

2018 Week 53: Sunday, December 30th and Monday, December 31st

Paul R. Potts

Sunday

I'm continuing right on from my notes on Saturday. I got to bed pretty late last night, and I kept forgetting to take my night-time medications, so I wound up taking them well after midnight, instead of at 9 p.m. when I was supposed to take them. This meant that I was groggy this morning. I intended to get up and make progress in the kitchen, and make breakfast for everyone, but I wound up spending extra time soaking in the tub before I felt up to facing the kitchen. While I was in the tub, the kids made a big pan of scrambled eggs — with way too much salt. So they wound up wasting quite a few eggs. When I got into the kitchen, I had to restart the dishwasher again — once again, something had gone wrong, and the soap was undissolved in the bottom of the dishwasher. I really hope this dishwasher isn't dying. We've used it hard, but for under two years. But I don't really know how old it is. Maybe it's ready to give out.

The bathtub drain was running very slowly last night, leading me to look for drain cleaner, realize we didn't have any more, and add it to a shopping list.

I made a pot of the Café du Monde coffee and turned it into bulletproof coffee. We didn't have any grass-fed butter, as we were out of the Kerrygold butter, but we had some Challenge butter, purchased for Christmas baking and never used, and more coconut oil, and some chocolate chips. So that gave me and Grace a small energy boost.

Grace and I talked for a while. She revealed that she was craving tacos. Then our housemate came down to talk to Grace, and it turned out that our housemate was craving tacos, too. The kitchen was in no condition to make tacos and we were missing most of the ingredients. I was willing to go get ingredients, but didn't want to have to spend three hours cleaning up the kitchen before it was ready to make lunch, so I pushed for getting takeout tacos. We dithered around for some time before deciding on a plan. I would take our housemate to Kroger to get drain cleaner and rainbow glitter glue — another shopping list item for an art project that was planned for today. She'd get some baby formula and a few other items covered by WIC. Then we'd go out to La Marqueza Taqueria on East Michigan Avenue in Ypsilanti. None of us had ever been there.

So I loaded up some returnable bottles and got our housemate to Kroger. As usual, she had some strange trouble with WIC at the checkout. They were able to ring everything up, and all the items were marked on the shelf as covered by WIC, and she supposedly had enough money left on her card to cover the items, but the system just wouldn't process her card for some reason. They sent her to the customer service desk, but she was fed up, and I don't blame her, because it seems like that entire system is designed to humiliate WIC shoppers in front of everyone else in the store. And so she left her groceries and stood at the front of the store waiting for me. I was a few places behind her in line and bought my items, and had them ring up her items as well, because I really just wanted to get us out of there, so we could go get our tacos!

La Marqueza is a very unassuming place. We ordered six beef and six pork tacos, an order of nachos, and a quesadilla. While we were waiting I drank a glass of horchata. We didn't have long to wait, and soon brought home all the tacos that Grace and our housemate could possibly handle. Everything was really good! So we hope to go back there soon.

After cleaning up the food, the kids decided that they wanted to build the Velociraptor Chase Lego set after all. So they worked on that. Grace, still exhausted, went back into the bedroom to nurse the baby and I wound up alone in the kitchen again, cleaning the stovetop and cast-iron pans and baking trays and emptying one dishwasher load and starting another, while periodically running back into the bathroom to put two rounds of drain cleaner down the bathtub drain. There's still more to do in the kitchen but it's now a quarter to ten, and I've been catching up on the journal for an hour and forty-five minutes, and I have to work tomorrow, so I'm not sure how much more I will do tonight. I took my medications, so they will be kicking in and making me sleepy shortly. I expect tomorrow to be a very slow day at work.

Our friend Alice apparently passed her virus off to Elanor, who has been coughing horribly. Veronica's been feeding her broth and tea and she's now getting a bath. We are trying to keep her away from Chi, because we really don't want Chi, who is only sixteen days old today, to wind up with a virus. We're just not sure his immune system is up to the challenge. This also means we are trying to keep Elanor away from her mom, which is also a challenge.

I expect tomorrow to be a quiet day in the office.

Monday

It's the last day of 2018.

After putting away my laptop last night, I did a little more work on the kitchen. I didn't get it completely cleaned, but I did get it to the point where the sink was mostly empty, the counters were mostly clear, and it was ready for me to make bulletproof coffee in the morning without having to make room or clean anything.

We didn't really have dinner last night, since most of us were still pretty well filled up from our taco feast. The kids who refused to eat any of it went to bed hungry. The exception was Elanor — she had a hacky cough last night, and a lot of snot. We fed her broth, and hibiscus tea with honey, and elderberry extract. She seems to have been whacked with a virus, which might be the one that our friend Alice brought. So we are trying to keep her away from baby Chi. It might be a hopeless quest, to keep a virus from spreading around a crowded household full of kids, but we are trying.

I slept later than I intended to. It was gray and rainy again this morning, and had frozen up in patches, including our dirt road, and my office parking lot. I drove to Joe and Rosie Creamery and had a toasted bagel with peanut butter and a small coffee before work, and read a few pages of *The Black Corridor*, the third novel of three in the *Traveling to Utopia* omnibus of novels by Michael Moorcock; I read the other two, *The Wrecks of Time* and *The Ice Schooner* this year. I won't finish *The Black Corridor* this year, but it's not very long, so I should be able to finish it early in 2019.

It turned out I had left half my horchata from La Marqueza Taqueria in the car. It was actually frozen, but after sitting on my desk for an hour or two, it was a nice treat.

At work, only three of us were in, and only to catch up on some paperwork and e-mail messages. Human Resources decreed that on New Year's Eve, they would count four hours as a full day. So I've got that going for me, which is nice.

I ordered a baby carrier, for myself, to replace the New Native carrier that I used to have. Grace sent my old carrier to Syria a few years ago, thinking we probably weren't going to have more babies. They've gone up in price — a lot. It cost \$87.50 for what is essentially a single piece of cloth sewn into a sling. I don't remember exactly what they cost fourteen years ago, but it wasn't \$87.50. I could grumble about that, but I also know I'm not going to make a damned carrier, so I just bit my tongue and bought it.

I'm hoping that I will be able to use it to carry baby Chi on some walks while he's still too small for the backpack-style baby carrier. Maybe I can use it while walking on the treadmill. I always liked the New Native design more than other baby carriers I've tried. It's a very simple design, just a folded piece of cloth stitched together. It's much simpler than the more elaborate designs Grace sometimes wears. You put it around your body over one shoulder, diagonally, like you are just won the Miss Universe pageant. Then you open up the fold and stuff the baby in there. It's pretty foolproof. Veronica used to love to ride around with me that way. I remember taking her to Trader Joe's with me when she was just a few days old.

I will head to Meijer for a few groceries. Grace wants to make greens, black-eyed peas, and corn bread on New Year's Day. We also need toilet paper and paper towels, and sparkling water and orange juice for mimosas (well, *faux*-mosas).

We'll start the year with our annual *Lord of the Rings* movie marathon. The extended editions are cool, but I think this year we might watch the shorter theatrical versions. I think I've got a set of those versions in the basement. At least, I hope I do.

I'll probably work tomorrow on writing summary of what I read and watched in the fourth quarter, and get that posted. It's been a terrible quarter for getting reading done. My totals will be way down. But I think I still have some tomorrows ahead of me.

In fact, it's been a terrible year in many ways — full of stress and anxiety and ugly politics and awful news. We're still here. May 2019 be better for you, and for all of us.

The Last Hours

It's the first, and we have just started our *Lord of the Rings* marathon, watching the theatrical editions instead of the extended editions. I came back to fill in the details of the last few hours of 2018.

I left the office about 3:15, and ran out to Costco. It was rainy and foggy, and I needed to run the car's air conditioner to clear the fog from the windows. On the way to Costco, I heard on the radio, or thought I heard, that Airport Boulevard was closed at State Street due to flooding, so I decided to get off at Ann Arbor-Saline Road and take Lohr to Ellsworth to the other part of Airport Boulevard to get into Costco, then go back up Lohr to Ann Arbor-Saline Road to get on I-94. In retrospect, though, I think they were probably talking about Airport Drive, not Airport Boulevard. They connect, but Airport Drive is a little further south (and services the actual municipal airport).

At Costco I bought orange juice, La Croix water in the tall cans, celery, apples, bagged salads, eggs, butter, bagels, two bags of Shishito peppers, and industrial-size packages of paper towels and toilet paper. My plan for New Year's Day breakfast was scrambled eggs, blistered Shishito peppers, and toasted bagels, with our faux-mosas.

Costco was hopping. I had to wait quite some time to check out. Then I went to GFS on Carpenter Road, and bought Jiffy Mix for cornbread and ham hocks. Then it was on to Meijer. I knew it was a bad idea to go to Meijer on New Year's Eve, but Grace wanted black-eyed peas, and they are the only local store where I've been able to find them. Meijer was crowded. I found that the space on the shelf where they stock black-eyed peas was completely empty. So I went to ask someone at the customer service desk. That required about twenty minutes in line. They confirmed that they had no more black-eyed peas. So I went back and picked up a couple of bags of red beans, a couple of bags of split peas, and a couple of bags of pinto beans, in case Grace and our housemate wanted to do something different — a red beans and dirty rice thing, a split pea soup thing, or maybe even a refried beans thing. Then it took me another twenty or thirty

minutes to check out.

When I got back in the car, Grace had been sending me text messages. I had left my phone in the car, apparently under the ridiculously optimistic assumption that I'd be able to get in and out of Meijer quickly. Our housemate was making chili, and we were out of diced tomatoes. So I told Grace that I would get gas and try one more place — the little Mexican grocery near Textile off of Carpenter.

That little grocery has hundreds of bags of beans of different types, occupying yards and yards of shelf space. But there were only five cans of diced tomatoes in the whole store, and they were quite hard to find. I'm still confused as to how they could stock so many beans and so few tomatoes. Aren't tomatoes pretty much a staple of Mexican cooking? Anyway, I finally found the tomatoes, but they did not have black-eyed peas. So then, home. It had taken me three hours to run a few errands. I was pretty sick of the whole thing by the time I got home.

Our housemate was finishing up a pot of chili, made with ground bison, and a pot of packaged Velveeta macaroni and cheese, and assembled one of the Costco Caesar salads. I got the groceries put away, leaving the orange juice and La Croix water in my car to stay cold, since there wasn't room for it in the refrigerator, and I didn't want the kids to get into them until New Year's Day.

I think we're just going to have to order a case of some nice heirloom black-eyed peas.

The three older kids had an invitation to a New Year's Eve party — their piano teacher invited them. I really didn't want to go out again, but Grace was feeling well enough to drive them, so after dinner and after the kids did some cleanup, she ran them up to their piano teacher's house.

Millions

We watched a movie on our housemate's computer, plugged into our TV. It's one of Grace's favorite movies: *Millions* from 2004. I actually have a DVD of this movie on order and we should be getting it in the mail in a few days. Having read the description, it sounded like a pretty conventional children's morality tale.

Millions turned out to be something quite different. It's actually a much odder movie that partakes heavily of magical realism, a real genre-bender. It's sort of a blend of *Home Alone*, *Stand By Me*, and *Household Saints*; it also reminds me of the old TV show *Joan of Arcadia*, but with more visual pyrotechnics. It's really fun, and I enjoyed it more than I expected. The screenplay contains many clever little bits of setup that pay off later in the form of jokes playing out in the backgrounds, or in minor subplots. The movie's only real flaws center around its ending. It has a couple of endings, and they both feel a little gratuitous and unconvincing: one is a bit too maudlin, and one is a bit too joyful. The whole

storyline stretches credulity a little bit, but the meetings with saints are funny and moving, and the back-story about the crime that sets the plot in motion is funny and brilliant.

We'll have a DVD shortly, and we'll no doubt watch this one again.

Last Words

I will write a summary of quarter 4. I might write some kind of epilogue, or afterword to the whole year-long journal; I'm not sure yet. But it will be a 2019 project, for the "director's cut," or book form of the blog, rather than something completed in 2018. After today's post, I'm going to put this weekly format on hiatus, at least for a while. I will write differently in 2019. I'm not yet sure just what I'll write.

Even without the quarter 4 summary, I've exceeded 450,000 words. If I turn the text into an OpenOffice document with **pandoc**, it's over 780 pages long. I have started a project to go back and edit the posts, but haven't even completed editing the posts from the first quarter yet. It's **long!**

I had hopes that I'd end this year-long writing project with some sort of a bang — a long autobiographical essay, or a number of book or film reviews — basically, something to close it out well. Instead it feels like we are just barely managing to get the basics accomplished, and my free time is being squeezed down to nothing. The medications are helping my anxiety level, but also making me tired. Maybe I need to feel that tiredness for a while, and get some extra sleep.

That's a whimper to end the year on, not a bang. But maybe a whimper is just more realistic. The holidays have always been a hard time for me, and we have additional challenges this year. I remain hopeful that things will improve in 2019 — that we'll finally sell the house, that we'll find more help in practical matters, that our financial situation will stabilize, etc. I'm optimistic because I have to be. How does the saying go? "Hope is a discipline." I follow **@prisonculture** on Twitter and I think I might have first read this in her tweet:

Before i *[sic]* log off. One thing. Many years ago, I heard a nun who was giving a speech say "hope is a discipline." It stuck with me and became a sort of mantra for me. I understood her to be saying that hope is a practice.

I hope to keep practicing hope, and remember how richly we have been blessed.

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 Black Corridor* by Michael Moorcock (in the Gollancz omnibus volume *Traveling to Utopia*)

- *Millions* (2004 film)

Pittsfield Township, Michigan

Sunday, December 30th and Monday, December 31st, 2018

This work by Paul R. Potts is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International License. To view a copy of this license, visit <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/>.