

A Family story for 2016: family visits and trips and comments about democracy

(pics and names removed)

My wife and I would say “We’re, *like*, smart persons” --- to paraphrase our minority (by 2.8 M votes!) President-to-be ---- if we were narcissistic, insecure, and selfish liars. While the American and the World’s democracies have been upended violently this year through the latest “New York teapot dome scandal” affecting 6 billion instead of 6 million people, our own personal journeys this year have been more sedate, with more family *visits* and fewer family *trips* than in years gone by...

Trips: “*Oh to be in England now that April’s there..*”(Browning) - we were there in April in Slindon, West Sussex to help my brother P. bury the ashes of his life-long partner at Boxgrove Priory. A beautiful short ceremony in the priory and at the grave in the Spring sunshine; and later driving through local villages to see a district-wide art show at the many artists’ studios; “...*while the chaffinch sings on the orchard bough; In England—now!*”. P. has now sold his magnificent house and grounds in Slindon, downsizing to a townhouse in nearby Chichester, but close to many of his friends.

In June, my wife and I went our separate ways: she to her 50th year(!) Trinity College reunion in Washington DC with many of her “young” friends (mostly called M.); while I drove off to Houghton in northern Michigan to celebrate a colleague’s retirement symposium - we have also known him close to 50 years.

July allowed M. to return to Beijing as part of her Erikson work enabling early childhood teachers to utilize effective child-learning of mathematical concepts in their classrooms. This time she took grand-daughter S1. along to develop her own Mandarin learning *in situ*.

August was the quinquennial “Cuzens-Duzens” reunion of the H. family in Blue Earth, southern Minnesota - a splendid weekend renewing friendships etc. M. joined in writing a faux history play about newly-found ancestors living in Chicago in the 1830s (see below -if space- for details).

We both went to Arlington, VA in September to celebrate M.’s brother P.’s daughter SH.’s marriage to a fine fellow, O. A highlight of the weekend visit was to stay and endlessly talk about real and imagined events with old Chicago friends, JG and BS (actually quite a young couple) . Twin mermaids provide fond memories.

November 5th gave me the opportunity to celebrate Guy Fawkes day with that great guy S. and family in the grounds of their *chateau* in New Albany - a good burning was had by all.

Intermediate note: Perhaps a different type of burning is needed: *humility in leadership seems to be regarded as a weakness* by our future leader: would that he could experience emotional growth beyond his *little-boy reactions...*; can we imagine him to say out loud (1) “I don’t know”, or (2) “I made a mistake”, or (3) “I changed my mind”? All parts of “I was completely confused, and it will not enable my ego-destruction”.

Visits: In the January cold, we were honored to entertain Y.’s parents (we visited their home in western China Lijiang last year) in Chicago and in South Bend. N. and his two girls S2. and S3. visited from San Francisco later in the month - we saw N. and S2. also at the “Cuzens-Duzens” in August. S1. had a brief visit on her way to China in July; and S. and family came up to Chicago for July 4th.

Of course, we saw lots of H. and family (D. and A.) since they were staying at our house until they moved in November 3 doors away to their own apartment. It is wonderful to watch a clever grand-child growing up - she is now 2.7 years old - a perfect age also for M. to calibrate her own professional work in progress on math learning in the very early years of birth to three years and beyond. A one-day trip to nearby Hesston, Michigan, indulged H. in her Thomas-the-train fascination aboard various-scale steam trains.

H. was also responsible for a more sinister discovery... A high lead level in her blood analysis in February led us to request a test for lead in our Chicago house drinking water, “eventually” revealing a lead concentration of more than 30 ppb (parts/billion) double the EPA limit. By “eventually”, we mean that only thanks to a CBS TV news-reporter did we discover that our house had the highest lead content of any other tested within the city. She had used a freedom of information to see the list of houses the

Chicago Water Management (CWM) had tested - two months after our CWM lead tests. The rest of the year has seen us in two TV news appearances, superficial apology and denial of any responsibility from the CWM, and now we are part of a class-action suit against them. Estimates for fixing our water supply are a mere \$15,000-\$24,000 (please send a donation) - no wonder H. moved out!

A surprise, delightful-but-brief, visit came in September from D., the granddaughter of my brother G.. She is graduating from Miami University this month, after which she will return to Guayaquil, Ecuador, where the family have lived since the 1960s (G. himself died 18 months ago, but L., 2 children and grandchildren mostly reside there). The visit triggered a visit back to Ecuador by G. and his two girls at their Thanksgiving break, and I am sorry that we have not been able to see her family at her Miami graduation.

What else happened?

M. has had an intensive work year with extensive success at the Erikson Institute in pioneering new ideas in the learning of math concepts in children from 1 month to three years, building on their math group's work for ages three to five and beyond. G. retired, but grants people seemed to think that leaves more time to continue the Science and mathematics teacher learning (middle school and high school) - hence, swamped by the needs of three grants to cover teachers at schools in north, central and southern Indiana, developing what we call TLCs (Teacher Learning Communities) and providing throughout-the-year encouragement and ideas.

"Finally" just a brief mention of M.'s 3-greats grandfather *NS*: to cut a long story short, his daughter *W*. married in 1838 in Chicago the French-Canadian *FB* (M's 2-greats grandparents); we discovered that *NS*. (of early English pilgrim descent, a widower from Vermont and Canada) also married a year or two later in Chicago, and moved to a farm in Berrien Springs, Michigan to raise *W*'s siblings and a new family. We found his grave overlooking the banks of the St. Joseph river, and other graves of *W*'s siblings and step-siblings; and also the streets and schools in Berrien Springs, named *S*. after the generosity of one of them. - the essence of M.'s "faux history" play at the "Cuzens-Duzens".

Final note: Rampant voter suppression is the first step to tyranny. **Mahatma Gandhi** taught us the practice of achieving goals such as social change through symbolic protests, civil disobedience, economic or political non-cooperation, *satyagraha*, or other methods, without using violence. We need to play active parts in these ideas **NOW**.

PEACE and LOVE to ALL - M. And G.