

2018 Week 25: The Week Ending Saturday, June 23rd

Paul R. Potts

Sunday

Hazardous Heat

It got hot — really hot. While Saturday was as perfect a summer day as I could ever ask for, Sunday it crept up into the nineties and with the humidity, the heat index was hazardous.

One of my college friends posted to her Facebook wall pictures and video clips of her home in Houghton, Michigan (or thereabouts). Apparently a stream near her home overflowed during recent flash floods and decided to make her home part of its new route. Her house looks like it is probably a total loss. I'm trying to imagine being her.

After breakfast (pancakes, croissants, and bacon), I got a little time to select bits of *Family Values* to read and discuss on the podcast. We had our friend Chris call in via Google Hangouts again. I thought the conversation went quite well. None of us have Cooper's detailed knowledge of political science and recent political history, which can make these scholarly books a little challenging. But then again, that's why we're reading it.

Without working air conditioning in the truck, we had to make the call that it was not safe to drive everyone to Mass on Sunday afternoon. So instead I stayed downstairs and finished up the podcast production. We really have to get our act together and figure out how to work Mass into our schedule. Part of the problem is that we don't live near any particular Catholic church; they are all quite a long drive away. And having been to several, we haven't really identified one where we felt that we fit. Going only out of official obligation has not been very motivating. We have to solve this problem, though, and find a Mass we are able and willing to attend.

We wound up eating pretty late again, and getting to bed late, and so had no bedtime story.

Monday

An Intern

I'm writing on Tuesday morning, as again I'm a day late and a dollar short. Yesterday was challenging. Our new intern at work started. It's nice to have something to change up the routine a bit. He will be mostly working under my supervision. I am handing him off now and then to other folks. We want him to learn a number of different practical tasks at the office, including basic soldering, basic fiber spooling, inventory, packing, and shipping things. He's also shadowing me on LabVIEW programming. We're getting him set up with a seat for LabVIEW and a seat for the Keil MDK-ARM IDE, our embedded programming environment.

As far as actual tasks to complete, I want him to spend part of his time running tests of a new firmware build on our flagship product line. It needs to be thoroughly regression-tested. I have some test cases written already. I think that will be the main thing he can contribute, as far as actually helping us get some valuable work done, but we want him to have a chance to pick up as much extra knowledge and as many skills as possible. He's only here for under two months, though, so the actual challenge is to stay focused on what is achievable, so he finishes up his summer feeling like he's really gotten some things done.

Last night was very difficult. I wound up sequestering myself in the basement for a couple of hours waiting for Grace to return from Saginaw after spending some very frustrating time trying to herd the kids into getting ready for dinner. I spoke into my recorder this morning on the way to work about it, but I'm not going to write it all up here, at least not now. I'm still processing things. The gist of it is that Grace and I are horrified beyond belief at how badly the kids take advantage of these times when she is away or distracted, ignore all the rules, ignore all their chores, and lie to us. It's really been a problem.

Grace met a potential buyer for our house in Saginaw and showed him around. As she walked around the front of the property she was horrified to discover that someone had badly vandalized the elegant stone wall that is part of the iconic appearance of the house. So we have another problem to deal with. It is a reminder that we just can't keep the property up from Ypsilanti; we *must* get out from under this responsibility one way or the other, and soon.

Tuesday

This morning I managed to get up and out, up about 7:00 and out the door about 8:05. I had breakfast at Harvest Moon Café. Coffee, black with one sugar, and a breakfast BLT sandwich. The coffee was a little much for me and I am jittery today, both physically tired and unpleasantly wired. It would be better if I had a bulletproof tea at home. I started marking up my copy of *The Benedict Option* with sticky notes. I need more time to work on this. I made it to work around 9:15. I'm hoping for a better night's sleep tonight. It is supposed to get

cooler tonight and I am looking forward to that.

Git Tools on Windows

Most of my work day was spent helping our intern get software installed. Even just installing the Git tools that I use was surprisingly hard. The new Github instalation for Windows did not install **posh-git**, the Git command-line environment implemented in Windows PowerShell. I had to uninstall that and go back and find an older version of the Git desktop application for Windows.

The Git tools I use are **posh-git** and TortoiseGit. I need them to work together smoothly and not conflict with each other. The sequence that finally seemed to get everything working, after much trial and error and a lot of Googling, was to install the GitHub desktop application for Windows using this old installer. (I finally found this by reading this thread.) Then, I had our intern sign in to his Github account using the desktop app. After that, I was able to get the shortcuts for the Git Shell working using the trick mentioned in this Stack Overflow answer. After that, the Git Shell would come up. It gave me a warning about an old version of PowerShell. I was able to find a PowerShell 5.1 installer on Microsoft's site by following links provided in the warnings, so we updated PowerShell. After doing that (and probably rebooting again, I don't really remember), that warning went away. There is another warning now; I tried to follow the instructions in that warning, but they referred to a file that doesn't seem to exist on the PC where we installed the tools, so I'm just ignoring it for now.

After that, I wanted to get TortoiseGit installed, but the installer could not find the Git binary. So I wound up running a Git installer for Windows from here. I just chose all the default options. Then, finally, I was able to run the TortoiseGit installer, and everything just worked: our intern could access Github using his account, from both posh-git and from Tortoise. We aren't using Git Bash, Git GUI, or Git CMD, which the installer set up for us under "Git" in the Windows program menu. Instead we're only using Git Shell, which is shown under "GitHub, Inc."

It looks like there is a way to clean this up after installing everything. I was able to configure TortoiseGit after installation to refer to the Git and SSH executables under my username, in a subdirectory of **AppData\Local\GitHub**. Then I could uninstall the separate set of tools under "Git," and everything still seems to work fine. This has the advantage of using only one version of the Git executable on my repository. That just seems a little safer and saner to me, although stuffing executables in AppData and configuring TortoiseGit to reference them still seems a little bizarre and not very clean and simple.

It's nice that these tools for the most part do their best to make stuff just work, but it could still be better. Why is **posh-git** broken in the first place? Why doesn't TortoiseGit know how to find your installed Git if you are using the GitHub tools for Windows? It seems like the developers of the GitHub toolset

and the Git toolset should git it together (haha). Maybe the GitHub installer shouldn't actually install a Git executable but require you to use a standard one previously installed with the Git installer. But I'm sure I don't know all the issues involved.

There's probably a fix to that warning message on our intern's computer and I'll probably figure it out eventually. But what a time drain this has turned into.

I wrote up a detailed description and tried to e-mail it with Outlook, and Outlook stopped responding. It didn't even save a draft. So the whole thing is gone, apparently. I also had a blue screen earlier today, while my computer was just sitting on my desk. This is getting old.

We received another check from Liberty Mutual, and I ran out to Meijer to deposit it, and pick up some more lunch food for my office.

After I set up Grace's laptop with Thunderbird, she's able to reliably get her e-mail. But Webmail is still incredibly unreliable, inaccessible for hours every day. I have to decide if we're going to do something about that. The idea of moving our hosting just seems incredibly daunting. It's like changing banks where you have all your accounts, but worse.

Wednesday

Last night went reasonably well. Everything still took far too long, but I got some kitchen cleanup done and the kids were reasonably helpful. We had a pretty odd dinner, one of those summer meals when no one is all that hungry but we need to eat anyway, and we have a collection of foods that don't necessarily go together, but represent whatever looked good at the farmer's market that day. So we had a dish of small oven-roasted purple sweet potatoes, really quite tasty and very deep purple-colored. We had a dish of young turnips cubed and pan-fried with bacon and their greens with some kale added. And we had a side of garlic scape pesto, made from garlic scapes, pine nuts, many cloves of garlic, and olive oil, blended in the Vitamix we are borrowing from a friend. The kids suprised me by all eating the turnip dish. Well, all except for Pippin, who didn't eat anything. We decided to avoid a screaming meltdown and let him fast.

This is the time of year when I tend to get a little sleep-deprived due to the long days. Physically I tend to feel pretty good, because I am eating a lot of salads and other produce, and getting a little sun and exercise. And my mood tends to be pretty good. But it is very hard to get enough sleep when the kids aren't tired until midnight, we're sleeping with a wakeful baby, and a toddler with a bit of a bladder management problem, and it starts to get light enough to wake me up before 6:00 a.m.

The kids were organized enough in their chores last night to be ready for bed in time for a story. I read the last few chapters of *The Wonderful O* by James Thurber. It's a really fun book, full of rhymes and verbal pyrotechnics. Thurber

makes all that seem effortless. The younger kids don't really click with it but the older ones enjoy it.

Thursday

It's the longest day. I'm tired. With the sun up so early and staying up so late, the kids have a really hard time settling down, and I'm just a bit sleep-deprived. After work last night I went to Costco for a few things, like olive oil and fruit, and then to the Bombay Grocers for cilantro, ginger, papadums, pickles, and some frozen desserts. We have invited our neighbor for Indian food tonight. Grace and I had a plan to do a lot of the prep work last night, but that did not really work out all that well, and so we did not get much prep done, except for the shopping and planning. We did get the kitchen pretty well ready to cook, and Grace ground up a spice mix.

A Small Indian Feast

We are making two dishes, both from Julie Sahni's *Classic Indian Cooking*. One is eggs in tomato sauce, which we've made a couple of times before. It's always been delicious and isn't too time-consuming. The other is a braised chicken in a creamy sauce with yogurt and spices, which we've also made before, although not for a long time. We're going to try using coconut cream instead of yogurt, or if she can Grace will get some cultured coconut-milk yogurt. Grace is trying to avoid dairy. Most of us could benefit from less dairy. It is really bothering Grace recently. Strangely, using Flonase daily means that I seem to be able to have dairy without any allergy symptoms.

Reportage by George Orwell (1998 Folio Society Boxed Set)

Last night my latest book order arrived from an eBay seller. It's a five-volume boxed set, released by the Folio Society in 1998, of George Orwell's non-fiction writing, called "Reportage." This set is what you might call "shopworn," with a little bit of "foxing" (aging) to the book covers, but they are in excellent condition and the price was right. They feel and smell new-ish even though they are twenty years old. They books are very nice. This edition has a number of photographs in each book, which was an unexpected bonus that really helps me get my head into Orwell's time and place.

Unfortunately the bookseller didn't put this boxed set in a larger box with bubble-wrap or peanuts or even newspaper to cushion it. The seller wrapped it up in several layers of paper and plastic and a couple extra custom-cut pieces of cardboard, basically folding a custom outer shipping box out of cardboard, a tight cardboard skin around the boxed set. I grimaced when I saw the package, because I knew that this kind of packaging probably meant the slipcase was damaged. And it was. The back and side seams are split.

It happens; these slipcases get brittle with age, and they are just made of

cardboard wrapped in paper. And it doesn't look bad, and the books are in fine shape, so I have no real reason to complain, other than the fact that with better packaging, the whole thing would probably have arrived with the slipcase intact.

***Down and Out in Paris and London* by George Orwell**

So it probably wasn't the best parenting choice, but for last night's story I read the kids the first few chapters of Orwell's *Down and Out in Paris and London*. I could have picked up where we left off in *Fellowship of the Ring*, but I was excited to read some Orwell.

I first read this book, I believe, in the summer of 1987, while I was "down and out" myself, in Wooster, Ohio; I spent the summer living with my friend John, in a very hot attic apartment, working the night shift as a custodian, reading about Zen Buddhism, writing letters, and trying to live as a vegetarian. After my roommate John left partway through the summer to go spend some time with his family, I had to pay the full rent myself. I think the job ended, too, although it is hard to remember the details after over 30 years. I found myself very broke, living on my scant stocks of split peas and rolled oats and pretty much nothing else. By the end of the summer I was down to about 120 pounds, having lost 25 pounds or so, and my ribs were sticking out uncomfortably. But at the same time, I remember being in a great mood. There's a sort of high one can get from fasting, or at least I could back then. And I had, even then, a sort of low-grade body dysmorphic disorder; I thought I was fat, and losing weight seemed like a win, although I certainly wasn't actually doing my body and brain any favors.

I could have broken down and asked my mom for some money, and I'm sure she would have helped me out, but at the time it was a point of pride to *not* ask for help. And it seems Orwell's story was similar, in that he *could* have left; he was, as this article suggests, "free to return to England and middle-class whenever he wanted." I'm not blind to the fact that there is something false and self-serving about both our "exploits."

Anyway, I loved Orwell's depiction of his life back then, and thought the kids would love it, too. And they do. I censored one passage, and if you are familiar with the book you probably know which passage it was: Charlie's story, in chapter 2. But I wanted them to get a feel for the style, including the gutter French. Grace and I tried to translate the French phrases, with only partial success. I translated "Rue du Coq d'Or" as "Golden Chicken Street." It should probably be "Golden Rooster Street," but my version just seemed funnier to me. The book is definitely meant to be darkly funny, at least in parts. I was looking for a complete glossary of the French phrases online, but haven't found one yet. It is probably for the best that we didn't correctly translate one particular phrase which means (I think) "How can I love just one soldier, when I love the whole regiment?"

This collection of Orwell's writing is far from complete, but it's a start. And I

always really love the chance to hold and read nicely-made books.

At work I was trying to run my latest code on our intern's computer, and found that things were just not working for some reason. Digging in with the debugger, I found that in recent revisions I made two very simple, stupid errors. Fortunately they were quick to find and fix, but there's nothing like making dumb mistakes in front of an 18-year-old intern to remind me of the importance of humility.

I got a nice-looking silk and cotton shirt, sized L, at Costco a couple of weeks ago, and I thought it fit pretty well, but after one wash it was unfortunately too tight across my somewhat expanded torso. So yesterday I tried a similar shirt, sized XL. That one looks like a circus tent. So I've got that going for me today. I'm hoping it will shrink to the size the the L shirt was, originally. I don't really expect that I'll be able to lose any weight until the stress of dealing with the old house is gone from my life.

Friday

The Indian Feast Debrief

Our Indian dinner with guest went fairly well, although it is always on the verge of total chaos. Elanor really enjoyed her basmati rice with saffron, which she demonstrated by throwing it everywhere. If we forgot to keep a pile of rice in front of her baby seat, she would demonstrate her discontent by climbing onto the table and shoving her hands in the serving platter. Fortunately our guest has raised several children himself and so seemed unfazed by all this.

He brought a couple bottles of wine. One of them was a Chenin Blanc which we thought was really delicious. It was sweet, but not dessert-wine sweet, with nice flavors of crisp green apples with a little bit of grassiness and mineral flavors. Grace and I finished up the bottle while we were doing the dishes and agreed that this was quite a delicious white wine. Even as it came up towards room temperature, it did not become acidic or off-putting the way that some white wines do.

We tried to engage our guest in conversation. With six kids at the table, there were plenty of interruptions, but he was a gracious guest and took all that in stride. He plays piano, and showed Joshua a few things on our piano. He was impressed with how quickly Josh picks up melodies (and so are we; I can play things by ear, but it took me years to get decent at it, and even today I'm not very quick).

Anthony Bourdain, Les Halles, and Brasserie Les Halles

Our guest had met Anthony Bourdain, and we took a moment to mourn his loss. I mentioned that I am reading the kids *Down and Out in Paris and London*, or Dee-Oh-Pee-Low, as Veronica has taken to calling it, and how the book mentions

the famous Les Halles food market. The original Les Halles was the inspiration for the name of Bourdain's restaurant, that he writes about so memorably in *Kitchen Confidential*. The Park Avenue Brasserie Les Halles location has closed, sadly. Anyway, I bought up *Down and Out* to mention that it seemed like a sort of early prototype of *Kitchen Confidential*.

Dee-Oh-Pee-Low, Continued

I asked the kids if they wanted to hear more of *The Fellowship of the Ring* or more of Dee-Oh-Pee-Low. They unanimously voted for Dee-Oh-Pee-Low. (Take that, Tolkien!) So we read three more chapters at bedtime. The narrator (Eric Arthur Blair, whose pen name was George Orwell), sunk in destitution, has pawned his clothes and is living on next to nothing. He recalls his Russian friend, Boris, who once told him to look him up if he ever needed a job in the restaurant industry. He does so, but finds that Boris has seen better days. But their camaraderie helps get them through days of miserable hunger while they scour Paris looking for work. Boris is an incredibly vivid character, and I loved making up a voice for him. I modeled it a bit after Gru, the villain/hero of the *Despicable Me* movies, voiced by Steve Carell. Boris is funny, and his optimism is infectious, but he does have an unfortunate tendency to go on anti-Semitic rants. So we'll need to unpack that for the kids and talk about anti-Semitism and its long history.

Eric Blair, *Plongeur*

Before long, the narrator of Dee-Oh-Pee-Low will have a job, as *plongeur*, and we'll have lots more to talk about. I've reminded the kids that the mouse in the Pixar movie *Ratatouille* refers to the young Alfredo Linguini, as a "*plongeur* (and sometimes the staff refers to him as a "garbage boy.") The word literally means "diver," not "plunger" (the suction cup device to clear drains), and it refers to someone who "dives in" to wash dishes and handle other low-status tasks, such as managing the garbage, in a restaurant kitchen.

Saturday

Another Stolen Debit Card Number

Friday afternoon was strange. I got a text message asking if I had made a charge at Bloomingdale's in Mason, Ohio for \$385. Apparently someone stole Grace's debit card and racked up some charges including over five hundred dollars at a Nike Store. This is the third or fourth time we've had one of our card numbers stolen since moving back to Washtenaw County. Last time the bank immediately refunded the charges. This time apparently because they are debits and not credit card charges, or something, they will not reimburse us until they do their investigation. So suddenly our checking account was down over nine hundred dollars, due to nothing we did. Our balance was negative. Fortunately I had

some money in a savings account that I could just transfer in. But now our savings account is depleted, so we currently have no emergency fund.

I hope they figure it out and credit us soon. So, I was distracted at work for a bit because I had to make some phone calls and had a conversation with Grace about all this. I was working on LabVIEW code and also trying to tutor our intern. After he left I was making progress so I was hesitant to leave. I got some recalcitrant code working. I couldn't finish everything I was working on, but made considerable progress, and got to the point where I had a reasonable plan for doing more on Monday, so I left. It was too late to go to Costco, so I went to Trader Joe's and got some frozen cod. We had the fish, some potatoes from the Instant Pot which Veronica under-cooked because they were extremely large potatoes, and some cookies, including my favorite cookies from Trader Joe's, the vanilla meringues. We don't go to Trader Joe's much in part because Stadium was under construction for so long, I got out of the habit of ever driving that way. But maybe we should get stuff there more often, not just when we are looking for affordable wine for holidays.

***Divine Invasions: A Life of Philip K. Dick* by Lawrence Sutin**

This morning I got up pretty early because it was too light to sleep any longer, and also because our baby girl seemed to be doing her best to kick me out of bed. I soaked in the tub for a while and read more of *Divine Invasions: A Life of Philip K. Dick* by Lawrence Sutin. This is my first time through this biography, although I've read some others. This one seems to be the most detailed. The Philip K. Dick that Sutin describes is quite a troubled guy. He seems to have many social anxieties and phobias and somehow this makes him more relateable. It is painful to read about his relationship troubles and marriages. It seems to me that he married too early, didn't choose ideal partners, and didn't know how to be a good partner. I think that was probably pretty common at the time; he seems to have married people the way I dated people in my twenties.

I had a few things on my agenda for today. One of them was to deep-clean one of our cast iron dutch ovens. That doesn't sound like it could possibly take up much of the day, but it did, and I'm still not sure it's really done. I'll get a good look at it when I take it out of the oven in the morning. This particular dutch oven had layers of baked-on oil that needed to come off. This involved a steel spatula, steel wool, and several abrasive pads. It's really hard to actually damage cast iron: the surface itself is extremely hard. If you do manage to take it down to the bare metal, it will rust immediately, but the coating of rust is superficial and will come off easily. Then you can apply a very thin coat of oil and put it in a hot oven for a couple of hours to form a new seasoning layer. When it works out right, it's great. If it doesn't work out right, you have kind of a mess, with flakes of burnt oil coming off in your food.

I made bacon and pancakes that were indifferently received this morning. Grace and I got out of the house together to run errands. We went to Meijer and

returned cans and bottles and bought a few necessities, then went to Costco. I don't like going to Costco on Saturday afternoon, but there we were. It was very crowded. On the drive back we got a phone call from our houseguest. The kids had apparently overflowed the toilet in the downstairs bathroom. She made it sound like there was a major flood, so we were kind of terrified what we were going to find.

A Minor Flood

Fortunately it did not seem to be a major flood. The kids had put down a whole bunch of towels, and that caught most of it, although water did go through the floor into the basement. The basement ceiling was still standing open after the washing machine catastrophe early last year. We tried to figure out just where the water came through. It might have been from bad caulking around the base of the toilet. The tiles of the bathroom floor do not run all the way to the edge of the wall under the heater. Some water may have soaked into the subfloor under there. There were a couple of small damp spots in the basement wall that looked like they might be from water going down through the wall. We got fans running downstairs and upstairs and mopped the floor. I turned the dehumidifier in the basement all the way up, and we set the air conditioning in the main house down. Now we are wondering if we need to have someone out to see if there is anything else we need to do, or if it is sufficient just to dry it out this way. I'll look at everything again tomorrow.

It always seems like we get punished for doing just these basic things. We were only gone for two and a half hours!

The guy we had scheduled to be on our podcast this weekend hasn't been answering messages, so it looks like he won't be on this week's show. So Grace and I are scrambling to come up with a backup plan.

For dinner we had Korean barbecue from Costco, and a pot of rice with the last of our saffron. The kids also got a cheese pizza. We thought our houseguest and her kids would be joining us for dinner, but she left for the evening, so it was up to us.

This evening did have a nice little break. Grace and I sat outside on the back deck for a while after dinner and enjoyed the way the day was cooling down. I got a little bit of time to myself in the basement. I did some work on a houseplant, an enormous sprawling *hoya carnosa* that I've had since the early 1990s. It's sending out winding runners everywhere, so I cut it back, polished up some leaves, and top-dressed it with some new potting mixture. I also planted some of the cuttings to see if they will root. I used to have a lot of ambition with house plants and had many plants. In recent years the only ones I've kept are the hoyas, and a small and not-very-healthy-looking wandering jew plant owned by my mother, although I've been pruning and propagating that one to try to get it looking better.

So, finally, I found it satisfying to do some things with my hands today: working on the cast iron pots until my fingers were raw, and then working on some plants. I need to do more of this kind of thing. And spend more time on the back deck. Our home is in too nice a wooded spot to not spend at least a little time outside at every opportunity.

I'm writing this late, past midnight. I'm sure I would have had more to write in the moments of frustration. It's probably better that I've had some time to let the frustrations recede a little, and gain at least a few hours' worth of perspective.

Next week's post, week 26, will mark the halfway point of 2018!

Books, Music, Movies, and TV Shows Discussed This Week

This list does not include books, chapters of books, or other works that I only mentioned briefly in the text above.

- *Reportage* by George Orwell (1998 Folio Society Boxed Set)
- *Down and Out in Paris and London* by George Orwell
- *Divine Invasions: A Life of Philip K. Dick* by Lawrence Sutin

Pittsfield Township, Michigan

The Week Ending Saturday, June 23rd, 2018

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