

Appendix A

Paul R. Potts

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Thursday

Birthday Debrief

Yesterday was my son Daniel Peregrine's ninth birthday. It's our regular practice not to give our kids gifts for their birthdays, but instead to have a dinner with a meal and cake of the birthday kid's choice. Pippin asked for roasted lamb, broccoli, and mashed potatoes with a lemon cake topped with blueberry icing. So that's what we had. We had purchased a leg of lamb on our last Costco trip and kept it in the freezer. Grace thawed, brined, and roasted it with an herb paste in the dutch oven, and made a gravy from the drippings, deglazing the pot with red wine and adding a little honey. The result was completely delicious. For the cake, Grace made an egg-free cake with lemon pulp in the batter, and cooked down frozen wild blueberries to mix into a butter icing. Overall, a very successful birthday dinner!

Columbo

My 34 (wow!) DVD set of Columbo episodes arrived in the mail and we watched the first pilot movie, "Prescription: Murder," which originally aired in 1968. I have loved watching Peter Falk as Columbo since I first saw him on episodes of *The NBC Mystery Movie*. I don't remember the details, but that probably would have been about 1976 or 1977.

"Prescription: Murder" is quite dated in several ways. The portrayal of the female characters is blatantly sexist. The racism is apparently mostly because there are *almost* no characters of color of any kind. I say "almost" because there is a fascinating scene in "Prescription: Murder" in which a black nurse has a speaking role, but she is very carefully shot so that the audience never sees her face; the scene is blocked so that other characters actually step in front of the camera so we can't see her. I can barely imagine what must have gone on in the production process that led to this scene. It's also dated in the portrayal of Columbo's police procedure. He does many things that would result in getting his collected evidence thrown out of court, including entrapment and harassment of witnesses. The character had his usual stopped posture and ingratiating,

but also incredibly irritating, manner, but his mannerisms weren't quite fully developed yet, and he was more aggressive and loud.

In the second pilot, "Ransom for a Dead Man," Falk's gruff accent and posture and mannerisms are all more pronounced, and the character seems fully-formed.

Both of the stories are quite fun and Joshua, especially, found them fascinating.

Columbo episodes are "inverted" detective stories, or "inside-out" mysteries. In these shows, the audience actually gets to see the murder in great detail, including the murderer's attempts to hide it. And so there's no mystery in the usual sense of wondering who did it. The mystery is how Columbo will figure it out, and the show's best scenes often consist of his apparently inept and bumbling interactions with the perpetrator, in which he really is cleverly collecting information and pushing the perpetrator into careless mistakes. The screenplays then constantly play with this basic format, twisting and turning in funny and terrifying ways.

I also love these early episodes for their wonderful editing and use of music. The first one uses what I think is a tape-loop echo machine on some of the instruments to produce a spooky effect. The second one gets downright psychedelic in parts with freeze-frame film effects and various early electronic audio effects including, I think, tape feedback. The DVD transfers look mostly clean and bright, with film grit and scratches cleaned up, although there are some scenes in the first pilot in which the brightness is uneven. The audio sounds excellent.

There are a *lot* of episodes. I'd love to binge them for days, but given the kids' attention spans, it's hard to get through even one without constant interruptions. So we are doing what we can.

Music

This week I've taken on the project of recording a song a day and sending it out on Marco Polo. I've also started doing live streams on Facebook. I'm trying to follow the adage "start before you're ready." When I'm doing creative projects, there's a certain feeling of being only partly prepared which tells me I should go ahead and get something out there. By the time I get to feeling fully prepared, I've learned, the energy and spontaneity will have disappeared from my performance. This is true especially when there's no visible audience.

The Recording Side

I've been working on the technical setup as I go along. Initially, I was recording the audio with my laptop's built-in microphone. This sounds OK for voice with an application like Zoom, but the audio is terrible for music. So I've been trying other solutions and it's a never-ending series of technical issues.

I tried using an old Edirol UA-25 audio interface purchased from eBay. That works but under Windows 10, it keeps shutting off. There's supposedly a

power management setting which will tell Windows not to shut off the power to connected USB devices to save power. But it doesn't seem to work reliably unless an application is using the device. So I'll be rehearsing, listening to the audio through headphones, and the UA-25 will suddenly power down and I won't be able to hear myself. That's incredibly annoying and I can't figure out how to disable it. I've never had a comparable issue on Mac hardware.

A single Rode NT5 small-diaphragm condenser microphone plugged into the UA-25 improved the audio, but I couldn't find a way to convince Facebook to stream mono audio. The UA-25 has an option to monitor in mono. This means when I'm using only a single microphone, plugged into the first input, I can use a button on the little box to mix the first two inputs to the stereo headphone output. Then I don't hear it only in my left ear. But this mono mode setting does not apply to the inputs as they go into the ADC (analog-to-digital converter) channels. So the computer only "hears" the audio on the left side, which means that anyone listening to the Facebook live stream, or playing back the recorded stream, will only hear the sound on the left side.

After much Googling, I discovered that there is an option to force Windows 10 to mix stereo audio inputs to mono. This option only appeared in the most recent Windows update, and it is buried in the maze of control panels under Accessibility options rather than Sound settings. It does seem to work, however!

I wanted to try stereo sound, so I pulled out my second NT5. Mice had gotten into the case holding my microphones and so one of the finish on one of the microphones has been stained with mouse urine. I got that cleaned up as best I could. But then I ran into another stupid problem. The bracket to hold them combined with the microphones themselves and their cables add up to a fair amount of weight. When I extend the microphone boom over my laptop, the counterweight on the other side is too light to balance the microphones. It doesn't tip the stand over, quite, although it does make it a little less stable. But the clamp that holds the boom in place using some internal rubber discs as a "clutch" mechanism won't clamp down tight enough. So I'll get it all set up, and start recording, and the boom will very slowly but inevitably sag down until the microphones and cables are resting on my laptop keyboard in front of the camera.

Various counterweight ideas all seemed to involve a lot of duct tape. So I decided to try using my old Russian Oktava MK-319 large-diaphragm condenser microphone. This improves the situation with the sagging microphone boom. But I'm also reminded of why I don't use this microphone a lot. It picks up a lot more background noise than the NT5 mics or the Heil-PR30 mics that Grace and I use for podcasting. And it's very sensitive to my position. So, I'm trying to use one mic to record both voice and guitar, and if I move away from the microphone a bit, or turn my head a bit, the volume of my voice drops off dramatically. This could be improved by compressing the audio from the microphone, but to do that I'd need either additional hardware or additional software in the loop and this was never really supposed to be more than a quick-and-dirty live recording.

The problem is, if you actually care about audio quality, and don't even get me started on video quality because I'm deliberately ignoring that for now, there's no such thing as quick-and-dirty. I was hoping to spend most of my time working on my playing and singing, but because I can't stand poor sound, I wind up spending at least as much time, if not more, trying to get a better-sounding setup.

It's gradually sounding better day-by-day as I experiment, and with zero budget to spend on this project, that'll have to be good enough.

The Performance Side

I've recorded several songs including "Rocky Raccoon" by the Beatles, "Bizarre Love Triangle" by New Order, and, today, "Under the Milky Way" by The Church. For each song I've tried to choose a guitar sound to fit it. I've also been practicing some other songs that need a lot more work before I feel ready to perform them.

For "Rocky Raccoon" I played the chords finger-picked on my acoustic guitar and I used a capo to bring the pitch up several steps. I can't sing as high as Paul McCartney does on the original recording, so I raise the key a fourth and drop the vocal part a fifth to bring it into a more comfortable range.

On "Bizarre Love Triangle" I decided to pull out my old Roland GR-30 guitar synthesizer. My nylon-string Godin guitar has a 13-pin GK output which means there is a separate pickup for each string. This allows this kind of guitar synthesizer to figure out what note each string is playing, separately. I've had the GR-30 for over 20 years and I keep trying to find a good use for it, but every time I pull it out, I usually mess around with it for a few days, decide it is still too cheesy and hard to use to good musical effect, and put it away. I have a little more playing experience now and so I think I may be able to come up with some less-cheesy uses for it. For "Bizarre Love Triangle" I found an organ sound that is not brassy and in-your-face but somewhat dull and muted, and seemed to evoke the cheerful artificial oohs and aahs of the synthesizer sounds from the original track. I turned the guitar's output all the way down and let the synth produce all the sounds. I wasn't thrilled with the result, but I'm guardedly optimistic. It would be interesting to try a more recent guitar synthesizer, since synthesizer sounds and signal processing for note-tracking have evolved significantly in the last 25 years.

On "Under the Milky Way" I wanted to use an electric guitar and get my loop pedal into the game. I have an old Boss RC-30. I love the idea of using a loop pedal to record parts of tracks on the fly and loop them, and I've seen some artists that do this really well live, but I've never truly gotten the hang of it coordinating my playing, singing, *and* controlling devices on the fly with my feet. Anyway, the idea with the RC-30 is that during the solo part, I wanted to trigger a pre-recorded loop of the first guitar, and then play a solo over the loop using a distortion pedal to give me an aggressive lead guitar sound. Ideally the

transitions would sound seamless. But I only had an hour or so today to set up, practice, and stream (and record) the song. So it was quite far from seamless.

It might work better for me to just have a sample player where I can just start and stop pre-recorded loops using one pedal at a time. But yeah, “zero budget.”

I’m working on a more challenging song — “Rainbow Connection” from *The Muppet Movie*. I found a transcription for guitar chords and I want to try finger-picking this song. The chord changes are fast and furious, so even though this is a fairly slow song, it’s tricky to play smoothly. And there is a technical challenge — at the end of the bridge, the song modulates up a half-step for the last verse and chorus:

Am7	D7	Bm7	E7	
Some - day	we'll find it,	the rain - bow	con - nection	
Am7	D7sus	D7 G	D/F#	
The lovers,	the dreamers,	and me,	all of us	
Em	G/D	C	G/B	Am7 D#7
Un - der its	spell,	we know that it's	prob - ably mag - ic	

The original key is A major (annotated with three sharps in the key signature). In the original score, the word “magic” is sung using two notes. The first syllable gets a B note, and the second gets a C note, but the C is marked with a natural sign, so there is only a half-step jump. In the score, the key is then shifted to B flat major (with two flats in the key signature).

On guitar, it is easier to play this song in (I think?) the key of G. If I don’t want to make the key change, I can sing “mag-ic” with C and D notes. If I want to make the key change, I can sing the word with the (transposed) notes from the original, D and D#, but I need to be able to play a D#7 instead of a D7 chord.

I’m trying to figure out if I can make the key change on the fly, live, by holding the first syllable of “magic,” clamping a capo on my guitar with one hand to raise the pitch a half-step, and then singing the second syllable a half-step up while continuing in the key of A flat major*, by playing a D7 chord shape, which is now really a D sharp dominant seventh chord.

We’ll see how well *that* goes!

It should also be possible to seamlessly shift from playing open chord shapes to playing barred chord shapes. I’d need to practice barred fingerings for the following chords:

- A#m7
- Cm7
- C#
- C#/D#
- C#maj7

- C#(9)
- D#
- D#/G
- D#sus
- D#7
- D#7sus
- Fm
- Fm/D#
- F7
- Gm7/C
- G#
- G#/D#

I think that’s all of them. That’s quite a few, and will require quite a few different shapes. Back when I was performing with a church band, I’d occasionally have to play a long series of barre chords after a key change like this, and it’s difficult — you have to keep your fingers clamped onto the neck with a fair amount of force, or the strings won’t ring properly. Playing this way a lot tends to cause my carpal tunnel syndrome to flare up. So I’ll have to experiment and see if I think the result is worth it.

*As a guitar player who never really learned to play sheet music formally, I think of this as a key change up from G major to “G sharp major.” However, “G sharp major” is not a “real” key that one speaks of, because by music notational convention, one would have to use six sharps and a “double sharp” in the key signature**. So, *by convention*, the key a half-step up from G major, written with one sharp in the key signature, is always called A flat major, written with two flats in the key signature, rather than “G sharp major.”

**Double sharps exist, and can be used in to indicate that a note should be raised by two half-steps. In practice double sharps are rarely used in key signatures because they tend to make a score needlessly difficult to interpret. And if you are reading a score for music to be performed using a different musical *temperament* — something other than twelve-tone equal temperament — then all bets are off and you might see all kinds of extra annotations such as half-sharps and sharps-and-a-half.

Saturday

Appendix A

As if we all didn’t have enough to worry about here in the Potts house, we’ve had a complication over the last few days. I haven’t written about it yet because I wanted to hold off until we got some more information, so as not to turn this newsletter into some kind of a cliffhanger. I also wanted to task Grace’s permission to write about this a bit, which I’ve done, so here we go.

Over the last few days Grace developed pain in her lower right abdomen, and it started to become moderately intense. We were of course immediately concerned about appendicitis, but given the situation with emergency rooms and the risk of acquiring a COVID-19 infection, we also wanted to be as cautious as we reasonably could in getting her care. So those potentially-conflicting needs were preoccupying us for a few days this week.

Grace spoke to her primary care doctor, and after some back-and-forth on exactly what to do, she agreed to go in for an abdominal exam and a urine test. She was favorably impressed that the office was taking pretty much every precaution possible to avoid COVID-19 transmission.

The abdominal exam seemed to indicate that the pain wasn't quite in the location they'd expect it to be if it was appendicitis. So they added blood tests to the order for a urine test and Grace had both the tests done on Thursday. The tests were marked as urgent and she was told to expect results later that evening. And her doctor's office was recommending an ultrasound and even a CAT scan, although again she was hesitant to risk the exposure.

Meanwhile, she got on the phone with her brother, a retired physician, to talk about strategy and treatment options. All elective surgery is suspended in the state of Michigan at the moment, but it's not clear just how relevant that is, because if this was appendicitis, it would probably be performed on an emergency basis. She also wanted to get a second opinion on the issue of whether it might work to take a round of antibiotics, in order to at least delay the need for surgery. She managed to get a telemedicine consultation with a doctor who was willing to prescribe antibiotics to have on hand in case there was an infection that started to rapidly get worse.

Her temperature did not rise during the night on Thursday, and the pain seemed to remain mostly steady rather than becoming worse. She elected not to take painkillers because she did not want to hide any sudden changes in symptoms.

So we had a bad night's sleep, Grace in pain and me wondering if I was going to need to take her to the E. R. at some point, and whether I'd even be allowed to go in with her or see her after surgery, and of course what we would do with a sixteen-month-old nursing baby who is not at all ready to be separated from his mother for any length of time.

On Friday morning she got her test results back and everything — urine, blood cell counts, liver enzymes, pancreatic enzymes — looked normal. There was nothing to indicate she had appendicitis or anything going wrong with her liver or pancreas. She went to pick up her antibiotics, at a drugstore with a drive-up window, and Friday afternoon took an Aleve, which gave her quite a bit of relief, even well into today.

So, as of Saturday, we're not entirely sure what is going on, but her doctor has suggested that she talk to her OB-GYN to consider whether there might be a cyst, fibroid, or something related. So she has an appointment on Monday. As

I write this she's taking a long bath and washing her hair, enjoying the fact that she's in less pain today.

And speaking of pain...

Politics

Michigan made the national news again because a group of heavily-armed protesters suffering from terminal micropenis and carrying large guns pushed their way into the state capitol building to conduct a Trump campaign photo-op. The president, surprising no one, called them good people, just as he called the domestic terrorists that murdered Heather Heyer good people. Twitter is crowded with month-old bot accounts spraying MAGA talking points in all directions and retweeting white supremacist accounts such as **@realdonaldtrump**.

The question of when and how to “re-open” — to end various lock-downs and restrictions — is of course a huge and important one, and so naturally the President and his supporters are doing everything they can to politicize it and turn it into a partisan weapon, guaranteeing that serious, public health-oriented discussion will be drowned out, because none of that is at all meaningful to the President; to him, only the ratings, and re-election prospects, and the endless grift, actually matter.

Meanwhile, corroborating evidence has emerged in Tara Reade's rape accusation against Joe Biden, including an episode of the Larry King show in which Reade's mother called in to anonymously speak about her daughter's rape. CNN, predictably, deleted the episode from their online archive and blue-check Twitter went berserk, calling Chris Hayes a Russian asset.

There is considerably more corroborating evidence for Reade's claim than there ever was for Christine Blasey Ford's accusation against Brett Kavanaugh. From what I can see, most of the liberal smears against Reade are entirely partisan, with a sprinkling of rancid class bias. It's been fascinating, but not at all surprising, to watch liberal white women abandon their principled “believe women” stances faster than Bill Clinton could get his trousers unzipped.

Eight other women besides Tara Reade have accused Biden of unwanted touching or harrassment.

Tara Reade's now getting death threats from Biden supporters.

From my perspective, it's horrifyingly obvious that Biden is not just an opportunistic sexual predator towards adults, but also harbors barely-contained pedophile impulses. There exist video clip after video clip of him fondling, sniffing, groping, and rubbing the chests of very young girls. It was incredibly predictable that Trump would weaponize these clips in his campaign, and in fact this is now happening.

Meanwhile, Biden's decline in cognitive function remains undeniable and his campaign's strategy seems to be, largely, keeping him from speaking off the cuff.

Folks are sharing the hashtag “I believe Biden,” but I’m not sure why anyone would believe Biden about... well, *anything*. Biden has lied about matters large and small for decades, opportunistically, tailoring his lies to his audience. He quite recently was claiming at campaign events that he was arrested in South Africa for attempt to travel to meet with Nelson Mandela, and that he participated in Civil Rights-era protests. He’s claimed that he taught classes at the University of Pennsylvania. He’s told stories about a soldier in Afghanistan that were entirely fabricated. In 1988 he was at the center of a plagiarism scandal that ended his presidential campaign. He’s lied about his support for our recent invasions. He’s even lied repeatedly about the death of his wife, claiming she was killed by a drunk driver. He’s also lied many times about his votes, including his support for the Bankruptcy bill. And there’s a *lot* more.

Recently, I sometimes find myself having the same kind of “out-of-body” experience that I frequently have in 2016, watching allegedly serious political discussions as though I am in a coma dreaming, almost unable to believe what I am seeing.

A friend on Facebook, a college classmate, asked me on Facebook:

What do you want to happen in November (realistically)? Do you have a better idea that can work? He was definitely not my first choice but between him and Trump I would chose him...

I wrote:

What do I want to happen? I want the liberal media establishment and the whole technocrat class to actually learn from the historic defeat and collapse of the Democratic party, which is inevitable now.

I want a viable leftist party rise up within the *next* 4-year cycle, a party that supports reasonable policies that are enormously effective and popular all over the world and have the potential to excite the majority that doesn’t vote. That’s what can work.

They don’t vote not because they are stupid or because they are lazy. They don’t vote first and foremost because they don’t see anything to vote for that coincides with their material interests. They are not wrong in that assessment. And secondly, they don’t have their votes counted because of the structural barriers against voting, so that’s something that has to drastically change, too — no more closing and reshuffling polling places in urban areas to suppress the vote. No more all-electronic voting machines. Election day needs to be a Federal holiday.

What can work to defeat Trump in the fall? Absolutely nothing can work to defeat Trump in the fall.

If our elected officials actually cared about removing Trump they could have removed him many times over by now. If the *Democrats* really cared they could actually work as an aggressive opposition party. But their donors like what Trump is doing for the most part, so they do nothing useful except an occasional symbolic gesture.

This fall there may very well not be an election, or at least not one we would recognize as fair and legitimate. But a lot of the primaries so far I don't recognize as fair and legitimate. Wisconsin was certainly not fair and legitimate and the Democrats played as much a part in that as the Republicans did. But looking at the vote discrepancies against exit polling shows very alarming inconsistencies in earlier states, farther off from results than these polls have ever been, which is suggestive of widespread fraud.

Election fraud is bipartisan. Citizens United is bipartisan.

I've been told for the last two cycles that Democrats don't need my vote, my support for universal health care is a radical, fringe idea that won't play with real voters. I've been told that if they run centrists, that for every New Deal Democrat they lose in the rust belt, they'll pick up three moderate Republicans in the suburbs. So I want to see the Democratic party actually canvass those folks and try to prove their irresponsible, ahistorical theories.

I've also been told that I should support Biden because the number one priority is to defeat Trump, and that not voting for Biden is the same as voting for Trump.

To that I respond: I will not vote for Trump. I don't want to see Trump re-elected. But I am not going to sell my vote — which is almost my only bit of power and leverage in the presidential election, now that the primaries are effectively over — cheaply. I did not vote for Clinton and I am not at all on board with the “any blue will do” movement, or even the “any warm body” movement, especially when I believe that the “blue” in question is an opportunistic liar and sexual predator, and I don't believe it is in my family's material interests, either in the long term or short term, to give that man power.

Yes, I'm saying that I believe Biden would be at least as bad for the country as Trump. Because while Trump is a monstrous grifter and a malignant narcissist, he's not *ideological* and while he chooses to use the presidency as an opportunity for constant graft and nepotism, he's not literally taking his policies from his campaign donors — the financial and pharmaceutical industries. And Biden has done that for his entire career. And while I don't think Trump has any particular interest in destroying Social Security and Medicare, because his base is heavily reliant on those programs, Biden does — his Wall Street donors' have long wanted to see Social Security replaced by investments in the stock market.

I will not vote for Biden under any circumstances.

Democrats fucked this up pretty badly. If they really wanted me to vote for a Democratic presidential candidate, they'd replace Biden with someone I might be willing to vote for.

Their donors won't allow that, so it isn't going to happen.

But November remains quite a long way away, especially in these days of accelerated catastrophe and constant, disaster capitalism-style shocks to the electorate. A lot can happen in the next few months. I think it's quite likely that Biden won't be the nominee; I also think it's quite likely there won't be an election, at least any sort of normal election, in November.

I reserve the right to vote strategically for a lesser-of-two-evils Democrat, if there is someone I can stomach. Otherwise, assuming I can vote, I will vote strategically, or vote-trade, or employ some other strategy as I see fit — maybe a strategy that isn't even on my radar yet. But I'm not going to vote for Biden or support Biden, either with my voice or my money, and in fact I'm going to continue to do what I can, with my very small amount of influence, to try to convince the Democratic party to throw him on the trash heap of history.

Hoping for change via the rusted-out vehicle of electoral politics is very much a losing proposition this year, as it was in 2016. There is still a lot of organizing that can be done. As finances and my employment situation allows, I may start giving financial support to candidates in down-ballot races, perhaps even in other states, such as Shahid Buttar in Nacy Pelosi's district. And there's much to do in my own back yard. Sometimes, literally. Today the kids and I moved wood chips and filled holes in a cinder block border, to use for planting herbs. Tonight we're baking sourdough biscuits to eat with black-eyed peas.

I'm going to send this out early (on Saturday night, not Sunday night as usual) because I'd like to work on some other things tomorrow. Maybe tonight we'll watch another old episode of *Columbo* and I'll write out chord diagrams while we watch.

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