

2018 Week 43: The Week Ending Saturday, October 27th

Paul R. Potts

Sunday

Yesterday got crazily busy and Grace has been quite tired, so things didn't quite go as I hoped yesterday. We spent much of the day driving around. Almost all the rest was spent cooking and cleaning up.

Washing Sam's Hair

The kids got up and had leftovers from our barbecue dinner out, but not all of us had leftovers, so I made a small batch of blueberry pancakes. There was a lot of kitchen cleanup to get through. I also wanted to get Sam in the tub and give him a thorough hair-washing. It was pretty dirty. Grace asked me to do it because, well, to put it bluntly, his hair smelled bad.

I had him soak in the tub for a while, then washed his hair twice using only conditioner, and trimmed it with our Wahl electric clipper. I used only conditioner because Grace had suggested that regimen for some of the kids with very curly hair. The conditioner-only regimen seems to work well with Benjamin and Joshua, but their hair is much more tightly curled. Sam's is more wavy, although it still has a somewhat rough texture. All the kids have some combination of Jewish, African, and Northern European genes, but each has a slightly different combination. So each kid's hair texture is noticeably different than all the others.

After trimming it, it looked better, but it was clear that his scalp was still dirty. He doesn't like to get his head wet, so he doesn't often get in there with his fingertips and vigorously scrub it. So we put him back in the tub and I washed it twice more with Grace's homemade shampoo, made of African black soap. I also worked his scalp over thoroughly with a scalp massager brush. That got a lot of dead skin and loose hair out, and afterwards his hair was *much* cleaner and smelled much better, although I should go over it again in a few days. It also left a huge ring in the tub. Joshua looked at it and said that it looked like we had given the planet Saturn a bath. (Joshua's sense of humor is unique.) The tub had been draining slowly for a day or two, but this was more than the drain could handle; it was now almost completely plugged.

Hot Sauce, Tried

Grace put on a tray of small, extremely hot red peppers from our friends' farm. The plan was to roast them, then blend them up into a hot sauce.

The Pumpkin Farm

About three o'clock Joshua asked Grace if she was going to take him and Pippin to the pumpkin farm. We had completely forgotten that they were signed up to spend a few hours at the farm with the chorus, where they had a corn maze and other Halloween things. So I asked Sam to let the tub finish draining (very, very slowly), and when it was done, to wipe it out with paper towels rather than trying to wash the soap scum and hair down the drain.

We got them there quite late. The farm is just past the Eastern edge of Washtenaw County, in Wayne County. I always think of Wayne County, the county where Detroit and most of its suburbs are, as all paved. But in fact the Western edge is pretty rural in parts.

A Chaotic Day

Anyway, we got them there only about 30 minutes late, which is unfortunately pretty typical for us. While they were having fun, Grace and I ran a couple of errands. She dropped me off at Lowe's and she went to Gordon Food Service. I was looking for some LED bulbs that would fit into the ceiling fan fixture in our bedroom. It was designed for old "A" type incandescent bulbs, and a lot of LED replacement bulbs are too long or too wide, including the last box I bought at Costco, 100 watt-equivalent Feit brand 3000K "bright white" bulbs that are 100W replacements. I also wasn't really happy with the "bright white." They aren't as bluish as the 5000K "daylight" version, but still too blue to want in our bedroom.

Are Some LED Bulbs Dangerous?

I think evidence is starting to accumulate that the high-energy blue wavelengths from some LED bulbs can cause eye injury. I think the bulbs I used in our the upstairs bathroom in our old house in Saginaw may have damaged my eyes, over and above what I might have reasonably expected from aging. Of course, I don't have a control set of eyeballs to compare them to. But in any case I wound up buying GE Relax 60 watt-equivalent bulbs in "warm white," and they look a lot better in our ceiling fan fixture and also in the bathroom light fixture. I had thought that the "middle" color, of the three Feit options, would look "normal" to me — that is, like the color of an incandescent bulb. But no, it appears that if I want the light to look like an incandescent bulb, I need to go with the "warm" version.

Years ago I used to get Chromalux full spectrum light bulbs to use in reading lamps. They are incandescent bulbs that look purple when not turned on. They

are made of glass that contains neodymium, which supposedly makes the bulb emits a more balanced spectrum than that emitted by standard incandescent bulbs. The old Chromalux bulbs apparently had a color temperature of 3200K, which is much closer to the “warm white” LED bulbs than to the “bright white” or “daylight” versions. Apparently you can still get Chromalux incandescent bulbs, although I’m unclear on how they can be sold under the “Energy Independence and Security Act of 2007.” Maybe they are exempt as “specialty bulbs?” Apparently GE also sells similar “reader light” bulbs including 150-watt and 200-watt bulb. That seems almost criminally decadent when a 60-watt equivalent LED draws about 9 watts. I don’t actually want to go back to heating my house with light bulbs, but I do want to figure out how to live with less eyestrain and, possibly, eye damage, especially as I get older.

When I opened up the bathroom fixture I found that the Feit bulb I had put in there was extremely hot. I would have expected an incandescent bulb in there to be quite hot, but I was a little surprised that an LED bulb was putting out so much heat. I had thought that the reduced electricity consumption in these bulbs meant that they turned a much higher portion of that electric current into light, and much less into heat, than an incandescent bulb. So I’m puzzled, and that heat can’t really be good for prolonging the life of the bulb. Maybe the 60-watt equivalent, which is also a bit smaller, will operate at a lower temperature.

I also bought drain cleaner. I’ve been using gallon jugs of Zep brand 10-Minute Hair Clog Remover for the bathtub drain that I can’t snake at all, because of the stupid non-removable stopper. That sometimes requires two or even three treatments before the drain gets moving again. They didn’t have it, so I got three smaller bottles of Liquid-Plumr Hair Clog Eliminator. My wife and my kids, especially my daughter who has grown her curly hair out long, put an awful lot of hair down the drain.

I also got some more of the green pads to scrub pots and pans, and some of the silvery steel scrubbers as well, which take off some baked-on grease that is hard to get off with the green pads. Things seem cheaper at Lowe’s than at Home Depot, although I did not do an item-to-item comparison.

Grace picked up some smoked ham hocks to use for cooking black-eyed peas, and some white grape juice as requested by her friend.

Racing Around Town

We had just enough time to go get coffee and bagels at Tim Horton’s, before we had to go pick up Joshua and Pippin. Well, actually we had *almost* enough time. We got there a few minutes after the planned pick-up time. But our kids’ chaperone and the group of kids she was going around with had not actually come out yet, so we didn’t wind up making anyone wait for us.

Think Outside the Books

On the way home Grace stopped at a place on Ellsworth called Think Outside the Books, which we had driven past on our way to Lowe's. I had never heard of this place and when we passed it the first time, it wasn't even clear to me that it was actually a bookstore. On the way back we stopped and found that in fact it was a huge used bookstore, but it was in the process of shutting down, because the owner had been unable to pay his rent. So the store was nearing the end of several rounds of price reductions; it was a dollar a book, or a box for ten dollars. Grace wanted to check on how things were going at home, so she left me there for a while with Joshua and Pippin. I skimmed through the shelves. The inventory was very picked-over, and the books were a huge mess, very disorganized and stuffed messily on the shelves. I found very little that I was interested in at all. Meanwhile Grace was gone a long time. It turned out that she had called Veronica, who asked her if she would take her to a St. Francis youth group event. So Grace drove her to St. Francis, then came back to get us. Then she took us back home, and went to pick up Veronica.

Hurrying Up and Waiting

She thought Veronica was done at 7:15, but it turns out she had read something about a different event, so she wasn't done for another hour. So she had to wait quite a while. She didn't get back until well after 8:00.

Using a Lot of Gas

This, readers, is how we can manage to use something like \$40 worth of gas in a single weekend without even trying. I'm glad that the kids are getting out and doing things — for the first year or so after we moved, they weren't doing all that much outside the house. But we are using more than twice as much gas as we used to. I haven't tried to figure it all out but I think between choir, choir-related activities, youth group, regular doctor appointments for Grace, speech therapy for Sam, trips to Grass Lake to visit our friends, and assorted other trips, we are probably spending over \$200 a week on gas now.

While Grace was out with Elanor to go get Veronica, I tried a bottle of the new drain cleaner. That worked the first try, although it took a whole lot of water to rinse it all down. Foam kept coming out of the overflow drain. I wanted to make sure I got all that stuff rinsed down since I didn't want anyone with an accidental chemical burn.

Hot Sauce, Failed

When Grace got back, she remembered the peppers. They were... *very* well-roasted. I think the best word is "carbonized." I tasted one, and it was like eating burnt paper. They unfortunately were a total loss; even blended with something moist, like tomato paste, they would have made it black and bitter-tasting. But

even burnt to a crisp, the seeds inside the pepper were not burned up, and still *extremely* hot. I guess we could have tried to separate out the seeds, but I wasn't up for dissecting the burned peppers with gloves on to keep the capsaicin off my hands. We'll have to see if our friends have any peppers left. It's a shame. We were looking forward to a nice scalding home-made hot sauce to warm us up in January.

Speaking of warming us up in January, we still haven't gotten a call back from the company we've been calling to arrange to have our gas boiler serviced. So the heat is still off. This must be their busy season. But we still need to get our heat on! It isn't that cold yet, but we want to have it available in November.

Preparing Dinner

So what we thought was going to be a mostly-free day, with time to write and finish a podcast, turned out not be free, at all, but very busy. When Grace got back she was quite tired. We had to recruit several kids to help get dinner ready. We made a giant box of Jiffy Mix corn muffin mix, in our biggest cast-iron pan. Veronica threw a ham hock and black-eyed peas in the Instant Pot. Then we made a dish out of the smaller "salad" turnips and their greens. That involved rinsing the greens several times — they are very gritty. I had to take over from Veronica and rinse them a couple more times. Then, she chopped them up. But when we threw them in the pan on high heat, I realized that the pieces she had made were very irregular in size. The recipe called for cutting turnips in half, but the recipe authors must have expected the turnips to be somewhat uniform in size. These turnips were all different sizes, so I had her cut up the larger chunks with kitchen shears while they were cooking. The recipe called for searing them on high heat, to get some nice browning going, then cooking them longer with liquid to soften. We threw in some of the leftover white Bordeaux wine and a little honey, then adding the chopped greens and softening them up on a lower temperature. (The recipe called for apple cider vinegar, but Grace wanted to use the wine instead; I'm not sure why. Maybe Grace thought her somewhat touchy stomach wouldn't handle the vinegar well.)

The black-eyed peas were delicious, and the kids always love the sweet cornbread from the Jiffy mix. The turnip dish — well, the turnips were from very late in the season, and so their natural sugars had probably converted into starches, and they were pretty bitter. The white wine and honey was, I think, too subtle a dressing for them. The cooked turnips and greens were much better with more salt and some white wine vinegar to cut the bitterness. The leaves of the greens were fine but the stems were too hard. Probably we needed to separate them and start sautéing the stems first, so that they would cook longer. But whatever — we got the kids to eat some very healthy greens. Most of them, at least; I think Pippin refused, but he did eat some black-eyed peas with smoked ham hock.

We didn't finish eating until almost 11:00. Our housemate smelled the cornbread and came down to eat some of that with us, although I don't think she ate

anything else. We had a reasonably good conversation. I forgot to mention the *gum*. Someone's been giving either her kids or our kids gum, and so I've been having to scrape dirty stuck-on chewing gum off our hardwood floors.

There was a lot of kitchen cleanup. Grace's energy level was fading. So I fortified myself by finishing off about half a bottle of the white Bordeaux. It didn't really improve, in my estimation. I still don't think it was very good. But it was good enough to finish drinking. Grace got the kids to brush their teeth and clean up the dining table and floor. Our housemate helped sweep. I was done in the kitchen by about 1:00 a.m. and Grace and I finally got Elanor settled down and our lights out by about 1:45.

Not Recording the Pottscast

As a last-ditch effort to get a podcast done, I brought up my little Olympus LS-10 digital recorder. I was going to use that to record a conversation before we went to sleep, with a plan to actually produce and upload it Monday night. I thought maybe we could spend a little time talking about how it was our seventeenth wedding anniversary, and what we remembered and looked back on from those dizzying seventeen years. But baby Elanor wasn't quiet yet — in fact, she was very much the opposite of quiet. So I had to give up on that plan. And not only did we not get a podcast up, I didn't even manage to get a blog post up explaining that we weren't going to get a podcast up. Maybe if things go very smoothly tomorrow...

Monday

During the night there was a nasty smell in the room. It smelled like someone had either vomited in bed or had an attack of diarrhea. That was pretty awful. I went around and felt everyone's bed and bottom. I couldn't find the source. Maybe someone just had really, really foul-smelling gas? I thought it might have been a mess in the bathroom, but it also smelled like it was coming from our bedroom.

Later during the night Joshua *was* up with diarrhea, although he made it to the toilet. About 2:00 a.m., our housemate's boyfriend was leaving for his work shift. He insists on wearing his shoes in the house, so his tromping around in the bathroom over our heads tends to wake me up. This morning a couple of the kids seem to be sick with sore throats. I'm not feeling my best either, although I'm not feeling terrible. I didn't have any noticeable fever. It did seem like I was having trouble digesting dinner, although that may be partly because the turnips and greens were older, maybe not cooked enough to completely soften the stems, and so hard to digest.

So maybe another virus is working its way through the household. Grace and the kids will probably take it easy for most of the day, although I know she has two more appointments in the afternoon.

I had a toasted bagel with peanut butter for breakfast, at Joe and Rosie Creamery on Jackson, along with a latte made with almond milk. I don't have any lunch food left in my office, so I'll have to go find something that sounds appealing for lunch.

I'm really, really hoping I don't have to miss work due to illness, my illness or anyone else's. I want to have my few precious vacation days available for the birth of the new baby. But kids are unfortunately little virus bombs, and I don't always get to veto the viruses.

I was wrong — I thought there weren't any noodles left at my office, but I had some spicy ramen left! So I microwaved that for lunch. Sometimes past me is not actually a total asshole to present me.

I had a strange voice mail on my work phone from an unknown number in Austin. I didn't answer it, thinking it was probably a recruiter call. But I got a two-minute voice mail message e-mailed to me by the phone system. The message consisted entirely of crackling noises, like a bad phone line. Strange. But maybe it's appropriate for Halloween season — is there a ghost in the machine?

Tuesday

To quote my friend Sean Hurley, "It's Tired and I'm Late.". Last night was kind of difficult. I didn't have enough lunch; my bowl of spicy ramen didn't quite sustain me until I got home, so I was a bit shaky when I got in a little before 8:00.

Pascha 85% Dark Chocolate

I ate a couple of squares of the Pascha 85% dark chocolate to try to give myself enough fortitude to face the evening at home. While Grace and Elanor and I munched a little chocolate, we looked more closely at the purple package it came in. It's covered with little logos: "USDA Organic," "Non-GMO," "UTZ Certified Cocoa," "Certified Vegan," "Paleo Certified," "Celiac Support Association," "1% for the Planet," and a kosher "U" logo. Do any of those mean that the cocoa wasn't harvested or processed with child labor or slave labor? UTZ Says So, but are they an authority I should trust on this issue? Should I be looking for Fair Trade Certification instead? It has always seemed to me that the Fair Trade chocolate tasted worse, and I really like this Pascha chocolate; I like it better than the Green and Black brand, and the Endangered Species brand. But I just don't know. Maybe I shouldn't be buying chocolate at all. That's a horrible thought.

Grace gave me an update. None of the kids had been very sick, but several were not feeling great. Joshua had napped. The foul smells the previous night had probably been children with a virus and bad gas, not actual vomit or diarrhea.

No news from our realtor yet. The furnace guy is ready to install the replacement furnace, if we tell him to go ahead.

Grace and the kids had dinner well underway, and so we were able to get dinner on the table quickly. And dinner was great — we had lamb steaks, Veronica had done all the chopping and prep work to make a dish with all the rest of the eggplant from our friends' farm, and I made a pot of basmati rice with tomatoes. (I stir-fried 3 cups of rice in butter, then added about 4 cups of water and a can of diced tomatoes and set it to pressure-cook on manual for ten minutes, doing a manual release as soon as it was done — it came out great).

I'm not sure what we'd call the eggplant dish. It was kind of like a ratatouille, and kind of like a caponata. But whatever you call it, it was delicious.

After two disappointing bottles of white wine from Costco, I decided I'd better taste the red wine I have been buying for our holiday meals — are Costco's buyers just asleep on the job this year?

2015 Castello di Monsanto Chianti Classico

At least, that was the excuse I needed to open one of the two bottles of 2015 Castello di Monsanto Chianti Classico. I'm happy to report that this wine is quite delicious, with nice oak, leather and tobacco aromas, and a lot of stewed fruit flavor. Grace had only a small taste but agreed that it was pretty decent Chianti. I could only manage one glass, so we've got almost 3/4ths of the bottle left. This is why I have been hesitant to open up bottles to pre-screen the wines; I can't get through the bottles myself without drinking more than I would usually drink. But if I can manage to pick up a beef roast at Costco tonight, we will happily throw it in the Instant Pot with the rest of this Chianti, and I expect the result to taste good enough that no one will feel that we wasted good wine.

So, over the course of my next few Costco trips, in the weeks remaining before Thanksgiving, I'll pick up two or three more bottles of this Chianti, and I'll be pleased to serve it at our holiday meals. I should probably also taste the rosé that I've bought two bottles of, to see if I'm satisfied with it, and if so, buy another bottle or two of that. just leaves a white wine and a dessert wine to sort out. I've got one more bottle of white wine to preview. If I'm not happy with it, I'll try Trader Joe's, to see if I can find something decent in a mid-priced white wine. Then I just need a few bottles of a decent dessert wine, and I think we'll be set for our holiday meals.

Life with a Housemate

Anyway, dinner was delicious, but while we were finishing up the meal, our housemate was making instant oatmeal, because it seemed that once again she could not eat what we were cooking, and once again would not *collaborate* — wouldn't suggest something else to eat, or help prepare something we could all eat. Early on, Grace got fed up with trying; she'd take our housemate's requests for a dinner, and cook it with her, only to have her completely refuse to eat it. So, again, she was cooking a different meal for herself, although I think her kids

ate our food — maybe not the eggplant dish, as I wouldn't necessarily expect kids to like that, but I think they ate some of the lamb and some of the rice.

Because Grace had been relentlessly cracking the whip for hours to have the kids help her get dinner ready, we were eating at a fairly reasonable hour — I think it was only about 8:30 or so. So it seemed reasonable to think we would get the meal cleaned up and have time to watch the third episode of the new season of *Doctor Who*.

After dinner our housemate and her boyfriend were in the kitchen doing something and they were loud. She was yelling at him and calling him the n-word. I really don't love having that happen around my kids. I could not bring myself to go in there while they were having what I called a "fight" and Grace called a "conversation." He was again wearing pants that left his entire underwear-clad rear end showing. That's another one of the things I have some trouble with. I just don't feel that I should be seeing his rear end, even accidentally, when he's just walking around the house, or I'm trying to clean up dinner. I'm also not really pleased that he dresses like this in front of my kids; I don't think they are going to emulate him, but it is something I don't really want to explain, and something I really don't feel *qualified* to explain.

Sagging

I'm aware that as a white person, trying to talk to a black person about sagging is not likely to go well, and I don't *actually* want to lecture him about respectability politics. After all, I am currently growing my hair long again, not *despite* the fact that it signals certain things, but *because* it does. And I *don't* believe that convincing black folks to *signal* respectability by emulating white fashion is really the answer to anything. There's no amount of signaling black folks can do that will *solve* structural racism, and it's ridiculous to pretend otherwise.

What would Miss Manners do with a guest whose pants were falling off? I think the answer to most etiquette questions is to avoid causing embarrassment or expressing needless criticism. What would Emily Post have to say to a guest who calls another guest the n-word? The mind goes blank at the thought. I'm left without a response, and yet, while at the same time, I don't want my kids to overhear them speaking to each other like this. The sagging pants make me *feel* like he is actively and continually insulting us, the way that drunken college students might moon each other. And by extension, it feels like he's insulting my family, and our values. But I also feel like this is a minefield I don't want to step onto. I don't think it would actually go well if, say, I offered him a belt.

This conflict is simply one more reason why I mostly just try to avoid being around him.

Anyway.

A Movie Night Failure

We were struggling to get the kids to clear the table. They kept disappearing into our bedroom to play on the computer. We'd send Joshua in to get Veronica and Sam to come out and help, and Joshua would stay in there. They kept disappearing. Nothing was getting done.

After thirty or forty minutes of frustrating, trying to keep the kids on track, I was starting to feel very stressed, so I went down into the basement to get the video downloaded and ready to show. iTunes gave me a lot of trouble. When I tried to download the file from the iTunes store, it would say that it was ready to play, but then it wouldn't actually finish downloading. I started getting error messages telling me to try again later. The file in my library would show a little error icon, a circle with an exclamation point inside it, but clicking on this icon would not display an error; it would turn into a play button, but wouldn't play. I quit the iTunes application and re-launched it and started the download again, and the file downloaded without any issues. There was not actually a network problem; iTunes was just in a screwed-up state. It really just seems like each version has become progressively more buggy.

More time went by. I practiced singing the vocal tracks from "The Sounds of Silence" with my loop pedal. I sounded terrible. I tried singing along with the isolated harmony track. That worked, but the original song is in too high a key, and so I couldn't sing the melody part above it; it goes right up out of my range. I gave up. Even more time went by. Eventually Joshua came down and I asked him if everyone was ready to watch a video. He went back up to check. And yet more time went by.

Joshua came back down in tears because Grace had told him, accurately, that there was no more time left to watch the movie. I didn't disagree with her. We had waited something like an hour and 45 minutes for the kids to get through the routine clearing of the table, wiping down the table, sweeping up the floor, and loading and starting the dishwasher. So I shut everything down and went back upstairs.

We suggested that there would still be time for a story if everyone got ready for bed quickly. Guess how that went?

More Messes to Clean Up

Grace had been burning candles earlier, on a high shelf, to try to kill some of the foul smell of sick-child farts. Somehow Benjamin had poured melted candle wax all over one of the kids' beds. He had also jammed the bathroom sink stopper all the way down, so I had to get under the sink to force it back out. The kids had also left a lot of junk in our bedroom, and had apparently also been eating in there, which is forbidden. So instead of reading a bedtime story, we made the kids clean up our bedroom. So we had to stay up for that.

The stress is of everything going on is getting to me. When we finally got the

kids on to bed, I tried to calm myself down. Talking with Grace about how we might pay for our furnace repairs and boiler repairs and any further car repairs was actually starting to trigger a panic attack. We really, really need to hear from our realtor about whether she is going to agree to rent our house — or not. I need some information, so we can make some hard decisions about money. And the ongoing situation with our housemate is just not something I want to try to wrestle with, on top of all this. I'm just trying to stay out of their way and avoid being in situations that are going to stress me out further.

***The Ice Schooner* by Michael Moorcock, Continued**

This morning I had breakfast at Harvest Moon Café. I wanted to try something other than my usual breakfast BLT sandwich, so I got a breakfast burrito. It wasn't great. I got a few more pages read in *The Ice Schooner*. Someone is trying to sabotage the ship on its journey across the ice to New York City. It's honestly a pretty exciting story! I just wish I had a few quiet hours to finish reading it.

I heard from Grace that Elanor is not feeling well today. She's apparently having a mild reaction to a vaccination she got yesterday. I'm not feeling too great myself. Physically there's nothing really wrong with me, but my stress level is through the roof, and if this doesn't change soon I very well might start to suffer some real health consequences. Even if nothing acute happens, the chronic, long-term stress certainly isn't doing me any good. Something's got to give, soon.

I'll head to Costco tonight.

Wednesday

A Small Bonfire

After work last night I went to Costco and got a few things including a pot pie, a small pot roast, and two more bottles of that Chianti. Grace had asked me to bring graham crackers and marshmallows, but Costco didn't have them. When I got home, Grace was out, but there was a small bonfire in our brick fire pit in the front yard, and a few of the kids were sitting around the fire. She had wanted to make s'mores, but it wasn't working out.

I had the kids help me unload the car and put things away. Grace arrived shortly after that. It was about 8:30 and dinner wasn't underway. She'd been thinking of eating the pork medallions. I suggested we use up the rest of the Chianti and put the pot roast in the Instant Pot. Veronica assembled a salad from one of the Costco salad kits. Grace chopped up some celery and carrots and threw them in and we told the Instant Pot to pressure-cook the roast for 30 minutes. I got out that 100% rye bread from Mother Loaf to eat with dinner and we went back outside while the Instant Pot did its thing.

We had only a small amount of firewood, one of those bundles you can buy at gas stations. So the fire didn't last very long, but it was beautiful while it lasted. The moon was nearly full, and there was that chill in the air, without too much humidity.

When we served up the roast and sliced it up, it was still very rare in the middle, and the vegetables weren't very soft. 30 minutes had not really been enough time. So we put half the meat back in for another ten minutes. Pippin seemed completely willing to eat the rare pot roast, which we found a little bit startling. After another ten minutes it was more thoroughly cooked and the broth was better-tasting.

Because we ate late, *Doctor Who* wasn't really on the table, but a bedtime story was. At least, until it wasn't. Cleanup was slow and uncertain. So we didn't have a bedtime story for the kids. Before going to sleep I read Grace and Joshua part of the introduction, and the first few chapters, of *The Haunting of Hill House* by Shirley Jackson. That book's been on the shelf waiting for us, but it has been hidden behind a second row of books.

Renting Out the Old House, Continued

There was no real news to speak of yesterday about the lease agreement. We have arranged to have a new furnace put into the old house, at a cost of about three thousand dollars. I'm not quite sure how I'm going to pay for it. The worst-case scenario is that I'll write a check that will overdraw our checking account and hit our overdraft protection line of credit for at least two thousand. If we go ahead with the lease, I will also have to pay for some tree removal work, which will cost another thousand dollars. Paying for both the furnace and the tree removal would probably eat up our entire overdraft protection line of credit. So I probably won't do that unless our realtor agrees to the lease arrangement; if she does, I might be able to pay for most of the tree removal with her November rent payment. Then maybe I could use her December rent payment to start knocking down the overdraft. It's all kind of a high-wire act. If we do this we will have racked up just about every bit of credit we have access to.

If she signs, I might also try to get a small bank loan to cover the furnace work, because I can probably get a much better interest rate that way, and keep the overdraft protection line of credit available for future emergencies.

I might also get an annual bonus in December, but I think it would arrive only *just* before Christmas, which will be too late to pay for the furnace, the tree removal, the gas boiler repair at our new house, etc. So at best it might only help me set aside some emergency money, or pay down some debt I've racked up.

The Escrow Shortfall

We had a fairly large escrow shortfall on our new house — almost \$2,000. So they are raising my monthly mortgage payment. I think the increase is bigger

than my recent increase in take-home pay. At best, it's pretty much a wash, which is just one more of the things that make me feel like I'm running in place. If I wanted to pay it in a lump sum, I could keep my mortgage payment closer to what it is now. But I just can't write that check. I should look closely at their numbers. I don't think they are allowed, legally, to charge a high rate of interest on the overage, the way that DTE offered to let me finance our energy expenses in excess of our budget plan payments, when we got the settle-up bill. But I should trust, but verify.

Bugs Built on Top of Bugs

At work I'm struggling to debug some drawing code that affects the MX family graphical user interface. Patrick discovered a bug where, when switching between editing different settings, some buttons redraw on top of other buttons. This bug was apparently caused by me trying to follow suggestions from Amulet to fix another drawing order bug. The framework is really bad at properly managing drawing; there's a static drawing order, but when you dynamically show and hide buttons, it doesn't work right. So we have a bug introduced by a workaround to avoid another bug. That's sadly common, unfortunately. Sometimes there are even more layers upon layers of workarounds.

Thursday

We tried to make things easy on ourselves last night, by having a Costco pot pie for dinner; we thought we might finally get everyone fed, and the meal cleaned up, in time to watch "Rosa," the third episode of the current season of *Doctor Who*.

I gave Grace my ETA yesterday afternoon, so she knew when to expect me. I told her to expect me about 7:30, and actually walked into the house about 7:45. When I got home last night there were sandwiches left out on the kitchen counter and dining table, and a fully-baked pot pie on top of the oven. Dinner was ready to eat, and since the pot pies take 90 minutes, the kids had been given *plenty* of time to get the table ready for a meal. But they hadn't done it. So, there was that to contend with. I'll elide the lectures and exhortations and threats to cancel the video. We did in fact manage to finish dinner at a reasonable time, although it could have been even more reasonable. And so we all tromped downstairs to watch "Rosa."

***Doctor Who* Series 11, Episode 3, "Rosa"**

It seemed like a pretty bold move for the producers of a British television series to take on the American Civil Rights movement. "Rosa" wasn't as tasteless as I feared, but it was also pretty simplified, and the plot was one of the most simplistic and contrived I've ever seen. The villain was tissue-thin, like Don John in Shakespeare's *Much Ado About Nothing*, who says:

...it must not be denied but I am a plain-dealing villain. If I had my mouth, I would bite; if I had my liberty, I would do my liking: in the meantime let me be that I am and seek not to alter me.

Later in the show our villain, who barely merits a name, is revealed as a white supremacist who has spent time in prison. A white supremacist... alien? Who is racist towards some types of *humans* over others? We've seen the reverse played for laughs when Bill Potts is accused of racism by a blue-skinned alien, because she's never seen a blue person before. But no, it seems that perhaps our antagonist is a time-traveling human. Maybe. Ryan sends him into the past, presumably stranding him. This gets no reaction from The Doctor, which seems strange, given how emotional this same sort of stranding back in time was, in "The Angels Take Manhattan." Is he really human? Is his stranding in time a sort of chronological death sentence, the way it was for Amy and Rory? I guess he's not irretrievable, the way they were declared to be irretrievable with some hand-waving about time paradoxes. Will we see him again? I have no clue, but he sure seems like a one-off villain of convenience at this point.

Continuity is a bit poor in this show. The Doctor is tracing "artron energy," but then later in the episode she refers to "artron molecules," and I was yelling at the screenwriters for their complete indifference to decades of continuity. Yeah, OK, of course the show's science-fictional elements are often pretty laughable, but which is it, matter, or energy? And there are some gags, like The Doctor's reaction to being told she's "not Banksy," that are funny in the moment, but which mostly tend to distract and derail the story.

Some of the best moments in the show involve the companions, Ryan and Yaz. Yaz, a Muslim of Pakistani descent, is racially ambiguous in 1955 Alabama, and is not thrown out of the white section on the bus, while in her own contemporary Sheffield, she has experienced racial slurs and branding as a terrorist. This is an interesting moment that suggests that decades later racism has not really diminished, just changed. Meanwhile, Ryan is accustomed to low-grade racial profiling, but the in-your-face contempt is a shock, and he does not want to take it — well, sitting down. At least, not sitting down in the "colored" section on the bus. But there's a fascinating, complex scene where Rosa (played really well by Vinette Robinson) takes Ryan to a meeting where Dr. King is present, and he agrees to do what she asks him to do in this context — to serve coffee, accepting a subservient role in Dr. King's presence. There's a lot going on, in those scenes, not just about race, but class, and voluntary, and involuntary, subservience.

I feel the need to mention Grace O'Brien, Ryan's grandmother, who dies in the first episode, since she's a continuing presence in the show, and brought up several times in "Rosa." If we're talking about racism, I think we should be willing to confront the fact that the producers of the show crafted this character — an older, strong black woman — and killed her in the first episode. Was that really necessary? And because of the way she's remained in the characters' thoughts, I've got uncomfortable feelings about what this season's story arc might have in mind for her.

So anyway — “Rosa” is not the most powerful episode, despite the strong subject matter. But it could have been a lot worse. I think it’s telling that we were very excited by the preview for *next* week’s episode, which apparently is a Halloween-themed story involving spiders, called “Arachnids in the UK,” a sly reference to the old Sex Pistols song. That one looks like it could be classic, old-school *Doctor Who*.

The Damned Oven

My kids baked the pot pie on a baking pan, which caught the drips. But cleaning up after dinner, I noticed that someone had, once again, let something boil over in the oven. So the bottom of the oven is once again crusted with burned-on goop, which means that it sets the smoke detector off every time it comes up to temperature. No one from my family would take credit. It might have been something one of the kids cooked, but I don’t think it is; our housemate and/or her boyfriend have done this in the past, again and again, despite numerous requests to use trays to catch boil-overs.

I don’t want to clean this up. I know that I should ask her to do it. But I also know that if she does it, she’ll do a very careless job. The last time she cleaned the oven, she left baked-on oven cleaner all over the inside of the oven, and I had to put in even more effort to clean it out, so all our food didn’t taste of oven cleaner.

Our oven has a seam in the bottom where parts fit together. Liquid that lands on the bottom of the oven will drip through the seam down into the compartment with the gas jets and flame spreader. I’m really fed up with having to disassemble the whole bottom of the oven to clean up these messes and stop the smoking. Oven cleaner won’t do that, but I also certainly don’t want her to attempt to take it apart and reassemble it. That’s not likely to go well.

I really don’t know what to do. Trying to get her to clean up the mess will punish *me*. Leaving it alone will also punish *me*, because our oven will smoke like crazy every time we use it, and the eventual cleanup will require much more work. I’m just beyond fed up, and praying for patience.

Money, Money, Money

I’ve cast our die across the Rubicon — the furnace guy is going to install a new furnace in the old house. I mailed him a check this morning. It’s for about \$3,000. That’s going to overdraw our checking account by about \$2,000, depending on when it clears. The overdraft protection loan should kick in. I don’t know how we’re going to pay for everything. We’re jumping off a little cliff, here, when we’ve already slid down a long, long hill. I don’t know how we’re going to climb back up. But we’ve made the judgment call that nothing will go any *better* if we leave the old house half-unheated through the winter, whether we turn the water off and “winterize” it or not. It’s still our asset, *and* our liability, for the time being.

Baby Girl

After “Rosa,” there was the usual interminable struggle to get the kids ready for bed. Things went off the rails for a while because Pippin snuck off and got on the computer. That led to a long lecture from Grace. Joshua read some more of *George’s Marvelous Medicine* and also started a *Winnie-the-Pooh* book; I’m not sure which one. I managed to read just a few pages of *The Ice Schooner* — I am trying so hard to finish that book!

We got to bed relatively early. It was only a bit after midnight, I think, when we turned out the lights. Elanor once again had a runny nose and was quite miserable during the night. She kept waking up, and didn’t wake up and just grouse and fuss a bit and go back to sleep — no, each time, it required a round of screaming protest. So our night’s sleep was broken up into pieces punctuated by a screaming toddler. I woke up pretty late. I had just enough time to shower and get out. I didn’t have time to read, or stop for a sit-down breakfast. I picked up a coffee and bagel on the way to work.

I’m continuing my struggle with some legacy GUI code. I was not making any progress tinkering around the edges, so I’m refactoring the drawing logic. This is quite painful and slow. But on the positive side, the refactored code executes fewer unnecessary page reloads and is easier to understand. It will be worth doing, when it’s done and I can look back at it. But the *doing* of it — ugh.

My boss brought in leftover cake, so I guess that’s lunch, or at least part of lunch. I should go get a sandwich, but I don’t want to take the time, or spend the money. The box of lunch meals I brought in yesterday, Loma Linda Chipotle Bowls from Costco, are not as good as I hoped. I heated one up yesterday, and regretted it. They smell like burning dog food, despite being entirely plant-based, and they give me terrible heartburn, in a way that the spicy ramen noodles don’t, at all. Don’t ask me to explain that. Maybe I’ll eat one anyway, and down a few Tums afterwards, just so I don’t wind up eating only leftover cake for lunch. The box says “Complete Meal Ready in 60 Seconds.” But what’s the hurry? Speed isn’t necessarily the most important thing; I mean, I could probably vomit it up even faster than that!

Sagging, Continued

I had a conversation with Grace about our housemate’s boyfriend’s sagging. She tells me it doesn’t bother her. And she also doesn’t think the kids are going to emulate our housemate’s boyfriend. Apparently Benjamin, our five-year-old, keeps reminding him that his pants are falling down and he should pull them up. So, he can try to explain to a five-year-old that he’s got his pants half-down intentionally, and why. If that discussion doesn’t make his pants protest in our household full of children feel a bit ridiculous, I don’t think he’s likely to be swayed by anything this fifty-one-year-old white man might have to say to him.

Friday

For dinner last night we had pork medallions and another salad kit from Costco. The kids weren't really on the ball when I got home, but with a lot of prompting they got the table ready. Veronica stepped up and actually cooked the pork medallions and even scrubbed up the pan afterwards. She was working on a project to dye her hair with henna. Before she went to bed, she rinsed out all the henna. It is unmistakably a different color now, a little more reddish — but, because her hair was fairly dark-colored to begin with, the difference is not dramatic. I'm not sure if she's disappointed or not, or exactly what she was expecting.

It was fairly cold in the house last night — tolerable with blankets, but I wondered whether the cold air might be causing some of Elanor's night-time congestion and runny nose. I thought we might try a space heater, so I asked Veronica to bring the space heaters in from the garage. I learned that Grace had already given one to our houseguest to use upstairs, since she can't tolerate the cold.

I set up the second one in our bedroom and ran it on high for a while, then set it to the lowest setting. It kept the ambient air in the room reasonably warm, since our house is pretty well-insulated. I don't think it helped Elanor stay asleep at all, though. She woke us up several times. She has not yet learned to say "water" or "wa-wa" or even "wa," or make the hand sign for water that we've tried to teach her, when she wants water. So the second or third time she woke us up and screamed at us for a while, I got her a bottle of water and that seemed to settle her down. I think I recall that it might have been about a quarter to five, but my mind was pretty fuzzy, having just been yanked out of sleep.

I'm happy to be able to report that I got some reading done, last night and this morning.

The Haunting of Hill House by Shirley Jackson

As a bedtime story, I read Grace and a couple of the kids more of *The Haunting of Hill House*. I got into a groove with the prose, which has an amazing feeling of flow to it — Jackson is right in her protagonist Eleanor's head. The first chapter, which I read Tuesday night, had a fair amount of telling and not much showing, but the narrative voice was so light and deft that I really didn't mind this "infodump." In the next couple of chapters, we get a wonderful sense for the contours of Eleanor's mind, while learning almost nothing about her physical being. Externally, I assume that she is unassuming, mousy, and introverted. Eleanor has spent years caring for her invalid mother, and has come to feel that she has missed a portion of her life:

She had taken to wondering lately, during these swiftcounted years, what had been done with all those wasted summer days; how could she have spent them so wantonly?

But now, she is “going,” having an adventure:

I have not very much, farther to go, Eleanor thought; I am more than halfway there. Journey’s end, she thought, and far back in her mind, sparkling like the little stream, a tag end of a tune danced through her head, bringing distantly a word or so; “In delay there lies no plenty,” she thought, “in delay there lies no plenty.”

As she passes through small towns and villages on the road, she experiences lives passing before her inner eye, as if she were dying. But they are not dying visions of her life to date; they are imagined *future* lives. Eleanor’s imagination is startling, both beautiful and strange:

On the main street of one village she passed a vast house, pillared and walled, with shutters over the windows and a pair of stone lions guarding the steps, and she thought that perhaps she might live there, dusting the lions each morning and patting their heads good night. Time is beginning this morning in June, she assured herself, but it is a time that is strangely new and of itself, in these few seconds I have lived a lifetime in a house with two lions in front.

It’s a little like Ambrose Bierce’s story “Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge.” This vision gets wonderfully and surrealistically detailed:

Every morning I swept the porch and dusted the lions, and every evening I patted their heads good night, and once a week I washed their faces and manes and paws with warm water and soda and cleaned between their teeth with a swab.

But then the river of her thoughts sweeps on, and she’s back in the present. But a little later, looking at another house:

I will light a fire in the cool evenings and toast apples at my own hearth. I will raise white cats and sew white curtains for the windows and sometimes come out of my door to go to the store to buy cinnamon and tea and thread. People will come to me to have their fortunes told, and I will brew love potions for sad maidens; I will have a robin... But the cottage was far behind, and it was time to look for her new road, so carefully charted by Dr. Montague.

While Eleanor is still taking, essentially, a passive role, having selected an adventure that was offered to her, she delights in small acts of defiance. She is possessed of an “imp of the perverse” — she is, internally, rebellious, and encourages a rebellious spirit in others:

Don’t do it, Eleanor told the little girl; insist on your cup of stars; once they have trapped you into being like everyone else you will never see your cup of stars again; don’t do it; and the little girl glanced at her, and smiled a little subtle, dimpling, wholly comprehending

smile[and shook her head stubbornly at the glass. Brave girl, Eleanor thought; wise, brave girl.

There's something else about Eleanor, carefully set up in these passages: she seems to have porous boundaries. She is quick to identify with others, and to position herself in solidarity with them. This was demonstrated earlier in the incident in which she took great pains to assist the "very little lady" that she accidentally knocks down.

That incident in the novel is quite strange — I think Jackson has cleverly suggested that Eleanor is actually encountering a "little person" — a faerie, who goes from damning her to blessing her — I feel that there is more to unpack in this brief scene; has Eleanor paid for her journey, and will she be repaid for her kindness, later, by some version of the faerie folk? It seems to me that Eleanor, freed from her old life, has allowed herself to drift, in this liminal moment where change is possible, into the land of faerie, and as she does so, she tries on a series of new lives for herself as easily, and reversibly, and also somewhat passively, as if she were trying on new clothes, handed to her one after another by a clothing store assistant.

Eleanor drives to Hill house. She's been warned by Dr. Montague in a letter not to stop in Hillsdale and not to ask there about Hill House:

I am making these directions so detailed because it is inadvisable to stop in Hillsdale to ask your way. The people there are rude to strangers and openly hostile to anyone inquiring about Hill House.

And of course with this prompt, Eleanor's sense of rebellion means that she can't *not* stop. But her rebellion is a careful one, that keeps herself inside the "letter of the law," at least as she interprets it:

In spite of what he said, though, she thought, I will stop in Hillsdale for a minute, just for a cup of coffee, because I cannot bear to have my long trip end so soon. It was not really disobeying, anyway; the letter said it was inadvisable to stop in Hillsdale to ask the way, not forbidden to stop for coffee, and perhaps if I don't mention Hill House I will not be doing wrong. Anyway, she thought obscurely; it's my last chance.

Sticking to the letter of Dr. Montague's instructions, Eleanor doesn't actually ask about Hill House. Instead, she asks about houses in the hills:

"I thought," Eleanor said carefully, "that I might even look around. Old houses are usually cheap, you know, and it's fun to make them over."

"Not around here," the girl said.

"Then," Eleanor said, "there are no old houses around here? Back in the hills?"

"Nope."

Character Names in *The Haunting of Hill House*

And she drives on. By the end of Part I, where I stopped last night, she has met Mr. Dudley, the angry husband of Mrs. Dudley; they are the caretakers. Sam joked that he thought he heard me refer to him as “Mr. Deadly.” I told him that I certainly didn’t think it was a coincidence that his name sounds like “deadly.” Authors like Jackson put considerable care into choosing the names of their characters. “Eleanor” sounds a bit like “oleander” — they are nearly anagrams. The letters of “oleander” can be rearranged into “Eleanor,” leaving a “d” left over. Perhaps the leftover “d” is for “deadly?” Eleanor thinks about oleanders several times:

Oleanders are poisonous, she remembered; could they be here guarding something? Will I, she thought, will I get out of my car and go between the ruined gates and then, once I am in the magic oleander square, find that I have wandered into a fairyland, protected poisonously from the eyes of people passing?

I noticed another interesting name. Dr. Montague’s name suggests doom. Romeo Montague was certainly “star-crossed.” But is Dr. Montague suggestive of Montague *filis*, the better-known Montague, or Montague *père*? Lord Montague, Romeo’s father, doesn’t have a lot of lines in *Romeo and Juliet*, and most of them are about his son. But early in the play he says:

*Who set this ancient quarrel new abroach?
Speak, nephew, were you by when it began?*

Eleanor may be walking into an “ancient quarrel new abroach.” It will be interesting to watch this novel unfold. At the end of Part I, Eleanor has not yet entered Hill House; she has only seen it. But what she’s seen is already unnerving:

She turned her car onto the last stretch of straight drive leading her directly, face to face, to Hill House and, moving without thought, pressed her foot on the brake to stall the car and sat, staring. The house was vile. She shivered and thought, the words coming freely into her mind, Hill House is vile, it is diseased; get away from here at once.

We haven’t even really begun to explore Eleanor’s back-story and character. In the first few pages we were told:

Her name had turned up on Dr. Montague’s list because one day, when she was twelve years old and her sister was eighteen, and their father had been dead for not quite a month, showers of stones had fallen on their house, without any warning or any indication of purpose or reason, dropping from the ceilings rolling loudly down the walls, breaking windows and pattering maddeningly on the roof.

I can’t even begin to guess, yet, just what *that* seed will grow into.

If you haven't guessed, just as I was deeply impressed with *We Have Always Lived in the Castle*, I'm also deeply impressed with this novel. It's wonderful, strange, and also, impressively brief. If I ever get a chance to teach a literature class again, I'd love to teach *The Haunting of Hill House*.

***The Ice Schooner* by Michael Moorcock, Concluded**

Despite the bad night's sleep, I was up early enough to finish reading *The Ice Schooner* this morning. Finally! Now that I have finished it, I can say that, yes, it is an allegorical story about climate change, but because it was written in the sixties, Moorcock doesn't seem to have been directly referencing our current global warming crisis. In any case, this Moorcock novel moves along quite well and ends decisively. It's certainly easier to enjoy than *Daughter of Dreams* or *The Revenge of the Rose*. There's a lot in it that is quite dated — it's a very sexist story, for example. The only female story is mostly a status symbol and possession, although she shows a little agency at the end. But if you're willing to overlook that, it's found it worth my time.

Like many science fiction stories of the era, this one juxtaposes low technology with high technology. It's a story about a society which has survived an environmental crisis by dividing in two. One side has reverted to barbarism. The other has retained a scientific understanding of what is actually going on. In such stories there's generally a new crisis of some sort, another environmental change or catastrophe, which forces the barbaric side to rediscover the scientists. I'm aware of a number of stories that follow this general outline; it goes back at least to *The Time Machine* by H. G. Wells, with the Eloi and Morlocks, but there are probably earlier examples. It's a common trope in stories that take place on generation starships, where the general population does not understand that they are aboard a ship. Off the top of my head, I'm thinking of stories by Gene Wolfe (in *The Book of the Long Sun* series), Stephen Baxter (in the novella *Mayflower II*), and Harlan Ellison (Ellison disowned the disastrous TV show *The Starlost* because of changes made against his wishes in production, choosing to be credited as "Cordwainer Bird," but the original story was his).

I don't want to give Moorcock's book more credit than it deserves. It's not really a great book. But there's some nice world-building going on, too, including a system of religious beliefs about an "Ice Mother" that seem to combine a personal deity who answers prayers with the second law of thermodynamics, which doesn't. This part seems especially relevant because some of the conflict in the novel centers around climate change denial! Again, I'm not saying this is world-building on the scale of *Dune* or *The Lord of the Rings*, but Moorcock did a little research, to write at least *somewhat* convincingly about the technology and culture of a society that has learned to survive in an ice age.

If you're new to Moorcock, you might try this standalone before trying to dive in to his more interconnected stories.

This book is allegedly based on Conrad's novel *The Rescue*. It would be

interesting to compare the two. Maybe I'll do that someday.

Money, Again

This morning I mailed a check for \$200 to the City of Saginaw, to pay the 2018 rubbish bill at the old house. No one is currently living there and so no one is leaving out trash to pick up, but I'm afraid if I don't pay it, the city will put a lien on the property, which could throw a monkey wrench into the situation if we have the opportunity to sell it.

To give some idea of how tight things are for us right now, my projected "low water mark" in the Team One checking account is about \$21.00, after both mortgage payments go through in the first week of November. The actual numbers will probably be a little bit better than that; I don't think my mortgage payment is actually going to increase to cover the escrow shortage until December, and things should be better in December. But it's definitely going to be a nerve-wracking high wire act.

In our other account, my balance today is about \$1,500. But I've written two checks, for the furnace replacement and for the 2018 City of Saginaw rubbish bill. These total about \$3,200. If they cleared today, it would mean an overdraft of about \$1,700. This would use up almost half of my available \$3,600 line of credit. But of course we have more expenses coming up for the week; I will get groceries after work, and fill up my gas tank, and I have a number of medical bill co-pays that need my attention. So we'll probably actually overdraw more than that.

A rent check would really help the situation, but we still haven't heard a decision from our realtor. So the money situation continues to feel very, very uncertain. I don't know how, or even if, we're going to pay for tree removal. I don't know how we're going to pay for our gas boiler repair. But it does feel like a bit of a relief that we've gone ahead and made the decision as to whether or not to install a new furnace; that decision made the money situation riskier, but it should make things easier on the old house, and thus improve our chances of selling or renting it. We're not going to get money *back, per se*, but it might allow us to lose a little less.

I had to scrape chewing gum off the kitchen floor last night. I didn't see our housemate at all. I think she's hiding out upstairs even more than usual, because she hates the cold in the house.

Tonight I'll make my usual Friday evening run to Costco.

Saturday

It's about a quarter to eleven in the evening. I'm writing this on my little laptop in the family room. I got a box of Duraflame fire logs at Costco last night and we've got one going. We still haven't had both fireplaces in the new house chimney inspected and cleaned. The guy we had inspect the chimneys back

when we had the house inspected, before moving in, didn't seem trustworthy. We got a more recent estimate, and it was pretty shockingly expensive — over seven hundred dollars to inspect and clean them, or half that just to inspect them. So we have not bought a load of firewood and haven't wanted to use the fireplaces much. Or, at least, use them for big wood fires. I feel reasonably comfortable burning the Duraflame logs, on the theory that they don't get hot enough to ignite any creosote in the chimney, and don't generate a lot of creosote or smoke. But maybe they're not actually good for fireplaces. In any case I don't know if we'll be able to afford to have this fireplace work done this fall. We have an appointment at the end of November, but if our financial situation hasn't improved somehow, we will probably cancel the appointment.

We had a busy day, despite getting a late start. It was a cool and cloudy day in Pittsfield Township, with a little rain now and then. Grace and I had a pretty good night's sleep last night — baby girl slept well, and so we slept well.

***The Haunting of Hill House* by Shirley Jackson, Continued**

Last night I read a couple more chapters of *The Haunting of Hill House* as a bedtime story. If they concentrate, the older kids can enjoy this kind of a text, but sometimes the younger ones either fall asleep (which is fine; it was a bedtime story, after all, so we just put them to bed) or get restless and start side conversations. The latter happened last night, and after asking the kids twice to stay quiet while I read, Grace ended the story early.

Hill House continues to impress me. In the chapters we read last night, Eleanor meets Mrs. Dudley, a drone of a woman who wants everyone to know that she will put dinner on the sideboard in the dining room at 6:00 sharp, and then immediately leave the house, cleaning up dinner when she returns the next morning. She makes it very clear that she will not be in the house after dark. This is played for laughs, and also... not:

“I don't stay after I set out dinner,” Mrs. Dudley went on. “Not after it begins to get dark. I leave before dark comes.”

“I know,” Eleanor said.

“We live over in the town, six miles away.”

“Yes,” Eleanor said, remembering Hillsdale.

“So there won't be anyone around if you need help.”

“I understand.”

“We couldn't even hear you, in the night.”

“I don't suppose —”

“No one could. No one lives any nearer than the town. No one else will come any nearer than that.”

“I know,” Eleanor said tiredly.

“In the night,” Mrs. Dudley said, and smiled outright. “In the dark,” she said, and closed the door behind her.

Eleanor almost giggled, thinking of herself calling, “Oh, Mrs. Dudley,

I need your help in the dark,” and then she shivered.

Eleanor gets herself settled in the blue room, one of the bedrooms. As she explores it, we aren't given a lot of detail on just *what* about Hill House is so unnerving, so as readers we are required to use our imagination quite a bit here. Jackson has started to make the house a character in the book; in fact, *we* have started to do it with her.

Eleanor and Theodora

Eleanor then meets Theodora, another one of the invited guests. Eleanor and Theodora have an introductory conversation, talking to, and around, Mrs. Dudley, which is quite brutally hilarious. The descriptions of Theodora go a long way towards giving us a more detailed impression of Eleanor, because Eleanor lacks a lot of what Theodora has:

Theodora came through the bathroom door into Eleanor's room; she is lovely, Eleanor thought, turning to look; I wish I were lovely. Theodora was wearing a vivid yellow shirt, and Eleanor laughed and said, “You bring more light into this room than the window.”

The two characters seem to develop a friendship almost instantly, doing the kind of bonding that happens in the face of adversity. The fact of their bonding immediately over Mrs. Dudley's comments, and against the house itself, serves to suggest how nervous both of them actually feel in this new environment. It's an interesting way to hint to the *reader* just how the reader should feel about Hill House, and a very clever storytelling trick. We'll read a little more of *Haunting* tonight if we can.

This morning I got a bath and it was warm in the tub, but cold in the bathroom, so I stayed in the but for a long while, reading the news on my phone. A mass shooting at a synagogue in Pittsburgh.

I dragged myself out of the tub and started working in the kitchen, recruiting the kids to empty the dishwasher and put away dishes, and to clean the stovetop. They did a first pass of the stovetop and I dug in with some more aggressive cleaning, and cleaned the teapot, then put on a pot of tea. I put a baking pan of buttered bagels under the broiler to toast, and put cream cheese on the table.

Cleaning the Oven, Once Again

When the bagels were toasted I sprayed oven cleaner strategically on the gunkiest parts of the oven, closed up the oven, and turned on both the fan in the oven's ventilation hood and the big Vornado fan on the floor. While the oven cleaner was doing its work, I fried up a big pan of bacon, recruited Veronica to beat a dozen eggs, and scrambled them. Joshua got out packets of guacamole. So anyone who cared to eat brunch got toasted bagels with cream cheese and/or guacamole, bacon, and scrambled eggs.

After everything was out of the oven and off the stove, I took the racks out of the oven, I turned the floor fan to blow past the oven to help me breathe easier while working with hot oven cleaner, opened up the oven, and started scrubbing it out. This took a considerable amount of work with sponges and steel metal scrubbers. The oven cleaner had softened up some of the spills, but part of the burned-on goo was still as hard as glass and took forever to abrade away. Then there was the loading of the dishwasher, and hand-washing of some things that had sat for several days, like the cast-iron dutch oven, which had been waiting for me to deep-clean it for a week. All this took me until almost 3:00.

Our housemate categorically denies being responsible for any of the oven mess that took me so much effort to clean up. It might be her boyfriend. I don't know what more we can say or do about that short of putting in security cameras to try to catch the miscreants.

Our Halloween

The kids had blown a lot of time on Friday and were very, very late getting out the door to go get some materials for their Halloween costumes. Grace wasn't willing to take them out again but told them they could ask me. So today they asked me to take them to a thrift store and a craft or fabric store. At about a quarter to 3:00, when I finally felt mostly done in the kitchen, I sat down and had Grace put my hair in a pony tail and add some hair clips to hold the loose parts that are still too short to go into the pony tail, and discussed the situation with her. We needed to be at Mass at St. Joseph's at 5:00, with a trunk-or-treat to follow, so she wanted everyone back at the house by 4:00. Then I told the kids I was willing to help them run an errand for costume materials, but that I would only take them one place, and since I wanted to take my car, which had a full tank of gas, there were only two seats available.

So I got dressed and took Veronica and Joshua to JoAnn Fabrics by Meijer, which is only a few minutes away up Carpenter. It seemed plausible that we would be able to get in, pick up a few small pieces of felt and fabric and piping, only about five dollars worth of stuff, and get home by 4:00, or just a few minutes after 4:00. We had to stand in line for quite a while, though, to get Veronica's fabric cut. It wound up being about ten minutes to 4:00 by the time we were ready to check out. Then we had to get in line. The store was extremely under-staffed for the number of customers shopping today for Halloween, so the checkout line stretched all the way to the back of the store. I had to keep deciding whether we were going to just give up and go home without our stuff, or stay in line. We stayed in line, for about 45 minutes, and so didn't leave until about 4:35 and didn't get home until about a quarter to five. There wasn't time for the kids to actually finish their costumes. We had to pack everyone up and head to Mass.

We got to Mass about ten minutes late. I had not actually been to St. Joseph's yet, but Grace liked it when she went there last week, so it seems to be our new church. It is much smaller than St. Francis, and smaller than St. John the

Baptist in downtown Ypsilanti, so it has a friendlier feel. One downside is that there doesn't seem to be a cry room to speak of. Eleanor was very rambunctious, so I spent most of the Mass with her in the small vestibule, trying to keep her entertained, and also trying to keep her from running back into the sanctuary. I tossed her in the air, wrestled her, I tickled her, I showed her the stained-glass windows, I dangled her upside-down. In short, she exhausted me.

After Mass there followed immediately after the trunk-or-treat in the parking lot, with coffee, cider, and donuts. I led the kids around from car to car. Not only had they not really finished their costumes, but they hadn't even brought bags to collect candy. So they filled up their pockets and the plastic bag from JoAnn Fabrics. It worked out reasonably well. None of my kids won the costume competition. Their costumes weren't really finished, so this was not terribly surprising.

The kids' piano teacher showed up with her kids, and I had a chance to talk with her. She is a fan of all kinds of different genres of music and so had been impressed that our kids want to learn songs by Simon and Garfunkel, and other elderly-person music. I told her about how I have, basically, two CD collections: one upstairs, with all the CDs that I don't mind terribly if the kids damage, and more downstairs, more CDs still in boxes. I also told her about my vintage Yamaha DX-7, wondering if she might be interested in trying it out, because it was featured in so many old hit records. She mentioned had heard something recently about the iconic synthesizer that was used for the fake harmonica solo in Tina Turner's "What's Love Got to Do with It," but didn't remember the name of it. I told her that the DX-7 was in fact *that* synthesizer; it was played with a breath controller to make that sound. We talked more, about teaching homeschool groups, participating in homeschool groups, what it's like to record music rather than perform it live... anyway, she seems cool. I'm hoping she'll come by sometime and I'll set up the DX-7 for her to play.

And speaking of more CDs, downstairs...

The Complete Sony Recordings by Philip Glass (CD Boxed Set)

I received a package yesterday containing 3 CD sets. I ordered these a couple of weeks ago, because *Nixon in China* stirred up something in my mind, and ever since hearing it, I've been wanting to hear more Philip Glass. I've been curious about *Satyagraha* for years, since reading that Kim Stanley Robinson listened to it a lot while writing the Mars trilogy. And recently after watching some excerpts from a recent performance of *Einstein on the Beach*, I've been intensely curious about that opera as well. I have an old cassette of *Glassworks*, and once thought of it as one of my favorite albums. In short, I wanted to hear a lot of Philip Glass. Fortunately, there *is* a lot of Philip Glass. Having looked at a lot of his CDs on eBay, some of which are out of print and a bit scarce, including some rarities like a remixed version of *Glassworks*, I decided that the most cost-effective way to satisfy my curiosity about all these Philip

Glass recordings was to simply order a copy of *The Complete Sony Recordings*. This is a 24-disc set. That ought to keep me going for some time. Here's a review.

I've been playing *Glassworks* for the kids, both on our home stereo and in my car. The special remix for "compact cassette" seems to me like a bit of a dud. The Pitchfork reviewer liked it, but to me it sounds like a badly equalized version of the original album. The high frequencies that give the original a sense of "liveness" are gone. There's more bass, and that's kind of cool, but both in my car stereo and on my Pelosi studio monitors, the mix just sounds very muddy and congested to me, where the original mix sounds clean and beautifully balanced.

But the other stuff, at least the discs I've sampled so far, since I've really only just barely started listening to this trove of material, is *remarkable*.

The original 4-CD recording of *Einstein on the Beach* is just *stunning*. I expected that listening to this opera would be an interesting exercise, a kind of hypnotic ordeal or meditation session that I was obliged to sit through. But this recording, as opposed to the recent video clips of the live performance, make it sound, in a way that I didn't quite expect, *gorgeous*. It's a recording of instrumentalists and singers working together at the top of their games. The speed and precision of the ensemble make it hard to believe that this recording was not put together on a digital audio workstation using samples and MIDI.

It's going to take me a while to fully unpack and appreciate the 4-disc *Einstein on the Beach*, the 3-disc *Satyagraha*, and the 2-disc *Akhmaten*, as well as the *thirteen* other discs in this collection. But I'm sure I'll be writing about it at length over the next few weeks. It's a really impressive collection, and fortunately comes with a cool little book to help me wrap my head around all these works; it includes the librettos.

I feel like I've been, in a sense, preparing my whole life to listen to the operas of Philip Glass. I first heard *Glassworks* when I was sixteen. It impressed me right off the bat, and I listened to it a lot back then. But now I don't think I really *heard* everything that made *Glassworks* so beautiful. Forty-five or so years later, an amateur musician myself, I feel like I'm finally ready to really *hear* it, and the rest of his work.

***Seventeen Seconds* and *Faith* by The Cure (1980 and 1981 Albums)**

While I was at it, I also picked up two reissued CDs by The Cure: *Seventeen Seconds* and *Faith*. I had these back in the day and played them a lot. I think I might have been in Junior High when I first listened to these two records. They are so similar that they feel kind of like one extended album. They were significant to me, and I still appreciate them a lot; *Seventeen Seconds* still seems like a groundbreaking work, even listening to it after the operas of Philip Glass. So, I'm listening to Philip Glass... and The Cure. I'll probably have comments about these albums as well in a future post.

A Delicious Dinner: Steaks, Arugula, and Radishes

While I was finishing up today's journal entry, and listening to *Songs from the Trilogy*, an album of excerpts from his three operas, Grace cooked some steaks in a cast-iron pan, deglazed the pan with a little bit of red wine, and sautéed arugula from our friends' farm in the pan drippings. We ate that, along with a little salad, and tasted another one of the white wines from Costco that I wanted to audition for our upcoming holiday dinners. The arugula was absolutely fantastic. It was harvested very late in the season, which meant that it had quite a pungent flavor. Some of the food our friends grow seems to have a particular affinity for their farm's soil, and it takes on a wonderful *terroir*. One of these was radishes. I never really liked eating radishes by themselves or in salad until I ate their radishes, which were delicious enough to polish off like candy. This arugula was another one. What a terrific way to finish out the week — it's about 1:00 a.m. and we'll be going to bed in just a few minutes.

2017 Château Reynon Sauvignon Blanc Bordeaux

The wine is a 2017 Château Reynon Sauvignon Blanc Bordeaux. I think this is the white wine for this year. It's quite dry, and quite tart — more tart flavor than I usually like in a white wine. But it's got a long finish, and some oakiness. It's just altogether more interesting on the palate than the other white wines I've tried recently. The tart flavors are more complex than in the other white Bordeaux we tried, the 2014 Château Ferrande Graves. So I think I'm going to end my search and say this is the white we'll serve this year at our holiday meals. Over the next few weeks leading up to Thanksgiving, I'll buy a bottle of this a week. I need to find a few bottles of a good dessert wine, too, like the justifiably popular Traverse City Rieslings.

Elanor is having a meltdown. Benjamin smeared toothpaste all over our space heater. It's time to get things cleaned up and get on to bed. It's been a difficult week! But it ended very nicely. And I have hopes that week 44 will be better.

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.

- *The Ice Schooner* by Michael Moorcock, in *Traveling to Utopia* by Michael Moorcock, Edited by John Davey (Gollancz Michael Moorcock Collection)
- *Doctor Who* Series 11, Episode 3, "Rosa"
- *The Haunting of Hill House* by Shirley Jackson
- *The Complete Sony Recordings* by Philip Glass (CD Boxed Set)
- *Seventeen Seconds* and *Faith* by The Cure (1980 and 1981 Albums)

Pittsfield Township, Michigan

The Week Ending Saturday, October 27th, 2018

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