasted garlic sauce, all washed down with a jug of lemonade with some exotic flavor and lots of small pieces of mint. I shared a dessert.

Apparently, the porter of my hotel was out sick for a few days, and as he oversaw the sauna, it wasn't running for the second night in a row. It is so hard to get good help these days!

[Next day] It was hard getting out of bed, but I made it down to breakfast. The day was clear and warmer than previously. We started the final day of my meeting at 09:00, and worked steadily until 16:30, with a break for lunch. I almost fell asleep mid-afternoon as jetlag overcame me. Afterwards, I took a colleague back to my hotel where we worked in the Business Lounge.

At 18:30, long-time Czech friend Robin met me in my hotel lobby, and we went out for supper. [I met him 20-odd years previous when I hosted him in Reston, Virginia. And each time I've come to Prague, we've gotten together.]

5.4 By Train to Germany

[Next day] Travel Day! Sleep wise, it was a very poor night. After five days in-country, I was still nowhere near getting on local time, bugger! When my alarm went off just after 06:00, I struggled out of bed and had a long, hot shower. At that hour, the breakfast room was almost empty, and there were more staff than diners! I made a snack "to go." Back in my room, I packed the last of my gear then checked-out at the front desk. Then I walked out into a cold, but very sunny, morning pulling my luggage over the rough tile and cobblestone sidewalk, the wheels making lots of noise as I did so, waking the neighborhood. If I had to be up this early, then so should everybody else!

The main train station was quite busy when I arrived at 07:45. Interestingly, platform assignments were not announced until about 20 minutes before departure, so like everyone else, I was standing watching the Departures board. Finally, the platform for the Euro City 176 "Johannes Brahms" train, to Hamburg, Germany, was displayed, and I headed off to Platform 7, the furthest away, where I waited in the cold open air. The train arrived five minutes before its departure time. There were two First-Class carriages, both at the end, and I was at the back of the final one, in a glassed-off area of 20-odd seats, all to myself. Was I being isolated from the other passengers, or they from me? I had a table, electric power, and free wifi connection. I was accompanied by my very colorful stuffed caterpillar, Mr. C., who was sticking out of the front of my shirt.

Although the train was painted and decorated in the Czech railway livery, the company seemed to have an association with the German railway company, Deutsche Bahn (DB), and the paper ReisePlan (itinerary) placed on each seat was written in Czech and German only. Soon after we departed, a uniformed waiter came through offering complimentary newspapers and bottles of water, and taking orders for food and drinks. Although the train was headed to Hamburg, I was only going as far as Berlin. There were just a few stops along the way. The train was very quiet with none of that clackety-clack noise! When the conductor came through, I had questions about buying a ticket in Berlin for the rest of my journey. However, he didn't speak English, so I had to dig deep to find enough German words and grammar to sound halfway intelligible. It was hard work, but I managed it.

As we went north, we came to the [River Elbe](#), which we followed all the way to the German border, and on into Dresden. [The Elbe runs all the way to Hamburg and out to the North Sea.] I'd been to Dresden once, in February 2013, when I'd trained up from Prague for a meeting with a university professor, and had an overnight stay. As the city was buried in snow back then, I saw very little of it.

As we progressed, trees were taking on some green buds, and fields showed small green plants pushing through the soil. There were occasional groups of wind turbines. In-between working on personal things on my laptop, I watched the world go by out the window as we raced along at 160 kph (100 mph).

As we approached Berlin, next to the train line, there were many garden plots, most with some sort of structure ranging from a primitive hut to a summer cottage. After a very comfortable and uneventful 4:20 hours, we arrived at Berlin's main train station. A few days before, I'd studied my options for the connecting trip. It was a bit complicated and involved two train changes, with tight changes with little room for delays. I had 30 minutes to buy a ticket and get to the right platform, and I had visions of a very long line at the ticket counter. As it happens, the Travel Gods were on my side. After riding escalators up three flights and taking a wrong turn, I was helped by a very efficient man who gave me a printed itinerary and then handed me off to a young woman at the next counter to issue me a ticket. As it happened, the middle leg of the itinerary I'd planned had been cancelled, so the first two legs had to be changed. And as half of the travel time would be in single-service trains only, there was no point in paying for a First-Class ticket.

Everything went so smoothly that I was on my first platform with 10 minutes to spare. Don't you just love that when that happens! The first leg took all of two minutes and involved riding an S-Bahn train one stop. There I descended way down underground to another platform where I waited 10 minutes for another S-Bahn that took me to Oranienburg. We stopped at all 16 stations along the way! There, I rode the elevator (lift) with an elderly Canadian couple from Vancouver. Interestingly, the station had platforms numbered 20–30 only; there was no indication as to what happened to numbers 1–19! After a 15-minute wait, I boarded a very comfortable double-decker carriage and sat at a window downstairs. Once again, I watched the countryside go by and, from time to time, I wondered what it had been like to live there in [East German](#) times when this area was behind the [Iron Curtain](#).

5.5 A Visit with Belinda

About 2:30 hours after leaving Berlin, I arrived in [Altentreptow](#) where Belinda, a friend of 20-odd years, was waiting for me. [I'd last seen her when I visited four years earlier, on the way back from western Poland. We'd first met when I hosted her in the US.]

Back at her house, we talked of many things, and as she teaches English, we soon got out an English dictionary and an English/German/English dictionary to help us in our discussions. We had a nice supper of beef goulash with boiled potatoes, and slices of tomato with mozzarella cheese and basil. Surprisingly, given my lack of sleep the previous night, I didn't start yawning until 20:00, so I capitalized on that by going to bed at 20:30. As Travel Days go, it had gone very well.

[Next day] I slept soundly until 03:00, but try as I might to get back to sleep, once I got a new writing-project idea in my head, I got very creative, and after two hours of brainstorming in the dark, I got up

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and started writing up the idea on my laptop. After that, I brought this diary up to date by which time it was 08:00. I went back to bed and slept until 11:30 after which I had a light brunch.

Around 13:00, we headed out in overcast weather with a very faint mist. We drove 90 minutes to the Baltic Sea Island, Usedom, which Germany shares with Poland. Our destination was the Army test site at Peenemünde. [Belinda took my son, Scott, and me there in 2000 during our first visit to her place.] This is where the rocket research and testing went on, which resulted in the infamous V1 buzz-bomb and V2 rocket. We toured the control bunker (now the visitors' center) and the power station, the only remaining buildings. The power was mostly to make oxygen for rocket fuel. We spent 90 minutes touring the museum and walking around the power station and grounds. Nearby was an old Soviet submarine. I read how that after the war, the Allied nations of the US, Soviet Union, Great Britain, and France each took scientists and engineers back to their respective countries to help build their military weapons and civilian space programs. The US group included Wernher von Braun who became a major force at NASA.

We drove home on back roads, and had a quiet evening. Lights out at 20:00 after a very nice day.

[Next day] I slept in two shifts, but didn't get up in-between, so I guess that's some sort of progress. After a shower, I was ready for the world, but was das Welt ready for me? Breakfast consisted of left-over beef goulash on toast with coffee and juice. It was Heavenly! Belinda loaded up her washing machine with all my laundry, and then we both settled down to administrative chores. She was trained to teach English, Russian, and French, and her job that morning was to grade some French papers, while thinking in German, and talking to me in English!

I hung my washing on the outdoor clothesline where the sun was shining brightly, and a light breeze was blowing. It had been a good while since my clothes were dried outside on a line! However, after three hours, most things were dry.

At 16:00, we headed out in the car. The first stop was Quilow, a small village where Belinda grew up and her mother had been Principal at a Primary School. There, we picked up her brother, Olaf, to take him out for a meal. Belinda's parents are both buried in the village cemetery, and I took photos of quite a few graves, all of which were mini gardens with small trees, bushes, and/or flowers. Many were covered with creepers, and all were covered with pine branches, as is the custom over Christmas. From there, we drove to Greifswald and to an old fishing village, Wieck, where the River Ryck runs into the Baltic Sea (which, by the way, the Germans and other neighboring country folk call the East Sea).

Our destination was "Jack & Richie's Steakhouse," a very nicely appointed restaurant decorated in a Wild West theme. I ate a small serving of pork spareribs cooked with a spicy sauce and served with coleslaw and garlic bread. Although the menu was in German, modern-German society uses many American-English words and phrases on a regular basis. For example, some of the items were "Mississippi BBQ Chicken," "Jack's Ribs," "Crispy Six" (6 chicken nuggets), and "Kentucky Mix" (onion rings, mozzarella sticks, steak strips, sweetcorn, garlic dip, and chili sauce). Many such names seem to be primarily to make the items seem exotic. Apparently, it works! I finished off the meal with a scoop of strawberry ice cream, which came with some small pieces of peppermint leaf. Afterwards, we drove Olaf home and then returned to our place in light fog. At several points along the highway, we were met by hundreds of UFOs hovering in formation ahead of us with blinking and steady red lights. Well at

least I imagined they were UFOs! In fact, they were wind turbines each of which had blinking lights on top and one or two sets of static lights at lower levels of their towers, all for aviation safety.

[Next day] After 12 hours in bed with about 10 hours of sleep, I got up to a wintry day. After a cup of coffee, toast, and slices of salami, I dressed in business attire, and headed out to meet the day. Fifteen minutes later, I arrived at the [Gymnasium](#) Altentreptow, the town's high school. I chatted with the principal who I'd met four years earlier. I then was a guest speaker for him in a 90-minute English class for Year-11 students (age 17). Belinda joined me for lunch in the cafeteria. Afterwards, I joined her for an English class for Year-8 students (age 14). First up, they had a 20-minute test on [gerunds](#); you know, those "-ing" words! I too took the test, which was quite challenging to start with, but I did OK. Then it was "open-question" time for about an hour.

On the way home, we stopped by a bakery—German bread typically has no preservatives, so people buy it every one or two days—and a supermarket, where I rescued some whole milk, a salad, and some [gummi bears](#). Back home, we worked on various projects. While doing so, I had a German internet radio station playing in the background. After a "traditional" German supper of salad, whole milk, and potato chips, I had a wonderful cup of coffee and a cookie with raisins. (Is there no end to my gourmet palate?) I called my next host to make plans for my train trip to her area later in the week.

[Next day] After an almost-uninterrupted night, I finally seemed to be on local time. After a small breakfast, I headed out in light drizzle for Belinda's school. Starting at 10:00, I worked with her in two English lessons. The questions I got covered a wide variety of topics from religion, organ donation, politics, Germany, travel, and food.

Around 13:00, we drove to Neubrandenburg, a large city to the south. There, I rescued some euros from a cash machine, and we settled into a coffee shop for hot drinks, a snack, and a chat. I walked around the main street area taking photos of some interesting signage. Then we went to the train station to buy a ticket for the next leg of my journey. Although Belinda was with me, I decided to give my German a workout. After I explained to the very pleasant older woman agent that I spoke only a little German, she spoke slowly and explained everything to me in a very polite and professional manner. However, when it came to say that I preferred to sit facing the direction of the train rather than backwards, I resorted to Belinda for help. We drove home via a country road through several small villages and farmland.

Back home, we each worked on personal projects and had a light evening meal.

[Next day] After 10 reasonably restful hours in bed, I got up around 07:00, and had a small breakfast while listening to an album by [Andrea Bocelli](#). It was another overcast day. After my morning email ritual, I worked on administrative chores.

After some false starts, I finally found an AirBnB place in which to stay during my time in England after I leave London, and I worked on a plan for my first few days of that leg. In the note I sent to my hosts, I wrote, "I'm traveling with a very colorful stuffed-toy caterpillar and several imaginary friends!" I didn't want them to think I was a "normal" guest.

At 13:45, Belinda came home to get me, and we headed out for Greifswald, 45 minutes to the north. She had to attend a meeting of regional English teachers. Meanwhile, I walked into the main shopping area, which is a pedestrian mall. It was very cold outside! As soon as I entered the town, things looked familiar from my visit there four years earlier. I went into some stores, mostly to get out of the cold, and took some good photos of signage. Afterwards, I took a long walk around a residential neighborhood.

When we were back in the car, we both thought about eating something hot, so we stopped off at a large shopping center that had a number of eating choices. I had a nice hot, but spicy, bowl of goulash soup with a bread roll. It was just the thing for a growing lad! I also bought Belinda a bottle of wine for her upcoming, BIG birthday.

Back home, we had an easy evening of snacking, drinking, music, talking, and TV news. Lights out early.

5.6 Off to Erfurt

[Next day] Travel Day and the Ides of March!

Well, don't you know, after 6½ hours of solid sleep, I lay awake for three more, bugger! I finally dozed off again and got up at 08:00. After I showered, I had breakfast and washed the dishes before packing my gear, which somehow seemed to have expanded. Don't you just hate that when that happens! Then I played some easy-listening music from an internet radio station while handling email and planning some travel activities.

At 11:15, I headed out under overcast skies hoping the rain would hold off for my walk to the train station. It sure was cold out. I arrived in 20 minutes, and had a 40-minute wait. Four other young people were already there, three of them smoking, and two of them playing with their phones. (Some bad habits are universal!) The station building was closed permanently, and was in a state of disrepair, although a good clean and some renovation would make it a nice building.

A young man approached me and asked me a question in German, although I figured that wasn't his native language. I replied in German that I spoke only a little of that language, but did speak English. He then switched to English, of which he had a good command. He was a refugee from Eritrea in northeast Africa, and had travelled to Italy by boat from Libya. From there he requested asylum in Germany. He had recently completed five months of German-language training, and had a good grasp of that. He spoke Arabic as well. None of these were his native language. He was looking forward to getting a job and being busy, and was enjoying experimenting with European food. He was very pleasant, and we spoke for 30 minutes. He seemed like he'd be a good contributor to whichever country he finished up in.

Regional Train 05 pulled up right on time at 12:16, and about a dozen passengers boarded the double-decker train that had five carriages. I settled into an upstairs table with four seats, and spread my gear around. Having looked at the First-Class seating area, I didn't see any advantage in upgrading. Although there was no internet service, I did have power, so I plugged in my laptop, found some headphones (which my airline now gives away on every flight), and played some "Body and Soul Duet" albums while looking out the window and bringing this diary up to date. In a field next to the railway line an array of solar panels was making the most of the sun that was getting through the thick cloud cover. The array

was about 100 meters wide and 500 meters long. Sadly, a number of stations we stopped at along the way were even more dilapidated than the one at Altentreptow.

As I was editing photos on my laptop, my electronic calendar raised two alarms that reminded me of my “previous” life. The first, was to schedule the annual termite inspection of my house. The second, was to schedule the 5-yearly pumping-out and inspecting of my septic tank. Unfortunately, it was not so easy to arrange either from my upstairs seat on a train in Germany, and nor were they very high priorities on my list for the day.

After a 2-hour quiet-and-smooth ride, we approached Berlin, and in the distance, I saw the distinctive Fernsehturm (TV tower) in the former East Berlin. [In 2000, son Scott and I ate a meal in the revolving restaurant at the top.] We pulled into Berlin's main train station, a rather new building in the heart of the city. Although I could have gotten a connecting train in 15 minutes, I chose one 50 minutes later, so I could take a walk around the station. I stopped by McDonalds McCafé for a milk coffee and to use the McRestroom.

I went down to Platform 2, and after a few minutes, the inter-city express, 1538, to Frankfurt arrived. From the carriage arrangement on a sign, I'd discovered mine would be the last one, so I made my way there to find someone in my seat. As that seat had a reservation sign, the man moved to another seat before I had a chance to evict him. As I had a wifi connection, I set to work dealing with a lot of non-urgent email that had been piling up in the past six days. I shared four seats at a table with a young woman who was headed to Erfurt for business. We had quite a conversation, and although I'm sure I butchered the German language repeatedly, she was polite and said that she could understand me perfectly well.

5.7 A Visit with Astrid and Günther

After 90 minutes, we arrived in Erfurt, the capital of the state of Thüringen, the home of the world's best bratwurst, or so the locals claim. There to meet me was Astrid, a teacher I'd met and hosted in 1995. I'd last visited her six years earlier. We drove to her quaint village, Tiefengruben, where we were met by her husband, Günther. After Astrid started a load of laundry for me, we sat in the dining room and talked of many things for hours, stopping for a light evening meal. I spoke mostly in German and they mostly in English. And even though that did absolutely nothing to help my sadly lacking comprehension of spoken German, it let us communicate quite effectively.

A restaurant in the village also rents rooms, and that's where I stayed. I walked the 400 meters there, unpacked my gear, and “made myself at home.” It was very nicely appointed with a great bed and worktable. It even had indoor plumbing! Lights out at 22:00 after a very good day.

[Next day] I had an uninterrupted night and, when I woke at 07:30, I actually felt rested. It was raining, and the village was immersed in a thin fog. As predicted, snow had fallen. After a long, hot shower, I brought this diary up to date and went through my photos from the day before.

At Astrid's house, I sat down to a light breakfast, which morphed into the usual discussion of the English and German languages. Late morning, Astrid and I dressed warmly and headed off in light snow to the town of Apolda. For a small town, it has a well-known art gallery that has hosted exhibitions of many famous artists. Currently showing was a large collection by Andy Warhol. On display were the

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following: [Campbell's Soup Cans I](#), Mao, Lenin, Skulls, Love, Shadows, Marilyn Monroe, Sunset, Camouflage, Flowers, and Sarah Bernhardt. The only ones I got a little bit excited about were two of the "Love" prints. The series of 10 called "Sunset" are not often shown, and are somewhat unknown. We spent time in the gift shop looking at cards and prints for sale, and compared notes on the various galleries we'd visited around the world.

Although the weather had deteriorated, Astrid decided to brave the roads, and we set off for her school in Weimar. At 18:30, a 1-hour musical play began with 80 10-year-old students performing. I understood an occasional word and some of the visual effects, and enjoyed the singing. The drive home was quite slow, as a number of large transports and cars were slipping around on the roads. Back home I tested the apple-almond cake we'd bought to make sure it hadn't gone bad. After a small slice, I wasn't sure, so I tested it again!

[Next day] I arrived at Astrid's place where Günther served me a fried egg with bacon pieces on bread. It was just the thing for a light breakfast, along with a cup of coffee. We sat at the table talking afterwards. Outside, it was -7C (20F), and some villagers were out for the annual "spring cleaning," but they could do little with all the snow on the ground. Around 11:30, Astrid and I rugged up with long underwear, scarves, and caps, and went for a walk around the village. The wind was quite strong until we got into the forest. I shot photos of various half-timbered houses.

Back home, Chef Günther served a great lunch of fish with curried Asian vegetables and flat noodles. We talked of many things, and got into the usual English/German word discussions before Astrid and I had a Backgammon tournament. We had three great games despite our both being rather rusty with the move calculations. The next thing we knew, it was "afternoon teatime," at which time, we ate slices of apple-almond cake with tea and coffee. We made good use of our dictionaries and tablet computer with access to Wikipedia. I then worked on bringing this diary up to date. Later, we paused for a light evening meal.

[Next day] I woke after a long sleep feeling quite rested. I worked in my room for a couple of hours before walking to Astrid's place. At 12:30, we went to the restaurant (above which was my rented room) for lunch. Of the three dishes on offer, I chose the pork schnitzel with Brussel sprouts and French fries. I washed it down with a glass of johannisbeere (red-current) juice. The proprietor joined us for a chat.

Astrid and I drove to Erfurt to buy my train ticket for the following morning, and to have a look at the main church, and to walk around the plaza nearby. I took some photos of some traditional buildings and signage. However, after taking my gloves off for only a minute, my fingers were absolutely freezing. The strong wind made it feel very cold. Back home, I had a piping-hot coffee. We played more Backgammon and then I posted the 100th installment of my blog. It had been running for more than eight years without a missed month.

We had a light evening meal together and visited various places around the world via Google Maps. Then I said "Goodnight" to Astrid and "Goodbye" to Günther. Back in my room, I prepared for my business meeting in London on Tuesday.

Next time, we'll continue the trip in London and Norfolk.

6. May 2022, “Odds and Ends: Part 2”

As I mentioned in [Part 1](#), during the Covid-19 pandemic, I spent time going through my bookcases, and I found some long-forgotten treasures. One of these was a large *Rand-McNally New Standard Atlas of the World*, published in 1900, when many national borders were quite different than now.

To get an overview of significant events, births, deaths, and other information from 1900, click [here](#). Some highlights taken verbatim from that site are:

- Dwight F. Davis creates the [Davis Cup](#) tennis tournament.
- In France, the length of a legal workday for women and children is limited to 11 hours.
- The second (modern) Olympic Games is held in Paris.
- L. Frank Baum's [The Wonderful Wizard of Oz](#) is published in Chicago.
- The first line of the Paris Métro is opened.
- The first [Michelin Guide](#) is published in France.
- [Winston Churchill](#) is elected to Parliament for the first time.
- Milton S. Hershey introduces the milk chocolate [Hershey bar](#) in the United States.

By the way, it may surprise you to know that 1900 was *not* a leap year, even though it is a multiple of 4. As it happens, only those century years that are multiples of 400 are leap years. So, 1600 and 2000 were, but 1700, 1800, 1900, and 2100 are not. As a result, we have the oddity that 1896 was a leap year, and the next one was eight years later, in 1904.

Here are this month's topics:

1. In various parts of the English-speaking world, married women's names are often written in the form “Mary Brown ([nee](#) Jones)” to indicate that Mary's married name is “Brown” and her maiden name is “Jones.” The word *nee* is an Anglicized version of the French *née*. This designation can also be used if the woman's name was changed for reasons other than marriage. The male counterpart is *né*. (I do know an American man who took his wife's family name when he married her.)
2. Speaking of things French, a written invitation to an event usually contains something like “[RSVP date](#).” Although I've heard people try to make the four letters into abbreviations for English words, they really are an [initialism](#) (acronym, that is) for *Répondez s'il vous plait*, which means “Please respond (by *date*).”
3. In English, men and women are often referred to more formally using the [honorifics](#) *Mr.*, *Mrs.*, *Miss*, and *Ms*. Back when I was a boy in rural South Australia, the local newspaper often had photos of groups of men and/or women, and the captions identified their names starting with honorifics. Oddly, instead of *Misters* (the English plural of *Mr.*) for men, the term *Messrs* (the French equivalent) was used. For woman, *Mesdames* (also French) was used. (As it happens, there isn't a universal way of writing the plural of *Mrs.* in English.) Although *Mrs.* comes from [Mistress](#), introducing your wife as your mistress might have unintended consequences! While we might think that the term *Ms.* came about with the feminist movement of the 1960's, it actually dates back to the 17th century. And regarding the commonly used American term *ma'am*, as English actress

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Hellen Mirren (in the role of Detective Chief Inspector Jane Tennison) famously said, "Don't call me ma'am. I'm not the bloody Queen." By the way, for the gender-neutral folks, we now have Mx.

4. Quakerism is a Protestant religion founded in England in the 17th century. While I had heard of it previously, my first contact with a Quaker was when my family was hosted by a country-doctor couple in Wales in the 1990's. (He was a Quaker, and she was an atheist, although she did attend Quaker meetings.) The term *Quaker* comes from "one who quakes," as in "trembles at the name of the Lord." What sets Quakers apart from most other Christian religions is that they have very simple meeting houses, no clergy, it's not male-dominated, and there is no child indoctrination (Sunday school). The US state of Pennsylvania, "*The Quaker State*," was founded by Quaker William Penn. When I visited the Monteverde cloud forest area of Costa Rica, I met a number of American descendants living there who were Quakers. Being pacifists and not wanting to pay taxes to help finance the Korean (or any other) War, they began to leave the US in the 1950's. While they started out as dairy farmers, they eventually got involved in ecotourism, which is how I came across them. US President Nixon was a Quaker.
5. In the 1950's a popular brand of cigarette tobacco in Australia was Peter Stuyvesant. I thought nothing of that until many years later when I discovered that it was named for the man who had been the governor of Dutch New Amsterdam (which later became New York City when the Brits took control). I never did understand why the makers might have thought that Aussies would be attracted to that connection (assuming they even knew about it). Stuyvesant died at age 80 in 1672, while his namesake ciggies did not debut until 1954. Perhaps he died of lung cancer; hmm?
6. Wall Street is known around the world as the US financial hub on Manhattan Island, New York City. But how did it get its name? One of the two theories is that back in the late 1600's, the Dutch settlement on that island was small, and a wall ran around the northern boundary to keep out "Native Americans, pirates, and the English." The street by the wall became Wall Street!
7. The title Duke of York has been given to the second son of English/British monarchs since the 15th century. (The current title holder is Prince Andrew.) In 1664, King Charles II granted his brother James (the Duke of York) the land that currently contains the US state of New York, hence its name and that of New York City. "New York, New York, it's so nice they named it twice!" From my elementary school days Down Under, I remember that "The grand old Duke of York, he had ten thousand men. He marched them up to the top of the hill and he marched them down again. And when they were up, they were up. And when they were down, they were down. And when they were only half-way up they were neither up nor down." Now, when Charles becomes king (and gives up his title Prince of Wales), his first-born son, William, will take on that title. However, will his second son, Harry, get to be Duke of York? That is, will Uncle Andy be de-Yorked? As best as I can tell, NO; Andrew will keep that title until his death.
8. Have you ever drunk a Bloody Mary? Although the origin of its name is not known for certain, one of the prime candidates has to do with Mary I, Queen of England, who because of her staunch Catholicism, went about executing Protestants. "Off with their heads, wot!" According to Wikipedia, this drink contains, 'vodka, tomato juice, and other spices and flavorings including Worcestershire sauce, hot sauces, garlic, herbs, horseradish, celery, olives, salt, black pepper, lemon juice, lime juice and celery salt. Some versions of the drink, such as the "surf 'n turf" Bloody Mary, include shrimp and bacon as garnishes.' Speaking of Catholics vs. Protestants: One day at a

Catholic girl's school, Sister Mary Elizabeth asked her students what they'd like to be when they grew up. Maria said she'd like to be a nurse in a poor neighborhood. "Wonderful," said Sister. Next, Theresa said she'd like to be a missionary Doctor in Africa. "Fantastic," said Sister. Then Jane said she'd like to be a prostitute! Well, Sister fainted on the spot! Later, when she had been revived, she asked Jane to repeat what she'd said, and Jane did. Sister replied, "Praise the Lord! I thought you said, 'a Protestant!'"

9. Speaking of Worcestershire sauce, one can actually use too much of it, and sometimes I get pretty close to that limit when I have a bottle in hand! To all you Americans, here's a lesson in correct pronunciation: Worcester is the county town of Worcestershire. And the town's name is spoken as if it was spelled "Wooster," not "war cester." OK, got that? (BTW, with Warwick, the county town of Warwickshire, one does not pronounce the second w unless one wishes to be labelled a philistine! You don't want to be accused of having pedestrian tastes do you?) Apparently, the sauce is a source of umami, and is the British equivalent of Asia's soy sauce. Speaking of savory sauces, often when one sits down for a British pub meal, the condiments on offer include brown sauce, which, frankly, seems like an uninviting name. Apparently, it's so boring, no-one ever came up with a proper name for it. That said, I have been known to sprinkle the odd packet of it on my full English breakfast!
10. In recent years, there's been a lot of media coverage of Islam and its adherents, Moslems. Now it seems that if a religion has been around for a bit, it inevitably breaks into sects of one kind or another. And so it was with Islam, with its Sunni and Shia factions. [I'm reminded of something a Protestant once said: "The only thing worse than not being Christian, is being Catholic!"] And when the sects are not fighting a common enemy (think the Crusades), they are fighting among themselves (think proxy wars between Iran and Saudi Arabia). The basic dispute between the two Islamic groups is the line of succession to the prophet Muhammad. Regarding groups with very strong differences of opinion, if you have never read "Gulliver's Travels," do learn about the Big-Endian/Little-Endian controversy regarding which end of a boiled egg one should open. (I first learned about these terms as they apply to computer science.)
11. Tomato: fruit or a vegetable? Apparently, a botanist says *fruit*, while a horticulturist says *vegetable*. I say, "Who cares? Just shut up and enjoy it!" BTW, like Worcestershire sauce, tomato is also a source of umami. And, yes, people do disagree about how to pronounce the word: tomayto/tomarto! Now I've seen yellow and black tomatoes, but my attitude towards them is that I'll pass on eating one unless I'm very hungry and eating in the dark. After all, everyone knows that proper tomatoes are bright red! (BTW, if you haven't seen the movie "Fried Green Tomatoes," I recommend it.)
12. Henry VIII had Walmer Castle built as a fort in County Kent "to protect against invasion from France and the Holy Roman Empire." Later, it became the official residence of the Lord Warden of the Cinque Ports, a title that was held by numerous, distinguished people, including Winston Churchill, Robert Menzies (former Australian Prime Minister), and Queen Elizabeth the Queen Mother. The five (cinque in French) ports are Dover, Hastings, Hythe, New Romney, and Sandwich.
13. So, which provinces of Canada are bilingual? While French and English are both widely used and taught throughout the country, only New Brunswick has made them both official in its constitution.

14. My adopted home state in the US is Virginia, the first state, having been settled in 1607. It was named by Sir Walter Raleigh for Queen Elizabeth I, the “virgin queen,” really! As a citizen of the British Commonwealth and as a school student in Australia, I learned about King John signing the Magna Carta (Great Charter) at Runnymede. When I visited that site, I was surprised to not find any significant English memorial of that historic event! However, there were three American memorials: There is a tree planted by QEII in soil from Virginia to commemorate the anniversary of the founding of that state; there is a small monument erected by the American Bar Association acknowledging the English law as a basis; and there is a memorial garden in a grove dedicated to President John F. Kennedy.
15. I first learned about the soldier/statesman/explorer Sir Richard Francis Burton when I was visiting my Dutch historian friend, Gerard. Burton is a prominent character in Phillip Jose Farmer's sci-fi series, “Riverworld,” to which Gerard introduced me and which I highly recommend. From time to time, as I read various pieces about history, I saw across references to Burton. And I was most surprised to find that a well-known biography about him was written by the mayor of a small town very near where I currently live in Virginia.
16. We tend to think of Western European countries as having been around for a good, long while. But not so, Belgium, which is rather new, becoming independent in the 1830s. The country is multilingual. The Flemings in the northern part, Flanders, speak Flemish, a dialect of Dutch, while in the southern part, Wallonia, the Walloons speak French. (A few people speak German.) “In Flanders Fields” is a well-known poem about WWI. The red poppies that grew over the graves of soldiers killed in action became a symbol around the world on Armistice Day. My main exposure to Flemish was on a bus tour from Dubrovnik, Croatia, to Mostar, Bosnia. The guide was originally from Flanders, and she spoke Flemish and English to her group.
17. Speaking of newish countries, Finland was created in 1917 while Russia was preoccupied with revolution. Over the years, Finland was occupied by Sweden and Russia. The country is officially bilingual, supporting Finnish and Swedish. As a result, all public signs are in both languages. Although part of Scandinavia, the language Finnish is *not* related to other languages from that area. I've had the good fortune of visiting this fine country a number of times, going to the Arctic Circle on one trip to meet Santa Clause, in person, well north of there to Lapland on another, and around the country by train and bus.
18. The UK Houses of Parliament are instantly recognizable around the world. But did you know that they are formally known as the **Palace of Westminster**. Although the structure looks quite old, it was destroyed by fire and completely rebuilt starting in 1840 to look old! Its distinctive tower houses the main bell, Big Ben. The week I hiked into London while completing my 187-mile walk along the Thames Path, because of unusually high humidity, the big clock slowed down and then actually stopped! On a separate trip, my teenage son and I sat in the Visitors' Gallery during sessions of both the House of Commons and the House of Lords.
19. According to Wikipedia, “West Point is the oldest continuously occupied military post in the United States. Located on the Hudson River in New York [state], West Point was identified by General George Washington as the most important strategic position in America during the American Revolution.” It's the home of the Army's military academy. Some very well-known graduates were

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astronauts [Buzz Aldrin](#) and [Michael Collins](#), and [George Armstrong Custer](#), [Dwight D. Eisenhower](#), [Robert E. Lee](#), [Douglas MacArthur](#), [George S. Patton Jr.](#), and [Norman Schwarzkopf Jr.](#)

20. The first European explorer to come across [New Zealand](#) was the Dutchman, Abel Tasman. Sometime later, the islands were named *Nova Zeelandia* (from Latin), after the seafaring Dutch province of [Zeeland](#). In Dutch, this became Nieuw Zeeland. (Dutch explorers had also named Australia Nieuw Holland.) The Māori name for the country is [Aotearoa](#), meaning “land of the long white cloud.” (The Australian state of [Tasmania](#) and the Tasman Sea are named after Tasman.)
21. The Olympic Games are well known, but are you familiar with the [Commonwealth Games](#), held by member countries of the (formerly British) [Commonwealth of Nations](#)? They are held every four years, midway between the Summer Olympics. Some events included that are not in the Olympics are [lawn bowls](#), [netball](#), [cricket](#) and [squash](#).
22. [Damask](#) is a woven fabric whose name was derived from the city of [Damascus](#), capital of modern-day Syria.
23. According to Wikipedia, [Jet](#) “is a type of lignite, the lowest rank of coal, and is a gemstone. ... It is derived from wood that has changed under extreme pressure. ... The adjective *jet-black*, meaning as dark a black as possible, derives from this material.”
24. In March of 2020, just prior to the US lockdown for COVID-19, I was vacationing in Tahiti where I was at the downtown port talking to passengers disembarking from a cruise ship. Tied up near the ship was what I thought was a super- or mega-yacht. Now when I grew up in rural Australia, I came to know a [yacht](#) as a small boat with several sails, that held 1, 2, or 3 people, and bobbed about on a freshwater lake. But when I stepped off the length of this baby, I figured it was about 350 feet (108 meters) long. After speaking to someone nearby, I found out it was brand new and had just been delivered to fellow Aussie, [James Packer](#), who had paid US\$200 million for it. Apparently, a yacht longer than 100 meters is known as a [gigayacht](#). At 14 knots, the twin diesel engines, and fuel tanks with 91,000 gallons give the yacht a range of 6,500 nautical miles. Now, what would you do with a spare \$200 million?
25. There I was working on my German vocabulary when I came across the term [fata morgana](#), which certainly didn't sound German to me; in fact, its origins are Italian! It means *mirage*. Other foreign language surprises I recall were learning that *nostril* in Spanish is *la ventana de nariz*, literally, *window of the nose*, and *toe* is *el dedo del pie*, literally, *finger of the foot*!
26. I first came across the term [wrangler](#) in the context of cowboys handling horses and cattle. But then I started seeing it in movie credits, usually in the context of a handler of some kind of animal or inanimate product. According to Wikipedia, the word is derived from the Low German “*wrangeln*” meaning “to dispute” or “to wrestle.” It was first documented in 1377. Its use as a noun was first recorded in 1547. Its reference to a “person in charge of horses or cattle” or “herder” was first recorded in 1888.’ My most recent encounter with the [word](#) was as a Cambridge University England student “who gains first-class honours in the final year of the university's degree in mathematics.”
27. Growing up in Australia, I learned that a [yahoo](#) was a derogatory term meaning “A [rough](#), [coarse](#), [loud](#) or [uncouth](#) person; [yokel](#); [lout](#).” (I have since learned that such creatures are, unfortunately,

not limited to my home country!) I was surprised to learn recently that the word was invented by Jonathan Swift in his book "Gulliver's Travels," in which Yahoo is the name of a race of brutes."

28. I had heard of dumdums, special kinds of bullets designed to expand on impact. It was developed at the British Royal Artillery Dum Dum Arsenal, in the town of Dum Dum, India.
29. The use of the term "quack" as a slang synonym for doctor, is well known. However, it is more appropriate to use it for someone who claims to have some medical background when they don't. Apparently, the term comes from the Dutch word "kwakzalver," which means "a seller of ointment."
30. Regarding people of mixed race, according to Wikipedia, "In the slave societies of the Americas, a quadroon or quarteron was a person with one quarter African and three quarters European ancestry (or in Australia, one quarter aboriginal ancestry)." Other terms are octoroon and hexadecaroon, mulatto, and mestizo.
31. There I was watching a nature program about monkeys when the term "opposable thumb" was mentioned. When I went to Wikipedia to read about this, I was surprised to find so much information about thumbs! Interestingly, the medical term for a thumb is pollex, from Latin. In the good old Roman days, the width of the thumb was 1 inch wide, and was 1/12 of a Roman foot.
32. The French Foreign Legion is not just a military group seen in old films about north Africa. It is very much alive and well today! "As of 2018, members come from 140 different countries."
33. There's a body of water in the US state of Massachusetts called Webster Lake. Its claim to fame is that "it has the longest name of any geographic feature in all of the United States." Longest, that is, when spelled using its invented, supposedly Algonquian Native-American-sounding name, Char-goggaqogqmanchauqgaqogqchaubunagungamaugg. The meaning of the name goes something like, "You fish on your side; I fish on my side; nobody fish in the middle." Reading this reminded me of another very long place name, in Wales, that I learned of many years ago, Llanfairpwllgwyngyll-gogerychwyrndrobwlllantysiliogogogoch. Apparently, that is only the second-longest in the world. The first is Māori-based from New Zealand: TaumatawhakatangiHangakoauauotamateaturipukakapikimaungahoronukupokaiwhenuakitanatahu. Click [here](#) to read about long-place names.
34. The word alibi comes from the Latin for "elsewhere."
35. Recently, I was involved in the preparation of a tax return for a non-profit organization, and I had need to consult IRS (Internal Revenue Service) Publication 526 Cat. No. 15050A, "Charitable Contributions." There, I found the following: "**Expenses of Whaling Captains:** You may be able to deduct as a charitable contribution any reasonable and necessary whaling expenses you pay during the year to carry out sanctioned whaling activities. The deduction is limited to \$10,000 a year. To claim the deduction, you must be recognized by the Alaska Eskimo Whaling Commission as a whaling captain charged with the responsibility of maintaining and carrying out sanctioned whaling activities. Sanctioned whaling activities are subsistence bowhead whale hunting activities conducted under the management plan of the Alaska Eskimo Whaling Commission. Whaling expenses include expenses for: • Acquiring and maintaining whaling boats, weapons, and gear used in sanctioned whaling activities; • Supplying food for the crew and other provisions for carrying out

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these activities; and • Storing and distributing the catch from these activities.” Who knew that such advice even existed!

36. Apparently, *Hell* is right here on earth. It's a community located in the US state of Michigan, and has a population of around 70 people!
37. When referring to temperature in the metric system, the terms *Celsius* and *Centigrade* seem to be interchangeable, and they are! The scale was originally named centigrade from the Latin *centum* and *gradus*, 100 steps. However, later it was renamed Celsius “after the Swedish astronomer Anders Celsius (1701–1744), who developed a similar temperature scale.” BTW, -40 Celsius is also -40 Fahrenheit!
38. Many of us have heard the term *Ides of March*, which is usually associated with the date of the assassination of Julius Caesar in 44 BC. Just what is an ide? Actually, the word is used in the plural, *ides*. For most months, it's the 13th day, but for some months, including March, it's the 15th day.
39. Apparently, *ichor* “is the ethereal fluid that is the blood of the gods and/or immortals.” And watch out, it's toxic to humans!
40. *Piccadilly Circus* is a well-known intersection in London, England. According to Wikipedia, “Around 1611 or 1612, a Robert Baker acquired land in the area, and prospered by making and selling *piccadills*, ... each of which is a large broad collar of cut-work lace that became fashionable in the late 16th century and early 17th century.”
41. I have long known the term “*Grand Prix*,” but always in the context of motor racing. It's French for “Grand Prize,” and is actually used in numerous contexts (follow the link). According to Jack's Reference Book (1908), it was first used for a horse race at Longchamps, France, established by Napoleon III in 1863.
42. The term “*peeping Tom*” is well known as “A person who watches another without the other's permission and usually without the other's knowledge, especially for the purpose of deriving sexual pleasure from the sight of the other.” But who was Tom and at whom was he peeping? For an explanation of that, click [here](#). Basically, Tom looked at Lady Godiva riding naked through the town.
43. Did you ever hear of a **10-gallon hat**? It's a kind of cowboy hat that is sometimes mentioned and worn in Western movies. Its origins are likely from several different *Spanish terms* neither of which has to do with the amount of water such a hat could hold.
44. As I travel the world, I find that America and its people are either loved and admired, or despised. Rarely do I find someone without an opinion on them. I recently discovered a possible explanation for some of America's traits in the works by prominent US historian, *Frederick Jackson Turner* (1861–1932). In his *Frontier thesis* he talks about “how the idea of the American frontier shaped the American character in terms of democracy and violence. He stresses how the availability of very large amounts of nearly free farm land built agriculture, pulled ambitious families to the western frontier, and created an ethos of unlimited opportunity. The frontier helped shape individualism and opposition to governmental control.”
45. It seems that the humble *umbrella* started out as protection against the sun (as in *parasol*), with use in rain coming later. I grew up in Australia, which like some other countries in the British Commonwealth, uses the slang term *broolly*. On one trip to London, England, I figured that as I

would be there for a week, it was bound to rain, so I should take an umbrella, something I never carried at home. Not having one of my own, I took my wife's. In London, I was in a supermarket, and when I left, I noticed I'd left my broly at the checkout. As I was walking back to retrieve it, a man came out carrying it to see if he could find its owner. When I approached him saying it was mine, he was quite surprised. After all, it was a woman's umbrella, and I was a man! Apparently, real men don't carry paisley-patterned brolys!

46. You probably know that "utopia is an imaginary community or society that possesses highly desirable or nearly perfect qualities for its citizens." But did you know that this word was invented by Sir Thomas More for his 1516 book "Utopia," which describes "a fictional island society in the south Atlantic Ocean off the coast of South America?"
47. From time to time, I've been known to make a large pot of creamy onion and potato soup. Then when I eat some, I add the magic ingredient, cayenne pepper. There's a connection between that name and the town and river of the same name in French Guiana. As it happens, the cayenne pepper fruit measures 30,000–50,000 SHU on the Scoville scale, a unit of "measurement of the pungency (spiciness or "heat") of chili peppers, as recorded in Scoville Heat Units."
48. When growing up in rural South Australia, we set off fireworks on "Guy Fawkes" night. As it happens, Guy was a very naughty boy, and was arrested for helping plan to blow up the English House of Lords. Our fireworks were much milder than barrels of gunpowder! This night was November 5, but Down Under, that's before the start of summer, when things are quite dry and fire danger is high. So, after many years, common sense dictated that the Aussies abandon the practice.
49. While reading a page on the UK newspaper Guardian's website, I came across the following question and answer: 'When did the term "First World War" get used? And when did people realise that the "Second World War" was such?' One response was, 'The term "First World War" came into use on or close to 3 September 1939. That is to say, as soon as the Second World War started. Until then it had been referred to as *The Great War*.'
50. Even though the terms Satan and The Devil seem to be used interchangeably, I was surprised to find that each has its own (lengthy) entry on Wikipedia.
51. Occasionally, when watching a movie involving sailing ships, we hear about Davy Jones' Locker. Just who was Davy Jones, and what did he keep in his locker? Of course, the term "is a metaphor for the bottom of the sea: the state of death among drowned sailors and shipwrecks." It has been suggested that Davy is the ghost of Jonah who was swallowed by a whale.
52. Something we all take for granted when shopping is the Universal Product Code (UPC code), which "is a barcode symbology that is widely used worldwide for tracking trade items in stores." According to Wikipedia, "The first UPC-marked item ever to be scanned at a retail checkout was a 10-pack (50 sticks) of Wrigley's Juicy Fruit chewing gum, purchased at the Marsh supermarket in Troy, Ohio, at 8:01 a.m. on June 26, 1974." In the late 1960's, after school, I worked at a supermarket. This was before UPC codes (and computers that can track them) were introduced. As such, prices had to be marked on each item, and when prices changed, new price labels had to put over the old ones. And the checkout operators had to memorize the prices of each week's sale items.

53. The modern-day use of the word "etiquette" has to do with social customs. However, the word comes from French, and meant, "property, a little piece of paper, or a mark or title, affixed to a bag or bundle, expressing its contents, a label, ticket."). Later, "The French Court of Louis XIV ... Versailles used étiquettes (literally "little cards") to remind courtiers to keep off of the grass and similar rules."
54. The English-speaking world has adopted the Japanese word "tsunami" (pronounced tsu-na-mi), which literally means "harbor wave." In the year following the Fukushima earthquake and subsequent tsunami, I was in Crescent City, California. While at a beach, I came across a notice asking anyone who finds human remains washed up on the beach to contact authorities. Apparently, such things did cross the Pacific Ocean from Japan after that disaster. That adds a whole new meaning to flotsam and jetsam!
55. The concept, and subsequent symbol for, zero makes for some interesting reading; take a look! BTW, as a kid in Australia, we referred to that number as *nought*. Of course, Americans just have to spell that *naught*!
56. Recently, I was watching a legal drama video, and I heard for the first time the abbreviation **SC** (Senior counsel). Being from a British Commonwealth country, I was familiar with QC (Queen's Counsel) and, from reading, KC (King's Counsel). These are titles given to a lawyer who has attained a certain level of achievement. Now some countries have left the Commonwealth, and some of them have renamed these titles to SC, as they no longer have a queen or king. A person who has achieved any of these titles is often said to have "taken silk."
57. Speaking of British-based legal dramas, they have barristers and solicitors rather than what Americans would call lawyers or attorneys. The former primarily argue cases in court while the latter deal with the clients directly. So, when a case goes to court, a client works with a solicitor who then works with a barrister who handles the client's case in court. (For some entertaining reading/TV episodes about life in the English lawcourts, I highly recommend "Rumpole of the Bailey.")

7. June 2022, "Signs of Life: Part 28"

From time to time during my travels, I come across signs that I find interesting for one reason or another. Sometimes, they contain clever writing, are humorous, or remind me of some place or event. Here are some, mostly from a trip to several states in eastern Germany.



When I saw this coffee mug on the shelf at a thrift shop, I just had to have it! Interestingly, every time I use it, I think of a particular woman friend, who I can imagine saying that!



The two sides of the placard to put on the outside doorknob of my room at my favorite place to stay in Prague: K+K Hotel Central



There I was minding my own business in a First-Class Euro-City train carriage going from Prague to Berlin, when I looked up to see that we were quietly racing along at 100 miles per hour! And, at times, we went even faster!

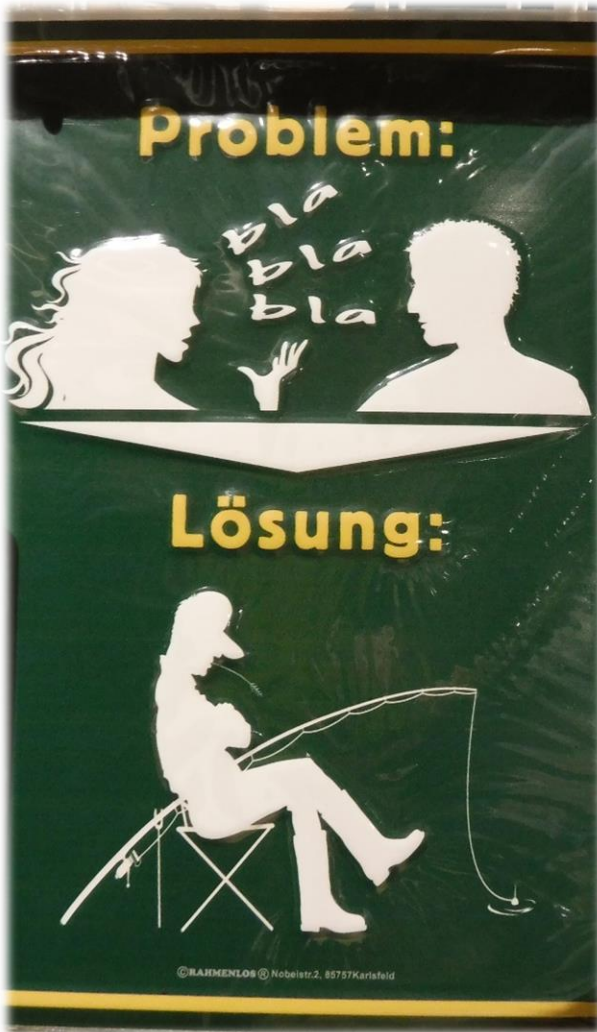


I was touring the Baltic Sea island Usedom heading for the famous Army test site at Peenemunde, where the German rocket research and testing went on, which resulted in the infamous V1 buzz-bomb and V2 rocket. I spent 90 minutes touring the museum and walking around the power station and grounds.



A few of the *many* thousands of coffee pots this place on [Usedom](#) had on display.

(Like most Europeans, Germans use “.” as the thousands separator in numbers, and “,” for the decimal point!)



Problem (the same in German and English):

Lösung (solution)

And, yes, the German equivalent to “blah” is indeed “bla.” Those foreigners have words for everything!



A home without a cat is just a house!



“Try not to hurt yourself. Do not slide in rain or snow.”

At “Karls” farmers’ market on Usedom, where there were lots of activities for kids, including a tractor ride and a very long slide, all at no charge. I slid down the slide on a coconut-fiber mat. Interestingly, at the entrance to the slide was this sign. It was good to see that people had to take responsibility for their own (possibly stupid) actions without suing someone; what an idea!



“Flower dream”: The flower shop Britta dreamed of owning every since she was a little girl.



Kleider = clothes; Kleiderbox = wardrobe. So a drop-off place for unwanted clothes.



I was quite amused by this menu in a German steakhouse. And, yes, I ate there, treating my friend, Belinda, for her 50th birthday. *Alles Gute zum Geburtstag Belinda!*

Hähnchennuggets = chicken nuggets

I am not familiar with what they eat in Kentucky, but the claim here is “onion rings, mozzarella cheese sticks, deep-fried steak fingers

(baked strips of beef with spicy steak sauce), grilled corn-on-the-cob, garlic dip and sweet chili sauce.” *Das schmeckt sehr gut!*



If you ever wondered what happened to Rapunzel, apparently, she *really* let her hair down and started one of the leading organic food producers in Europe!

“We lead: Rapunzel”



The “Blossom Magic” flower shop.

(Not to be confused with *Blutenzauber*, without the umlaut, which means *Bleeding spells*.)

HAUSGEMACHTE SMOOTHIES

grüner Smoothie
Feldsalat, Banane, Apfel

Power Ranger
Karotte, Ingwer, Orange

Tweety
frisch gepresster Orangensaft

Homemade Smoothies!

Green Smoothie: Lamb's lettuce, banana, and apple.

Power Ranger: Carrot, ginger, and orange.

Tweety: Freshly squeezed orange juice.



Sign outside a bakery: “I am not allowed in!” How can man discriminate against his best friend?

Many shops in Europe have a wall-mounted fixture outside to which one can tie a dog's leash. Some also have water bowls.



A fast food chain in northeastern Germany. This one just happened to be in the city of Neubrandenburg, which, of course, means “New Brandenburg!” Clever name, hey!

8. July 2022, “Travel: Memories of London and Norfolk”

As reported in [April 2022](#), in March 2018, I spent two weeks in Prague and Eastern Germany before crossing the Channel to London.

8.1 From the German Countryside to London

I was awake quite a bit earlier than my alarm, which is common on Travel Days. Astrid picked me up at 07:45, and we headed for Erfurt in bright sunshine. The snow and ice were gone from the roads, and it looked like a nice day. At the station, we had a snack. My 08:50 train was five minutes late, and by the time we got to Frankfurt, it was 20 minutes behind schedule. My carriage was quite full and even though I was at a table, there was no room to open my large laptop, so I worked on a plan for a June vacation in the Netherlands, and read my new novel. At Frankfurt's main train station, I found an inter-city to Amsterdam leaving within minutes, and got on-board that as its first stop was Frankfurt airport.

Although I was in priority lines at that airport, check-in and security were quite slow, and so was the passport control. However, it was all worth the wait. At Lufthansa's Senators' Lounge I had a very nice meal of potato and vegetable soup, salad, juice, and bread while reading a newspaper. My Lufthansa flight was delayed 10 minutes. I boarded the A320 and took up a window seat. Almost all the center seats were empty, giving us extra room. The 45-minute flight to London's Heathrow airport ([LHR](#)) was uneventful, as one prefers. Passport control was slow. I turned back my clock an hour for local time.

Having forgotten to bring my public transportation [Oyster Card](#), I bought a new one, charged it with £15, and went down to the [Tube](#) platform where a train arrived a minute later. The airport line is the Piccadilly, which was exactly the one I needed, so there would be no transfers. I got off at the Gloucester Road station, an area I'd stayed in years ago. Things looked just as I'd last left them.

It was a short walk to my hotel where a very friendly receptionist checked me in, and I dumped my gear in my room. I then went to a bank to get some local currency and some things from the supermarket. As my room didn't have a fridge and I had bought juice, I got inventive and put it outside on the broad window ledge where it was quite cold!

As I had not gotten my full quota of sleep the night before, I abandoned plans to go to the theater. Instead, I snacked in my room while dealing with email, and had an early night.

8.2 Chairing a 3-Day Conference

[Next day] A vice chair of my committee met me for breakfast at my hotel, and we made last-minute preparations for our 3-day meeting. [The meeting was for the international committee that defines and maintains the standard for the [JavaScript](#) programming language, commonly used by web browsers.]

At the meeting place, tea, coffee, and pastries were served, and delegates socialized before I started the meeting at 10 o'clock. By the end of the day, more than 60 people were present, with a few of them attending by videoconference from the US. We broke at 5 pm, and at 5:30, I started a “newcomers' meeting” for the newer attendees to ask any questions they might have about the committee and its work. At 7 o'clock, we moved the discussion to a nearby pub.

Back in my room, I handled an email about a new job opportunity, and that took several hours.

[Next day] I was awake way too early, composing and sending more emails about the new job opportunity that had arrived the night before. I then had less than a full English breakfast, and worked on a Sudoku puzzle throughout. I headed out into a nice day with a cool breeze blowing. I started Day 2 of my meeting promptly at 10 am, and we had another busy and productive day. I forewent lunch, saving myself for supper. At 5:30, I walked 15 minutes with a colleague to a pub at which 40 of us had a group meal in a private, upstairs room. I had a wonderful serving of bangers and mash (sausages and mashed potatoes, that is), with onions and a red-wine sauce. The walk back to my hotel around 7:30 pm was very pleasant, and back in my room, I had a very nice cup of coffee while dealing with email. Lights out by 9 o'clock.

[Next day] After a very good sleep, I had a light English breakfast while scanning the morning's news in a paper. The French airline controllers were going on strike, and one line of the London Tube will be struck, but neither affected me.

I was at my seat for the third and final day of my meeting by 9:15. It was another productive day with breaks for unnecessary eating and drinking. We ended at 4 o'clock, and soon after, I headed back to my hotel to change into my tourist clothes.

8.3 Taking in Some Theater

I rode the Piccadilly Tube to Leicester Square where I went to the discount theater ticket office. I grabbed a booklet that described all the shows on offer for March, and chose an event for that night for which I bought a ticket. I had two hours to kill, but as it was cold, I looked for a warm place to wait. It was McDonalds! I bought a cup of hot chocolate, and pulled up a stool at a set of community tables. Next to me was a pleasant young woman, a primary school teacher who'd moved from Leeds to London. We chatted at length of many things. Then a Frenchman joined me, and we had a long conversation about his work, life in his city of Lille, and other topics. Finally, several young Polish teenagers arrived. They lived an hour from my ancestral home of Posen. The time passed quickly.

At 7:30, the curtain at the Apollo Theater went up on "Everybody's talking about Jamie." In a word, it was "Fantastic!" The dialog, music, dancing, and acting were all of exceptional quality, and it was full on from the very beginning. It's a story about a gay 16-year-old boy who dreams of being a drag queen. I had one of the best seats in the house, at the back of the stalls in a raised area. It ran 2:40 hours with one intermission.

Outside the weather was pleasantly cool as I walked to the Piccadilly Circus Tube station. The platform clock read 22:22:22, which I thought was an ominous sign! A train arrived immediately, and I headed back to Gloucester Road. Back in my room, I had a belated supper of hot chocolate with some rolls with tuna. Lights out at 11 pm after a great evening.

[Next day] After breakfast at my hotel, I packed my gear and took care of email and administration. I checked out of my hotel around 10:30, and went to a bank to change an old £10 note, which was no longer being circulated. I then rescued two pints of whole milk from a supermarket, and drank one while waiting in line to pay.

8.4 Off to Norwich, Norfolk

At the Tube station, I rode the Circle Line to Liverpool station where I walked to the adjoining train station. I bought an off-peak return ticket to Norwich, Norfolk, for £55. The noon train left on time, and I had a 4-person table to myself even though I'd put on deodorant that morning. I was lacking sleep, but managed to stay awake during the 1:50-hour journey. The countryside was quite flat with a lot of agriculture. The fields were green, and trees were beginning to bud.

At the Norwich station, I spied a Cornish pasty shop from which I bought a large sausage roll that I smothered with ketchup. I had a hand-drawn map of the city, and set out to find the tourist information center. I took a wrong turn, but after consulting some locals, I found the place, and a friendly woman gave me a map and brochures. From there, it was a short walk to my home for the next six nights, a room in a flat.

Unfortunately, my hosts hadn't told me the flat number, so I borrowed a mobile phone from a passer-by to call. Theodora welcomed me to the place she shared with partner James, and gave me an orientation. She'd cleared a shelf in the kitchen cupboard and the fridge to put my stuff. After I dumped my gear, I walked five minutes to a Tesco supermarket to lay in some basic groceries. After a nice hot shower, I stayed in for the rest of the day working on various projects. Lights out at 8 o'clock.

[Next day] After 11 wonderful hours of sleep, I was up early exploring the kitchen and making a light breakfast. James joined me soon after and we chatted a while. Soon after, I headed out for the station stopping to take photos of interesting signage on the way. I had planned to catch what I thought would be an 8:45 train, but hadn't checked the schedule. However, I found the train left at 8:20 instead, so I had to wait for the 9:45. C'est la vie! So, I had a good look around the station, which I must say was one of the cleanest and nicest I've ever been to. I paid a visit to my friendly Cornish pasty man from the day before, and had another sausage roll. There was a very comfortable waiting room with soft sofas and heating. And once I convinced a railway employee to close the doors that had been locked open, the heater kicked in.

8.5 Sheringham and Surrounds

For £8.80, I bought a day-return ticket to the town of Sheringham, the end of the line, with unlimited stopovers on the way back. I noticed something odd on my ticket; the abbreviation for the month of march was MCH rather than the usual MAR! The 2-carriage train departed on-time, and we rolled along at a steady pace past a small river with white swans, people kayaking, and a yacht factory. There were several large fields of solar panels. Many fields were bordered with the classic English hedgerows. There was forest, some rolling hills, black-faced sheep (which I guessed were Suffolk), and beef cattle. We stopped in the coastal town of Cromer for several minutes.

The reason I'd decided to go to Sheringham was to see the small market in the parking lot by the train station, so I walked around that. On sale were plants, fruit, vegetables, fresh and smoked fish, hardware, clothes, footwear, haberdashery items, crafts, and hot food. I bought a nice leather wallet. Nearby was the old train station, which had been very nicely restored. A section of line went with it, and a diesel and steam service alternated for the tourists. I bought a ticket on the next steam train, which I rode to the village of Holt. I sat with two young women from Germany and Spain who were on

their gap year. We stopped for 30 minutes in Holt where I toured the railway museum. The round trip took 90 minutes, and all the stations and equipment were in impeccable order, and the staff friendly. I took lots of photos including one of the fire box after I climbed into the locomotive. I rode back in a compartment with an English couple on holiday with their lovable bulldog.

Back in Sheringham, I walked around the town and down to the sea taking photos of signage and houses. An elderly woman dressed in full uniform was holding a donation can for the Salvation Army, and after I gave her a generous donation, we chatted at length about the projects her group was working on locally. Much of it involved food banks. As I had a long wait for the next train, I dropped into the Star Fish Tea Shop where a very nice young woman served me a mug of hot chocolate with marshmallows and a slice of lemon-drizzle cake. I then rode the 14:47 train eight minutes to Cromer.

I walked into town from the station and stopped at the tourist office. Like other people I'd talked with, the woman attendant recommended a walk to the lighthouse and then the pier. So, I set off for the cliff-top walk path, which was on a steady uphill incline. Many hikers had their dogs, all of which were disciplined and running free. At the top of the final hill, I sat on a bench and put my heart back in my chest while chatting with a retired couple who had a holiday cottage in the area. I was visited by many dogs, all of which wanted attention. Fortunately, the rain that had been forecast did not occur, and there was no wind. However, it was quite cold, and I was rugged up for the 3-mile round trip.

I walked down to the beach where quite a few old tractors were parked. Their job was to pull large boats from the sea. And given they drove into the water, they all had signs of rust from the salt. I walked out on the long, impressive pier where a number of people were fishing.

I caught the 17:00 express train back to Norwich where I walked home stopping to buy supper. Back home, I settled into a cup of boiling leek soup and a chicken salad. It had been quite a physical day, and I was ready to stay warm and inside! Soon after I got home, James and Theo left for London. Although he'd be back on Monday, she was headed to her native France for a while, so I'd be alone in the flat for the weekend. I spent the evening snacking and working on various projects. It had been a great first day in Norfolk.

8.6 Exploring Norwich

[Next day] The UK started daylight-savings time, so I lost an hour. Much of the morning was spent looking for it! I eased into the day, postponing breakfast until I got this diary up to date. Then I treated myself to a tall mug of milk coffee with toast, cheese, and jam. By the time I got done with administration and domestic chores, it was noon, and I headed out in clear, cold weather.

I walked a path along the River Wensum, crossing from side to side over various old and new bridges. The willows were budding leaves, some bulbs were flowering, the swans were begging for food, and lots of people were out walking. The sun even came out for a while. I stopped off to look at a tower ruin from the city's defenses back when guns and cannon were being introduced. At the train station, I turned around and walked back on the other side of the river and then off to the cathedral.

To say that Norwich Cathedral, its grounds, and extensive set of buildings is very impressive, would be an understatement! I walked inside and then through the cloisters before coming across the Refectory Cafe. This modern glass, wood, and stainless-steel cafeteria is where the refectory used to be, and was

filled with light, conversation, and great food. I chatted at length with a retired couple, he a theoretical Physics researcher, she a psychotherapist (originally from Galway, Ireland). Then I had a bowl of spicy carrot and sweet potato soup with a large slab of bread smothered in creamy butter. It was delicious, and better than anything Grandma used to make! I sat in the sun streaming in the skylights, and read a newspaper and worked on a sudoku puzzle.

I walked back to the city center to find [Greggs bakery](#) open, so I stopped to rescue a couple of pasties, one of which I ate on the walk home. I came across a building with a large atrium inside, which had a knitting/sewing/crafts exhibit. I was quite impressed by the many things made to emulate real life, as in full-size people, tea settings, and such, all knitted or [crocheted](#). Back home, the sun was streaming in my lounge window, so I sat there with a steaming mug of Earl Grey tea and some English biscuits (US: cookies). I worked on some travel planning and email until the sun went down.

I had another quiet night at home consuming unnecessary snacks and drinks before reading a gripping spy novel in bed. Lights out at 9 o'clock. Asleep at 9:02!

8.7 A Day Trip to Great Yarmouth

[Next day] I was wide awake at 7 o'clock, feeling quite rested. I had a light breakfast (that included [marmalade](#)-on-toast) and handled the email that had arrived overnight. It was a pleasant but cool day out and I arrived at the train station by 9:15. I rode a train 35 minutes to [Great Yarmouth](#), a seaside resort town. Along the way, I sat and talked with a couple from [El Salvador](#), and I unexpectedly got a bit of a Spanish workout. As we were all heading to the tourist office quite some distance from the station, we walked together.

From all I'd read, there wasn't much likely to interest me there. At one time, it was the [herring](#) capital of the world, and one of the wealthiest cities in England, but overfishing caused that industry to almost disappear. Now, it's sort of a gaudy tourist beach town. Fortunately, the season had not yet arrived, so there weren't many visitors around. However, I liked riding trains, it was a nice day to be out, and I was just filling in time before I died!

After a long walk along the promenade (with a 150-yard-deep sandy beach that ran along the coast for miles), I headed for the one place I thought might be interesting. It was a museum with a café. I went in to check out the menu and decided to have an early lunch. I had a bowl of piping-hot, red lentil soup with bread smothered in garlic butter. It was "to die for," I kid you not! I sat in the sunshine reading a newspaper and working on a sudoku puzzle.

Afterwards, I paid my £5.70 admission to the [Time and Tide Museum of Yarmouth Life](#). What a surprise! It was housed in an old herring processing factory, and was very well organized. Apart from the fishing-related exhibits, there was a section on the Roman occupation, bronze-age artifacts, the town's role in WWI and WWII (being a submarine base, it was a target), and more modern times. It was definitely worth the visit. In the courtyard, a large group of small children was watching a [Punch and Judy](#) show.

I then strolled along the riverfront and then back into the pedestrian zone of the town. I found a Poundland store at which many things cost £1 or £2, and found exactly the thing I was looking for, large boxes of [Maynard's wine gums](#). I rescued two! I tried to pay with a handful of coins, but the

cashier rejected one. Apparently, all £1 coins issued prior to a year or so ago were no longer legal tender, and had been replaced by a new one, which has many edges. So, I went next door to a bank to change it.

After four hours, I was ready to go home, so I power-walked to the station, jumped on the waiting train, and we departed five minutes later. My timing was impeccable! I sat on the sunny side looking out the window at the very woolly sheep with their newborn lambs. Many fields had drainage canals around and across them, and there were pools of water on the ground. I saw the remains of numerous windmills (all now without blades), which presumably used to pump the water around in the canals.

Back at Norwich station, I was hoping for a [sedan chair](#) and some bearers, but good help is so hard to find these days! I dragged my weary legs up the incline to the city where I stopped to hear a young man play banjo. Then I rescued a pint of ice-cold whole milk. Back home, I handled email and brought this diary up to date. James arrived back from London.

Without a doubt, the highlight of the day was lunch. In fact, it was one of the highlights of my whole trip thus far!

8.8 Two Easy Days Around Norwich

[Next day] Once again, I had a good, long sleep. After days of rain being forecast, but not happening, it finally caught up with me. After a breakfast that included honey-on-toast, I worked on administration and went online to see the news and sporting event results from the weekend. I saw that it was also raining at my house back in the US, and was likely to do so for several days.

Around 10 o'clock, I rugged up, put on my rain gear, and stepped out in a dreary day. Although it had rained quite a bit, it was not raining then. My main goal for the day was to visit [Norwich Castle](#). Known locally as "The Box on the Hill," it literally is a cube on top of a tall, man-made hill. I started with the [keep](#) where I read about a variety of exhibits. The Normans built the stone castle around 1120. However, many additions and changes were made during the Victorian era, and the outside walls are fewer than 100 years old. Nonetheless, it was an impressive complex that once covered 23 acres (9.3 hectares). The number of small, but interesting museums and galleries housed there included the following: Roman and Anglo-Saxon times, an Egyptian section, a natural-history museum, and a large collection of landscapes and portraits by artists from the [Norwich School of Painters](#). I walked around the gardens where I discovered an entrance to an underground shopping mall.

I walked down some new streets and lanes, and stopped in at a [Dr. Martens](#) store to look at some interesting boots. Then it was on to [Norwich Market](#), where I strolled the aisles between the several hundred stalls. Along the way, I had a short concert from a young woman playing guitar in light drizzle. I made it back home without getting too wet, and was happy to rest up for the remainder of the afternoon.

In the evening, I had a sudden craze for some salt-and-vinegar potato chips (which the British cleverly disguise as "crisps"), of which I'd sampled a few days earlier. I'd been meaning to buy some on my way home each of the last couple of days. I was lamenting my predicament to James, my host, and he reached into his kitchen cabinet and pulled out a large bag of Tesco's finest "sea salt and cider vinegar,

hand-cooked potato crisps!" As a result, I told him that such hospitality was sure to get him a higher rating when I sent in my report to AirBnB.

I went to bed early and finished my gipping spy novel. I then had "sweet dreams" of covert operations and assassins! (It must have been the salt-and-vinegar chips!)

[Next day] After more than 10 hours of restful sleep, I got up to spend my last day in Norwich. For breakfast I had a savory pastry with a touch of ketchup and a dusting of ground black pepper, don't you know! I washed that down with a nice cup of coffee.

After processing my overnight email, I headed out around 10:30 in light drizzle. My plan was to walk the back streets and alleys, looking for photo opportunities, especially interesting signage. I turned left into Cow Hill and then crossed over to Ten Bell Lane, and on to St. Swithens Alley. The names were all so terribly English! I came to Elm Hill, a cobble-stoned street for veddy upscale shops, some of which one had to make an appointment to visit; I say!

Eventually, I was back at the textile exhibition I'd seen the day before. Adjacent was the Norwich Library, and I went in to have a look around. In one far corner there was a memorial library to groups from the United States Army Air Force. (It didn't become a separate military service until 1949.) It was dedicated to the Americans who were based in the area from 1942–1945, during WWII. At any one time, there were 50,000 American servicemen there. As well as having materials about that time and place, the library has a fine collection of American-related books on a wide range of topics. It was a surprise to find such a thing even existed. (While there, I learned that the only US War Graves Cemetery in the UK is in Cambridge.)

As I walked home, I remembered to swing by Tesco's to buy a replacement bag of crisps for James. When I saw that the price for a large bag was only £1, I bought an extra one, just for me. Now back home, I still had some left over from the previous night, but the thought crossed my mind that I might not be able to make it all the way home to eat them. At that very moment, a man pressed a gun to my head and forced me to open one of the bags and to start eating! Well, what could I do but obey? Now, several hours later, it occurred to me that I might just have been hallucinating, from a deficiency of salt-and-vinegar! Back home, I was glad to be inside where it was warm and dry.

I packed most of my gear and had a quiet evening working on various editing projects along with some unnecessary eating and drinking. I went to bed early and read a Jack Reacher novel for several hours.

[Next day] I was wide awake before my alarm clock, but felt rested. James was already up and eating breakfast. I made a meal out of my remaining groceries while we talked. He headed off to work around 8:30. I got my final email fix for the morning, packed my computer bag, and headed out the door. As I walked down the street, a town clock chimed 9 am. It was cool out, but sunny, and as I was in no hurry, I took my time getting to the train station.

8.9 Back to London and More Theater

Trains departed for London's Liverpool Street station every half hour, and I'd planned to catch the one at 10 o'clock. However, I arrived at 9:15, so I boarded the 9:30, which was already waiting at Platform 3. It was a long train, and I went way down to the end in the hope of finding an unreserved

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forward-facing seat at a table. I was successful! I chatted with a young Englishman going home to his Welsh wife in Wales. At 9:29, a conductor blew his whistle, at 9:30 we pulled out of the station, and I said, "Goodbye" to Norwich. Then I set up my laptop and worked on this diary. And while I got things done, the constant swaying of the carriage made for some interesting typing and editing mistakes as my mouse cursor danced around and about as I clicked.

We arrived at Liverpool Street on time, and I rode the Circle Line to South Kensington where I changed to the District Line. I got off at Ravenscourt Park, and walked the short distance to my Airbnb home-for-a-night. Let's just say that it was spartan, but adequate, although the outside looked like a hideaway for someone in the Witness-Protection Program!

I rode the Tube back to Leicester Square where I sat and looked at the day's theater offerings. I finally chose a serious play matinee, and a musical for the evening. As I had time to kill, but it was raining lightly, I found a "traditional" English establishment, Burger King, where I had some chicken nuggets and onion rings. From there, I walked to Trafalgar Square where I watched many tourists trying to climb onto the backs of the large lions. (I've done it, but it's challenging!) I then walked down towards Downing Street, but as the rain got heavier, I took a shortcut to the theater.

At 2:45, I was seated upstairs in the Dress Circle (wearing my hiking boots and pants, with my toy caterpillar sticking out my shirt front) at the Playhouse theater. At 3 pm, the curtain went up on a Gore Vidal play, The Best Man, set in 1960 and covering the days before and during a fictitious US-Presidential Primary convention. The main actor was Martin Shaw. Honeysuckle Weeks (of Foyle's War fame) played a slightly naïve, southern-accented wife of a sleazy candidate. I was not at all familiar with any of Gore Vidal's work, but was pleasantly surprised at some of the humorous dialog. Despite numerous references to American culture and people, the audience seemed to have no trouble following along. After 2:40 hours, I was back out in light rain, with an improved "kulcha quotient!"

I was in the mood for a small snack, and as I came up a side street next to Charring Cross station, I spied an interesting sign and stopped to take a photo. Then I saw an ever better one in the shop window, and then noticed it was an eating place, called "Herman ze German," which seemed a little politically incorrect, another attraction for me! The kicker was that their slogan was "Our wurst is ze Best!," and a photo of that would definitely make it in one of my future blog postings! The menu was written in Germlish, some staff spoke German, and a German family with two young kids sat next to me. Then a young couple from Berlin came and sat with me and declared the food "authentisch!" We chatted at length while I ate my bratwurst-with-dried-onion-pieces-and-ketchup-on-a-bread-roll, which I washed down with a bottle of Fritz-kola (I kid you not). [The joke here is that many words in German are v-e-r-y long, and are made up of what would be a phrase in English, with the words joined together without any intervening spaces.] The next diner to join me was a young Ghanaian called Daniel. His parents left Africa and moved to Germany, where he was born, but now they all lived in the UK.

I stepped out into a pleasant evening, with the drizzle stopped. As I had time to spare, I walked up to Covent Garden and through its halls, thinking perhaps I might run into Eliza Doolittle or Professor 'enry 'iggins.

At 7 o'clock, I was seated in a prime spot in the Stalls seven rows from the stage of the Drury Lane, Theater Royal. My seatmates were an extended American family who had flown in from Los Angeles

the day before. At 7:30 sharp, the conductor got the orchestra going (in a pit down front), and except for a 15-minute intermission, it was 2:30 hours of non-stop music, singing, and tap dancing. The show was 42nd Street, set in 1933 Philadelphia and New York City. It certainly was spectacular, and the large sets were impressive. There was a cast of 58, and at times, almost all were on stage.

Afterwards, to avoid changing trains on the way home, I walked down to the Thames River to the Temple tube station where I got talking to a young man on the platform. Well, don't you know, he was one of the main characters in the musical I'd just seen, so I asked him a lot of questions. He was quite new to the cast, and just two weeks into a 1-year contract. The main characters each had two understudies who also had regular roles, so there was plenty of backup coverage. And as people got four-weeks holiday per year, but the show didn't stop for that, while they were away, their understudy stepped in. The cast performed a 2:30-hour show six nights a week, and two matinees, with Sundays off. Given the very physical nature of the show, he said they really didn't get much rest.

At my home station, I walked away from my room to a street that looked like having some places open. At a deli, I bought a pint of cold, whole milk and a sandwich, which I ate as I checked out the neighborhood. Back home, I collapsed into bed at 11:30 pm.

8.10 Homeward Bound!

[Next day] Although my bed was comfortable, I took a good while to get to sleep, and I didn't get my full complement! However, after a long, hot shower, I felt much better. At 9 o'clock, I ventured out into a very sunny, but cool, day. I'd asked a fellow guest for breakfast-place recommendations, and he gave me one. I walked to the main shopping street and to a pub that was part of the Wetherspoons chain. Although I wasn't planning on a large breakfast, they had a large- or medium-sized English breakfast on offer, both for under £5, with all the hot drinks one could manage. I ordered at the bar. (One could order from the table if one had the appropriate app downloaded on one's phone!) As I waited for my food, I perused the rather-thick quarterly magazine the pub published. A few patrons were sitting in a quite darkened section, and one had two large glasses of beer in front of him, and it was only 9:15 am! His big decision of the day seemed to be, "Now, which one of these will I drink first? Maybe I'll be daring and alternate!" A young waitress served me a fried egg, bacon, sausage, hash-brown potatoes, baked beans, fried tomato, and toast with butter. An older man entered the pub, and took up a table near me. From the bar, he got a bottle of beer and an empty glass, and a glass of water. He proceeded to use the water to wash down a series of tablets, and then he attacked the beer. It looked like it might have been his daily morning ritual!

From there, I walked up and down the high street taking photos of some interesting signage.

Back in my room, I got my final email fix, packed my gear, and walked the 200 yards to the tube station. I had a 7-minute wait for the next District Line train going to my destination. Now the Piccadilly Line to Heathrow Airport ran through my station, and two of its trains went by as I waited, but they didn't stop at my station. Don't you just hate that when that happens! The platform was deserted, and as it was rather cold out, I took refuge in the heated, "safe" glass-walled room. Soon after, an elderly lady arrived at the platform, but when she saw the bearded foreigner with a caterpillar in his shirt front standing in the room, she apparently thought it would be safer for her if she stood outside in the cold! I rode the train to Acton Town where I waited another eight minutes for a Piccadilly Line train to

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Heathrow Terminal 2. On the ride to the airport, I stood next to an Aussie couple who were flying back to Melbourne via Perth on the new Qantas non-stop B787 service. We spoke at length about the good old days of Aussie football.

After a very long walk to the check-in area, I was happy to find there was no line at the priority counter. I asked about catching an earlier flight, but they had just closed out the one prior to mine, so I had a long wait. In the priority security line, I was the only passenger, and all the staff were enamored with my stuffed caterpillar. One woman asked me, "Why are you wearing a caterpillar?" to which I replied, "Because my giraffe was sick today!" After she decided that neither I nor my caterpillar were security risks, she just smiled!

After another long walk, I made it to the United Airlines Business Lounge near my departure gate, and I settled in at a workbench where I had some juice, worked on this diary, and processed 2-days-worth of photos. After all that demanding effort, I took a look at the food offerings. [I'd much rather eat a meal served on real crockery and with real cutlery, on a large and stable table, than try to eat in Economy Class with all courses served at once.] There was a decent selection, and I settled on a bed of rice and a portion of steamed vegetables, all smothered in beef stroganoff with lots of gravy. It was just like Grandma wished that she could make! I helped that down with a can of England's finest Coke. For afters, I had a fine serving of mango and passionfruit cheesecake.

United Flight 928 boarded on time, but was at least 30 minutes late departing. I declined the meal, but looked forward to the ice cream coming later. Unfortunately, it was their vanilla with ginger pieces, which I definitely don't like! I chatted at length with the young schoolteacher sitting next to me, who taught high school social studies. I tried sleeping, but only managed to rest my eyes. I ate the snack that was served just prior to arrival.

At IAD, I went through passport control, got my luggage, and in a cab in double-quick time. It was pleasant out. I picked up my car and headed home, stopping to buy a few groceries. At home, I dumped my gear and got into bed. My body's London clock time was 3:15 am! After four weeks away, my bed sure felt good!

9. August 2022, “A Little Bit of History”

According to Wikipedia, ‘[History](#) ... is the study of the past. Events occurring before the invention of writing systems are considered [prehistory](#). "History" is an umbrella term that relates to past events as well as the memory, discovery, collection, organization, presentation, and interpretation of information about these events. Historians place the past in context using historical sources such as written documents, oral accounts, ecological markers, and material objects including art and artifacts.’

Some time ago, I was looking at all the books on my shelves, many of which hadn't been opened in years despite having survived several moves (including a trip across the Pacific in a container), and I came across one called, “Australia since 1606.” I cast my mind back to the 1960s when I first had social studies in school, and I remembered that the [First Fleet](#) arrived in Botany Bay in 1788, not too many years after Captain James Cook “discovered” Australia.

[It wasn't until many years later that I discovered the link between American independence and the settlement of Australia. Also, from [Wikipedia](#), “Convicts were originally transported to the Thirteen Colonies in North America, but after the American War of Independence ended in 1783, the newly formed United States refused to accept further convicts. On 6 December 1785, Orders in Council were issued in London for the establishment of a penal colony in New South Wales, on land claimed for Britain by explorer James Cook in his first voyage to the Pacific in 1770.”]

I remembered learning about the Dutch explorers (especially [Dirk Hartog](#) and [Abel Tasman](#)); after all, Australia used to be called [New Holland](#)! However, as I got into that book, I found that the Spanish had also sighted the northeast tip, something I'd never heard about before. And these folks were exploring the general area well before 1770. However, they thought the land was quite inhospitable and they made no claim to it.

When I got to the chapter covering the settlement of my home state, [South Australia](#), I came across a reference to [Encounter Bay](#), a place I had visited on several occasions. But how did it get its name? Who encountered whom and why might anyone care? Captain Matthew Flinders (an English navigator and cartographer) encountered one Nicolas Baudin (a French explorer, cartographer, naturalist and hydrographer). They met peacefully in April of 1802 even though they thought their countries were at war back home. [Unbeknown to them, a peace treaty had been signed two weeks earlier.] So now the French were in the picture, something else I don't recall having learned in school.

After 25 years in Australia, I've now lived 43 years in the US, almost all of that in the state of [Virginia](#), the oldest of the US states having been formed in 1607 (vs. South Australia in 1836).

In this essay, I'll talk about my early exposure to the subject of history, I'll mention some of the historically significant places I've visited, and I'll mention how history actually can *come alive* when you are standing in the place where it happened!

9.1 My Early Exposure to History

Let's begin with social studies in elementary (AU: primary) school. I was one of 28 students in a 1-teacher country school, with seven grades being taught in parallel, *by the same teacher!* I expect we barely got the basics. Our entire reference library was probably no more than 50 books, one of which was a world atlas, lots of which was colored pink to indicate the far-flung British Empire.

In high school, I had history classes for four years, with emphasis on the British Commonwealth. [Of course, now that I live in the US, not surprisingly, I see the emphasis here is US- and state-based.] From my report card, Year 8: Terms 1, 2, and 3 – 63%, 52%, and 53%, respectively; Year 9: 57%, 56%, 45%; Year 10: 74%, 48%, passed the EOY state-wide exam; Year 11: 57%, 49%, failed the EOY state-wide exam; Year 12: no history; YES! And none in university/college. (Hey, I was a math/science nerd!)

Let me make this perfectly clear: **I did not like history!** The materials were boring: no color, no slides, no films, and no relevance. It was all about the regurgitation of dates for tests, and there was absolutely no doubt in my mind that learning history was punishment! I did, however, have a small world atlas, and to this day, I love maps and various aspects of geography, and I've even come to embrace at least some history.

In a fit of madness, in Year 11, I took Modern History, which covered South East Asia, Australia's own backyard. We learned about China and Vietnam. Now this was in 1968, and Australia was a significant player in the Vietnam War, and Australia had conscription at age 20.

By the way, being raised in the British Commonwealth, for us World War II started in September 1939, whereas for the Americans, it was December 1941.

Outside of school, I was exposed to a few historical things:

- One of the main immigrant groups (including my ancestors) to settle my home state were German-speaking Lutherans from Prussia. They started arriving in the 1840s. [Even though my parents were 4th-generation Australians, they spoke only German until they started school. My maternal grandparents' first language was actually Wendish/Sorbish.]
- When my parents were children, their families farmed with horse-drawn machinery, and I well remember riding in a horse-drawn cart with my maternal grandfather, repairing fences on his farm.
- My region had several Historical Villages and restored paddle-wheeler boats as tourist attractions.
- Once during my school years, I visited the South Australian Museum in the state capital.
- At the end of Year 11, I travelled to Alice Springs in Central Australia where I visited the old Telegraph Station and the Hermannsburg Aboriginal Mission where my sister lived.

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- I visited [Uluru](#) (formerly Ayer's Rock), a huge world-renowned sandstone rock formation in central Australia that is sacred to the local Aboriginal people.

9.2 My First Trip Abroad

During my 25 years Down Under, I visited only a few areas of my state and I had few short trips to two neighboring states. My first big travel adventure involved five weeks in Southeast Asia and Western Europe on my way to living in the US. Here are some of the history-related activities from that trip, all of which involved visiting places with a recorded history that was far older than the almost-200 years I was used to:

- Hong Kong: This was my first exposure to a non-Western society and my first ever international destination. It surely was exciting. (According to Wikipedia, "Hong Kong became a colony of the British Empire after the Qing Empire ceded Hong Kong Island at the end of the First Opium War in 1842.")
- Singapore: I took a cable car to Sentosa Island to see the military fortress and [WWII Allied surrender memorial](#).
- Malaysia: Kuala Lumpur, Malacca, and Penang. In Penang, I had my first experience of being woken by a very loud public-address system for early morning prayers at a mosque nearby.
- Thailand: Bangkok, Kanchanaburi, and Pattaya. Kanchanaburi featured in the construction of the infamous [Burma Railway](#), and was the location at which the movie "[The Bridge on the River Kwai](#)" was filmed.
- India: In Bombay (now Mumbai) I encountered my first slums and deformed beggars. Initially, I had visions of touring much of the country by train, but I stayed only 24 hours. The experience was quite a shock, and I couldn't leave fast enough!
- Italy: After seeing many and huge sitting, standing, and reclining Buddhas through Southeast Asia, in Rome, I progressed to the 7-hour walking tour of the [Vatican City](#) museums, which I completed in an hour, [Philistine](#) that I am! I also dropped by the [Coliseum](#) and [Circus Maximus](#).
- Switzerland: In Geneva, I stumbled across an interesting museum of armor, [pikes](#), and crossbows.
- France: I was accidentally in Paris during [Bastille Day](#), and I made the usual tourist walk along the Seine.
- England: In London, I checked out the [Houses of Parliament](#) and watched the changing of the guard at [Buckingham Palace](#).

9.3 The Very Old Days

- After 10 days in the Amazon rainforest of northeastern Peru, my first foray into an old culture was to Cuzco and [Machu Pichu](#), Peru, the heart of the [Incan](#) civilization. Once the afternoon train departed with the day-trippers, I was one of only 100 overnight tourists on-site, and I lay

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on the grassed terraces listening to the roaring river beneath the clouds below me, thinking about life there during the city's heyday.

- While [Stonehenge](#) looks impressive in photos, I had the opportunity of walking among, and touching, the great stones. [On my second visit, the stones had been roped off and we looked from a distance.] It's hard to imagine that 150 years ago, one could rent a hammer from a local blacksmith and break off a souvenir piece to take home, and farmers crushed some of the huge [lintels](#) for gravel.
- On a trip through Mexico City and points east, I stopped off at the great earthen pyramid near [Puebla](#). Much later, on a trip to Guatemala, I spent several days at the Mayan Temple city of [Tikal](#). Finally, I visited the Mayan city of [Chichen Itza](#) in the Mexican Yucatan Peninsula. While at each, I thought a great deal about their builder's knowledge of mathematics and astronomy.
- The reason I went to Jordan was to spend several days at the 2,000-year-old Nabatean city of [Petra](#). [By the way, Jordan's capital, Amman, was named Philadelphia during its Greek and Roman periods.] Once I got in-country, I discovered a delightful bonus, the Roman city of [Jerash](#), where tourists could ride in a horse-drawn chariot driven by a centurion!
- My first trip to Beijing, China, was in early winter, and it was cool! However, I braved the elements and went to see, and walk on, a section of the [Great Wall](#). There were no labor unions back in those days!

9.4 The Good Old Days

- I was very impressed by the [castle](#) in Heidelberg, Germany, which had already been a ruin for 400 years.
- Places worth visiting when in London, England: [Hampton Court Palace](#), the [Tower of London](#), and [Greenwich](#) (where one can straddle the Prime Meridian).
- The Protestant [Reformation Wall](#) in Geneva.
- Classic Italy: Pisa, Lucca, Florence, Venice, and a walk around the ruins of [Pompeii](#).
- The Adriatic coast of Croatia, including the fabulous walled city of [Dubrovnik](#) with a sobering day trip to [Mostar](#), Bosnia, and a walk around [Diocletian's Palace](#) in Split.
- The [Viking ship museum](#) in Roskilde, Denmark.
- The [Forbidden City](#) in Beijing.
- The temples in Kyoto, Japan, and the [great bronze statue of Buddha near Kamakura](#).

9.5 New Europe

I've spent quality time in the following European countries and cities, all of which have plenty of historical sites:

- Berlin, Potsdam, Leipzig, Dresden, all in Germany

- [Hanseatic League](#) states: Lubeck, Rostock, and Bremen in Germany, and Tallinn and Tartu in Estonia
- Denmark and Norway
- Paris, Brussels, Amsterdam
- St. Petersburg, Russia
- Prague, Czech Republic
- Vienna and Salzburg, Austria
- Bratislava, Slovakia
- Budapest, Hungary

9.6 North America

Here are some historical highlights I've visited in Canada and the US:

- [Canadian Museum of History](#) in Ottawa
- [Museum of Anthropology at the University of British Columbia](#) (UBC) campus in Vancouver
- The [Citadel Hill star fort](#) at Halifax
- [Fort Louisburg](#) on Cape Breton Island
- Boston Harbor and the naval vessel [USS Constitution](#)
- New York City: [Ellis Island](#) and the [Statue of Liberty](#)
- The [Amish](#) communities in Lancaster County, Pennsylvania
- Philadelphia, Harper's Ferry, New Orleans
- The [Civil War battlefield](#) at Gettysburg
- The Lewis and Clark camp in Illinois
- Inscription Rock at [El Morro National Monument](#) in New Mexico
- [The Alamo](#) in Texas
- The [Boot Hill Cemetery](#) in Tombstone, Arizona
- [Little Big Horn battlefield](#) where General Custer "died with his boots on!"

9.7 Military/War-Related Places

- [Dover Castle](#), England, is impressive. Its miles of underground tunnels are still mostly off-limits. It's the place from which the [Dunkirk](#) evacuation of WWII was managed.
- In Brussels, Belgium, I spent time at the [Waterloo battlefield](#).
- While in Helsinki, Finland, I visited the island of [Suomenlinna](#), home to an impressive naval dry dock and fortress. There, in a museum, I learned about the [Winter War](#) of 1939–1940 against the Soviet Union.
- The 1066 [Battle of Hastings](#) actually took place in Battle, some miles inland. The battlefield has never been developed. It was interesting to walk that field with an audio wand that allowed me to listen to a reenactment from the point of view of the Normans, the Anglo-Saxons, and

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someone in King Harold's medical corps. On a separate trip, I visited the [York battlefield](#) area where Harold defeated his half-brother just days before having to march all the way to Hastings to face William of Normandy.

- If you have a spare half day in London, I highly recommend the [Cabinet War Rooms](#) and Churchill Museum.
- It was a sobering experience to visit the US War Cemeteries in Luxembourg (General Patton); the Netherlands; and in Normandy, France.
- I've been to the [Dachau concentration camp](#) near Munich, three times; frankly, once is enough.
- On a walk through the lovely town of [Caen, France](#), I tried to imagine what it was like in the days immediately following the D-Day landing in WWII.
- After WWI, the French started—but never completed—the [Maginot Line](#), a defense against future attacks by Germany. I toured some of the tunnels near Alsace.
- [Peenemunde](#) on the German island of Usedom was the place where the V1 and V2 flying bombs were built and tested. I've visited it twice.
- On a visit to the [Hiroshima Peace Park](#) in Japan, I was most interested to see that people who had survived the atomic bomb blast there received free admission to the museum. Some benefit, huh? My young son was especially taken with a wristwatch from a victim, which showed the exact time of the blast, when the watch stopped working.
- In Ireland, I walked around the field from the [Battle of the Boyne](#) (1690).
- Part of a "social" event during a conference in Berlin, Germany, involved a tour of a WWII [bunker](#).
- While riding a bike in rural Germany with two German friends, we stopped for a picnic lunch at a small village church. As I walked around the cemetery, I saw a section for local men who'd died in WWI and WWII. I immediately thought of similar graveyards back in Australia, and I quickly realized that people were conscripted on both sides.
- My hotel in Belfast, Northern Ireland, almost bragged about having had the most bomb threats during [The Troubles](#)!

9.8 Some Odds and Ends

- While touring the Adriatic Coast of Croatia, I visited the island where long-time Yugoslav President, Tito, lived and met with leaders from the non-aligned countries. It's now [Brijuni National Park](#).
- A plaque marks the place on the steps of Lincoln Memorial in Washington D.C. where Martin Luther King gave his famous "[I have a dream speech](#)."
- On a week's holiday in County Kent, England, I stopped off in [Sandwich](#) and visited the Earl's place. I also visited [Botany Bay](#) the namesake of [the place were the first settlers landed](#) in Australia. [The Earl of Sandwich was a sponsor of Captain James Cook, who named the Sandwich Islands (now Hawaii) after him.]

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- The highlight of Pula, Croatia, is a beautifully preserved [Roman Coliseum](#).
- I once spend a few hours in [Lutherstadt Wittenberg](#) where Martin Luther famously nailed his theses on the church door.
- If you are looking for a spectacular castle that is not at all drafty, go visit the Bavarian castle [Neuschwanstein](#), which Walt Disney reportedly used as the model for the centerpiece of his Magic Kingdom. (King Ludwig's palace [Linderhof](#) ain't half bad either!)
- I've had the pleasure of visiting more than a few areas over which the [Habsburgs](#) ruled.
- While in Bratislava, Slovakia, I saw a memorial to all the people killed trying to escape from behind the [Iron Curtain](#) by swimming across the Danube River to Austria (near Vienna).
- While in Berlin, I went in search of [The Empty Library](#), "a Memorial in memory of ... the Nazi book burning that took place in the Bebelplatz in Berlin, Germany on May 10, 1933. The memorial is set into the cobblestones of the plaza and contains a collection of empty subterranean bookcases." As a non-recovering bookaholic, it was stunning!
- The highlight of my personal time in Stockholm, Sweden, was a visit to the [Vasa](#) Museum, which houses the warship that sank on its maiden voyage in 1628.
- In Denmark, I spent an enjoyable afternoon at the home/museum of [Hans Christian Anderson](#).
- [Lapland, Finland](#), was definitely worth the visit, although the vodka the reindeer herder gave me to drink from a traditional wooden mug surely was "fire water!"
- On a day trip from Reykjavík, Iceland, I visited the site of the [Althing](#), the oldest parliament.
- [Port Arthur](#) the infamous convict settlement (in the Australian state of Tasmania), is definitely worth a visit. (Separately, in 1996, it was the scene of a tourist [massacre](#) by a deranged gunman.)

9.9 Conclusion

- For years, I've been saying, "History is nothing but one thing after another," something I'd picked up over many years of reading. It seems that around 1909, various US magazines and newspapers contained text such as, "Life: One damn thing after another," "life is just one darn thing after another," and later "History is just one damn fact after another."
- A number of people (including George Santayana and Winston Churchill) are credited with saying something like, "Those who don't learn from history are bound to repeat its mistakes."
- If you want a quick overview of (tongue-in-cheek) history, watch Mel Brooks' movie "[History of the World: Part I](#)." In the same vein, I also recommend Monty Pythons "[Life of Brian](#)."

10. September 2022, "Signs of Life: Part 29"

From time to time during my travels, I come across signs that I find interesting for one reason or another. Sometimes, they contain clever writing, are humorous, or remind me of some place or event. Here are some from Germany and England.



From the instant I saw this postcard, I knew I just *had* to buy it for myself! For the past four years, it's been sitting on my work desk.

The translation is, "I will grow up next week!" Now that said, I can't promise I will *actually* do that. In fact, I often ask people I meet, "What do you want to be when you grow up?" If they ask me the same question, I usually reply, "It's a moot point, as I don't plan on growing up!"

Schuhe verändern dein Leben,
frag Cinderella



Shoes change your life, ask [Cinderella!](#)



Well, that seems pretty clear!

Sometimes when I'm cooking, I announce that, "You can order anything you like, but you'll eat what I serve!"



A supermarket sign; obviously, as the terrier is carrying the groceries home!

According to Wikipedia, "[Netto](#) is a Danish discount supermarket operating in Denmark, Germany, Poland, and [other places]."



"Here, there is no sex, no drugs, and no rock-n-roll; just coffee." And at very good prices, too!



What caught my eye was the second sign from the top: Way of St. James to Santiago de Compostela 3,400 kms (2,125 miles).

This pilgrimage walk—[Camino de Santiago](#)—is very popular, and ends in Galicia, northern Spain. It is the subject of [The Way](#), a 2010 movie directed and written by Emilio Estevez and starring his father, Martin Sheen.



Given the love affair many people have with their mobile phone, this phone store's name seems appropriate: "Your phone and you!"



Ladies, have you never [lusted](#) after a particular handbag? Yes, it's the same word in German!



No dancing on the train platform! Or, perhaps I'm misunderstanding.



High-tech weapon? Rivet gun? No, this tool is used to break a window of the train carriage to get out in an emergency! What will those Germans think of next!



Now I'm all for having "Quite Cars" when riding on a long-distance train. However, it's not clear to me that "Psst" is the best indicator of one. According to Wiktionary, this word is used "to get someone's attention or to communicate with them" yet nowhere is there any symbol indicating to "keep quiet." It seems to me that the word "shush," written the same in English and German, would be better.



Don't you just hate that when a large boulder crashes through your windshield (AU: windscreen)!

Well if that happens, and you are anywhere near the German city of [Apolda](#), "We can take care of your glass damage!"



Well, I've seen parking places reserved for people with disabilities, pregnant women and new mothers, military veterans, and "Employee of the Month," however, I'd never before seen any reserved just for women! I think it had to do with safety, as this spot was in a well-lit area near an exit and elevator (AU: lift).

Now it just so happens that the German equivalent of "parking" (Parken) also begins with the letter P, so the sign is instantly recognizable by English speakers. However, in Spanish-speaking countries, it's an E (estacionamiento).



There I was touring the [main cathedral](#)

[in Erfurt](#) (the capital of the German state of Thuringia), and I came across this set of tourist prohibitions. And while I easily figured out the first five, all I could think of for the sixth one was being struck down by a bolt of lightning. (The wrath of God, perhaps?)



Now, if you were going to have a lower goat lane in your village, it seems entirely

reasonable to also have an upper one! That said, when I walked said lanes, no goats were to be seen.



"Psst, want some quality white stuff?"

No, not that kind of white stuff! According to [Wikipedia](#), "*White Stuff* is a British fashion and lifestyle brand that sells women's, men's and kids' clothing, accessories, homeware and gifts in over 120 shops in the United Kingdom, shops in Germany, via mail-order catalogues and through its website."



11. October 2022, "Travel: Memories of Paris, France"

This trip involved four days of business in [Paris, France](#), followed by seven days of play in [Normandy](#), and three more back in Paris, all in December, 2009.

11.1 Heading Out

My 3:15-pm taxi arrived five minutes early, and my Indian driver whisked me away to Washington Dulles International Airport (IAD) at a break-neck pace. The weather was very pleasant, and we had the windows down all the way there, an unexpected treat after the recent rain and cold. Although it was the end of the 4-day Thanksgiving holiday, the cab driver said that business was quite slow. Apparently, all the people from out of town who were returning to the airport had friends or family members drive them.

Surprisingly, the airport was far from busy, and I was through check-in in 10 minutes. The new security area lines moved quite quickly, but the new inter-terminal train system opening had been delayed, so I boarded the old-fashioned bus to Terminal C. I settled into United Airline's Red-Carpet Club lounge and snacked on some celery and carrots while chatting with some Germans who were heading home, and a retired American couple heading for Alsace. I started my emergency rations kit by taking some of the complimentary granola bars, cookies, cheese, and crackers.

My in-coming plane was 45 minutes late departing San Francisco, so I was sure my departure would be delayed. However, that was not to be, and boarding at Gate 4 was called right on time, at 4:35 pm. So, I made my way there and took up starboard window Seat 11J in Business Class on a Boeing 777.

Business Class was no more than half-full, and the seat next to me was empty, so my imaginary friend sat there. Although I very much like the B777, having recently flown the refurbished B767 several times—the Business Class of which now has large suites with lay-flat beds—Business Class in the B777 seemed rather feeble by comparison.

The scheduled departure time was 5:20 pm and the doors closed right on time. However, we were informed that there was a problem with one of the fuel pumps and that a mechanic was on his way to "check it out." (Don't you just hate that when that happens!) Not long after, the pilot told us with great confidence that the mechanic stared hard at the offending piece of equipment, and it started working again. (This interested me very much as I've stared at all sorts of malfunctioning appliances at home, and none has ever jumped back to life!)

We were 20 minutes late pushing back from the gate and 15 minutes after that, flight UA914 took off to the west, circled back to the east, and headed northeast up towards the New England states, the Atlantic states of Canada, and across the Atlantic. I was quite tired, so decided to forgo a movie and to watch several episodes of the TV show "[The United States of Tara](#)," during which hot towels were dispensed and drinks were served.

Dinner included the following: Saumon fume, prosciutto et crudité aux sauce ranch, and salade César ou Vinaigrette asiatique au sesame et au gingembre, followed by a choice of three main courses: mahi mahi grille, boeuf braise sauce au poivre, or roulades de lassagne aux épinards sauce rosetta la tomate. For those of you not versed in the French language that would be smoked salmon and ham with

vegetables and ranch dressing, a green salad with Asian sesame ginger vinaigrette, and fish, beef, or pasta. I had the braised beef with peppercorn sauce, and it was very good despite the preponderance of spinach. (I rationalized that it was good for me as it contained lots of iron, and I had recently been rejected not once or twice but three times at the blood bank because of a low iron count.) I forwent the cheese, coffee, and port wine, and at 7:30 pm I put my seat way back, arranged two pillows and two blankets, put in my ear plugs, put on my sleep goggles, and wished for dreamland.

[Next day] After a very long time, I finally got to sleep. When I woke, my clock showed 12:15 am, so I put it forward six hours to GMT+1 making it 06:15, Paris time. We'd just crossed the English Channel ("La Manche" in French, meaning "the sleeve") and were over Joan of Arc's former stomping ground, Rouen, in Upper Normandy with only 20 minutes flying time to go.

11.2 Arrival in Paris

I'd slept through breakfast, but managed to get a glass of orange juice. There was a flurry of activity as the cabin crew prepared for landing, and at 06:45 we touched down at Charles de Gaulle ([CDG](#)) international airport. Passport control was a formality; I didn't need an immigration card and the agent barely looked at my passport and did not stamp it. (Apparently, for both my and France's benefit, there would be no record of my having entered the country!) A series of long moving sidewalks took us from the plane into the terminal. At Carousel 3, I had a 10-minute wait for my bag. Then I walked straight through the "Nothing to Declare" (except that it was bloody cold) line at Customs and was out in the general population in no time at all, mingling freely with the Cancan dancers from [Moulin Rouge](#) who had been sent by the President to welcome me to "Gay Paris." (Actually, that's not true; I think it was the Prime Minister.)

I found a cash machine, which was happy to dispense €250 in €50- and €20-bills. I deliberately avoided finding out the exchange rate, as I knew it was in the "extremely depressing" range. At the information desk, a young woman was ever so happy to direct me to the train that went into the city. I rode the airport train two stops to get to the main station and along the way, I chatted with an elderly French couple who were returning home from a holiday in Laos.

Using my minimal French, I deduced that the sign on the ticket machine at the entrance to my train platform indicated the machine was out of order, so I went in search of another entrance. With the help of a local man, I managed to buy a ticket, which cost €6.90. I had some Euro coins left over from my Netherlands trip in September, so I used those. At the platform, I set about deciphering the schedule on a large TV screen. There were two tracks, both of which serviced the inner city; however, they had slightly different sets of stops. A Chinese man from Singapore approached me for help and together we tried to figure it out. He was going to a stop two beyond mine.

We got on the next train that came and chatted as we rode towards the city. Interestingly, he too was in town for an international standard's meeting; however, his was all about metal welding while mine was on office software technology. As we talked, day broke around 08:15. At the station before mine, I got up and made my way to the door for a quick exit. Then off to the right I saw a very large sporting stadium, and as that was right next to my hotel, I knew I was on the right track. Unfortunately, the train failed to stop and did not do so until it had gone some distance to the next stop, Gare du Nord, the Paris North station. (Don't you just hate that when that happens!) So, it was on to Plan B. I found

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the track going in the opposite direction and, don't you know, the very next train (which left in two minutes) was a local one terminating at my station. (Don't you just love that!) And once I got out, the first thing I saw was the building where I'd be meeting for the next three days.

It was rather cold and overcast out and commuters were pouring in and out of the station area stopping for their breakfast croissants and coffee and having their early morning cigarettes. There were more than a few restaurants and snack places open including a large McDonalds.

In 15 minutes, I was in front of the Suite Hotel, one of the recommended conference hotels that I'd booked via the internet. It was 08:45 and I fully expected to have to wait 3–4 hours before I could get a room. But no, the very friendly front desk clerk was ever so happy to see me and to give me a room right away at no extra charge. I had a nightly rate of €101 with the final night (a Friday) running €125. Breakfast was another €12 but I could accept/reject that each day. High-speed wired internet access was included.

Each room was a large suite that was very nicely decorated and had a large work desk on wheels and a series of tall pull-down screens that could be lowered to separate the sleeping area from the working/living area. There was a microwave oven, fridge, electric kettle, and tea/coffee-making facilities along with a large digital TV on wheels.

Once I pulled the blinds closed, the room was very dark, and the windows sealed well enough to keep out the noise from the traffic. Within five minutes, I was in bed with the lights out. I think I lay there a good while, but I finally made it off to sleep. Four hours later, my alarm went off. I made a cup of boiling tea and snacked on cheese and crackers from my emergency supplies. I connected to the outside world and, of course, email arrived. I also was notified that a colleague had arrived at his hotel.

The TV had only one channel with English-language programming, and that was Germany's DW-TV, which alternated between German and English every hour. I watched some news and current affairs programs while working on email and this diary. Soon, it was afternoon teatime, so I boiled the kettle and enjoyed another cuppa along with several of the Walkers' finest shortbread cookies I had rescued from the Red-Carpet Club.

I spent several hours preparing for my meeting. I also worked on some personal stuff. Around 19:00, I went out in search of a place to eat and finished up at a restaurant right next to the hotel. I ordered a pizza, which was quite large. It came with an egg fried in the middle something I hadn't seen since eating at my favorite pizza place in Adelaide, South Australia, many years ago. Unfortunately, the egg white was nowhere near cooked, so between the waiter's basic English and my minimal French I managed to explain that I needed it cooked more. I finished off with a decent but strong cup of café au lait while reading the arts section of the UK newspaper, the "Financial Times."

I found a greengrocer's and bought juice, fresh fruit, some carrots, and other emergency snacks. The combination coconut/pineapple juice was "to die for." Back in my room, I worked and played while keeping one ear on the TV news. Lights out at 23:30.

11.3 Getting Down to Business

[Next day] Sleep-wise, it was a terrible night. I had a small breakfast in my room, and after a very hot shower, I packed for work. Outside it was cold but dry and I took some back streets to [AFNOR](#) the French national standards organization. The 500-meter walk got my circulation going. A number of colleagues were already there when I arrived at 08:30, and we chatted until the conference room was unlocked.

People were late arriving, so our meeting start was delayed 40 minutes. Eventually, we got underway for a 3-day standard's meeting for which I was secretary. Eighteen people from seven countries attended. We worked through until 16:00 taking an hour break for lunch at which time I stayed behind to bring the minutes up to date and to work on some action items. After lunch, I had to fight sleep, but several times, it got the better of me. Although the sun came out in the afternoon, unfortunately, I was in no position or mood to take advantage of it.

We broke early with some of us taking home action items to be completed overnight. On the way back to my room, I stopped by McDonalds to have an early supper of fish and chicken. The walk and cold air woke me up a bit but once I sat at the desk in my room, I had to fight to stay awake. I got most of my work done and sent it out to the other members for proofing before I turned out the lights at 18:30.

[Next day] I woke at 00:45 after six hours of deep sleep. After a small snack, I checked my email and phoned home. At 01:00, DW-TV broadcast in English, so I caught up with some world news and current affairs. After several hours of work, I went back to bed where I got another three hours of sleep before my 07:00 alarm sounded. Breakfast consisted of a cup of very hot tea and a large [nashi](#) (Asian pear). If you've never tried one, I highly recommend it. It has the consistency of an apple but tastes like a pear and has sweet juice.

Workwise, it was a very productive day, running from 09:00 through to 18:00 with an hour break for lunch at 13:00. At 18:30, we moved to a reception room for a social event hosted by IBM and Microsoft. A large variety of appetizers was served along with drinks. As is often the case, business issues get resolved more easily by different factions getting together socially. I ate enough snacks that I didn't need an evening meal. I walked home in light rain with a German colleague and friend, Mario, who was staying at the same hotel. I worked on the day's minutes and then tried to keep busy and awake. Lights out at 21:30.

[Next day] After a short and restless night, I was up, showered, and dressed by 08:00. Once again, we had a productive session and completed an important phase of our work. The meeting adjourned at 13:00 and once again, I forwent lunch. Around 14:30, the committee chair and I had a private meeting to discuss a number of issues. Around 15:30, I said goodbye to my colleagues and walked back to my hotel in light rain. I worked for several hours completing the draft minutes for the 3-day meeting, and then circulated them to attendees by email. Then I worked on some personal projects while keeping one ear on world news that played in the background.

At 19:00, I dressed warmly and went down to the hotel foyer. A few minutes later, Mario joined me, and we walked to a restaurant nearby. "Events" was a sports bar with a giant TV screen and casual fare. We spent two hours talking mostly about travel especially the four weeks he had spent in New

Zealand and Tahiti. I had a nice piece of veal with hot vegetables and a small salad while Mario enjoyed a large steak. By the time we ventured outside light rain was falling, again. Back in my room, I dealt with email that had arrived while I was out, and did some planning for my upcoming vacation while sipping coffee. Lights out at 22:30, asleep very soon after.

[Next day] I woke at 09:30 after 11 hours solid sleep and when I raised the blinds, I saw that the sun was shining brightly. That was indeed a very good start to the day. I caught some world news from DW-TV while sipping a cup of boiling tea and savoring some Walkers shortbread cookies. A local radio station played various French and American hits. After playing some games on my computer and working on this diary, it was time to go to work for the day right there at the desk in my hotel room. It was just the kind of work commute I prefer!

At 14:00, I broke for lunch and went out to a local bakery. It sure was busy and the server and I struggled to communicate. Eventually, I managed to order a large bowl of onion and potato soup and a bread roll. It really hit the spot! As I left, I bought a large bread stick filled with sausage and cheese, and a pastry “for Ron,” as in “later on.”

I worked through to 23:30 with occasional snack breaks delivering a major piece of work by email at the end. My seat got pretty hard by day's end, and I was glad to lie flat that night. Lights out at 23:45.

11.4 A Visit with Stéphane and a Culture Fix

After a week in Normandy (click [here](#) for that trip's diary), I was back in Paris, staying with friend, Stéphane, who I'd hosted some years before. His apartment was located right downtown on the Left Bank (Rive Gauche) of the [Seine River](#), 200 meters from the [Sorbonne university](#), and 400 meters from Notre Dame Cathedral on an island in the river.

Within 45 minutes of my arrival, we headed out to meet a group of more than 20 of his friends for a walking tour of Paris. Members of the group walked together monthly, and this time they planned to see the City of Lights all lit up! By the time the group all gathered, and we set out, it was 16:00. It was bitterly cold with a light wind, but except for my nose, I kept warm. Here was our itinerary (note that we only walked by these places; we did not go in any of them): Notre Dame, Hotel de Ville (city hall), George Pompidou Center, Forum des Halles, the Louvre Museum (we walked through the courtyard as the outside lights came on), the Tuileries Gardens, Place Vendome, Opera, Maxim's restaurant, Galeries Lafayette (several department stores decorated and lit up like Macey's or Harrods), Madeline, Concord Plaza, Grand Palais (where one of the great Paris exhibitions was held 100 years ago), all along the Champs Elysees to the Arc de Triomphe, and, finally, back across the Seine, to the Eiffel Tour. The streets and garden walks were lit for Christmas, many with lights that simulated melting icicles. One big section was filled with rides, including an enormous Ferris wheel, and stalls selling all kinds of things.

Mid-way in our walk, some people brought out containers of hot wine with cinnamon and we warmed our insides. We walked, stopped, looked, and talked for 5½ hours, and we covered 11 kms. Then we caught the Metro and rode 20 minutes back across the city to Place d'Italia where, at 22:00, we sat down to a 2-hour dinner in a Greek restaurant. The food and company were superb! We caught the Metro back home and were in bed by 00:30. It had been a long but good day. As I closed the blind of my bedroom window, I could see the top half of the [Eiffel Tower](#) all lit up in the distance.

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[Next day] I slept soundly for 10½ hours, which was great. After a nice warm shower, I had brunch, which consisted of a bowl of boiling tea with some bread and jam. By then it was afternoon, and we discussed what we might do for the day. Around 13:30, we set out on a 2–3 km walk to the [Museum d'Orsay](#). Several of the floors were closed for renovation but what was open kept us very busy for three hours. We saw rooms full of paintings by Degas, Manet, Monet, Cezanne, and van Gogh, and many sculptures by Rodin. There was also some furniture, ceramics, and glassware. One of the two temporary exhibitions was on [Art Nouveau](#). Although I really liked half a dozen things I saw, what I liked most of all was the building. Until not many years ago, it was a major train station, and after the renovation and conversion, it looked fantastic. And I managed to improve my culture quotient a little bit. After the long walk the night before and then three hours of standing and walking, we decided to catch a bus home. At our stop, we visited a small supermarket to get some provisions; for me, that meant whole milk (my first in two weeks), juice, and chocolate with hazelnuts.

Back home, I worked on this diary and phoned home. Stéphane cooked fish, rice, and vegetables for supper, which we followed with a selection of cheeses and some fresh fruit. Lights out at 22:30.

[Next day] I was wide-awake at 10:30 after 12 hours sleep. Yes! Over a light breakfast of tea, bread, jam, and cheese, I looked at the possibilities for the day. Stéphane had gone out for the morning, and I was on my own. Plan A was to go to the Museum Picasso but according to the website that was closed for renovation. So, I moved to Plan B, the Rodin sculpture museum, but that was closed on Mondays. Plan C was that good old Parisian backup, the [Louvre](#), and although its website suggested in French that there were work stoppages, it gave no status about that day. Being positive, I decided to go and find out.

I went down to my local Metro station to find that there was no ticket window or machine. I asked a young woman where I could buy a ticket, and (presumably) as I was so cute, she smiled and simply waved me to the turnstile and passed me through on her pass. Then, because the machine wouldn't let her use that pass again immediately, she bent down and pushed her way under the now-closed barrier. I was now a criminal, certain that Interpol would be waiting for me at the next stop. (Unlike some subway systems, the Paris Metro does not require a ticket to get out of any station.) I rode three lines until I got to the main Louvre station.

I came out the station in a small underground city of shopping arcades that lead into the museum entrance. And boy was it crowded. I bought a general admission ticket from a machine and found my way up to the 2nd Floor. That was full of Flemish, Dutch, and French paintings, hung in small and large halls some from floor to ceiling. Based on my observations there and the day before at the d'Orsay, I decided that the subjects of many paintings were poor people especially women. I deduced this from their obvious inability to afford much clothing. I came around one corner and there was a very realistic "still life." However, on closer inspection I determined it was an elderly patron asleep in a chair. (I kid you not. Hey, it could have been art!) I spent quite some time on that floor looking at a large room full of Rubens' and "The [Lacemaker](#)" by Vermeer. (Back in September, I'd been to Vermeer's hometown of Delft, the Netherlands, and seen a collection of his works including some of the Girl/Pearl Earring series.) While it was all very impressive, I could not help but wonder if these guys could actually paint my house. I don't mean a picture of it; I mean to actually paint it!

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The 1st Floor had all kinds of artsy-fartsy stuff called “antiquities,” which is a fancy name for “old stuff,” and I moved through that very quickly. In the Italian paintings wing I dropped by to see da Vinci's [Mona Lisa](#). As I walked from side to side, it sure looked like her eyes were following me. Opposite, taking up a whole wall was Veronese's [The Wedding at Cana](#). It was huge with such a lot of detail.

The Ground Floor had sculptures and lots of antiquities from the Orient, Egypt, and Greece. I stopped by to see [Venus de Milo](#). She was only discovered 180 years earlier on a remote Greek island in the eastern Mediterranean, and there is some doubt as to whom she depicts, Aphrodite or some other goddess. She looked quite (h)armless. The big attraction for me was in the Mesopotamia section; it was the large basalt pillar on which was carved [Hammurabi's code](#) of laws from around 1750 BC. This was one of the first known collections of written laws and was very progressive.

I browsed the bookstore a bit and then went up the steps into the big glass pyramid in the courtyard to look outside in all directions. Now, being the [Philistine](#) that I am, I went through all four floors in double-quick time; however, it was not quite like the cartoon depicting an American tourist arriving at the Louvre by taxi and asking the driver to wait while he took a tour!

I rode the Metro (this time as a paying customer) to the town hall where I came back above ground into the vicious cold. In the tunnel leading from the subway, I stopped for a mini concert by a young woman playing a cello. After a short walk, I was at the [Notre Dame Cathedral](#) where I went in for a sit and a look around. Admission was free unless one wanted a guided tour, but I noted that admission to the Treasury cost €3. I quickly figured out how the Treasury was funded! One ignorant tourist ignored the “no chapeau” sign at the entrance but the hat police—in the form of an 80-year-old woman with a walking stick—caught up with him and made him remove his hat.

From there it was a 10-minute walk home, and I was glad to be out of the cold wind. To be sure, it had been an abbreviated tour, but I had to leave something for the next visit, right? I worked on this diary, occasionally looking out the window to the Eiffel Tower as day turned to dusk and then to night.

At 19:30, we ventured out for my last supper. Throughout the day, I had been thinking about a nice veal dinner at an Italian restaurant, so where did we finish up, but at the Maharaja's Indian place. Both country names began with the same letter, so close enough, right? We started with some garlic nan and then we each had curried chicken, one with fresh cream, almonds, and tomato, the other with onions and green peppers. We shared a dish of rice with vegetables. Although I was quite full after that, I had already picked out a dessert at the beginning and nothing could dissuade me from having a small scoop each of passion fruit, mango, and coconut sorbet.

On the way home, we stopped by a train station where I bought a ticket to the airport for the following morning. When we checked the schedule on the internet back home, a rail strike was still going on, but most trains were scheduled to run. Lights out at 22:30.

11.5 Travel Day

[Next day] I was awake at 06:00, 90 minutes before my alarm. (Don't you just hate that!) I lay there until 07:15 listening and feeling the vibrations from the subway system below as the city came alive. Stéphane and I had our usual light breakfast, and I wrote in his visitor's book.

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I had planned to take the 08:46 train, but I was packed and ready to leave at 08:00. We said our goodbyes and I walked out into the dark street to go a block to the RER B station that served CDG directly. Despite the strike-restricted service, three trains were scheduled to leave before the one I'd planned to take, so I took the first one that came along. When it arrived, it was only 110% full, so 10 more people pushed their way on at each door. It was everyone for themselves with elbows out and pushing and shoving. Fortunately, many people got off at the next two stops, so I soon got a seat.

Daylight broke on the way to the airport and the trip was uneventful. At the end, I changed to the inter-terminal train and went to Terminal 1. Check-in took only a few minutes, and I was off to passport control where the agent gave me an exit stamp. While I was in line, I spoke to a young American living in France who was going home to Colorado. I asked him if he'd like to be my guest in the Business Lounge. He accepted, and we sat there and snacked for the hour before our flight. It was his first time in such a lounge.

The security process at the gate was very slow and a bit chaotic, but as all the staff members were so darned polite it was hard to be upset. In any event, the plane was right there and wasn't going without us. Eventually, we boarded, and I took up window Seat 11J in Business Class—the same as my flight over—where I could keep an eye on the starboard engine. The sun streamed in my window as boarding completed and all seemed right in that part of the world.

United Airlines flight 915 took off to the east about 10 minutes late. As we used up the whole runway, I figured we had a full load onboard. We circled around to the west and headed home over France, UK, the Atlantic, and Canada. Once we'd gotten to our altitude, drinks and nuts were served followed by hot towels; then came lunch. To begin with we had bresaola ham with roasted peppers and vegetable barley salad (which I found not at all interesting) and a green salad with creamy peppercorn dressing (which was excellent). The main course was a choice of filet mignon with garlic, potatoes, and carrots with parsley (my pick); roasted cod with honey ginger sauce, herbed rice pilaf and creamed spinach; or porcini mushroom raviolacci with cream sauce and chopped chives. Dessert consisted of cheese and passion fruit white chocolate mousse cake.

During lunch, I watched the Quentin Tarantino movie, "[Inglourious Basterds](#)," starring Brad Pitt. I found it very interesting, and the two hours went by quickly. After that tiring activity, it was naptime, and I managed a couple of hours. When I awoke, we were over Nova Scotia, Canada, on the final leg home. After burning all the calories sitting, sleeping, and watching a movie, what I needed was more food. Right! So, 90 minutes before landing, a substantial snack was served. I had the fruit and cheese plate with two cups of coffee and that got my pulse rate back to normal.

We had an on-time touchdown landing from the south. We were on one of the first flights in from Europe that afternoon, so the airport was not at all crowded. Our plane pulled into a gate right next door to the mobile lounge gate, and soon we were in the immigration hall where I walked straight up to an officer for processing. My luggage came out soon after, and I was in a taxi headed home in double quick time. Although it was cool out it was nowhere as cold and windy as in Paris.

I was happy to be home and to be staying in one place for an extended period. I made a shopping list and went off to the supermarket to fill my fridge and pantry. Then I unpacked my luggage and synchronized my laptop and desktop computers. Lights out at 8:30 pm.

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Merci beaucoup. Au revoir mon ami.

12. November 2022, “What is Normal - Part 11: Electrical Power”

Those of us living in the developed world take a number of basic things for granted, and one of them is the stable availability of electrical power. It usually isn't until we have a power outage that lasts for more than a few hours that we are reminded of how much of our lives relies on being able to simply “plug something in!”

I was raised in rural [South Australia](#), and up until age seven, I lived in houses *without* electricity. We used [kerosine](#) to fuel lamps and a refrigerator. The wood stove had a hot-water tank attached, and we also heated water on top of that stove in a large kettle, as needed. Bath water was heated by a wood-fired contraption, which was only operated on a weekly basis. Perhaps you've heard the old saying, “I bath every Saturday, whether I need to or not!” Been there, done that!

In 1961, we moved to a farm on which we had a 32-volt DC generator, the standard for rural properties at that time. However, the 16 2-volt batteries could only hold enough charge to drive lighting, or *very* low-current appliances. Our house certainly did *not* have any power outlets! Rural electrification came through the area during my five years on that farm, but the farm's owner declined to pay for the hookup, the cost of which was based on the number of poles needed to divert the line to the property. About that time, several television signals started broadcasting to our area, and we got a TV set. That needed an inverter to go from 32-volt DC to 240-volt AC, and it required the generator to be running, so TV watching certainly was *not* available on-demand! Regarding clothes washing, Mom progressed from doing it all by hand to a gasoline-operated washer that, like a motorcycle, was started with a [kick starter](#) pedal.

In early 1966, when I was 12, I moved to a house with [mains electricity](#). [In fact, the back half of the house was still wired for 32-volt DC, and we had a generator for that too, although we had no real use for it.] We got our first freezer and electric stove. And hot water in the kitchen and bathroom sinks, on-demand; how decadent!

In this essay, I'll compare electrical-related things in various places around the world. And we know how *normal* is relative, right?

12.1 Australasia

The electrical system is 240 volts, 50 HZ, with power outlets using a [3-pin plug/socket](#) where the top two blades are flat and slanted, and the third flat blade serves as the earth/ground. The cables on some appliances omit the ground blade. For safety, power points (US: outlets) have switches. Outlet and light switches go down to switch on, and up to switch off. Light bulbs have a [bayonet connection](#). To allow multiple devices to be hooked to a single plug, a *double adapter* is used. This is a large plastic brick that has two outlets on one side and one plug on the other; it is quite different from a [power strip](#).

Initially, like many facilities in Australia, electricity generation was the responsibility of state governments, and in my state, that fell to the Electricity Trust of South Australia ([ETSA](#)). [ETSA was privatized in 1999.] The steam turbines were driven by burning coal, which initially came from another

state. However, a huge, open-cut mine was created in my state at [Leigh Creek](#), and being the mine's biggest customer, ETSA took over the town as well. According to Wikipedia, "the current town is 13 km further south than the original town—it was moved in 1982 to allow for the expansion of the mine."

Unique to South Australia and an invention by a local man, James Stobie, was the [stobie pole](#), "a power line pole made of two steel joists held apart by a slab of concrete."

The [Snowy Mountains scheme](#) is a huge complex for generating [hydroelectric](#) power (as well as irrigation), built in the mountains of the southern-eastern states between 1949 and 1974.

Australian power is still generated mostly from coal, oil, and natural gas. According to the World Nuclear Association, "Much of the energy exported from Australia is used for generating electricity overseas; three times as much thermal black coal is exported as is used in Australia, and all of the uranium production is exported."

Given Australia's geographical location, [solar power](#) is a fast-growing industry.

According to [Wikipedia](#), "The prospect of nuclear power in Australia has been a topic of public debate since the 1950s. Australia has never had a nuclear power station. Australia hosts 33% of the world's uranium deposits and is the world's third largest producer of uranium."

The World Nuclear Association stated, "New Zealand is one of the few developed countries not using electricity from nuclear energy. As hydro-electric potential was progressively utilized, nuclear power featured in national power plans from 1969 to 1976." See "[New Zealand nuclear-free zone](#)" for details about NZ's ban on nuclear-powered or armed ships, and the impact that has had on the [ANZUS treaty](#). As I've often stated, "Principles belong to those who can afford them!" Fortunately, New Zealand has plenty of hydroelectric, geothermal, and wind power.

12.2 North and Central America

The system is 110 volts, 60 HZ, with power outlets using a [3-pin plug/socket](#) where the top two blades are flat and parallel, and the third circular pin serves as the earth/ground. The cables on some appliances omit the ground pin. In general, power outlets do *not* have switches. Light switches go up to switch on, and down to switch off. Light bulbs have a [screw-in connection](#). [Going back 100 years, 40-HZ power was common.]

The US is the land of the private enterprise, so it should be no surprise that what are public utilities in many other countries are privately-owned in the US. (My power comes from [Dominion Energy](#), formerly Virginia Electric & Power Company [VEPCO].)

One of the biggest power projects in the US was the TVA project. According to [Wikipedia](#), "The Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA) is a federally owned corporation in the United States created by congressional charter on May 18, 1933, to provide navigation, flood control, electricity generation, fertilizer manufacturing, and economic development to the Tennessee Valley, a region particularly affected by the Great Depression."

Another project built during the Great Depression, which supplies electricity, was [Hoover Dam](#), not far from Las Vegas. The dam spans a canyon on the Colorado River, and at the base on each side is a power station, one of which is part of the public tour. I've visited it more than a few times when passing through with guests. It surely is impressive, especially for something built in the 1930s. The [dams along the Columbia River](#) in the North-West US and Canada are also major suppliers of power.

Although [Niagara Falls](#) isn't very high, it is very wide, and a huge amount of water passes over. However, a great deal of it no longer does; instead, it is diverted! On the Canadian side, pipelines take water downstream some distance to a [hydro power station](#). A major player in the development of hydro power in Canada was Henry Pellatt. He was also known for his 100-room chateau in Toronto, called [Casa Loma](#), which was the biggest private residence ever constructed in Canada. If you are in the Toronto area, do go see it; it is impressive! (There, steam pipes ran through the soil of the indoor gardens to keep plants from freezing.)

On a business trip to the Livermore area of Northern California, I came across [Altamont Pass wind farm](#), which has more than 5,000 turbines, of all shapes and sizes. I pulled over to the side of the road in several places just to watch them. Many of them were *not* the traditional up-right fan-style.

In June 1999, I left Australia to move to the US. In March of that year, there was a [meltdown](#) at the Three Mile Island nuclear facility. As I was going to start out in the greater Washington DC area, I thought I'd see just where that disaster took place. And lo and behold, it was only 150-odd miles away!

12.3 The United Kingdom

The system is 240 volts, 50 HZ, with power outlets using a [3-pin plug/socket](#) where the top two blades are flat, and the third flat pin serves as the earth/ground. The cables on some appliances omit the ground pin. The plug is large and contains a fuse. In general, power outlets have switches. Outlet and light switches go down to switch on, and up switch off. Light bulbs have a [screw-in connection](#). The system is common in many current and former [Commonwealth](#) countries.

During a family vacation to Wales, we stayed with a host family in a small village. It was the year after the [Chernobyl nuclear reactor meltdown](#) in the Ukraine. A group of children from the Chernobyl area had come to the village for a physical and mental respite and were staying with local families. Our hosts had a swimming pool, which proved very popular with those kids.

12.4 Continental Europe

The system is 220–240 volts, 50 HZ, with power outlets using a [3-pin plug/socket](#) where the top two blades are pins, and the third pin serves as the earth/ground. The cables on many appliances omit the ground pin. In general, power outlets have switches. Forty years ago, I ran into places having the same configuration, but with thinner pins instead, or as well.

12.5 Asia

Countries having a strong connection with the US—such as Japan and South Korea—use the US system. My hotels in Beijing, China had US and Aussie plugs. Of course, you are bound to find colonial connections in former British, French, and Dutch territories.

12.6 Travelling with Electrical Gadgets

When I left Australia in 1979 and travelled for five-plus weeks in Asia and Europe on my way to the US, I started shaving with a hand razor, as I knew that taking electric appliances to different countries would be a challenge. Some twenty years later, I travelled to Europe with my first video camera. I plugged it into a brick that changed voltage and frequency, and sometimes the brick hummed, and it certainly got warm.

Later, as laptop computers became common, there was the issue of accessing a local dial-up network for email. For US\$100, I bought a kit that contained some 30-odd phone and power adaptors for most countries. I've found that there really are only three needed these days: US, UK, and European. (Although the Aussie socket is different to that of the US, I have an adaptor that allows the top blades to be swiveled to satisfy both.)

These days, lots of devices come with a [USB plug](#), which allows them to be charged in a great many places without having to have a local power plug adaptor.

Ten years ago, I had a colleague from South Africa, and I was surprised to find that country had its own idea of an [electric plug](#).

12.7 Power Generation Methods

We have the traditional approaches—coal, hydro, natural gas, geothermal, and nuclear—but alternate ones such as water-waves, wind, and solar are becoming more popular.

Over an 18-year period, I commuted to Maine to work on a power-related project. A network of minicomputers monitored and controlled a set of six hydroelectric dams and monitored (but did not control) two steam plants that burned wood chips and chemicals that were extracted from wood by a digester. [See my essay, "[My Time in Maine](#)" from January 2019, in which I discussed that as well as reporting on my adventure of a snow survey, measuring how much power was lying on the ground as snow.]

When it comes to wind power, Denmark is a world leader in the manufacture and use of wind turbines. On one stay with my friend Keld near Copenhagen, we toured a wind farm where one turbine had been shut down for maintenance. (Its blades had been struck by lightning, which had burned holes right through some of the carbon-fiber material.) We took the opportunity to climb up the ladder inside the 40-meter tower and stood out on the platform at the top by the huge generator. The view, as well as the equipment, was impressive. At that time, they were starting to ship 100-meter towers, which could be installed in the forest, but be high above the trees. Separately, on several visits to friend Belinda's town in northeast Germany, I have been enchanted by the many clusters of turbines,

all turning ever so gently, often looking like choreographed dancers. And at night, when they have static and/or flashing lights on, they can look like a large convoy of UFOs approaching.

Of course, one can always generate one's own electricity! In fact, in many parts of the US, if a private individual generates more power than they need, the local utility is obliged to buy it from them.

A few years ago, a large tree came down in my neighborhood and brought down the power lines. As such, I was without power for more than 24 hours. When it looked like being longer than a few hours, I went in search of a generator. Initially, all the ones I found cost at least US\$1,000, and had way more capability than I needed. However, soon after, I found an entry-level one for only \$200. Back home, I sat it on some old towels on my small front verandah, fired it up, ran a cable through the window, and hooked up my two fridges/freezers and some lights. The unit was not powerful enough, however, to run my microwave oven, so I resorted to a gas camping stove. Being in the IT industry, I also hooked up a computer, so I could work. And then I discovered that when I powered up my internet gear, I had my usual strong signal. The fiber optic cable for that was quite separate from the power lines and was not affected by the outage. Basically, I was camping in my house, in comfort!

12.8 Electric Vehicles

While [electric vehicles](#) (EVs) are becoming popular and the US tax system provides generous incentives, they are a long way from becoming [ubiquitous](#). However, battery technology is improving all the time, and with longer-lasting charges, people can drive further without the need to recharge. At the start of 2021, one of my local supermarkets added a charging station. General Motors' recent announcement that it was moving completely to EVs was a welcome thing. However, as I don't drive many miles a year, and I only buy cheap, used vehicles, it's unlikely I'll ever own one.

Now electric vehicles are *not* new. From Wikipedia, "EVs first came into existence in the [mid-19th century](#), when electricity was among the preferred methods for motor vehicle propulsion, providing a level of comfort and ease of operation that could not be achieved by the gasoline cars of the time. Modern internal combustion engines have been the dominant propulsion method for motor vehicles for almost 100 years, but electric power has remained commonplace in other vehicle types, such as trains and smaller vehicles of all types." I had no idea about this until I came across a WWI-era electric truck on display in Germany.

My most unusual electric-powered mode of transport was a submarine. My family and I were on a Disney Cruise out of Florida through some of the Bahamian Islands, and this was one of the options we could choose for activities when we were anchored at a small island. I was lucky to get a seat right up front next to the pilot, so was able to shoot video out the front and to one side.

12.9 Miscellaneous Stuff

During various stays in business hotels in Japan and South Korea, I've had the dubious distinction of having a toilet that plugs into an electrical outlet. Not only does the power operate various fancy options, including water sprays, it also can heat the seat. In some hotels, as a power-saving measure, one must insert one's magnetic room keycard into a slot to activate the room's electrical appliances. At

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one place, this even included the toilet, so every time I came into the room and inserted my card, the microcomputer in the toilet went through its boot (start-up, that is) phase. Can you say, “overkill?” In any event, would you trust a computer with attached mechanical devices to conduct “its business” around your [nether regions](#)?

On an IT-related business trip to Montreux, Switzerland, after we broke for the day, some of us took a mountain railway up a steep ride to the 1,000-meter mark. There, we had drinks and took in the view. Someone reported that the public toilets there had a very high-tech mechanism, so quite a few of us computer-nerds just had to go in and watch it go through its motions, as it retracted the seat and put it through an extensive cleaning process. If you have *never* been mesmerized by a toilet with an electric brain, do add that to your list-of-things-to-do-before-you-die.

In 1966, while my family moved to a house that had mains electricity, it still had an [outhouse](#) (AU: dunny). A year or so later, my dad decided to go modern, and have a flush toilet installed, but, of course, that required a rather large hole to be dug in the back yard to accommodate the associated [septic tank](#). As it happened, around that time, a crew from ETSA was working in the area, drilling holes for some new power poles. Apparently, my dad approached them (probably with the promise of some cash or several dozen bottles of beer) and asked them if they wouldn't mind dropping by the house with their truck-mounted drill and making some good-size holes as practice for their main job, which he'd then finish off with a shovel.

In case you were wondering, YES, I have been shocked by 240-volt and 110-volt systems, several times. However, I don't go making a habit out of it.

Almost certainly, the most impressive use of battery power I've ever seen was in the [electric light parade](#), which was primarily held at Disney's theme parks in Florida and California, but no longer operates on a regular basis, if at all. Hundreds of performers and floats were lit up with many thousands of lights as they moved around the park; it was mesmerizing for both young and old!

On a flight from Frankfurt, Germany, to Washington, DC, as we entered New England airspace, there was a complete power outage in New York City and the greater surrounds, so air-traffic control for the region had minimal operating services. As such, our plane went for a tour of the New England countryside, but after an hour or so, we ran low on fuel and had to detour to Boston, where we waited some hours to get refueled. However, by the time we were done there, we had a clear flight path down to DC.

For many years, I lived in a planned city, Reston, Virginia. [See my essay, “[Living in Utopia](#)” from February 2012.] I used to joke that Reston had so many (sometimes anal) rules, that one could only breathe in on Mondays, and out again on Tuesdays! As such, to avoid “unpleasant-looking pylons and wires” around the residential areas, all local power lines were buried underground. Oh, and while one could put powered boats up to a certain size on the four man-made lakes, the power had to come from a small electric motor.

In the early 1970s, I played semipro Australian Rules Football. [See my essay, “[Football, Aussie Style](#)” from January 2020.] My club's arena, Norwood Oval, was one of the very few in the state capital with a

great lighting system, and we trained there two nights a week each winter. (Games were played Saturday afternoons.) The Oval also hosted the city's baseball league games and an occasional international rugby test, all played at night. It takes some getting used to playing at night, especially when one has to look up to find and track a football. At some point, the game introduced yellow (and later, white) balls for night games, as the traditional, red/brown ones were hard to see.

12.10 Conclusion

For more information that you ever wanted to know about power in various countries, click [here](#). And for AC power plugs and sockets, click [here](#).

It is rare that the power goes out at my house. But when it does, as I turn to other activities, invariably almost all of them require power! It can be humbling to have to go back to the "good old days." That said, I *always* have a pencil and paper nearby!

As I get ready to publish this, we're more than two years into the coronavirus pandemic, and when people complain about how bad things are, I reply, "It could be much worse; we could be without power as well!" And in my case, having my own underground water well, no power means no water either.

When I wrote this in February 2021, some 100 million here in the US had been hit by extreme winter weather with several million having no power for days. Fortunately, those storms largely bypassed my area. More recently, [Hurricane Ian](#) hit Florida, causing major and extended power outages.

Annex A. Cumulative Index for Volumes 1–13

A.1 Postings in Reverse Chronological Order

Here are the essays posted thus far, with the most recent listed first:

- #156 November 2022: [What is Normal – Part 11. Electrical Power](#)
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- #153 August 2022: [A Little Bit of History](#)
- #152 July 2022: [Travel – Memories of London and Norfolk](#)
- #151 June 2022: [Signs of Life: Part 28](#) — Germany
- #150 May 2022: [Odds and Ends – Part 2](#)
- #149 April 2022: [Travel – Memories of Prague & Eastern Germany](#)
- #148 March 2022: [Signs of Life: Part 27](#) — Frederick, Maryland
- #147 February 2022: [Oh the Things that I have Written](#)
- #146 January 2022: [Travel – Memories of Beijing, China](#)
- #145 December 2021: [Signs of Life: Part 26](#) — Germany and elsewhere
- #144 November 2021: [A Little Bit of Music](#)
- #143 October 2021: [Travel – Memories of Normandy, France](#)
- #142 September 2021: [Signs of Life: Part 25](#) — Germany and Austria
- #141 August 2021: [Odds and Ends – Part 1](#)
- #140 July 2021: [Travel – Memories of The Yucatan Peninsula, Mexico](#)
- #139 June 2021: [Signs of Life: Part 24](#) — San Francisco
- #138 May 2021: [My Formative Years – Part 3](#)
- #137 April 2021: [Travel – Memories of Hong Kong](#)
- #136 March 2021: [Signs of Life: Part 23](#) — Switzerland
- #135 February 2021: [My Formative Years – Part 2](#)
- #134 January 2021: [My Formative Years – Part 1](#)
- #133 December 2020: [Travel – Memories of Finland](#)
- #132 November 2020: [Signs of Life: Part 22](#) — Switzerland
- #131 October 2020: [School Days: Part 2](#)
- #130 September 2020: [Travel – Memories of Russia](#)
- #129 August 2020: [Signs of Life: Part 21](#) — the Northern Neck of Virginia, USA
- #128 July 2020: [School Days: Part 1](#)
- #127 June 2020: [Travel – Memories of Chile](#)
- #126 May 2020: [Signs of Life: Part 20](#) — Edinburgh, Scotland; London, England; Beijing, China; and more
- #125 April 2020: [The REALLY BIG Picture](#)
- #124 March 2020: [Travel – Memories of the US Desert Southwest](#)
- #123 February 2020: [Signs of Life: Part 19](#) — Edinburgh, Scotland
- #122 January 2020: [Football, Aussie Style](#)
- #121 December 2019: [Travel – Memories of Yorkshire](#)

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- #120 November 2019: [Signs of Life: Part 18](#) — Japan
- #119 October 2019: [Washington D.C.](#)
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- #117 August 2019: [Signs of Life: Part 17](#) — Texas and Utah
- #116 July 2019: [My Experience with Airbnb](#)
- #115 June 2019: [Travel – From Adelaide to Washington DC](#)
- #114 May 2019: [Signs of Life: Part 16](#) — St. Croix
- #113 April 2019: [Law Enforcement in the US](#)
- #112 March 2019: [Travel – Memories of Abu Dhabi, UAE](#)
- #111 February 2019: [Signs of Life: Part 15](#) — Norway
- #110 January 2019: [My Time in Maine](#)
- #109 December 2018: [Travel – Memories of Prague, Salzburg, and-Munchen](#)
- #108 November 2018: [Signs of Life: Part 14](#) — Croatia, Slovenia, and Italy.
- #107 October 2018: [Living in Chicago](#)
- #106 September 2018: [Travel – Memories of Puerto Rico](#)
- #105 August 2018: [Signs of Life: Part 13](#) — Croatia.
- #104 July 2018: [A Little Bit of Religion](#)
- #103 June 2018: [Travel – Memories of Sacramento, Tahoe, Reno, & Napa Valley](#)
- #102 May 2018: [Signs of Life: Part 12](#) — Vienna, Austria, and Seoul, Korea.
- #101 April 2018: [These United States](#)
- #100 March 2018: [Travel – Memories of The Dalmatian Coast](#)
- #99 February 2018: [Signs of Life: Part 11](#) — US states of Idaho, Wyoming, and Montana, and Korea and Japan
- #98 January 2018: [Having a Plan B](#)
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- #93 August 2017: [Signs of Life: Part 9](#) — Barcelona, Spain
- #92 July 2017: [What is Normal – Part 10. Automobiles and Driving](#)
- #91 June 2017: [Travel – Memories of Jordan](#)
- #90 May 2017: [Signs of Life: Part 8](#) — France, Finland, California, Croatia, England, Korea, and Washington State
- #89 April 2017: [Oh, the Things that I have Eaten](#)
- #88 March 2017: [Travel – Memories of Southeast England](#)
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- #84 November 2016: [Signs of Life: Part 6](#) — Various countries
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- #82 September 2016: [Travel – Memories of Poland](#)
- #81 August 2016: [Signs of Life: Part 5](#) — Various countries
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- #79 June 2016: [Travel – Memories of South America](#)

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- #76 March 2016: [Travel – Memories of Switzerland](#)
- #75 February 2016: [Signs of Life: Part 3 — London and Yorkshire](#)
- #74 January 2016: [Accidents and Incidents](#)
- #73 December 2015: [Travel – Memories of Germany](#)
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- #71 October 2015: [What is Normal – Part 9. An American in Australia](#)
- #70 September 2015: [Travel – Memories of Austria](#)
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- #68 July 2015: [Confessions of a Canine Companion](#)
- #67 June 2015: [Travel – Memories of Mexico and Central America](#)
- #66 May 2015: [What is Normal – Part 8: Public Holidays](#)
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- #61 December 2014: [Travel – Oh the Places I have Stayed](#)
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- #54 May 2014: [What is Normal – Part 7: What's in a Name?](#)
- #53 April 2014: [Travel – Memories of Ireland and the UK](#)
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- #51 February 2014: [Travel – Memories of Scandinavia](#)
- #50 January 2014: [The Cost of Bad Weather and Natural Disasters](#)
- #49 December 2013: [Travel – Memories of Italy](#)
- #48 November 2013: [English – Part 4: Pronouns](#)
- #47 October 2013: [Last Writes](#) — Leaving an audit trail for your executor and/or loved ones
- #46 September 2013: [A Little Bit of Kulcha – Part 4](#) — Gardens, Theme Parks, Parliament Houses and Capitals, National Parks and Historic Places, and some Odds and Ends
- #45 August 2013: [A Little Bit of Kulcha – Part 3](#) — Museums and Art Galleries, Libraries, and Aquariums
- #44 July 2013: [English – Part 3: Nouns](#)
- #43 June 2013: [A Little Bit of Kulcha – Part 2](#) — Royal Hangouts and Military-Related Places and Things
- #42 May 2013: [A Little Bit of Kulcha – Part 1](#) — Ancient Civilizations and Old Sites, and Religious Places and Artifacts
- #41 April 2013: [Standards – The Secret Life of a Language Lawyer](#) — A look at some everyday standards and conventions
- #40 March 2013: [What is Normal – Part 6: Weights and Measures](#)

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- #38 January 2013: [Starting your Own Non-Profit](#)
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- #36 November 2012: [English – Part 2: Pronunciation](#)
- #35 October 2012: [A Little Bit More American Civics](#) — The Congress, Presidential Succession, The Supreme Court, and the Flag
- #34 September 2012: [A Little Bit of American Civics](#) — The Constitution, Presidency, Vice Presidency, and Cabinet
- #33 August 2012: [What is Normal – Part 5: Numbers and Counting Systems](#)
- #32 July 2012: [Are You Getting Enough Vacation?](#)
- #31 June 2012: [English – Part 1: A Potpourri](#)
- #30 May 2012: [Shooting and Editing Home Video](#)
- #29 April 2012: [Electronic Mail Etiquette](#) — Some of my pet peeves and observations about people who use email
- #28 March 2012: [How Committees Work](#) — My take on 40 years of committee participation, and how successful committees can and should work.
- #27 February 2012: [Living in Utopia](#) — Life in a planned American city.
- #26 January 2012: [Travel – Packing and Preparing](#)
- #25 December 2011: [Making Good-Looking Documents](#) — Some tips on how to take advantage of a word processing program.
- #24 November 2011: [A Little Foreign Language Goes a Long Way](#) — The advantages of having some basic foreign language skills when traveling.
- #23 October 2011: [Starting Your Own Business](#)
- #22 September 2011: [What is Normal – Part 4: Dates and Times](#)
- #21 August 2011: [Teaching English as a Second Language](#)
- #20 July 2011: [A Walk along the River](#) — A look back at my 187-mile hike along the Thames Path in England.
- #19 June 2011: [Just Me and MiniMe: Traveling with Technology](#)
- #18 May 2011: [Planning for Success](#)
- #17 April 2011: [Travel – FAQs](#)
- #16 March 2011: [What is Normal – Part 3: Money](#)
- #15 February 2011: [Talk is Cheap. Write it Down](#) — I explore what I perceive to be the four stages of turning a dream into reality and why many people don't have what it takes to go beyond the first one or two stages.
- #14 January 2011: [Waiting My Turn](#) — A look back at all those times I'd stood in line or taken a number and waited my turn.
- #13 December 2010: [Technology, Unplugged – Part 2](#) — I discuss automobiles, still and video cameras, the written word, a digital data preservation strategy, and my right-hand gadget.
- #12 November 2010: [Technology, Unplugged – Part 1](#) — I discuss the telephone, television, the internet, and recorded music.
- #11 October 2010: [Books by My Bed](#) — My love of books.
- #10 September 2010: [Making Allowances](#) — My experiences in setting up an allowance for my son.

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- #9 August 2010: [Confessions of an Obama Volunteer](#) — My involvement in the 2008 US Presidential election.
- #8 July 2010: [What is Normal? – Part 2: Writing Systems](#)
- #7 June 2010: [Australia and the U.S. – A Contrast](#) — A comparison of the following: politics and government, law enforcement, taxation, education, and changing light bulbs.
- #6 May 2010: [Travel – Fly Me to the Moon](#) — My flight log after 40 years of air travel.
- #5 April 2010: [The Road to US Citizenship](#)
- #4 March 2010: [What is Normal? – Part 1: Getting Started](#)
- #3 February 2010: [Where's My Damn Gold Watch?](#) — A look back at my first 40 years in the workforce.
- #2 January 2010: [Travel – Home Stays](#)
- #1 December 2009: [Hi Ho, Hi Ho, it's Off to Blog We Go](#) — The introduction to my blog.

A.2 Series: Travel

- #155 October 2022: [Travel – Memories of Paris, France](#)
- #152 July 2022: [Travel – Memories of London and Norfolk](#)
- #149 April 2022: [Travel – Memories of Prague & Eastern Germany](#)
- #146 January 2022: [Travel – Memories of Beijing, China](#)
- #143 October 2021: [Travel – Memories of Normandy, France](#)
- #140 July 2021: [Travel – Memories of The Yucatan Peninsula, Mexico](#)
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- #86 January 2017: [Travel – Airports](#)
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- #76 March 2016: [Travel – Memories of Switzerland](#)

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- #67 June 2015: [Travel – Memories of Mexico and Central America](#)
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- #63 February 2015: [Travel – Memories of the Eastern Bloc](#)
- #61 December 2014: [Travel – Oh the Places I have Stayed](#)
- #59 October 2014: [Travel – Memories of the Benelux Countries](#)
- #57 August 2014: [Travel – Memories of Japan](#)
- #55 June 2014: [Travel – Memories of Australia](#)
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- #49 December 2013: [Travel – Memories of Italy](#)
- #26 January 2012: [Travel – Packing and Preparing](#)
- #17 April 2011: [Travel – FAQs](#)
- #6 May 2010: [Travel – Fly Me to the Moon](#) — My flight log after 40 years of air travel.
- #2 January 2010: [Travel – Home Stays](#)

A.3 Series: What is Normal

- #156 November 2022: [What is Normal – Part 11. Electrical Power](#)
- #92 July 2017: [What is Normal – Part 10. Automobiles and Driving](#)
- #71 October 2015: [What is Normal – Part 9. An American in Australia](#)
- #66 May 2015: [What is Normal – Part 8: Public Holidays](#)
- #54 May 2014: [What is Normal – Part 7: What's in a Name?](#)
- #40 March 2013: [What is Normal – Part 6: Weights and Measures](#)
- #33 August 2012: [What is Normal – Part 5: Numbers and Counting Systems](#)
- #22 September 2011: [What is Normal – Part 4: Dates and Times](#)
- #16 March 2011: [What is Normal – Part 3: Money](#)
- #8 July 2010: [What is Normal? – Part 2: Writing Systems](#)
- #4 March 2010: [What is Normal? – Part 1: Getting Started](#)

A.4 Series: English

- #95 October 2017: [English – Part 7: Adverbs](#)
- #77 April 2016: [English – Part 6: Verbs](#)
- #60 November 2014: [English – Part 5: Adjectives](#)
- #48 November 2013: [English – Part 4: Pronouns](#)
- #44 July 2013: [English – Part 3: Nouns](#)
- #36 November 2012: [English – Part 2: Pronunciation](#)
- #31 June 2012: [English – Part 1: A Potpourri](#)

A.5 Series: A Little Bit of ...

- #153 August 2022: [A Little Bit of History](#)
- #144 November 2021: [A Little Bit of Music](#)

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- #104 July 2018: [A Little Bit of Religion](#)
- #83 October 2016: [A Little Bit of Astronomy: The Moon](#)
- #64 March 2015: [A Little Bit of Royalty](#)
- #52 March 2014: [A Little Bit of Mathematics](#)
- #46 September 2013: [A Little Bit of Kulcha – Part 4](#) — Gardens, Theme Parks, Parliament Houses and Capitals, National Parks and Historic Places, and some Odds and Ends
- #45 August 2013: [A Little Bit of Kulcha – Part 3](#) — Museums and Art Galleries, Libraries, and Aquariums
- #43 June 2013: [A Little Bit of Kulcha – Part 2](#) — Royal Hangouts and Military-Related Places and Things
- #42 May 2013: [A Little Bit of Kulcha – Part 1](#) — Ancient Civilizations and Old Sites, and Religious Places and Artifacts
- #35 October 2012: [A Little Bit More American Civics](#) — The Congress, Presidential Succession, The Supreme Court, and the Flag
- #34 September 2012: [A Little Bit of American Civics](#) — The Constitution, Presidency, Vice Presidency, and Cabinet

A.6 Series: Autobiographic Essays

- #153 August 2022: [A Little Bit of History](#)
- #147 February 2022: [Oh the Things that I have Written](#)
- #144 November 2021: [A Little Bit of Music](#)
- #138 May 2021: [My Formative Years – Part 3](#)
- #135 February 2021: [My Formative Years – Part 2](#)
- #134 January 2021: [My Formative Years – Part 1](#)
- #131 October 2020: [School Days: Part 2](#)
- #128 July 2020: [School Days: Part 1](#)
- #122 January 2020: [Football, Aussie Style](#)
- #110 January 2019: [My Time in Maine](#)
- #107 October 2018: [Living in Chicago](#)
- #89 April 2017: [Oh, the Things that I have Eaten](#)
- #74 January 2016: [Accidents and Incidents](#)
- #68 July 2015: [Confessions of a Canine Companion](#)
- #41 April 2013: [Standards – The Secret Life of a Language Lawyer](#) — A look at some everyday standards and conventions
- #39 February 2013: [The Big Move](#) — preparing and selling a house, finding another one, and moving.
- #27 February 2012: [Living in Utopia](#) — Life in a planned American city.
- #14 January 2011: [Waiting My Turn](#) — A look back at all those times I'd stood in line or taken a number and waited my turn.
- #13 December 2010: [Technology, Unplugged – Part 2](#) — I discuss automobiles, still and video cameras, the written word, a digital data preservation strategy, and my right-hand gadget.

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- #12 November 2010: [Technology, Unplugged – Part 1](#) — I discuss the telephone, television, the internet, and recorded music.
- #11 October 2010: [Books by My Bed](#) — My love of books.
- #10 September 2010: [Making Allowances](#) — My experiences in setting up an allowance for my son.
- #9 August 2010: [Confessions of an Obama Volunteer](#) — My involvement in the 2008 US Presidential election.
- #5 April 2010: [The Road to US Citizenship](#)
- #3 February 2010: [Where's My Damn Gold Watch?](#) — A look back at my first 40 years in the workforce.

A.7 Series: Signs of Life

- #154 September 2022: [Signs of Life: Part 29](#) — Germany and the UK
- #151 June 2022: [Signs of Life: Part 28](#) — Germany
- #148 March 2022: [Signs of Life: Part 27](#) — Frederick, Maryland
- #145 December 2021: [Signs of Life: Part 26](#) — Germany and elsewhere
- #142 September 2021: [Signs of Life: Part 25](#) — Germany and Austria
- #139 June 2021: [Signs of Life: Part 24](#) — San Francisco
- #136 March 2021: [Signs of Life: Part 23](#) — Switzerland
- #132 November 2020: [Signs of Life: Part 22](#) — Switzerland
- #129 August 2020: [Signs of Life: Part 21](#) — the Northern Neck of Virginia, USA
- #126 May 2020: [Signs of Life: Part 20](#) — Edinburgh, Scotland; London, England; Beijing, China; and more
- #123 February 2020: [Signs of Life: Part 19](#) — Edinburgh, Scotland
- #120 November 2019: [Signs of Life: Part 18](#) — Japan
- #117 August 2019: [Signs of Life: Part 17](#) — Texas and Utah
- #114 May 2019: [Signs of Life: Part 16](#) — St. Croix
- #111 February 2019: [Signs of Life: Part 15](#) — Norway
- #108 November 2018: [Signs of Life: Part 14](#) — Croatia, Slovenia, and Italy.
- #105 August 2018: [Signs of Life: Part 13](#) — Croatia.
- #102 May 2018: [Signs of Life: Part 12](#) — Vienna, Austria, and Seoul, Korea.
- #99 February 2018: [Signs of Life: Part 11](#) — US states of Idaho, Wyoming, and Montana, and Korea and Japan
- #96 November 2017: [Signs of Life: Part 10](#) — Hawaii
- #93 August 2017: [Signs of Life: Part 9](#) — Barcelona, Spain
- #90 May 2017: [Signs of Life: Part 8](#) — France, Finland, California, Croatia, England, Korea, and Washington State
- #87 February 2017: [Signs of Life: Part 7](#) — Italy, Jordan, and France
- #84 November 2016: [Signs of Life: Part 6](#) — Various countries
- #81 August 2016: [Signs of Life: Part 5](#) — Various countries
- #78 May 2016: [Signs of Life: Part 4](#) — Australia
- #75 February 2016: [Signs of Life: Part 3](#) — London and Yorkshire

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- #72 November 2015: [Signs of Life: Part 2](#) — London and Yorkshire
- #69 August 2015: [Signs of Life: Part 1](#) — London and Yorkshire