

2018 Week 46: The Week Ending Saturday, November 17th

Paul R. Potts

Sunday

Faraway, So Close!

Last night went pretty smoothly until I had to give our friend Luke a ride home. The boys wanted to all go with me. So I took the truck. I got him home fine — he lives just off Plymouth Road. The kids all wanted to jump out of the truck to go say hello to Luke’s mom, who is their piano teacher, and his dad. But on the way back, trying to get back on US 23 South, I could not spot the right on-ramp. There is not much street lighting, and the signage is a little weak. I also don’t have great night vision, and so I have been trying to do less driving at night. I can see lanes and cars just fine. I have trouble clearly seeing any features that are unlit, which often includes street signs, until I’m on top of them.

I’m not used to those freeway entrances and exits on Plymouth Road. Years ago I lived right off of Plymouth Road, but back then it was two lanes, and half those freeway entrances and exits didn’t exist.

So I made a series of wrong turns. I passed the entrance for 23 South. I went a little further, did a U-Turn, and tried to take the entrance going west, and took the wrong one, getting on 23 North instead of 23 South. So I took M-14 to Plymouth. I wound up taking the exit to Ford Road and then taking Prospect south through Ypsilanti, and then making a wrong turn onto Grove, and taking Grove to Rawsonville Road, and at that point I called Grace to ask her for help navigating. I guess we took the scenic route. I don’t really know my way around the Ypsilanti area very well. I knew that I was at about the right latitude, but too far East, getting near Belleville. As soon as I got Grace on the phone, though, I reached the intersection with Textile, so I knew my way back from there. So from there it was just a long drive down Textile to get to Crane. I was about six and a half miles too far East.

If I recall correctly, I read Benjamin and Joshua a story — Benjamin seems to want to read *Ivy Can’t Wait* every night. Maybe he has a sense that he has a lot in common with Ivy the Impatient Iguana.

Sunday

It's 11:37 Sunday night and it's been a very challenging day. I have to get up early, 6:00 or 6:30, and get to an appointment with a new doctor at Domino's Farms. I had hoped to get a little time today to try again to fill out the online forms they keep asking me to fill out, but that didn't happen. I hope they will not just send me home. It's taken weeks to get an appointment.

The day started pretty well; I was up at 8, and got a bath. Grace wound up taking Veronica to an early Mass to serve coffee and donuts with the youth group. I didn't even know this was happening; Grace apparently didn't find out until late last night and didn't tell me (she says "I didn't want you to panic.") Grace wound up in some kind of long argument with Veronica about clothes, and so Veronica was fifteen minutes for the 9:00 Mass.

Winterizing the Dishwasher

My friend John had a thought about the old dishwasher — he was concerned that if we were going to keep it in the garage during the winter, it should be "winterized." So I looked up a video on how to do that. Apparently with these models all they recommend is that you remove any water left inside the little "sump" in the bottom of the unit, with a sponge and a bucket (or a shop vac). So later in the day I found myself in the garage with a sponge and a bucket disassembling the filter in the bottom of the dishwasher and sponging out some icy, vinegar-scented water. (I think they must have run it with vinegar to try to freshen it up before putting it in their garage.) Then I left it all opened up to dry. We had to lock up the garage so the kids can't go in there until I have it back together. Otherwise, we'll lose parts. In fact I'm afraid they will break the dishwasher and/or the refrigerator we are storing in there, so I'm wondering if we need to ban them from playing in the garage indefinitely. We've been letting them dig into boxes of LEGO in there, rather than bringing LEGO pieces into the house, where they tend to leave them scattered where Elanor could try to swallow them.

Anyway, after my bath I got dressed and came out to the kitchen and toasted bagels, both cinnamon raisin and "everything," with butter. I made a pot of black tea, got the kids to empty the dishwasher, and loaded the dishwasher again, to try to catch up a little bit on the backlog of dishes. We had tea and bagels and then I worked more on the kitchen while trying to get the kids to follow Grace's instructions to get dressed and ready to go to Mass.

Asleep in the Bath

The kids got dressed (not without a lot of tedious supervision and demands to put on socks and jackets), and I had them in the car at a quarter to 11, but Grace was not ready. It turned out that she had fallen asleep in the tub; she woke up when Benjamin came into the bathroom. Our friend Joy came upstairs and we said goodbye to her; she had to head back to Grand Rapids. I had

planned to make a round of fried eggs before we took the kids to Mass, but that didn't work out. We didn't even get the car moving until a quarter after 11:00. We drove to Mass, arriving about thirty minutes late for the 11:00 Mass.

I hate getting there late; it is gratuitous stress. There's not any actual terrible consequence, but it just bothers me beyond my ability to even convey in words. I spent most of the rest of Mass with Elanor in the overflow room since she was getting loud and active. We had coffee and donuts and on top of the bagels the kids were now primed with disturbing amounts of carbohydrate.

Nap Time

When we got back home at about 1:15, I made eggs for a few people who were willing to eat eggs: 2 fried eggs for me, 3 scrambled eggs for Grace, and 4 scrambled eggs for Veronica. I seem to be sharing in Grace's exhaustion. I tried to take a brief nap hoping that it would energize me, but was interrupted so many times that I wasn't able to sleep for more than a few minutes. Still, my nap helped a little bit.

Grace stayed in the kitchen for a while trying to plan meals, and started to nod off herself, so she came in to lie down as well and for a while we both napped irregularly, in between interruptions. The kids were running wild and trashing the house. Elanor wound up falling asleep on the floor outside our bedroom door. We're wondering now if we all might be fighting a virus, because we were so sleepy today, despite having gotten a reasonable amount of sleep.

Our housemate came in and asked us if she could use the kitchen, and of course we said yes. We have never said no. Somehow out of all our concerns both Grace and I have shared with her, about she and her boyfriend leaving the kitchen a mess, making a big mess of the oven, trying to store food and cook two completely separate sets of meals, entirely refusing to eat meals with us, about food upstairs, about her boyfriend smoking in the house, trash all over the yard, all that — her takeaway had apparently been "I'm not supposed to use the kitchen," which was never true. So it is clearer than ever to us that we have not successfully communicated much — maybe not anything at all.

Among the General Mess

She set herself up with her kids and a laptop in the kitchen and made a meal. Meanwhile the hall and the boys' bedroom was a huge mess; the kitchen was a huge mess; the family room was a huge mess. These things were not our housemate's fault. We made this kitchen mess over the course of days, by falling behind and not managing to catch up last week, and not getting as much help from the kids as we've tried to get.

Grace and I tried to figure out how to salvage the rest of the day and figure out what we were going to be able to get done. I wanted to work on the online forms, and clean the kitchen, but the kitchen was crowded. Grace tells me we

wasted some time indecisively staring at our phones. I mostly remember being very frustrated and feeling like we couldn't get the kids to help with *anything*. I had a few arguments trying to get them to help empty the dishwasher and put away dishes again. Veronica apparently had put away one round of dishes and started another one but we were so backed up on dishwashing that it was barely noticeable; it seemed like we had not made any progress.

Too Much to Do

Veronica had another youth group meeting back at the church, and our friends the Martins were also having a celebration at their farm for the Feast of St. Martin. And I needed to fill out forms, and there was still a lot of work to do in the kitchen. It was clear we weren't going to manage to get all of those things done. I really wanted to take the kids out to our friends' farm. I thought we might even go to the barbecue restaurant in Chelsea afterwards, the way we did a couple of weeks ago. But it was clear that the kids needed to eat some protein (or, really anything besides more carbs) before we tried to take them anywhere, and we just were not going to be ready to go. We also don't really have the spare money to be eating dinner out, especially now that I'm trying to pay off the line of credit advance we used to pay for the furnace replacement in the old house.

Grace and I slowly got ourselves moving. Somehow it took us about the next three or four hours to do more work on the house and kitchen, and make dinner. We had so much food in the house. Our fridge contains a lot of our housemate's food items. She rarely seems to throw anything out even when it is obviously past its prime. I finally had the chance to ask her if she was planning to use any of the jars of baby food. She said no, and asked Grace if she wanted the jars. Grace said no, so she threw them in the trash. Again, I'm at a loss. We have talked so many times about how we return things that are returnable, or recycle things that are recyclable. So I once again found myself fishing jars out of the trash in order to clean them out and recycle them. I'm glad to have a little space in the refrigerator back, though, since it is at a premium.

Preparing Dinner

From Friday night's Costco run, we still had a package of flank steak and another package of short ribs. Both of those can be cooked very nicely in the Instant Pot. Grace settled on the Mongolian flank steak recipe, a recipe we have tried before, modifying it this time to use less sugar. She got the kids to help her prep. I made a pot of brown rice with a quart of Grace's homemade beef broth. When it was done, she needed to use the Instant Pot, so I warmed up a red ceramic soup tureen that Joy brought us by filling it with hot water, then put the rice in it to keep it warm for a while, and scrubbed out the Instant Pot insert.

While doing all this prep, somehow Benjamin had a screaming tantrum, Pippin got in trouble for being too rough with Elanor, and Joshua kept getting into

that state he gets into where he laughs until he cries. I'm getting thoroughly sick of the "children behaving like screaming lunatics" thing, and the "children fighting like cats and dogs" thing, and the "children screaming for no discernible reason" thing, not to mention the "children running in the house until they fall and hurt themselves" thing. The "children getting loud again very late at night even though we've asked them to be quiet a dozen times" thing gets old as well. And I can't forget that my weekend started out with the "children plugging up the toilet until it overflows" thing.

I assembled a kale salad kit. I had to take a time out and leave the room for a while, because the noise was getting to me, and I was starting to fear that if I didn't get away from it for a few minutes, I might just snap and beat me some kids. Grace ran Veronica to her youth group event. While she was gone, Benjamin finished slicing up the flank steak. I could not hope to keep them all on track with finishing the recipe *and* simultaneously keep them from fighting and/or destroying our home while she was gone, so we had to put the dinner prep on hold while I just tried to keep them from ruining the meal in progress. Grace came back and picked up where she had left off. An hour later Grace had to go back again to pick her up. I did not feel up to navigating my way to our new church, especially as the route involves dirt roads without much street lighting. I didn't want to wind up taking the scenic route like on Saturday night.

We eventually finished preparing the meal. The kids were crazy and melting down left and right. Dinner was Mongolian beef over brown rice with kale salad. It was delicious, but there was still a lot of cleanup work. I had to take apart and clean the juicer, and do a bunch of hand washing of Elanor's bottles, and clean the big ceramic tureen, and the baking pans from earlier, and finish all kinds of tedious hand washing like that.

A Pretty Awful Weekend

So now it's about 12:40 and I had to ask Grace to help me reconstruct what happened today. I could not even remember the order of events. It just seems like a very long, exhausting, aggravating blur of cleaning things and yelling at screaming children. I'm really not sure why today was so hard, but it was. In fact, to me, the whole weekend seemed pretty awful.

It was just on the bed a short while ago, but now we can't find Grace's blood sugar monitor. Elanor was carrying the little case around earlier, but I had the kids take it and put it back on the bed and close and lock our bedroom door.

I think we're going to have to wake up the kids. I still have to record my blood pressure and Grace has to record her blood sugar. We're a pathetic duo. So I have to put my laptop away and help her wake up the kids and scour the house until we find her blood sugar meter.

Monday

We woke up Veronica and Sam. The situation with the blood pressure meter was just about the last straw for Grace. Sam diligently looked around until he found Grace's blood sugar meter. It was hidden behind some other items on a bookshelf in our bedroom. No one had any explanation for how it got there. So we got on to bed. I set my alarm for 6:30. After a not-very-restful five hours of broken sleep I got up and had a bath. Grace and I both left; Grace had a "non-stress test" to check on the baby, and I had to go to my doctor appointment at Domino Farms.

I made it on time, but just. Traffic on 23 North and Plymouth was not bad at a quarter to eight. Fortunately I had the foresight to put some canned espresso drinks in the refrigerator so that I could down a caffeine hit on my way out the door. But despite that, I've had a headache all morning.

My New Doctor

My new doctor took a thorough history, and seems friendly and engaged, so I was pleased with that. He looked over my blood pressure records. In his view it was a little worrying, but didn't seem persistently high, even without the labetalol. So he did not prescribe me anything for blood pressure, at least not yet. He wanted to get some labs done first. He also took my blood sugar, which was not elevated. I got a flu shot. He prescribed me Flomax for my difficulties in peeing, and Celexa for anxiety. I talked to him about the big stressors going on in my life. He'd like to see me back on an exercise routine. (So would I, of course.) I told him about my alpha-1 carrier gene and how that led me to a specialist who (I think, correctly) determined that I really was just suffering from bad allergies and bad reflux.

We talked about belly fat and BMI. He asked me to try to see if his practice can get test results from my colonoscopy and PSA test. So I have to try to track down contact info for those providers. He wants to rule out sleep apnea, so will plan an in-home sleep study of some kind. I got a flu shot, so I will probably feel pretty lousy tomorrow. Then Thursday, I have a follow-up appointment with the ophthalmologist. Then I'll see this doctor again in January.

I don't think I'm a very good patient, and I told him this; I told him that I seem to tend towards hypochondria, and also tend to somaticize stress. My grandmother was the same way, so at least I come by it honestly. It's his job to help me figure out the right things to worry about. The retinal hemorrhage worries me a lot, but it might not be the *right* thing to worry about, if it is mostly due to a genetic problem and I can't do much about it. The ophthalmologist noted "hypertensive retinopathy" but if my blood pressure is not actually high enough to have caused that — then what? Then I guess maybe work on the things I can improve.

Wikipedia says:

Mild signs of hypertensive retinopathy can be seen quite frequently in normal people (3–14% of adult individuals aged 40 years), even without hypertension.

When I left I had a dizzying number of things to try to write down. So I drove to the West Ann Arbor health center where I thought I might get my blood test done before work. He had said something about a fasting test. I honestly couldn't remember if he was talking about one of the tests he requested today, or a future test. It wasn't clear from the form. So I was standing in line, but realized I should probably come back Tuesday morning on an empty stomach. So tomorrow morning I'll try to remember not to eat anything at all in the morning and go right to the lab before work.

I had not eaten anything except the 120-calorie canned coffee drink, so I stopped at Joe and Rosie's on Jackson Road for smoked salmon and cream cheese on a bagel, and exchanged text messages with Grace. Grace's "non-stress test" was fine. The baby looks fine.

I really need this week to go smoother than the weekend did.

The Facets Complete Video Catalog

Today in random synaptic misfirings: I'm wishing I had my old copy of the Facets Complete Video Catalog #16. Facets Multi-Media used to offer a print catalog for sale and I bought one. It was a massive paper catalog and they couldn't send them to you for free. Although, for some reason I can't now remember, I wound up with two copies of Catalog #16. I never wound up ordering anything from it, but it was fascinating just to leaf through it. And I read the descriptions trying to find movies that I vaguely remember watching as a child.

Copies of these catalogs seem to be scarce now. #16 may have been the last one, although I'm not sure of that. Facets doesn't seem to offer a printed catalog any more, but they still send movies-by-mail for members, kind of the way Netflix used to be. There is still a Netflix DVDs-by-mail service, but they seem to offer a much shallower collection of films than they did back when we used the service.

Typos in *Moderan*, a Reply from NYRB

I sent a note to the New York Review of Books editorial contact e-mail listing the errors I found in *Moderan*. I was surprised to get a reply immediately:

While those seem very much like OCR errors, I can tell you that our books are not digitized by OCR but by humans typing (fallible humans, true!). They are then proofread. It looks like those two slipped through, unfortunately. I will make a note and these will be corrected on the next printing.

Thank you very much!

So... someone there is answering e-mail immediately. That's cool. If I find more errors in *Moderan* I'll pass them along.

Tuesday

Because of my doctor appointment Monday morning I had to stay at work until after seven, and I was quite tired by the time I left work. I went to Meijer to pick up prescriptions, and even though my doctor's office had called them in Monday morning, I still needed to wait fifteen minutes. So I think it was after eight by the time I got home. The kids had not taken both trash bins down to Crane Road yet. I had to remind them to finish a chore that they've had to do every week for almost two years. Then I had to drag them back into the kitchen to replace the trash bag, which they forget to replace every single time. This has become tedious.

I started both medications: Flomax and Celexa. So I was not feeling my best from the flu shot, and took two meds, both of which can cause drowsiness. I will try taking both of them at night for a while and see what happens.

Grace made three soups for dinner! One was a blend of potatoes, the leftover cooked sauerkraut, and bratwurst. That was really delicious. She also made greens with black-eyed peas, and she fixed up the squash soup that was too salty and needed some more sweetness. I think she added some carrot or potato to cut it, and then some molasses to sweeten it. She asked me to make a cast-iron pan of the Jiffy Mix corn muffin mix, so we had that, too.

The kids had not been on top of their chores. The kitchen, which I had left almost spotless Sunday night, was piled with dirty dishes. I got a dish load on and had Veronica hand-wash a few things, but when we don't stay right on top of it, we tend to fall farther and farther behind. So I was frustrated and feeling exhausted demoralized. Grace needed to get up at 6 to head to Saginaw early to meet the duct-cleaning company, so I was desperate to get to bed. We discovered that apparently someone had broken a glass on the floor in the family room and never cleaned it up. So that was a bit of a "WTF" moment. Who broke the glass? Elanor, maybe. Who saw it? Sam. What did he do about it? He asked Joshua to help. Did Joshua help? No. What happened next? Nothing. At least, that's as much as I could piece together. Leaving glass all over the floor so people can step on it? Priceless!

Three Juicers

Our friend Joy had brought three used juicers to try. One of them, an all-stainless steel appliance, looked like the best-built one, but it didn't work well at all; it seemed like the motor was weak, and it kept slowing down. Maybe something is burned out. So she tried another one, a Jack LaLanne juicer. It worked better. As we have now tried three juicers, and taken them apart and put them back together, it really looks like the guts of all of these juicers are actually made by the same company. The inside parts look nearly identical, while the exteriors

look very different. I think all of these are “centrifugal” juicers, with a disc blade that spins at high speed. The Jack LaLanne juicer seemed to extract a little bit more from the celery. The pulp was pretty dry, although it also didn’t seem to do as good a job chewing up the celery. There were some big pieces remaining. I think at some point I’d like to try a “masticating” juicer. They are supposedly able to get more juice out of the stuff you put into them. They are supposedly easier to clean than centrifugal juicers. But it seems that they are quite a bit more expensive, and I think we’re unlikely to find a used one at a thrift shop.

I had hoped to have a chance to sit down with Grace and go over my notes from my doctor’s appointment. But it was just too late and everything was too chaotic for that. We managed to get the kids down and the lights off by about eleven. The kitchen was not fully cleaned up. I was feeling odd and jittery because of the new drugs in my system.

A Difficult Night, A Beautiful Morning

It was a bit difficult to get to sleep. Then I woke up about 4:20. (Yes, 4:20; I checked my phone. And no, that’s not a hidden drug reference.) Elanor was fussing in Veronica’s room. It took me some time to get back to sleep. Then Benjamin came in to sleep with us, reporting that he had been having bad dreams, at 5:50. Then my phone alarm went off simultaneously with Grace’s phone alarm at 6:00. She sat up and started doing things with her phone and laptop, so the blue light was in my face, even with my eyes closed. I tried to get a little bit more sleep, but it was not really happening for me. Grace got up and out with Elanor. I managed to doze off a little bit more, with interruptions. About 8 I got up and got bathed and got out the door a bit past nine. I wanted to maintain a 12-hour fast before my blood tests, although I’m not sure that was strictly required or not, so had only a small glass of water before I left home. I drove to the West Ann Arbor medical center and had my blood drawn. Fortunately I didn’t have a long wait. Then I went to Joe and Rosie’s and got a mocha with almond milk and a muffin, and got in to work about 10:10.

I’m not sure if Grace made it on time. She needed to get up to Saginaw in time to meet the duct cleaning company. It snowed overnight. I saw reports that traffic conditions were hazardous in mid-Michigan. It was beautiful, though, on my morning drive. The sun was illuminating all the snow-covered trees, and the roads in Southeast Michigan were not bad, because the snow had largely melted. It is clouding up, though, and it is supposed to get much colder tonight — into the teens.

The Flomax is definitely helping already, after only one dose. It’s too early to tell if the Celexa is doing anything. I haven’t been on an SSRI in many years, since about the year 2000 I think. I’ve been happy that I have been able to function without them, because of their various side effects, although I definitely have gone through some rough patches over the last eighteen years. I had dry mouth early this morning and I have been yawning even after my morning caffeine, but

it's really impossible to tell how much of this is poor sleep, how much is the flu shot, and how much is the new medications.

I'll have to go to Costco after work. It's going to be another long day. I hope we can get through the evening routine better than we did last night. This is the time of year, with the days getting shorter and shorter, when I'd really like to sleep *more*, not less. I'd like to get home, eat some soup in front of a roaring fire, sip a glass of whisky, read everyone stories, and go to bed early, all without ever turning on a bright artificial light. Maybe someday.

I don't have any reading or viewing to report today. We probably will be too busy and tired to watch a video, but maybe on Wednesday or Thursday night this week we can watch the latest episode of *Doctor Who*, called "Demons of the Punjab." The premise, involving the historic partition of British India into India and Pakistan, seems very promising. But the reviews are, once again, pretty mixed, so I'm trying not to get my hopes up too high.

Meanwhile, in the real world (or at least this hell-world that we're stuck in), I'm riveted by coverage of the fires in California:

Even as Southern California faces at least one more day of fierce wind and bone-dry conditions, state officials and residents are trying to come to terms with the level of death and destruction left by the past week's wildfires. As of Monday night, at least 42 people were reported killed by the Camp Fire, which decimated the city of Paradise on Thursday. The fire is now the deadliest in California history, beating the grim record of 29 set in a October 1933 blaze at Los Angeles's Griffith Park. More than 200 people in the Camp Fire area remained missing on Monday, and it is very possible more victims will be found in and near Paradise as the search expands into areas that were too dangerous or difficult to assess right away.

How do we get off the bad timeline? Anyone?

***Akhnaten* Continued, and Other Glass Works**

To soothe my mind, I've been listening to *Akhnaten*. I've mentioned it before, but this is such a beautiful work. Act I, Scene 3, called "The Window of Appearances" is just an unbelievable piece of music. I find myself listening to it again and again, along with the duet "Akhnaten and Nefertiti."

Not everything in *The Complete Sony Recordings* is quite as enjoyable, though. I have tried to get through *Dancepieces*, and so far it isn't really working for me; the pace of most of the pieces is too frenetic, and the repeating, evolving patterns do a little too *much* repeating, and a little too *little* evolving. I'll try again and maybe something will "click" and I'll start to like them, but I may have to just admit that I'm never going to love *Dancepieces* the way I love *Glassworks*.

I've started to dig into *Satyagraha*, which in scale is somewhere between *Akhnaten*

and *Einstein on the Beach*. The parts are beautiful, but I don't really have a feel for the arc of *Satyagraha* in the way I have started to get a feel for the arc of *Akhnaten*, and the way it abruptly leaps across time.

The "Smash Cut" in *Akhnaten*

That leap across time, which reminds me of the "smash cut" between the prehistoric past and the era of spaceflight in *2001: A Space Odyssey*, is essential to *Akhnaten*, and it doesn't happen between pieces, but across a long musical section in the track "The Ruins." At the start of the track the narrator recites text from Tutankhamen's tomb. In the recording, he is panned slightly to the left of the stereo sound-stage, as he says, with spacious reverberation:

The new ruler, performing benefactions for his father Amon and all the gods, has made what was ruined to endure as a monument for the ages of eternity, and he has expelled the great criminal and justice was established. He surpassed what has been done previously.

I'm reminded of "Ozymandias" by Shelly:

*I met a traveller from an antique land
Who said: Two vast and trunkless legs of stone
Stand in the desert...*

In the opera, as the scene progresses and the orchestra plays, the ruin of Akhetaten appears, and the narrator becomes a twentieth-century tour guide. In the recording, the narrator's voice becomes quieter, and moves in the stereo sound-stage, so that it is heard almost entirely in the right channel, and the reverberation is gone. His voice has become "smaller." He does not stay in the right channel, though; his voice gradually moves, as if the tour guide is walking on the stage:

There is nothing left of this glorious city of temples and palaces. The mud brick buildings have long since crumbled and little remains of the immense stone temples but the outlines of their floor plans.

After "The Ruins," there is a wordless piece called "Epilogue," in which the ghosts of Akhnaten, Nefertiti, and Queen Tye sing together, producing a series of pure, sustained chords that seem nearly inhuman in their precise tonality. We feel as if we are hearing the voices of angels, or demigods. Even the vibrato of the singers seems to be synchronized perfectly. The libretto says:

(At first they seem not to know that they and their city all are dead and now a part of the past. They become aware of the funeral cortege of Akhnaten's father (Amenhotep III) moving across the background. They form a procession of their own and, as the opera ends, can be seen moving off toward the first funeral group still on its journey to the heavenly land of Ra)

And at that point, listening, I'm pretty much speechless as well.

The Real Akhnaten

The opera portrays Akhnaten and Nefertiti as inhumanly beautiful, moving majestically across the stage, and singing as immortals might sing. The historic Akhnaten, known earlier as Amenhotep IV, tried to introduce a form of monotheism to Egypt. DNA evidence suggests that a mummy found in tomb “KV55” was closely related to Amenhotep III and Tutankhamen, although apparently their exact relationships are disputed. The mummy, originally believed to be female, was later identified as a male with feminine traits.

Is this why Glass used a counter-tenor to sing Akhnaten’s part? I don’t know. Far from being some sort of demigod, Akhnaten may have had a genetic disorder:

The rather strange and eccentric portrayals of Akhenaten, with a sagging stomach, thick thighs, large breasts, and long, thin face — so different from the athletic norm in the portrayal of pharaohs — have led certain Egyptologists to suppose that Akhenaten suffered some kind of genetic abnormality.

The genetic disorder theory is disputed:

Because the god Aten was referred to as “the mother and father of all humankind” it has been suggested that Akhenaten was made to look androgynous in artwork as a symbol of the androgyny of the god.

Genetic disorder or no, the family tree of Akhnaten is a tangled one. Ahmenhotep I may have been the product of *three generations* of sibling marriages. His son Tutankhamun (*aka* “King Tut”) was also the product of sibling inter-breeding:

The young king’s mother was found through the DNA testing of a mummy designated as ‘The Younger Lady’ (KV35YL), which was found lying beside Queen Tiye in the alcove of KV35. Her DNA proved that, like his father, she was a child of Amenhotep III and Tiye; thus, Tutankhamun’s parents were brother and sister.

And Tutankhamen later married his own half-sister.

To quote the character Ed Rooney in *Ferris Bueller’s Day Off*, “so *that’s* how it is in their family.” I’m not going to add the obligatory “not that there’s anything wrong with that,” because there is. These folks must have been genetic train wrecks. And it apparently the incest situation was even worse in the Ptolemaic dynasty. As Grover tells Elmo in the *Sesame Street* special *The Street We Live On*, “history *is* fascinating!”

There is a very dated, but still pretty nifty documentary available online: *The Lost Pharaoh: The Search for Akhenaten* (note that different sources spell his name differently, as it is a transliteration). Keep an eye out for the Commodore PET computer — one of the first computers I ever used! I’m not sure how well all the historical assertions about Akhnaten measure up to the present-day

scholarly consensus, or even if there is a present-day scholarly consensus, but it still captures a mood and a time, and I like the use of music.

Wednesday

After work yesterday I made a run to Costco, and picked up some of our regular items: bananas, butter, eggs, and a chicken pot pie. They didn't have any more of that Lundgren short-grain brown rice that we like so much, unfortunately. I got a 12-pound bag of a different kind of organic brown rice to try. My impulse buy this time was a 2-pack of beef summer sausages and a package of assorted crackers. This sausage is not that great, though. It has a strangely soft texture. I'm used to summer sausage from Ted's Meat Market in Saginaw — it was quite chewy, and delicious. I left one sausage and half the crackers at home and took the rest to work. They are huge — two pounds each. I probably don't actually want to eat a quarter-pound of summer sausage every day for eight days. Maybe my co-workers will help me. Maybe the kids will eat the other one, although they will probably eat all the crackers and leave the sausage.

Planning for Expenses

I spent some time yesterday working on the money spreadsheets for our Team One account. I was in a mild panic because it turns out I had some errors in the spreadsheet. In one cell I had turned a withdrawal, for our mortgage, a negative number, into a positive number accidentally. But I had also left off an upcoming paycheck, which improves the situation a bit. And I had mis-ordered some upcoming transactions in December.

Even with these corrections, things are going to be very tight at the end of November through mid-December in our Team One account. Unless we have a windfall, we can't afford any more boiler work through the end of the year. We can't afford to have our fireplaces inspected and/or cleaned. Our payments for the rest of the paint and plaster work on the old house, \$3,500 over the past few months, have left us with very little margin for error. And the cost of the new furnace in the old house, about \$3,000, has left me with more debt to pay off, leaving me less money to move into the Team One account.

We will probably squeak through a bottleneck around December 15th. We may hit a low-water mark of under \$100. The exact low water mark depends on the exact dates in which various charges and credits actually clear. Some of these, like our mortgage payments, Vonage phone service, and T-Mobile bill, shift around by a few days. It's my job to plan for the most pessimistic scenario. If I need to, I can overdraw our Huntington account again to bring a little extra money into the Team One account. But we are nearly maxed out on everything, so I'd really rather avoid eating up the small amount of credit still available to us in case of financial emergency.

The good news is that if we make it to the end of the year, things should ease up. With no more big repair expenses at the old house, I should be able to recharge

the Team One account and gradually bring up the “low-water mark” we hit each month.

Old House News

Grace made it up to Saginaw and met the duct-cleaning crew — the company we paid months ago, but who never came to clean the ducts. Yesterday they finally cleaned the ducts. Grace made it there and back without any difficulty, although she was very tired.

Old People News

I was very tired also last night. When I got home the kids were making latkes, and Grace was making chili in the Instant Pot. Fortunately they had done kitchen cleanup during the day, so we weren’t too far behind. That is such a simple thing, but it gave me a huge sense of relief not to face a complete mess in the kitchen.

We are still using up cans of beans that I stashed away in the basement storage room in our old house back when I was unemployed in December of 2014 (I wrote dates on the cans). They technically expired in 2017 but there was no reason not to use them in chili. They tasted fine. It took the kids something like two hours to finish frying the latkes — one of the reasons we don’t like to make them frequently. Grace and I both just wanted to eat and get on to bed. We finally ate about ten, and Grace went right into the bedroom while I did some cleanup. We got to bed at a reasonable hour. You can’t really “catch up” on lost sleep, but we got a pretty good night’s sleep, with a couple of exceptions. At 4:20 a.m. (yes, again, 4:20; I checked the time on my phone), the old laptop, in the family room on the other side of the house, started playing a video. It wasn’t enough to wake up anyone else, but I’ve always been a very light sleeper.

My first thought was that Benjamin had gotten up and was watching videos. But no one was up. Apparently the kids had left a video playing, and closed up the computer, and it went to sleep. Then at 4:20, some maintenance task ran, and woke up up, even though the lid was closed, and the video started playing again.

It took me a long time to get back to sleep again. Grace and I wound up talking for a while. This is probably because somewhere in the 4:00 hour I reach a point of natural wakefulness before going back into deep sleep for a second round. The Celexa may be also making me sleep more lightly. I’m not really sure. I was also woken up (but don’t recall just when) by Elanor fussing in her bedroom with Veronica.

Celexa

I took my second dose of Celexa last night. I am experiencing slight dizziness. I had a very dry mouth the first night, but it was less so last night. I’ve also got

mild flu symptoms — sneezing just a bit. I've been slightly headachey. Since I got a flu shot *and* started two new medications, it's hard to know just what is causing what. My jaw feels sore and my TMJ (temporomandibular joints) are popping. I might have been grinding my teeth during the night. I hope that goes away. That side effect hit me really hard when I was on Welbutrin, almost 20 years ago. I had to stop that medication; it was so bad I couldn't open my jaw. I hope I don't have to stop Celexa before I can determine if it helps with anxiety.

I'm so glad to have gotten a *better* night's sleep, even if it wasn't even really a *good* one!

Tomorrow I have a follow-up visit with my ophthalmologist, and I'm looking forward to finding out more about what is happening with my eyes. Even if it isn't good, I want to know, so I can determine if there is something more I can do to protect my vision.

If I get a decent bonus at the end of the year, maybe I can use it to buy Grace a new juicer, and buy myself new glasses. I want to try Gunnar computer glasses that block some of the excess blue LED light from my computer displays. Ideally I would get all three of my glasses — computer glasses, sunglasses, and regular glasses — updated at the same time. That's really not cheap, but maybe I can at least get new computer glasses. Supposedly Forest Place Optical in Plymouth handles Gunnar prescription glasses.

Thursday

Grace and the kids made chicken paprikash, salad, and pasta with yeast for dinner. Grace got home late from errands and I got home late, so we arrived at about the same time, almost 8, and did not manage to sit down to dinner until 9:45. So, a quick round of cleanup, leaving some of the dishes for Veronica to hand-wash today, with no video and no story, and we got to bed at a sane time. And we slept with no interruptions!

The Flomax is helping me considerably. I didn't even have to get up to pee during the night. The Celexa is giving me some of the usual side effects that I get from SSRI. I have intense yawning fits. My jaw gets sore, and sometimes my jaw muscles start twitching rapidly — I can feel the muscle “firing” about ten times a second. I struggle to find a “neutral” position for my jaw. The twitching stops if I get it closed at just the right degree of tension, but I can't seem to get it to relax. It usually settles down after a while. Then there are the muscle tremors, and the slight dizziness, and the dry mouth. So much fun! But... it may be helping my anxiety, and helping me feel not so “stuck” in our various troubles. It's too early to tell for certain if I'll be able to stay on it, or if the side effects will become too debilitating.

This morning we have snow coming down, moderately heavy at times. We might have two inches total, according to Weather Underground. The temperature is

right around freezing, so I don't expect it to freeze up badly on the roads, but the slush might be slippery later. I had breakfast at Harvest Moon Café and after a cup and a half of black coffee and a breakfast sandwich, felt more ready to confront the snow.

This afternoon I have my follow-up appointment with ophthalmologist Dr. Puro, right down the street from my office on Parkland Plaza. Grace is going to be running errands all day. I'll have to see how my eyes recover from the drops. I should be able to drive the short distance back to my office. If I can't see well enough to drive home this evening, I'll have to leave my car at work and have Grace give me a ride home.

Friday

Yesterday's ophthalmology appointment went fine and I was able to get back to work in under two hours. My doctor only dilated my right eye, so my vision wasn't too bad, as my left eye could compensate somewhat. The news from inside my eyeball was about as good as I could hope for: there doesn't seem to be any further damage to my retina, and the swelling associated with the initial hemorrhage is subsiding. I have another follow-up in 3 months. The effect of the drops had worn off by the time I left work, about 7:30, so I had no difficulty driving home, other than the haze of road salt and heavy traffic.

I asked my doctor whether he thought that constant blue light exposure could be playing a role in damaging my eyes. He didn't reject the idea completely, but said something about a lack of evidence to date. The evidence I've seen is worrying enough that I still intend, if possible, to replace my computer glasses late this year or early next year with something that reduces blue wavelengths. I think in a few more years the consensus may be that the more blue-intensive LED lights *are* damaging eyes and we might be looking at the mother of all class-action lawsuits.

Ideally the light *sources* would not have this potential hazard, but I can't replace all my screens with old CRTs or even old fluorescent-backlit monitors, especially not at work. At home the two monitors on my Mac Pro, an Apple monitor and an old HP portrait monitor that I bought used about a dozen years ago, *do* use the older fluorescent backlights. The Apple monitor is just about the nicest I've ever used. The HP, which I can orient in portrait mode for writing, is very nice too, although its backlight is a little dim. But with respect to this potential source of eye damage, maybe dim isn't that bad.

So, LabVIEW, My Old Nemesis, We Meet Again

At work I've been wrestling with LabVIEW again. There is some error-reporting code that I designed to be "non-blocking" — that is, it throws up a window with an error message, but the code running in the main window does not pause waiting for the user to respond. This particular code shuts down voltages if too much or too little current draw is detected, as a precaution to protect the devices

we are testing; we want that shutting-down to happen immediately. So I followed some National Instruments sample code, along with some other examples I found in various blogs, to make my code open up another “VI” (virtual instrument).

This code works fine when running the program in the LabVIEW development environment, but was failing when running from a compiled executable (a Windows `.exe` file). There is a second layer of error-checking that normally would display an error after the shutdown, but this shutdown logic intentionally scrubs those errors so that they aren’t reported twice. The problem is apparently that LabVIEW doesn’t know that the VI I’m opening needs to be linked in to the executable, because it is reference indirectly at runtime, by name, and the compiler can’t detect that reference. I was entirely unable to find a way to force the project to include the extra VI.

There is probably a way, but I had to give up on this approach for now. Instead of calling a separate VI which then opens up the VI displaying the error message, I’ve put the error message in the main window. My error-handling VI can’t reference the error message text field directly, so I’ve had to essentially “de-factor” this error logic into a subroutine. Instead I now have duplicated code in several places where the main VI needs to display this kind of error. That’s really annoying.

Update: there’s supposedly a way to do this kind of thing using a control refnum connected to a property node, but I have not tried it yet.

In addition, I’ve struggled to make sense of the right way to reference the error message text field. Elsewhere in the code I can set the text of text fields by using the “Value (Signaling)” property node. In fact, elsewhere in the code I can set the text of *this* text field that way. But in some of my code, it is not working. The debugger shows me that the string is coming in as expected, and no errors are generated by invoking this property node, but the text field remains blank. Using a so-called “Local Variable” created from the text field, though, and connecting my string to *that*, seems to work. So there are still some things I don’t understand about how to use property nodes and local variables.

Home Again

For dinner last night we had pot pie from Costco, and Benjamin screamed through most of the meal because he had the wrong kind of plate. I think the Celexa is starting to help me tolerate this kind of thing better. It feels like I have a little more “insulation” between my nerves and the noise and chaos of children behaving badly. Over dinner Grace and I struggled to have a conversation with Sam over constant interruptions and side conversations, which we kept trying to squash. We were trying to get Sam to tell us how his speech therapy has been going, and what he is doing in the sessions. (I believe Grace is actually in an adjacent room where she can watch the sessions, so she knows, from her perspective, what he did, but we wanted to hear it from his perspective.) It sounds like he is, essentially, having guided conversations with the speech

therapist, and getting coaching during them. And it does seem like these sessions are helping him, which is great.

Returning to Rivendell: “The Council of Elrond,” Continued

For our bedtime story last night I read a long section of “The Council of Elrond” chapter in *The Fellowship of the Ring*. In this section, Gandalf recounted meeting Radagast and then Saruman, and his imprisonment on the pinnacle of Orthanc. There are notable differences between the book and the movie here. In the movie, Radagast is entirely removed. In the book, Gandalf asks Radagast to mobilize an army of spies:

‘“We shall need your help, and the help of all things that will give it. Send out messages to all the beasts and birds that are your friends. Tell them to bring news of anything that bears on this matter to Saruman and Gandalf. Let messages be sent to Orthanc.” ‘“I will do that,” he said, and rode off as if the Nine were after him.’

There is no violent battle of wizards described; there’s no indication that Saruman “levitated” him up to the top of Orthanc by magic, as he does in the film. Gandalf says:

‘They took me and they set me alone on the pinnacle of Orthanc, in the place where Saruman was accustomed to watch the stars. There is no descent save by a narrow stair of many thousand steps, and the valley below seems far away.’

It’s not entirely clear why Gandalf can’t leave; is he locked there by magic? Are there guards? Or is he just not good at descending stairs, in that long robe?

Without Radagast, the filmmakers needed another way for Gandalf to pass information on through the whisper network and eventually to Gwaihir the Windlord, who eventually rescues Gandalf from Orthanc, so they show Gandalf using a moth as a messenger. But in the book, Gandalf tells the Council that Radagast did indeed carry out his assignment:

‘...he rode away towards Mirkwood where he had many friends of old. And the Eagles of the Mountains went far and wide, and they saw many things: the gathering of wolves and the mustering of Orcs; and the Nine Riders going hither and thither in the lands; and they heard news of the escape of Gollum. And they sent a messenger to bring these tidings to me.’

The film makes Gandalf’s actual rescue extra-dramatic, as he appears to step right off the top of the tower of Orthanc to escape Saruman. There’s no real justification in the book for this:

‘So it was that when summer waned, there came a night of moon, and Gwaihir the Windlord, swiftest of the Great Eagles, came unlooked-for to Orthanc; and he found me standing on the pinnacle. Then I

spoke to him and he bore me away, before Saruman was aware. I was far from Isengard, ere the wolves and orcs issued from the gate to pursue me.'

But the simplification and extra drama in these scenes in the film don't really bother me; they are clearly designed to turn some of the talky, somewhat abstract scenes such as the conversation between Gandalf and Saruman into something that portrays their conflict *visually*. The movie still holds up very well, and I still look forward to re-watching it every year.

About Last Night

Again, the kids were noisy and somewhat disruptive during the story, but I felt as if I was a bit insulated from it. Grace and I spent some time talking about what behavior we can tolerate, and what we can't.

After the story was done, Grace and I noticed that the dishwasher was not running, so we roused Veronica and Joshua to finish a little of the kitchen cleanup we thought they had already done; I had already told them several times to start the dishwasher and been reassured that they had. They had also left some of the leftover pot pie sitting on the counter. So we were not very pleased at the way they finished up chores.

Baby Elanor woke me up about 3:45. She was in her room with Veronica, and Veronica did not seem to be responding to her. Grace went to intervene, and discovered that while we had told Veronica to get her a bottle of water and have it on hand in case she woke up during the night, Veronica had not done this. Veronica got her water and she quieted down, but Elanor started fussing again a few minutes later, so I went to check on her. Veronica has been complaining that her room is cold. I discovered that her windows were not completely shut and locked, so after stumbling around her room stepping on LEGO DUPLO blocks, which fortunately aren't as painful as regular LEGO blocks, and latching her windows shut, we were all able to get a little more sleep.

The side effects of Celexa continue to be a bother, but I'm going to try to stick it out longer, as it does seem to be helping my ability to handle chaos. It's too early to tell for sure, but it also appears that it *may* be helping my blood pressure. Both numbers were in the green-light ranges for all four of the readings I took this morning. I will continue to measure it morning and night and if it looks like this, consistently, I might be able to avoid having to take a prescription blood-pressure medication altogether. That would be great!

I got paid, and sent most of my paycheck back out again, in the form of transfers to the Team One account and a credit-card payment. Things will continue to be very tight through the end of the year and I will have to be extremely vigilant. I will try to stop complaining about it here in the blog. I wish it wasn't like this and I could look forward to worrying about money less and enjoying the holidays more.

For breakfast I had a canned coffee drink from GFS that past me had thoughtfully left in the office refrigerator, for a day like today when future me didn't have the time or money to stop for breakfast. I ate the last two packets of instant grits. I'll have to figure out something for lunch. I've got summer sausage and crackers, which is not really the healthiest lunch option, and I've got some of those shelf-stable Loma Linda Chipotle Bowls from Costco, which I previously described as smelling "like burning dog food." Maybe I should just pitch those in the trash, so I'm not tempted to eat them. I hate wasting food, but it seems like those were wasted when they were made. Tonight I'll head to Costco and try to spend less than usual. I think we have enough wine to get us through Thanksgiving.

Saturday

I threw out the Chipotle Bowls. I'll have to find some better stuff to keep at work.

LabVIEW Control References

In case you're following the thrilling story of the LabVIEW code, I did get the approach I mentioned above working. You can make a reference from a control, and then you can pass the reference as an input to a sub-VI. The trickiness here is all around object types. There's a sophisticated type system in LabVIEW. But creating objects of these different types is very idiosyncratic, with actions and settings buried in hierarchical menus. It's easy to make a mistakes and accidentally create an object that doesn't work, and won't wire up. The visual representation doesn't do much to help me diagnose problems with types. They aren't shown in any clear way in the object properties. I've really never seen anything resembling a complete taxonomy of LabVIEW types. Too much of this seems like overly-complex, poorly-documented voodoo. But it is working. I've taken to putting links to the National Instruments help pages right in the comments in the code, in the hopes that this will make it easier for me to figure out what I was doing, if I have to update this code.

After work I went to Costco as usual and brought home a load of groceries. For dinner we had salmon, rice, and macaroni and cheese. There was an apple pie for dessert. There was kitchen cleanup. Then it was pretty much bedtime. We didn't have the greatest night's sleep. Elanor woke us up, when she woke up and complained for a while. Our houseguest and her boyfriend were in and out of the house early. I've been taking Celexa before bed, but I'm honestly not sure if it makes my sleep better or worse.

Today it's been overcast, and I've been sleepy. Grace got up and out early, to take Joshua and Veronica to church at 8, so they could volunteer to help set up the craft fair. Grace also ran down to Mother Loaf in Milan and got some bread and a potato focaccia. That was delicious! I was feeling sluggish, but by the time she got back I was up and bathed and dressed and cooking bacon, and had

made a pot of tea.

Craft Fair Confusion

I had agreed to take them back this afternoon for another round. Pippin wanted to go, too, so I drove them over to the church at 2 (well, we were only a few minutes late). There was some misunderstanding, though. They had signed up to help with the bake sale and the raffle. Minors aren't allowed to work on the raffle (they were raffling off alcohol, and handling money). They also didn't want them handling money for the bake sale. So there wasn't really anything for them to do as volunteers, and I brought them back home. There will be more for them to do tomorrow after Mass.

Grace told some people that I play guitar and now I'm getting recruited to play guitar at upcoming events. Having not practiced regularly in years I don't feel at all ready. And I'm going to have very little time off over the holidays, so this may not be something I can practically get involved in until next year at the earliest.

When I got back home with the kids, Grace had finished a batch of muffins made out of the remnants of the celery and apples she puts through the juicer. They taste pretty good, although she is still tweaking the recipe, trying to perfect it. They're high in fiber, that's for sure. And they taste a bit like celery. I'm not saying that's a bad thing. The kids ate them happily, which I found a little bit surprising.

It's about 3:45 and I'm still having yawning fits. I just don't have any energy today. I don't even really feel up to reading. I will go ahead and post this since I don't think I will have a sudden rush of inspiration to write more. Maybe I will attempt a nap before dinner. We still have last Sunday's episode of *Doctor Who* that we haven't watched yet. We could watch that tonight if everyone is up for it.

I think we're cooking beef ribs in the Instant Pot for dinner tonight.

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.

- *Akhnaten* by Philip Glass
- *The Fellowship of the Ring* by J. R. R. Tolkien, Book 2, Chapter 2, "The Council of Elrond"

Pittsfield Township, Michigan

The Week Ending Saturday, November 17th, 2018

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