

## 2018 Week 45: The Week Ending Saturday, November 10th

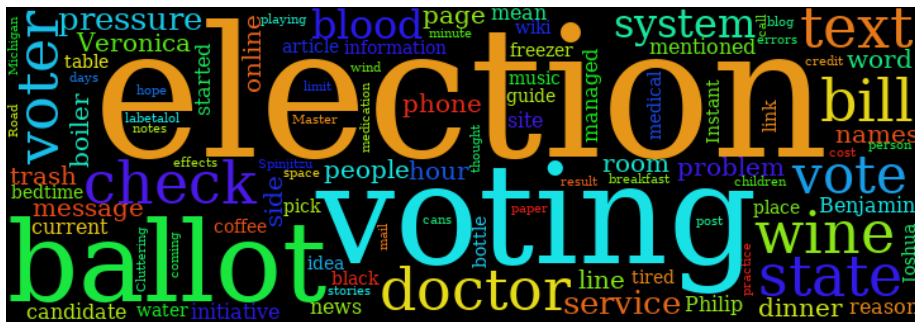


Figure 1: Word Cloud

### Sunday

This is week 45 and so I only have eight weeks to complete, and I will have finished out a whole year of daily blog posts, posted weekly. I've accumulated over 370,000 words so far, and so I think it's quite likely I'll top 400,000 words. Meanwhile as time allows I've been attempting to edit all the weekly posts. I've made some progress, but I haven't even finished January yet, so there's an awful lot of editing left.

### Veronica and Joshua's Shared Birthday Party

Yesterday I got some work done on the editing I mentioned, and updating old blog posts from 2003 about the Iraq War. I managed to get a brief nap in the late afternoon, although the kids kept coming in to check on me, which of course kept waking me up. The day was pretty chaotic. The kids wanted to watch videos, but they weren't getting chores done. We finally settled on having lamb steaks and salad for dinner, and then they finished their brownie cake project, the one that Veronica and Joshua had originally planned for their shared birthday, the 29th. They had wanted to make some kind of a thin cake out of brownie mix, and roll it up with whipped cream to form a kind of cake roll. That didn't seem

like it was going to work. So yesterday they did something simpler, which was to bake the brownie mix with chocolate chips in it, cut it up, and assemble it into a two-layer cake with whipped cream in the middle and on top. So we ate that for dessert and sang Happy Birthday to them, finally.

After dinner and cleanup it was getting pretty late. We had hoped to watch *Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find Them*, which I got them on DVD a couple of weeks ago. I still haven't had a chance to see it. But there was not enough time for a full-length movie. Instead I told them we could watch some shorter things on my laptop. So I brought my laptop upstairs to the bedroom and we watched the penultimate episode of season 3 of *Lego Ninjago: Masters of Spinjitzu*, called "Return of the Overlord." Then, we watched another episode of *Star Wars: The Clone Wars* season 1, "Destroy Malevolence." The Ninjago episode has a lot of silly references: to the Harry Potter books, to *The Lord of the Rings*, etc., while the Clone Wars episode has some scenes with C-3PO that are very much like the droid factory scene in *Star Wars: Episode II — Attack of the Clones*. And then it was about 1:00, and time for bed.

### **Success with Labetalol**

I took my blood pressure again before bed and it was pretty much where it has been all week. I had no caffeine to speak of yesterday, except for a little bit of chocolate, which suggests that caffeine isn't playing a big role in keeping my blood pressure high. So I decided to take 400mg of labetalol at bedtime instead of 200. When I measured it this morning, that had definitely done the trick. All 4 measurements had my numbers below 120 over 80, in the 110s and 70s. I definitely felt the side effects this morning, though — lot of random aches and pains and stiffness, and a feeling of tiredness. About five hours later, I just took it again, and it remains somewhat lowered — into the 120s and 80s. That's an improvement, although the diastolic was still creeping into the yellow zone for two of the four readings.

This might suggest I can't take labetalol only at night the way Grace does. For now, though, I don't really want to experiment with taking it during the day. So I will continue taking 400mg at bedtime and continue monitoring myself for a few more days until I can consult with a doctor. There might be something that I could use that has fewer side effects.

The time changed. We set the clocks back an hour, which ought to make it easier for me to get to work by 9:30 tomorrow instead of 10:30 or later. I really hope so. My schedule has been terribly screwed up for several months and my efforts to shift it back have in general been completely unsuccessful.

The kids wanted green tea, so we had a couple of pots of green tea. I made bacon and paleo pancakes (made from the Birch Benders mix) with chocolate chips added, since we are out of blueberries. Then I spent quite some time cleaning up dishes, scrubbing the stove and counters, hand-washing baking pans and frying pans, cleaning out the compost container, etc. As soon as I was all done, Grace

and the kids made celery, apple, and lime juice. So we all had juice. The kids are eating leftover cake. Grace and I are trying to stay off the carbs.

### ***Akhnaten* by Philip Glass**

This afternoon I'm listening to *Akhnaten*, Philip Glass's opera. *Akhnaten* comprises discs 14-15 of *The Complete Sony Recordings*. It's a relatively short opera, or at least the recording is relatively short, compared to 3 discs for *Satyagraha* and 4 discs for *Einstein on the Beach*. It's not really understandable without the translated libretto, as it is in "Egyptian, Akkadian, Hebrew, and language of the audience." But the music is gorgeous, and it has a powerful spiritual feel to it, even if the details of the story are not very clear. (It has something to do with the origin of monotheism, I think.) One wild aspect of the music is that I realized only after reading the notes that I was listening to a male singer's voice. Paul Esswood, who sings the title role, is a countertenor, singing in a vocal range that roughly matches a female contralto or mezzo-soprano range. His performance is pretty amazing.

We didn't manage to make it to the 11:00 Mass, although I was up and around. I'm not really sure what we'll get done today. I'm going to wind up the blog text for today and shift over to looking at my spreadsheets and bills, paying some medical co-pay bills and other bills as our balance allows. It may not.

Our housemate, her boyfriend, and her 3 children have all been out for most of the weekend, although they seem to have come back. We hardly speak, and still have no clear notion of when they might be able to move. We've also heard nothing at all from our realtor about our proposed lease agreement. Grace will go to Saginaw on Tuesday. She was not able to schedule the duct cleaning, but we want to get up there and check on the house and new furnace anyway.

### **Monday**

**About Last Night** Grace was out a lot longer than we expected. She was running errands trying to track down some medical supplies. Nothing that should have been that rare or difficult to obtain! But she wound up having to go several places, and still couldn't get what she needs, so she'll have to go back today. She was out so long, and used up so much of her limited store of energy, that when she got back, we had to give up on plans to go to Mass, and instead focus on simply trying to feed everyone and get everyone to bed at a reasonable time.

While Grace was out, I had set up my laptop on the dining table and gotten out all the various bills and related paperwork from my bag, including checkbooks, stamps, and envelopes. I fought my way through the process of updating several spreadsheets and paying several bills online, including an online water bill for the old house in Saginaw, an online medical bill (which, confusingly, seems to have been adjusted, so I owed less than the paper bill), a medical bill by check, and a \$500 payment to Early Bird Lawn Services — they are the folks who did

the plaster repair and painting in our family room. This check finishes paying off the \$3,500 we owe them for that work. We still owe them another \$120 or so for actual lawn services. We were clear with them when they did the work that we were planning to pay them in part with money we got back from our insurance company, and they have been great about allowing us to pay them over several months.

### **“Let’s Torment Dad!”**

I say that I “fought my way through the process” because it seems like as soon as Grace leaves, the kids all begin a game of “let’s torment Dad.” They immediately start getting into the refrigerator, and into the kitchen cabinets, and turning on the stove, and playing at the sinks, and dropping glasses and plates, and getting into screaming fights with each other, and slamming the cabinets in the boys’ bedroom, and locking each other out of various rooms, and pounding on the doors. I do my best to tune out any noises that don’t require actual intervention on my part, but... this is so hard. I am glad that I had been taking blood pressure medication.

After Grace got home, she and I managed to have a brief sit-down and I walked her through the current situation with our credit cards, overdraft protection line of credit, and our two checking accounts. There’s a cash-flow crunch coming up over the next couple of weeks. After spending \$3,000 on the new furnace I have a new debt, the overdraft protection line of credit, and the first required minimum payment is coming up next week, in the same week that I have to pay one credit card bill and the unknown cost of our gas boiler service, scheduled for Wednesday. If we make it through this bottleneck without any big unexpected expenses, like emergency car repair, we should be OK again, for a while. Well, if we define “OK” as “limping along spending far too much every month and with no emergency savings to speak of.” Last spring I adjusted my state withholding to improve the situation with my 2018 state taxes, but I won’t know how well that worked until we actually file them.

After I ran through the money situation, we tried to figure out how to manage some things coming up on our respective schedules. Tomorrow is election day. Next week I have two doctor appointments, the first one at 8:00 on Monday morning, the second one an ophthalmology follow-up at 1:45 p.m. Thursday afternoon. Both are going to require me to put in extra hours at work to make up the time, so I can continue to avoid using up any of my remaining seven vacation days and one discretionary day. Did I mention again that we are having a new baby in mid-December? Or, maybe earlier.

Grace has been taking some classes to help her work on some specific skills with Benjamin. These, unfortunately, partially collide with Joshua and Pippin’s choir practices. So we are trying to work out how I can get from my office to downtown Saline by 5:45 to pick up the boys on certain days. To do that I have to drive out of the parking lot by 5:15, when I normally wouldn’t leave

work until at least 7:15. So that's more schedule-juggling to work out. And it turns out that the next class is next Thursday, and will be shortly after I've had my eyes dilated. I think I can drive back to my office after that, with my sunglasses on, since it is just a quarter mile or so, but I would not trust myself to jump into rush-hour traffic with my pupils all screwed up. So Grace will have to work something out while I stay at work at least until my eyes have returned to normal, which might mean I'll be driving home quite late. I hope I can at least focus on a computer screen. Maybe with my sunglasses on.

Really I'm stressing about all this because I want to help Grace as much as I can, but I also don't want to rack up a whole string of "I have to leave early today" and "I'll be in late today" and "I'll be out for part of the afternoon" messages at work. I just try to avoid ever being the "seems like he's gone a lot" guy. Or, to put it another way, I know it will make me *very anxious* to have to be "seems like he's gone a lot" guy at work and so I want to avoid it for that reason, whether it really bothers my boss or not; it bothers *me*.

While we were finishing up our meeting and deflecting random interruptions, Benjamin did another one of his bizarre Benjamin things — apparently he suddenly decided that he wanted to drink some of the contents of the half-empty bottle of white wine that was on the counter. I don't think he actually drank more than a very small amount, but he spilled wine everywhere. Grace made him clean it up. It wasn't really within a child's reach" in the normal sense of the word. It was at the back of the counter, along the wall. But he was apparently very committed to using a stool and climbing onto the counter to get it. This is just not behavior we've seen from any of his five older siblings. Once again, Benjamin is... special. I guess we can't keep any alcohol on the counter, or kitchen cupboards, and probably not in the refrigerator either, which is going to be kind of a pain in the ass when we have holiday meals and open bottles of wine. I guess I have to keep everything locked up in the basement and hope he doesn't shoulder-surf the key code.

We made the Jiffy Mix corn muffin mix in the cast-iron pan as usual, and an Instant Pot of black-eyed peas. Because she needed to sit down, Grace handed out assignments: I got the cornbread. Joshua wanted to help, so I had him break and mix up the eggs. Veronica got the black-eyed peas. Grace gave her pretty clear instructions, but she didn't quite follow them. She said something like "add enough water to cover the ham hock — it should be about a quart." Veronica did add enough water to cover the ham hock, but she stuck the ham hock in the Instant Pot so it was standing upright, not lying on its side. She added about three quarts of water, apparently not understanding that the "it should be about a quart" part represented a *limit* — Grace was really telling her not to use more than a quart of water.

So, we had a thin black-eyed pea soup for dinner.

## Sensory Overload

Then, I got into an angry state because when the table was set and everything was ready to go onto the table, I went over to the CD player and put on *Akhmaten*, with the volume set low, to listen to during dinner. As soon as I pressed play and the music started, Veronica began practicing some Christmas music on our piano. I was angry that she was playing right over the music. She responded that she had started playing before I started the music. Joshua then jumped in to also insist that she had started playing before I started the music.

I had to take a time out downstairs because I was too angry to be civil at the dinner table with two of my children.

Grace came down after a few minutes to see if I could come up and eat. She pointed out that the issue wasn't really whether I had started the music first or Veronica had started playing — the issue was that there was food waiting to go to the table, the kids had been told that there was food waiting to take to the table, and there was no conceivable world in which Veronica should have concluded that it was time to practice piano.

I think I was getting touchy for several reasons — the obvious reasons, “my children screwed up a nice dinner and now they are being obnoxious, lying assholes,” but some not-so-obvious reasons as well. It had been an extra-long day, due to the time change; I had not eaten anything in about seven hours; we had blown so much time that it wasn't going to be possible for us to finish a podcast; and, of course, my many money-related and time-related worries. Then, another possible reason: the side effects of the blood pressure medication.

## The Fucking Election

There's also the fucking election. I have tried to write up some notes on the candidates and ballot proposals. I tried to print out the ballot from the State of Michigan's web site. It comes out in pretty much illegibly tiny type. Michigan Radio (the NPR station) keeps talking about their voter guide. But if you go to their web site, the “voter guide” is just a list of interviews and news stories about the candidates that you can listen to. So if I had a whole quiet day, I could listen to these twenty or thirty audio files and make notes and that would give me some information about the various candidates and ballot initiatives, but it's nothing I could download or print out and quickly review, or take with me. The League of Women Voters has a ballot guide, but it's not printable, and it just shows names and parties, nothing more than the information that is on the ballot itself. It's also incomplete — it doesn't even show two of the three ballot initiatives that are on this year's ballot!

There's no “local paper” with an election guide. There used to be a printed Ann Arbor News, but it hasn't existed in a long time, and there's not a paper specific to Pittsfield Township. So it's the night before the election and I know next to nothing about most of the candidates. At least I have managed to read up a bit

on the ballot initiatives.

I've been hoping I could sit down again and have an uninterrupted chat with Grace, because she knows more about them than I do. Even thirty minutes with her and the ballot and a notepad would be a huge help to me. But I don't think we're going to have a chance. I will try to get up and out early, so I can get to the polling site before work. Without having really finished my "homework," tomorrow morning I will probably be going into the voting booth quoting Bill O'Reilly, "Fuckin' thing! We'll do it live!". I'm just hoping that there isn't an hours-long line.

We really could use early voting, or at least no-excuse absentee voting. I totally would have used that this year.

I comfort myself with the words of Chris Hedges:

Trump is a clownish and embarrassing tool of the kleptocrats. His faux populism is a sham. Only the rich like his tax cuts, his refusal to raise the minimum wage and his effort to destroy Obamacare. All he has left is hate. And he will use it. Which is not to say that, if only to throw up some obstacle to Trump, you shouldn't vote for the Democratic scum, tools of the war industry and the pharmaceutical and insurance industry, Wall Street and the fossil fuel industry, as opposed to the Republican scum. But Democratic control of the House will do very little to halt our descent into corporate tyranny, especially with another economic crisis brewing on Wall Street. The rot inside the American political system is deep and terminal.

So, there's that. I'm voting because I believe one should vote. I'm not very optimistic about the "blue wave" — first of all, I'm far from certain it will happen. And second of all, even if it does happen, I don't expect much change.

We ate dinner.

And Grace chewed out Veronica again, because when she served herself, she scooped out the beans and meat and left most of the broth. She got a lecture on how we all have to eat our cooking mistakes — if she makes watery beans, we all have to eat watery beans. She can't pick out the beans and leave the rest even more watery for the rest of us.

### **"The Stone Sky" by Italo Calvino**

We tried to get to bed early. I read Benjamin a few more of the comics from *Super Scratch Programming Adventure!* and then I read Sam and Joshua a story from *The Complete Cosmicomics* by Italo Calvino (it's been on the bottom of the book pile, unfinished, for too long). I chose the story called "The Stone Sky," in which Qfwfq lives inside the Earth, and regards living on the *surface* of the Earth, effectively inhabiting a two-dimensional space instead of a three-dimensional sphere, as far inferior. It's an interesting story, especially in light of the fact

that we now know that lots of organisms live miles below the Earth's surface. I don't think his notion of the Earth as containing a multi-layer liquid core is fully up-to-date with current scientific speculation, but that isn't really important. And I also found that apparently Jane Grant published an article in *Technoetic Arts: A Journal of Speculative Research* that refers to Calvino's story, so I have requested the full text of the article via ResearchGate. We'll see if I get it!

After the story we were on track to go right to bed, and be in bed with the lights off before midnight. But a certain little girl had other ideas. And a certain cadre of Potts boys aided and abetted her. While I was reading the story, Grace allowed Elanor to play with her phone. This kept her quiet. But somehow, she ran off with it. When the story was done, Grace unsurprisingly wanted to find her phone. It was nowhere to be found. She got up out of bed and went from room to room looking in the diaper pail, the trash bin, the toilet, under the bed, under bookshelves — basically, looking in all the places that we thought a little girl might be likely to stick a phone. I poked around a little bit. Neither of us could find it. So I was mad at Grace because the last time she lost a phone like this, I had to buy her a new one. So I went to bed angry, which is never a good idea, and set my alarm for 8:00.

### **Time, Changed**

I thought that setting the clocks back an hour would mean that if I just got up and went to work at the same time I usually do, where by "same time" I mean "time of day" rather than the time the clock says, I'd be get to work an hour earlier than I've been getting to work — which would be great. But this didn't really happen. I got up when my alarm went off, got a bath, and didn't *feel* like I was wasting any more time than usual, went for a breakfast BLT sandwich at what *seemed* like the usual time — and proceeded to get to work at the same clock time as I was last week, which means I got there roughly an hour later, relative to sunrise and sunset.

That's... disappointing. And frustrating. And all the rest.

I also managed to pick a fight with Grace before I left, which wasn't really my intention, but somehow that became important to me. I got enough sleep, in theory. I did not feel good this morning. I think the blood pressure medication is doing its job but making me feel physically beat up, which is having a negative effect on my mood. I was tired and achey today. I had coffee at breakfast, and then I left the office at lunchtime, to go get a grilled cheddar and Branston pickle sandwich and another coffee. I usually don't need a second caffeine hit to stay awake, but today I did.

I have apologized by text message to Grace and I need to apologize again in person and try to make up with her.



## Meet the Parents

It looks like this weekend I succeeded in pissing off my father and stepmother, or at least dismaying them. I guess I had not mentioned to them that we were having another baby, and they happened to see it in a note I wrote about a podcast posting.

Last time I deliberately kept them out of the loop. I was tired of getting lectures from my father on how I was being irresponsible by having children. He had a tendency to call me up to say things like “you should look into whether the state might have a free program for vasectomies for people like you who have been repeatedly unemployed.” So I didn’t let him know about Elanor. We actually created a closed group on Facebook where Grace could talk with her friends about her pregnancy and share pictures and news.

This time, the secrecy wasn’t really all that deliberate. At least, I didn’t really mean to keep it a secret indefinitely, although because I mostly have been talking with my Dad about problems like the house, I haven’t really wanted to talk with him about having another baby, too; I didn’t want that to be a “problem magnifier,” if that makes sense.

Honestly, I’m not entirely sure I know all the reasons I’ve kept it quiet on Facebook and not told my father and stepmother. One of them is that this is a late, high-risk pregnancy. I didn’t want to wind up grieving along with everyone we know, if things went badly. I also haven’t shared it on Facebook because I haven’t *been using* Facebook much. But I think mostly it had just become a habit not to talk to my parents about Grace’s pregnancies. I have mentioned it in this blog, although I’m not sure at exactly what point I first mentioned it. Grace and I have mentioned it in the podcast, although again I’m not sure I know exactly when we first mentioned it.

I guess sometimes I just assume that if anyone wants to know what is going on with me, they will read my blog, and/or listen to my podcast. I mean, I don’t think anyone can reasonably accuse me of under-sharing, right?

This situation probably sounds odd to people who have closer relationships with their parents. It seems perfectly normal to me to have to limit what I share with my father. And one of the reasons I think Grace and I get along well is that she had a similar relationship with her mother.

So my stepmother’s calling Grace, and leaving messages, and my father’s calling me, and leaving messages, and neither of us really wants to get an earful of — whatever. Disappointment, frustration, even expressions of support. Mostly I think we both feel like we’re just barely scraping along, and don’t have the energy for anything else. Not one thing.

### Maybe It's Not So Bad?

I have worked over the spreadsheets again, and it seems like if I transfer out less money from my next paycheck, and am able to hold onto most of that and use it to pay the credit card bill and line of credit payment next week, and the boiler service isn't too expensive, we might squeeze through the bottleneck I mentioned above without overdrawing our checking account again. I might have to put tomorrow's Costco run on the credit card, though.

I still want to watch *Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find Them* with the kids. If there is enough money, it would be nice to take the older ones to see the sequel, which opens November 15th. Maybe the weekend after Thanksgiving?

They were doing some kind of work on the heating system in my office today. I think they replaced some blowers or something. When they cranked it up and we had warm air coming out of the air vents, it stank of burning oil. I hope that goes away quickly.

I'm still driving around with the dishwasher in the back of my car.

Veronica and Sam keep leaving my bike and her bike outside. They are more-or-less under our overhanging roof, but that isn't enough to keep them from getting wet when it rains.

When I got home tonight, as I turned into our driveway I noticed that my kids had brought the recycling and trash bins down to Crane Road where they are supposed to be, for tomorrow morning's trash pickup. I also found a wet plastic grocery bag with a few beer cans in it, in the middle of the driveway.

Grace tells me that today she asked both our houseguest and her boyfriend to take care of some of the cigarette packs and beer cans that she's found in the driveway and in the woods along the driveway. We've certainly mentioned this to them before many times, starting shortly after they arrived. I'm not sure just how that bag of cans got there, but I suspect it got there the same way the cans in the woods and the liquor bottles down by Crane Road got there — I think our housemate's boyfriend just throws cans and bottles out of his car, either as he's leaving for work, or coming back from work. I can't prove that, but they didn't get there by themselves. The kids tell me the bag wasn't there when they took the trash bins down to Crane Road, and after they left, but must have appeared when they returned.

I had the kids walk the bag down to the trash. If I find beer cans left around the house I normally rinse them out and return them with our returnables. But I wasn't feeling up to angrily sorting through a wet bag of beer cans, with or without beer left in them, with or without cigarette butts in them as well.

I'd like for there to be some meaning to it *other* than him just giving us a passive-aggressive "fuck you," for asking him to recycle and pick up his trash. But I'm not sure there is one.

## Tuesday

We had a very late dinner last night. It was after 11. Grace tried to follow the instructions in the Instant Pot for cooking a whole thawed chicken. It didn't go well. I don't think that thing puts out nearly enough heat. Maybe the instructions are calibrated for much smaller chickens? Anyway, she had to roast it in the oven for so long, she may as well not have used the Instant Pot at all. And after taking it out once and finding that it was really not done, she stuck it back in and let it cook until it was *definitely* done. Which made it kind of over-done.

We ate that with salad and some leftover sliced sweet potatoes. It was so late that our baby girl Elanor fell asleep while still sitting in her high chair, with her little head resting on her neatly-folded forearms. It was almost too cute to bear.

We had no story last night. I measured my blood pressure before bed, and the labetalol seemed to still be keeping my blood pressure at a reasonable level. So I'm continuing with that strategy of 400mg at bedtime until I can consult with a doctor. Grace went through three other medications and for her, the side effects of the other ones were all worse. But she and I might respond to them differently. I'm willing to try something different, as long as it does the job and reduces my risk of further eye damage, and other damage.

Grace is traveling to Saginaw today. We set the alarm for 7:00 a.m. I got in the shower and out by 7:25 and while Grace bathed, made coffee. We didn't have any ground coffee left in the house, but we did have some instant coffee. So I made coffee with chocolate chips and coconut milk. The bad news is I think the instant coffee gave me heartburn. It's been in there a while. I also made a small batch of paleo pancakes so that I wouldn't need to get breakfast out this morning. I ate half of them and left the other half for Grace, kissed her goodbye, and went to vote.

On my way out the door I noticed that our housemate and her boyfriend had left a big bag of trash sitting where the trash bins usually are. (We roll the trash bins down to Crane Road every Monday night, as trash is picked up early Tuesday mornings. It's been that way every week since she moved in, in March, and we've told her about it many times. I did not want to leave a torn bag of trash sitting in our driveway, where it might be ripped open by animals. So I gritted my teeth, and put the dirty, foul-smelling trash bag in the back of my car, and drove it down to the end of the road to put it in the bin. Fortunately the trash had not been picked up yet. But it gives me the opportunity to get pissed off all over again, as their trash is full of recyclable containers and returnable cans; I've talked myself blue in the face about that particular issue.

## Voting

My polling place on Textile Road is very close to my house. Parking was a chaotic mess. There was a half-empty parking lot conveniently located on one

side of the building, but folks insisted on parking on the grass, in the driveway, in fire lanes, on the edge of the road — places that are *definitely* not safe for parking. I'm always dismayed by the incontrovertible evidence that people will take the slightest excuse to behave like privileged, anti-social assholes. Somebody was likely to get hit by a car in the parking lot. There really needed to be an officer on-site directing traffic.

I was able to get in and vote and get out in only about fifteen or twenty minutes. I posted some notes on Twitter; here they are, lightly edited:

My precinct in Pittsfield Twp. was busy but lines weren't long. I was in and out in 15 minutes. I'm not too confident about the new scanning machines though. They are supposedly made to suck your ballot right out of the privacy sleeve, but the sleeves don't fit as described.

I had four ballot initiatives. The best-known one is "A proposed initiated law to authorize and legalize possession, use and cultivation of marijuana products by individuals who are at least 21 years of age and older, and commercial sales of marijuana through state-licensed retailers." I'm not really happy about the wording which includes a 10-ounce limit and requires "amounts over 2.5 ounces be secured in locked containers," and I think that may be enforced abusively. But I am in general in favor of legalization. I think anyone who wants to ought to be able to grow any kind of hemp plant, with or without THC, and create their own derivative products from them, either for recreational use or therapeutic use or cooking, or cosmetics, or even to make paper or rope. Whatever. And so I'm not really keen on the 12-plant limit; I can grow unlimited tomatoes on my property (well, however many I have space for) to make tomato paste. And I don't think a 12-plant limit makes sense along with a 10-ounce limit. I mean, how much in ounces can 12 plants produce? Also, I can sell the tomatoes I grow on my property, and there are cottage food laws that would allow me to sell jam or tomato paste. So I'm not keen on being restricted from selling hemp-infused green tomatillo jelly or whatever the hell I want to create. But it's a start.

There's another initiative: "A proposal to authorize automatic and Election Day voter registration, no-reason absentee voting, and straight ticket voting; and add current legal requirements for military and overseas voting and post-election audits to the Michigan Constitution." I did vote yes for this but again it's a mixed bag. This one initiative mixes up a whole lot of things that I don't really think should be all lumped together.

I'm highly in favor of no-reason absentee voting. I'm highly in favor of election day registration. Our housemate just asked my wife *yes-*

*terday* for a ride so she could register to vote, because apparently she only just now realized that an election was about to happen. The problem is that MI registration closed a month ago. So she was disenfranchised because she didn't do it earlier; automatic or Election Day registration would have solved that problem for her. But straight-ticket voting is not something I'm in favor of. It encourages partisanship and, in my opinion, reduces the level of voter participation. So if those things were separate, I'd vote for a couple of them and against straight ticket voting. MI has "motor voter" registration which meant when I changed my address with the Secretary of State's office, to get a sticker for my driver license, I was automatically registered at my new address. But there are plenty of people who don't drive and/or own cars.

There's also a proposal to create a citizen's commission on redistricting. I think that's a good idea although the actual proposal is complicated.

And finally this last one is a perfect example of how these things are often written. The full text reads, and I quote:

"To renew the millage expiring after December 31, 2019, shall the limitation on the amount of taxes which may be imposed each year for all purposes on real and tangible personal property in Washtenaw County be increased as provided in Section 6, Article IX of the Constitution of the State of Michigan and the Board of Commissioners of the County be authorized to levy a tax not to exceed one quarter of one mill, reduced by the Headlee Amendment to 0.2314 (\$0.2314 per \$1,000.00 of state equalized valuation) on the taxable value of such property for a period of ten years beginning with the levy made on December 1, 2020 (which will generate estimated revenues of \$3.84 million in the first year) for the purpose of acquiring, developing, operating and maintaining park lands and recreational facilities for County citizens?"

Can you diagram that sentence? I think removing all the qualifiers you get something like "shall the limitation (on taxes)... be increased... to acquire, develop, operate, and maintain park lands and recreational facilities?" But even the way it is about raising the *limit* on taxes, instead of saying very simply that it will raise property taxes to fund parks, is confusing as hell. Imagine trying to parse that if you read at, say, a fourth-grade level. You are just able to read *James and the Giant Peach*, although you have to sound out some words.

Remember, "only 7 percent of students in the Detroit Public Schools

Community District can read at or above grade level. Nearly half of all adults in Detroit are functionally illiterate meaning they cannot read their child a bedtime story even if they had a book and wanted to read to them.” (Source: this article from the Detroit News.) Imagine being one of those functionally illiterate people and trying to parse that ballot initiative. You’d give up, and either pick “yes” or “no” randomly, or leave that ballot initiative unmarked.

Anyway, that’s my voting story for today. As is often the case in midterm elections, to me the initiatives and local elections for things like County Commissioner and Park Commissioner are much more interesting than the Congressional election. And one person like me can have a much more profound effect on one of these small elections for positions like judges and school board members.

One last comment. It used to be that you could get voter guides in your local (printed) paper. Trying to find a voter guide in Washtenaw County is hard. You can download your ballot from the State site, but it is confusing as it removes the boxes that group candidates, and it is a PDF in something like 2-point type — that’s almost illegible. And it has nothing on the candidates but name and party affiliation. Michigan Radio (our network of NPR stations) has been advertising a voter guide on their web site, but if you go their web site and find the link that says “2018 Midterm Election – Catch Up on Michigan Radio’s Coverage Here — Read up on the issues and candidates before Nov. 6 — Learn More,” there is not actually much to read, and nothing that is downloadable, or printable. It is mostly just a list of all their recent radio stories about the election, including interviews with some candidates. It would take, by my estimate, about two hours and forty-five minutes to listen to all the radio stories on that page, and you’d have to take notes if you wanted to extract some kind of “crib sheet” that you could take with you to your polling place.

The League of Women Voters provides a thing that will show the races and initiatives on your ballot, but it is not printable or downloadable. It’s an interactive online-only thing that lets you expand one topic at a time. Again, you’d need to take paper notes.

An aside: Vote.org, which has been harassing me with several e-mail messages a day since I accidentally clicked on a link to their site in order to check my registration, has a “what’s on your ballot” page. But it’s strange — it basically wants you to check all the boxes as if you were voting. I fear that is very confusing — less-informed voters might think that *this is voting*, and I’m also not comfortable telling a web site how I plan to vote. There’s a feature to send this to your phone, but that assumes your phone is online and knows what to

do with a QR code (my LG Smartphone doesn't seem to do anything with it), or that you can send yourself the link and open it on our phone. The links for "more info" all go to Ballotopedia anyway. So does Ballotopedia make it easier? Yes, sort of — it will generate something you could print, although when I tried it, I got 13 pages of mostly white space, as it removed all the photos, and again it is really just a list of candidate names, with nothing about their platforms. We really have lost something when there's no easy way to get your hands on some kind of a *printed* voter guide that contains candidate platforms. Ideally there would be more than one, so you could choose your trusted source.

Back to my rant on Twitter:

My final point: the loss of this kind of easily accessible printed information is not accidental. D's and R's both seem perfectly comfortable with these factors that discourage people without high educational attainment, flexible schedules, and research skills. So go vote, but recognize that by design what you can affect by voting is very limited, and that our system is telling millions of our fellow citizens, in lots of subtle and not-so-subtle ways, that voting isn't really *for* them. Fight *that*. Kthxbye!

One more note. According to Ballotopedia, the "grade levels" required to understand the 3 statewide MI proposals are between 21 and 23 years of schooling (16 would be a Bachelor's degree, 18 a Master's degree, and 21 to 23, a Ph.D. or post-doc.)

One nice thing about getting out to vote is that I got into work much earlier.

Tonight I need to do some rearranging in the utility room in the basement, to ensure that the person coming tomorrow to service our boiler has some room to work and access to the sink. And then I can spend half of the next day worrying about how much work is needed and how much it will cost.

I'm hoping that any news from our old house up in Saginaw is good news. No more disasters, please! No break-ins, no squatters, no plumbing leaks, no more contractors who cashed our checks but didn't do their jobs!

### **Adaptations of Works by Stanislaw Lem**

I ran across this article about things that Stanislaw Lem predicted in his writing. It's not a terrific article, but it refers to some stories and movies that I had not heard of, including this one: *The Congress* (the 2013 film starring Robin Wright). I remember seeing a trailer for this movie, but never saw the movie itself, and pretty much forgot it existed. Apparently it is inspired by Lem's book *The Futurological Congress*, one of my favorite Lem novels.

I should watch it! And I should re-read the novel! And *that* reminds me that I'd love to be able to buy a full set of DVDs of *Ijon Tichy: Space Pilot*. But unfortunately I believe only the second season has English subtitles available.

Apparently there's another movie, called *1*, (yes, just the numeral one), inspired by Lem's *One Human Minute*.

### **The New Haruki Murakami Novel**

I'm a big fan of Haruki Murakami. His novel *The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle* is, to me, a modern classic. So I have been curious about the upcoming release of the English translation of Murakami's new novel, *Killing Commendatore*.

It's out now. There's a copy of my local independent bookstore, Nicola's Books. I could have bought it. I didn't. It's 674 pages. It has an elaborate die-cut cover. I just felt that maybe it wasn't the right time to take it home. Maybe I would wait until a paperback release. Or something. In the nineties, I eagerly snapped up every translated Murakami novel as they became available, including some of his lesser works like *Dance, Dance, Dance*. Those hardcovers are scarce and collectible now, but sadly I did not keep all mine. And I'm not that twenty-something guy anymore. I just don't think I'm up to reading *Killing Commendatore* anytime soon. Maybe next year. I didn't really love *1Q84* or *Colorless Tsukuru Tazaki and His Years of Pilgrimage*. Maybe I just don't like Murakami's stylistic choices any more. Or maybe his later stuff just isn't as good.

Meanwhile, I think I still have an unread copy of the 2015 release *Wind/Pinball*, which contains his first two novels. I should dig out that volume and see if I like early Murakami better than late Murakami.

### **Wednesday**

I left work about 6:30 and made a trip to Costco. I brought home 3 bags of water softener salt. I will need to restock for the winter, since I don't really want to be carrying bags of salt in January. So I'll pick up 3 bags a week for the next few weeks. We seem to go through about a bag a week. I also picked up a bag of frozen tamales for us to try. They are made without lard, which is not a selling point for us. I also got some sausages, some rolls, some sliced roast beef, a chicken pot pie, and a few other ready-made or nearly ready-made items, to try to make dinnertimes easier for us over the next few days.

I haven't even managed to get the dishwasher out of the back of my car, and my friends are also replacing their freezer, and offered me the old one. Yes, we could definitely use it! So I need to figure out how to transport it. Our friend Joy has a tentative plan to visit starting tomorrow, and she has a van, so we might be able to pick it up in her van. My Element can hold a lot of things, but I think it is not long enough for this. The real bottleneck, though, is that we need to do further rearranging in the garage.



## Old House News

Grace was in Saginaw yesterday with the kids, to vote in person and to check on things in the old house. The new furnace is up and running and she was satisfied with the installation job, although someone — and we're not sure who, honestly — knocked some kind of hole in the ceiling in the upstairs hall. So that's annoying. But I'm just glad that there is a working furnace in the house.

## 2017 Arcturos Pinot Gris

We ate steak and salad last night and I opened another “experimental” bottle of wine to taste. This one was a 2017 Arcturos Pinot Gris from Black Star Farms. We know Black Star Farms mostly from their delicious late-harvest Riesling, a sweet dessert wine. This Pinot Gris is dry. It's *almost* really good.

Wineries in the Traverse City region have been stepping up their game in recent years, to the point where some of their wines, like the Rieslings, and some sparkling whites, can pretty much go head-to-head with any wines of those styles. This one can't, quite. But it is still a very nice wine. It definitely has that quality they call “drinkability.” Steak was not the best thing to taste it with, but it matched well with the salad, which had a tart dressing and crumbled blue cheese on it. Grace and I won't make it one of the special wines we serve at our Thanksgiving or Christmas meals, but we both agreed it would be a definite step up from an average inexpensive white table wine. So I plan to try other bottlings, as I come across them in the future. I expect Traverse City wines to get better and better over the next few years. And if things go better for us, financially, in 2019, we might be able to get up to that area on a vacation.

I was quite tired last night. Taking the medication only at bedtime, my blood pressure looks great in the morning, but is creeping up a bit by the next bedtime. It's still better than it was without taking the medication. I've been tired during the day, so I'm not keen on trying to take a second dose; I'm afraid it would put me right to sleep. Also, it has strange side effects; I can tell it is kicking in because my scalp starts itching. So I am currently planning to stick with the 400mg once daily until I can consult with a doctor Monday morning. I just have to hold out on this regimen for a few more days. My bottle of CBD oil is almost gone, and I don't think I will get another one. It seems like before long I ought to be able to make my own.

I tried to read a bedtime story. I had selected the second book in the Earthsea Trilogy by Ursula LeGuin, *The Tombs of Atuan*. I gave up after only a page or so, because the kids weren't paying attention. Instead I had Joshua finish reading *George's Marvelous Medicine*. The ending of the story is kind of dark — George's grandmother shrinks so much that she disappears. It raises, as we say, “many troubling questions.”

I had my alarm set for 7:00 again and managed to get up and out. I have asked Grace to rearrange things in the utility room because today is the day that the

boiler guy is supposed to come and service our boiler. If all goes well we might be able to get the heat working! Over breakfast at Harvest Moon I managed to read a few more pages of *Moderan*.

### **Boiler Service Fail**

I got word from Grace that the boiler service company didn't show up. Somehow, they say, they "failed to put us on the schedule." So she is calling around... but we already had to wait several weeks for this (supposed) appointment. So this is not good news. How much longer will we have to wait? Can we turn the heat on even if the system is leaking or low on water? (I've been thinking that would be a bad idea.) Shit.

### **"The Island" by Peter Watts**

It occurred to me that I had intended to read "The Island," the only remaining story in the Sunflower cycle that I haven't yet read.

At least, I thought that I hadn't read it. As I read it, I remembered reading it before. It's in my copy of *The New Space Opera 2*, the one I didn't want to try to dig out of my piles of book boxes. I must have read it in that volume. It was the first of the Sunflower cycle stories, but it has extra resonance if you've read more of them: chronologically, it refers to events that are described in *The Freeze-Frame Revolution*.

It's a long story, but not as long as a novella. You might call it a "novelette." Judged on the scale of the depth and complexity of its science-fictional ideas, it's a pretty damned thought-provoking story. And it's not just a story of ideas. There are some dark and emotionally charged moments between the characters. I'm not going to say more than that; go read it, if you want to see an example of how good a recent science fiction story can be. (2009 is still recent, right?)

### **Thursday**

I left work at about 6:20 and so was home earlier than usual, even after getting bogged down in nearly-stopped traffic on I-94 E. The Costco pot pie was ready, and Grace had also made a smaller pot pie of her own out of leftover steak. Grace's was better!

Costco seems to be constantly tinkering with the ingredients in their pot pie. Recently it seems that they must have changed the kind of fat they use in the crust, and so the last couple have given the grown-ups painful heartburn. We may have to stop buying them. That would be a big pain because this is a "get out of jail free" card we can play during the work week, a dinner we don't have to do much work to prepare, and which everyone will eat without complaint. Or, at least, a dinner everyone used to eat without complaint.

## Plan B for the Boiler

Yesterday afternoon Grace managed to find someone else to make a service call for the boiler. Someone is supposed to show up tomorrow as early as 8:00. We still needed to rearrange some things in the utility room in the basement so that a service person would have access to the sink and room to work around the boiler. Grace had not managed to muster the energy to do that, but by the time I was home yesterday I was also quite tired. I also didn't want to be the one to mess with our friend Joy's things. So she agreed to do it while we watched some videos. I was considering watching the new *Doctor Who* episode and then *Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find Them*. That seemed like a lot to fit in to one evening, and I was already tired, but we were ready by 8:00 p.m., and I still hadn't seen *Fantastic Beasts*, so was willing to give it a try. But Veronica had missed "Rosa." I can't remember why she missed it — maybe she was at a youth group event? Anyway, she wanted to watch "Rosa." So we watched "Rosa" again (actually, I worked on editing more of the first quarter of this journal while the kids watched it). There was leftover popcorn and Halloween candy. Then we watched "The Tsuranga Conundrum."

## *Doctor Who* Series 11, Episode 5: "The Tsuranga Conundrum"

We all felt that this was a pretty entertaining episode, although a couple of things felt a little too familiar. Having everyone injured and knocked unconscious in the opening scene, then waking up on board a spaceship? That felt an awful lot like the opening moments of "The Ghost Monument." There are some wasted bits and pieces in this story. The Doctor and her companions were missing implanted medical information chips. Valuable seconds of story time are wasted while the characters discuss how the doctors on the ship need this information so that they can properly treat the Doctor and her companions. I thought they were setting up plot gags in which they were given the *wrong* treatment. But nothing at all seemed to come of it. That just seems sloppy to me.

The little monster, one of the Pting, is pretty hilarious. I thought they were going to blow the thing up, and was pleasantly surprised that they didn't. The side stories are fun. The use of a pregnant male character, as an opportunity for Ryan to unpack his feelings about his father, works moderately well, although it made me wonder at such an implausible species, requiring the baby's two umbilical cords be cut simultaneously? (And — having cut umbilical cords — they are way, way tougher to cut through than that.

The subplot involving war hero Eve Cicero, played by Suzanne Packer, is moving, but also a bit troubling. She is traveling with her brother, and her "consort," an android named Ronan. After she dies, Ronan says that he will be shut down. That seems like the kind of thing that the Doctor would traditionally be opposed to, and fight. And sentient sex slaves? That also seems like a bad thing. I'm also not really pleased the way that another black woman found her highest calling in sacrificing herself for others. Not that this isn't sometimes called for,

but we've had Grace O'Brien, and now Eve Cicero. I'm beginning to think that the showrunner has a black woman problem. Or, at least, a living black woman problem. I'm gonna bet that there will be another one. And shall we place a bet that these characters wind up somehow connected and resurrected in the season finale? Maybe they activate wonder-triplet powers and become Voltron or something, I don't know... but I fear it.

### **Ninjago: Masters of Spinjitzu, Season 2, Episode 13: "Rise of the Spinjitzu Master"**

After those two episodes of *Doctor Who*, Benjamin really, really wanted to watch a Lego Ninjago episode. It wasn't really that late yet, so we obliged him, and watched the last episode of season 2, "Rise of the Spinjitzu Master." This one seemed to channel some bits and pieces from the final battle in *Avatar: The Last Airbender*. It also seems like the end of the series, or at least a possible end of the series. It looks like the writers weren't sure if there would be a third season or not. Wikipedia says:

Both the Lego theme and the TV series had an intended shelf life of three years, so it was expected that the second season would be the last. However, after comments from fans, it was soon revived and has been in production ever since.

We'll continue with Season 3... because I love my kids, not because I love *Ninjago: Masters of Spinjitzu*.

### **Waiting, Bills, and Other Boring Things**

The boiler service person didn't show up this morning. Go figure. Meanwhile, it might snow tonight.

In last night's mail, we got a bill from the company that mows our lawn, for \$160. That's \$40 a pop, four visits. The problem is that at least two or three of these visits, Grace has given them a check. They haven't cashed the checks. I need to look through our account online and figure out what they've cashed and not cashed. She's going to look through her record of the checks she's written. I think we need to stop paying them at the time of service and just record the dates when they come to mow. It's endlessly confusing when they don't cash the checks.

Grace and I just got multimedia text messages from our realtor. I can't receive them since my phone isn't on WiFi and I don't have a data plan. Grace tells me she can't read the message either. She has asked our realtor to e-mail whatever she was sending. It's been almost a month since we sent her the lease agreement to look over. The agreement was supposed to begin a week ago. So I'm really wondering what she has to say to us now. I'm not sure we have any patience left for it, whatever it is.

### **Zingerman's Roadhouse**

I got up and out pretty early this morning and because I haven't been there in a long time, I stopped at Zingerman's Roadhouse for breakfast. It seems like the place is falling into disrepair, just a bit. The fabric in the booths is dirty and frayed. The bathroom was in rough shape. That wouldn't be an issue in just about any other place that calls itself a "roadhouse." But at this "roadhouse," my grits and eggs cost \$15, my coffee cost \$2.75, and the small side of fruit cost \$3.00. With tax, that came to \$22.00. With tip, it came to \$27.00. If I'm going to spend \$27.00 for breakfast, it really seems like the place should look spiffy, not neglected. I might have bought the blue plate special, \$11.00 including coffee, and gotten out of there for \$14.00, but today's blue plate special was the same as it always is on Thursday, cornmeal mush with syrup and fried eggs. I've had it; it's OK, but I didn't want it.

It's not a good time of year for fruit, but I still hoped they would have had something better on hand than the fruit I got. There were blueberries that were small and sour, and there was only a tiny slice of orange. Apples are in season, more or less, aren't they? At least, it seems like I can still get lots of apple varieties, and not a lot of citrus.

It was nice to see Mandy, a waitress there who I've been chatting with since I first started having breakfast there, back when I started commuting to my current job, in June of 2015. But I'm not sure I need to go there anymore. And... once again, I find myself wishing that the food at Harvest Moon Café was just a little bit better.

### **The Blood Pressure Chronicles**

My blood pressure has not been reading as low as I'd like it to, when I measure it before bed. I've been taking 400mg of labetalol at bedtime. So today I added another 200mg taken before breakfast. I don't like the side effects; it makes my scalp itch, my urinary tract feels sore and I'm constantly having to pee and not getting very much out, and I feel tired and beat-up. But this is an experiment to see if I can get my evening blood pressure into the green range on the meter. The results ought to be of use when I talk to a doctor on Monday.

### ***Dancepieces* by Philip Glass**

Today I'm listening to *Dancepieces* by Philip Glass, part of the *Complete Sony Recordings* boxed set. These pieces are beautiful. "In the Upper Room" is a suite for a ballet. This CD contains five of the nine pieces, two additional pieces that are versions of tracks from *Glassworks*, and one from *Akhmaten*. Listening to them is a nice emotional break in the middle of an ugly gray day. We might get the season's first snowstorm tomorrow.

## The Heat is On

The heat's back on! Grace tells me that the service call was \$135. But the boiler guy recommends another round of upgrades and repairs which would cost more, \$840. I'll consider those in a week or two. Also, she has arranged for someone to clean our gutters on Monday. And we're trying to puzzle out the mystery of the lost checks written to the lawn guys. They haven't cashed one of our checks since the beginning of October. We've written them at least four more. I'm guessing they are in the glove box of their truck, or lost. If they are going to lose the checks we hand them, or even just fail to cash them in a timely manner and then bill us for work we've already paid them for, we need to stop giving them checks in person and just mail them checks when they bill us.

## Excessive Technology

Shortly after Grace set up my doctor appointment next Monday, I started receiving all kinds of text messages demanding critical information and confirming my appointment. The problem is that just about everything I try to do with these messages is broken!

First, I don't have Internet access from my phone, if I'm not on a WiFi network. According to this Pew study from 2015 which is likely somewhat out of date,

19% of Americans rely to some degree on a smartphone for accessing online services and information...

and

...7% of Americans own a smartphone but have *neither* traditional broadband service at home, *nor* easily available alternatives for going online other than their cell phone.

But I have e-mail. Why am I getting text messages with URLs in them instead of e-mail messages?

Unless I'm at home or at a café or somewhere else where my phone is online via WiFi, these links are useless to me. And even if I am online, I probably don't want to use my phone to fill out forms. That's what the links lead me to — forms. And what a broken system it is. I typed the links into the address bar on a plain old computer, and tried to fill out the forms. They are pretty user-unfriendly. For example, some of the information is described as “optional,” but if I don't want to give them the name of a doctor to contact, to transfer in medical records, I can't proceed. Even though those fields are supposedly optional. (In my case, I haven't *had* a doctor I see regularly for... ummm... at least a decade, and she's no longer practicing, and hasn't been practicing for years. So I don't think there are really any records I want to have sent.)

They're also sending links that are hard to read. For example, I just got a link with an URL-shortened code. The code looks like this: 2JJtIG5. My phone's

text-messaging app uses a sans-serif font. It's next to impossible to tell if that "I" is an "I" (uppercase eye) or an "l" (a lowercase ell).

Oh, they're also calling me, with recorded messages. From numbers without caller ID, and leaving me two-minute voice mails in which the same text is repeated. It's mostly just more demands that I fill out the forms online, which... I was unable to complete because of their crappy user interface.

I'm really not feeling great about this new medical practice. I think it's good that medical practices are doing things like sending text messages to remind patients of appointments. And it would be nice to get some paperwork out of the way before the appointment. Those ideas aren't bad. But the execution is awful.

## Friday

It was snowing this morning, and it's supposed to snow more tonight, although it may turn into rain.

Grace made us a terrific pumpkin soup with beef broth last night. We ate that with some bread rolls and leftover greens.

Grace and the kids did just about all the meal prep and cleanup. I was feeling very tired. The labetalol makes me tired. It's also doing some nasty things to my gut and urinary tract. I wound up having a strange combination of constipation and repeated urgent trips to the rest room. Five or six times yesterday I felt the need to run to the rest room, but had only small bowel movements each time. I didn't have what I'd call real diarrhea, but things were a bit loose. And I had a similar problem with urination, but even worse — a constantly recurring need to pee, so at least a dozen trips to the rest room, but each time I could get very little out. And a feeling of inflammation or burning all day.

Last night when I measured my blood pressure, it was clear that taking 200mg twice a day instead of 400mg once a day was successfully keeping my blood pressure down, because it was still good before bed. But I'm not happy with these side effects. The tingling scalp is apparently very common, along with tiredness. A "less common adverse event" reported is "difficulty in micturition, including acute urinary bladder retention." That doesn't sound good, and the aggravation of my colon is also not good. I haven't seen any bleeding, but it could be a warning sign of a known side effect called "ischemic colitis."

It seems like I should probably stop this medication. I took a 200mg pill this morning. I will try stopping it until Monday morning when I see the doctor, and just record my blood pressure and see what it does.

### ***The Tombs of Atuan* by Ursula K. Le Guin (Book 2 of the Earthsea Trilogy)**

I read Benjamin a children's book, and then I asked the rest of the kids what they wanted me to read. They surprised me by asking me to go back to Ursula K. Le Guin's *The Tombs of Atuan*. So I started it over, and read the preface, and the first chapter. I have not read this book in a long, long time — it was probably about 1979, when I was eleven or twelve. I really don't remember it so far, although I'm guessing I will eventually find some scenes or events that I recognize. It's a dark and strange book. I'll continue as the kids' attention span allows, and see where it takes us.

### **Typographical Errors in *Moderan***

I saw a typo a few days ago but didn't make a note of it. Then yesterday I saw another one, so decided to go find the earlier one. *Moderan* has some typos that look like OCR errors. On page 79, the phrase "a shimmer of fight" should read "a shimmer of light." And on page 47, the phrase "a tight little smite" should read "a tight little smile." This is disappointing; in general, I've always been very impressed by the editing of New York Review Books Classics editions (at least, those that are re-set, like this one is, and don't just reproduce the pages of an earlier edition).

### **Elections**

I feel like I should write something about the elections. There is so much to say about them, and the frenzy of other political news, that I'm hard-pressed to separate the meaningful events from the meaningless distractions. I am pleased that the Democrats won the House, but I have learned not to have much hope that the Democrats will mount any kind of notable resistance to the Trump administration.

Two results from this election are, to me, the most significant. The first result Florida Amendment 4, which restores the franchise to a lot of Floridians with prior felony convictions (but not all). This ballot initiative required a 60 percent supermajority to win, and it won! That's big news and will enfranchise something like 10% of the eligible voting population. That could mean that Florida will no longer be a swing state.

The second result is not really an election result *per se*, but about the election process. It's the widespread and increasing understanding of election fraud and criminal acts of disenfranchisement in states like Georgia and Florida. I see this as a result of the rise of "citizen-journalism" including the deployment of cameras in cell phones and the ability of ordinary citizens to spread stories on social media networks like Twitter. (Of course, misinformation can be spread this way, too.)

Right now several election results are contested as I write this; Florida is going



to do a mandatory machine recount in the gubernatorial election. The claims and lawsuits are flying back and forth. The reports I'm reading about voting machines and ballots are horrifying. The way we vote in many states is unworthy of a Banana Republic, and it's that way because powerful people like it that way.

There's a criminal situation in Georgia, as well, in the Abrams/Kemp race, with increasing evidence that Kemp acted to disenfranchise large numbers of voters *in the race that he himself supervised, as Secretary of State.*

Hey Kemp? You know you've lost the moral high ground when Jimmy Carter calls on you to resign over your blatant conflict of interest.

My hope is that Kemp will be utterly destroyed in court. He should go to prison, and his children should have to change their names. I don't know if any of this will lead to election reform in the affected states, but I sure hope so. And it's also clear that some of this is fallout from the dismantling of the Voting Rights Act:

Before the U.S. Supreme Court invalidated it in 2013, Section 5 required states like Georgia to submit election changes like this to the U.S. Department of Justice for review and "preclearance" before implementation. Kemp's 2008 program failed that review because, as the Justice Department's rejection letter read, the "flawed system frequently subjects a disproportionate number of African-American, Asian, and/or Hispanic voters to additional and, more importantly, erroneous burdens on the right to register to vote."

To me this kind of disenfranchisement on technical grounds is especially aggravating, because I know that a lot of database systems don't allow large portions of the population to record their names as they would prefer. It can come down to ignorant or lazy state employees:

One of the biggest flaws of Georgia's current "exact-match" program is that it relies on the work of county election officials who input voter registration data into the match system. This means that errors in the system could happen not just by the person filling out the form, but also by the election officials themselves.

But it seems likely to me that some of these "exact match" failures probably have nothing to do with the diligence of the voters involved, or the good intentions and efforts of the election officials, but are due to the inabilities of different systems to represent voter's names the way they would prefer them to be represented. Many, many people, even people who aren't of ethnicities you'd likely consider rare or exotic, have to work around these limitations.

For example, this gentleman, John Graham-Cumming, can't put his name into online forms. If even a hyphenated last name is too exotic, what are people supposed to do when they have names like "Björk Guðmundsdóttir," or "José Eduardo Santos Tavares Melo Silva," or names transliterated from languages

represented by ideographs, which don't use the Latin alphabet? Many people have to contend with these difficulties all the time, and so despite their best efforts, wind up with records in different systems that will not pass an "exact match."

These problems aren't limited to American systems trying to handle non-European names; in this article the author talks about trying to put his name, "Patrick McKenzie," into database systems in Japan that are unable to represent it.

Implicit bias is *everywhere* in technology. Database systems designed only to handle WASPy names, like mine, or only Japanese names, like the systems McKenzie describes, are the natural result of institutional ethnocentrism. Handling names is a hard problem, and ordinary programmers often just punt when the going gets rough. That isn't good, and we need to improve these systems, and meanwhile try to accommodate their failures. Instead, we have assholes like Kemp who have been weaponizing them. These people need to go.

### **An Unclear Path Forward**

Our realtor finally got back to us. She's been very ill, apparently, and she's decided that she is no longer interested in leasing our old house. She also referred us to a friend of hers, but that part of the message was muddled, as she was throwing out sale prices and monthly rental costs that didn't really match anything in the lease agreement we had our attorney draw up. So I think we will just thank her and move on. We'll try to consider what we might do next with the house. It's entirely unclear at the moment.

### **Saturday**

It's 5:39 p.m. and already dark out. We're getting on towards the darkest days. I have been pretty busy since last night and there is a lot going on all around me, so I will try to finish up a few notes and get this posted before I get derailed.

### **The Bathroom Flood**

I'm confused trying to even remember what has happened over the last 24 hours or so. It seems like a cluttered blur. After work I went to Costco and brought back salmon, macaroni and cheese, and some frosted German cinnamon cookies. When I walked in the front door I discovered that Benjamin had stuffed an entire roll of toilet paper into the toilet, again, and the first floor toilet had overflowed.

Grace had thrown basically every towel we own on the floor to soak up most of the liquid but there are seams. There's a gap around the edge of the bathtub. There's a sizable gap in the tile under the baseboard heater. If liquid runs back there, it can soak right into the subfloor material. So far the only times this has been an actual issue have been in this kind of situation — when the kids back up the toilet by playing with it. It's very aggravating. I think it might be possible

to make the floor nearly waterproof but it would be hard. I have no idea how to clean and dry and deodorize all this. I took the front of the baseboard heater off and I've been running a fan to try to dry it. But I'm going to have to go after the gap around the tub with a toothbrush or something. It's a disgusting job because the toilet didn't contain only water when Benjamin made it overflow.

The kitchen was pretty trashed and it took us some time to get dinner made, so we ate quite late. Our friend Joy is visiting. I was hoping we could burn a fire log and have a group story, but there were so many things that required cleanup work. I got one big dishwasher load going, but couldn't really finish getting the kitchen cleaned up. I tried to read the kids some more of *The Tombs of Atuan* but Sam went to sleep and Veronica kept leaving so I read an AlphaPets book to Benjamin and Joshua instead. It was *Ivy Can't Wait*, featuring Ivy the Impatient Iguana. I don't like this series much, but Benjamin seems to love it.

### **2017 Château D'Aqueria Tavel Rose**

With dinner I tried another bottle of wine we were considering for our holiday meals. This was a rosé, a 2017 Château D'Aqueria Tavel Rose. (The label puts the circumflex on the first "a" in Château, but does not put an accent on the "e" in Rose; go figure!

This wine is just awful. It has a lovely, rich color. The nose is promising. But on the palate, it tastes like unsweetened Kool-Aid mixed with rubbing alcohol. I didn't want to drink it. Grace was also disappointed. I couldn't even think of any way to use it for cooking. So I did something I very rarely do, as there aren't many wines I won't drink at all. I poured it down the drain.

I've come to distrust Costco's wine buyer. Do they have someone actually tasting their wines before they order them? Why are these mediocre-to-awful wines even on the shelves?

It's not that I don't like rosé wines. It's not my go-to style, but last fall we found a really delicious rosé from South America. I'm not sure I wrote down the name. I probably took a picture of the bottle and if I did, it's probably in my photo library. I'll see if I can find it.

I think for Thanksgiving we'll probably just have the Chianti and the Riesling (with dessert). We're not having turkey anyway; Grace ordered prime rib from Tippin's. If I can, I'll get to Trader Joe's in time for Christmas and see if I can find a decent rosé there.

### ***Cluttering: Current Views on its Nature, Diagnosis, and Treatment* by Yvonne van Zaalen and Isabella K. Reichel**

After the kids went to bed I read part of *Cluttering: Current Views on its Nature, Diagnosis, and Treatment* by Yvonne van Zaalen and Isabella K. Reichel. I thought this book might serve as an introduction to someone who is not a speech

therapist. But it dives right into the history of the concept and does not explain any of the technical terms that it uses.

It's not completely opaque, but like a lot of things I read in fields like psychology and sociology, it seems to veer back and forth between aspects of observation and practice that are commonsensical, and theoretical models that seem like complete pseudo-science. Here's a basic definition ("PWC" means "People with Cluttering"):

According to the evidence-based practice and practice-based evidence, PWC have an articulatory rate that is perceived to be too fast and/or too irregular combined with one or more of the three main characteristics:

- (a) Reduced speech intelligibility based on telescoping or word structure errors;
- (b) A high frequency of normal disfluencies;
- (c) Errors in pausing (St. Louis et al., 2007).

There's some suggestion that the part of the brain responsible for cluttering has been identified, which is interesting, but whether that suggests any useful treatment strategies is unclear so far. The model of cluttering as "telescoping" words and phrases, dropping syllables accidentally, seems useful. The observations about how people who speak with "cluttering" seem to be rushing, even if they don't actually speak more words per minute than fluent people, is also interesting, and potentially helpful to keep in mind:

...the rate of the PWC fell well within the normal range of syllables per second even though the individuals' speaking rate was perceived as very fast (St. Louis et al., 2007). We believe that this difference between objective measurements and listeners' subjective judgment is caused mainly by the high frequency of disfluencies, abnormal prosody, and the errors in pausing and word structure. Speech production of PWC is disturbed so much that the listener's processing time is affected, giving the impression that the speech goes even faster than measured.

The text gives examples of "coalescence," in which parts of syllables are inadvertently combined; a PWC might say "mation" instead of "limitation," or "implations" instead of "implications." There are also "sequencing errors" which you might know as Spoonerisms: syllables in the wrong order, such as "unt-edectable" instead of "undetectable." I haven't noticed these sequencing errors in Sam's speech. His cluttering seems to me to manifest primarily as problems with the *rate* of speech: rushing combined with long, apparently involuntary, pauses. I'll read some more of this book, looking for insight and practical suggestions. Meanwhile, he is getting speech therapy, but I think it is too early to judge whether it is helping.

This morning I was not up all that early. When I got up, our houseguest was

using the oven, so I couldn't toast bagels. I worked on cleaning things up for a while and made an Instant Pot of oatmeal. That took a while because the kids had misplaced the Instant Pot book that has all the cooking times in it. I had planned to toast bagels and make a frittata out of the leftover salmon and rice, but didn't get to it, because there were other errands to run. While Joy was here, I wanted to pick up my friends' freezer. My friends John and Regan were upgrading their freezer as part of a major renovation of their house, so they offered us their old freezer.

### **A New Old Freezer**

Joy had done quite a bit of organizing in the garage, assembling more shelves and arranging things. It's still crammed with stuff, but there are aisles now! You can walk around to get to things! And in the process, she found all kinds of things we were missing, like a rolling pin and a box of light bulbs.

Joy has a full-sized van now, with seats that fold down into the floor of the vehicle (they are called "Stow 'n Go.") With all the seats folded away, a full-sized upright freezer will easily fit. "Easily," that is, if you don't count actually getting it in and out of the van. But with some help both loading and unloading, we got it done. It's now in our garage along with their old dishwasher.

Having an empty refrigerator or freezer around unsupervised children is a bad idea. There is a key lock on the freezer, but they were not immediately able to locate the key. So we took the door off.

I had to make a special trip to Lowe's to find a suitable tool to remove the door. The bolts are, I think, Philips #3 machine screws. I had some trouble with them because I could not apply enough torque to them, using a regular screwdriver. I needed something like a nut driver or L-shaped screwdriver that would give me more leverage. Lowe's had a set of L-shaped drivers, but nothing for a #3 Philips head. So I wound up having to buy a small ratcheting driver set. It seemed to be the only way to get the combination of ratchet driver and #3 Philips tip, unless I wanted to drive a lot farther and spend a lot more time. I was concerned that the one I bought would be too small and flimsy for the job, but it worked perfectly. So the door is stashed behind the refrigerator in the garage, and the screws and the driver set are taped to the top of it waiting for me to reassemble them. There are some outlets in the garage, but they don't work. We need to get the garage properly wired for power, and then we will run the freezer out there.

Joy is bringing things from her inventory and Veronica is photographing items and listing them for sale on Etsy. Like I said, lots going on!

Dinner is on the table (bratwurst with sauerkraut, greens, soup), so it's time to wind this up. I didn't take a labetalol tablet last night. We'll see what my blood pressure is doing. I'll be seeing a doctor Monday morning.

## Editing My Q1 Posts

I'm about halfway through my first pass editing the first-quarter blog posts — weeks one through thirteen. So in a few weeks I should have a more-or-less edited version of the text. That doesn't include any kind of introduction yet.

Looking at the current output from **pandoc**, when I turn the text into a **.docx** file, and open it in OpenOffice, it's 197 pages. If I turn it into an **.odt** file, it's 183 pages. This is due to minor differences between the templates, such as the default fonts. Those could change. I have not made any of the formatting changes that I want to make. I haven't gotten the weekly posts breaking so they all start on right-hand pages yet.

The text is about 103,000 words. I want to continue experimenting with adding an index, and indexing everything that I think needs indexing. Presumably I'll be able to get that done. And then — what?

## Media 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 Stone Sky” by Italo Calvino, in *The Complete Cosmicomics* by Italo Calvino
- “The Island” by Peter Watts
- *Doctor Who* Series 11, Episode 5: “The Tsuranga Conundrum”
- Ninjago: Masters of Spinjitzu, Season 2, Episode 13: “Rise of the Spinjitzu Master”
- *Dancepieces* by Philip Glass
- *The Tombs of Atuan* by Ursula K. Le Guin (Book 2 of the Earthsea Trilogy)
- *Cluttering: Current Views on its Nature, Diagnosis, and Treatment* by Yvonne van Zaalen and Isabella K. Reichel

*Pittsfield Township, Michigan*

*The Week Ending Saturday, November 10th, 2018*

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